IV

The Object

of Work
1. **Decent surroundings**

It has been well-established that during the mid to late 1870s Morris became increasingly involved in public political debate, and that in lectures and letters to the press he began to produce an educating, agitating discourse formulated initially upon his ‘hopes and fears for art’. More recently, particular attention has been drawn to the ways that Morris’s writings on art and society reveal ‘a deep and resonant late-nineteenth-century critique of contemporary environmental and social devastation’. These discussions have explored Morris’s views on the preservation of ‘the environment’, and have tended to emphasise the ‘eco-communal’ or ‘green’ aspects of his work. Certainly the desire to protect and preserve the ‘beauty of the earth’ is a significant feature of Morris’s rhetoric at this time. Yet perhaps more fundamental to his lectures and letters of the late 1870s and early 1880s is a concern to establish ‘decent surroundings’: to offer a view of the earth as a place of human habitation. Nature played an important, though not always central, role in his arguments. Yet what is apparent from the way he discusses nature is his increasing awareness that nature and humanity are interlinked, and that nature is frequently the object of human

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1. Morris’s first venture into politics was his involvement in the debate surrounding the ‘Eastern Question’. In early 1876 a bankrupt Turkish government retaliated against an uprising of Christians in their Bulgarian province by massacring thousands. Morris was angered when Disraeli’s Conservative Government proposed that Britain should intervene on behalf of Turkey against the threat of a Russian invasion. Morris (‘To the Working-men of England’, pamphlet issued on 11 May 1878; in The Letters of William Morris to his Family and Friends, ed. P. Henderson, Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1950, Appendix II, p. 389) vigorously opposed any British involvement in what he felt would be an ‘unjust war against a people who are not our enemies, against Europe, against freedom, against nature, against the hope of the world’. Consequently, he served as Treasurer of the Eastern Question Association, and spoke at a number of meetings on behalf of this group. See Morris’s pamphlet ‘To the Working-men of England’ (quoted above), and his letters throughout 1876–78, particularly his first on this topic to the Daily News, 24 October 1876, in Letters, vol. I, pp. 323–6.

2. Hopes and Fears for Art is the title of the first volume of lectures published by Morris in 1882. For a biographical outline and general discussion of Morris’s activities during these years, see, for example, Mackail, Life, vol. I, pp. 338–75, and vol. II, pp. 1–90; Thompson, Romantic to Revolutionary, pp. 192–274, and MacCarthy, A Life for Our Time, pp. 375–461.


4. One needs to be aware, of course, that in the late twentieth century the words ‘environment’ and ‘environmental’ carry much more emphasis on nature than they did in the late nineteenth century. Whereas today’s ‘environmental groups’ are likely to be concerned with the preservation or reconstitution of ‘natural’ surroundings, Morris and his contemporaries understood ‘environment’ in broader, less explicitly naturalistic terms. In this chapter, the environment is understood in these broad terms.
work. Thus in the early, 'pre-Marxian' lectures discussed here,\(^5\) it is necessary to be aware of both the socio-aesthetic basis of his 'environmental' concern, and his growing social awareness.

The first, broadly environmental group with which Morris became involved was the S.P.A.B. Morris's reasons for founding the Society in 1877, and his active and conscientious endeavours on its behalf, have been well discussed.\(^6\) Familiar with debates on protection and restoration since an early age,\(^7\) his association with 'Anti-Scrape' was deep and enduring. Of particular interest here is the way and extent to which ideas about nature informed his work for the Society, and, perhaps more importantly, the way his work for the Society informed his ideas about nature.

The S.P.A.B. was most concerned, of course, with the built environment and therefore not directly involved in issues relating to landscape or nature conservation. Yet the Society did partake of a wider environmental ethic, which was a result of Morris's influence over its principles and proceedings. This is apparent from the first letter to *The Athenaeum* in which Morris suggested that an association might be established to save buildings such as the Minster of Tewkesbury from the restoring zeal of architects such as Sir Gilbert Scott. In this letter he also directed his appeal to 'whatever else of beautiful or historical is still left us on the sites of the ancient buildings we were once so famous for'. He argued that 'watching over and protecting' such 'wonderful treasures' could prove particularly valuable in 'this age of the world,'

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\(5\) This is to indicate that the discussion in this chapter is limited to those lectures delivered before Morris read Marx, and before he declared himself a socialist in 1883.

\(6\) Morris wrote many, often passionate, letters on behalf of the Society between 1877 and his death. He drafted its Manifesto (which the Society still adheres to), wrote many reports and examined numerous buildings on the S.P.A.B.'s behalf. Moreover, as MacCarthy (*A Life for Our Time*, p. 416) has noted, in spite of his many other commitments, Morris regularly attended S.P.A.B. meetings. For further discussion of Morris's activities on behalf of the S.P.A.B., see Lethaby, *Philip Webb*, pp. 146–59; Chris Miele, 'The Conservationist', in V&A Catalogue, pp. 72–87; and Frank C. Sharp, 'A Lesson in International Relations: Morris and the S.P.A.B.', *JWMS*, vol. X, no. 2, Spring 1993, pp. 9–15.

\(7\) Morris's knowledge of architectural restoration derived from a number of sources. Interested in architecture from an early age, he was, of course, a keen reader of Ruskin and an ex-employee of Street, both of whom were aware of the dangers of 'restoration'. Morris would also have been aware about debates on restoration in *The Ecclesiologist, The Athenaeum, The Builder* and *The Church Builder*. Thus as early as 1855 he noted in a letter to Cormell Price (6 July 1855, in *Letters*, vol. I, p. 13) that the cathedral at Ely had been 'horribly spoilt with very well meant restorations, as they facetiously term them'.
when the newly-invented study of living history is the chief joy of so many lives'.
Later, he clarified his aims in the Manifesto of the Society, in which he indicated that it was as ‘monuments of art’ that he wished to protect these ancient buildings, and in all of his addresses on behalf of the Society he sought, as E.P. Thompson noted, ‘to
convince the unconverted of the existence of beauty, and to explain to them something of its meaning and its value’. As Morris asserted at the Twelfth Annual Meeting in 1889, though ‘Podsnap political, Podsnap social, Podsnap scientific’ might not
recognise the value of the pleasure of beauty, ‘[t]he capacity of seeing beauty means the capacity for art’. Thus the S.P.A.B. can be more broadly conceived as a society for the protection, and promotion, of beauty.

The concept of beauty invoked by Morris in this context was derived from the Ruskinian aesthetic he had assimilated at Oxford. As noted above, Ruskin’s ‘organic’
conception of art, architecture and the beautiful was founded upon specific ideas about the relationship between the artist and nature. In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* he had argued that ‘it is out of the power of man to conceive beauty without … [Nature’s] aid’, thereby indicating that nature was essential to the conception of all forms of art, including architecture. Ruskin’s and Morris’s call for the protection of ancient buildings, and particularly their insistence on the protection of medieval buildings can be seen, therefore, as a call to defend the monuments of a time when, as Ruskin had argued in ‘The Nature of Gothic’, ‘man’ had been closer to nature. For both Ruskin and Morris, it was not just the buildings that mattered, but what they represented, and how that representation spoke of the nature of past generations to present and future ones. Thus Morris urged a S.P.A.B. audience in 1879 to understand that the ‘thin starved work’ and ‘smooth, tame, rubbed-down pieces of stone’ of a ‘restored North Porch of Westminster Abbey’ would say nothing of the art of the thirteenth century: could be ‘like nothing that is or could be in nature’.

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8 Morris to the Editor of *The Athenaeum*, 5 March 1877, in *Letters*, vol. I, p. 351.
The S.P.A.B. was also a Ruskinian venture in many other respects. Soon after he had formed the Society, Morris wrote to Ruskin asking if he could print excerpts from ‘The Lamp of Memory’ in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. Morris told his mentor that his words were ‘so good, and so completely settle the whole matter, that I feel ashamed at having to say anything else about it, as if the idea was an original one of mine, or any body’s else but yours’.\(^\text{14}\) Ruskin gave his permission, and the following passage was printed in a S.P.A.B. pamphlet of 1877:

> It is ... no question of expediency or feeling whether we shall preserve the buildings of past times or not. *We have no right whatever to touch them.* They are not ours. They belong, partly to those who built them, and partly to all the generations of mankind who are to follow us.\(^\text{15}\)

Subsequently, Morris echoed Ruskin’s ‘now famous and most eloquent passage’ in many of the papers he wrote and delivered on behalf of the S.P.A.B., considering it ‘a protest unfortunately as much needed now as it was years ago’.\(^\text{16}\)

Morris’s reproduction of Ruskin’s earlier message points to another important feature of Morris’s involvement with the S.P.A.B.: that it prompted him to develop a conservational ethic. Morris did not actually use the word ‘conservation’ to describe the aims or activities of the Society. Instead, his letters and papers refer to ‘saving’, ‘watching over’, ‘protecting’, ‘defending’, and ‘preserving’ ancient monuments. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a more radical and active conserving impulse in Morris’s work at this time, which emphasises provision rather than preservation. At the Second Annual Meeting of the S.P.A.B. he argued:

\(^\text{14}\) Morris to John Ruskin, 10 July 1877, in *Letters*, vol. I, p. 383. It is possible that Morris not only refers to Ruskin’s literary prescriptions here, but also to his pivotal role in founding the Conservation Fund in January 1855, which also sought to catalogue old buildings and conserve ancient monuments. For further discussion of Ruskin’s influence on the S.P.A.B., see Spear, *Dreams of an English Eden*, p. 223, and Stephan Tschudi-Madsen, *Restoration and Anti-Restoration: A Study in English Restoration Philosophy*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, 1976, pp. 43–51.

\(^\text{15}\) Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, p. 245.

many of the best men among us look back much to the past, not with idle regret, but with humility, hope and courage; not in striving to bring the dead to life again, but to enrich the present and the future... Surely in days to come people will feel ashamed of us, that we took so little trouble to guard the things they have heard told of as so precious; that we could not exercise something more of patience and forethought in arranging the relative claims of what our own lives compelled us to make for our immediate use, and what our honour and gratitude bade us hand down from our fathers to our children. For if a thing is seriously worth having, it is worth making some sacrifice to keep... 

In this regard, Morris can be seen as one of those contributing to a new understanding of conservation. As Gill Chitty has noted, before the nineteenth century, the word 'conservation' denoted the act of 'preservation from corruption'. Developed in the writings of Ruskin, in various papers and journals such as *The Ecclesiologist*, and in debates on architectural restoration such as those provoked by the S.P.A.B., conservation began to take on some of its modern meanings of active protection. Morris's role is notable because of his emphasis on what today is designated 'cultural significance': his advocacy, that is, of 'those [places] which help an understanding of the past or enrich the present, and which we believe will be of value to future generations'.

Yet Ruskin's influence again needs to be emphasised, because what Morris found culturally significant about ancient buildings was in large part derived from the older conservationist. Indeed, it was in reference to 'the conservation of cultural context', as Chitty has argued, 'that Ruskin's thought was truly innovative'. His conserving 'vision' embraced people as well as architecture and landscape, and demonstrated a consciousness that the quality of environment is intimately related to social relations. For Ruskin, aestheticisation, or the working over, of the environment always provided the mediating frame for his view of the landscape, built or otherwise, and this was the key concept that Morris took up and developed. Thus...
while it has been argued that art became an increasingly subservient term for Ruskin, it became an increasingly important one for Morris. Nature, in turn, was seen as increasingly culturally mediated and, therefore, historically determined. It is important to recognise that, for both Ruskin and Morris, beauty was not just a purely visual phenomenon. For Morris, as his S.P.A.B. colleague W.R. Lethaby noted, the problem with the work of nineteenth-century restorers was the 'crude ... root absurdity that art was shape and not substance'.

In trying to save the 'substance' of art, therefore, Morris was also trying to preserve the records of a more general history. Ancient architecture, he argued, bears witness to the development of man's ideas, to the continuity of history, and, so doing, affords never-ceasing instruction, nay education, to the passing generations, not only telling us what were the aspirations of men passed away, but also what he may hope for in the time to come.

In statements such as these it is possible to see the way in which Morris's activities on behalf of the S.P.A.B. were also part of a more general recognition on his behalf of the value of the 'lessons of history'. His recognition of the value of 'continuity', and of the seriousness of the damage done when history is destroyed or falsified is also relevant to his ideas about nature. Though nature is not explicitly referred to in his S.P.A.B. letters and speeches, it is the consciousness raised by his work in this area which informs his discussion of nature preservation. Morris's S.P.A.B. campaigning led him to a broader awareness of the destructive forces at work within his society.

While E.P. Thompson's argument that Morris's S.P.A.B. activities 'lead to Communism' rather overstepped the mark, he was certainly accurate in his assessment that Morris

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21 John K. Walton, 'The National Trust: Preservation or Provision?', in Ruskin and Environment, p. 163.
22 Hanley, 'The Discourse of Natural Beauty', p. 18.
23 Lethaby, Philip Webb, p. 145.
25 Thompson, Romantic to Revolutionary (1955), p. 270. It should be noted, however, that Morris's activities for the S.P.A.B. in 1879 were judged by Punch cartoonist Charles Keene (Charles Keene to Joseph Crawhall, 23 November 1879; quoted by MacCarthy, A Life for Our Time, p. 416) as those of a 'pestilent Red'.

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In giving leadership to the Anti-Scrape ... was forced again and again to examine and set to words his deepest preoccupation—the relation of the arts to society. In the controversies which sprang up around the work he was continually forced to define (and to revise) the basic assumptions which had guided his life from his Oxford days.  

Moreover, as Thompson also indicated, through his work for the S.P.A.B., Morris was brought into direct conflict with the property sanctions of capitalist society. Time and again, Morris encountered landlords or clergy who maintained that they could do what they liked with their buildings. Perhaps this is why Morris also felt it important to have Carlyle’s support in this venture. Possibly he recalled the passage in *Past and Present* where Carlyle had argued, in terms similar but broader than Ruskin’s, that ‘[l]and ... is not the property of any generation, ... but that of all the past generations that have worked on it, and of all the future ones that shall work on it’. Certainly Carlyle’s use of the terms ‘land’ and ‘property’ indicate a broader, more general and political concern with cultural inheritance. In April 1878 altercations over property rights provoked Morris to write to *The Times* in terms that directly recalled Carlyle’s earlier tirades against ‘Mammon-worship’:

Surely an opulent city, the capital of the commercial world, can afford some small sacrifice to spare these beautiful buildings the little plots of ground upon which they stand. Is it absolutely necessary that every scrap of space in the City should be devoted to money-making, and are religion, sacred memories, recollections of the great dead, memorials of the past, works of England’s greatest architect, to be banished from this wealthy City?

‘Anti-Scrape’ business, therefore, forced Morris to repeatedly confront the insensibility of commerce and capital, as well as its constant remaking: its ‘cynically

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26 Thompson, *Romantic to Revolutionary*, p. 231.
27 Morris did this through a letter to his friend and Carlyle’s neighbour, William de Morgan, 3 April 1877, in *Letters*, vol. I, p. 361. In the letter he argued that ‘it is not only artists or students of art that we are appealing to, but thoughtful people in general’. Carlyle accepted membership of the Society, but insisted on the special merit of the City churches of Wren: the kind of seventeenth and eighteenth-century architecture that Morris loathed. See Morris, ‘Report on the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, First Annual Meeting, 21 June 1878’, p. 117; and Mackail, *Life*, vol. I, pp. 344–6.
28 Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 175.
brutal destruction' of the beauty of the earth. Moreover, in later years, after he had read Marx and joined the Social Democratic Federation, Morris’s reports to the S.P.A.B. illustrate the kind of awareness of history that Thompson read in his earlier papers. In a speech delivered at the Seventh Annual Meeting of the S.P.A.B. in 1884, Morris drew attention to the new ‘spirit’ that ‘has animated history in these latter days’:

moving forward ever towards something that seems the very opposite of that which it started from, and yet the earlier order never dead but living in the new, and slowly moulding it to a recreation of its former self.

This is a history, he continues, which will ‘[n]o longer [engender] shallow mockery at the failures and follies of the past, from a standpoint of so-called civilization’, but will produce instead ‘deep sympathy with its half-conscious aims, from amidst the difficulties and shortcomings that we are only too sadly conscious of today’. Furthermore, by speaking of this history and the appreciation of those monuments of history that are also works of art, Morris now feels himself ‘compelled … to touch upon the conditions under which handiwork has been produced from the classical times onward’, and warns his audience that in doing so, he ‘cannot avoid touching on certain social problems, on the solution of which some of you many differ from me’. Having alluded to ‘a great man, whom, I suppose, I ought not to name in this company and who cleared my mind on several points … relating to this subject of labour and its products’, Morris argues that the S.P.A.B. still has an important role to play in a society that

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30 Morris, ‘Report of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, First Annual Meeting, 21 June 1878’, p. 117. It is also necessary to remember that Morris had already begun to be ‘politicised’ by his involvement in the Eastern Question Association. Indeed, it seems that it was not until Morris had gained some confidence in the effectiveness of public action via this organisation that he felt confident enough to begin the S.P.A.B. Mackail (Life, vol. I, p. 340) noted that in the autumn of 1876 Morris had been incensed by the ‘restoration’ of Lichfield Cathedral, and made even more angry by alterations to the parish church in Burford. According to Mackail, he ‘drafted a letter urging the formation of a Society which might deal with such cases’, but ‘for some reason or other’ he did not take his proposals any further at this stage.


anarchical as it is, is nevertheless forming a new order... so that in the long run our work, hopeless as it must sometimes seem to us, will not be utterly lost. For, after all, what is it that we are contending for? The reality of art, that is to say, of the pleasure of the human race.35

In attempting to protect and promote this pleasure, and by providing a ‘distinct rallying-point for collecting the genuine feeling on this subject, hitherto scattered and helpless’, 36 the S.P.A.B. was one front on which Morris began to campaign for ‘decent surroundings’.

It is necessary to understand this growing social emphasis when we turn to look at Morris’s involvement with conservation groups that identified their goals more specifically in relation to nature.37 In groups such as the C.P.S. the concept of nature entered arguments as part of a preservation or conservation ethic, in which ‘nature’s benefits’ were opposed to the perceived moral and physical redundancy of the ‘spoilt’, urban environment. Yet, even though Morris’s name is listed on the General Committee in the Society’s Reports of Proceedings, 1876–80, and though he was in contact with C.P.S. members such as Bryce in his work for the Eastern Question Association, there is no evidence of Morris being substantially involved until the 1880s, and even then his role was limited.38 Founded in 1865 by Shaw-Lefevre, the C.P.S. was heavily influenced by land reform ideas (Mill was also a founder member), and the main platform of the Society was the protection of common land from urban

36 Morris, ‘Report of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, First Annual Meeting’, p. 119. It should also be noted that, while the Society was hardly a hotbed of socialism, several of Morris’s colleagues in the S.P.A.B. followed him into the S.D.F. and the Socialist League.
37 In fact the S.P.A.B.’s aims as well as its membership often coincided with those of the ‘nature societies’, and they cooperated with these groups on a number of projects. Among the first to join the S.P.A.B., for example, were the prominent conservationists Sir John Lubbock and James Bryce, both of whom were already involved in the C.P.S. See, for example, Bryce’s address to the Selborne Society in 1900, in which he told his audience that Morris ‘thought it very desirable that those Societies which aimed at the preservation of Nature should be linked in broad sympathy with those which had for their object the care of historic monuments’ (Nature Notes, II, 1900, pp. 107–9, 103; quoted in Ranlett, ‘Checking Nature’s Desecration’, p. 197, 199).
38 There is a brief note from Morris to Bryce of 29 July 1881 (in Letters, vol. II, p. 60), in which Morris states that he would ‘be happy to come & do my best in such a good cause’. It is probable that this letter refers to the C.P.S. meeting which, according to the brief diary he kept during this year (‘Scribbling Diary’, 1881, British Library, Add. MS 45407B), Morris attended on 4 August. MacCarthy (A Life for Our Time, p. xv) is wrong to suggest that Morris played a part in the formation of the Society in the late 1870s.
development, agricultural enclosure and incorporation into hunting reserves. Though Morris wholeheartedly supported their campaigns to defend the Lake District, to maintain Epping Forest in its ‘integrity’, and to preserve open spaces in the poorer, densely populated areas of London, he was probably increasingly wary of what Gareth Stedman Jones has described as this ‘new urban squirearchy’.

Morris was more involved in Octavia Hill’s Kyrle Society, founded in 1875 to provide ‘colour, space, and music for the people’. The broad efforts of this Society to provide pleasure through contact with nature and ‘the diffusion of Beauty’ has been noted above. It is necessary here to examine Morris’s efforts on its behalf in order to appreciate how he understood the role that nature might play for those who were ‘starved’ of beauty. Why did Morris join a group which emphasised not the poverty of the East End, but its ‘ugliness’: which prescribed ‘space, quiet, the sight of grass and trees and sky’, rather than the recreation of the ‘beauty of the earth’ through hopeful and pleasurable work?

Perhaps one answer to this question emerges from the fact that Morris’s efforts on behalf of societies that campaigned for greater access to nature, beauty and open space, began not long after he had come to a new personal appreciation of space, and awareness of degradation and squalor. In 1879 Morris had leased a new house on the Upper Mall at Hammersmith, which he renamed ‘Kelmscott House’ after his beloved country retreat. Considerably larger than Horrington House ('the little shed

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40 In 1882 Morris 'fancied' that 'most' of his audience at the Leek School of Art agreed with him 'in thinking it a hopeful token that all classes show signs of uniting to prevent the robbery of commons which till quite lately has gone on unchecked in England' (‘Art: A Serious Thing’, British Library, Add. MS 45332(3); in Unpublished Lectures, p. 51). For details of the C.P.S.'s campaigns, see Shaw-Leleve's English Commons and Forests, passim.
42 The title of an article by Octavia Hill, pleading the Society's cause, in Nineteenth Century, vol. XV, no. 87, May 1884, pp. 741-52.
43 See Chapter 4 of Section I above.
on the high road\textsuperscript{45} to which they had moved when more space was needed at Queen Square for extended workshops and a showroom), Morris felt that ‘the open river and the garden at the back are a great advantage’, and wrote enthusiastically about the trees and other features of the garden (see figs. lxv–lxvii).\textsuperscript{46} As MacCarthy has suggested, it is likely that the Morrises were also eager to find a more spacious, private and ‘healthful’ environment for their daughter, Jenny, who had developed epilepsy (then a severely debilitating condition).\textsuperscript{47} Thus when Morris delivered his first speech for the Kyrle Society at a joint meeting with the National Health Society in January 1881 (a meeting called to consider ways of reducing smoke pollution and of bringing art and music to the people), Morris felt the Society’s ‘case … almost too good to bear much talking about’. Telling the audience that it was an ‘inoffensive, but most useful Society’, he emphasised that it had been formed to fight the ‘Carelessness, Ugliness, and Squalor … specially bred by our system of huge towns, and above all by this great city’.\textsuperscript{48} Two months later, in a lecture to the Nottingham branch of the Society, he similarly applauded its efforts to spread beauty by making ‘everybody to whom they have given a better chance of seeing leaves and flowers and grass from time to time … into a missionary of beauty’.\textsuperscript{49}

What Morris particularly emphasised in his speeches on behalf of the Kyrle Society, however, was the Society’s work on amenities and access to open spaces for the poor. Thus, while congratulating the Society on its ‘valiant attempt … to save open spaces from bricks and mortar’, he was equally impressed by their efforts ‘to make them open in another sense, from bolts and locks’.\textsuperscript{50} ‘These references to access to open spaces may reflect his experience of the less pleasant aspects of living at Hammersmith. Though, as MacCarthy notes, Upper Mall itself was ‘quiet and

\textsuperscript{45} Webb’s description of the house (now demolished) at Turnham Green was exaggerated (Webb to Jane Morris, 8 November 1878, British Library, Add. MS 45342), but Morris (Morris to Aglaia Coronio, 23 January 1873, in \textit{Letters}, vol. I, p. 176) also felt the house to be ‘very little’ and kept a bedroom at Queen Square for himself.

\textsuperscript{46} Morris to Jane Morris, 12 March 1878, in \textit{Letters}, vol. I, p. 456. See also the other letters Morris wrote to Jane that month while she was in Italy with their daughters (pp. 456–63, 466–7, 469–70).

\textsuperscript{47} MacCarthy, \textit{A Life for Our Time}, p. 393. On Jenny’s illness, which began in 1876 but appears to have got worse in the year preceding the move to Hammersmith, see also pp. 368–9, and 387–8. Also of interest is MacCarthy’s contention, following George Bernard Shaw’s suggestion in \textit{The Observer} of 1949, that Morris himself suffered from a form of epilepsy known as \textit{eclampsia} (pp. xiii, 77–9).

\textsuperscript{48} Morris, ‘Speech at a Meeting of the Kyrle Society’, pp. 192–3.

Fig. lxv
London survey map, 1896, showing the Morrices' house at 26 Upper Mall, Hammersmith.

Fig. lxvi
26 Upper Mall, Hammersmith, from the Thames.
Plan of the garden at Kelmscott House from a letter written by Morris in March 1878. Morris wrote:
'There is a good garden & root house, besides the large green house. A tank in the former for watering purposes: there are 2 arbours: there are of big trees 1st a walnut by the stable: 2nd a very fine tulip-tree halfway down the lawn. 3rd. 2 horse chestnuts at the end of the lawn: beyond that is a sort of orchard (many good fruit trees in it) with rough grass (gravel walk all round garden): then comes the green-house & beyond that a kitchen: garden with lots of raspberries'.
respectable’, it was verging ‘on the edge of disreputable London’. Rossetti had warned Jane Morris that the area between the high road and the river held ‘a labyrinth of slums’, and May Morris recalled how ‘ragged mites from the neighbouring riverside slum would tumble around, turning our garden steps into their playground’. Morris was particularly exposed to the street, having his bedroom and study on the ground floor facing the river. In the ‘Scribbling Diary’ he kept during 1881, he noted how he witnessed a suicide being dragged out of the river. Later in the year he wondered aloud about the meaning of the indecent surroundings near his home:

as I sit at work at home ... I often hear go past the window some of that ruffianism of which a good deal has been said in the papers of late... As I hear the yells and shrieks and all the degradation cast on the glorious tongue of Shakespeare and Milton, as I see the brutal reckless faces and figures go past me, it rouses recklessness and brutality in me also, and fierce wrath takes possession of me, till I remember, as I hope I mostly do, that it was my good luck only of being born respectable and rich, that has put me on this side of the window among delightful books and lovely works of art, and not on the other side, in the empty street, the drink-steeped liquor shops, the foul and degraded lodgings. What words can say what all that means? 

For this reason, in his speeches on behalf of the Kyrle Society, Morris pleaded passionately for decent surroundings, for ‘more light and air in our big towns’, and for the popularisation of reverence for both art and nature:

I feel clear ... that it is idle to talk about popularizing art, if you are not prepared to popularize reverence for nature also, both among the poor and the rich. Can you expect the people to believe you to be in earnest in bidding them to love art and cultivate it, if they see you in your greed for riches, or your fear of what are falsely called commercial interests, take no heed of and pay no reverence to the greatest of all gifts to the world, the very source of art, the natural beauty of the Earth? For my part ... words

50 Morris, ‘Speech at a Meeting of the Kyrle Society’, p. 196.
51 MacCarthy, A Life for Our Time, p. 400.
54 Morris, ‘Scribbling Diary’, 1881.
fail to express my gratitude to any man who has saved for us in London so much as one tree or one plot of grass.57

He frequently harangued the middle to upper-class audiences that attended his Kyrle Society addresses, asking them to do all they could to bring about a future that would pay more heed to the natural beauty of the earth. He told his audience at Nottingham that he looked forward to a time when

a capitalist will be as much ashamed of letting his factory chimneys pour out a dense cloud of smoke as he would be now of robbing on the highway; a railway company will no more think of running their line through a recreation ground of the people than they now would through Buckingham Palace; the Square gardens will be both unfenced and unhurt: nay the poorest quarters will have some garden or other, public or private, easily accessible to them: no landowner will grudge people wandering over his park or fields, where they are doing no damage to stocks or crops; nor indeed will anybody think of going anywhere where they could do damage; no builder will cut down a tree until he has exhausted his ingenuity in planning his houses so as to avoid it.58

In these entreaties, in which he appealed for broader access to nature as solace and inspiration, Morris often replicates the tone of Ruskin or Hill.

Yet in both the passages quoted above it is also possible to note the way that Morris incorporates his own growing concerns. He was quick to steer his speeches towards the broader importance of the art–work–labour connections he inherited from Ruskin. He rebuffed those who sniffed at the Society’s attempts to stir a ‘longing for beauty’ by arguing that such people ‘do not know whence art springs or whitherward it aims’. Morris adjured: ‘Its aim is the making life happy and dignified for all people. To succeed in such an aim, is it not necessary that it should both spring from and be cherished by the people at large?’59 At Nottingham the message was repeated. He told his audience that he preferred their town to the ‘counting-house’ of London, because it still made things, and that ‘the future of art’ rested with them:

Depend upon it, art, which is the very highest of all realities, ... can only be helped by people whose daily life consists in dealing with realities; men

59 Morris, ‘Speech at a Meeting of the Kyrle Society’, p. 196.
whose honour and comfort, nay, their daily bread depends upon their looking keenly into the nature of things; whose practical knowledge gives them a right to say when they look at things fashioned by man, this is genuine, well made—good: this is pretentious, ill-made—false.60

He informed them that it was the aim of the Kyrle Society to ‘show the working classes that there is such a thing as art and that it is for them’.61 Thus Morris insisted on the creative nature of environment: on the fact that beauty, even if inspired by forms that spring from the world of plants and animals, is created, constructed, made. Consequently, he shrugged off recent ‘discussions as to whether art should be for art’s sake’ as ‘most fruitless’ and ‘mere confusion of words’: ‘a real artist does his work because he likes it, and … [because] when done 'tis a blessing to his fellows’.62

Another way in which Morris’s speeches on behalf of the Kyrle Society reflect concerns above and beyond those of other members, was their emphasis on the broader, social implications of the Society’s work: an emphasis that betrayed an understanding of this work as a step towards other, more fundamental, changes. Contrary to the accent on moral reform, self-improvement and civic responsibility by members such as Hill,63 Morris called for changes that went beyond ‘mere palliation’.64 He stressed that the ‘lofty ideal’ of the Society was not simply bound up with appearances, but was a means of looking forward to the day when poverty shall be a name only for a dreadful phantom of the past; when the brutality of the poor and the insolence of the rich shall have been slain by hope and pleasure shared by all; when the man of the most refined occupation, student, artist, physician, what not, shall be able to speak to him who does the roughest labour in a tongue that they both know, and to find no intricacy of his mind misunderstood; and when as a sign and symbol of all this, and the necessary outcome of it, this very London, which even many years ago Cobbett in his disgust would call the

64 At this stage it seems that Morris (‘Nottingham Kyrle Society, 1881’, p. 202) believed that other members of the Society also felt the same way: that they, too, did not consider current inequalities ‘necessary and enduring’. ‘[W]hat they have been looking to is this’, he argued, ‘that every one whom they have … given a better chance of seeing leaves and flowers and grass from time to time has been turned in a small way into a missionary of beauty’. 
wen, shall have become a delightful abode of men, full of beauty and
guiltless of any spot of squalor. 65

The emphasis, here, is still substantially aesthetic, but, in words that prefigure the
prophecy of John Ball, he urged his listeners
to do something, the first thing that comes to hand, ... not fearing that
meantime our ideal will escape our vision, nor overweighted by the
insignificance of what each of us personally can do against the huge mass
that has to be moved; since we may well wrap ourselves in the faith, that
when our share of the work is over, others will take it up: the cause needs
us and will use us, but it will not stand still for our departure, but will
carry our work along with us for ever.66

Most strikingly, he used a metaphor drawn from nature to explain the development of
‘great things’ from ‘small beginnings’: ‘all great things may grow from a small root if it
but be a piece of nature and planted as nature will have it’.67 This was another feature
of Morris’s lectures at this time: his understanding that the current state of affairs is not
‘natural’. Carelessness, ugliness and squalor are not ‘part of the eternal order of
things’, and are not ‘inseparable from ... progress’. They are ‘the outcome of the
blindness and hurry of short-lived men’.68

These themes and concerns come together most effectively in his longer, more
developed lectures of the late 1870s and early 1880s, most of which were published in
Hopes and Fears for Art (1882) and in various pamphlets, papers and journals.69
Beginning in 1877 with ‘The Lesser Arts’ (also known as ‘The Decorative Arts’),
these lectures still have art as their central topic, but, because of the broad, Ruskinian
definition Morris employs, also encompass much wider concerns. Nature, in these

66 Morris, ‘Speech at a Meeting of the Kyrle Society’, p. 195.
68 Morris, ‘Speech at a Meeting of the Kyrle Society’, p. 194.
69 The lectures under consideration here are: ‘The Decorative Arts’ (1877; also known as ‘The Lesser
Arts’, a phrase he borrowed from Froissart); ‘The Art of the People’ (1879); ‘Labour and Pleasure
versus Labour and Sorrow’ (1880; also known as ‘The Beauty of Life’); ‘Some Hints on House
Decoration’ (1880; also known as ‘Making the Best of It’); ‘The Prospects of Architecture in
Civilization’ (1881); ‘Art and the Beauty of the Earth’ (1881); ‘The Lesser Arts of Life’ (1882); and
‘Art: A Serious Thing’ (1882). LeMire’s invaluable appendices, ‘A Calendar of William Morris’s
Platform Career’, and ‘A Bibliographical Checklist of Morris’s Speeches and Lectures’ (Unpublished
Lectures, pp. 234–322) are the source of all details regarding place and time of delivery, unless
otherwise indicated.
papers, is a secondary concern,70 but by no means an unimportant one. Indeed, it is in these lectures that Morris set out most explicitly the role that nature plays in his work and thought. The task of writing and delivering them seems to have forced him to draw together and articulate his concerns, and moved him towards a more sophisticated and comprehensive understanding of what had happened, what was happening, and what might happen to art and, increasingly, society. Thus, though May Morris argued that the lectures indicated Morris’s agreement with Ruskin that ‘it is every man’s duty to know what he is, and not to think of the embryo he was, nor the skeleton that he shall be’,71 it is clear that Morris was more interested in thinking historically, and in arguing that humanity’s place in nature was defined, quite literally, by what humanity made of it. Human labour, therefore, emerges as the key issue in these lectures, but Morris also clearly sets out his belief in the necessity of ‘responsible’ links between art–work and nature.

The most obvious reference to nature in these lectures is as inspiration to art. ‘[W]herever Nature works there will be beauty’,72 and ‘observe the beauty of nature around you’ are constant refrains.73 Such themes again attest to the Ruskinian quality of Morris’s early lecturing career. Much of Morris’s discussion reflects his mentor’s understanding of nature in works such as The Stones of Venice, and contemporary reviewers of Hopes and Fears for Art noted the influence of the older critic.74 Yet they also noted discrepancies,75 and Morris himself indicated that he did ‘not always

70 Contemporary reviewers, for example, did not consider Morris’s views of nature as a prominent feature of these lectures. The one review that does mention nature (unsigned review, Athenaeum, 16 September 1882, no. 2864, pp. 374–5; in The Critical Heritage, p. 286), does so merely to acknowledge that Morris believed observation of the natural world to be one of the solutions to the poor quality of modern art. The reviewer states, however, that they are not sure what Morris requires artists to learn from nature, and suggests that Morris should have dwelt upon this topic a little longer.


73 In ‘Art: A Serious Thing’ (pp. 36–9), for example, Morris complained that a passenger in his railway carriage pulled the blind down on the ‘bright hill-sides’ and ‘pleasant homesteads’ of the Chilterns, and went on to compare this scene with a Van Eyck ‘view’ he had seen at the Louvre in the previous year.


75 Edith Simcox (review, in The Critical Heritage, pp. 270–1), for example, contrasted Ruskin’s ‘despairing tone’ with ‘the qualified but unextinguished hopefulness of Mr. Morris’.
agree' with 'the first comer' in a letter of 1882. Nevertheless, in these early lectures, Morris never strayed very far from Ruskin. He insisted, as Ruskin had in *The Stones of Venice*, that ‘those who are to make beautiful things, must live in a beautiful place’, and made nature one of the standards against which such beauty should be measured. Similarly, as Ruskin had stressed in *Fors Clavigera*, Morris argued that ‘Of all the things that is likely to give us back popular art in England, the cleaning of England is the first and the most necessary’. He told an audience at Leek in March 1881 (that is at the height of his involvement with the Kyrle and Commons Preservation Societies), that in order to give people ‘eyes with which to see works of art’ there was ‘one duty obvious to us all’:

> it is that we should set ourselves, each one of us, to doing our best to guard the natural beauty of the earth: we ought to look upon it as a crime, an injury to our fellows, only excusable because of ignorance, to mar the natural beauty which is the property of all men; and scarce less than a crime to look on and do nothing while others are marring it...

These arguments recall his work for the S.P.A.B. and occasionally, when he tells his audience ‘to treat the natural beauty of the earth as a holy thing not to be rashly dealt with for any consideration’, Ruskin’s more frenzied jeremiads.

Rash dealings with the earth are, therefore, another context in which nature frequently appears in these lectures. ‘[O]ur fathers treated our lovely land well’, he told his Birmingham audience in 1881, ‘and we have treated it ill’:

> Time was when it was beautiful from end to end, and now you have to pick your way carefully to avoid coming across blotches of hideousness which are a disgrace, I will not say to civilization, but to human nature. I have seen no statistics of the size of these blotches in relation to the unspoiled, or partially spoiled, country, but in some places they run together so as to cover a whole county, or even several counties, while they increase at a fearful rate, fearful in good earnest and literally.

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76 Morris to an unknown recipient, 4 September 1882, in *Letters*, vol. II, p. 126.
Birmingham and the other industrial centres in which he lectured were frequently the
targets of Morris's Ruskinian diatribes. In ‘The Beauty of Life’, a lecture delivered at
the Town Hall in Birmingham in 1880, Morris felt obliged to speak ‘of possessions
which should be common to us all, of the green grass, and the leaves, and the waters,
of the very light and air of heaven, which the Century of Commerce has been too busy
to pay heed to’. 82 He then took a swipe at all kinds of, what today we might call,
‘environmental vandalism’ or pollution. He reminded the audience that ‘there is an Act
in existence which was passed to prevent them ... from pouring a dense cloud of
smoke over the world’, though noted what ‘a very lame and partial Act it is’. 83 He
admonished them for leaving ‘sandwich-papers all about the Lickey hills and your
public gardens’; 84 for the ‘daily increasing hideousness of the posters with which all
our towns are daubed’; 85 and for the ‘wanton murder’ of trees. 86 None of these habits
is ‘an unchangeable necessity of your life and position’, he argued:

such miseries as this were begun and carried on in pure thoughtlessness,
and a hundredth part of the energy that was spent in creating them would
get rid of them: I do think if we were not all of us too prone to acquiesce in
the base byword ‘after me the deluge,’ it would soon be something more
than an idle dream to hope that your pleasant midland hills and fields
might begin to become pleasant again in some way or other, even without
depopulating them... 87

In the meantime he warned his audience that ‘while this goes on unchecked,
nay, unlamented, it is really idle to talk about art’. 88 How could manufacturers ‘buy

which serves the acres of weaving and spinning sheds of Sir Titus Salt and his brothers [which] is
as guiltless of smoke as an ordinary kitchen chimney’ (p. 71). The Smoke Act referred to by Morris
was Lord Palmerston’s Smoke Consumption Act that had come into effect on the 1 August 1854.
Morris was certainly not alone in complaining of the ineffectiveness of this Act. As early as 26
August 1854, The Builder (vol. XII, no. 603, p. 450) complained that ‘it is too apparent that ... the
intolerable London smoke is as thick as it was prior to the “Smoke Act” coming into operation, and
the wholesome provisions of the Act are set at defiance by the smoke-makers’. On smoke pollution in
London, see Peter Brimblecombe, The Big Smoke: a History of Air Pollution in London since
86 Morris, ‘The Beauty of Life’, pp. 72–3. See also, for example, ‘The Prospects of Architecture in
Civilization’, p. 130.
pictures and profess to care about art'? How could his audience ‘care about the image of a landscape’, he asked,

when you show by your deeds that you don’t care for the landscape itself? or what right have you to shut yourself up with beautiful form and colour when you make it impossible for other people to have any share in these things?89

Morris insisted that

[w]hile we are doing this or letting it be done, we are really covertly rejecting art, and it would be honester and better for us if we did so openly. If we accept art we must atone for what we have done and pay the cost of it. We must turn this land from the grimy back-yard of a workshop into a garden.90

Thus, though he ‘heartily sympathized’ with many strikes, what he most looked forward to is ‘the day … [when] there is a serious strike of workmen against the poisoning of the air with smoke or the waters with filth’. Then, he argued, ‘I shall think that art is getting on indeed, and that the schools of art have had a noble success’.91

Apparent here is Morris’s understanding that it is the task of art to replicate and guard the natural beauty of the earth: in other words, that human activities are an integral part of the wider creative processes of nature. Indeed, in ‘The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization’, Morris argued that art is ‘the only possible guardian’ of the natural beauty of the earth.92 It is a sentiment reflected in the value that he placed on the built environment, and in the kinds of terms he used to describe it. If art colludes with nature, it

will make our streets as beautiful as the woods, as elevating as the mountain-sides: it will be a pleasure and a rest, and not a weight upon the spirits to come from the open country into a town … all the works of man that we live amongst and handle will be in harmony with nature.93

93 Morris, ‘The Lesser Arts’, p. 27.
His belief in the natural benefit of art is also reflected in the way he conceives of his own work: that Morris & Co. provides the means for ‘making the best of it’, and support for the work of nature. ‘[E]xternal beauty’, he argued, is nothing more than ‘a symbol of a decent and reasonable life’ and

above all the token of what chiefly makes life good and not evil, of joy in labour, in creation that is: and this joy of labour, this evidence of man helping in the work of creation, is I feel sure the thing which from the first all progress in civilization has been aiming at...

One of the consequences of ‘man helping in the work of creation’—of ‘healthy’ art predicated upon enjoyable labour and the ‘use of the eyes’—would be

that civilized man will no longer seem (as he does now) to be the enemy of nature, to shame her and befoul her, and turn her rest and order and beauty into feverish ragged squalor: the house shall be like a natural growth of the meadow, and the city a necessary fulfillment of the valley.

In all of these lectures, Morris’s tendency was to encourage humanity to participate in nature: not to regard nature as a separate sphere, or to set it aside for protection. Nature will be protected by active human participation in it. Yet a dualistic element was also present in his argument. According to Morris, it was not wrong that ‘the strongest and wisest’ strive to ‘attain a complete mastery over Nature [my emphasis]’, except if they ‘destroy her simplest and widest-spread gifts’. Moreover, in the 1880s he began to use the word ‘external’ to indicate that he was talking about the nature that humanity transforms and works upon. Thus in ‘The Beauty of Life’ he described ‘a feeling for the romance of external nature, which is surely strong in us now’. The

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94 The title of a lecture delivered to the Trades’ Guild of Learning and the Birmingham Society of Artists in 1880. Speaking in London at the Working Men’s College (‘Some Hints on Pattern-designing’, p. 189), Morris admitted: ‘Well, you must not suppose that I object to people making the best of their ugly houses; indeed, you probably know that I personally should be finely landed if they did not’.


97 Morris, ‘The Beauty of Life’, p. 52. This suggests that the influence of Carlyle, as well as Ruskin, was at work in these lectures. As noted above, one feature of Carlyle’s attitude to nature was a dualistic element, which conceived of nature as matter to be mastered. It is his dialectic of progress over nature which, perhaps, resurfaces here.

allusion to ‘mastery over Nature’, and the delineation of an ‘external’ nature do not signify separation, or a belief that ‘man’s place is [not] in nature’. Rather, it indicates Morris’s realisation that nature is, to borrow a phrase from someone who would soon help Morris to clarify this relationship, human ‘work and … reality’. 99

Nevertheless, nature is not just a ‘product’ in these lectures. It is also a force, a group of laws that guide and determine human action. Art is a ‘gift’, which ‘Nature meant to solace all’. 100 Art–work is naturalised in this discussion: it is natural to work, Morris told his audience; and it is natural that this work is pleasurable. In an earlier, one can almost hear Morris say ‘more natural’, era, ‘surely as poor folks needed a solace, they did not altogether lack one, and that solace was pleasure in their work’, a solace that ‘Nature holds forth to us’. 101 Nature, Morris maintained, intends that there be ‘contented craftsmen’ working in ‘decent surroundings’. 102 ‘[R]eal art’, which for Morris meant ‘the expression by man of his pleasure in labour’, is ‘a most kind gift … of nature’ since all men, nay, it seems all things too, must labour; so that not only does the dog take pleasure in hunting, and the horse in running, and the bird in flying, but so natural does the idea seem to us, that we imagine to ourselves that the earth and the very elements rejoice in doing their appointed work... 103

Moreover, in turning from being ‘contented craftsmen’ to ‘discontented agitators’, Morris told an audience of artists, they become ‘rebels not against the laws of Nature, but the customs of folly’. 104

Shortly after Morris began to argue that beautiful surroundings were a prerequisite for art, he moved the Morris & Co. workshops from ‘dismal Queen

100 Morris, ‘The Beauty of Life’, pp. 52, 56.
102 Morris, ‘Making the Best of It’, p. 82.
104 Morris, ‘Making the Best of It’, p. 82.
Square'\textsuperscript{105} to far more pleasant premises on the former site of Merton Abbey in suburban south London (see fig. lxviii). Contemporary descriptions of the Merton Abbey works dwell upon its ‘scenic’ location beside the River Wandle, the beauty of the grounds and the various forms of wildlife. In 1883 \textit{The Spectator} contained the following ‘description’ of Morris’s factory ‘On the Wandle’:

Passing through the gates from the high road, the mill and Wandle present themselves much mixed up together. The river as we saw it was shimmering in the sunlight... Near its edge the stream is shedded-over, to protect some bright brown wooden pegs, turning on a wheel, through the mysteries of which bright blue stuff is dripping and splashing. The opposite bank is a green meadow, where the trees are scantily hung with fading leaves, golden against the blue country distance beyond... A party of white ducks, very orange about the feet, are quacking and waddling along the narrow footpath between the mill and the grassy edge of the stream. We are confident that on the premises of no other ‘thriving business’ should we be allowed to come so near to such nice things as ducks and cows and untouched river-banks.\textsuperscript{106}

Emma Lazarus provided a similarly idyllic portrait for \textit{Century Magazine} after a visit on 7 July 1883.\textsuperscript{107} Drawings and photographs of the Merton works also emphasise the natural, semi-rural ‘delights’ of Merton (see figs. lxix-lxxi).

Although Morris was tempted by visions of a ‘fictionary’,\textsuperscript{108} and even considered buying a mill at Blockley in the Cotswolds,\textsuperscript{109} the taking of premises at Merton meant, as Harvey and Press have indicated, the triumph of commercial judgement over the love of nature.\textsuperscript{110} Merton was not ‘the realisation of a Ruskinian dream’,\textsuperscript{111} nor was it ‘the promise of “A Factory as It Might Be”’.\textsuperscript{112} Indeed once

\textsuperscript{106} Anonymous, \textit{The Spectator}, 24 November 1883, p. 1508.
\textsuperscript{107} The article, ‘A Day in Surrey with William Morris’, did not appear in \textit{Century Magazine} until July 1886, no. 32, pp. 388–97. Lazarus was particularly impressed by the circulating library at Merton, where ‘the books were as richly bound as though intended for the poet’s private shelves in consonance with [Morris’s] theory that the working man must be helped and uplifted ... by developing and feeding his sense of beauty’ (p. 390).
\textsuperscript{108} ‘Fictionary’ was the name Morris and William de Morgan coined for the imaginary factory they dreamed of jointly occupying. See Morris to William de Morgan, 16 April 1881, in \textit{Letters}, vol. II, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{110} Harvey and Press, \textit{Design and Enterprise}, p. 135. See pp. 128–57 for extended discussion of the commercial reasons behind Morris’s relocation of his workshops at this time.
Fig. lxviii
Fields, factories and workshops: Morris & Co.'s Merton Abbey works, shown on a map of 1894. The site is now occupied by a housing estate and shopping centre.

Fig. lxix
The 'fictionary'. Painting of the mill pond at Merton Abbey by Lexdon Lewis Peacock (1850–1919), showing the carpet, tapestry and printing shed.
Photographs also emphasise the ‘rural’ and ‘idyllic’ qualities of the Merton works. Top: the carpet, tapestry and printing shed. Bottom: the stained glass and dye house. There is no record of Morris ever questioning his own pollution of the Wandle. Though the dyes he used were insect or vegetable-based, the concentration of such dye-stuffs in the water could hardly have benefited the quality of the water.
Morris had resolved to purchase Merton, he was moved to write to William de Morgan: 'so adieu Blockley and joy for ever, and welcome grubbiness, London, low spirits and boundless riches'.

This is not to say that Morris did not do his best to make the surroundings as decent as possible at Merton. Though he considered the suburb ‘woeful beyond conception’, he thought the grounds of his factory were ‘even very pretty’. He added extra trees and flowers to the shrubs, lilies, larkspur, primroses and violets that already adorned the site. He also allowed the kitchen garden to be divided into plots and let out to the workers. Furthermore, in March 1882, when the London and South Western Water Company brought a private bill before Parliament to sink wells and tap the springs of the Wandle, Morris was vigorous in opposition. No doubt some of this vigour derived from his awareness that such a tapping of the river would endanger his recently relocated business. Morris depended on a constant supply of good water at Merton, and wrote in a state of some agitation to family friend and M.P., George Howard: ‘I am in a fix—for look here: I took this place muchly for the sake of its water-power, & for the water of the Wandle; and now the Wandle is going to be dried up’. Nevertheless, these were not the only grounds on which Morris objected to the bill. Morris also asked his C.P.S. colleague, James Bryce, for help, writing: ‘I think you will believe me when I say that such a loss of a beautiful stream would grieve me more on public than on private grounds’. To the novelist William Hale White he also commented ‘even if I were not pecuniarily interested in the flow of water, I should, both as an artist & a man of letters, feel myself sorely injured by the destruction of the beauty of this famous little stream’. Much to Morris’s relief, the bill was rejected on 31 March.

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113 Morris to William de Morgan, 16 April 1881, in *Letters*, vol. II, p. 42.
115 For descriptions of Morris’s work on the grounds at Merton, see Morris, ‘Scribbling Diary’, 1881, entry for 27 December; Wardle, ‘Memorials of William Morris’, in *Art, Ethics and Enterprise*, pp. 99–104; and the articles in *The Spectator* and *Century Magazine* described above.
The difficulties involved in establishing a viable, decent workplace at Merton, and the impossibility of making it all he wished it to be, undoubtedly spurred Morris towards a more general awareness of the broader kinds of social change that would be necessary to facilitate ‘beautiful work in beautiful surroundings’. Already, in September 1880, he was beginning to wish that ‘something more startling could be done than mere private grumbling and occasional public speaking to lift the standard of revolt against the sordidness which people are so stupid as to think necessary’. ‘I have more than ever at my heart the importance for people of living in beautiful places’, he told Georgiana Burne-Jones.\footnote{Morris to Georgiana Burne-Jones, 27 September 1880, in \textit{Letters}, vol. I, p. 591.} Even in March 1881, at the height of his campaigning for the Kyrle Society, Morris indicated the need to look elsewhere for solutions. In ‘The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization’, one of his most powerful lectures, Morris grappled with these problems at considerable length. Guarding the natural beauty of the earth, he claims, is one of the ‘first and readiest way of giving people back their eyes’ and is easy ‘to set about; [because] up to a certain point you will have all people of good will to the public good on your side’; and he notes that what ‘has actually been begun in this direction ... considering how hopeless things looked twenty years ago ... is marvellous’.\footnote{Morris, ‘The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization’, p. 135.} Nevertheless, his praise of such efforts is somewhat barbed. He hopes that the citizens of the future will be proud that the members of a small, humble, and rather obscure, though I will say it, a beneficent society, should have felt it their duty to shut their eyes to the apparent hopelessness of attacking with their feeble means the stupendous evils they had become alive to, so that they might be able to make some small beginnings towards awakening the general public to a due sense of those evils.

Thereafter, he proceeds to cautiously underline the limitations of such moves:

\begin{quote}
I say, that though I ask your earnest support for such associations as the Kyrle and the Commons Preservation Societies, and though I feel sure that they have begun at the right end, ... [and] though we are bound to wait for nobody's help than our own in dealing with the devouring hideousness and squalor of our great towns, and especially of London, for which the whole country is responsible; yet it would be idle not to acknowledge that the difficulties in our way are far too huge and wide-spreading to be grappled by private or semi-private efforts only.
\end{quote}
Thus he asks his audience not to look on ‘all we can do in this way ... as palliatives of an unendurable state of things’

but as tokens of what we desire; which is in short the giving back to our country of the natural beauty of the earth, which we are so ashamed of having taken away from it; and our chief duty herein will be to quicken this shame and the pain that comes from it in the hearts of our fellows: this I say is one of the chief duties of all those who have any right to the title of cultivated men...\(^{121}\)

Yet Morris was also becoming wary of the aims, intentions and effectiveness of ‘cultivated men’. By July 1881 he had even become wary of the paternalistic agitating of the S.P.A.B. He confided to Georgiana Burne-Jones: ‘As to the Anti-Scrape, I have little comfort there I must say: we have begun too late and our foes are too many’. ‘[T]o take ... trouble in any degree’, he now argued, ‘it is needful that a man should be touched with a real love of the earth, a worship of it, no less; and I think that as things go, that is seldom felt’. ‘[T]he most refined and cultured people’, Morris argued, ‘have a sort of Manichean hatred of the world’. It is in this letter that Morris indicates that ‘cowardice’, ‘tyranny’ and ‘people’s apathy’ have shaken his ‘faith in gradual progress’. In July, however, he could only respond to his friend:

if you ask me why I kick against the pricks in this matter, all I can say is, first because I cannot help it, and secondly because I am encouraged by a sort of faith that something will come of it, some kind of culture of which we know nothing at present.\(^{122}\)

In October, though Morris still found the work of the Kyrle and Commons Preservation Societies ‘encouraging’, he warned his audience that he had ‘ideas as to what steps would best help us on our way, [which] ... would not be accepted by you’.\(^{123}\) Nevertheless, he argued:

I feel sure that when you are thoroughly intent on the goal you will find the means to reach it, and it is of infinitesimal importance what those means may be. When you have accepted the maxim that the external aspect of

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\(^{122}\) Morris to Georgiana Burne-Jones, 2 July 1881, in *Letters*, vol. II, p. 52.  
the country belongs to the whole public, and that whoever wilfully injures that property is a public enemy, the cause will be on its way to victory. 124

This reference to ‘means’ and ‘the cause’ are not, at this stage, covert allusions to the socialism he would embrace in just over a year’s time. They are indicative, however, of Morris’s impatience with gradualism and reform. This can be seen, in muted form, as early as February 1880, when he challenged his audience to ‘[h]ave nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful’. 125 By early 1881, however, such pleas to opt for ‘white-washed walls, and the green trees and flowery meads’ rather than ‘a grimy palace amid the smoke with a regiment of housemaids always working to smear the dirt together’ were linked to calls to reject the luxury that ‘choke[s] both demand and supply of Mechanical Toil’. 126 In 1879 Morris had asked:

We who think, and can enjoy the feast that Nature has spread for us, is it not both our right and our duty to rebel against that slavery of the waste of life’s joys, which people thoughtless and joyless, by no fault of their own, have wrapped the world in? 127

By July 1881 he had identified ‘the river of fire’, 128 and more stridently emphasised the production of beauty rather than the protection of it:

I have prayed you to set yourselves earnestly to protecting what is left, and recovering what is lost of the Natural Fairness of the Earth: no less I pray you to do what you may to raise up some firm ground amid the great flood of mechanical toil, to make an effort to win human and hopeful work for yourselves and your fellows. 129

The ‘fairness of the earth’ (sometimes, though not usually, capitalised) becomes an emphatic refrain in Morris’s lectures throughout 1881. His exhortation to art and its patrons and protagonists to ‘do their best to give us back the fairness of the Earth’ comprises an understanding of ‘fairness’ as both ‘just’ and ‘beautiful’. He

127 Morris, ‘Making the Best of It’, p. 118.
insists that ‘our museums and art schools will be but amusements of the rich’ which will ‘cease to be of any use to them also’ until

our streets are decent and orderly, and our town gardens break the bricks and mortar every here and there, and are open to all people; until our meadows even near our towns become fair and sweet, and are unspoiled by patches of hideousness; until we have clear sky above our heads and green grass beneath our feet; until the great drama of the seasons can touch our workmen with other feelings than the misery of winter and the weariness of summer...

Decent surroundings are, in other words, ‘fair’ and natural, and fair and natural surroundings are just. They are surroundings that should be enjoyed by all. In them we should see

the faces of people in the streets bearing the tokens of mirth and sorrow and hope, and all the tale of their lives: the scraps of nature the busiest of us would come across; birds and beasts and the little worlds they live in; and even in the very town the sky above us and the drift of the clouds across it; the wind’s hand on the slim trees, and its voice amid their branches, and all the ever-recurring deeds of nature; nor would the road or the river winding past our homes fail to tell us stories of the country-side, and men’s doings in field and fell. And whiles we should fall to muse on the times when all the ways of nature were mere wonders to men, yet so well beloved of them that they called them by men’s names and gave them deeds of men to do; and many a time there would come before us memories of the deeds of past times, and of the aspirations of those mighty peoples whose deaths have made our lives, and their sorrows our joys.

And ‘what voice could tell it’, Morris asks, ‘but the voice of Art: and what audience for such a tale would content us but all men living on the Earth?’ ‘[A]ll the ever-recurring deeds of nature’, Morris the evolutionist postulates, should be part of an ‘outward order and beauty’ that is ‘a token of fair and orderly life, of days made up of unwearisome work, and of leisure restful but not vacant’. In fact, the distinction need not be made; according to Morris, one cannot have one without the other. Thus, towards the end of ‘The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization’, Morris tells his audience that what he has ‘been really urging on you’ is ‘belief in the beneficent

progress of civilization’ and in ‘the real meaning of the arts, which are surely the
expression of reverence for nature, and the crown of nature, the life of man upon the
earth’. This is why, three months later in October, he asks those assembled at the
Burslem Town Hall whether ‘a reasonable share in the beauty of the earth’ is ‘such an
exorbitant claim to make of civilization’.

Morris never abandoned his care and concern for ‘external nature’. Later in
life, he served a term as president of the Selborne Society and was also a member of
the Society for Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising. Each of these
organisations were concerned with preserving or protecting nature in some form.
Morris also campaigned vigorously whenever he discovered some local or familiar
‘piece of nature’ under threat. In August 1883 he complained about the state of the
‘malodorous and insanitary … ditch which runs along the towpath from the Soap
Works by Hammersmith-bridge’. In 1887 he appealed to the readers of
Commonweal ‘to do their best to preserve the beauty and interest of the country’, and, in particular, to oppose the proposed Ambleside railway, which he believed would make ‘the Cumberland and Westmoreland “show-country” a mere appendage to … [the] filth-heaps of Manchester and Liverpool’. In 1895, he wrote a series of
lengthy letters to the Daily Chronicle concerning tree felling in Epping Forest.
Later that same year, he also wrote to the Thames Conservancy Board about
alterations to the lock-keeper’s cottage at Eaton Weir near Kelmscott, which he felt
were not in keeping with the Thames and its landscape.

Yet by 1882 Morris was much more concerned with the human figure in the
landscape, and more motivated by his apprehension that

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136 The Society for Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising was formed by Richardson Evans and
Octavia Hill in 1893 to campaign against the erection of outdoor advertisements, such as those placed
alongside rail routes. Morris became a member in its first year, and gave his last public address at its
annual meeting in January 1896.
200.
85; in Journalism, p. 206.
140 This campaign is discussed in Chapter 4 the Appendix.
outward order and beauty ... [are] a token of fair and orderly life, of days made up of unwearisome work, and of leisure restful but not vacant: of a life in which year by year the land ... grow[s] dearer and fairer to a man as he gets to know it better and better..."  

By 1883 Morris had come to the conclusion that reforms ‘founded on individualism must perish with the individuals who have set it going’. ‘Both my historical studies and my practical conflict with the philistinism of modern society’, he told Andreas Scheu, ‘have forced on me the conviction that art cannot have a real life and growth under the present system of commercialism and profit-mongering’. This is the ‘view’, he argued, that he had been trying to develop in his lectures since 1877: ‘which is in fact Socialism seen through the eyes of an artist’. In the 1880s, however, his prism of perception and locus of understanding began to change. Increasingly, Morris began to look at the beauty of the earth—to look at ‘the expression of reverence for nature, and the crown of nature, the life of man upon the earth’—not through the eyes of an artist or conservationist, but through the eyes of a socialist. In 1884 he told the Seventh Annual Meeting of the S.P.A.B. that it would simply not be possible for a small knot of cultivated people to keep alive an interest in the art and records of the past amidst the present conditions of a sordid and heart-breaking struggle for existence of the many, and languid sauntering through life for the few..."  

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2. The land for the people

Before we examine the specific nature of Morrisian socialism, it is necessary to acknowledge the other social and socialist thinkers who influenced Morris's imagination of relationships between human and non-human nature. Morris was familiar with many dissenting voices who, along with Ruskin and Carlyle, facilitated and coloured his reading of Marx. In 1882, though seemingly poised on the brink of active socialist engagement, Morris spent a great deal of time 'working out new theories of life', often 'very much alone'. Outwardly at least, he passed much of the year engaged by matters of art and business. This was, however, more a period of reassessment and personal reorientation than 'retreat'. During his time alone he was reading Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* (1879), John Stuart Mill's 'Chapters on Socialism' (1879), Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) and Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872). He also became familiar with the work of writers and reformers whom he would later label 'utopists', and in 1883, at about the same time he was reading Marx, the works of William Cobbett. It is necessary to be aware how these alternative forms of social, radical and socialist thought provided a wider interpretative framework of social analysis that included nature in ways different to Marx.

It is likely that Morris first heard of Henry George in 1881, when *Progress and Poverty* was being read by many British Radicals and intellectuals. Morris

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1 The dating of Morris's becoming a socialist, in a broad sense, is a matter of some debate. Retrospectively, Morris (Morris to Andreas Scheu, 15 September 1883, in *Letters*, vol. II, pp. 230–1) himself claimed that, since his entrance into public life, he had never been under any illusion as to how little Liberal or Radical politics could achieve, and had 'always intended to join any body who distinctly called themselves Socialists'. 'I had no transitional period', he claimed in 'How I Became a Socialist' (p. 277), 'unless you may call such a brief period of political radicalism during which I saw my ideal clear enough, but had no hope of any realization of it'. This seems slightly disingenuous. In a letter of 8 January 1882 (in *Letters*, vol. II, p. 95), for example, Morris still identified his 'cause' as art and appears to have had no specific plan of action, arguing: 'I know that the cause for which I specially work is doomed to fail, at least in seeming; I mean that art must go under, where or how ever it may come up again. I don't know if I explain what I'm driving at, but it does sometimes seem to me a strange thing indeed that a man should be driven to work with energy and even with pleasure and enthusiasm at work which he knows will serve no end but amusing himself; am I doing nothing but make-believe then, something like Louis XVI's lock-making?'


3 Apart from appearing on the platform at a meeting at the Mansion House to protest at the pogroms in Russia following the assassination of Czar Alexander II, all of the lectures delivered by Morris in 1882 were at or on behalf of 'artistic' organisations. His letters also reflect a lessening of interest in public affairs, with the exception of his efforts later in the year to organise famine relief for Iceland.
probably read the book in 1882, during or after George’s highly successful tour throughout England and Ireland.\(^4\) George argued that ‘[t]he great cause of inequality in the distribution of wealth is inequality in the ownership of land’.\(^5\) So long as private hands barred access to ‘Nature’s storehouse’,\(^6\) he maintained, the gap between wealth and poverty would remain. Instead, George called for the socialisation of rent by means of a ‘single tax’ on land. He believed that relieving ‘labour and capital from all taxation, direct and indirect’, and ‘throw[ing] the burden upon rent’ would totally destroy inequality.\(^7\) A single tax, he argued, would restore the value of the land to the community that had created it. His scheme appealed to the moral assumption that God had intended the land for the people; it affirmed the gospel of ‘natural rights’ and, with ‘Rousseauian undertones’, challenged the utilitarian respect for property rights.\(^8\)

As Thompson noted, George’s work, drawing on a rich heritage of radical thought concerning the ‘land question’, ‘struck an answering chord’ among those already interested in land nationalisation, and ‘gave voice’ to growing resentment of orthodox political economy.\(^9\) In the 1880s numerous organisations were founded upon ‘Georgist’ principles, and for many it opened ‘revolutionary perspectives’.\(^10\) For Morris, part of the appeal of George’s work probably lay in the ‘tension between pragmatism and utopianism’ running through the book. While the means of achieving reform was dwelt on at length, George also underlined that the single tax was designed, as Avner Offer has argued, ‘to bring about a reversal of urbanisation, a return to nature, an end to alienation and inequality and the full development of men’s innate powers’.\(^11\)

\(^4\) That Morris had read *Progress and Poverty* by November 1882 is indicated in a letter he wrote to his daughter, Jenny (13 November 1882, in *Letters*, vol. II, p. 135), in which he favourably compares it with Alfred Russell Wallace’s *Land Nationalisation*.
\(^7\) George, *Progress and Poverty*, p. 311.
\(^8\) Offer, *Property and Politics*, p. 185.
Most of what we know about Morris’s opinion of George comes from letters and articles written after 1882. Yet it is possible to discern from these comments just what it was that appealed to Morris at this earlier stage. In June 1883 he described the reception of *Progress and Poverty* as akin to that of a ‘new Gospel’. In April 1884, while noting that there were ‘grave differences’ between George and socialists, Morris hailed him in *Justice* as a ‘friend and noble fellow-worker’, telling his readers that they shared crucial ‘common goals’ with the ‘Prophet of California’: ‘We too desire to overthrow the landlord domination; we too have worked for years to get back the land for the people’. Thus, though Morris would denounce him as a ‘wretch’ and a ‘traitor!!’ in 1887, in 1882 he was drawn to George because George identified land—‘Nature’s storehouse’—as a key issue.

Morris was no doubt reminded of the arguments of the land reformers at the C.P.S. Champions of popular claims to the land since 1865, the Radicals in this organisation had also lashed out at enclosure and appealed to the ‘natural rights’ of the community. Having established, therefore, that all had a right to a ‘reasonable share in the beauty of the earth’, George’s politics of land reform convinced Morris that all should also have a share in the produce of the earth. *Land Nationalisation* (1882), by the naturalist Alfred Russell Wallace, further convinced Morris of this fact, and it is worth noting this was the most prominent creed of the Democratic Federation when Morris joined this association at the beginning of 1883. In future years, as noted below, land reform remained high on the agenda of both the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League.

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13 Morris (‘Henry George’, *Justice*, vol. I, no. 12, 5 April 1884, p. 23) wrote: ‘The worst enemies of the people to-day are those whom our ‘Prophet of California’ leaves untouched by his denunciations and unscathed by his sarcasm. To Mr George the robber of a hundred is a villain indeed: the dexterous annexer of many thousands may pass full pocketed on his way as a benefactor of his race’. Yet, for a number of years, he still considered George ‘a good destructive agent’ (Morris to Frederick Harrison, 22 January 1884, in *Letters*, vol. II, p. 260).
15 This was in response to George’s approval of the condemnation and execution of the Chicago Anarchists. See Morris, ‘Notes on News’, *Commonweal*, vol. III, no. 96, 12 November 1887, p. 361; in *Journalism*, p. 309.
16 On 13 November 1882, Morris wrote to Jenny Morris (*Letters*, vol. II, p. 135) that though he did not think Wallace’s *Land Nationalisation* ‘nearly such a good book as George’s … there are some things to remember in it’.
Morris might also have drawn certain parallels between George’s discussion of land reform and the work William Cobbett, which he began to read at about this time. The immediate impact of Cobbett on Morris was less conspicuous than that of George, but probably more lasting and profound. E. P. Thompson claimed that Cobbett ‘had a pronounced influence upon the forthright polemical style of Morris’s later Socialist writings’, and Morris’s empathy for Cobbett probably derived from kindred structures of sentiment or feeling. Morris referred to being ‘amused’ and ‘touched’ by Cobbett, and noted that his books were ‘queer’ but ‘with plenty of stuff in them’. He also noted that his works were ‘of great literary capacity of a kind’, and called Cobbett ‘the master of plain-speaking’. He particularly liked *Cottage Economy* (1822) and its ‘chapter on the making of a straw plait’ and ‘the article on the pig’. Moreover it is quite likely that Morris felt a certain affinity with the man who had lived just across the Thames at Barn Elm and observed the ‘monstrous wen ... sucking up the vitals of the country’.

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17 It is difficult to accurately date Morris’s reading of Cobbett. Though Thompson (*Romantic to Revolutionary*, p. 269) writes that Morris ‘was reading a good deal of Cobbett’ in 1882, and claims this ‘is evident from the many references’, I have found no references to Cobbett by Morris prior to 14 August 1883 (*Letters*, vol. II, p. 215), when he ordered Cobbett’s works from the publishers Ellis & White. It is worth noting, moreover, that Morris does not link Hindhead with Cobbett when he visits the area in the summer of 1882, but does in a later visit of 1888. See *Letters*, vol. II, pp. 120–1, 830.

18 Thompson, *Romantic to Revolutionary*, p. 269.

19 Morris to Jenny Morris, 4 September 1883, in *Letters*, vol. II, p. 223.


22 Morris to Jenny Morris, 4 September 1883, in *Letters*, vol. II, p. 223. The full title of this work was: *Cottage Economy: Containing Information Relative to the Brewing of Beer, Making of Bread, Keeping of Cows, Pigs, Bees, Ewes, Goats, Poultry, and Rabbits, and Relative to Other Matters Deemed Useful in the Conducting of the Affairs of a Labourer’s Family*. No doubt, part of Morris’s delight in these chapters was the way they reminded him of the domestic economy of Woodford Hall in his youth. May Morris’s comments (*AWS*, vol. II, pp. 31–2) also reflect Morris’s interest in the habits of country life discussed by Cobbett.

What Morris read in Cobbett was both the ‘countryman’s’ and ‘tribune’s’ sense of the misuse of the land and the crisis of the people.24 Long before George and the C.P.S., Cobbett had railed against increasing privatisation, arguing that it was ‘useless in point of production’ and that it broke up ‘[d]owns, most beautiful and valuable too’.25 Cobbett’s real emphasis, however, was on the ways in which enclosures had been ‘malignantly mischievous’ to labourers. He emphasised that they drove them from the skirts of commons, downs and forests. They took away their cows, pigs, geese, fowls, bees, and gardens. They crowded them into miserable outskirts of towns and villages, for their children to become rickety and diseased, confined amongst filth and vermin. They took from them their best inheritance: sweet air, health, and the little liberty they had left.26

And he blamed the ‘taxing and funding ... system’ which had ‘drawn the real property of the nation into fewer hands’, while the labourer ‘look[s] back upon his half-naked and half-famished children, while, from his door, he surveys all around him the land teeming with the means of luxury to his opulent and overgrown master’.27 His ‘rural rides’ led him to declare emphatically:

Here are resources! Here is wealth! Here are all the means of national power, and of individual plenty and happiness! And yet, at the end of these beautiful ten miles, covered with all means of affording luxury in diet and dress, we entered ... [a city], which, out of twenty thousand inhabitants, contained at that very moment upwards of eight thousand miserable paupers.28

Thus Cobbett argued that the whole culture of the rentier, the whole way of life based on profit from the work of others, was ‘unnatural’. ‘What!’ he characteristically exclaimed in terms and tone that Morris both appreciated and replicated, ‘how

24 Williams pointed to this dual orientation of Cobbett’s criticism, and my analysis of Cobbett here is indebted to his reading of Cobbett in Culture and Society (pp. 13–20) and Cobbett, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983.
27 Cobbett, Political Register, 15 March 1806; quoted in Williams, Culture and Society, pp. 13–14.
28 Cobbett, Political Register, 6 December 1806; quoted in Williams, Culture and Society, p. 14.
wretched; how troubled; how unnatural; how every thing abominable, must that state of things be, where abundant harvest can be called a *redundancy*, and where men talk of a remedy for such *redundancy*!  

This is the aspect of Cobbett’s work that Raymond Williams underlined: ‘always the first physical facts and resources in Cobbett are people’.  

In this respect, Cobbett’s work referred Morris back to his earlier interest in Kingsley’s ‘socio-political ideas’; that is in the Kingsley who, as Gillian Beer has noted, spoke against an exclusively aesthetic appreciation of the countryside.  

Cobbett also discussed nature in very specific terms, and in a way that related to the anti-utilitarian concerns of George and the land reformers. One of his most vitriolic columns in the *Political Register* was an attack on ‘Parson’ Malthus. Morris, himself not above journalistic insult, would have agreed with both the tone and content of this letter. The letter attacked Malthus’s conception of the ‘laws of nature’ in his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), a book that Cobbett found ‘more offensive to my feelings even than that of the Dungeon-Bill’. Cobbett begins by opposing what he sees as the real ‘laws of nature’ to Malthus’s ‘cool and deliberate and unrelenting cruelty’:

> The law of nature bids a man not starve in a land of plenty... Your law of nature is sitting at Westminster, to make the labourer pay taxes, to make him fight for the safety of the land, to bind him in allegiance, and when he is poor and hungry, to cast him off to starve, or, to hang him if he takes food to save his life! I am glad, however, that you blundered upon the law of nature; because that is the very ground, on which I mean to start endeavouring clearly to establish the Rights of the Poor...  

He then develops his ‘laws’ at length, and they are worth quoting because of the similar insistence in Morris:

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30 Thus, making his point in the 1980s, Williams (Cobbett, p. 77) argued, in no uncertain terms, that ‘though ecology has a friend in Cobbett’, it is not ‘the abstract and sentimental “ecology” (“conservation”, “preservation”) which has been spreading so fast through the rentier culture: a way of seeing which is always willing to subordinate people, other people, and their immediate physical needs’.


32 Cobbett, ‘To Parson Malthus, On the Rights of the Poor, and the cruelty recommended by him to be exercised towards the Poor’, *Political Register*, vol. XXXIV, column 1019, 8 May 1819; in *The Opinions of William Cobbett*, p. 187.

when nature causes a country to exist and people to exist in it, she leaves
the people ... to live as they can; to follow their own inclinations and
propensities ... at their pleasure. She imposes no shackles other than those
which the heart and mind themselves suggest. She gives no man dominion
over other man, except that dominion which grows out of superior cunning
or bodily strength. She gives to no man any portion of the earth or of its
fruits for his own exclusive enjoyment...

But when this state of things is wholly changed; when the people
come to an agreement to desist, for their mutual benefit, from using their
cunning and strength at their sole will and pleasure. When the strong man
agrees to give up the advantages which nature has given him, in order that
he may enjoy the greater advantage of those regulations which give
protection to all, he surely must be understood to suppose, as a condition,
that no state of things is ever to arise, in which he, without having broken
the compact on his part, is to be refused, not only protection from harm,
but even the bare means of existence.

The land, the trees, the fruits, the herbage, the roots are, by the
law of nature, the common possession of all the people...  

Finally, he wags his finger at Malthus:

Oh, no! Mr. Parson! If we are to be left to the punishment of nature, leave
us also to be rewarded by nature. Leave us to the honest dame all through
the piece: she is very impartial in rewards as well as in her punishments:
let us have the latter, and we will take the former with all our hearts.  

This was certainly the emphasis that Morris took from Cobbett, whom he
considered ‘a man ... with flashes of insight as to social matters far before his time’.  

In 1889, writing about the London Dock Strike, Morris suggested that the strikers
carry a banner with Cobbett’s words: ‘A good man will be contented fast enough if he
be fed and clothed sufficiently; but if a man be not well fed and clad, he is a base
wretch to be contented’. ‘[O]n this foundation of victuals and shelter without anxiety’,
Morris claimed, ‘must you build “refinement” and all’.  

At about this time, also, Morris was beginning to observe the land in the same
way as Cobbett. In 1882 he noted that ‘the tilth is scanty’ in Hindhead, and that it

36 Morris and Bax, ‘Political Movements in England’, vol. II, no. 33, 28 August 1886, pp. 170–1; in
Political Writings, p. 548.
Political Writings, p. 452.
‘looks more than most countrysides as if it were kept for the pleasure of the rich, as
indeed it is’. He made similar observations of the country around Godstow and
Wytham in Wiltshire, and was appalled by the conditions described in ‘a book written
by an Italian peasant (near Verona) complaining of their misery’:

How shocking it seemed to me that all the riches of rich lands should be
wasted til they are no better than the poorest for most men. Think what
the constitution of civilised society must be for most men when the Italian
peasant is not better off, but worse off (taking one year with another), than
his brother of Iceland.

Iceland struck this message home hard in 1882. Britain had itself, of course, been experiencing a depression in agriculture and trade over the last decade. Morris’s reflections mentioned above therefore occurred at a time of general concern at economic conditions, and growing unquiet over the efficacy of utilitarian political economy. In this respect it is instructive to note that in the same letter that he remarked on the depopulation of the country around Hindhead, Morris also indicated that he was again thinking about Carlyle. He told Georgiana Burne-Jones that he had just read J.A. Froude’s recently published, Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years, 1795–1835 (1882), and that he liked Carlyle ‘much the better’ for reading it. ‘I fare to feel’, Morris concluded, ‘as if he were on the right side in spite of all faults’.

38 Morris to Georgiana Burne-Jones, 23 August 1882, in Letters, vol. II, p. 121. In 1888, he again visited Hindhead, this time referring to Cobbett explicitly. On 17 October he wrote to Jenny Morris (in Letters, vol. II, p. 830): ‘On Monday I went ... down into the Wilds of Surrey: our client lives on the top of Hind-head; so what Cobbet would have said to him I am sure I don’t know. The view from there is certainly beautiful... But the place itself is quite a desert: brake, whortleberries, Scotch fir, nothing else will grow’. As Kelvin observes, Morris was probably referring to Cobbett’s description of Hindhead in Rural Rides: ‘certainly the most villainous spot that God ever made’ (n. 4).
41 Repeated poor harvests and crippling cold winters had resulted in severe famine in Iceland by the summer of 1882. From late summer through the autumn, Morris again assumed a more public profile, organising a famine relief committee and writing to the papers with appeals for funds. See Letters, vol. II, pp. 116–33.
Carlyle had been asking the same questions in the same style as Cobbett. As Williams noted, there is a similar ‘intensity of denunciation’ in both their work, and a confidence that present chaos and evil cannot last long. Reading Froude and then Cobbett, probably reminded Morris of Carlyle’s censure of ‘unworking aristocracy’ in *Past and Present*: the ‘Game-preserving aristocratic Dilettantism’ which accused workers of overproduction, and provided ‘no-government and Laissez-faire’, or ‘misgovernment and Corn-Law’, rather than ‘true government and guidance’. In these chapters, Carlyle had also emphasised that ‘[t]he Land is Mother of us all’ and that ‘a Nation’s Life depends upon its Land’. He had claimed that ‘there can be no true Aristocracy, but must possess the Land’, and argued:

Properly speaking, the Land belongs to … the Almighty God; and to all His Children of Men that have ever worked well on it, or that shall ever work well on it. No generation of men can or could, with never such solemnity and effort, sell Land on any other principle: it is not the property of any generation, we say, but that of all the past generations that have worked on it, and of all the future ones that shall work on it.

And, though Carlyle’s appeal had been to the ‘Working Aristocracy’—to the ‘Mill-owners, Manufacturers, [and] Commanders of Working Men’—the questions he had posed suggested revolutionary answers, especially now. He had asked: ‘Who made the land of England? Who made it, this respectable English Land, wheat-growing, metalliferous, carboniferous, which will let readily hand over head for seventy millions or upwards, as it here lies: who did make it?’ Not the ‘much-consuming Aristocracy’, he had answered, who needed to learn that ‘Nature’s message will have itself obeyed’. ‘Nature and Fact’, he had warned, will dictate that ‘England will not be habitable long, unreformed’. Such, Morris must now have considered, was Carlyle, Cobbett and George’s ‘right side’.

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43 Williams, *Cobbett*, p. 58.
46 Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 175.
47 Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 177.
Surprisingly, it was not Carlyle, George or Cobbett who put the ‘finishing touch’ to Morris’s socialism, but the philosopher and economist, John Stuart Mill. Morris probably became acquainted with the work of Mill through the latter’s involvement in land reform and the C.P.S., and through the circulation of Mill’s ideas among his colleagues at the E.Q.A. and in the Labour Representation League. The ideas which had the most significant affect on Morris were those expressed in Mill’s posthumously published ‘Chapters on Socialism’, which first appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* in February and April 1879. It seems likely, however, that Morris did not read these chapters until late 1882. In ‘How I became a Socialist’, written for *Justice* in 1894, Morris recalled that although Mill had attacked ‘Socialism in its Fourierist guise’, he had ‘put the arguments ... clearly and honestly, and the result ... was to convince me that Socialism was a necessary change, and that it was possible to bring it about in our own days’.

What was it about Mill’s presentation of the case for socialism that Morris found so convincing, and what were the conceptions of nature and land contained therein? It has generally been acknowledged that in these ‘Chapters’, Mill was much more sympathetic to ‘socialist objections to the present order’, than socialist proposals to replace it. He did, indeed, ‘clearly and honestly’ prepare the ground for his essay, claiming that ‘the discussion that is now required is one that must go down to the very first principles of existing society’. Thus he immediately asked whether poverty was a ‘necessary evil’, and tackled socialist challenges to the ‘institution of property’. ‘The working classes’, he argued, ‘are entitled to claim that the whole field of social institutions should be re-examined, and every question considered as if it now arose for the first time’. They are entitled to do this, he claimed, because ‘the condition of the

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48 In ‘How I became a Socialist’ (p. 278), Morris wrote that Mill’s papers ‘put the finishing touch to my conversion to Socialism’.

49 Again, the dating of Morris’s reading of Mill cannot be definitely ascertained. Morris’s own description of Mill providing the ‘finishing touch’ to his socialism, just before his joining of the Democratic Federation in January 1883, however, suggests such a date.

50 Morris, ‘How I became a Socialist’, p. 278.


52 Mill, ‘Chapters on Socialism’, pp. 227, 224.

53 Mill, ‘Chapters on Socialism’, p. 228.
numbers in civilised Europe, and even in England and France, is more wretched than that of most tribes of savages who are known to us'. Moreover, he rejected all discussion of so-called distributive justice:

Since the human race has no means of enjoyable existence, or of existence at all, but what it derives from its own labour and abstinence, there would be no ground for complaint against society if every one who was willing to undergo a fair share of this labour and abstinence could attain a fair share of the fruits. But is this the fact? Is it not the reverse of the fact?

Having cleared the ground in this way, Mill proceeded to ‘exhibit the opinions of distinguished Socialists on the present arrangements of society’. He set out the doctrines of Charles Fourier and examined the work of Robert Owen and Louis Blanc. Most discussion of Morris’s reading of Mill’s ‘Chapters’ have concentrated on the possible influence of Fourier. It is worth pausing to consider, however, that Morris would also have warmed to the passages quoted from Louis Blanc’s *Organisation du Travail* (1845), which discuss the inability of the poor to access the ‘fruits’ of the ‘soil’ because they have been appropriated. Long-time railer against the ‘age of shoddy’, Morris would also have been impressed by Blanc’s denunciation of a ‘cheapness’ which ‘is the great instrument in the hands of monopoly’. Cheapness, Morris would have summarised, cheapens labour, cheapens life.

Undoubtedly, Morris was most impressed by Mill’s explication of Fourierist doctrine. Mill himself was highly impressed by these arguments. He found ‘the picture of a Fourierist community … attractive’, and even argued ‘it is much to be desired that the scheme should have that fair trial which alone can test the workableness of any new scheme of social life’. Mill explored these ideas through the work of Fourier’s most effective proselyte, Victor Considerant. He quoted approvingly Considerant’s contention that ‘if nations are poor and starving it is not because nature has denied the means of producing wealth, but because of the anarchy and disorder in our

\[54\] Mill, ‘Chapters on Socialism’, p. 230.
\[55\] Mill, ‘Chapters on Socialism’, p. 231.
\[56\] Mill, ‘Chapters on Socialism’, p. 234.
\[57\] Mill, ‘Chapters on Socialism’, p. 234.
\[59\] Mill, ‘Chapters on Socialism’, p. 273.
employment of those means'. '[I]n other words', Considérant argued, 'it is because society is wretchedly constituted and labour unorganised'.

Fourierist solutions to this 'anarchy and disorder' attracted many, and it has been argued that Fourier 'perceived much more clearly than others ... the primacy of self-development and self-expression within the world of work and society'. Central to this vision was a theory of 'attractive labour', and it is probably this idea that appealed most to Morris. While Marx rejected the idea of attractive labour because he made a philosophical distinction between necessity and freedom, Fourier was content to make only a psychological one. Thus, as Jonathan Beecher and Richard Bienvenu have argued, while Marx insisted that 'man' was destined to live at least part of his life within the 'Kingdom of Necessity', the fact that work was objectively necessary mattered little to Fourier 'because he did not sense an irreconcilable antagonism between man and nature':

Harmonians would work arduously, but their productive activities would be as elegant and graceful as taste and intelligence could make them. Nature, Fourier believed, was neither harsh nor hostile and Harmony would have no room for the Promethean dynamism or the sweating bodies and calloused hands celebrated in many nineteenth-century socialist visions of the future.

Most famously, Fourier also asserted that contemporary codes of morality led to the 'betrayal of nature, or the martyrdom of attraction'. This indictment of 'civilised' morality, as well as his attack on the family and plea for the emancipation of women, were incorporated into much developing socialist thought.

Morris set down his thoughts on the contributions of Fourier and other 'utopists', such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Saint Simon, in the *Commonweal*

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60 Victor Considérant, 'La Destinée Sociale'; quoted in Mill, 'Chapters on Socialism', p. 240.
62 Mill ('Chapters on Socialism', p. 247) describes as 'one of the cardinal points of this school' that the present system 'has for its special characteristic ... a repugnance for work—a disgust for labour'.
64 Charles Fourier, *Théorie de l'unité universelle* (1841-43); quoted in *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier*, p. 147.
essays ‘Socialism from the Root Up’. Here Morris criticised them because they ‘had not learned to recognise the sequence of events which forces social changes on mankind whether they are conscious of its force or not’. Yet there are also many similarities between Fourier’s social vision and Morris’s later imagination of a ‘natural society’ of communities that had transformed work into ‘meaningful play’. The importance of dream, vision and ‘moral imagination’ in Morris’s work has also been noted, and, though Morris consistently underlined his ideological differences with such visionary anarchists, his hatred of ‘profit farming’ and the later moral topography of News from Nowhere reveal common ground with a writer such as Proudhon.

Also included in Morris’s list of ‘utopists’ was Owen, whose Book of the New Moral World (1836–44) was briefly discussed by Mill. Morris did not emphasise the links between his own work and this earlier, though very different, English socialist. Yet, besides what he read in Mill, he appears to have been reading Owen around the time he joined the Democratic Federation: a friend’s diary records that he ‘praised Robert Owen immensely’.

Owen had drawn greatly on the work of William Godwin, whose Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793) had emphasised that nature was a ‘common stock’, which should be used to the best advantage of all. More importantly, Godwin believed that human nature was formed by circumstance or environment. Thus,

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67 See Chapter 2 of the Appendix.
69 Proudhon had, of course, coined the slogan ‘Property is Theft’, and advocated federalism and decentralisation as organising principles for self-managing communities. He was also among the first ‘socialists’ to articulate a deep nostalgia for loss of human connection to a natural or rural environment. Proudhon preached, what could be read in effect as, a more sensuous or material version of the ‘gospel’ of George, or the vigorous exclamations of Cobbett. See, for example, Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, ed. Stewart Edwards, trans. Elisabeth Fraser, Macmillan, London, 1960, p. 197.
following Godwin, Owen had provided 'decent surroundings' for his workers at New Lanark, and Owenite socialism had envisioned 'natural societies' made up of decentralised, self-governing communities.

It was this element of Owen that appealed to the imagination of Morris and many of his contemporaries. In 1886 Morris noted with approval Owen's 'great experiment' at New Lanark, and explained to the readers of Commonweal that Owen founded 'all his action on his theory of the perfectibility of man by the amelioration of surroundings'. Later, News from Nowhere would recall many aspects of the social topography of Owen's vision. Certainly, his view that human character is formed by the environment reinforced Morris's sense of the importance of a 'reasonable share in the beauty of the earth' as the right of all. As Williams noted, Owen's significance in the socialist tradition is his teaching that human nature itself is the product of culture and environment. By 1888, however, Morris was careful to warn his readers that

[since the days of Robert Owen the position of Co-operation has been quite changed by the uprising of revolutionary Socialism as a result of the application of the doctrine of evolution to human society, and the consequent perception of the class-struggle. The Co-operationists of Robert Owen's time did not perceive the existence of the class-struggle, and their co-operation was but a part of their ideal of Socialism in the future, and a means to that end in the present. They knew that monopoly of the means of production existed, but they did not know (in spite of Adam Smith) that it was an essential part of the society, political and economic, under which they lived.

He emphasised that

true co-operation and privilege cannot exist together. The monopolists of the means of production will only allow the Co-operationists to rise out of their class misery on condition that they themselves shall join the ranks of the privileged, and live on interest, rent, and profit, thus forming a new class of owners, whose business is in the main keeping down the producers.

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72 Morris and Bax, ‘The Utopists’, p. 564.
73 Williams, Culture and Society, p. 29.
Mill, however, in summing up his ‘Chapters on Socialism’ had no such faith in revolutionary socialism, ‘the application of the doctrine of evolution to human society’ or class-struggle. Though he ended his review by suggesting that ‘the various schemes for managing the productive resources of the country by public instead of private agency have a case for trial’, he also considered that ‘an entire renovation of the social fabric, such as is contemplated by Socialism, establishing the economic constitution of society upon an entirely new basis, other than that of private property and competition’, was at that time impossible. Moreover, he warned that any kind of compulsive or revolutionary socialism ‘would plunge mankind into the state of nature so forcibly described by Hobbes’.

Yet Mill also noted that although ‘individual property has presumably a long term before it, if only of provisional existence, we are not, therefore, to conclude that it must exist during that whole term unmodified, or that all the rights now regarded as appertaining to property belong to it inherently, and must endure while it endures’. Moreover he went on to underline the need for land reform and to discuss the ways in which property had been differently conceived and handled in different places and times. He was able to conclude, therefore, that property ‘is variable like all other creatures of the human mind’, and to assert that ‘society is fully entitled to abrogate or alter any particular right of property which on sufficient consideration it judges to stand in the way of the public good’. ‘And assuredly’, he continued,

the terrible case which … Socialists are able to make out against the present economic order of society, demands a full consideration of all means by which the institution may have a chance of being made to work in a manner more beneficial to that large portion of society which at present enjoys the least share of its direct benefits.

Morris, whose reading of nature was romantic rather than Hobbesian, concurred with Mill on this last point, but could not understand why Mill ultimately

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76 Mill, ‘Chapters on Socialism’, p. 275.
77 Mill, ‘Chapters on Socialism’, p. 274.
78 Mill, ‘Chapters on Socialism’, p. 275.
79 Mill, ‘Chapters on Socialism’, p. 279.
thought monopoly of the land 'natural'. Yet it was Mill who had played a large part in convincing him of quite the opposite:

In plain words a monopoly can be maintained as long as the monopolists have fraud and force enough to hoodwink the most of men and bully the rest; failing that sufficiency of fraud and force, it is scattered to the winds.

Such a quote takes us beyond 1882, when Morris was reading Mill's 'Chapters'. Yet it is interesting to note that in the autumn of that year he was reading works that dispensed with 'fraud and force' and monopoly as well. These included Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), which contained a vehement rejection of enclosure, and a model for dispersed, semi-agrarian, 'natural' communities; Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872), a satirical fantasy about a land where morality is equated with health and aesthetics, and where machinery has been banned. With these works, it is not so much what is said or meant by these writers that is important, but the context in which Morris read them. These were ideas and 'images' stored up for later visionary reference.

What it is ultimately important to recognise here, is that the immediate pre-history of Morris's Marxian socialism was politically rich and varied. Moreover, as Lindsay noted, Morris 'arrived at Marxism' by his own logic: 'by a clear sense of the living relations of humanity and nature, of nature and art'. And it is these alternative 'socialisms', the radical thought of George, Cobbett, Mill, Fourier, Owen and More, along with the constant presence of Ruskin and Carlyle, that helped to maintain his focus on these 'living relations'. Morris's familiarity with, and possession of, an alternative socialist imagination led him to be drawn to the work of those such as

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80 See Chapter 3 of Section I above.
82 For Morris's reading of More, see Mackail, *Life*, vol. II, p. 89. *Utopia* was later included in a list of Morris's favourite books and published by the Kelmscott Press.
83 For Morris's reading of Butler, see Mackail, *Life*, vol. II, pp. 89–90. May Morris ('Introduction', in *CW*, vol. XXII, p. xxvii) noted that 'Erewhon' was 'a household word'.
84 Lindsay, *Life and Work*, p. 380. E.P. Thompson, Miguel Abensour and John Goode have all also emphasised the elements of Morris's socialism that resisted assimilation to Marx. See, in particular, Thompson's discussion of Goode and Abensour in his 'Postscript: 1976', in *Romantic to Revolutionary*, pp. 786–99.
Edward Carpenter and Peter Kropotkin, who placed great stress on the ‘natural’ bases of human society. It also helped facilitate his response to Marx’s ‘object of work’.
3. Communism as completed naturalism?

Morris joined H.M. Hyndman’s Democratic (soon to become Social Democratic) Federation in January 1883, after attending a number of its meetings over the winter. Land nationalisation had been one of the key topics discussed at these meetings. By April, he had begun to read Das Kapital (1867) in its French translation,¹ and was an immediate and enthusiastic ‘convert’ to Marxian socialism. By 1884, his copy of Capital ‘had been worn to loose sections by his own constant study of it’, and had to be rebound.² In lectures he commented on the ‘great man ... who cleared my mind on several points’;³ in articles he referred to ‘the author of the most thorough criticism of the capitalistic system of production’;⁴ in letters he advised his socialist colleagues that ‘tough as the job is you ought to read Marx’.⁵ Moreover, in March 1884, he ‘performed a religious function: ... trudged all the way from Tottenham Court Rd. up to Highgate Cemetery (with a red-ribbon in my button-hole) ... to do honour to the memory of Karl Marx and the Commune’.⁶ Even though he stated that he had ‘suffered agonies of confusion of the brain over reading the pure economics of that great work’, he also ‘thoroughly enjoyed the historical part’ and considered Capital an important part of his ‘education in Socialism’.⁷ It is necessary to establish, therefore, the extent to which Morris adopted and utilised Marx’s concept of nature.

Before examining Marx’s own understanding and formulation of nature, it is necessary to note that Morris’s reading of Marx was not only generally mediated by those works mentioned in the previous chapter, but also more specifically by

¹ Cornell Price’s diary entry for 23 April 1883 notes that Morris ‘was full of Karl Marx, whom he had begun to read in tr.’; quoted in Letters, vol. II, p. 204n.
² Thomas Cobden-Sanderson rebound Morris’s copy of Capital in green leather, and tooled gilt foliate patterns on its cover and spine. The effect is aesthetically sumptuous, yet the stylised foliage is one with the motifs from nature used to adorn many of Morris’s socialist texts. Cobden-Sanderson’s binding is discussed and illustrated in Parry’s V&A Catalogue, pp. 66–7. For the use of natural motifs on various socialist pamphlets and literature, see Chapter 4 below.
discussions of Marx’s work among contemporary socialists.\textsuperscript{8} Crucial to Morris’s understanding of Marx, for example, were the explanatory lectures of fellow S.D.F. members (and, later, Socialist League members), Edward Aveling and E. Belfort Bax. Aveling lectured frequently on topics such as the ‘Curse of Capitalism’ and ‘Charles Darwin and Karl Marx’.\textsuperscript{9} Bax, fluent in German, wrote a number of commentaries on Marx (some of which Marx himself praised)\textsuperscript{10} and was one of the few English socialists accepted into Engels’s London circle. Interested in the wider ethical implications of socialism, Bax was author of \textit{The Religion of Socialism} (1885), and collaborated with Morris on \textit{The Manifesto of the Socialist League}, issued in 1885. Together, they also wrote the series of articles featured in \textit{Commonweal} as ‘Socialism from the Root Up’, which were later published as \textit{Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome} (1893). These articles traced the ‘evolution’ of socialist thought, from ‘Ancient Society’, through utopian and scientific socialisms, ‘Marx’s Deduction of the Historical Evolution of Modern Industry’, and culminated in ‘Socialism Triumphant’. Morris referred to his discussions with Bax as ‘compulsory Baxination’,\textsuperscript{11} and was ‘glad of the opportunity … of hammering some Marx into myself’.\textsuperscript{12} Examples of the ways in which Bax and Morris commented on Marx’s concept of nature in \textit{Capital} are noted below.

Nor should the influence of Hyndman be underestimated. Though Morris would later split with Hyndman’s S.D.F. over its aims and tactics, he gained his initial understanding of Marx through Hyndman, whose work he recommended to comrades and possible recruits as ‘well worth reading & very easy to read’.\textsuperscript{13} Hyndman’s \textit{England For All} (1881), in particular, had played a crucial part in introducing Marx’s

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{8} This is made particularly clear in a letter of 28 February 1885, in which Morris recommends a number of texts that ‘would make reading Marx comparatively easy’. Apart from those mentioned in the body of this discussion, Morris also suggests: John Carruther’s \textit{Communal and Commercial Economy} (1883), Lawrence Gronlund’s \textit{The Cooperative Commonwealth in its Outlines} (1884), J.L. Joynes’s \textit{The Socialist Catechism} (1884) and F.A. Sorge’s \textit{Socialism and the Workers} (1884).
  \item \textsuperscript{9} See printed matter issued by the Socialist League, which advertises the types of lectures each of the lecturers are able to present, in the \textit{Socialist League Archives}, microfilm. A complete series of Aveling’s lectures was published in \textit{Commonweal} between April and December 1885.
  \item \textsuperscript{10} Marx told F.A. Sorge that Bax’s article on his work in \textit{Modern Thought} was ‘the first English publication of the kind which is pervaded by a real enthusiasm for the new ideas themselves and boldly stands up against British philistinism’. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, \textit{Selected Correspondence, 1846–1895}, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1936, pp. 397–8.
  \item \textsuperscript{11} On these sessions with Bax, and Morris’s reference to them, see May Morris, \textit{AWS}, vol. II, pp. 173–4.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Morris, entry for 16 February 1887, \textit{Socialist Diary}, p. 32.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Morris to unknown correspondent, 8 January 1884, in \textit{Letters}, vol. II, p. 254.
\end{itemize}
thought to British socialists. Subtitled The Text-book of Democracy, England for All, though disowned by Marx himself, was written to provide a Marxian interpretation of history for ‘the great English-speaking democracies to take the lead in the social reorganisation of the future’. It emphasised ‘possession of the land’ as ‘a matter of ... supreme importance to the liberty and well-being of Englishmen’; the value of labour and the valuelessness of ‘water, air, virgin soil, &c.’ unmediated by that labour; the ‘unnatural’ constitution of contemporary society; Cobbett’s criticism of enclosure and the demise of the self-sufficient farmers who had prospered in a ‘merrie’ fifteenth century; the ‘stunting’ of ‘all natural growth’ caused by colonisation; and the possibilities for progress through industry and technology. ‘For the first time in the history of mankind’, Hyndman argued in conclusion, ‘the whole earth is at our feet’.

In The Historical Basis of Socialism in England (1883), which enlarged and extended this discussion and was often referred to by Morris, he also underlined the existence of a fifteenth-century ‘Golden Age of the People’; noted the important contribution of George’s discussion of land and his ‘noble moral tone’; stressed that ‘mankind are modified by their surroundings’; and espoused an evolutionary socialism, commending Marx as ‘the Darwin of modern sociology’. Such subjects and themes made their way into A Summary of the Principles of Socialism (1884), ‘written for the Democratic Federation by H.M. Hyndman and William Morris’. Though Hyndman claimed he ‘wrote it all with the exception of about a page and a half which William Morris wrote’, the point here is that Morris’s reading of Marx was directed from the start by a number of English commentaries.

14 Edward Carpenter (My Days and Dreams, p. 114) typically noted that it had made sense of, and given direction to, ‘the mass of floating impressions, sentiments, ideals, etc., in my mind’.
15 See Marx’s letter to F.A. Sorge, 15 December 1881, in Selected Correspondence, 1846–1895, pp. 397–8.
The first thing to note about Marx’s concept of nature itself is that it has encouraged many different interpretations.\textsuperscript{20} That said, what seems to lie at the root of his discussion (and at the heart of most of these interpretations) is what has been described as a ‘double’ concept of nature.\textsuperscript{21} On the one hand, nature was for Marx the totality of all existing ‘reality’, comprising human beings and ‘external nature’. On the other hand, he also conceived nature as only truly existing for human beings when they enter into a transformative relationship with it, that is when it becomes the object of their work. This did not mean, however, that Marx understood natural and human histories to be two completely separate entities. One of the central features of his dialectic of historical materialism is that human beings interact with and are a part of their surroundings. Nevertheless, while the Hegelian basis of this dialectic prevented Marx from positing an excessively mechanistic account of the relations between humans and the natural world, Marx emphasised that mind, while originating in matter, was distinct in nature from it. Indeed, he argued that

\begin{quote}
\begin{quote}
it is in the working over of the objective world that man first really affirms himself as \textit{species-being}. This production is his active species-life. Through it nature appears as his work and his reality.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}
\end{quote}

This emphasis on the dialectic of production is more strongly asserted in the following formulation, again with a qualifying inversion:

\begin{quote}
\begin{quote}
Industry is the real historical relationship of nature ... to man. If then it is conceived of as the open revelation of human faculties, then the human essence of nature or the natural essence of man will also be understood.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}
\end{quote}

Thus, if nature is the \textit{object} of work, it is also, for Marx, an \textit{instrument} of human self-creation:


\textsuperscript{21} It is Schmidt who most emphasises this tendency throughout \textit{The Concept of Nature in Marx}.

\textsuperscript{22} Marx, \textit{Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts}, p. 139.
Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates and controls the material reactions between himself and Nature ... by thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway.  

This passage indicates the prevalent tendency in Marx's thought for humanity to be the dominant term in this relationship. As Alfred Schmidt has noted:

It is the socio-historical character of Marx's concept of nature which distinguishes it from the outset. Marx considered nature to be 'the primary source of all instruments and objects of labour', i.e. he saw nature from the beginning in relation to human activity. All other statements about nature, whether of a speculative, epistemological, or scientific kind, already presuppose social practice, the ensemble of man's technologico-economic modes of appropriation.

In an extreme, dualistic formulation of this position, Marx argued: 'nature ... taken abstractly, for itself—nature fixed in isolation from man—is nothing for man'. This instrumental approach to nature, which rests on unquestioned human alienation from, and domination of, nature, was central to Marx's analyses of modes of production. All production, for Marx, involved the transformation of nature by human beings within and through definite forms of society. Human freedom was the movement out of 'natural necessity' by means of the domination of nature: 'man' had to master nature to the extent that it is no longer a threat.

Marx saw this mastery of nature taking a number of forms. In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), he and Engels recommended that agriculture and industry be combined, and that the distinction between town and country be abolished. Given the urban-centred nature of Marx's political philosophy, it is likely that Marx imagined the communist landscape at least initially to be a result of the town invading the country and transforming it in its image. Marx did not disguise his contempt for the 'rural idiocy' of peasants, whom he despised as a historically doomed 'servile

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rabble'. Rather, for both Marx and Engels, the factory was the key vehicle of liberation, and social progress was to be gauged by the extent to which nature became human nature. What remains constant in all this is the active subject, 'man', and the passive object, nature. Passages in the *Grundrisse* (written in 1857–58), for example, suggest that the crucial factor in increasing this transformative process (and decreasing human labour) would be the introduction of machinery and automation by an industrial army. Indeed, it is through Marx and Engels that the ideal of social progress by way of a technological mastery of nature becomes a central tenet of the labour movement. As Mary Mellor has noted, Marx’s socialism, because of its ‘obsession with productionism’, was essentially an urban ‘industrial socialism’. Dominating nature, in other words, required modes of production that led to the progressive alienation of ‘external nature’.

Thus, Marx welcomed the capitalist mode of production as a civilising influence that destroyed the illusive deification of nature and traditional ways of life of ‘primitive’ societies. For Marx, capitalism was:

> a stage of society compared with which all earlier stages appear to be merely local progress and idolatry of nature. Nature becomes for the first time simply an object of mankind, purely a matter of utility; it ceases to be recognised as a power in its own right; and the theoretical knowledge of its independent laws appears only as a stratagem designed to subdue it to human requirements, whether as an object of consumption or as the means of production.

Here we see the Marx who emphasised the ways nature is a challenge to *Homo sapiens* and distinct from *Homo faber*.

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30 He believed that Indian villages, for example, ‘restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies’; *British Rule in India*, in Marx and Engels, *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, ed. Lewis S. Feuer, Fontana, London, 1969, p. 517.
Nevertheless, there is also a definite strain, particularly in the early works of
Marx, which laments this distinction or 'alienation', and emphasises the degree to
which humanity exists in unity, as well as in struggle, with nature. In *The German
Ideology* (written in 1846), Marx argued that the

unity of man with nature has always existed in industry and has existed in
varying forms in every epoch according to the lesser or greater
development of industry, and so has the 'struggle' of man with nature,
right up to the development of his productive forces on a corresponding
basis.\(^{32}\)

Moreover Marx’s earlier works criticised the ‘actual despising and degrading of
nature’ under the contemporary system of production. They reveal that Marx believed
that a capitalism in which private property and money were dominant caused ‘man’ to
view nature as ‘an alien and hostile world opposed to him’. In his first expression of
the theory of alienation, Marx argued:

> Money is the universal, self-constituted value of all things. It has therefore
> robbed the whole world, human as well as natural, of its own values.
> Money is the alienated essence of man’s work and being, this alien essence
> dominates him and he adores it.\(^{33}\)

In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (written in 1844), Marx
developed this notion of alienation, arguing that the alienated labour of capitalist
production resulted in the alienation of nature from humanity and of humanity from
itself:

> Nature is man’s *inorganic body*,—nature, i.e., in so far as it is not the
> human body. *Man lives* by nature. This means that nature is his *body*,
> with which he must constantly remain in step if he is not to die. That
> man’s physical and spiritual life is tied to nature means no more than that
> nature is tied to itself, for man is a part of nature.
>
> *In alienating (1) nature and (2) man himself, his own active
function, his life activity, from man, alienated labour alienates the *species*
from man. It converts the *life of the species*, for him, into a means of
individual life.*\(^{34}\)

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There is the suggestion here that Marx believed that it was essential to establish appropriate relationships between humans and their environment in order for humans to express their social being: not just that communal ownership needs to replace private property, but that nature must flourish if humanity is to flourish. Indeed, Marx's point seems to be that nature is harnessed not by violating its laws, but by obeying them.\(^{35}\) In *Capital*, for example, he argued that

\begin{quote}
all progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art ... of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time, is a progress towards ruining the lasting sources of that fertility...

Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combination together of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of wealth—the soil and the labourer.\(^{36}\)
\end{quote}

Even Engels, in his *Dialectics of Nature* (probably written between 1872 and 1882), cautioned his readers: 'Let us not ... flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human conquest over nature. For each such conquest takes its revenge on us'. '[W]e by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature', he argued, 'we, with flesh, blood, and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst'.\(^{37}\)

Though Morris's understanding of this relationship will be examined in greater depth in the next chapter, it is salient to note here that although Bax and Morris did not discuss the 'externalising' or 'alienating' process in their commentary on Marx (whose earlier work would probably have been unfamiliar to them), they did, in conclusion, discuss the way in which nature became alienated from humanity through the development of religion. That Bax and Morris should concentrate on the ethical implications of the rise of capitalism is hardly surprising. What is striking, however, is the extent to which their examination of *Capital* culminates in such a discussion of 'distinctions':

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with the development of material civilization from the domination of things by persons to that of persons by things, and the consequent falling asunder of Society into two classes ... arose a condition of Society which gave leisure to the possessing or slave-holding class... As a consequence of this a process of reflection arose among this class which distinguished man as a conscious being from the rest of nature. From this again arose a dual conception of things: on the one hand was man, which was familiar and known, on the other nature, which was mysterious and relatively unknown.38

Furthermore, in this last section on 'Socialism Triumphant', Morris and Bax envisaged an end to alienation. Though their focus is on the disappearance of enmity between 'man' and 'man', rather than 'man' and 'nature', the formulation should be noted because it emerges in Morris's later imagining of a 'natural society'.39

As regards the future form of the moral consciousness, we may safely predict that it will be in a sense a return on a higher level to the ethics of the older society, with the difference that the limitation of scope to the kinship society in its narrower sense, which was one of the elements of the dissolution of ancient society, will disappear and the identification of individual with social interests will be so complete that any divorce between the two will be inconceivable to the average man.40

All of which is not to suggest, however, that there is a 'green' Marx lurking beneath the 'red' one, but merely to propose that Marx was concerned to imagine a solution to the antagonism between humanity and nature, and that Morris was probably alert to it. The most fundamental achievement of a proletarian revolution, Marx argued, would be the changed relationship of humans to nature and, subsequently, to each other. Marx believed that when the productive forces of nature were owned, and were able to be exploited by all—'after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly'41—society would have reached a perfect state of communism. In 1844 he wrote:

38 Morris and Bax, 'Socialism Triumphant' (Chapter XXIII of 'Socialism from the Root Up'), Commonweal, vol. IV, no. 123, 19 May 1888, pp. 154–5; in Political Writings, pp. 618–19.
39 See Chapter 2 of the Appendix.
40 Morris and Bax, 'Socialism Triumphant'; in Political Writings, p. 619.
Communism as completed naturalism is humanism and as completed humanism is naturalism. It is the genuine solution of the antagonism between man and nature and between man and man.  

This conceptualisation of the dialectical process in which labour ‘humanises’ nature and ‘naturalises’ humanity suggests that the early Marx, at least, recognised that humanity participates organically in nature, and that society and nature penetrate each other within a ‘natural whole’. For this Marx, to be fully human is to work, and to work is to transform natural things into human things and so to humanise all of nature and to integrate material nature with human nature. As Abrams noted, this is ‘the purport and very vocabulary’ of the humanistic naturalism of the romantics: a ‘consonance-in-difference’ that Marx holds with them. It underlines, as Schmidt has stated, that Marx demonstrated that society itself was a natural environment:

This was meant not only in the immediately critical sense that men are still not in control of their own productive forces vis-à-vis nature, that these forces confront them as the organised, rigid form of an opaque society, as a ‘second nature’ which sets its own essence against its creators, but also in the ‘metaphysical’ sense that Marx’s theory is a theory of the world as a whole. The human life-process, even when understood and controlled, remains in a natural environment. Under all forms of production, human labour-power is ‘only the manifestation of a force of nature’. In his work, man ‘opposes himself to nature as one of her own forces’. ‘By acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature.’ The dialectic of Subject and Object is for Marx a dialectic of the constituent elements of nature.

Morris and Bax concurred, and noted that the

relation between the capitalist and the labourer is a conventional and not a natural one; nature does not produce men who from the first are possessors of money which it is their business to turn into capital, nor on the other hand does she produce men who are possessors of labour-power which they are compelled to sell in the free and open market to other men.

42 Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, p. 148.
44 Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, pp. 315–16.
Quoting *Capital*, Morris and Bax also underlined ‘the historical tendency of capitalism to work out its own contradiction’:

capitalistic production begets with the inexorability of a law of Nature its own negation. It is the negation of negation... The transformation of scattered private property, arising from individual labour, into capitalistic private property, is naturally a procession comparably more protracted, violent, and difficult, than the transformation of capitalistic private property, already practically resting on socialised production, into socialised property. In the former case we had the expropriation of the mass of the people by a few usurpers; in the latter, we have the expropriation of a few usurpers by the mass of the people.\(^{47}\)

At the very end of their discussion of *Capital*, however, Morris and Bax provide their own picture of ‘what Socialism in its turn will evolve’:

that goal is sublime and beautiful enough which promises to us the elevation of the whole of the people to a level of intelligent happiness and pleasurable energy, which at present is reached, if at all, only by a chosen few at the expense of the misery and degradation of the greater part of mankind; and even by those few, is held on such a precarious tenure that it is to them little better than a pleasant dream disturbed by fantastic fears which have their birth from the terribly real sufferings of the ordinary life of the masses on whom they live.\(^{48}\)

Human ‘pleasurable energy’ is, therefore, the focus of Morris and Bax’s work. Fundamentally human-centred, Marx valued nature only in so far as it was the setting for the liberation of humanity, and Morris adopted this sense of privileged human participation in nature. Morris’s break with this thinking, as many have noted, is his view of work as essential and pleasurable; a point at which he ‘takes hold of Carlyle, Ruskin and Marx, and out of their ideas in combination makes something radically new’.\(^{49}\) For Morris, industry remained the insufficiently problematised key term in Marx’s conception of the relationship of the human and natural world. He believed that the task, the joy, of ‘completing’ nature—of transforming it not from nature into something other-than-nature, but into a combination of (privileged) human nature and

\(^{47}\) Marx, *Capital*, quoted in Morris and Bax, ‘Scientific Socialism—Conclusion’ (Chapter XXI of ‘Socialism from the Root Up’), *Commonweal*, vol. III, no. 82, 6 August 1887, p. 253; in *Political Writings*, pp. 599–600.

\(^{48}\) Morris and Bax, ‘Socialism Triumphant’; in *Political Writings*, p. 622.
external nature—was essential to life. ‘Man’ was not just *Homo faber*, but *Homo aritis*, and the natural beauty of the earth was reproduced ‘by the labour of man both mental and bodily’; by ‘the expression of the interest man takes in the life of man upon the earth with all its surroundings’. Thus, while Morris accepted the explanatory power of Marx’s critique of the capitalist mode of production, Morris was just as interested in Marx’s explanation of the ways in which labour was made uninteresting, unjoyful and, therefore, unartistic. For Morris, Marx explained why labour no longer produced ‘the beauty of the earth’. In the preface to *Signs of Change*, a collection of his lectures on art and industry first published in 1888, Morris underlines this link:

My ordinary work has forced on me the contrast between times past and the present day, and has made me look with grief and pain on things which many men notice but little, if at all. The repulsion to pessimism which is, I think natural to a man busily engaged in the arts, compelled me once to hope that the ugly disgraces of civilization might be got rid of by the conscious will of intelligent persons: yet as I strove to stir up people to this reform, I found that the cause of the vulgarities of civilization lay deeper than I had thought, and little by little I was driven to the conclusion that all these uglinesses are but the outward expression of the innate moral baseness into which we are forced by our present form of society, and that it is futile to attempt to deal with them from the outside. Whatever I have written or spoken on the platform, on these social subjects is the result of the truths of Socialism meeting my earlier impulse, and giving it a definite and much more serious aim...  

51 Morris, ‘Preface’ to Signs of Change, pp. 1–2.
4. The transition between works of nature and of art

In the 1880s, as ‘the truths of Socialism’ met his ‘earlier impulse’, Morris devoted less attention to ‘outward uglinesses’ and more to the ‘moral baseness of society’. An enthusiastic Marxian socialist, Morris accepted that the transformation of nature was an essential part of human ‘species-being’ and that communism was the ‘solution’ to the discord between humanity and nature and between humans themselves. Yet Morris’s socialism was not identical to that of Marx, and he did not simply accept Marx’s understanding of the relationship between humanity and nature. Communism was completed naturalism for Morris, but, in his concern for ‘the organization of man who wields the force of nature’, he focussed on the character of the work that brought about the ‘transition between works of Nature and Art’. Morris’s concept of nature had a lesser but still significant influence on these ‘definite and much more serious aim[s]’.

Morris concurred with Marx (or at least the early Marx) that humans were a part of, and not separate from, nature, and that the mediating term between human life and the rest of nature was labour. He believed that humans were governed by ‘the law of nature which bids all to labour in order to live’, and that human history was entrenched in the natural environment and vice versa. Thus, though he disapproved of the capitalist transformation of England from ‘a country of tillage cultivated for livelihood’ to ‘a grazing country farmed for profit’, he argued that nature was there to be transformed. A Socialist League pamphlet, entitled ‘A Straight Talk to Working-Men’, asserted that everyone should ‘have equal opportunity to use the great gifts of Nature according to their needs’. The pamphlet emphasised that ‘ALL WEALTH IS PRODUCED BY LABOUR OF HEAD OR HAND, APPLIED TO NATURAL RESOURCES’.

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1 Morris, ‘Preface’ to Signs of Change, p. 2.
2 Morris, ‘How We Live and How We Might Live’, p. 15.
Morris particularly valued this kind of wealth and was well aware that such labour meant it was now difficult to speak of 'simple unblended works of Nature':

In all old civilized countries, even when we are in the country, out of sight of a single house, the aspect of the place is largely influenced by the work of man: the hedge-rows, the road, the lanes leading out of it, the trees which have all been planted by men’s hands, the growing crops, the tame beasts and sheep, the banked and locked river...

Yet Morris believed that these interactions between humanity and the natural world, the ‘transition between works of Nature and of Art’,

when they are happily harmonised, produce the greatest pleasure that the eye can have, and appeal most directly to the imagination. For in these landscapes, which include building, we have before us history in its most delightful, and even I will say, its most instructive, shape.

Thus, unlike Marx, Morris emphasised that although ‘[n]ature does not give us our livelihood gratis; [and] we must win it by toil of some sort or degree’, ‘she takes care to make the acts necessary to the continuance of life in the individual and the race not only endurable, but even pleasurable’. Even so, it is necessary to note that, in the 1880s, Morris spoke much more often than previously of nature as an ‘enemy’ to be ‘struggled’ with or ‘conquered’. In 1885, for example, he described human history as a contest with nature:

in the early days of the history of man he was the slave of his most immediate necessities; Nature was mighty and he was feeble, and he had to wage constant war with her for his daily food and such shelter as he could get. His life was bound down and limited by this constant struggle; all his morals, laws, religions, are in fact the outcome and the reflection of this ceaseless toil of earning his livelihood. Time passed, and little by little, step by step, he grew stronger, till now after all these ages he has almost completely conquered Nature...

By 1886 he had come to the belief that

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10 Morris, ‘Useful Work versus Useless Toil’, p. 98.
in order that his labour may be organized properly ... ['man'] must have
only one enemy to contend with—Nature to wit, who as it were eggs him
on to the conflict against herself, and is grateful to him for overcoming her;
a friend in the guise of an enemy.\textsuperscript{12}

Morris found himself ‘bound to preach’ socialist principles because ‘they are no mere
dreams ... but reasonable rules of action, good for our defence against the
tyrranny of Nature’.\textsuperscript{13}

On the other hand, Morris’s lectures and essays also suggest that he
considered nature a force or set of laws that broadly guided the ‘natural progression’
of human history. This is demonstrated in a lecture of 1886, where his remarks betray
the fact that he had absorbed the evolutionary racism of his century.\textsuperscript{14} Though Morris
found it ugly, distasteful and even immoral, he considered that the ‘victory over
Nature’ of urban industrial capitalism was, inevitably, a more historically advanced
state. The Indian, the Javanese and the South Sea Islander, Morris argued,

\textit{must leave his canoe-carving, his sweet rest, and his graceful dances, and
become the slave of slave: trousers, shoddy, rum, missionary, and fatal
disease—he must swallow all this civilization in the lump, and neither
himself nor we can help him not till social order displaces the hideous
tyranny of gambling that has ruined him.}\textsuperscript{15}

He believed that the natural evolution of society indicated that change would come
from ‘the working-classes, the real organic part of society’.\textsuperscript{16}

Yet, as is clear from his description, Morris was loathe to forego ‘sweet rest’
and ‘graceful’ art, and, due to his highly developed socio-aesthetic sensibility grounded
in Ruskin, worked out his own priorities within the Marxian schema. In particular,
Morris was concerned that both the process of transforming of nature, as well as its
results, should be, as far as possible, pleasurable and natural. This was the ‘great

\textsuperscript{13} Morris, ‘Dawn of a New Epoch’, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{15} Morris, ‘How We Live and How We Might Live’, pp. 8–9.
question’ to which so much of Morris’s work was addressed in the 1880s: ‘How can men gain hope and pleasure in their daily work?’

Under the present system, Morris contended, humanity would find no joy in its ‘victory over nature’ because it had abused this privilege and failed to conquer or understand its own nature:

['man'] still has to think how he will best use those forces which he has mastered. At present he uses them blindly, foolishly, as one driven by mere fate. It would almost seem as if some phantom of the ceaseless pursuit of food which was once the master of the savage was still hunting the civilized man; who toils in a dream as it were, haunted by mere dim unreal hopes, born of vague recollections, of the days gone by. Out of that dream he must wake and face things as they really are. The conquest of Nature is complete, may we not say? and now our business is, and has for long been, the organization of man who wields the forces of Nature.

Morris looked with dismay, however, at his society’s ‘organization of man’ to ‘wield the forces of Nature’. Under industrial capitalism, human interaction with nature had become ‘wasteful, misdirected and unrewarding for the majority’. Even the luxurious ‘puffery’ of the few, he insisted, was waste, not wealth. Wealth, he stressed,

is what Nature gives us and what a reasonable man can make out of the gifts of Nature for his reasonable use. The sunlight, the fresh air, the unspoiled face of the earth, food, raiment and housing necessary and decent; the storing up of knowledge of all kinds, and the power of disseminating it; means of free communication between man and man; works of art, the beauty which man creates when he is most a man, most aspiring and thoughtful... This is wealth.

Most could never enjoy such wealth under the present system because

the fruits of our victory over Nature [have been] stolen from us, thus has compulsion by Nature to labour in hope of rest, gain, and pleasure been turned into compulsion by man to labour in hope—of living to labour!

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20 Morris, ‘Useful Work versus Useless Toil’, p. 103. In 1883 Morris (‘Art, Wealth, and Riches’, in Lectures on Socialism, p. 159) asked a Manchester audience: ‘Were not the brown moors and the meadows, the clear streams and the sunny skies, wealth? Riches has made a strange home for you’.
In order to counteract this human folly, and maintain a useful struggle against the 'tyranny of Nature', Morris contended that humanity must look to a 'new epoch'. It would never be free of 'that terrible phantom of fear of starvation', or 'its brother devil, desire of domination', he maintained, until the land was nationalised, and people had learned 'to do away with competition and build up co-operation'.

It is the nature of cooperative labour in this new era which differentiates Morris's conception of the human/nature nexus from that of Marx. Unlike Marx, Morris did not posit two separate realms of work: one governed by 'necessity' and another by the 'development of human powers as an end in itself'. Whereas Marx could speak of the disappearance of 'natural necessity', and the 'abolition of labour', Morris held that human joy lay precisely in the natural necessities of life. Indeed, he believed that nature had made such labour pleasurable; it was only the organisation of such work under capitalism that made it drudgery. He argued that labour could and should be useful, personally meaningful work, and that it could and should carry within it 'the hope of pleasure in the rest, the hope of the pleasure in our using what it makes, and the hope of pleasure in our daily creative skill'. The processes of most work, he argued, are pleasurable if they are done in the right way. As indicated above, Morris believed that most work could in fact be art, and that this was 'a gift of nature'. In other words, Morris considered art to be beauty produced by interest in, and love of, life: that it arose naturally out of the human struggle with nature. And it was this conception of art, or rather the 'transition between works of Nature and of Art', that helped him towards answers to the questions he posed about how people could find

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23 As a central tenet of socialism, land nationalisation was a crucial feature of Morris's vision of a communist society. Socialist League pamphlets, such 'Are We Over-Populated?' (issued in July 1890), decried the monopoly of land and questioned the effectiveness of current land use, cultivation, and agriculture. 'Fellow workers', it proclaimed, 'we ask you to wake up from your apathy, and demand that as the land is and always has been the collective property of the nation, it shall be used for the benefit of the whole people; that as the capital and wealth of the country are the results of the labour of many past generations as well as the present, it shall be used for the benefit of the present and all future generations' (Socialist League Archives, microfilm).
24 Morris, 'How We Live and How We Might Live', p. 15.
27 Morris, 'Useful Work versus Useless Toil', p. 100.
hope and pleasure in their work. ‘It is the province of art’, he argued in 1894, ‘to set the true ideal of a full and reasonable life ... a life to which the perception and creation of beauty ... shall be felt to be as necessary to man as his daily bread’.29

This theory of work was central to Morris’s socialism. ‘To the Socialist’, he claimed, ‘a house, a knife, a cup, a steam engine, ... anything ... that is made by man and has form, must either be a work of art or destructive to art’. According to Morris, the socialist saw in the contemporary ‘lack of art ... a disease peculiar to modern civilization and hurtful to humanity’.30 It is necessary to emphasise that this was not just a matter of aesthetics for Morris. In 1888 he stressed that he
disclaim[ed] the mere aesthetic point of view which looks upon the ploughman and his bullocks and his plough, the reaper, his work, his wife, and his dinner as so many elements which compose a pretty tapestry hanging, fit to adorn the study of a contemplative person of cultivation...

‘[W]hat I wish for’, he argued, ‘is that the reaper and his wife should have themselves a full share in all the fulness of life’.31

Morris believed that the eradication of the division of labour was crucial to the achievement of this full working life. This was not simply a result of his reading of Marx, but of his own observation of the kind of culture produced and reproduced under a capitalist system. Morris believed the division of labour had ‘expropriated’ people from the land, and pitted ‘man against man’ in quantitatively competitive rather than qualitatively cooperative work that destroyed individual creativity. Like Owen and Fourier before him, Morris emphasised ‘not selfish greed and ceaseless contention, but brotherhood and co-operation’, and strove to develop Fourier’s doctrine of making labour both meaningful and enjoyable.32 Thus, in lectures such as ‘The Hopes of Civilization’, ‘How We Live and How We Might Live’, and ‘The Beauty of Life’, Morris called for the elimination of the division of labour because it infringed on what he considered to be a basic human need for a satisfying, high quality work experience

(and also because it embodied productivist assumptions about maximising output). To a certain extent, he managed to achieve some of these ideals in his own workshops at Merton. His manager, Thomas Wardle, recalled that although Morris did not turn the works into 'a little communistic society' (because 'you cannot have socialism in a corner'), '[i]t was in the contentedness and cooperation of his workmen that Mr. Morris looked for any success he might have'.

One result of Morris’s concern about the nature of work was his anxiety about the use of mechanical power in the workplace. If an item could be made well, and pleasurably, by hand, he reasoned, why use a machine? He never tired of emphasising that he believed the phrase ‘labour-saving machine’ to be elliptical: that what it really meant was machinery that saves the cost of labour. Morris did believe, however, that

if the necessary reasonable work be of a mechanical kind, I must be helped to do it by a machine, not to cheapen my labour, but so that as little time as possible may be spent upon it, and that I may be able to think of other things while I am tending the machine.

Thus he did concede that humans should be freed from arduous ‘necessary’ work. Indeed, having ‘boundless faith in their capacity’, Morris believed ‘machines can do everything’, with the important, and in Morrisian terms subversive, proviso, ‘except make works of art’. They could not, Morris insisted, produce items that testified as art to human pleasure in their creation; could not produce definite signs, or material evidence, of a person’s desire or sensuous creativity. Machines interfered in the processes of human joyful energy-becoming-art. Art, both as object and process, was, for Morris, invariably organic: tied up and embedded in creation, from selection of materials to contemplation of the finished product (the enjoyment of which had, for

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34 ‘Once a year at least’, Wardle (‘Memorials of William Morris. Appendix I’, pp. 108, 110) recalled, ‘there was a meeting to discuss the balance sheet and the state of the business. In this way, though the formal communism of convent or phalanstère was not observed, there was practical communism: an identity of interest and solidarity’.
36 Morris, ‘How We Live and How We Might Live’, p. 20.
Morris, more to do with understanding the pleasurable course of its creation, than any form of appreciation 'free' from such considerations). This is why Morris urged workers not to 'let yourselves be made machines, or it is all up with you as artists'.

These were the processes which Morris considered reproduced the beauty of the natural world. Beautiful surroundings were, for Morris, an indication of workers' pleasure in labour, and it was his belief that this kind of labour should be applied to all the 'externals of our life':

not only painting and sculpture, and architecture, but the shapes and colours of all household goods, nay, even the arrangement of the fields for tillage and pasture, the management of towns and of our highways of all kinds... For I must ask you to believe that every one of the things that goes to make up the surroundings among which we live must be either beautiful or ugly, either elevating or degrading to us, either a torment and burden to the maker of it to make, or a pleasure and a solace to him.

This is why, in the 1880s, he asked his audience to consider their own treatment of the environment:

How does it fare therefore with our external surroundings in these days? What kind of account shall we be able to give to those who come after us of our dealings with the earth, which our forefathers handed down to us still beautiful, in spite of all the thousands of years of strife and carelessness and selfishness?

Not just for the sake of nature, but because the environment under industrial capitalism was unable to provide the conditions of pleasurable labour or to allow for regenerative rest, Morris demanded 'pleasant, generous, and beautiful' surroundings for work.

Morris described exactly what he meant by this:

1. good lodging; 2. ample space; 3. general order and beauty. That is: 1. Our houses must be well built, clean, and healthy. 2. There must be abundant garden space in our towns, and our towns must not eat up the

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38 Morris, 'Art and the Beauty of the Earth', p. 166.  
40 Morris, 'Art under Plutocracy', p. 165.  
41 Morris, 'How We Live and How We Might Live', p. 21.
fields and natural features of the country; nay, I demand even that there be left waste places and wilds in it, or romance and poetry, that is Art, will die out amongst us. 3. Order and beauty means that not only our houses must be stoutly and properly built, but also that they be ornamented duly: that the fields be not only left for cultivation, but also that they be not spoilt by it any more than a garden is spoilt...

Morris's imagined, non-profit-driven 'Factory as it Might Be' stands 'amidst gardens as beautiful (climate apart) as those of Alcinous, since there is no need of stinting it of ground, profit-rents being a thing of the past'. It also 'make[s] no sordid litter, befoul[s] no water, nor poison[s] the air with smoke'. In a communist society, with decent work done in decent surroundings, Morris argued, 'these islands which make the land we love should no longer be treated as here a cinder-heap, and there a game preserve, but as the fair green garden of Northern Europe'. Unlike the conditions that ensued under nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, work would not have a separate place in the landscape distinct from 'recreational nature'.

A 'reasonable share in the beauty of the earth' was the right of everyone, therefore, because it was the precondition for a full and joyous existence. This was the natural state for humanity, Morris argued; human ornamentation of the world was a natural result of 'pleasure in the hope and sense of power and usefulness which men felt in the making of things in the childhood of the world'. Human labour is, or should be, an extension of nature's realm: 'evidence of man helping in the work of

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43 Morris, 'A Factory as it Might Be', p. 131.
45 Wilson (The Culture of Nature, pp. 25, 20) distinguishes 'recreational nature' as 'a place of leisure on weekends and summer holidays' attached to 'the schedules and personal geography of an urban society'. It was, he argues, part of the nineteenth-century idea of leisure, 'introduced by a culture that defined work itself as a separate sphere of life, an activity that had its own politics and increasingly its own place in the landscape'.
46 Morris, 'On the Origins of Ornamental Art', in Unpublished Lectures, p. 142. Many, if not most, of Morris's nineteenth-century socialist colleagues did not follow him in this assertion of the moral value of beauty. While Beatrice Webb (The Diary of Beatrice Webb, vol. II, p. 38) did 'not wish it to be thought that simplicity of daily life means ugliness and lack of order and charm' and went 'to Morris's for papers and furniture', she could still understand why 'the enemy ... blaspheme' and say '[t]hey do not see much socialism in that'. 'Efficiency', the Fabian Webb confided to her diary, 'only demands plenty of nourishing food, well-ordered drains, and a certain freedom of petty cares—it is somewhat softening to contend that you need beautiful things to work with. It may be desirable to have them, but it requires a lot of proving!' See also the hostile unsigned Fabian review of Signs of Change in Today, November 1888, pp. 153-4; in The Critical Heritage, p. 316.
creation’. Naturally, ‘man’ was not just *Homo faber* but *Homo artis*. This is one of the crucial differences between Morris and Marx.

Another is the degree and kind of autonomy and authority Morris allowed ‘external nature’. In Morris’s work, nature is considered a source of human pleasure, and, consequently, Morris insisted that the natural world should be, as far as possible, maintained and protected as a locus of value. This strain of thought is more persistent, more determined and more variously considered in Morris than in Marx. An entire extra dimension to (Morris’s) socialism arises from it. Morris’s broadly sympathetic view of ‘external nature’ caused him to concede that he could ‘sympathize with ... a craving to escape sometimes to mere Nature’, and to find life’s interest in

_the face of the country, the wind and weather, and the course of the day, and the lives of animals, wild and domestic; and man’s daily dealings with all this for his daily bread, and rest, and innocent beast-like pleasure._

In particular, Morris suggested that humanity appreciate the sensuous joys provided by nature. Most of the work done on nature, he insisted, would be innately pleasurable ‘if our stupidity did not add grief and anxiety to’ it. ‘I mean’, he explained, ‘that the course of the fishing-boat over the waves, the plough-share driving the furrow for next year’s harvest, the June swathe, the shaving falling from the carpenter’s plane, all such things are in themselves beautiful’. When imagining the advent of a communist society, Morris envisaged nature ‘recovering her ancient beauty and ... teaching men the old story of art’.

This appreciation of nature meant that he continued his calls to prevent the destruction of the beauty of the earth throughout his socialist lectures of the 1880s and 1890s. In his first speech as a proclaimed socialist, he complained:

_Not only are London and our other great commercial cities mere masses of sordidness, filth, and squalor, embroidered with patches of pompous and vulgar hideousness, no less revolting to the eye and the mind when one_

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knows what it means: not only have whole counties of England, and the heavens that hang over them, disappeared beneath a crust of unutterable grime, but the disease, which to a visitor coming from the times of art, reason, and order, would seem to be a love of dirt and ugliness for its own sake, spreads all over the country, and every little market-town seizes the opportunity to imitate, as far as it can, the majesty of the hell of London and Manchester.  

Though he now considered what such outward signs meant, he was still concerned with the ugly ‘crust’ that stifled nature.

As a socialist, of course, Morris blamed capitalism and the profit motive for the accumulation of such a ‘crust’, reserving special venom for its creation of the industrial city. Capitalist industrialism, with its voracious appetite for nature as resource and dumping ground, had entrenched the city’s alienation from nature and spoiled any chance of decent urban surroundings:

It is profit which draws men into enormous unmanageable aggregations called towns ... which crowds them up when they are there into quarters without gardens or open spaces, profit which won’t take the most ordinary precautions against wrapping a whole district in a cloud of sulphurous smoke; which turns beautiful rivers into filthy sewers...  

Profit, he continued, forces us to

cut down the pleasant trees among the houses, pull down ancient and venerable buildings for the money that a few square yards of London dirt will fetch; blacken rivers, hide the sun and poison the air with smoke and worse ... that is all that modern commerce, the counting-house forgetful of the workshop, will do for us herein.  

In Commonweal he attacked Lord Brownlow, ‘who is setting about robbing [the locals] ... of some of the open ground on the beautiful chalk headlands of the Chiltern Hills’, and railed against the ‘curmudgeon’ who was planning to enclose and

52 Morris, ‘How We Live and How We Might Live’, p. 22.  
restrict access to certain stretches of the River Mole.55 ‘The external beauty of the country is part of its wealth’, he insisted, ‘and every citizen has a right to the enjoyment of it to the full extent of his capacity’:

No private person or group of persons has any right to deprive the rest of the citizens of this enjoyment, this wealth, on any pretext whatever; the whole community only has a right to determine what occasion may be pressing enough to make the sacrifice of some portion of this wealth necessary. Any private person, or corporation, therefore, who invades the public right in this matter, is acting as an enemy of the public.56

Morris also supported opposition to the Ambleside Railway Bill, and was wary of the intentions of railway companies in general.57

As a socialist, therefore, Morris argued, that one of the first steps ‘toward the fresh new-birth of art must interfere with the privilege of private persons to destroy the beauty of the earth for their private advantage, and thereby to rob the community’.58 Moreover, though he considered that ‘interest in the mere animal life of man has become impossible to be indulged in in its fulness by most civilized people’ in his own society, he insisted that they endeavour to

keep the air pure and the rivers clean, to take some pains to keep the meadows and tillage as pleasant as reasonable use will allow them to be; to allow peaceable citizens freedom to wander where they will, so they do no hurt to garden or cornfield; nay, even to leave here and there some piece of waste or mountain sacredly free from fence or tillage as a memory of man’s ruder struggles with nature in his earlier days...59

In the meantime, Morris hoped that science might be able to tackle some of the problems resulting from current modes of production: ‘to get rid of refuse, to minimize, if not wholly to destroy, all the inconveniences which at present attend the

57 See Chapter 4 of Section I above; Morris, editorial on the Ambleside Railway Bill, Commonweal, vol. III, no. 61, 12 March 1887, p. 85; in Journalism, pp. 206–7; and comments on the function of railways in India, in an untitled paragraph, Commonweal, vol. III, no. 74, 11 June 1887, p. 191; in Journalism, p. 242.
use of elaborate machinery, such as smoke, stench, and noise’.60 Though he understood that nineteenth-century science was ‘in the pay of the counting-house’, he nevertheless urged scientists to teach ‘Manchester how to consume its own smoke, or Leeds how to get rid of its superfluous black dye without turning it into the river’,51 rather than making ‘devices for killing and maiming our enemies present and future’.62

Yet science and technology were not so central a part of Morris’s socialist agenda as they were for Marx and Engels. In some ways, Morris exhibited a more sophisticated understanding of the positive and negative aspects of scientific inquiry. He observed that ‘science is only interesting as showing the frame of mind of the person who devotes himself to it’, and considered that his own generation’s work was ‘probably all wrong, and the next generation will only regard us as a pack of ninnies for having believed such rubbish’.63

Morris’s opposition to science was as much a result of his romantic disposition, and his sympathies with the ‘pastoral impulse in Victorian England’ and its resultant ‘cult of the countryside’,64 as a consequence of a carefully considered analysis of science. This romantic, ruralist disposition affected both the activities and aesthetics of his socialism. Although it would be misleading to suggest that the Socialist League was anything other than an urban-based organisation, it often looked to the countryside for pleasure and a release from town life, organising outings similar to those of the Clarion Clubs in the 1890s.65 On 14 June 1886, for example, a group of Leaguers took the train to Box Hill Station, walked to Burford Bridge and then took a path up Box Hill to Swiss Cottage and on to Bletchworth Clump. ‘[T]he view from each place’, a flier announced, expanded ‘over different counties, but each of equal

60 Morris, ‘Useful Work versus Useless Toil’, p. 115.
64 On the ‘cult of the countryside’, see Back to the Land, pp. 27–92.
65 The Clarion Clubs believed in getting away from the towns and cities into the fresh air of the country in order ‘to bring the town dweller more frequently into contact with the beauty of nature; to help forward the ideal of the simpler life, plain living and high thinking’. See D. Prynn, ‘The Clarion Clubs, Rambling and Holiday Associations in Britain since the 1890s’, Journal of Contemporary History, vol. XI, no. 2, 1976, pp. 65–77.
beauty’. 66 F.W. Jowett recalled that Morris’s ‘chants for socialists’ were sung on some
of these outings. ‘[I]n country lanes or on river bank’, he remembered, we ‘tramped
together to spread the gospel’. 67 Many of these ‘songs’ look forward to the days when
everyone has regular access to ‘the wastes and the woodland beauty, and the happy
fields we till’. 68

Other branches considered establishing rural communities. At a meeting of
the Croydon, Mitcham and Merton branches of the League in 1887, a proposal was put
‘to raise capital to purchase one of the many beautiful estates hereabouts, now fast
falling into the hands of the jerry builders’. This land, it was suggested, would provide
members with ‘a release from town life’. Morris was to be one of the convenors at a
meeting for further discussion of this scheme. 69

Moreover, many of the pamphlets, posters and inter-branch communiques
announcing these schemes were ornamented by naturalistic designs created by Morris.
Indeed many of Morris’s socialists texts, from S.D.F. or League membership cards to
the covers and frontispieces of books, were decorated with the same kinds of free-
flowing patterns that he designed for fabric and walls (see figs. lxxii–lxxiv). These
‘amalgam[s] of the Gothic and the nineteenth-century demotic’, which ‘set a kind of
house style for late-nineteenth-century Socialist graphics’, 70 seem also to say that
‘socialism is natural’. The sturdy oaks, spreading branches, twining growth, fruit and
floral blossoms, all support, surround and suggest the natural bases and growth of
these ideas.

That Morris conceived of his socialist endeavours in such a way—that is as an
activity founded upon the principles of nature and promoting a more natural way of
life—is also apparent from the kind of people drawn to his version of socialism. Some

66 See the pamphlet ‘Socialist League Excursion. Box Hill & Dorking’, issued by the Socialist League
in 1886; Socialist League Archives, microfilm.
67 F.W. Jowett, What Made Me a Socialist (n.d.); quoted in Thompson, Romantic to Revolutionary
69 See the pamphlet ‘To Socialists and Friends of the Cause’ issued by the Socialist League in 1887;
Socialist League Archives, microfilm. It seems that this plan was never realised.
70 MacCarthy, A Life for Our Time, p. 484.
Fig. lxxii
Membership card for the Democratic Federation, designed by Morris in 1883.

Fig. lxxiii
Cover designed by Morris for *A Summary of the Principles of Socialism* in 1884.
The natural growth of socialism. Pattern drawn by Morris at Hammersmith Socialist Society meeting.
of Morris's closest and most admired friends and comrades were socialists of a rather
unorthodox, nature-loving character. No doubt this was due to the fact that the
'religion of socialism' was 'thoroughly permeated by the religion of nature'. Edward
Carpenter, "a prophet of both", was able to think of them jointly as 'the great Socialist
and Humanitarian and Nature movements which are destined to play such an important
part in the new democracy'.

Both the S.D.F. and the League, for example, had a small but noteworthy
vitalist contingent. Vitalists, whose creed issued largely from the wreck of orthodox
belief left by the triumph of evolutionary theory, built a positive and optimistic creed
upon the Darwinian insight that humans are merely another biological species: 'in and
of nature, not above and outside it'. Drawing, as well, on the organicism of Ruskin
and Kingsley, they argued that the workings of nature offered alternative, more hopeful
insights than the sterile, mechanistic interpretations prevalent in society at large.
Nature depends, they insisted, on cooperation, not competition: on 'intensity of
helpfulness — completeness of depending of each part on all the rest'. As David
Elliston Allen has noted, vitalism played a important role in the resurgence of interest
in the protection of nature in the 1880s, and it brought this interest to bear on
socialism.

It also lent a mystic or transcendental tinge to certain socialist's
pronouncements. Morris's friend George Bernard Shaw was a self-proclaimed
believer in 'transcendental metabiology' who vigorously rejected the 'hideous fatalism
... [and] ghastly and damnable reduction of beauty and intelligence, of strength and
purpose, of honour and aspiration' he read in Darwin's theory of natural selection.
Shaw refused to believe that nature 'is nothing but a casual aggregation of inert and
dead matter' in which 'the stars of heaven, the showers and dew, the winter and
summer, the fire and heat, the mountains and hills ... modify all things by blindly

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71 Offer, *Property and Politics*, p. 343.
starving and murdering everything that is not lucky enough to survive in the universal struggle for hogwash'.

There also seems to have been an interest in vegetarianism among Morris’s circle and among the readers of *Commonweal*, a change of life considered necessary by many vitalists. Shaw infuriated Jane Morris by refusing to eat meat at her table (Shaw maintained, however, that Morris thought ‘a hunk of bread and an onion was a meal for any man’). Other vegetarian comrades included Carpenter, James Joynes, Henry Salt, and Kate Salt. Morris, although sympathetic to his friends, felt it necessary to remind the readers of *Commonweal*, however, that ‘a man can hardly be a sound socialist who puts forward vegetarianism as a solution of the difficulties between labour and capital’.

Yet, though Morris’s work generally espouses a material, sensuous and earthly understanding of nature, he felt a great deal of sympathy with much that these vitalists said. He was opposed to the view expounded in a hostile Fabian review of his lectures, which asserted that ‘antagonism is the law of the world’. Moreover, though he was wary of the ‘faddist’ element among many of these ‘back to nature’ enthusiasts, his imaginative writing of the late 1880s and 1890s (explored in the Appendix), reveals that many of these enthusiasms were ones held in common.

Furthermore, there were those among these enthusiasts whom Morris greatly admired and respected. In 1883 he met Edward Carpenter when Carpenter donated £300 for the launch of the S.D.F.’s *Justice*. Carpenter’s passionate *Towards Democracy* appeared in the same year, which promoted ‘back to the land’ alternatives to industrialism. Carpenter, who complained that ‘the source of all production’ lay

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neglected, had set up a market garden business in Chesterfield in 1882, and called upon all men and women 'to come close to the Earth itself and those that live in direct contact with it'. A later work, England's Ideal (1887), used Marxian socialism to analyse history and censor capitalism, challenging production for the market on the basis that it made humanity 'miserable and feverish'. Rather than advocating the 'cast-iron regulation of industry', however, Carpenter called for an assimilation of consumer and producer: for self-sufficient communities of limited wants and needs, with '[t]he vast majority of mankind [living] in direct contact with nature'.

Although never close, either personally or doctrinally, Morris felt that Carpenter's was 'the real way to enjoy life':

I went to Chesterfield and saw Carpenter on Monday and found him very sympathetic and sensible at the same time. I listened with longing heart to his account of his patch of ground, seven acres: he says that he and his fellow can almost live on it: they grow their own wheat, and send flowers and fruit to Chesterfield and Sheffield markets: all that sounds very agreeable to me.

The visit caused Morris to reflect that all life's 'necessary ordinary details' should be a source of pleasure, and that one of the most serious indictments of 'modern civilization' was that it 'huddles them out of the way, has them done in a venal and slovenly manner till they become real drudgery which people can't help trying to avoid'.

During the visit mentioned above, Carpenter lent Morris his copy of Thoreau's Walden. Morris wrote back to Carpenter:

I have read a good bit of Walden, & find it (of course) very interesting—only it seems to me that he (in his book) looks on human life as a spectator only. That's a convenient and pleasant position to take up; but quite apart from the question of whether one ought to do so or not, very few people

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80 Edward Carpenter, Co-operative Production, with References to the Experiment of Leclaire, Lecture at the Hall of Science, Sheffield, 1886, pp. 15, 6.
can... I don't object, meantime, to a one-sided way of looking at matters so long as we understand that it is one-sided. And I know from experience what a comfortable life one might lead if one could be careful not to concern oneself with persons but with things; or persons in the light of things. But nature won't allow it, it seems, and we must e'en make the best of it, and (when we can) sing under the burden instead of groaning under it.85

In this letter, among others, Morris's emphasis upon humanism underlines the differences between Carpenter and himself. Nevertheless, there is a certain empathy that flows through their letters. In many respects, Carpenter's Civilization: Its Cause and Cure (1889) provides an interesting contextual parallel to News from Nowhere. Moved by Carpenter's adherence to a simple lifestyle and land ethic, Morris drew on this practical example for his vision of the future.86

In a similar way, but for different reasons, Morris was also drawn to Peter Kropotkin, one of the many political refugees sheltering in England in the 1880s. After meeting him at a commemoration of the Paris Commune in 1886, Morris invited Kropotkin to lecture at the Hammersmith Branch of the League on several occasions, and appears, at one stage, to have hoped that he might become a member.87 Yet Kropotkin was a committed anarchist who believed that anarchism was not simply a matter of faith, but an observable tendency in nature. Though he believed that 'the conquest of bread' had to involve human 'conquest over nature',88 Kropotkin maintained that nature 'was the first ethical teacher of man',89 and in Fields, Factories and Workshops (1899) argued for a harmonious balance between agriculture and industry. Kropotkin's vision of a decentralised society, made up of 'an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees',90 held a deep appeal for Morris. In 'The Society of the Future', delivered at

86 The influence ran both ways. Carpenter wrote of Morris, after his death, as 'one of the finest figures of this century', and described his great contribution as 'the impulse of growth which ... has been one of the most potent, most generous and humanly beautiful, of all the many impulses ... of modern Socialism'; in Freedom, vol. X, December 1896, p. 118; in The Critical Heritage, pp. 401-3.
Ancoats in Manchester in 1888, Morris held out a similar vision of ‘a society conscious of a wish to keep life simple, to forgo some of the power over nature won by past ages in order to be more human and less mechanical, and willing to sacrifice something to this end’.  

This kind of openness to contemporary alternatives to Marxian socialism meant that Morris’s own brand of socialism was never orthodox or rigidly ‘scientific’. While Morris drew on the letter of Marx for his analysis of ‘How We Live’, he often called on the spirit of utopians, anarchists or ‘back to nature’ enthusiasts for his imagination of ‘How We Might Live’. The nature of this imagining is explored in the Appendix. The following extract from a friend’s diary, however, indicates the broad environmental, ideological, social, and aesthetic bases around which Morris’s socialism was formed:

[Morris was] very angry with Seddon for replacing old Hammersmith Church (‘a harmless silly old thing’) by such an excrescence. He was bubbling over with Karl Marx, whom he had just read in French. He praised Robert Owen immensely. He had been giving an address to a Clerkenwell Radical Club and found the members ‘eager to learn but dreadfully ignorant’... Finely explosive against railways. Some imitation Morris wallpaper was ‘a mangy gherkin on a horse dung ground’... It was perhaps this breadth and eclecticism that caused Walter Crane to observe that Morris’s value lay in the fact that he brought ‘imaginative force to bear upon the hard facts of Nature’.  

In considering the relations between labour and nature, therefore, Morris conceived of humanity, nature and work in ways that are qualitatively different from those of Marx. In his emphasis on process, and in his desire for ‘a reasonable share in the beauty of the earth ... as the right of every man’ (rather than an emphasis on the

necessity of massive and expansive production at any cost), Morris not only looked for solutions to the exploitative relationships that ensued between human beings, but also to those between humanity and the natural world. By transcending the capitalist emphasis upon production for profit, and subduing the Marxian emphasis upon the subjugation of nature, Morris developed a culture of nature which allowed space for both culture and nature.

Yet, in the end, all of Morris’s interest in, and endeavours to preserve or protect, nature were in order to be ‘thoughtful of man’s pleasure and rest, and to help so far as this, her children to whom she has most often set such heavy tasks of grinding labour’.95 With nature, however problematic the definition, acting as a guide or standard in the inspiration of the object, in the materials used to make it, in the fashion in which it was made, in the environment in which it was made, and in the relationships which ensued when it was made, Morris arrived, as Lindsay argued, at a point that Marx had set out in 1844:

The human essence of nature exists only for social man; for only here does nature exist as the foundation of his own human existence... Thus society is the unity of being of man with nature—the true resurrection of nature—the naturalism of man and the humanism of nature both brought to fulfilment.96

This led Lindsay to claim that Morris was one of the few Marxists who have understood, as Marx did, that in political economy we deal not only with forces outside men’s control—the exploiting side of production, in which alienation and reification are concentrated—but also with the very life process of men, in which what is produced and reproduced is not merely commodities, but is men themselves and nature.97

It is also true, no doubt, that Morris was able to understand this because of his grounding in Ruskin.98 Yet it is also necessary to understand that Morris’s awareness of the environmentally destructive potential of commodity-production was a much

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96 Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844); quoted in Lindsay, Life and Work, p. 380.
97 Lindsay, Life and Work, p. 310.
98 Spear, Dreams of an English Eden, p. 227.
wider product of his age. Thus when Lindsay argues that Morris ‘was pioneering a century ago in the comprehension of problems which have only recently risen into the general consciousness’, 99 we need to be aware of those pioneering alongside him, of the broad and disparate responses to the problems of industrial capitalism and of natural and historical determinism. Furthermore, we also need to be aware that, more than comprehension, Morris provided vision, and it is to this ultimate ‘transition between works of nature and of art’ that his work finally turned.

99 Lindsay, Life and Work, pp. 382–3.
Appendix:

The Vision

Fair
1. Pilgrims of Nature?

Although Morris’s lectures provide us with a concise and persuasive account of his hopes for a socialist future, Morris always felt more comfortable with work that had a strong visual and aesthetic component. It is, therefore, no surprise that he was once again drawn to imaginative, poetic expression in the mid-1880s. In many respects, this work culminates in the ‘vision fair’ of *News from Nowhere* (1890–91), in which Morris creates a landscape in which all of humanity can enjoy ‘a reasonable share in the beauty of the earth’, in which culture and nature interweave and define one another. Yet Morris also undertook many other imaginative ventures at this time. He was revising some of his earlier poems for publication and preparing translations of the Icelandic sagas; studying typography in anticipation of launching his own printing press and choosing works to publish at that press. Most significantly, in 1885, he began to produce the first of a number of other historical and fantastic stories or ‘prose romances’. *News from Nowhere* is the most celebrated of these, and probably offers the most useful place to look for Morris’s mature, hoped-for culture of nature. Yet *News from Nowhere* also needs to be seen in the context of his other imaginative works, works in which he also explores the contours of the vision fair. The first chapter in this Appendix will explore the place of nature in the early, pre-*Nowhere*, historical romances in order to discern and illuminate concerns that emerge more fully in *News from Nowhere*.

The tales which precede the writing of *News from Nowhere*—*The Pilgrims of Hope* (1885–86), *A Dream of John Ball* (1886–87), *The House of the Wolfings* (1888) and *The Roots of the Mountains* (1889)—all deal with social upheaval in the past and can be read as historical prototypes for revolution.¹ They are not nostalgic compensation for, or loss of faith in, contemporary socialist struggle, but part of Morris’s attempt, as critics have noted, ‘to find what was best worth having and doing now’.² They resonate, in many ways, with the social and political events of Morris’s

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time. Two main themes are predominant: ‘fellowship’ and the movement of history. Any consideration of nature is subservient to each of these.

*The Pilgrims of Hope* was first published in thirteen parts in *Commonweal* and appeared between March 1885 and July 1886. The poem, narrated in a complex metre, follows the lives of a young socialist couple who move from the country to the city and eventually cross the Channel to fight on the barricades in Paris in 1871. It charts the commitment of the couple, both to each other and to ‘the cause’, and, as Linda Hughes and Michael Lund have noted, involves a number of personal steps backward on the way forward to the future, ‘a rhythm extended by the poem’s serialisation’.

The story opens with a song, ‘The Message of the March Wind’, which begins by celebrating the sensual joys of nature in spring:

Fair now is the springtide, now earth lies beholding  
With the eyes of a lover the face of the sun;  
Long lasteth the daylight, and hope is enfolding  
The green-growing acres with increase begun.

Now sweet, sweet it is through the land to be straying  
Mid the birds and the blossoms and the beasts of the field;  
Love mingles with love, and no evil is weighing  
On thy heart or mine, where all sorrow is healed.

Such lyricism was, no doubt, the reason why a writer in the *Athenaeum* noted that the poem was ‘full’ of ‘perfect rapport with nature’ and ‘admirable sketching of scenery’. Rural reverie is soon broken, however, by ‘the message’, which emanates from London. The ‘wind in the elm-boughs’ warns the young couple, travelling to the city in order to join the socialist cause (rather than to escape the ‘hopeless toil’ of contemporary Victorian rural life, as many did), that the capital is a place of struggle.

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6 In an introduction entitled ‘The Background: Country Life’ (AWS, vol. II, pp. 25–6), May Morris suggested that the social and economic dislocation caused by the industrial revolution was an important context for the emergence of Morris’s socialism. Her observation that ‘[t]hose who remained in the country lived under a crushing weight of poverty’ recalls the results of the 1834
and unrest, of greed, ignorance and misery, a place where ‘innocent’, aesthetic, earthly pleasures are unknown. It tells them that ‘the earth and its glory’ is for the rich ‘but a burden they scarce might abide’. It also tells them of the ‘haggard and grim’ lives of the poor, for whom the land ‘hangs in heaven, high out of their reach’. Alienation from the aesthetic pleasure to be found in nature, in other words, is part of the reason why those who inhabit the city live in ‘the blackness of night’.7

Such comparisons between the life of the city and the country are implicit throughout the poem. In contrast to the beauty and stability of the countryside, the city is a chaotic, sordid site where the earth is ‘foul with its squalor’ and the ‘stench from the lairs’ of the poor has ‘poisoned the sun-lit spring’.8 It is also a place of flux and uncertainty. For the lovers, London is where the quality of their life is degraded and where their love for each other is broken by a third party. In Paris, two of the three are killed on the barricades, and the remaining protagonist returns to ‘the country’ as a place of regenerative rest. In one of the last sections of the poem, the survivor appeals to the earth on behalf of his wife and friend: ‘Oh Earth, Earth, look on thy lovers, who knew all thy gifts and thy gain, / But cast them aside for thy sake, and caught up barren pain!’9

In many respects, therefore, it appears that Morris brought his own experiences of the city to this poem. Certain passages seem to reflect how Morris might have felt upon returning to London from Kelmscott,10 and many have noted how Morris’s poem draws more on the British socialist agitation of the 1880s than events in France a decade earlier.11 The meeting in ‘a wretched quarter’, where one of the heroes is arrested, is obviously based on Morris’s experience of street-corner speaking,

amendment to the Poor Laws. In Pilgrims, written during a severe rural depression, Morris states that only ‘if one need not work is [the country] a place for happy rest’ (p. 393).

7 Morris, The Pilgrims of Hope, pp. 369–70.
8 Morris, The Pilgrims of Hope, p. 375.
10 See, for example, the passages in the section ‘Sending to the War’, pp. 374–5.
propaganda outings, and open-air demonstrations.12 Similarly, the description of the ‘dull and dirty’ ‘Radical spouting-place’ recalls the headquarters of the S.D.F. and Socialist League on Westminster Bridge and Farringdon Roads.13 Yet, while Morris vents his dislike of the aesthetics of the city in Pilgrims, the city is also, undisputedly, the place in which ‘hope’ is located in the poem. It is where ideas are disseminated, where the ‘pilgrims’ congregate and organise, and where revolution is born. The very fact that Morris chose the Paris Commune as the climactic setting for his story indicates his belief that the city can be ‘the hope of the world’.14

Thus the contrasts between city and country, though real, are not facile or overly one-sided. Pilgrims is not a tale of the city versus the country, but of the ‘grim net’ of capitalism—agricultural and industrial—versus the fellowship of socialism.15 Moreover, rurality is not posited as a revolutionary goal in the poem, but is rather ‘the first movement in a spiralling dialectic’.16 The last instalment, with its eulogy to the earth and the hero’s return to the country, is not an ending. As Hughes and Lund have noted, below the last line of the poem was printed ‘to be concluded’: ‘the poem ceased, like some middle instalment, but did not end’ (the implication being that the tale could only end in the future, with the help of readers willing to aid the protagonists’ cause).17 Nor is Pilgrims’ evocation of rurality ‘idealised’ or ‘pastoral’, as E.P. Thompson has suggested,18 so much as ‘vernacular agrarian’. Anne Janowitz has indicated how the poem can be located as part of a ‘communitarian interventionist’ romantic tradition, the sources of which lie in Thomas Spence, whose heritage in the nineteenth century can be followed through Shelley, the Chartist Land Plan and ‘back to the land’ movements.19 It is a romanticism, Janowitz suggests, which ‘in the atmosphere of socialism in the 1880s represented an important advance upon the

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18 Thompson, Romantic to Revolutionary, p. 670. The hero recalls, for example, while watching the ‘sore and grievous sight’ of workers in the city, that ‘enough and to spare had I seen / Of hard and pinching want midst our quiet fields and green’ (The Pilgrims of Hope, p. 375).
plebeian communitarianism which had fuelled, as well, the ideology of the radical Tories and the conservative Burkeans. Maybe this is because Morris concentrates on ‘purposeful historical narration’ rather than nature or landscape description. Morris compresses events and tells them from the perspective of the participants in order to demonstrate the direction in which historical forces are headed. The hero sees ‘the city squalor and the country stupor gone’. The inference is that he only bides his time until another chance arises for him to cast earth’s ‘gifts’ and ‘gains’ aside in order to force revolutionary change.

A Dream of John Ball, published in Commonweal between November 1886 and January 1887, repeats some of the same themes albeit in a different time and setting. The story follows the dream of a nineteenth-century narrator who imagines himself in a fourteenth-century English village during the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381. As in Pilgrims, the story starts by celebrating the physical appearance of the countryside. The first things that the narrator notices when he ‘wakes’ are the ‘lie of the land’: ‘ordinary English low-country’ with ‘copses scattered over’ it, ‘two or three villages and hamlets’, ‘some orchard-land’ and unhedged, tilled fields. Here the comparison with nineteenth-century England is made explicit, as the narrator contrasts the ‘garden-like neatness and trimness of everything’ with the ‘hedged tillage and tumble-down bankrupt-looking surroundings of our modern architecture’. Thus one of Morris’s purposes in A Dream of John Ball is to juxtapose the ‘countryside’ of nineteenth-century England with the rural landscape of his idealised Middle Ages, an image derived from various sources, including Carlyle, Froissart, Hyndmann, Cobbett and the economic historian James Thorold Rogers. The Morrisian dreamer also admires the beauty and simplicity of the dwellings made from stone, wood and plaster and the ‘wonderful skill and spirit’ in walls decorated with ‘a rose stem running all around the

24 Morris, A Dream of John Ball, p. 217.
room, freely and roughly done'. The constant suggestion is that this is a more natural, and therefore more beautiful, world. It was an image appreciated by the *Pall Mall Gazette*, where Morris was commended once more for his 'genius for suggesting beautiful things' and for his 'delightful ... picture of the Kentish hamlet'.

This theme is more insistent here than in *Pilgrims* because of the different historical situation of the drama. In this period, revolution *did* occur in the fields, and the story's action takes place in the countryside; its chief revolutionary is the 'hedge-priest' John Ball. Thus the difference between town and country is drawn much more sharply in *A Dream of John Ball*. The tale definitely suggests that the countryside is a moral repository of honesty and goodness and the town a harbour of corruption and avarice. The narrator hears a ballad which tells 'how that the wild wood and the heath, despite of wind and weather, were better for a free man than the court and the cheaping-town'. Moreover much is made of the banner of the villagers, a symbol of an egalitarian humanity with its origins in nature: 'a man and a woman half-clad in skins of beasts seen against a background of green trees, the man holding a spade and the woman a distaff and spindle'. Drawn later by Burne-Jones, and made into a frontispiece when the story was published as a book in 1888 (fig. lxxv), this image forms a kind of emblem for the tale, a figuring of the ideals underpinning the story.

Nevertheless, 'underneath this symbol of the early world and man's first contest with nature', the narrator tells us, is the question:

*When Adam delved and Eve span,*  
*Who was then the gentleman?*

Thus, once again, Morris's images are not primarily about a 'nobler life in nature', but the 'natural rights' of those who live there. The constant refrain throughout the story

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Fig. lxxv

Frontispiece to *A Dream of John Ball*, designed by Edward Burne-Jones (first produced as a photogravure frontispiece in 1888, reproduced as a woodcut for the Kelmscott Press edition in 1892). A reviewer in the *Pall Mall Gazette* felt that the spade in this picture was so ‘primitive’, and the manner of digging so ‘amateurish’ and ‘ineffectual’, that the illustration begged the question, ‘Who was then the husbandman?’
is that the relationship of master and servant is unnatural, and that all ‘are the sons of one man and one mother, begotten of the earth’. Fellowship, it is steadfastly asserted, is the natural state of relations between humans: ‘fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell: fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death’. These ‘natural rights’ are not seen as dues that occur naturally, but as rights that need to be fought for. John Ball reinforces this message as he reminds his listeners that ‘the deeds that ye do upon the earth, it is for fellowships sake that ye do them, and the life that is in it, that shall live on and on for ever, and each one of you part of it’.

The narrator is then prompted to his reflection on ‘how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name’. Morris looks forward to nothing other than the fellowship of socialism here. Thus, even though this is a story set in natural surroundings which are lovingly dwelt upon, the ultimate appeal in A Dream of John Ball is not to nature, but to history. The story emerges as an attempt to explore a common antecedent that would stimulate the readers of Commonweal. Published alongside ‘Socialism from the Root Up’, A Dream of John Ball, to the Pall Mall Gazette’s intense irritation, moved from being a ‘charming romance’ to providing a ‘Short History of the English People’. Holding out hope that ‘the Fellowship of Men shall endure’, Morris ultimately celebrates the strength of the just vision. And, in fact, it is this that ultimately makes the ‘sights’ of the fourteenth century beautiful. It is when the narrator sits or walks with the people that he is most struck by the ‘wonder

31 Morris, A Dream of John Ball, p. 228.
32 Morris, A Dream of John Ball, p. 235.
33 Morris, A Dream of John Ball, p. 230. It has been suggested that Morris stuck close to Froissart’s account in this respect, which emphasised the peasants’ rebellion as an appeal to natural law in face of the unnaturalness of class society. Froissart wrote: ‘These unhappy people of these sayd countreyes began to styrrre, bycause they sayde they were kept in great servage; and in the beginning of the worlde they sayd ther were no bonde men. Wherefore they sayd thed that none ought to be bonde, without he dyed treason to his lorde, as Lucifer dyde to God’. See Michael Holzman, ‘The Encouragement and Warning of History: William Morris’s A Dream of John Ball’, in Socialism and the Literary Artistry of William Morris, p. 101.
34 Morris, A Dream of John Ball, p. 230.
35 Morris, A Dream of John Ball, pp. 231–2.
36 Unsigned review, Pall Mall Gazette, p. 3; in The Critical Heritage, p. 318.
37 Morris, A Dream of John Ball, p. 284.
and pleasure’ and ‘the great beauty of the scene’.\(^{38}\) It is the people, their lives and
daily activities, that affect him ‘almost to tears’.\(^{39}\) Moreover, though the battles are
waged in the fields in this story, Morris is careful to emphasise that the peasants are on
their way to London to demand ‘real’ change. Like his lovers, Morris’s peasants are
not pilgrims of nature, but of history and hope.

It has been suggested that Morris turned towards such stories at this time
because of the slow progress being made by the English socialist movement. In
particular, events in Trafalgar Square on 13 November 1887, ‘Bloody Sunday’, seem
to have made Morris realise that the socialist revolution would be a long, frustrating
and violent process, and that a socialist society would remain unattainable in his
lifetime. Some have also argued that this led Morris to search for compensation in
proto-socialist victories of the past. Boos has read the saga-like \textit{A Tale of the House
of the Wolfings and all the kindreds of the Mark} and \textit{The Roots of the Mountains} as an
exploration of two such victories.\(^{40}\) The first, published in 1888, recounts the struggles
of Goths against the Romans and their allies in Alpine Europe in the late sixth century.
The latter, which appeared in 1889, is a more leisurely tale of a group of related tribes
who come under threat from ‘wild horsemen of the east’, and is set in an indeterminate
later period. Both of these tales are more recognisably ‘romances’ than \textit{Pilgrims} or \textit{A
Dream of John Ball}. Yet both also served a cultural function much greater than that
of mere compensation and are the most ‘realistic’ of his imaginative prose romances.

Morris himself indicated that \textit{The House of the Wolfings} was ‘a story of the
life of the Gothic tribes on their way through middle Europe, and their first meeting
with the Romans in war’;\(^{41}\) while \textit{The Roots of the Mountains}, which concerns
descendants of the Wolfings, has been described as ‘the pendant in many regards’ of
the earlier work.\(^{42}\) As such, both stories again provide an opportunity to describe a

\(^{38}\) Morris, \textit{A Dream of John Ball}, pp. 259, 257. See also Florence Boos, ‘Alternative Victorian
Futures: “Historicism”, \textit{Past and Present} and \textit{A Dream of John Ball}’, in Florence S. Boos (ed.),
\(^{39}\) Morris, \textit{A Dream of John Ball}, p. 257.
\(^{40}\) Boos, ‘Morris’s German Romances’, p. 322.
142–4.
people living close to nature. In *The Roots of the Mountains* the people are literally defined by the land. There are the 'men of Burgdale and the Sheepcotes; and the Children of the Wolf, and the Woodlanders, and the Men of Rose-dale'. The land and its natural features not only name but also link, divide, enervate, agitate, and make or break these people. The areas of government are defined by the contours of the earth and tribal decisions are made communally at open air ‘Things’: ‘This was the custom of our forefathers, in memory, belike of the days when as yet there was neither house nor tillage, nor flocks and herds, but the Earth’s face only and what freely grew thereon’. Moreover, in both works, the various Gothic clans venerate nature in various forms. The tribes of the Wolfings worship ‘the holy beasts who drew the banner-wains’ and the site of the ‘Holy Thing’. The people in *The Roots of the Mountains* swear by ‘the Earth’ and the elements. As Boos has pointed out, it is likely that Morris derived many such details of Germanic tribal life and values from Edward Gibbon’s *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776).

Yet, once again, it was not Morris’s intention merely to describe ‘natural’ societies living in harmony with the world around them. *The House of the Wolfings* was meant, he told a correspondent, ‘to illustrate the melting of the individual into the society of the tribes’, and this is the overriding theme of both these tales: the necessity of sacrificing individuality for the sake of the community. The Wolfings’ hero ‘Thiodolf’, for example, is initially protected in battle by the magic of his lover, the ‘Wood-Sun’. He discovers, however, that this magic is causing the tribe to lose their battle against the ‘Dusky Men’, and he is eventually convinced to fight without

46 According to Mackail (Life, vol. I, p. 38), Morris read H.H. Milman’s annotated edition (1852) and J.C.L. Sismondi’s (1834) while at Oxford. May Morris (‘Introduction’, in CW, vol. XXII, pp. xxvi–vii) also recalls her father re-reading Gibbon at various times throughout his life, particularly during his last years when these romances were written. Boos (‘Morris’s German Romances’, p. 325) notes, however, that Morris tended to idealise the communal virtues and mitigate or suppress practices which did not fall within the limits of romance. Morris himself is supposed to have exclaimed, when pressed to reveal his sources, that ‘it’s a romance, a work of fiction—that it’s all LIES!’; quoted in Sparling, *The Kelmscott Press and William Morris*, p. 50. Yet he reconstructs tribal life in some detail, and was possibly also influenced by Bax (with whom he wrote essays on ‘Ancient Society’ and ‘The Rough Side of the Middle Ages’ for *Commonweal*), Lewis Morgan’s *Ancient Society* (1877), and Frederick Engels’s *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigenthums und des Staates* (1884, though not translated into French until 1893, or English until 1902).
his magic protection in order to save the tribe. Thus, while the story paints a sympathetic picture of a people 'at one with nature', much more value is ultimately given to being at one with the tribe. The hero’s ‘coming of age’ represents a step away from what is in many ways the ‘natural magic’ of the Wood-Sun, that is from nature, to society. Thiodolf’s final speech to the Wood-Sun, just before he dies in battle, stresses the values that bind the tribe together and that it is ‘through them’ that he is ‘of the whole earth, and all the kindreds of it’.48

This reiteration and development of the idea of fellowship at the level of the tribe repeated Morris’s study of ancient and medieval society in ‘Socialism from the Root Up’. In these essays Morris had traced the development of the Gens after ‘man’ had found that he could ‘aid nature in forcing the earth to produce livelihood for him’, a stage at which ‘he’ found that

the hill and the forest became something more to him than the place where berries and roots grew, and wild creatures lived, the land became pasture ground to him, and at last amid some races ground for tillage.49

Among these people ‘the land was common in the sense that it was not the property of individuals, but it was not common to all comers’. Morris believed that by the time tribes replaced the Gens ‘this Communism had been broken into’, but the tribe ‘at large disposed of the use of the land according to certain arbitrary arrangements’, and ‘did not admit ownership in it to individuals’.50 We can read into this celebration of tribal life a deep hostility to the property rights and individualism of Morris’s own age, and also a keen awareness of the meaningful relationship between a people and their land. Yet the communal bonds between people remain of paramount importance in these texts. In The Roots of the Mountains it is the alliances forged between the Burgdalers, the Woodlanders and the people of Rose-dale which ensures their survival when faced by the threat of the Dusky Men. While writing The House of the Wolfings, Morris explained to the Rev. George Bainton:

man as a social animal tends to the acquirement of power over nature, and to the beneficent use of that power, which again implies a condition of society in which everyone is able to satisfy his needs in return for the due exercise of his capacities for the benefit of the race...\(^{51}\)

It is noteworthy that Morris chose to portray 'barbarians' at a time when he was seeking to emphasise the qualities of fellowship. Possibly he found in his reading of accounts of Germanic tribes just that combination of stoicism and fortitude mixed with respect for the land that he had admired in Icelandic literature. It is also likely that he was at least partially inspired by Richard Jefferies's extraordinary tale of an England lapsed into barbarism, *After London, or Wild England* (1885). While reading this novel in 1885, Morris told Georgiana Burne-Jones that 'absurd hopes curled round my heart as I read it'.\(^{52}\)

Morris also had other reasons for telling tales about squabbling tribes. It was during these years that the Socialist League was beginning to be riven by the factions that would force his withdrawal from it in 1890. *The Roots of the Mountains*, in particular, was written during an especially difficult period. In 1889 Morris returned from the chaotic International Socialist Congress in Paris, divided between Guesdist 'Marxists' and Broussist 'Possibilists',\(^{53}\) to find himself battling those whom he thought 'would make the League parliamentary & opportunist' and those tending more and more towards anarchism.\(^{54}\) It is possible that these tales signify his acquiescence to the eventual disintegration of the League, while signalling the need for greater cooperation between different elements of the socialist movement. Lindsay wrote that Morris, finishing *The House of the Wolfings* at Kelmscott, needed to feel 'close to the earth and to elemental life in order to write his romance', that he 'recoil[ed] from the

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\(^{51}\) Morris to George Bainton, 2 April 1888, in *Letters*, vol. II, p. 763.

\(^{52}\) Morris to Georgiana Burne-Jones, 28 April 1885, in *Letters*, vol. II, p. 426. For the influence of Jefferies's *After London*, see also Chapters 2 and 3 below.


confused inner-party struggle' to the 'dream-picture of tribal society, which he now saw in the light of the spiral-concept of history'. Yet perhaps these works are not so much a 'recoil' as an attempt to show the way forward. Though Morris writes about a society 'close to the earth and to elemental life', the dialectics of this work involve, as Lindsay acknowledged, a resolution between barbarism and civilisation such that the values and qualities Morris admired in barbarians could be regained on a new level through socialism. Morris and Bax's notes appended to the 'Manifesto of Socialist League' describe just such a spiral movement of history, possibly resulting from discussions between them and Engels.

Indeed these stories, far from being a compensatory escape into the past, ultimately provided Morris with a means of working out a framework for a socialist future. The egalitarian features of a community linked to the land inspired Morris to include them in News from Nowhere. The genre of historical romance allowed Morris to express both the physical reality of a life close to nature, and the personal and emotional adjustment needed for such a society. The House of the Wolfings and The Roots of the Mountains were organic proto-socialist societies which Morris reworked and transformed into News from Nowhere. Of crucial importance in these, as in Pilgrims and A Dream of John Ball, was the primacy of historical development. In each of these stories, 'man's ruder struggles with nature in his earlier days' are just that: 'ruder'. They are of secondary importance compared to the struggle between humans: they concern 'the organization of man who wields the force of Nature' (my emphasis).

Morris might have continued to write these historical tales had it not been for an event that drove him to underline the fact that the organic life of the tribe could be transformed into a socialist vision for the future. This catalyst was the publication in 1888 of Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward 2000–1887, which describes life in Boston in the year 2000 from the point of view of a nineteenth-century traveller in

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55 Lindsay, Life and Work, p. 332.
56 Lindsay, Life and Work, p. 294.
57 As noted by Lindsay, Life and Work, p. 293. This spiral concept of socialism was developed by Engels in The Dialectics of Nature (1925).
58 Morris, 'Art under Plutocracy', p. 170.
time. The traveller wakes up from a mesmerised sleep to find America operating under a system of 'state nationalism'. Private property has been abolished, and all citizens participate in the 'industrial army' of a highly industrialised, centralised and ordered state. Written, as Stephen Coleman has argued, as an indictment of the 'waste and inefficiency of the American Gilded Age', Bellamy's work attracted almost as much attention internationally as it did in America. Over 400,000 copies were sold in the first two years of publication and its impact was wide ranging.

Morris read Looking Backward in May 1889. His immediate reaction is recorded in a letter to his colleague in the Glasgow Branch of the Socialist League, J. Bruce Glasier: 'I suppose you have seen ... 'Looking Backward'... Thank you, I wouldn't care to live in such a cockney paradise as he imagines'. Morris's use of the word 'cockney' is indicative of the overall tone of his more considered review of Looking Backward for Commonweal in June 1889. Alarmed at the influence of the book, Morris felt compelled to explain why he so vehemently disagreed with Bellamy's vision, insisting that 'it should not be taken as a Socialist bible of reconstruction'.

In 1888 the first Bellamy Club was founded in Boston to propagate the principles of Nationalism, the system of social organisation by which America of the year 2000 was governed. Within two years more than 150 Nationalist Clubs had been organised over the country, most of them in the Middle West where agrarian unrest was severe. The clubs published newspapers, promoted discussion forums, took part in political campaign, and, more concretely, agitated for the nationalisation of utilities as a first step toward public ownership of all means of production and distribution...

Soon after publication translations appeared in German, French, Italian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Danish, and a dozen more languages. The work had a huge sale in England ... and was influential even in Russia...

In 1935 John Dewey, Charles Beard, and Edward Weeks (editor of the Atlantic Monthly) were asked to list the twenty-five books of the preceding fifty years which had the greatest influence on the thought and action of the world. Independently the three men listed Karl Marx's Das Kapital first and Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward second.


62 Elliott has noted that the number of copies sold caused the publishers, Houghton Mifflin, some unease at the success of a such a politically sensitive publication (Looking Backward, pp. vii–viii). He goes on to record the impact of Looking Backward:


On the whole, Morris's main concern was that Bellamy's utopia reproduced too many of the features of nineteenth-century society, and that the 'temperament' of the book was 'the unmixed modern one, unhistoric and unartistic'. Morris wrote: '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.' Bellamy's world, Morris complained, was one in which wasteful commercial production and the 'philistinism of the triumphant bourgeois' continued. 'The underlying vice in it', he considered, is that the author cannot conceive ... of anything else than the machinery of society, and that, doubtless naturally, he reads into the future of society, which he tells us is unwastefully conducted, that terror of starvation which is the necessary accompaniment of a society in which two-thirds or more of its labour-power is wasted: the result is that though he tells us that every man is free to choose his occupation and that work is no burden to anyone, the impression which he produces is that of a huge standing army, tightly drilled, compelled by some mysterious fate to unceasing anxiety for the production of wares to satisfy every caprice, however wasteful and absurd...

Thus it is primarily the 'useless toil' to which Morris most objected in Looking Backward. In particular, he attacked the proliferation of automated machinery that had aided the nineteenth-century exploitation of both human and natural resources, complaining that 'a machine-life is the best which Mr Bellamy can imagine for us on all sides'. As he had in his lectures, Morris argued:

the development of man's resources, which has given him greater power over nature, has driven him also into fresh desires and fresh demands on nature, and thus made his expenditure of energy much what is was before. I believe that this will always be so, and the multiplication of machinery will just—multiply machinery; I believe that the ideal of the future does not point to the lessening of men's energy by the reductio of labour to a minimum, but rather to the reduction of pain in labour to a minimum...

Extrapolating, Morris also rejected the predominantly centralised and urban environment which this system of production created:

[Bellamy] has no idea beyond existence in a great city... In one passage ... he mentions villages, but with unconscious simplicity shows that they do not come into his scheme of economical equality, but are mere servants of the great centres of civilization. This seems strange to us, who cannot help thinking that our experience ought to have taught us that such aggregations of population afford the worst possible form of dwelling-place...\(^{69}\)

For Morris, the city in its present form represented a pathological effort to distance humanity from the natural world, but mainly from its own true fulfilment. Rejecting Bellamy's trapping and tapping of human nature, and the urban industrial culture-beyond-nature produced by it, Morris emphasised that 'the problem of the organization of life and necessary labour' would best be dealt with by a 'unit of administration ... small enough for every citizen to feel himself responsible for its details, and be interested in them'. The individual should not be able to 'shuffle off the business of life on to the shoulders of an abstraction called the State', but people should have to 'deal with it in conscious association with each other'.\(^{70}\)

Morris's objection to Bellamy's future of 'artificial needs', 'machine life', and an urban industrial environment, galvanised him into providing the world with his own vision of a society in which pleasurable labour is 'the necessary expression and indispensable instrument of human happiness'.\(^{71}\) *Looking Backward* forced Morris to look forward to a world in which work and pleasure, town and country, culture and nature, were not so uncompromisingly divided. His next article for *Commonweal* was 'Under an Elm-Tree; or, Thoughts in the Countryside' in which he described how 'man in the past, nature in the present, seem to be bent on pleasing you and making all things delightful to your senses',\(^{72}\) and imagined 'haymakers' as 'friends working for friends on land which was theirs, as many as were needed, with leisure and hope ahead

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\(^{69}\) Morris, 'Looking Backward', p. 423.
\(^{71}\) Morris, 'Looking Backward', p. 425.
\(^{72}\) Morris, 'Under an Elm-Tree', p. 426.
of them'. Looking forward, Morris chose a vision that was the antithesis of Bellamy's, a vision predicated on the themes that had most concerned him during the 1880s: a natural life of pleasurable labour and fellowship grown up and out of the past.

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73 Morris. 'Under an Elm-Tree', p. 430.
2. A natural society?

*News from Nowhere*, Morris's attempt to imagine a life of pleasurable labour and fellowship, appeared in serial form in *Commonweal* between January and October 1890. Celebrated today as a work that was 'ahead of its time', and 'that has much in common with the views of ... “green” thinkers', it represented at the time of its publication both a culmination and a departure in terms of Morris's views of nature. It drew together many of the arguments and themes of lectures over the previous ten years, and figured his environmental and aesthetic ideas. In this respect, it was both an intensely personal vision that demonstrated the author's concerns, preferences and idiosyncrasies, and a piece of work that bore the working-class readership of *Commonweal* very much in mind. It had, as Norman Talbot has argued, a 'special availability' to this distinct group, who knew a substantial amount about the author, and who relished the 'secret' that the narrator and protagonist was 'comrade’ Morris. *News from Nowhere* can be read, therefore, as an attempt to look 'forward-to-nature' on behalf of those who did not have the opportunity to 'get back' to it. Yet this journey from the city to the country, from a Socialist League meeting to a communal harvest, also links the idea of culture and nature in a transforming motion. Once prompted to use his imagination in this way, Morris increasingly focused on imaginative realms, the more fantastic of which will be explored in the last chapter of this Appendix. In this and the next chapter, however, the society and then the landscape of Nowhere are explored at greater length. The so-called 'natural' society of Nowhere will be dealt with first because Morris could only imagine a radically restructured landscape as the product or concomitant of a transformed society.

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2 This is consonant with Morris's claim in his review of Bellamy's *Looking Backwards* (p. 420) that 'the only safe way of reading a utopia is to consider it as the expression of the temperament of its author'. See also Morris to Gabriela Cunninghame Graham, 8 June 1891 (Letters, vol. III, p. 310), in which he acknowledged that 'one can only in such a work say what one likes oneself'.
3 As one contemporary reviewer acknowledged, 'Mr. Morris is preaching in the vernacular with his face to the people'; Maurice Hewlett, 'A Materialist's Paradise', *National Review*, vol. XVII, August 1891, pp. 818–27; in *The Critical Heritage*, p. 350.
4 Norman Talbot, 'A Guest in the Future: *News from Nowhere*', in *Socialism and the Literary Artistry of William Morris*, p. 39. Talbot convincingly argues that it 'is impossible to get to the energy-core of *News* without recognising its author's special availability', and that the 'enduring vitality of the book
News from Nowhere is a tale structured on many different levels, but the internal organisation of the story concerns a journey from the capitalist, urban, industrial London of the late nineteenth century to a small, communist, rural village on the Upper Thames in the early twenty-second century. We encounter this landscape and society through the eyes of nineteenth-century narrator and protagonist, William Guest, who bears more than a passing resemblance to Morris. Guest encounters an England that has been socially, economically, politically and aesthetically transformed, and is assisted in his comprehension of these changes by a number of 'guides'. The most important of these are: Dick, the Morrisian ideal of healthy, artistic and intelligent 'manhood'; Hammond, the intellectual who explains the change and 'how matters are managed'; and Ellen, the Pre-Raphaelite 'woman-as-object' transformed into strong, intelligent and beautiful subject, Morris's most articulate commentator on 'the beauty of the earth'. The tale is a journey of discovery in which Guest observes that many of the social institutions of nineteenth-century England have been overturned to create new relationships between people, and between humans and the rest of the natural world.

The first and most basic premise to note in any discussion of News from Nowhere is that Morris's new society is founded upon a conception of human nature that radically transcended the dominant nineteenth-century Judeo-Christian theory of an innate, limited human nature, miserable in its estrangement from God, and above and apart from the rest of creation. In this work, Morris's utopians have rejected transcendental religion for a 'religion of humanity', and exist on the basis of a cooperative rather than competitive theory of social relations and a view of nature as relatively beneficent. This earned Morris the enmity of some who criticised his work because of 'the absence in it of anything like a belief in a divine purpose running through nature and history, or in the divine essence of man'. Percival Chubb, member of The Fellowship of the New Life, argued that Morris's optimistic view of nature led him to a faith in human nature that was misguided, and the imagination of a society of

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5 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 132.
sensuous delights with little or no self-denial. Similarly, Maurice Hewlett, in the *National Review*, attacked *News from Nowhere* as ‘a materialist’s paradise’, complaining that Morris had produced a world in which ‘[m]an could now conceive of nothing higher than he saw or felt ... nothing more than to grow with the plants and birds’: ‘not an earthly, but an earthy, Paradise’. Hewlett regretted that this aspect of *News from Nowhere* could be considered a ‘gauge of contemporary polity’. While many enjoyed the ‘honest country mirth and manners’ based on a ‘homely affection for the seasonable works of agriculture’, Hewlett complained that Morris had ‘exaggerated the dependence of human nature upon its environment’.

Hewlett and Chubb’s criticisms are useful because they help to clarify just what Morris’s story was not: a vision of humanity existing in, or dependent upon, an amoral ‘state of nature’. Indeed, at the time of writing *News from Nowhere*, Morris addressed an open letter to the readers of *Commonweal*, urging them to look forward to an ‘all-embracing’ moral system that would ‘absorb’ the Christian ethic. As in previous years, he was also corresponding with Christian Socialists, carefully justifying his materialist standpoint as more ethical. More importantly, Morris qualified what he described as Owen’s ‘theory of the perfectibility of man by the amelioration of his surroundings’, with Marx’s belief that human behaviour was determined historically within economic relationships. *News from Nowhere* repudiates the idea of naturally limited human behaviour, describing, rather, a revolution in human conduct. Morris does not suggest that Nowhere’s people are more ‘truly human’ or natural than Guest and his contemporaries. He was, as Stephen Coleman has argued, ‘too imaginative a

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13 Morris and Bax, ‘The Utopists’, p. 564.
materialist to presume to have discovered a single, finalised human nature'. While working on News from Nowhere, Morris wrote to Andreas Scheu stating that he entirely agreed with the condemnation of Huxley that Scheu had meted out in Commonweal. Scheu’s article was a response to Huxley’s recent essays, ‘On the Natural Inequality of Men’ and ‘Natural Rights and Political Rights’. Morris did not quantify his objections, but he would have taken particular exception to the idea of natural limits as expressed by Huxley.

Yet Morris’s vision in News from Nowhere is one of a substantially transformed relationship between humans and the rest of the nature. His imagination of human society can be placed within a utopian tradition that recalls the sinless imagery associated with a pre-Fall Golden Age, and depicts, or evokes, a society that imagines itself living within nature in a harmonious or complementary way. Morris delineates the life of a people whose relationship to nature has undergone major changes, which has led to what might be considered a more ‘natural’ culture or society, one that recognises that humans are part of, and not separate from, what today we might call the ecological organisation of the world. As argued below, it is in this respect only—that is, in its accommodation of ‘external nature’—that the culture of Nowhere can be described as ‘natural’, not because it is somehow more innately human. Relationships are kinder, more considerate and cooperative in News from Nowhere, but this does not mean that Morris considered them more ‘natural’.

Even so, one is tempted to interpret News from Nowhere as a reaction to ‘unnatural’ contours and constraints that Morris believed existed in nineteenth-century society. In the very first pages of News from Nowhere, Morris expresses his impatience with such restrictions. After a League meeting, at which the warring factions do not listen to each other’s opinions, Guest has to journey home ‘using the

17 Coleman, ‘How Matters are Managed’, p. 80.
means of travelling which civilization has forced upon us like a habit' (my emphasis). As he sits in ‘that vapour-bath of hurried and discontented humanity, a carriage of the underground railway’, he ‘stews discontentedly’ on his inability to forcefully represent his vision of a new society to his socialist comrades.18 Thus, to a substantial extent, the narrative genesis of the journey to Nowhere, emerges as an effort to imagine a more ‘natural’ body of institutions and relationships from the context of a world in which a ‘natural’ life is blocked and repressed. It emerges that when Morris says ‘natural’, he frequently means not coerced or constrained.

Morris’s concern for individual freedom and collective welfare is reflected early in the story during Guest and Dick’s discussion concerning the treatment of children in Nowhere. In a letter of 1886, Morris had stated that he believed children should be ‘citizens with inalienable rights of livelihood’,19 and this appears to have become the case in Nowhere. Moreover, because he believed that he had not been taught anything useful at school and saw more educative value in the time he spent rambling around the local countryside, Morris was at pains to illustrate that freedom to learn, rather than compulsion to be taught, is the rule in the new society. Dick assures Guest that their children learn ‘whether they go through a “system of teaching” or not’,20 but also underlines that the emphasis is not on scholarly pursuits, but on personal growth and the development of ‘living skills’ such as swimming, rambling, cooking, mowing, thatching and carpentering.21 It is certainly inferred that this is a more ‘natural’ system of learning.

Morris placed considerable emphasis on child-like responses to the world throughout the story. There are several explicit, idealised references to Morris’s own childhood,22 and Dick rejoices that ‘we have got back our childhood again’.23 In many respects, News from Nowhere represents the second childhood-in-nature Morris

20 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 28.
21 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 28.
22 Morris remembers his ‘very early days in the kitchen-garden at Woodford’, ‘the green forest scents’ of Epping Forest, ‘the wide green sea of the Essex marshland’, and ‘the mound of the Dykes looking up at Sinodun and its clear-cut trench’ (News from Nowhere, pp. 17, 27, 68, 185).
23 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 102.
wished both for himself and for the world, indicating there was still plenty of romance in his conceptualisation of nature. Yet the most significant feature of this regained childhood is not that the people of Nowhere are able to romp through ‘Kensington Woods’, but that they are able to respond more freely and imaginatively to the world around them: they are able to produce better art. ‘[I]t is the child-like part of us that produces works of imagination’. Hammond explains.  

Having discovered how character is formed, Guest is then informed of the various other ways in which forms of social organisation that impede a full and pleasurable life have been discontinued or transformed. Private property has been abolished, which, apart from removing the ability to exploit resources for private gain, has resulted in a number of fundamental social changes. Gone is the nineteenth-century parliamentary political system, explained away as merely ‘a kind of watch-committee sitting to see that the interests of the Upper Classes took no hurt’, and ‘a sort of blind to delude the people into supposing that they had some share in the management of their own affairs’. The real government of the nineteenth century, it is argued, ‘was the Law-Courts, backed up by the executive, which handled the brute force that the deluded people allowed them to use for their own purposes’; a ‘brute force’ that enforced a ‘class system which proclaimed inequality and poverty as the law of God and the bond which held the world together’. One of the strikingly radical features of News from Nowhere is the abolition of the legal system and the punitive measures imposed thereunder. Morris believed that it was only the defence of ‘unnatural’ private property which necessitated civil law. Hammond explains that, ‘private property being abolished, all the laws and all the legal “crimes” which it had manufactured of course came to an end’. Criminal law is also eliminated because crimes of violence were largely ‘the result of the laws of private property, which forbade the satisfaction of ... natural desires to all but a privileged few’. By contrast, the people of Nowhere do not need a coercive, fear-inducing state because ‘there are no unvarying set of rules by which people are judged; no bed of Procrustes to stretch

24 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 102.
26 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 80.
27 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 80.
or cramp their minds and lives’, and because it has become ‘a point of honour ... not to be self-centred’. 28

Most famously, Morris has Hammond say that there are no politics in Nowhere. There are, however, relationships of power: what is ironically referred to as the ‘tyranny of the majority’. 29 This will of the majority is ascertained at the level of the ‘commune’, ‘ward’ or ‘parish’. Highly decentralised, these units of social management have replaced the nation state, and meet at ‘Motes’ to discuss and vote on community issues. 30 Such meetings are not held because of ‘political strife’, but merely in order to make decisions on issues that are a matter of common interest. Political disagreement is a rare occurrence, because the human nature of people in Nowhere is not that ‘of paupers, of slaves, of slave-holders’, but ‘the human nature of wealthy freemen’. 31

Nor do the people of Nowhere lack materially in any way. The distribution of goods and services is free and, as Guest discovers on his shopping expedition in a communised Piccadilly, there is plenty to go around. 32 The major reason for such affluence is the new nature of production and distribution in Nowhere. Hammond explains to Guest that the ‘World-Market’, which ‘created in a never-ending series sham or artificial necessities’, has been replaced by a system of production for needs rather than wants. 33 Morris has Hammond display particular contempt for the economic and cultural colonisation of countries under the auspices of world trade, emphasising the devastating impact of the introduction of new material goods upon other, non-capitalist societies:

When the civilised World-Market coveted a country not yet in its clutches … some bold, unprincipled, ignorant adventurer was found … and he was bribed to ‘create a market’ by breaking up whatever traditional society there might be in the doomed country, and by destroying whatever leisure or pleasure he found there. He forced wares upon the natives which they

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29 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 90.
30 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 88.
32 When buying some Latakia tobacco, Guest is advised to ‘cram’ his pouch with as much as he wants; News from Nowhere, p. 36.
33 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 93.
did not want, and took their natural products in 'exchange', as this form of robbery was called, and thereby he 'created new wants', to supply which (that is, to be allowed to live by their new masters) the hapless, helpless people had to sell themselves into the slavery of hopeless toil so that they might have something wherewith to purchase the nullities of 'civilisation'.

Morris suggests here that capitalist commerce imposed a more cruel and unpleasant system upon 'traditional society', not a more 'unnatural' one. Yet, as Lindsay noted, the implication in News from Nowhere is that a society which has swept away capitalism has reached an equilibrium with nature. This is an achievement that bears some relationship to earlier 'traditional' societies, but one that is on a firmer footing because historically achieved. Society in Nowhere has evolved beyond capitalism, and beyond nature. Morris is here taking an important step beyond the pessimism of Darwinism to reveal his essential agreement with Engels (and Marx) that historical evolution would lift humanity beyond 'free competition, [and] the struggle for existence'. 'Only conscious organisation of social production, in which production and distribution are carried on in a planned way', Engels argued, 'can lift mankind above the rest of the animal world as regards the social aspects, in the same way that production in general has done this for men in their aspect as species'. In News from Nowhere Morris's aim, like Engels, is to lift humanity beyond the norm of animal behaviour, to separate value from fact such that an arbitrarily willed social project can be recognised and created. Unlike Jefferies's After London, Morris's vision of England in the future does not imagine a return to nature that is largely barbaric, but the development of culture such that humanity 'won't stand any nonsense from Nature in their dealings with her'.

Perhaps the most significant feature of this changed system of production and distribution is the redefined nature of work in Nowhere. Morris attempts to portray what the end of commodity production, with its division of labour, money, market

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34 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 95.
35 Lindsay, Life and Work, p. 350.
37 In this assertion and use of Engels, I rely on the argument of Levine in Darwin and the Novelists, p. 241.
38 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 73. This is a phrase I shall return to in the next chapter, but it is interesting to note that, in this respect, News from Nowhere works in antipathy to After London.
systems, and alienation from self and nature, might look like. This endeavour was considered one of the central features of the text by contemporary reviewers.\(^3\)

The people of Nowhere enjoy 'the absence of artificial coercion and the freedom for every man to do what he can do best, joined to the knowledge of what productions of labour we really want'.\(^4\) The result of these circumstances is that goods are produced 'because they are needed: men make for their neighbours' use ... not for a vague market of which they know nothing, and over which they have no control'. As a consequence, Hammond maintains, 'we are not driven to make a vast quantity of useless things, [and] we have time and resources enough to consider our pleasure in making them'.\(^5\)

The workers Guest encounters on his journey through Nowhere accordingly enjoy freedom from the clock, factory whistles and bells, probably unimaginable to many of Morris's readers. His introduction to this form of labour occurs after Dick has rowed him out into the middle of the Thames for a swim. Guest asks how much he owes Dick for the service and Dick replies that 'ferrying and giving people casts about the water is my business, which I would do for anybody; so as to take gifts in connection with it would look very queer'.\(^6\) Guest later asks Hammond to explain 'how you get people to work when there is no reward of labour'. Hammond's response is that 'the reward of labour is life' and the 'reward of creation'. He explains that there is no longer a 'natural desire' not to work (a feature that may have startled Morris's working-class readers) because 'all work is now pleasurable', and that it was only the conditions of labour, rather than the necessity for it, under which people in the past suffered. 'Fourier', Hammond claims, 'understood the matter better'.\(^7\) Now all work is enjoyed 'either because of the hope of gain in honour and wealth', 'because it has grown into a pleasurable habit', or 'because there is conscious sensuous pleasure

\(^{3}\) See, for example, Lionel Johnson, review of News from Nowhere, Academy, 23 May 1891, vol. XXXIX, pp. 483-4; in The Critical Heritage, p. 340. In this respect, as James Buzard has noted, News from Nowhere presents not the 'epoch of rest' suggested by its subtitle, but a society 'that is characterised, above all else, by constant work'. It is only a period of rest for Guest, who gets an 'almost literally rejuvenating vacation'. See Buzard, 'Ethnography as Interruption: News from Nowhere, Narrative, and the Modern Romance of Authority', Victorian Studies, vol. XL, no. 3, Spring 1997, pp. 451, 453.

\(^{4}\) Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 92.

\(^{5}\) Morris, News from Nowhere, pp. 97–8.

\(^{6}\) Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 10.
in the work itself; it is done, that is, by artists'. This last—the expression of an aesthetic sensibility through work—is the predominant theme. Guest is informed that art itself 'has no name amongst us now, because it has become a necessary part of the labour of every man who produces'.

A central part of this art–work is participation in, and enjoyment of, sensuous physical interaction with nature. The fact that labour is 'sensuous' reflects News from Nowhere's broad, textual-natural aesthetic. In the analysis of labour contained in his lectures, Morris had stated that art should be informed by nature and history, and his depiction of work in News from Nowhere is guided by a creativity that derived its aesthetic from the natural world. The result is close physical contact with nature, and an emphasis on physical rather than mental work. Several times in News from Nowhere, Morris attacked what he perceived as the nineteenth-century devaluation of manual work. Throughout the story, though intellectual endeavour is not absent or wholly denounced, 'hands-on' labour, or handicraft, receives much more attention and praise. Thus a stone mason 'gobbles up' her work and declines the invitation to take a break because 'this open-air and the sun and the work together ... make a mere delight of every hour'.

As a result, machine-work is also restricted in Morris’s new world. Shunned in order to ensure humanity's closeness to nature, because they cannot produce works of art, and because they 'cheapen' human life, machines are a shadowy presence in the text. Hammond explains to Guest that the people of Nowhere look with abhorrence upon the days when 'the happiness of the workman at his work' was sacrificed to the 'cheapening of production'. Unlike Bellamy's inhabitants of a new Chicago, the people of Nowhere believe that machines are not an unmixed blessing. Hammond argues that, in the past, they had been 'made to “save labour” ... on one piece of work

43 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 91.
44 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 92.
45 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 134.
46 Thus at the beginning of his journey (News from Nowhere, p. 20), Guest meets a weaver who prefers to pass his time studying mathematics and history, and who is conscious of being considered 'rather a grinder' in this new society: 'a kind of revenge for the stupidity of that day, which despised everybody who could use his hands'.
47 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 174.
48 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 93.
in order that it might be expended on another, probably useless, piece of work'. All such 'devices for cheapening labour', he informs Guest, 'simply resulted in increasing the burden of labour'.49 Since the 'Great Change', however, '[a]ll 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'.50 Above all, machines are not allowed to reduce the role of the 'intelligent hand', to sever the sensuous link between the worker and their work.

Science and technology, in general, are not allowed to dominate the reproduction of life. Both still have a place in Nowhere, but are applied with a care to aesthetics and a view to exploit natural forces more than resources. Guest notices 'force-barges' travelling the river 'without any means of propulsion visible',51 and understands that these have replaced steam-powered craft. Guest also wonders why the prosperous and resourceful inhabitants of Nowhere have not invented some sort of mechanical lock for moving up-river. Dick quickly explains that theirs is 'not an age of invention', and that the prerequisite for any application of technology in Nowhere is that it must work with nature, aesthetically as well as technically. '[A]s long as water has the clumsy habit [an ironic paraphrase of Guest's question] of running down hill', Dick argues, 'I fear we must humour it by going up-stairs when we have our faces turned from the sea'. Dick explains that 'the simple hatches, and the gates, with a big counterpoising beam, were found to answer every purpose'; and insists 'this kind of lock is pretty … and I can't help thinking that your machine-lock … would have been ugly and would have spoiled the river: and that is surely reason enough for keeping such locks as these'.52

Guest is also informed that changes in the use of mechanical force have made it an 'easy matter' to eradicate huge factories. And, because it is no longer necessary for workers to come together to use mechanical power (though certain work is still performed in 'banded workshops'), the inhabitants of Nowhere are able to pursue their work in the 'decent surroundings' more suited to Morris's ideal of creative labour. As

49 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 94.
50 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 97.
51 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 162.
Hammond explains, 'the big murky places which were once ... the centres of manufacture ... have ... disappeared', and natural resources are collected and distributed 'with as little possible of dirt, confusion, and the distressing of quiet people's lives'.

Direct physical interaction with the natural world, therefore, is the most repeatedly celebrated form of work and reflects Morris's belief that 'there are few men ... who would not wish to spend part of their lives in the most necessary and pleasantest of all work—cultivating the earth'. Guest's journey up the Thames to participate in the haymaking has the aura of a pilgrimage, and the description of this work is nothing short of idyllic. He notes a 'long line of haymakers who were spreading the low ridges to dry off the night dew'. They are all 'gaily' dressed and '[t]he meadow looked like a gigantic tulip-bed because of them'. Guest observes that '[a]ll hands were working deliberately but well and steadily, though they were as noisy with merry talk as a grove of autumn starlings'. Here, finally, is the 'realisation' of 'friends working for friends on land which was theirs, as many as were needed, with leisure and hope ahead of them instead of hopeless toil and anxiety'. It is a vision of alienation overcome. The creative processes of work in Nowhere reproduce and ensure 'a reasonable share in the beauty of the earth'. In 1885 Morris had written:

By such work and such a life we should be set free from intestine warfare among ourselves for the nobler contest with Nature, and should find that she also, when conquered, would be our friend, and not our enemy.

Such is the discovery of Nowhere.

Nevertheless, contemporary reviewers were divided as to whether this represented a healthy 'delight in physical life upon earth [as] ... the natural state of

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54 Morris, 'Useful Work versus Useless Toil', p. 112.
man’, a ‘return to “the primal sanities” of nature’,\textsuperscript{58} or a ‘latter-day Neo-
Epicureanism’, a ‘great Nature-worship’ that only ‘points to a deep joy in mere
sensation, and to a deeper, vaster ignorance of what underlies it’: flesh not as grass,
but as God.\textsuperscript{59} Most seemed to welcome the ‘back-to-the-land’ aspect of \textit{News from Nowhere}. Lionel Johnson’s review in the \textit{Academy} congratulated Morris on his
simple, non-‘effeminate’ depiction of ‘athletic pleasure’ and ‘personal regard for the
very earth itself’:

that sense for the motherhood of the earth, which makes a man love the
smell of the fields after rain, or the look of running water. These things, to
the modern poet, are so much material for rhyme and metaphor: ‘rain’ and
‘pain’, ‘stream’ and ‘dream’. We have fallen in love with a way of
torturing nature into complicity with our vague emotions: we should do
well to gain the Homeric simplicity and grandeur of mind, the Lucretian
sense of majesty and power, the Virgilian sense of rapture and glory, in the
presence of the natural earth. Mr. Morris … has always shown this
rightness of mind, this healthy delight in physical existence…\textsuperscript{60}

Though Morris’s work included romantic and idealised depictions of the
natural world, Johnson’s emphasis on the materialism, or physicality, of \textit{News from Nowhere} is accurate. Physical delight in working with nature is seen as a necessary
constituent of culture, or, more accurately, it is culture. In this way, the natural is
pulled within the cultural in \textit{News from Nowhere}; nature exists not so much in harmony
with humanity as an integral part of human culture. According to Clara, another of
Guest’s companions, this makes culture part of nature. Trying to understand why
work was unpleasant and therefore avoided before the ‘Great Change’, she reasons:

Was not their mistake once more bred of the life of slavery that they had
been living?—a life which was always looking upon everything, except
mankind, animate and inanimate—‘nature’, as people used to call it—as
one thing, and mankind as another. It was natural to people thinking in
this way, that they should try to make ‘nature’ their slave, since they
thought ‘nature’ was something outside them.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{60} Johnson, review of \textit{News from Nowhere}, p. 341.
\textsuperscript{61} Morris, \textit{News from Nowhere}, p. 179.
Here we understand nature as something that is inside humanity and, therefore, culture. In 1889 Morris had insisted:

We shall not be happy unless we live like good animals, unless we enjoy the exercise of the ordinary functions of life: eating, sleeping, loving, walking, running, swimming, riding, sailing. We must be free to enjoy all those exercises of the body without any sense of shame; without any suspicion that our mental powers are so remarkable and godlike that we are rather above such common things.\(^\text{62}\)

It is the qualification 'good' that is of greatest significance here. Though Morris's view of non-human nature owed a debt to the romantic emphasis on the unity of natural phenomena, and thus the human and natural worlds were not distinct in his imagined future, nature in *News from Nowhere* was an extension of a series of human values that it at once embodied and reflected: aesthetic beauty, practical utility, organic cooperation. Even though, once humanity and nature are no longer distinct, once the very word nature no longer describes something outside of humanity, the organic world begins to provide a model for human judgements of value, it is the 'good' that becomes the 'natural', not the 'natural' that becomes the 'good'.\(^\text{63}\)

The explanation of social changes in *News from Nowhere*, however, extends beyond the organisation of government, economy and labour. Morris also discusses what he had previously referred to as life's 'necessary ordinary details'.\(^\text{64}\) In particular, he stresses that the 'artificial perversion' of sexual relationships under private property has been dissolved. Echoing aspects of radical romantic writing on love, sex and marriage,\(^\text{65}\) but also an 'awakening' in the latter half of the nineteenth century to the


\(^{65}\) Morris's views on the subject of relationships between men and women share many features with Blake and Shelley's idealising poems. As Nichols noted in his paper on 'Morris's Materialist Romanticism', Morris's thinking was part of a long line of nineteenth-century considerations of reform in sexual and marital politics, and his treatment of sexual relationships in *News from Nowhere* can be compared to Blake's celebration of the union of the sexes in the state of Beulah, and Shelley's protestations against any law pretending to 'govern the undisciplinable wanderings of passion'.

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links between human sexuality and the productive vitality of nature, the inhabitants of Nowhere regard sexual desire as a ‘natural’ force that will not, and should not, be thwarted. In Nowhere relationships are started and continued on the basis of free will, and are grounded in emotional attachment rather than proprietorial constraint.

As a result, the story’s language is suffused with eroticism and the characters’ responses are often openly sexual (another ‘earthy’ feature that perturbed contemporary reviewers). Moreover, even though the text is ‘imbued with the feeling and imagery of male desire’, the expression of women’s sexuality is frank and unrestrained. As Marsh has suggested, this might represent an effort by Morris to balance the sexual asymmetry of desire. It is certainly an attempt to exhibit a world in which ‘eroticism, finally fused with social fellowship’, is able to emerge, for both men and women, as an expression of, and demand for, joy. News from Nowhere represents in fictional form Morris’s views set out in a letter of 1886. Responding to a friend’s inquiries as to the nature of sexual relations under socialism, Morris explained that he considered ‘[c]opulation ... worse than beastly unless it takes place as the outcome of natural desires and kindliness on both sides’. ‘[D]ecent animalism plus human kindliness’, Morris asserted, are ‘infinitely better than the present system of venal prostitution which is the meaning of our marriage system on its legal side’. ‘In short’, he argued, ‘artificial bolstering up of natural human relations is what I object to; though I admit that to make some ceremony or adornment of them is natural & human also’. Again, nature or ‘decent animalism’ needed ‘human kindliness’ to

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66 House, ‘Man and Nature’, pp. 230-2. House argued that writers such as Swinburne and Meredith were among the first, after the romantics, both to give a new importance to the idea of the earth as the ‘mother’ of all living things, and to express the idea of sexual reproduction as the common principle of life. He suggested that Rossetti showed ‘indoor inklings’ of this in some of his pictures, but, by the end of the century, the expression was much franker. Thus Carpenter’s Love’s Coming of Age, published six years after News from Nowhere, fully and openly embraced the kinds of openness that Morris was perhaps more cautiously moving towards in News from Nowhere. Carpenter complained that ‘sexual embraces themselves seldom receive the benison of Dame Nature, in whose presence alone, under the burning sun or the high canopy of the stars and surrounded by the fragrant atmosphere, their meaning can be fully understood’; quoted in House, ‘Man and Nature’, p. 232.

67 See Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 57.

68 Hewlett (‘A Materialist’s Paradise’, p. 351) warned readers that “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life”, are very volcanoes, breeding eruption and riot; burning fiercely, they scorch, and may not always be quenched by being let loose’.

69 Marsh contends: ‘In the nicest possible way, the two men [Guest and Dick] are sexually on the make’; ‘News from Nowhere as Erotic Dream’, JWMS, vol. VIII, no. 4, Spring 1990, pp. 20, 22.


make sex socially acceptable. In this respect, love of the 'natural' emerges from a love, and knowledge, of the ability to be human in a social and cooperative sense.72

However sexually liberating, Morris’s depiction of women in *News from Nowhere* is more dependent on ‘their nature’ than that of men. Like many men, both before, during and after the nineteenth century, Morris often read into the natural world the caring and warmth he desired from women—and vice versa. As discussed in the final chapter of this Appendix, Morris’s idea of nature is frequently one that is feminised. Certainly, Morris is able to imagine some roles for women beyond the bounds of what was considered ‘natural’ in the nineteenth century. Most importantly, they have been freed from the ‘law-made idea’ of being ‘the property of the man ... as well as certain follies about the “ruin” of women for following their natural desires ... which of course was a convention caused by the laws of private property’.73 ‘When the wife can earn her living as a citizen’, Morris asserted, ‘there will be nothing to force people into legal prostitution or tempt them into irregular venal do. [ditto]’.74

Nevertheless, Morris’s handling of ‘the Woman Question’ often falls back on a conception of women’s ‘natural role’. Knowing that we can regard Morris’s ‘man’ to be inclusive of women, according to his own criterion: ‘Each man is free to exercise his special faculty to the utmost, and everyone encourages him in so doing’.75 Indeed, Guest meets women with special talents, such as Philippa, the expert stonemason, but she is the exception rather than the rule. Most representations of women revolve around their physical appearance and the ‘domestic graces’ of hospitality, food preparation and the arrangement of flowers. These various qualities have been reconstructed: women are no longer ‘bundled up with millinery’ or ‘upholstered like arm-chairs’, but ‘decently veiled with drapery’;76 they are strong, ‘well-knit’ and tanned rather than having ‘wretched little arms like sticks’, ‘waists like hour glasses, and thin lips and peaked noses and pale cheeks’;77 domestic work and

74 Morris to Charles Faulkner, 16 October 1886, in *Letters*, vol. II, p. 584.
75 Morris, *News from Nowhere*, p. 81.
human nurturing are also highly valued. Yet, as Marsh has observed, the words used
to describe women ‘are those of quite unreformed masculine desire’, and Nowhere is a
world of ‘decorative, contented women and active, interesting men’. Work still
seems to be divided by gender with women as nurturers and men as makers of
culture. Does Morris see this as a natural division? When Guest suggests to
Hammond that women waiting on men could be considered reactionary, Hammond
replies:

perhaps you think housekeeping an unimportant occupation, not deserving
of respect... Don’t you know that it is a great pleasure to a clever woman
to manage a house skilfully, and to do it so that all the house-mates look
pleased and are grateful to her? And then, you know, everybody likes to
be ordered about by a pretty woman: why it is one of the pleasantest forms
of flirtation...

It has been suggested that Morris’s views on domestic economy had much in common
with Engels’s description of ‘primitive communism’, in which household management
is as socially necessary as hunting, and in which, he claimed, there was much more real
respect for women than under European capitalism. The tone of both Morris and
Engels’s eulogies to domestic work, however, suggests that female skill in housework
is not culturally determined but has a biological origin.

In the society of the future maternity is also highly honoured and is
considered an instinctive role. The ‘ordinarily healthy woman’ of Nowhere, has

far more instinct for maternity than the poor drudge and mother of drudges
of past days could ever have; or than her sister of the upper classes,
bringed up in affected ignorance of natural facts, reared in an atmosphere
of mingled prudery and prudence.

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79 For evidence that Morris considered housekeeping as ‘a woman’s special work’ and that men would
‘never do any good at it’, see News from Nowhere, pp. 59–60; and also an interview with Morris by
Sarah Tooley, 19 April 1894, printed in The Woman’s Signal and reproduced as ‘Interviews with
Morris: II. From The Woman’s Signal, 19th April 1894 A Living Wage for Women’, JWMS, vol. X,
no. 4, Spring 1994, pp. 5–9.
80 Morris, News from Nowhere, pp. 59–60.
81 See, for example, Florence S. Boos, ‘An (Almost) Egalitarian Sage: William Morris and
Nineteenth-Century Socialist-Feminism’, in Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating
206.
82 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 61.
Hammond dismisses as the 'baseless folly' of 'class tyranny', the desire by some women of the nineteenth century to 'emancipate the more intelligent part of their sex from the bearing of children'. Yet motherhood is now considered not only as a natural biological event for the reproduction of the species, but also as a creative act based on love and pleasure. Ady Mineo has observed that in *News from Nowhere* a significant analogy arises between motherhood and other work as creative processes of equal relevance. Nevertheless, a sexual division of labour is apparent in Nowhere, and is based on the idea of women's 'natural' role.

There are other anomalies which further complicate Morris's assimilation of women to nature, and nature to women. The women of Nowhere are the most forceful articulators of the new society that Guest encounters. Ellen and, to a lesser extent, Clara express a 'passionate love of the earth' which Guest states was 'common to but few people at least, in the days I knew; in which the prevailing feeling amongst intellectual persons was a kind of sour distaste for the changing drama of the year, for the life of earth and its dealings with men'. Ellen, although a strong physical presence, is also the most impressive intellectual voice in the text. She upholds the vitality and interest in life which constitute the ethos of Nowhere, challenging her antiquarian grandfather: 'When will you understand that after all it is the world we live in which interests us; the world of which we are a part, and which we can never love too much? It is also Ellen who leads Guest up to the walls of Morris's beloved Kelmscott Manor to cry out in story's narrative climax: 'O me! O me! How I love the earth, and the seasons, and weather, and all things that deal with it, and all that grows out of it,—as this has done!' This is a most characteristically Morrisian statement, expressing as it does a profound passion for the way nature and culture intertwine: a profound declaration of love for the earth that includes every structure, plant, animal and human in the narrative. Standing with her 'sun-browned hand and arm on the lichen-covered wall', Ellen represents the proximity of humanity, history, and nature, and a

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recognition that all culture has its genesis in the natural world. Uttering this most
forceful expression of the nature–culture continuum, Ellen stands as visible, outspoken
champion of the human qualities which must flourish in order for this society to
survive.

Ellen is also offered up to Guest, and the reader, however, as a female figure
who both speaks for and embodies the nature of this 'foreign country' (much like
female guides in certain anthropological texts).88 Ellen is almost an object of nature-
study. On their journey up the river, Guest observes Ellen as a part of nature:

I looked, and over the low hedge saw Ellen, shading her eyes against the
sun as she looked toward the hay-field, a light wind stirring in her tawny
hair, her eyes like light jewels amidst her sunburnt face, which looked as if
the warmth of the sun were yet in it.89

In this hazy, almost unearthly scene, Ellen blends into the elements: she is woman-
being-nature.

Somewhat paradoxically, Ellen is also the figure who speaks most
passionately for the importance of culture and history. Along with Hammond, she
urges the utopians never to forget what has happened to them, worrying that
'sometimes people are too careless of the history of the past'. 'Who knows?', she
asks:

Happy as we are, times may alter; things may seem too wonderful for us
to resist, too exciting not to catch at, if we do not know that they are but
phases of what has been before; and withal ruinous, deceitful, and sordid.90

Thus Ellen sounds a warning not to think of their world as 'natural', but as achieved.
Even though Nowhere exists in an 'alien temporality' that at times appears to be
'behind the historical dialectic, beyond the succession of “epochs”', it is described as a

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87 Morris, News from Nowhere, pp. 201–2.
88 Buzard makes this analogy in his discussion of News from Nowhere as a form of ethnography
(‘Ethnography and Interruption’, p. 468).
89 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 179.
90 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 194. Ellen describes these ‘ruinous, deceitful, and sordid’ times in
an outburst on p. 158.
product of history.91 One of the longest chapters in the story is ‘How the Change Came’. Thus these are not ‘People Without History’,92 but rather, as A.L. Morton observed, the first utopians to have one.93 Historically grounded and conceived (the first chapter was, after all, a blast on the front page of Commonweal against divergent factions in League at that time disintegrating into anarchism), News from Nowhere invited nineteenth-century readers to consider their culture, to know it as a product of ‘the life of slavery that they had been living’.94

The exploration and re-invention of culture rather than nature, therefore, is the central focus of News from Nowhere. For Ellen, Hammond, Dick and, ultimately, Guest, culture operates not as ‘an external set of constraints on desire’, but as their very ‘system of desire’, to which they ‘cling with the full force of their “love of the very skin and surface of the earth”’.95 This is to emphasise deliberate action, even if within the realm of fantasy or imagination. The best description of the function of such writing is still Thompson’s borrowing from Miguel Abensour:

in such an adventure two things happen: our habitual values ... are thrown into disarray. And we enter into Utopia’s proper and new-found space: the education of desire. This is not the same as ‘a moral education’ towards a given end; it is, rather, to open a way to aspiration, to ‘teach desire to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and above all to desire in a different way’.96

The new society of Nowhere is not one that has returned to a utopian Eden, or one that has regained grace and lives in ‘innocent harmony’ with nature. Although a certain symbiosis with nature is an important part of the story, the ‘fairness’ of Nowhere’s society—of government, polity, economy and sexual and familial relations—arises because they spend their lives ‘in reasonable strife with nature,

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91 Buzard, ‘Ethnography as Interruption’, p. 452.
92 As asserted by Buzard (borrowing Eric Wolf’s phrase) in ‘Ethnography as Interruption’, p. 452.
94 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 179. Buzard (‘Ethnography as Interruption’, pp. 448–50) has argued that Morris, writing at the start of a decade of ‘crucial developments toward the ethnographic notion of culture’, practised ‘metropolitan autoethnography’, defined as ‘the romance by which modern Western societies seek to know themselves as “cultures”’.
96 Thompson, Romantic to Revolutionary, pp. 790–1.
exercising not one side of ourselves only'.

Morris constantly reflects upon the artificiality of human society in nineteenth-century England, and does at times seem to suggest that the culture of Nowhere is an unfettered expression of human nature freed from the coercion of an 'unnatural' poverty and misery. Yet in imagining this world where 'the men and the women who go to make up humanity are free, happy and energetic', Morris also emphasises that they are 'surrounded by beautiful things of their own fashioning, and a nature bettered and not worsened by contact with mankind'.

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3. The mould of the ages: a new garden of England

Guest’s experience of ‘a nature bettered and not worsened by contact with mankind’ occurs throughout his journey, and the description of this ‘natural’ world was, and still is, one of the most appealing features of News from Nowhere. At the end of his first day in Nowhere, Guest recalls that

for the first time in my life, I was having my fill of the pleasure of the eyes without any of that sense of incongruity, that dread of approaching ruin, which had always beset me hitherto when I had been amongst the beautiful works of art of the past, mingled with the lovely nature of the present; both of them, in fact, the result of the long centuries of tradition, which had compelled men to produce the art, and compelled nature to run into the mould of the ages.²

It is therefore clear that the ‘lovely nature’ presented in News from Nowhere is not a timeless essence, but has a history linked to the human activities and cultural practices which had sought to know, enjoy, control and exploit it.³ Considered by many as ‘a vision of the Promised Land’,⁴ the landscape of Nowhere represented an attempt by Morris to constitute a new garden of England,⁵ in which the topography of a land in which all might enjoy ‘a reasonable share in the beauty of the earth’ could be explored.

The imagination of England as a garden is the logical outcome of Morris’s culture of nature. As, in the past, he had ‘conventionalised’ ‘natural’ growth in patterns, structured ‘natural’ cycles in poetry, and subdued ‘alien’ landscape in verse, so in News from Nowhere Morris made England ‘a garden, where nothing is wasted and nothing is spoilt, with the necessary dwellings, sheds, and workshops scattered up

¹ Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 133.
² Morris, News from Nowhere, pp. 140-1.
³ Morris does not sink London underneath a bog or flood half of central England, therefore, in order to create this future landscape. Unlike Jefferies, he has no need of cataclysmic ‘natural’ change because he is not so much concerned with a change in nature, as one in culture. Nowhere is more ‘culverted’ than the landscape of ‘Wild England’, because News from Nowhere is a more cultural novel than After London. It is about people who ‘have fought and won the battle’, not a change in nature.
⁴ Johnson, review of News from Nowhere, p. 340.
⁵ Apart from occasional references to the ‘north’ and ‘these islands’, Morris’s description is of a garden of England rather than Britain. Even though he indicates that similar changes have occurred throughout the country, Morris’s descriptions are limited to London and central southern England, specifically those counties that border the Thames.
and down the country, all trim and neat and pretty'.\textsuperscript{6} Yet the landscape of Nowhere also reflects wider nineteenth-century preoccupations with gardens, and Morris’s imagination of a new ‘garden of England’ can be seen both as a reaction and an accommodation to many of these.

As Martin Gaskell has indicated, before and in the early part of the Victorian era, the garden was most commonly perceived either as the private, personal preserve of the upper classes or a place of gratification and amusement. As the century progressed, a new understanding developed, in which gardens were understood as solutions, as ‘safety valves for the mind’ and for the working classes. Thus they came to play an integral part in the housing reform movement during the latter half of the century. As the possibility of owning a garden diminished, they came to be seen as sources of moral and physical regeneration and as the birth-right of all. In the process, gardens were transformed from passive to active agents.\textsuperscript{7}

The landscape of Nowhere has little in common with the socially exclusive preserves of the upper classes, nor with walled gardens, moated granges or private retreats (an indication of the distance Morris had travelled since his construction of the Red House and writing of \textit{The Earthly Paradise}). Neither are there specific areas set aside as parks or gardens \textit{per se}. In Nowhere the entire landscape has become a garden for the use of all.\textsuperscript{8} Nevertheless, while the garden of Nowhere represents a reaction to the politics of both privilege and palliation, as well as to the gardenesque aesthetic of nineteenth-century design, it also reflects Victorian ideas related to the values and virtues of gardens and gardening. It provides ‘satisfaction to the mind’, ‘health and cheerfulness’, and the opportunity to produce ‘something useful or agreeable’ in much the same ways as those ‘suburban gardens’ promoted by Loudon.\textsuperscript{9}

The most significant differences between Morris and Loudon’s gardens, however, are

\textsuperscript{6} Fletcher, \textit{Gardens and Grim Ravines}, p. 186.
\textsuperscript{7} Gaskell, ‘Gardens for the Working Class’, p. 479–83.
\textsuperscript{8} Fletcher, \textit{Gardens and Grim Ravines}, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{9} Loudon, \textit{The Suburban Gardener}, p. 2.
that Morris's are not there to provide respite from an otherwise ugly world, and are owned and maintained collectively.  

Like many other Victorian gardens, the landscape of Nowhere is also a very personal place, a map of a very particular somewhere. Starting in Hammersmith and moving through places Morris knew in London, readers are taken on a voyage up the Thames which the author had performed twice. With Guest rowing slowly, Morris devotes many pages to the description of beloved, and redeemed, reaches of the river. Sydney Cockerell recorded in 1892 that the spot Philippa designates 'the prettiest place for a house up and down these reaches' was indicated to him by Morris while on the train from Lechlade to Paddington. The 'old house amongst new folk' is unmistakably Kelmscott Manor, and letters indicate that Morris spent some time here while writing the story. In August, he was there for the haymaking while writing the climactic harvest scenes, and noted: 'The hay is all cut now and the fields are most beautifully green, and the wide spreading meadows as lovely as anything can be. I do little bits of work here & hope to finish the News from Nowhere this week'. Personal, but not private—for Morris shares this desired space with his readers—the novel works as an invitation to all to recover the garden in the world around them.

The inclusion of landscapes, or rather idealised memories of landscapes, with which he was familiar in childhood—'the kitchen-garden at Woodford, and the large blue plums which grew on the wall beyond the sweet-herb patch', 'the Forest wholly made up of pollard hornbeams mixed with holly thickets', and 'the wide green seas of the Essex marshland'—also demonstrates the personal nature of the landscape of Nowhere. In addition, it indicates that Morris's conception of the utopian garden was informed by the romantic sensibilities of his youth carried through into later life: the ways in which an 'impression of romance' remained an important part of Morris's

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10 Waters (The Garden in Victorian Literature, p. 307) has suggested that this is unique in Victorian literature.  
11 Talbot ('A Guest in the Future', p. 40) has argued that Guest follows a 'highly personal map' that 'insists on the subjectivity of the journey'.  
12 Buzard, 'Ethnography as Interruption', p. 452.  
14 Morris to Kate Faulkner, 8 August 1890, in Letters, vol. III, p. 188.  
15 Morris, News from Nowhere, pp. 17, 68.
landscape aesthetic. Though the inhabitants of Nowhere do not seek the sublime heights, they have a Wordsworthian 'intense and overweening love of the very skin and surface of the earth'. Guest is not a lonely wanderer, but his is a tale that describes the out-of-doors, exteriors rather than interiors. Nineteenth-century reviewers advised readers that they would particularly enjoy those pages 'which tell of England’s natural beauty, of the sylvan Thames, and of the Oxfordshire meadows'. In this respect, *News from Nowhere* exhibits elements of the romantic preference for landscapes not dominated by intense, urban or industrial human cultivation and activity. It reflects and repeats the valorisation of rural scenery by educated classes, facilitated by new means of travel, and by their immunity from immediate involvement in agricultural processes.

It also depicts nature as fertile and beneficent. As many have noted, Morris generates a pastoral or rustic charm in *News from Nowhere* by changing the season from early winter to late summer. By bringing the year round to harvest time, Morris is able to portray a generous, bountiful 'natural' world, one which shows the links between humans and nature in their most humanly beneficial aspect. Indeed the whole atmosphere is infused with a warm benevolence. Riding through Kensington woods, Guest finds it 'exceedingly pleasant in the dappled shadow' and lapses into 'a condition of dreamy pleasure' in 'that balmy freshness'. On the upper waters of the Thames, he experiences 'the sort of afternoon that Tennyson must have been thinking about, when he said of the Lotos-Eaters’ land that it was a land where it was always afternoon'.

This romantic aesthetic is also applied to the more obviously human or constructed environments of Nowhere. The buildings are 'organic' and recall Morris’s reverence for the 'nature of Gothic'. They rise from 'amidst the pleasant fields', and

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17 Kelvin has argued, however, that in spite of this exteriority, *News from Nowhere* is still an 'interior text' because the landscape chosen is so personal and forms a kind of autobiography for Morris ('Interiors and Exteriors', Oxford, 1996).
18 Johnson, review of *News from Nowhere*, p. 343.
express a ‘generosity and abundance of life’ similar to the architecture celebrated by Ruskin. Those Guest encounters in Hammersmith are of a ‘splendid and exuberant style’ which ‘embrace the best qualities of the Gothic of northern Europe with the Saracenic and Byzantine’. Most are surrounded by ‘teeming garden[s]’ and are ‘countryfied in appearance, like yeomen’s dwellings’. In Oxford, feeling as though he were ‘alive in the fourteenth century’, Guest notes that

the meadows all round ... had once again become as beautiful as they should be, and the little hill of Hinksey, with two or three very pretty stone houses new-grown on it (I use the word advisedly; for they seemed to belong to it) looked down happily on the full streams and waving-grass...

Yet Morris’s privileging of a pastoral or ruralist landscape never yields to an admiration of ‘unimproved nature’ or a particular concern for uncultivated nature as a spiritual resource. Though his preference for a more informal garden aesthetic faintly echoes this tendency, there is no great stress on the importance of wilderness per se. When Guest asks why they keep ‘wastes and forests ... in a garden’ (a question Morris must have heard many times in his quest to preserve various landscapes), Hammond replies that ‘pieces of wild nature’ are set aside because they ‘like’ them, ‘can afford them’ and ‘need’ them. Large areas of forest are maintained because ‘we need a great deal of timber, and suppose that our sons and sons’ sons will do the like’. ‘Wastes’ such as the Cumberland and Westmoreland moors and heaths are referred to as the ‘shrubberies and rockeries’ of their garden, which are used for grazing sheep, ‘so that they are not so wasteful as you think’. Though a kind of preservationist, and even ecological, understanding underpins Hammond’s insistence that these areas are ‘not so wasteful as forcing-grounds for fruit out of season’ or so harmful as land covered ‘with factories for making things that nobody wants’, the emphasis is largely utilitarian or

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23 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 23.
24 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 23.
25 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 186. Morris was paying particular attention to the ‘destruction’ of Oxford during 1890. On 19 May, he had written to The Speaker complaining that ‘two-thirds’ of its beauty had now been destroyed due to ignorance and disregard (Letters, vol. III, pp. 156–9).
26 Thomas has observed this movement and has outlined its various manifestations in Man and the Natural World, pp. 267–8.
27 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 74.
28 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 74.
at least related to values linked to human use. Though Morris challenges nineteenth-century notions of 'waste', he also recognises that the capacity to derive pleasure from scenes of relative desolation was more likely to be shared by those who could afford to contemplate with equanimity the prospect of uncultivated land. It is Morris's ability to see the land in these terms that makes his 'garden of England' more revolutionary than romantic. 'Wild nature' persists only as part of a total plan.

Morris's garden of England was also influenced, therefore, by Morris's concern about nineteenth-century actualities, and, in particular, the effects of the agricultural depression and of capitalist farming. Hammond describes the English landscape of the nineteenth century as 'a country of huge and foul workshops and fouler gambling-dens, surrounded by an ill-kept, poverty-stricken farm, pillaged by the masters of the workshops', and outlines how toward the end of the nineteenth century the villages were almost destroyed... Houses were allowed to fall into decay and actual ruin; trees were cut down for the sake of the few shillings which the poor sticks would fetch; the building became inexpressibly mean and hideous. Labour was scarce; but wages fell nevertheless. All the small country arts of life which once added to the little pleasures of country people were lost. The country produce which passed through the hands of the husbandman never got so far as their mouths. Incredible shabbiness and niggardly pinching reigned over the fields and acres which, in spite of the rude and careless husbandry of the times, were so kind and bountiful.

This understanding of the social poverty and decay caused by agricultural decline and economic struggle shapes the new landscape. Thus, although Nowhere bears some physical resemblance to the meadows of the Thames valley, what is overwhelmingly

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29 Thus O'Sullivan ('Struggle for the Vision Fair', p. 7) has argued that the inclusion of 'wild nature' in Nowhere as 'places where feelings and experiences may be had which are unobtainable anywhere else' is akin to what environmental economists such as Fred Hirsch would today call 'positional goods'.

30 Thomas (Man and the Natural World, p. 264) writes: 'Those still engaged in the struggle to wrest a living from the land were also understandably reluctant to adopt a mystical attitude towards wild, uncultivated scenery. The man who lived permanently in 'romantic' countryside ... tended to regard it in a very different light from that in which it was seen by the cultivated tourist who came only on a brief visit'.

31 This point has been made by Fletcher (Gardens and Grim Ravines, p. 187), but with a different emphasis.

32 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 72.

33 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 71.
different is the kind of organisation of the life there, the relationships that underpin ‘country life’.

Morris described a landscape changed not only by different social and economic relations, but by different patterns of habitation. Most significantly, the countryside has been ‘invaded’ by town dwellers. Hammond tells Guest that the invasion of the ‘countryside’ had been ‘most strangely rapid’, but that

the invaders … 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 … happy and leisurely but eager life…

Thus the picture News from Nowhere gives of the country after the revolution is not ‘quite simply the country’. The country described by Morris is unlike any existent in England in the nineteenth century, providing a new vision of rural life for the future rather than a glimpse of a people who have gone back to the land. This ‘happy and leisurely but eager life’ leading to ‘generosity and abundance’ has also resulted in changes in the physical appearance of the countryside. Trees are allowed to grow in the fields as there is ‘none of the niggardly begrudging of space to a handsome tree’. Some trees are ‘polled’ to provide wood, but this is done with ‘a thoughtful sequence in the cutting’ so as not to destroy landscape or habitat. Guest notes that ‘the fields were everywhere treated as a garden, made for the pleasure as well as the livelihood of all’.

Morris’s inspiration for this view of England was drawn, to a large extent, from his conceptualisation of ‘the face of medieval England’. This view of the medieval landscape was garnered from the aesthetic, economic and historical analyses of Ruskin, Carlyle, Thorold Rogers and Hyndman, and discussed in many of his

34 Morris, News from Nowhere, pp. 71–2.
36 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 191.
37 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 191.
lectures. For Morris, the vision of a ‘Gothic Eden’ brought to mind an unfragmented cultural landscape, in which town and country interpenetrated, and a landscape owned and maintained collectively. Though Fletcher has argued that Morris’s ‘central image of a happy and fruitful life’ was ‘the field full of folk’, it is necessary to emphasise that it is not the field itself that is important (nor the fact that it is scattered through with trees and flowers), but that it is commonly owned, worked and harvested. The ‘folk’, in other words, are more important than the field. Well aware that medieval ‘life was often rough and evil enough, beset by violence, superstition, ignorance, slavery’, Morris also objected to the kind of progressivism which ignored the fact that ‘much as the world has won since then ... it has not won for all men such perfect happiness that we can afford to cast aside any solace that Nature holds forth to us’. ‘Or must’, he asked, ‘we for ever be casting out one devil by another?’

Areas that are dominated by human activity also partake of a medieval and garden aesthetic, and are vastly different in appearance to the urban landscape of nineteenth-century England. Just as the town has reinvigorated the country, so the country has breathed new life into the town. In smaller towns ‘there has been but little clearance, though much rebuilding’, but the suburbs ‘have melted away into the general country’. Urban buildings share a similar ‘organic relationship’ to their surroundings as those in the country, but provide, more importantly, ‘sympathetic’ shelter for those who inhabit them. The houses Guest sees lining the Thames are ‘low and not large ... and looked, above all, comfortable, and as if they were ... alive and sympathetic with the life of the dwellers in them’.

Most significantly, reflecting the emphases of the Kyrle Society, the Open Spaces Committee, and indeed the entire nineteenth-century parks movement, ‘space and elbow-room has been got in their [the towns’] centres’. Foreshadowing, and partially inspiring, the rus in urbe ideal of later ‘Garden City’ planners, Morris

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38 See, for example, Morris, ‘The Hopes of Civilization’, pp. 61–2.
39 Fletcher, Gardens and Grim Ravines, p. 188.
41 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 9.
42 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 70.
43 See, for example, Howard, Garden Cities of Tomorrow, passim; Hall, Cities of Tomorrow, pp. 86–112; and Fishman, Utopias in the Twentieth Century, pp. 27–75.
‘clears’ the ‘misery’ from all urban areas. Much of London has changed beyond recognition. It is still, however, a vibrantly populous ‘centre’, and it is the human-made environment, as much as the features of the ‘natural’ world, that have transformed this ‘brick and mortar desert’. But the spread of London has been severely curtailed. London is hemmed around by a substantial ‘green belt’, a feature adopted by many later planners concerned with the environmental development of London. Like Morris, however, each of these upheld, even as they transformed, urbanity as an important physical and theoretical constituent.

Just as importantly, sites that were once symbolic of the triumph of capital and industry have been transformed into places where nature is admitted both as ornament and amenity. Guest remembers Trafalgar Square as the ‘sight’ of ‘Bloody Sunday’:

A great space surrounded by tall ugly houses, with an ugly church at the corner and a nondescript ugly cupolaed building at my back; the roadway thronged with a sweltering and excited crowd, dominated by omnibuses crowded with spectators. In the midst a paved be-fountained square, populated only by a few men dressed in blue, and a good many singularly ugly bronze images (one on top of a tall column). The said square guarded up to the edge of the roadway by a fourfold line of big men clad in blue, and across the southern roadway the helmets of a band of horse-soldiers, dead white in the greyness of the chilly November afternoon...

By the twenty-second century, however, it has become ‘a large open space … the sunny site of which had been taken advantage of for planting an orchard’. Parliament House has become a ‘Dung Market’, thus turning a central symbol of the polity and economy Morris despised into ‘a storage place for manure’: home of a very different cultural process. In this context, if no other, culture has reverted to one of its earlier

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44 See the well-known description on pp. 67–8.
46 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 68.
47 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 41.
48 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 41.
49 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 32.
meanings as a noun of organic processes: 'the tending of natural growth'.

Parliament is finally a 'fertile' place.

Morris is also at pains to make clear that none of these areas are polluted due to the effects of livelihood or manufacture. The city has no 'smoke-vomiting chimneys', 'grimy sootiness' or 'sound[s] of riveting and hammering'. The Hammersmith creek, which Morris always watched carefully, has 'been rescued from its culvert', and its swollen waters flow openly and carry 'gay boats'. For most of the nineteenth-century readers of News from Nowhere, one of the most striking images of this new London must have been the clear, sparkling water of a Thames teeming with salmon. Hammond explains to Guest that while the capitalist market had forced people to live 'amidst sights and sounds and smells which it is in the very nature of man to abhor and flee from', in their new society people would be 'too much ashamed of ourselves if we allowed the making of goods, even on a large scale, to carry with it the appearance, even, of desolation and misery'. In this respect, therefore, Morris offered his readers, as an alternative to 'looking backward', not just a 'looking forward' but a 'looking after': an entreaty to tend their 'garden'.

Thus, in many respects, the town/country divide is broken down in Nowhere. There is open space and greenery both within and surrounding the town, and the 'stir' and interest of urban living apparent in the country. To suggest that both these areas constitute a 'garden', however, involves, as Waters has argued, having 'to re-learn the concept of the garden', which at its simplest entails 'a renewed attentiveness to the importance of gardens as beautifying elements of the humanised landscape' and also 'a very radical shift in property values'.

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50 Williams, Keywords, p. 87.
51 Hammond informs Guest that 'dung is not the worst kind of corruption; fertility may come of that, whereas mere dearth came from the other kind': News from Nowhere, p. 75.
52 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 8.
53 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 23. In August 1883, as noted above, Morris had written to the Daily News complaining about the condition of this ditch, which he claimed was in 'one of the most beautiful spots in the suburbs', an area in which 'William Cobbett lived and wrote for some time' (Letters, vol. II, p. 216).
54 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 94.
55 Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 72.
56 Waters (The Garden in Victorian Literature, pp. 221–2) has argued that Morris’s vision of 'the city in the garden' is 'the most challenging exposition of city/garden relationships in Victorian
It also requires an understanding of 'garden' in a totally different cultural context. 'Garden' is no longer used exclusively to designate those spaces reserved for refuge and recreation, but indicates all the features of a human landscape which express a 'generosity and abundance of life'. It is not the conservative 'garden of England' beloved of so many Victorian novelists, in whose books the reader can indulge 'in the happy belief that the world is all an English garden and time a fine old English afternoon'. Even though there are elements of an 'emphasis upon old-fashioned and long established plants and gardens and upon picturesqueness by default', and of 'rootedness in a stable and familiar domestic world, with happy experiences and pleasing memories', *News from Nowhere* cannot be assimilated to 'the conservative and culturally dominant model of gradualism' typically associated with the image of the garden in Victorian literature. That Dick cannot understand why the beautiful wood by Kensington Market is distinguished by the epithet 'gardens' is indicative of a total reformulation of the word. The garden of England is the nature of England within which all English people reside. The people who populate Morris's garden cannot understand how those who came before could not make this connection between humanity and nature. Ellen asks:

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

It is her extension of this question, however, which reveals the concept of nature at the heart of the story: 'How could people be so cruel to themselves?' Moreover, this invocation of history moves Guest to reveal that he himself has been
part of ‘that ugly past’; and to explain that this exclusion of nature from culture was not only cruel to ‘themselves’ but to each other: that it was a cruelty imposed upon many by a few. This is why Morris has made England a country in which all tend to and care for the garden, and why, for Morris, human beauty is the true face of nature operating freely. It is why the journey’s end, the heart of the story, is not a meadow or a forest but a house: a place built by human hands, a site that indicates the human culture and history which is the foundation of Nowhere. The garden of Nowhere exists only as the product or concomitant of a fundamentally transformed society, as a product of ‘the mould of the ages’. As Hammond explains to Guest, the landscape of Nowhere is the result of a certain way of dealing with nature:

we like everything trim and clean, and orderly and bright; as people always do when they have any sense of architectural power; because then they know that they can have what they want, and they won’t stand any nonsense from Nature in their dealings with her.

In Morris’s ‘garden of England’, the people have not gone ‘back to nature’, but have further acculturated nature, forcing it back to them.

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63 In a slightly different context, Kelvin suggested this emphasis on human beauty in his paper, ‘Interiors and Exteriors’.
64 Morris, *News from Nowhere*, p. 73.
4. Woods Beyond Worlds

After he completed *News from Nowhere*, Morris continued to write prose romances until his death in 1896. Along with his work on the Kelmscott Press,¹ these tales comprised the major literary and imaginative output of his last years. In some ways, they resemble Morris’s earlier attempts to portray imagined yet ‘natural’ landscapes. The various worlds described in these tales also reveal a greater commitment to the wilful conjuring of ‘woods beyond worlds’, or a landscape of desire. Many have noted the ‘very obvious sexual mythopoeia’ apparent in these texts.² Though such a reading is revealing, this is not the kind of desire examined in this chapter. Rather, the focus here is on the ways in which these stories, and the depiction of nature therein, signalled Morris’s concern with, yet acquiescence to, the fact that the socialist movement had ‘taken the turn ... towards unideal and humdrum “gradual improvement”’.³ Having split from the Socialist League, Morris had come to define his role as a socialist educator and visionary who supplemented, complemented and hopefully extended the desires of his ‘gas and water’ comrades.⁴ Like *News from Nowhere*, therefore, these stories are about ‘the education of desire’. They reveal and offer to the reader a greater emphasis on a culture of nature that saves for the imagination both a vision of a world that can and should be transformed to produce a better human society, and the idea of a nature beyond human control.⁵

¹ Morris founded the Kelmscott Press in 1890 with ‘the hope of producing [books] which would have a definite claim to beauty’. See ‘A note by William Morris on his aims in founding the Kelmscott Press’, in Sparling, *The Kelmscott Press and William Morris*, p. 135. Morris’s designs for capitals and foliate motifs and borders are also striking examples of how he conventionalised nature in his work: many of his wood-cut motifs are as complex and luxuriant as many of his designs for wallpaper and textiles. I have discussed these ‘green borders’ in ‘The Green Borders of William Morris’.² Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1990 (1957), p. 306. See also Mineo, ‘Eros Unbound’, *passim*; and Marsh, ‘News from Nowhere as Erotic Dream’, *passim*.³ Morris to John Bruce Glasier, 7 October 1890, in *Letters*, vol. III, p. 218. Though he increasingly acknowledged the importance and even the necessity of ‘gas and water’ socialists, Morris explained to Glasier that he felt disinclined to join wholeheartedly with ‘“branches of intelligence”’ dominated by ‘damned greasy pot-scum’.⁴ Morris had written to the ‘Secretaries of Branches of the Socialist League’ (26 November 1890, in *Letters*, vol. III, p. 234) to explain the defection of the Hammersmith Branch to form the Hammersmith Socialist Society only six weeks after finishing *News from Nowhere*.⁵ I refer here to the movement discussed by Knoepflmacher and Tennyson in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination* (pp. xxii–iii): ‘Eager to preserve the harmony posited by a sacramental and humanistic conception of Nature, they [the Victorians] nonetheless endeavoured to accommodate the more fragmented views of Nature increasingly urged on them by scientific scepticism... The Victorian response [to the breakup of the amalgamation of tradition, Romanticism, Darwinism and materialism] remains an extraordinary and still exemplary attempt to preserve Nature for the human imagination’.
The titles of these romances suggest the ways in which nature as landscape is an important part of the telling of the tales: *The Story of the Glittering Plain or the Land of the Living Men* (1890), *The Wood Beyond the World* (1894), *The Well at the World's End* (1896), *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* and *The Sundering Flood* (both published posthumously in, respectively, 1897 and 1898). Indeed, if taken as an indication of content, it might be construed that each of these works told the story of a landscape itself. This, however, is not the case. Each is a tale about a human journey—a quest in which Morris’s description of nature, of both real and imagined landscapes, is governed by his need to provide a suitable environment for the deeds of his protagonists. The first chapter of *The Sundering Flood* indicates that it is a story ‘Of a river called the Sundering Flood, and of the folk that dwelt thereby’ (my emphasis). Each is both a story of and in a series of landscapes, but the story in the landscape is more important. The natural world is portrayed as the setting for the physical and emotional adventures of humanity and is often sublimated into signs for subjective states. In *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* each isle has its own mystery and implied narrative, and quite often it is nature which is made to change when the narrative changes. Thus, although these tales are the myths Morris created in an attempt to resolve some of the problems of culture drifting too far from nature, there is an emphasis on imagining worlds in which the fulfilment of human potential is the most important goal.

The primary structure of each tale is that provided by the history of the human figure in the landscape. Most of the stories follow the schema outlined by Walter Davis for the ‘pastoral romance’, a structural pattern which ‘follows the hero from the complex urban world to a simple natural world to the supernatural centre, then out again, and shows the hero’s disintegration in the chaotic outer circle, education in the pastoral circle, and reawakening at the sacred centre’. Yet the term ‘pastoral’ fails to

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6 Thus, as Norman Talbot (‘Introduction’, *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, Thoemmes Press, Bristol, 1994, p. xix) has noted, when Birdalone returns to the Isle of Increase Unsought after the Queen’s death, this former land of riches has become a land of thorns, reptiles and ‘great carrion flies’, representing the true character of a ‘Tory paradise’.

7 Walter R. Davis, *A Map of Arcadia*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1965, p. 38. Squires (*The Pastoral Novel*, p. 87) has noted that the pastoral was the point of departure for many writers, including Keats.
convey adequately the atmosphere of Morris’s tales: the landscapes traversed by his characters vary greatly, and their journeys are something more than self-discovery or ‘the getting of wisdom’.

Why is the landscape in these prose romances more diverse than the ‘countryside’ of A Dream of John Ball, The Pilgrims of Hope, and News from Nowhere, or the limited locale of The House of the Wolfings and The Roots of the Mountains? One of the main reasons for this new diversity is that most of these tales involve the undertaking of a journey of considerable length. All the main characters—Hallblithe, Walter, Ralph, Birdalone, Osborne and Elfhild—leave home and travel such great distances, often overseas, that they are bound to encounter diverse terrain. Yet each of the characters encounters similar spaces as the others, and it is in these spaces that some of the most telling interpretations of nature and culture are encoded. Morris’s ‘mapping’ of these worlds involves not only the representation of geographical spaces and environments but also of metaphors and images that exhibit his ideas about the organisation of boundaries between the known and unknown.

The word ‘mapping’ may be applied to these adventures because it is crucial for each protagonist to chart and come to know their world by means of experience. Considered as such, Morris’s ‘maps’ are based, however, on a kind of medieval geography in which there is a central, known world bounded by unknown zones ‘beyond the world’ or ‘at the world’s end’. In this respect, it is tempting to read these stories as a reaction to the final acts of Europe’s cartographic colonisation of the globe: to the expeditions charting the arctic sea passages, the location of the poles and the interior continental regions of Africa, Australia and South America. Morris was fond, throughout the eighties and the nineties, of ridiculing Victorian attempts to survey and subdue their extensive territorial empire. Perhaps, Morris produced these

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‘maps’ because he understood that all conceptions of the world are ways of seeing controlled by the context in which they are produced.\textsuperscript{10} He might have been attempting to provide alternative ‘maps’, with an alternative ‘cultural and representational logic’\textsuperscript{11} or ‘terrestrial centrality’.\textsuperscript{12} None of these tales are supplemented by an ‘actual’ map of the terrain covered, except for the posthumously published \textit{Sundering Flood}. This map quite accurately conveys the ‘medieval’ geography of these tales, with the land that surrounds the ‘flood’ unbounded and imprecise (fig. lxxvi). On the whole, however, the reader knows little more about the lie of the land than that perceived by the protagonist. One does not stand above the world and know: one moves through it and experiences, and has to imagine ‘beyond the world’.

It is because he is concerned to provide the greatest scope for imagining that Morris offers the reader such a variety of landscapes. Most of these worlds are comprised of four different types of ‘natural’ realms: woods and forests, mountains and ‘wastes’, seas and rivers, and rural ‘homelands’ with small ‘medieval’ towns. Woods appear in all of these stories, usually as a ‘wood perilous’, ‘masterless’ or ‘debateable’, and are often feared by an urban or agrarian people. In \textit{The Water of the Wondrous Isles} the walled town of Utterhay is situated on the edge of a wood ‘held to be mighty great, or maybe measureless’. The reader is told that ‘[t]herein was neither highway nor byway, nor wood-reeve nor way-warden’, and that ‘all men deemed it more than perilous’ because they believed that ‘the devils swarmed amidst of its thickets, and that wheresoever a man sought to, who was once environed by it, ever it was the Gate of Hell whereto he came’.\textsuperscript{13} Norman Talbot has suggested that such a


\textsuperscript{12} Cosgrove, ‘\textit{Mappa mundi, anima mundi}’, p. 85.

Fig. lxxvi

The course of the Sundering Flood, drawn by H. Cribb, included in *The Sundering Flood* (overseen for the Kelmscott Press by May Morris), 1897.
fearful attitude to the woods leads the reader to 'expect alienation from external nature, with important consequences for individual and social behaviour'. Talbot argues persuasively, however, that what may at first seem like a description of the wood is in fact only a list of the reasons that some people find to react against and avoid it, and that the supernatural images bestowed upon the wood are held up for question. The sentences that associate the natural world with evil, he reasons, make a 'grotesquerie' out of these views.

As is revealed in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, and in the other tales, woods are places that revive, protect and enchant (though sometimes they are enchanted). Birdalone wanders ‘much in the wood’ and has ‘no fear thereof’. The ‘lovely land of wooded hills’ which offer up ‘many boughs hung low laden down with fruit’ in *The Wood Beyond the World*, and the ‘fair oak-wood’ in which Hallblithe the ‘Wood-lover’ dwells on the Glittering Plain, and which provides him with the means of escape, both indicate a similar stance. These stories also contain a number of benevolent wood-spirits, which suggest that Morris’s work is part of a more general romantic-mythic change from the privileging of solar deities to tree-worship. Though woods are not figured as places in which to dwell, Morris tempts his readers to ‘return’ for a visit.

Though a didactic message is not what Morris intended, there were other reasons for him to champion the woods at this time. In the 1890s the treatment of Epping Forest by its Conservators had become the subject of much public criticism,
and Morris became particularly concerned about the extent of tree-felling. Three letters to the Daily Chronicle in 1895 outlined these concerns and were backed up by a detailed inspection. Anxious that controlled ‘thinning’ was being replaced by ‘clearing’, Morris refused to be ‘gagged’ by the opinion of the ‘committee of “experts”’ and ‘call[ed] on the public generally to take the same position’. Claiming that in the last seventeen years, 100,000 trees had been felled, he argued that ‘the public may now fairly ask for a rest on behalf of the woods’. Emphasising the ‘romantic’ character of the Forest, and stressing that it was ‘a thicket, not a park’ that was wanted, these letters ‘on behalf of the woods’ form a sort of continuum with his prose romances.\footnote{Morris to the Editor of the Daily Chronicle, 22 April, 27 April and 8 May 1895, in Letters, vol. IV, pp. 268–75. In the same year, Morris’s response (8 March 1895, in Letters, vol. IV, p. 252) to a neighbour who had asked him to cut down his favourite tree at Kelmscott House was brief and non-negotiable: ‘I am sorry not to be able to pleasure you in any way, but I really cannot cut down my tree, which, with its fellows, is so great an ornament to the neighbourhood’.}

It is not difficult to recognise the ‘re-creation’ of Epping Forest in many of these tales, but Morris wanted woods in this world as well as the fictional ‘beyond’: places where people could do as his character Walter, who ‘in the heat of the afternoon … sought to the hazel-copse, and laid him down there hard by a little clearing thereof’; and where they could imagine ‘something white and gay gleaming through the boles of the oak-trees’.\footnote{Morris, The Wood Beyond the World, pp. 43, 38.}

Mountainous ‘wastes’ are also a feature of many of the prose romances, but these receive somewhat different treatment than the woods. Unable to nurture human or much other life, these are places to endure and reach beyond. In The Story of the Glittering Plain, the hero Hallblithe is led by the Puny Fox to the deathly ‘Isle of Ransom’. Hallblithe sees that it is ‘waste indeed and dreadful; a wilderness of black sand and stones and ice-borne rocks, with here and there a little grass growing in the hollows’.\footnote{Morris, The Story of the Glittering Plain. p. 30.} In the distance stretch ‘great mountains, some very great and snow-capped, some bare to the tops’, and ‘about him on the heath were scattered rocks … and peaks, and hammers, and knolls of uncouth shapes’.\footnote{Morris, The Story of the Glittering Plain, p. 30.} Obviously conjured through memories of Iceland,\footnote{Morris also invoked Iceland when attempting to describe strange and unfamiliar landscapes in his letters. On 29 July 1891 he wrote to Georgiana Burne-Jones (in Letters, vol. III, p. 327) from}
Desert' and 'Wall of the World' in *The Well at the World's End*; in the mountainous wilderness Walter climbs through to reach *The Wood Beyond the World*; along the mountainous path by which Hallblithe attempts to leave the *Glittering Plain*; and in the land around various parts of the river of *The Sundering Flood* (a story inspired by an Icelandic saga). Morris, a self-professed 'dale dweller', clearly did not have the same sympathy for this landscape as he did for the wooded valley. Clearly, also, these are landscapes which unsettle Morris. In them, his protagonists starve and become feeble. Mountains and wastes betoken absence of life and the brutality of a landscape devoid of human influence. Yet they are included in these stories as paths for the heroes to 'wend', as places to test out their nerve, and as places where they are most aware of the need and desire to transcend isolation and seek out community. Thus, though Walter and the Maid find peace in the mountains in *The Wood Beyond the World*, the Maid realises that she feels 'afraid in the wilderness, and as if I needed help and protection'. It is the experience of the wilderness that prompts her to appreciate 'the comfort of many people, and the throngs of the cities' and 'warding and protection against the foes of our life and soul'.

Morris's protagonists always return, therefore, to a gentler, lower country. These are more recognisably English landscapes, though to some it seemed as though Morris had 'in his mind the England of Arthur and Lancelot—a dim, half-known country', or 'no futurity, but an illuminated past'. Tales such as *The Well at the World's End*, H.G. Wells argued, were 'Malory, with the glow of the dawn of the Twentieth Century warming his tapestries and beaten metal'. Yet these stories were not just the 'wild territory of dream', or the gentler terrain of a 'golden' English past. They are more accurately described as 'magical real' versions of places in Oxfordshire,
Berkshire, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. Though they pervade most tales, these influences are most apparent in *The Well at the World's End*. The 'meadows and acres, the woods and the fair streams, and the little hills of Upmeads' echo Morris's delight in the 'winding valley beside the clear Colne', 'the wide spreading meadows as lovely as anything can be', and the grass 'well grown and as green as green'. As May Morris noted, 'a passion for the soil and loving observation of familiar country' are 'woven into the story', and May is able to draw many comparisons between fictional places and localities such as Uffington, White Horse Hill, Bear Castle and 'the more remote down-country'. These correspondences can also be found in the other tales. Moreover, it is clear from his letters that Morris often wrote these tales at Kelmscott between walks in the garden and the surrounding fields and woods. Thus, even through displacement, the prose romances, like much of his other work, reflect his 'sense of place' or 'regional consciousness'.

Such representations of particular landscapes are also an indication of the personality behind these descriptions, and of Morris's personal desires. They reveal Morris finding a 'conscious sensuous pleasure' in his work, and loving 'the earth through that small space of it'. This was obvious to many Victorian readers. One reviewer in the *Academy* noted '[t]he family likeness in his ideal landscapes', and described Morris as a writer

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28 Unsigned review of *The Sundering Flood*, p. 428.
31 Morris to Kate Faulkner, 8 August 1890, in *Letters*, vol. III, p. 188.
34 On 18 May 1892 (*Letters*, vol. III, p. 402), for example, he writes from Kelmscott to Jenny Morris that he is working on *The Well at the World's End* 'all day today and have done a good deal though there were intervals of duckling hunting [a lost brood] & garden strolling'. Cockerell's diary entry for 7 August 1892 also indicates that in between fishing and visits to Buscot Woods, Morris was working on *The Well at the World's End*. Other references to work on these tales at Kelmscott include a letter to Georgiana Burne-Jones of 28 April 1896 (in *Letters*, vol. IV, p. 369) referring to *The Sundering Flood*.
35 In 'The Land in Victorian Literature' (p. 139), W.J. Keith notes that '[a]dvances in communications, the improvement of roads and the establishment of the railway system had "opened up" the countryside for exploration and comparison', and that the Victorians had 'learned to recognise not a generalised countryside but a series of different countrysides with their own physical features, history, customs, dialects and ways of living'.
who might easily dream his favourite Cotswolds into 'the Great
Mountains' of the story ... and eke it out from that other chamber of
remembrance where lay his early days in Essex and Epping Forest, and his
knowledge of the broad lower Thames. 36

Like the woods, these were sometimes places that Morris felt to be under threat.
Letters reveal his fears concerning the landscape along the Thames in the 1890s.37
Other changes moved him to ‘half wish that I had not been born with a sense of
romance and beauty in this accursed age’.38 His prose romances allowed him,
however, to re-achieve a ‘sense of place’, to journey out, but return home. As Morris
confessed to a friend in 1891, he had no sympathy ‘with the moderners whose chief
desire always seems to be somewhere where they are not’.39

Woods, wastes and pastures, therefore, are the three main landscapes
encountered in these stories. Water also appears in all of these tales, but the rivers and
seas are usually strangely calm and do not appear to bear the same symbolic burden or
personal meaning. Nevertheless, most bodies of water are the means by which the
protagonists initially leave their world or make their way across it. They are routes
and courses and, consequently, signs of restlessness, departure and rebirth. The river
of the Sundering Flood and the boats it carries causes people who live nearby to be
'heart-smitten with that desire of wandering and looking on new things'.40 Water
kindles desire: the seeking of the water in the Well at the World's End not only gives,
but is, life.

Even more important in the kindling of desire are women who are an
important aesthetic element in these landscapes, and are often depicted as woman-as-
nature. There are women raised in nature who exist in harmony with plants and
animals. These women-as-nature, such as Birdalone, the main protagonist of The

36 Unsigned review of The Sundering Flood, p. 427.
37 On 19 July 1895 (in Letters, vol. IV, p. 294) he wrote to the Secretary of the Thames Conservancy
Board as 'a great lover and close observer of the Thames and its landscape' to complain about the
'intrusion' of materials other than stone into the area's buildings. Mackail (Life, vol. II, p. 318) also
records that Morris persuaded the Board 'to give instructions that the men who cut the weeds on the
river should spare the flowering plants as much as possible'.
Water of the Wondrous Isles, know of 'the ways and the wont of all the creatures round about her'. They inhabit an almost liminal state between nature and culture, mediating between the two. Others are more definitely nature, or nature-as-woman. Habundia in The Water of the Wondrous Isles, an old woman in The Wood Beyond the World, and a similar figure in The Sundering Flood teach Birdalone, the Maid and Elfheld to overcome the evil under which they suffer. Contemporary reviewers understood these wise women to be 'Nature'. Yet it is women-as-nature who are the most powerful and provocative presence. In The Wood Beyond the World, the Maid becomes 'The Mother of Summer', who bears 'the heart that maketh increase and the hand that giveth', and when she speaks

the faded flowers that hung about her gathered life and grew fresh again; the woodbine round her neck and her sleek shoulders knit itself together and embraced her freshly, and cast its scent about her face. The lilies that girded her loins lifted up their heads, and the gold of their tassels fell upon her; the eyebright grew clean blue again upon her smock; the eglantine found its blooms again, and then began to shed the leaves thereof upon her feet; the meadow-sweet wreathed amongst it made clear the sweetness of her legs, and the mouse-ear studded her raiment as with gems.

Here Morris uses women both to eroticise or provoke desire for nature, as well as to naturalise eroticism. There appears in these romances, as Thompson found, 'every ... the figure of Ellen from News from Nowhere, saying: “The earth and the growth of it and the life of it! If I could but say or show how I love it!”' Talbot suggests that we might read such episodes as the 'figuring forth of “the promise of the earth” in the heroine’s body'. Burne-Jones’s woodcut for the Kelmscott Press edition of this story provides the imagistic equivalent (fig. lxxvii).

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42 Unsigned review of The Wood Beyond the World, Spectator, vol. LXXV, July 1895, pp. 52–3; in The Critical Heritage, p. 383. Morris also presents us with women who are linked to and manipulate the 'natural' world for evil or destructive purposes. These types of nature-as-woman, however, are generally perceived as 'supernatural' or 'unnatural' rather 'natural'. The Mistress in The Wood Beyond the World is characterised as a powerful sorceress, sensual but malevolent, linked with physical gratification and the archetype Venus. As the story progresses she also becomes a powerful symbol of destructive sexuality closely associated with Diana, the fierce ‘hunting goddess of the Gentiles’ (The Wood Beyond the World, p. 101). Each are defeated, however, by the reconstructive powers of ‘natural’ women, sometimes aided by men.
44 Thompson, Romantic to Revolutionary, p. 682.
Fig. lxxvii
The Mother of Summer. Burne-Jones's frontispiece to
*The Wood Beyond the World*, engraved on wood by
W. Spielmayer for the Kelmscott Press edition, 1894.
Borders designed by Morris.
The ‘promise of the earth’, however, is never enough for Morris’s protagonists. Though they are happy to learn from and live close to nature, they never abrogate the quest for human vitality and power. At the centre of most of these quests, as Amanda Hodgson has demonstrated, is the characters’ desire to know and come to terms with their past, to comprehend experience and unravel mystery. History, therefore, is privileged over any kind of world that is cloaked in mystery or static or merely ‘an epoch of rest’. None of Morris’s heroes and heroines retreat into nature or paradise, because they know it to be ‘unearthly’. In The Story of the Glittering Plain, Hallblithe has the choice to stay in a world where nobody dies or grows old and nature is bountiful. As Roderick Marshall noted, the Plain is clearly paradisal, and similar to the Nowhere Morris had created less than a year earlier. Yet Hallblithe escapes this world, stressing that he ‘seek[s] no dream … but rather the end of dreams’. It is as if Morris had decided, as Talbot has argued, that he had ‘unfinished business’ with News from Nowhere. In Nowhere nature and society provide amply, while similarly on the Plain ‘no man hath a lack which he may not satisfy without taking aught from any other’. Yet the Plain dwellers suffer progressive amnesia about their own history, much like Dick in News from Nowhere. Hallblithe’s quitting of the Plain, therefore, can be read as an indication of Morris’s decision to emphasise that a life worth living does not involve a changeless future.

Much the same happens in each of the other tales. In The Wood Beyond the World, Walter also quits the enchanted realms of the Mistress in order to inhabit a world where human action can help to determine ‘natural’ growth. In The Well at the World’s End, no-one expects the ‘innocent folk’ to be able to survive over the Wall of the World, where Ralph and Ursula feel that they have ‘come into the very Garden of

45 Talbot, ‘Whilom, as tells the tale’, p. 21.
God'. True this kind of paradise, this heaven-haven is clearly signalled as alien to humanity. All the imagery suggests that a meaningful life can only be found by returning, as Ralph’s toast declares, ‘To the Earth, and the World of Manfolk!’ True dwellers in the world, it is suggested, take a drink from the Well of Life and support Ralph in his vow: ‘The dead would I love and remember; the living would I love and cherish; and Earth shall be the well-beloved house of my Fathers’. All, including Birdalone, who escapes from a wood to the town, seek community rather than paradise. All, in the end, have ‘lived without shame and died without fear’. As Hodgson suggested, it is as if Morris now says to those who seek paradise

[by all means ... seek an ideal and make it your motivating force. But remember that ideals must be tested and applied in the real world if they are to be life-giving rather than attenuating or destructive. When this practical setting of the ideal at the service of reality is achieved, the Earthly Paradise is attainable not in fantasy but in actuality. By this means, man may join with the unfettered powers of nature to make time and change benevolent...]

Yet perhaps this is not quite the right emphasis to draw from these stories. E.P. Thompson and John Goode have argued how Morris’s later prose romances reveal doubts about socialist determinism or evolutionism. Such a process would be, they noted, merely ‘a pseudo-resolution of the problem of alienation: a resolution (or “Revolution”) “achieved by forces outside himself: man’s alienation will be brought to an end by alien forces”’. Rather, the emphasis in Morris’s tales is that the answers are not in paradise or outside one’s society, but that one needs to take the journey to know it; that it is the province of dream to teach the limits of one’s history. This is the value of imagining beyond it. As Goode has insisted, Morris’s aim in writing romance was ‘to find a mode in which the creative mind can be portrayed in its determined and determining relationship to historical actuality’, in which people themselves may be seen ‘as a determining as well as a determined force’.

All of which might indicate that Morris now wished that the kinds of paradises he had previously imagined be permanently postponed. The year he started to write these romances was the year in which he formed the Hammersmith Socialist Society and penned its ‘Statement of Principles’. This document stated that the Society understood socialism to mean ‘the realization of a condition of true society all-embracing and all-sufficing’. Though it reasoned that ‘the whole evolution of society and all the signs of the times bid us hope for a better fate than this for our epoch’, it stressed that it ‘is not the dissolution of society for which we strive, but its reintegration’. The ‘special aim’ of their group, it argued, was ‘to make Socialists, by putting before people ... the elementary truths of Socialism’. Therefore some contemporary reviewers felt that the romances were socialism preached ‘in the most seductive and poetical form’. More recent critics have also described them as works ‘subtly but richly coloured by socialism’. Yet the romances are perhaps more usefully read as the attempts of an educator—of someone trying to ‘make Socialists’—to develop what Anthony Trollope called ‘a confidence in vision’.

In doing so, the late prose romances have a slightly different function than News from Nowhere. These romances do, in fact, depart from the point where News from Nowhere had to cease. Morris had a far different purpose in writing News from Nowhere and probably a different audience in mind. Whereas this earlier romance was written for a widely socialistic audience in order to detail certain possibilities for a

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60 Unsigned review of The Wood Beyond the World, p. 383. It should be noted, however, that Morris insisted that his romances were not allegorical. In a letter to The Spectator of 16 July 1895 (in Letters, vol. IV, p. 291), he explained that The Wood Beyond the World was ‘meant for a tale pure and simple, with nothing didactic about it’. ‘If I have to write or speak on social problems’, he continued, ‘I always try to be as direct as I possibly can’.
61 Carole Silver (‘Socialism Internalised: The Last Romances of William Morris’, in Socialism and the Literary Artistry of William Morris, pp. 117, 124) has argued, for example, that class struggle is an important feature of most of these tales; that these are conflicts which arise from history, of which these romances are a ‘transmutation’.
62 “There are two kinds of confidence which a reader may have in his author... There is confidence in facts and a confidence in vision. The one man tells you accurately what has been. The other suggests to you what may, or perhaps what must have been, or what ought to have been. The former requires simple faith. The latter calls upon you to judge for yourself, and form your own conclusions”, The Autobiography of Anthony Trollope, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1974 (1883), p. 112. The phrase was used by Hartley S. Spatt in his discussion ‘William Morris’s Late Romances: The Struggle Against Closure’, in History and Community, p. 126.
future England, the later romances seem to be an imaginative bequest. More wide­
roaming and less committed to definite endings, they exhibit ‘the moral ordeal of the
revolutionary mind unprotected by determinist rationalisation’ ,63 and affirm ‘the
responsibility of dream’.64 They reflect Morris’s preoccupation with vision in the
1890s—with the ‘vision of a real Socialist party at once united and free’65—but also
his acknowledgment of the need for engagement: of the benefits of London County
Council elections,66 of the need for a Joint Committee of Socialist Bodies; and of ‘the
efforts of the workers themselves’ in the Coal Miners’ Strike of 1893, ‘small as is the
actual gain which they are claiming’.67 Thus, in the last article on socialism to appear
in print during his lifetime, Morris argued that

the tokens that this great change in society is on the way are no longer
merely the spread of academic discussion, or the setting forth of Utopias
with their roots in the air, but the attempts to deal with ‘practical’
questions concerning the present daily life of the greater part of the
population…68

Yet still Morris wrote his romances to ‘teach desire to desire, to desire better, to
desire more, and above all to desire in a different way’. Noting that others were
dealing with the here and now, Morris tried to hold and offer a tension between
acknowledging the present but desiring better. Thus, in this article, he also maintained

You that are not Socialists, therefore, learn, and in learning teach us, that
when we know, we may be able to act, and so realize the new order of
things, the beginnings of which we can already see, though we cannot
picture to ourselves its happiness.69

Representing ‘the revolt of the … “magic” of imagination banished from the capitalist
world’,70 Morris provided these final romances not as history but story.

64 Goode, ‘William Morris and the Dream of Revolution’, p. 239.
Appendix A, p. 398.
What happens to nature in this movement? Is this 'where nature ends'? Has it merely become just a certain form of culture? Hartley Spatt has argued that Morris looked 'beyond' the traditions of literature and politics to a tradition that 'he and his audience imbibed in their youths: the tradition of Nature', and that he found 'traceable a different, yet complementary dialectic: that between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, Nature as an imminent, abiding presence and Nature as a consumable yet inexhaustible product of that presence'. This is a tradition, Spatt continues, which 'successfully embraces both product and process, Being and Becoming', allowing a perspective to emerge that both looks upon and is a part of nature. For him, Morris's achievement in these tales is just this dual vision: of a 'natural supernaturalism' that synthesises the natural and the cultural as well as past and present, with a result that 'is not closure, but rather an eternal succession of creative tales, running parallel to that "eternal recurrence of lovely changes" which is the created world'.

The tales do not represent, however, a movement from the revolutionary to the romantic. Morris's employment of a magically real mode is also a way of facing the late nineteenth-century challenge of depicting a 'designified nature'. Certainly, he did this by 'balancing ... conventions for depicting meaningful and unmeaning nature', as did many contemporary novelists. As Susan Lorsch has argued, nature for the Victorians was 'still very much "out there"', was 'matter as well as mind, subject and independent object'. Such an epistemology, Lorsch maintains, compelled them 'to obey their mimetic inclinations, to mirror external reality in their art neither as a function of the mind nor as a background to human interaction but as a powerful presence in human life'. These writers could not 'elide the issue ... by locating reality in the mind'. By noting how Morris balanced 'nature as fact and nature as symbol', we recognise him, unlikely as it may seem, as a contemporary of Hardy. For both,

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75 Morris, in fact, admired some of Hardy’s work. On 15 December 1891 (in *Letters*, vol. III, p. 367) he wrote to the younger author to thank him for sending a copy of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), and stated: 'I have read two of your books with much pleasure, Far from the Madding Crowd, & The return of the Native. The first one is the most pleasing and I suppose you would look upon it as the
nature can seem ‘kindly’ and ‘malevolent’, but is really neither. Both writers also emphasise not the division between humanity and nature but the proximity between the two;76 ‘the sense’, as Virginia Woolf noted in a comment on Far From the Madding Crowd, ‘that the little prospect of man’s existence is ringed by a landscape’.77

Morris’s ‘prospect’, however, is far from little. These stories have geography as well as scenery, concentrating more on the broader ‘lie of the land’ rather than the smaller details of landscape. The effect, as C.S. Lewis noted, is ‘at first very pale and cold, but also very fresh and spacious’.78 It reflects, as J. Hillis Miller has commented in relation to Hardy, the mind turned outward towards the world,79 a tangible, three dimensional dealing with nature. Though other writers shift towards a more introspective view of nature, each of Morris’s protagonists manifest their feelings for nature through action in and on the landscape.

Thus, through the character Ursula, Ellen’s declaration of love for the earth is repeated in The Well at the World’s End, but this time as a more strident expression of Morris’s hope for the future. Ursula exclaims: ‘well it will be in those days if I love the folk then as well as now I love these trees and the wild things whose house they are’.80 It was also the inverse which Morris wanted to achieve by telling these tales: to make people love trees almost as much as ‘the folk’. They indicate his wish to make the view on the road from Nowhere both beautiful and ‘decent’: fair places which provide for the development of both humanity and nature in a history which preserves mind in the landscape and land in the mind-scape. Attempting to re-enchant the landscape, not as a ‘faery land forlorn’, but so that it once more becomes a place of possibility rather than alienation or ennui, Morris sought to educate his readers to desire more and better for themselves by desiring more and better for the landscape.

Afterword

In fact the sociologist and his ‘object’ form a couple where each one is to be interpreted through the other, and where the relationship must itself be deciphered as a historical moment.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique*

When I began to write this thesis, I had a somewhat different project in mind. Interested in Morris as a figure who argued for the centrality of art to society, but who also energetically participated in a world ‘outside’ art, I began to read his work in order to find out how he managed this tension. All the while I remained alert for significant and recurring themes, and what struck me most forcibly at once was the presence of nature throughout his work. Natural scenery and shapes in various forms appeared to be everywhere, suggesting they were of paramount importance to his art, writing and social thought.

This reading, however, was partly the result of a historical conjunction. The relationship that I formed with the work of Morris, the fact that I looked for and found nature everywhere, was due to the increasing social, cultural and even political impact of ‘green’ thinking in the early 1990s. It was the prevalence of the new, or at least newly vocal, ‘green’ environmental and ecological lobby groups that led me to the initial conclusion that I had ‘discovered’ a proto-‘Green’, whose work manifested an interest in and concern for nature that mirrored or prefigured many of our own anxieties at the end of the twentieth century. Occasionally, I found (to my dismay) that I could not ignore Morris’s triumphal tone concerning the ‘conquest’ of nature, nor his desire to keep it in order—to stand no ‘nonsense from nature’.

Initially, however, I felt able to bury such statements under what appeared to be the weight of evidence that Morris was ‘really’ much more deferential to nature. There appeared to be so much nature in Morris’s work that it seemed obvious to give it primacy.

Slowly, however, I began to accept that some allowances would need to be made for the fact that Morris had done his work in the nineteenth rather than the twentieth century (I was a history student after all), and that his social thought and
prescriptions were undeniably anthropocentric rather than ‘eco-centric’. It was this emphasis that led me to focus on the idea that what was important to Morris was ‘a reasonable share in the beauty of the earth’, where the emphasis should be laid as much on the first as the second part of that quotation. Nevertheless, at this stage, it still seemed that the tensions and inconsistencies in Morris’s work suggested the history of our own troubled relationship with nature; Morris felt part of a threatened landscape too. In this respect, as I soon discovered, my thoughts echoed those of other recent readings of Morris. Since the late 1980s in particular, Morris had been seen as a fellow ‘green’ with whom one could share a sense of common crisis and to whom one could turn for answers to similar questions.

Sensitive to the ways in which Morris may not be assimilated easily to a ‘green’ position, I then participated in the 1996 events surrounding the centenary of Morris’s death. This included visiting the Victoria and Albert Museum’s exhibition, where visitor expectation was shaped by green acanthus leaf advertisements. Here, it seemed to me, was Morris displayed as aesthetic conservationist, someone born with a sense of the romance of nature, who remembered this romance throughout his work, and was motivated to campaign for the conservation of landscapes and buildings because of it. Yet, while suggestions of Morris’s ‘greenness’ were implicit throughout the exhibition, nowhere was it discussed openly, except somewhat obliquely on a small panel at the end.\(^2\) This seemed to be symptomatic of the wider, substantially unexamined current of thought that ‘of course Morris was green’.

There were some, however, who \emph{were} prepared to examine the contours of ‘Morris the Green’. Florence Boos, in her paper delivered to the William Morris Centenary Conference, argued that Morris’s thought prefigured that of ‘deep

\(^1\) Morris, \textit{News from Nowhere}, p. 73.

\(^2\) This panel read: ‘Morris believed that without the appropriate environment, civilization was impossible. He would have included beautiful buildings, old and new, and the full beauty of nature in his idea of an acceptable environment. In our times these two elements tend to be viewed separately but they both emanate from his example. We are now careful to preserve and conserve old buildings and objects of cultural importance. We have made the protection of these things a matter of law. Whilst we also protect places of natural beauty, this has proved in recent times a subject of international controversy, from the rain forests of the amazon to English woodlands, the debate rages on the need to keep the planet green. In recognising the beauty of the buildings and monuments of
ecologists', 'eco-feminists', 'eco-activists' and resource planners, and that his views also echoed the belief structures of 'non-growth-driven cultures', such as those of Native Americans. As we read *News from Nowhere*, Boos suggested, we should be sensitive to the ways in which Hammond 'anticipates' 'deep' or 'spiritual ecologists', such as Arne Naess and George Sessions, and should also consider Ellen's role as a 'tree-hugger'. Given Boos's earlier work on Morris, it is perhaps unfair that in this context her interpretation is cited as narrowly 'green' (and certainly her later paper, retitled 'An Aesthetic Ecocommunist: Morris the Red and Morris the Green', qualified her pronouncements in significant ways). Yet her conference paper seemed to crystallise much of the considerably less critical thinking and identification of Morris with environmentalism, 'eco-centrism' and 'green' thinking in general. Moreover, for many (though not perhaps Boos), it was not simply a case of both/and but either/or. Discussions with those involved in 'green' politics often turned on the question of whether Morris was really a 'red' or a 'green', and Boos's ardent conference paper seemed to articulate a certain amount of this thinking.

As a result, I can identify almost to the minute when I decided that I would have to rework my thesis. Listening to Boos reinforced my feeling that what was important about Morris was not the fact that one could approximate his ideas to those of 'deep ecologists' or 'eco-spiritualists', but that it lay in his thinking about the ways in which nature might be 'reasonably shared' in and between human societies. Indeed, it seemed that one needed to ask just how useful a description 'eco-centric' was, especially when one had immediately to qualify that description by asserting he was of the communalist rather than Gaian type. Clearly, there was nothing 'eco-centric' about Morris if being 'eco-centric' means caring for landscape, plants and animals more than, or even as much as, caring for human life; or even if it means putting the past, and in joyfully acknowledging nature, we are recognising the influence of William Morris, who was one of the first and greatest defenders of both.'

3 Boos, 'Morris the Green', Oxford 1996.

4 Apart from valuable studies of *The Earthly Paradise* and her editing and annotating of William Morris's *Socialist Diary* (1982), Boos has published a number of papers on the importance of Morris's 'red' (as opposed to his 'green') thought, including: 'Morris's German Romances as Socialist History', *Victorian Studies*, vol. XXVII, no. 3, Spring 1984, pp. 321–42; and, with William Boos, 'The Utopian Communism of William Morris', *History of Political Thought*, vol. VII, no. 3, Winter 1986, pp. 489–510.

5 I am indebted to Florence Boos for a copy of this as yet unpublished paper.
whole 'eco-system' above its human parts. Nor did it appear to me that a work such as *News from Nowhere* was best appreciated as a text that provides 'radical environmentalists with a document setting out many of their basic ideas ... which then also explored in quite considerable detail how these would actually operate in a future society'. While it seemed reasonable to ask 'What key features of Morris's work have led to important attitude change in the past, and what key concepts appear to be useful in environmental discourse today?'; the question 'How green was Morris?' did not seem very helpful. When Morris was viewed simply as the starting point for a 'line of romantic critics' that extended through 'Lewis, Tolkien, many CNDers and eco-activists' to E.F. Schumacher, or simply as a romantic ecologist, something important in his thought seemed to be lost. Trajectories such as 'fantasy, the bomb, and the "greening" of Britain' appeared to preclude an understanding of 'the Morris who reads us'. Once more, it seemed, we were 're-valuing' a Victorian by claiming that he was like us. As Jeffrey Spear has observed at the end of *Dreams of an English Eden*:

> Neither Ruskin nor Morris imagined mankind being driven into Eden by a fiery sword, and the circumstances that have brought their visions of harmony with nature back into vogue are not those from which they began. *Ecology* is not their word.

Ecology was not only not Morris's word because it was not of his time, but also because he failed to consider in enough detail many of the issues that are central to ecological discourse today: questions relating to population, resources, bio-diversity, ecological systems, and a whole range of other 'green' concerns. Thus far, I have not

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8 Wheeler makes this distinction concerning questions about Ruskin in his 'Introduction' to *Ruskin and Environment*, p. 3.
10 I do not dispute, here, that this is how Morris may have been read and used by those who participated in these movements, but merely that there is much more to Morris than this. Thus I consider Meredith Veldman's *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest, 1945–1980* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, quote p. 305) useful as an essay in the reading habits of post–Second World War Britain, rather than an analysis of *Morris per se*.
12 I paraphrase Isobel Herbert Armstrong here, who makes this point with specific reference to Victorian poets in *Victorian Poetry, Poetics, Politics* (p. 7).
attempted to define the term, but Morris seems a problematic ‘green’ no matter how one defines this position. Morris is obviously not merely a ‘light green’, ‘shallow ecologist’, conservationist or environmentalist because fundamental socio-economic and political change was a crucial part of his agenda. Where ‘light greens’ eschew radical political initiatives (property is to remain private, and so on), and class and social equity issues, such questions were central to Morris’s politics. Still less is he a ‘deep green’ or ‘deep ecologist’ when such terms refer to those who trace environmental problems to humanity’s lack of ‘ecological consciousness’ and to their predilection for dominating other species and exploiting natural resources. Unlike Bill Devall, Arne Naess et al., Morris was not fundamentally opposed to human domination of nature.

‘Eco-centrism’, ‘bio-centrism’, or the moral equivalence of all species, were not his concepts, let alone his words. Humanity was, for Morris, the ‘crown of nature’, and he unfailingly gave priority to it. Anthropocentrism, of a kind that appreciated human material dependency upon nature and advocated that it be celebrated in a natural, yet orderly, aesthetic throughout society, is the more appropriate term. He welcomed and celebrated the ways in which certain forms of human activity transformed the environment, seeing nature as historical rather than static. Moreover, no matter how expansive or ‘holistic’ the consciousness of the earth-loving Ellen, Morris drew his vision from a philosophical materialism rather than ‘eco-spiritualism’.

Thus I came to the conclusion that it was necessary to emphasise the ways in which Morris’s context was more properly materialism and culture, rather than spiritualism and nature. This is positing a dichotomy between the two that Morris strove to soften or diminish. It does not obscure the fact, however, that he also consistently acknowledged the need for humanity to ‘conquer’ nature and act as ‘reasonable sharers’ of it. It was a desirable thing, Morris argued, that humanity had ‘conquered’ nature, and it was also necessary, he believed, that

in order that his labour may be organized properly ... ['man'] must have only one enemy to contend with—Nature to wit, who as it were eggs him
on to the conflict against herself, and is grateful to him for overcoming her; a friend in the guise of an enemy.\textsuperscript{14}

It is by accepting rather than ignoring such statements that we can use Morris’s thought most helpfully. It is from this angle that we can build a critique of Morris that acknowledges certain elements of ‘absolutism’, ‘paternal dictatorialism’ and ‘unacceptable determinism’ in his thought.\textsuperscript{15} And it is also in this perspective that we can read Morris not ‘as a post-postmodernist’, but in the post-postmodern ‘moral and aesthetic space’ where we might wish to debate questions about work and pleasure, politics and ethics, self and society.\textsuperscript{16}

The Morris centenary year, therefore, reinforced my opinion that it was necessary to emphasise the ways in which Morris’s understanding of nature did not spring from any form of thinking that was fundamentally about nature in itself, nature as something to preserve against or in spite of humanity. Rather, encountering the ‘deep green’ image of Morris (as well as the nature of the long worked-over English landscape) suggested that one needed to reassert the importance of history in Morris’s work, and specifically the way it related to his sense of the human place in nature. In other words, while still seeking to find out what Morris thought about nature, I realised the need to examine the ways and spaces in which nature was absent or not given priority. This has meant that this thesis represents the result, in many ways still

\textsuperscript{14} Morris, ‘Dawn of a New Epoch’, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{15} Paul Greenhalgh, ‘The Trouble with Utopia’, \textit{Crafts}, no. 140, May–June 1996, p. 25. Some, however, have taken this critique to rather ludicrous extremes. Deyan Sudjic, for example, has described Morris as ‘an inspiration both for the Khmer Rouge and for the World of Interiors’, and argued that Morris’s ‘real significance’ is the injurious role he has played ‘in the decline of the industrial spirit’. Morris’s career, he considered, was merely a series of ‘petulant episode[s] in a lifelong inability to see the wood from the trees on a truly monumental scale’ (‘Papering Over the Cracks’, \textit{The Guardian}, 3 May 1996, ‘Arts’ section, p. 6). Sudjic’s diatribe sits uneasily with the democratic impulse in \textit{A Dream of John Ball,} where Morris describes history as a process in which people fight for what they believe in, fail, find they have actually achieved something of what they wanted, but that it was not what they meant and so others pick up the struggle once more under a different name. It seems to me that such commentators, for whom the Victorians often seem excessively moralistic, are haunted by the Victorian plenitude of content which eludes their own work.
\textsuperscript{16} I refer here to Kelvin’s discussion of ‘The Morris Who Reads Us’ (p. 351). Always one of the more astute commentators on Morris, Kelvin suggests that Morris can return us to politics if we perceive ‘the desire for pleasure as the starting-point for imagining the good society for everyone’ (p. 349). See also, however, Peter Beilharz’s argument that Morris’s famous passage on the movement of history and politics in \textit{A Dream of John Ball} is one of the best expressions of ‘postmodern socialism’; \textit{Postmodern Socialism: Romanticism, City and State,} Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 115.
continuing, of an interpretive process involving a series of readings, interpretations, re-readings and revisions. It has meant that the title, initially intended to be a totalising statement about Morris's work—that his culture of nature was the most important thing about him—should now be read as reflecting a sense of process and particularity—that it is about the various ways he used the concept of nature.

So, what can one say about Morris's concept of nature? It was never my intention to unpack neatly parcelled definitions; I wanted, rather, to explore the complexity of Morris's understandings, the patterns that he used to weave art, society, history and nature together, and the messages of cultural significance which they convey. In this respect, I believe that my decision not to be bound by a formal definition of nature has been particularly helpful. So many are the forms and functions of nature at work in Morris's 'texts' that even an informal inventory turns out to be remarkably comprehensive: historic landscape, cultivated countryside, locus of romance, organic model, aesthetic analogue, domestic sanctuary, Elysian field, aesthetic motif, historical movement, object of work, humanised landscape, therapeutic environment, recreational space, socialising agency, de-civilising agency, symbolic landscape, representational text, and locus of cultural hopes, values and beliefs. All these and more emerge from his work, and it should be clear at least that the nature in Morris's work is not just trees, flowers, fields and rivers.

That said, one can trace the development of Morris's understanding of nature through his representation of these more obvious indications. In them we find Morris tending, especially early in his life, to attach notions of greenery and separateness to nature. This is a result of the society in which Morris thought and wrote: societies that have attained a degree of control over nature tend to disassociate people from nature and thus define nature as all that is not directly or obviously manufactured. As a separate, green space, Morris's nature was geographically and aesthetically particular: the nature of a northern European, an inhabitant of England, and more specifically of the group of counties spread between the Severn Valley and the Thames Estuary. This was a nature that tended to be the 'countryside' rather than wilderness, woods rather than forests, rolling meadows rather than craggy heights: in many ways the pastoral rather than the sublime. This was a kind of natural patriotism; Morris acknowledged:
‘as for the face of the land we live in I love it with something of the passion of a lover: that is to say, more than its beauty or interest in relation to other parts of the earth warrants’.  

As one begins to explore Morris’s later work, however, and even to look more closely at many of his earlier enthusiasms, it becomes apparent that a discussion that defines nature as external and non-human leads to vacuity rather than increased understanding. Organicism, historicity and acculturation are more important concepts. In fact nature features in many of the spaces Morris created for it in such a way that there was a fundamental alignment of culture and nature. Thus he acknowledged that his passion for the English landscape was a result of his ‘habit of looking at things that pass before my eyes ... and connecting their present outward seeming with times gone by and times to come’. Nature here is not a static scene or panorama, but what Murray Bookchin has described as a ‘cumulative, history of natural development’. Thinking programmatically, or looking toward the future, therefore, it is not that we need to understand what kind of nature Morris was invoking when he posited it as a central value for a certain kind of culture, but what kind of culture. The distinctions Morris draws between good and bad society, between good and bad art, are not between culture and nature, but between different types of culture.

Yet Morris did care about a nature ‘out there’, both at a deeply personal level and in a broader sense. On the personal side, reading Morris has often reminded me of D.W. Winnicott’s saying that ‘[t]he mind has a root, perhaps its most important root, in the need of the individual, at the core of the self, for a perfect environment’. The presence of the landscapes of youth, the country around family homes, and the plants and flowers of private gardens throughout his work testify to Morris’s sense of his inhabiting some particularly beautiful environments, and to his desire to celebrate, cherish and ‘protect’ these spaces in his work. Yet nature, or the environment, was much more than a personal salve to Morris. It was also a communal asset beyond

19 Murray Bookchin, Remaking Society, Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1989, p. 36.
utilitarian value. Morris’s ideas were proto-‘eco-socialist’ to the extent that they highlighted the importance of a cultural revolution following swiftly upon a socio-economic one, a revolution in which aesthetic culture would shape priorities in production. One cannot ignore that a ‘reasonable share’ in the beauty of nature remained a key feature of what Morris believed a communist society would achieve, and that he was one of the first to recognise the importance of the nexus between environment, work and pleasure.

For Morris, however, the only way to a full and lasting appreciation of nature, and to ‘a reasonable share in the beauty of the earth’ for all, was concern for humanity. The vision fair had to be just before it could be beautiful. Moreover, throughout his life, Morris moved increasingly towards appreciation of the humanised landscape, standing for a society in which humans were self-determined and cooperative. This was a society in which humans mastered nature and, therefore, social life, rather than being mastered by nature, or existing in spiritual ‘oneness’ with it. For Morris, environmental, and what today we would call ecological problems, were social problems, and their true solution would not be found in focussing upon social symptoms rather than social causes. Morris felt, like Murray Bookchin, that it was necessary to ‘search out the relationship of society to nature, the reasons why it can destroy the natural world, and, alternatively, the reasons why it has and still can enhance, foster, and richly contribute to natural evolution’.21 This is why Morris belongs at the ‘social justice’ rather than ‘deep ecologist’ end of an ‘eco-socialist’ spectrum, where the emphasis is on the need for any kind of ‘red–green’ confluence to include Marxian perspectives.22 Always of greatest importance to Morris was ‘the terrible crime we have fallen into of using our control of the powers of Nature for the purpose of enslaving people’.23 To this end, he called upon those who loved the nature and history of England—those ‘who are come of the actors of it and live among the scenes where it was enacted’—to ‘keep it in order by cultivating our sense of justice to other nations’. Only then, he argued, might ‘our insight and interest in the history of

22 See Pepper’s discussion in Eco-Socialism, pp. 179–85.
the whole world', and our 'affection for [our] own parish and the people of it', come to be 'useful to us and others'.

Ultimately, understanding Morris's culture of nature is best achieved by allowing all of these tensions and complexities; and in watching his various processes of continuous interaction with, and enjoyment of, human life in all its natural-cultural fields. In Morris's work there is a reciprocal relationship between human beings and nature, a dialogue between Morris's concerns for humanity and an appreciation of the pleasures of nature. He believed that the voices of culture and nature were connected, not as interrelating subjects, but in a subject/object dichotomy. Yet both his aesthetic and social theory incorporate ideas of natural limits: art is defined and limited by nature; the artist should work in harmony with natural forms: a kind of naturalism that is also a prescription for society.

On the other hand, one of the most important things about Morris's culture of nature was that it had a semantics of pleasure, self-empowerment and joy. A share in the fullness of human life was what Morris desired most for 'every honest and industrious family', and the most important thing in life, for Morris, was meaningful work, which he defined as art. Morris's meaning of art is one of the 'resources of hope' that indicates ways in which one might start to think about crucial questions of social and natural order. Discussing these problems in 1984, Raymond Williams argued that '[t]he deepest problems we have now to understand and resolve' are in the 'relations of nature and livelihood'. In doing that, he continued, one of the most important changes that needs to be made 'is in the received and dominant concept of the earth and its life forms as raw material for generalised production'. Morris seems to me most useful at the point where Williams qualifies this last point:

in the equally necessary perspective of ... an apparently unmediated nature—the living world of rivers and mountains, of trees and flowers and animals and birds—it is important to avoid a crude contrast between 'nature' and 'production', and to seek the practical terms of the idea which should supersede both: the idea of 'livelihood' within, and yet active

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within, a better understood physical world and all truly necessary physical processes.\(^{25}\)

Perhaps Morris was not ‘practical’ enough for Williams. Nevertheless, it seems to me that it is in these terms, in the idea of ‘livelihood’ that Morris’s thinking is most important today. If one gets livelihood right, the living world of nature will stand a much better chance of surviving in something like the forms that so appealed to Morris and to us still. This was one of the reasons why, believing in the ‘beneficent progress of civilization’, Morris entreated his contemporaries ‘to strive to enter into the real meaning of the arts, which are surely the expression of reverence for nature, and the crown of nature, the life of man upon the earth’.\(^{26}\) To do this, it will be necessary to cease the division between work done by those who devise and control their own ends, and a labour force seen only as a means. It will be necessary, as Morris noted over 100 years ago, but has also been articulated recently, ‘to stitch work and labour together again … both conceptually and practically’.\(^{27}\)

Morris is a useful person to think with in this respect because he helps us to form the new ideas that might lead us to the new relationships that Williams suggested we needed to develop. At the end of his paper on ‘Ideas of Nature’, Williams quoted Pope’s epigraph for Newton—

\[
\text{Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night.} \\
\text{God said, let Newton be, and all was light.} \\
\text{Now o'er the one half world} \\
\text{Nature seems dead.}
\]

—and then noted that it is ‘[b]etween the brisk confidence and the brooding reflection of those remembered lines [that] we feel our own lives swing’.\(^{28}\) Morris’s life also swung between these ideas; he also lived this tension. He did not live it in the same way as us, but this should not preclude our giving it due attention.

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\(^{27}\) Donald Brook, ‘Rent-a-Crowd: a Nocturnal Meditation on the Engine of History’, \textit{Overland}, no. 151, Winter 1998, p. 37. In these ‘meditations’ on the recent Maritime Union dispute in Australia, Morris is now mentioned as ‘not quite the perfect fool’ (p. 37).
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I would like to acknowledge here, without listing them all, the papers presented at the Victoria and Albert Museum’s William Morris Reviewed Conference, 21–23 June 1996, and at the William Morris Society’s William Morris Centenary Conference, Exeter College, Oxford, 27–30 June 1996. Unless otherwise indicated, the references to these papers in my text are from notes taken by myself at the time.


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Author/s: WILLS, SARA

Title: A reasonable share in the beauty of the Earth: William Morris's culture of nature

Date: 1998


Publication Status: Unpublished

Persistent Link: http://hdl.handle.net/11343/37876

File Description: Part IV-End