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In a letter addressed to his wife Jane, dated 18 March 1884, Morris records that:

On Sunday I performed a religious function: I was loth to go, but did not dislike it when I did go; […] I trudged all the way from Tottenham Court Road up to Highgate Cemetery (with a red ribbon in my button-hole) at the tale of various banners […] to do honour to the memory of Karl Marx and the Commune.¹

The mangled syntax of the double negative – ‘did not dislike it’ – goes some way towards capturing the ambivalence of Morris’s attitude towards the routine of political agitation, in this instance taking the form of a symbolically commemorative procession. Yet he nonetheless understood such a routine to be an important part of the process of socialist education. It is not necessarily a coincidence that a certain mood of double negativity seems to define the present conjuncture as well. In his introduction to Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions (2005), Fredric Jameson offers the following formulation, again a double negative, by way of an attempt to redeem the utopian impulse from its pejorative identification with Stalinism:

For those only too wary of the motives of its critics, yet no less conscious of Utopia’s structural ambiguities, those mindful of the very real political function of the idea and the program of Utopia in our time, the slogan of anti-anti-Utopianism might well offer the best working strategy.²

Writing against Jean-François Lyotard’s The Postmodern Condition (1979), Matthew Beaumont has similarly noted that ‘[t]he dramatic rise, since the Seattle demonstration in 1999, of the anti-capitalist movement […] betrays what might be called an incredulity towards incredulity towards metanarratives’.³ In seeking to find a vocabulary with which to articulate the persistence of various forms of political commitment in the so-called ‘postmodern’ age, Beaumont, too, reaches for a twofold negation which he suggests is characteristic of the ‘contradictory and ambiguous theoretical conjuncture’ that we inhabit.⁴ This working strategy – a pessimism of the intellect which is still, if only just, coupled to a wilful, as opposed to merely wishful, optimism – was already familiar to Morris as long ago as the 1880s.

2016 has been quite a year for utopia. The quincentennial anniversary celebrations of Thomas More’s Utopia (1516) have seen numerous kinds of commemorative, critical,
curatorial and creative activity, not all of which can be recorded here. It might be noted, in passing, that Morris attracted some attention in this regard as part of the Radio 4 Dangerous Visions series, which included an adaptation of News from Nowhere by Sarah Wood. This dramatisation was described on Tony Pinkney’s William Morris Unbound blog as ‘vigorous and ingenious and, in terms of our own political struggles, inspiring too’.\(^5\) The connection between utopianism and contemporary politics was a keynote of Morris’s own response to More. In his Foreword to the 1893 Kelmscott Press edition of Utopia, Morris wrote that the text ‘has been considered by the moderns as nothing more serious than a charming literary exercise, spiced with the interest given to it by the allusions to the history of the time, and by our knowledge of the career of its author’. He went on to add that, latterly, it had become just as widely known as ‘a Socialist tract familiar to the meetings and debating rooms of the political party which was but lately like the “cloud as big as a man’s hand”’. For the avoidance of doubt, he added that ‘we Socialists should look upon it as a link between the surviving Communism of the Middle Ages […] and the hopeful and practical progressive movement of to-day’.\(^6\)

In this special issue of the Journal, Ruth Levitas elaborates on Morris’s engagement with More in order to emphasise the contemporary relevance of some of the programmatic documents to which Morris put his name, including the Manifesto of the Socialist League and the Statement of Principles of the Hammersmith Socialist Society. She focuses, in particular, on the important principle of substantive equality, and the way in which Morris’s commitment to propagating this idea rings true in the contemporary neoliberal era (which began to appear especially fragile during 2016). David Leopold offers an extended close reading of six different functions of utopia in News from Nowhere, expertly specifying the text’s role in the domains of construction, criticism, clarification, context-revelation, consolation and cheer. Françoise Kunka examines the heretofore overlooked presence of two French socialists, Cécile Desroches and Jeanne Deroin, in Morris’s political network, and elucidates their connections to the utopian socialist and feminist movements of the 1830s and 1840s. The utopian impulse is also very much at work in David Mabb’s A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament, an installation that has been exhibited in both the UK and Sweden. In juxtaposing Morris’s pattern designs with the slogans and symbols of the anti-nuclear movement, Mabb reminds us that the issue of nuclear disarmament, and the struggle for a nuclear-free world, remains of the utmost importance for the ‘hopeful and practical progressive movement’ of our own day.

NOTES
4. Ibid.
The occasion of this special issue of the *JWMS* is, like many other utopia-themed events this year, the quincentenary of Thomas More’s book *Utopia* (1516). Suddenly, and no doubt briefly, the topic of utopia, which has for so long been marginal and somewhat disreputable, has a wider public presence. My own view is that More’s book is not, in fact, all that important. It did not invent the process of imagining the world otherwise, which occurs in different forms and with different contents in many cultures before and since More. Nor did More invent, as some argue, the form of utopia, inaugurating the literary genre of the utopian novel, for More’s *Utopia* is not a novel. More did, however, give us the word Utopia – that pun on ‘good place’ and ‘no place’ which is reproduced in contemporary culture in the dismissal of utopianism as, at best, perfect and impossible, and, at worst, the instigator of totalitarianism and violence. I have dealt with these attitudes to utopia more fully elsewhere, and add here merely that they have been tediously manifest throughout 2016, both in discussions of utopia and in the wider political culture.¹

In this article, I argue that Morris’s utopianism is of far greater significance for the contemporary age than More’s, partly because of its content, but more
particularly because of its connection to a transformative politics. However, it is useful to begin from Morris’s own reflections on More. For More’s *Utopia* was among the books produced by Morris at the Kelmscott Press, and he wrote a Foreword to it for that edition. Morris suggests that More’s *Utopia* was the subject of discussion among socialists during the 1890s: it has ‘become a Socialist tract familiar to the meetings and debating rooms of the political party’, and this because the question of ‘the best state of a publique wale’ had become a central issue of the time. Morris, however, argues that More’s work is best seen as expressing the survival of the communism of the middle ages, and thus as the last of the old rather than the first of the new – a useful warning against reading Morris’s own politics as essentially medievalist and backward-looking.

More’s *Utopia* is divided into two books. The second book is a dialogue describing the imaginary island of Utopía and its social arrangements. Book One (written later) considers at length the advisability of accepting the role of adviser to a king. It also contains a vehement protest at the state of England, condemning, as Morris put it, ‘the injustice and cruelty of the revolution which destroyed the peasant life of England, and turned it into a grazing farm for the moneyed gentry; creating withal at one stroke the propertyless wage-earner, and the master-less vagrant’. The political economist Ellen Meiksins Wood, who died earlier this year, argued consistently that this moment of enclosure is the founding moment of modern capitalism because it is this phenomenon which creates the class of landless labourers compelled to sell their labour power. Thus, for me, the most powerful passage from *Utopia* is that excoriating critique in which More rails against the extent of enclosures, protesting about the increasing numbers of sheep, reared for their valuable wool, which drive people off the land; and against a social organisation which drives people to poverty, starvation and crime, and then hangs paupers for theft:

Forsooth […] your sheep that were wont to be so meek and tame and so small eaters, now become so great devourers and so wild, that they eat up and swallow down the very men themselves. They consume, destroy and devour whole fields, houses and cities. For look in what parts of the realm doth grow the finest and therefore dearest wool, there noblemen and gentlemen, yea and certain abbots […] not contenting themselves with the yearly revenues and profits that were wont to grow to their forefathers and predecessors of their lands […] leave no room for tillage. They enclose all into pastures; they throw down houses; they pluck down towns and leave nothing standing but only the church to be made a sheep-house […]. The husbandmen be thrust out of their own […]. [T]hey must needs depart away […] men, women, husbands,
wives, fatherless children, widows, [...] their whole household small in substance and much in number. And when they have wandered abroad [...] what else can they do but steal, and then justly pardy be hanged, or else go about a-begging.  

Morris claims that More saw the root causes of this injustice more clearly than any other man of his own day, and, in identifying this as the core of More’s insight, so too does Morris.

Morris also argues that *Utopia* combines aspects of More’s own temperament: his sympathy with the communistic elements of medieval society; his protest against the ugly brutality of commercialism; his enthusiasm for the Renaissance; and his personal asceticism. These moods, says Morris, are combined with a clarity and beauty of style that renders *Utopia* a ‘living work of art’. This is an important passage because it recalls Morris’s cautionary observations about utopian speculation in his review of Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888): ‘[t]he only safe way of reading a utopia is to consider it as the expression of the temperament of its author’. Morris’s own utopianism is often regarded as coterminal with his utopian romance *News from Nowhere* (1890), partly because of a false identification of utopia with a distinct literary genre. And *News from Nowhere* does occupy a special place in Morris’s writing, and in utopian literature. It initially appeared serialised in the political journal *Commonweal*, and thus was directed at an already politically-engaged audience. As is widely known, it was a specific response to Bellamy’s vision of a highly organised and regimented society put forward in *Looking Backward*. Yet Morris was ambivalent about the utopian mode itself. In conventional Marxist terms he recognised the impossibility of defining the needs and wants of the future, and the historical limits placed on the process of imagining itself. He wrote that ‘it is impossible to build up a scheme for the society of the future, for no man can really think himself out of his own days; his palace of days to come can only be constructed by the aspirations forced on him by his present surroundings, and from his dreams of the life of the past, which themselves cannot fail to be more or less unsubstantial imaginings’. His strictures about the dangers of taking Bellamy’s vision as a plan for the future apply equally to his own:

there is a certain danger in books such as this: a twofold danger; for there will be some temperaments to whom the answer given to the question ‘How shall we live then?’ will be pleasing and satisfactory, others to whom it will be displeasing and unsatisfactory. The danger to the first is that they will accept it with all its necessary errors and fallacies (which such a book must abound in) as conclusive statements of facts and rules of action, which will warp their
efforts into futile directions. The danger to the second [...] is that they also accepting its speculations as facts, will be inclined to say, ‘If that is Socialism, we won’t help its advent, as it holds out no hope to us’.9

It was, he said, ‘essential that the ideal of the new society should be always kept before the eyes of the mass of the working-classes, lest the continuity of the demands of the people should be broken, or lest they should be misdirected’; and yet there was a real danger that such speculation might become detached from political struggle altogether, and ‘be left adrift on the barren shore of Utopianism’.10

There has been much ink spilt in the interpretation of News from Nowhere and Morris’s utopianism. Morris’s own comments suggest that it is both a direct political statement and an excursion into a non-literal imaginary. It is clearly intended to illustrate his objections to Bellamy and to set out the basis of his own socialism:

there are some Socialists who do not think that that the problem of the organization of life and necessary labour can be dealt with by a huge national centralization, working by a kind of magic for which no one feels himself responsible; that on the contrary it will be necessary for the unit of administration to be small enough for every citizen to feel himself responsible for its details, and be interested in them; that individual men cannot shuffle off the business of life on to the shoulders of an abstraction called the State, but must deal with it in conscious association with each other. That variety of life is as much an aim of true Communism as equality of condition, and that nothing but an union of these two will bring about real freedom. That modern nationalities are mere artificial devices for the commercial war that we seek to put an end to, and will disappear with it. And, finally, that art, using that word in its widest and due signification, is not a mere adjunct of life which free and happy men can do without, but the necessary expression and indispensable instrument of human happiness.11

Yet given Morris’s own warnings about literalism, it is hard to disagree with Miguel Abensour that the purpose of the text is not to offer a plan, but to ‘embody in the forms of fantasy alternative values sketched as an alternative way of life’, and therefore to disrupt – at an existential level – the taken-for-granted nature of the present.12

Morris’s imaginative reach is greater than More’s. Fredric Jameson argues that More’s most important contribution was to imagine the abolition of private property.13 Morris, of course, does this too, and more thoroughly than More. For in More’s
"Utopia," heads of household (who are all male) are gatekeepers of consumption, controlling the nature and quantity of goods that the household can draw from the common store – in practice a limitation on equality, and one which does not occur in News from Nowhere. The issue of access to land is more significant. Both More and Morris identify that moment of enclosure as critical to the development of modern capitalism. Yet More does not imaginatively reverse the process of enclosure and dispossession: in Utopia the land is cultivated collectively through the compulsory rotation of labour, and there are restrictions on travel. Morris, in contrast, does imagine such a reversal: after the revolution – or as part of it – people flocked into the depopulated country villages and ‘flung themselves upon the freed land like a wild beast upon his prey’, a process which he conceded was ‘awkward to deal with’.14

But Morris’s utopianism was not confined to News from Nowhere. If we think of utopia more broadly, as the expression of the desire for a better way of being or a better way of living, we can see that utopianism is diffused throughout Morris’s more political writings as well. We can, indeed, usefully think of utopia as a method, a means of exploring and interrogating potential alternative futures rather than developing and implementing political plans. As method, utopia must be provisional and dialogical, rather than rigid and exhortatory. And while News from Nowhere clearly deploys such a method, Morris also uses it repeatedly in his lectures and essays. Time and again, he contrasts prevailing conditions with an imagined alternative. This is the method of such pieces as, for example, ‘Useful Work versus Useless Toil’ (1884), ‘How We Live and How We Might Live’ (1885) and ‘What Socialists Want’ (1887). His journalism for Justice and Commonweal fills two fat volumes edited by Nick Salmon. Moreover, Morris’s political writing, both fictional and non-fictional, was embedded in his practical political activity; he was an indefatigable campaigner, and his Socialist Diary, edited by Florence Boos, documents a punishing schedule of meetings, street corner agitation and lectures.15 Morris joined the Democratic Federation, later the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), in 1883, aged forty-nine. Morris, with others including Eleanor Marx and Ernest Belfort Bax, seceded from the SDF at the end of 1884 to form the Socialist League. This group also split in 1890, when the Hammersmith Branch of the Socialist League was reconstituted as the Hammersmith Socialist Society.

As part of his political activity for the Democratic Federation, Morris, along with Henry Mayers Hyndman, wrote the sixty-two-page Summary of the Principles of Socialism (1884). In 1885, Morris wrote the five or six pages of the Manifesto of the Socialist League, and, five years later, the equally succinct Statement of Principles of the Hammersmith Socialist Society (1890). Notwithstanding the anti-statist character of Morris’s 1889 review of Bellamy’s Looking Backward, there is a strong emphasis on state action in these
documents, especially in the programmes of the Democratic Federation and the League. The Democratic Federation document is a long and rather tedious rehearsal of changes in the forces and relations of production from pre-history onwards, setting out the myriad ways in which the fruits of the labour of ordinary people have been extracted by social elites. Only in the last few pages do late-nineteenth-century society and the alternative of socialism come to the forefront. And here we have proposals that are, perhaps, rather like Clause Four of the Labour Party constitution which stood until 1995: ‘[t]o secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry, and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange’. The Democratic Federation’s *Summary of the Principles of Socialism* demands the universal franchise, ‘not that the vote will free [people] from economical oppression, but because in this way alone is a peaceable issue possible for the possessing classes’. If there is a claim that running of mines, factories and workshops requires a degree of workers’ control, its prescriptions are largely statist. It calls for the collective ownership of land; the ‘immediate management and ownership of the railways by the State’, together with shipping, national banks, national credit establishments, state and communal centres of distribution. While some may see this as confiscation, it is presented as being rightly understood as restitution – restitution to the people of what has been stolen from them. And while there is a call for ‘equality’ which is not elaborated, the document says that ‘our first principle as Socialists is that all should be well-fed, well-housed, well-educated’; and that ‘[g]ood housing for all cannot be got if greed is to organise the new arrangements: good food and physical, mental and moral education for all classes cannot be obtained if factitious superiority and harmful social distinctions are to be kept up’.

The *Manifesto of the Socialist League* is much briefer. It opens with an assertion of the fundamental difference and essential antagonism between the interests of the owning class and everyone else; people are treated merely as instruments of profit. The proposed solution to this unjust situation is that ‘the land, the capital, the machinery, factories, workshops, stores, means of transit, mines, banking, all means of production and distribution of wealth, must be declared and treated as the common property of all’; and Morris suggests that the necessary labour of the world will be reduced to two or three hours daily, while enabling ‘every one to live decently’. There is some very careful positioning – not surprisingly given the recent split between the SDF and the League. State Socialism, says Morris, would merely make concessions to the working class while leaving the system of capital and wages in place. The League aims at the realisation of ‘complete Revolutionary Socialism’, impossible in one country alone. The strategy of the League is to educate and
organise, and Morris also insists that the League’s members must be the change they wish to see. There must be no distinctions of dignity or rank in the movement: ‘[w]e are working for equality and brotherhood for all the world, and it is only through equality and brotherhood that we can make our work effective’. 18

The Statement of Principles of the Hammersmith Socialist Society also spends some time on political positioning – this time as neither State Socialists (Fabians) or Anarchists. But it is more positive than the Socialist League manifesto about its aims. It opens with an assertion of the need for socialism as the condition of ‘true society’: the present basis is privilege, servitude and exclusion; the further basis must be equality of condition. This document also makes one of the earliest references to social exclusion, but rightly understands it as intrinsic to the nature of the prevailing economic system. Capitalist society is ‘an exclusive society, a combination of privileged persons united for the purpose of excluding the majority of the population from participation in the wealth they [the workers] make’; and the ‘workers […] are not a part of capitalist society, […] they are but its machinery’. Again, the strategy is to agitate and organise: the ‘special work of the Hammersmith Socialist Society and others who are neither State Socialists nor Anarchists [is] to make Socialists’. 19

By this stage, having read Bellamy’s Looking Backward in 1888, reviewed it in 1889, and written News from Nowhere in 1890, Morris is concerned to distinguish the ‘machinery’ of socialism from ‘true and complete Socialism […] what I should call Communism’, as he put it in 1893. 20 The importance of the manifestos is two-fold. They are a significant public face of the organisations Morris supported. All three documents unequivocally distinguish between the interests of a small owning class and everyone else; all use the term socialism for the alternative; and equality of condition is identified as the defining characteristic of socialism itself. Morris reiterates this in his Foreword to More’s Utopia:

But lastly we Socialists cannot forget that [Utopia’s] qualities and excellencies meet to produce a steady expression of the longing for a society of equality of condition; a society in which the individual man can scarcely conceive of his existence apart from the Commonwealth of which he forms a portion. This, which is the essence of [More’s] book, is the essence also of the struggle in which we are engaged. 21

The claim for equality of condition cuts across the later and current anti-socialist opposition between ‘equality of opportunity’ and the imputed uniformity of ‘equality of outcome’. For Morris, equality of condition is the prerequisite for the development of true difference based on people’s different capacities and desires. It is a concern
that runs through Morris’s political lectures and essays, which are a more extensive political resource than the manifestos, as well as a recurrent deployment of the utopian method. In ‘What Socialists Want’, a lecture delivered at least seven times, Morris addresses the questions of equality, difference and collective provision free at the point of need:

Socialists no more than other people believe that persons are naturally equal: there are amongst men all varieties of disposition, and desires, and degrees of capacity; nevertheless these differences and inequalities are very much increased by the circumstances amongst which a man lives and by those that surrounded the lives of his parents: and these circumstances are more or less under the control of society, that is of the ordered arrangement of persons among which we live […].

I have admitted that men are not naturally equal, yet all persons must admit that there are certain things which we all need; in that respect we are equal: we all need food, clothes, and shelter, and clearly if we need these things we need them in sufficiency, and of good quality, or else we have not really got them. Since then these needs are common to all, it follows that if anyone is not able to satisfy his needs in these respects there is something wrong somewhere, either with nature, or the man himself, or with the society of which he forms a part and which therefore dictates to him how he shall live […]. Again then I say that if a person has not leisure, pleasure, and education they fall short of human necessaries and there is something wrong somewhere.

So you see whatever inequality I admit among people, I claim this equality that everybody should have full enough food, clothes, and housing, and full enough leisure, pleasure, and education; and that everybody should have a certainty of these necessaries: in this case we should be equal as Socialists use the word […].

Morris argues (as does Marx in the ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’) that to consider a person’s right to a share in the social product in relation to their capacities and contribution is to regard them not as a full member of society, not as a whole human being. He talks of goods and services being free at the point of use:

I have been speaking as if there would still be some social inequalities, as if one man would earn more money than another, though none would earn less than enough to keep him comfortably: but I do not think that this would last long: we should find that when we ceased to fight with each other for livelihood
and to rob each other that all ordinary necessaries and comforts would be so abundant and so cheap that they would be free for everybody to take as he needed: of course we should pay for them, but in the lump [...] .

He proposes the nationalisation of the means of production, land and the railways, adding, again, ‘[o]f course we should between us have to pay for the maintenance and renewal of these things, but we should find it more convenient to pay for them in the lump, and everybody to use them freely just as we do for our bridges and highways and our postal service’. These political statements, that are now about one hundred and thirty years old, can be given both historical and presentist readings – that is, they can be looked at historically in terms of the situations they grew out of and spoke to, or, alternatively, they can be looked at in terms of their current and immediate relevance. One of the astonishing – and terrifying – things about Morris’s writing is how relevant so much of it still sounds. Yet one correspondent, Mercia MacDermott, writing in the Morning Star weeks after the 2015 Conservative election victory, on the day of a large anti-austerity demonstration organised by the People’s Assembly, complained that the movement does not make enough use of Morris, and especially his rich legacy of political writing. By ‘the Movement’, she meant, I think, the whole gamut of organisations and non-affiliated individuals that challenge capitalist orthodoxy in different ways and to different degrees. Some might call it the labour movement, but it includes trades unions, parts of the Labour Party, the Green Party, other socialist, communist and anarchist groups, as well as others, identifiable by their banners and placards, along with the People’s Assembly itself. ‘The Movement’ may be roughly identified with what Morris called ‘the Cause’, by which he meant socialism, or ‘the struggle’.

Morris is not entirely absent from the Movement. There were occasional references to Morris on the march, as in the banner of the Waltham Forest branch of the new Left Unity party, which bears the quotation ‘to give hope to the many oppressed and fear to the few oppressors, that is our business’. There are occasional portraits of Morris on older-style Labour or trade union banners. There are echoes in the Strawberry Thieves, one of many socialist choirs up and down the land, continuing the tradition of the socialist choir at Kelmscott House, conducted by Gustav Holst and then May Morris. There are echoes, too, of the Arts and Crafts legacy of Morris in the crafting of some of the more individual, personal banners. One such banner was embroidered with the phrase: ‘hearts starve as well as bodies: give us bread, but give us roses’, invoking James Oppenheim’s poem ‘Bread and Roses’, associated with the 1912 textile workers’ strike in the United States. Yet
Morris's appearances are few, alongside occasional references to Shelley or Tom Paine, and his profile is not particularly high.

The William Morris Society's own replica of the banner of the Hammersmith Branch of the Socialist League has had at least two outings on Trades Union Congress and anti-austerity demonstrations since 2010, and has provided something of a talking point. Some people said: ‘who are you, I've never heard of you’; others: ‘you haven’t existed for a hundred years’. A handful immediately recognised the reference and said: ‘you must be the William Morris Society’. For Morris does remain a resource for a wider culture of dissent. The contemporary visual artist Jeremy Deller makes use of Morris, both as image and as author. Deller’s mural at the 2012 Venice biennale featured Morris as a colossus hurling Roman Abramovich’s yacht into the lagoon, while Deller, along with Scott King, has also produced posters for the Save the Arts campaign, emblazoned with Morris’s statement: ‘I do not want art for a few any more than I want education for a few, or freedom for a few’. Bracket Press produced a poster for Queen Elizabeth’s Diamond Jubilee in 2012, using Morris’s response to Queen Victoria’s jubilee in 1887 printed over a delicate Morris design: ‘Hideous, revolting and vulgar tomfoolery. One’s indignation swells pretty much to the bursting point’. Morris has also become a resource for the green movement because of his early and intense concern with environmental issues.

MacDermott was arguing, however, that more use should be made of Morris’s political writing, especially such essays as ‘How We Live and How We Might Live’, ‘Useful Work versus Useless Toil’ and ‘A Factory as it Might be’ – and that such essays need to be made more easily available as pamphlets, and be routinely on sale at Morris’s houses. ‘How We Live and How We Might Live’ was actually republished by the Socialist Society in both 1990 and 2000; ‘Useful Work versus Useless Toil’ was reprinted (with some other matter) in 2008. It cost £4.99, whereas the original was a penny pamphlet, equivalent to thirty-eight pence in today’s money. So MacDermott may have a point, although thanks to the work of Nick Salmon, they are all available freely – together with virtually all of Morris’s writing discussed here – on the internet at: <www.marxists.org>.

Morris’s political writing has substantive relevance when given presentist readings. Take that line from ‘What Socialists Want’: ‘I claim this equality that everybody should have full enough food, clothes, and housing, and full enough leisure, pleasure, and education; and that everybody should have a certainty of these necessaries: in this case we should be equal as Socialists use the word’. Housing, food and education have never been more central to contemporary political agitation, as house prices and rents spiral, housing benefit cuts produce a process of class cleansing (in London especially), food bank use increases and university fees escalate. Meanwhile, Morris’s
insistence on making goods and services free at the point of use (‘of course we would pay for them, but in the lump’) was fundamental to the welfare state. Even to the limited extent that a welfare state was achieved, it is now being systematically dismantled.

Since the financial crash of 2008, questions of equality and inequality have become much more salient. Until then, many people would have argued that concepts such as class war were completely passé. The Blair-led Labour governments between 1997 and 2008 were supremely relaxed about the very rich, and did nothing to reverse the huge rise in inequality that took place during the Thatcher years from 1979 to 1990. Equality, in so far as it figured in political discourse, was about equality of opportunity, not substantive equality. Notably, the equalities legislation in the European Union prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender, sex, sexual orientation, disability or age, but makes no such stipulation about class or economic inequality. Those of us writing about substantive inequality had, after the late 1980s, a very small audience.

It is useful to remind ourselves of the change in inequality since Thatcher’s election in 1979. Britain was less unequal during 1976-77 than at any time before or since. The share of national income taken by the top 10 per cent of the population rose from about 20 per cent to about 30 per cent between 1977 and 1990, and has then remained more or less constant. But there has been a continuing increase in the share going to the top 1 per cent. That share, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, rose from 5.7 per cent in 1990 to 8.3 per cent in 2013-14. Wealth is even more concentrated. According to the annual Sunday Times Rich List, the top 1 per cent doubled their collective wealth during the ten years leading up to 2015. The total wealth of the top one thousand individuals resident in Britain (most of whom are not British) rose by 5.4 per cent or £29.5bn in the period from 2014 to 2015, to a total of over £547bn. The threshold for inclusion in the Rich List became £100m, and there were 117 billionaires. Far from wealth trickling down, it floods up. Britain, indeed, is pretty well as unequal as it was in Morris’s own day. Morris’s claim for equality of condition is a radical challenge to this state of affairs. Indeed, it is a radical challenge to the ideas of ‘fairness’ bandied about by the likes of Will Hutton, and proponents of meritocratic differences in reward. 27

Inequality – even rapidly growing inequality – can pass relatively unnoticed when ‘economic growth’ – a disturbing and muddy concept that I don’t have space to explore here – means that most people’s real incomes are rising. When growth stops, and incomes fall, as happened after the crash, the distribution becomes more apparent and more salient. The bail-out of the banks following the 2008 crash is the largest hand-out to the owning class since 1834, when slave-owners were ‘compensated’ for
the value of their alienated property. The costs of this bail-out were similarly born by the general population through consumption taxes, which may have some relevance to the unrest of the 1830s and the development of the labour movement at that time. But the bank bail-out, and the related imposition of austerity policies, put inequality back on the political agenda. There has since been a veritable tsunami of books on the subject, not least Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2013), but also books like Danny Dorling’s *Inequality and the 1%* (2014) and Andrew Sayer’s *Why We Can’t Afford the Rich* (2014). In 2011, the Occupy movement, beginning as Occupy Wall Street, and spreading to cities across the world, including London, used the slogan ‘We are the 99 per cent’ – mobilised against the bankers, the global elite and the 1 per cent. Suddenly the relational distinction Morris and Marx made between the owning class and the working class was reinstated, and the working class were no longer equated simply with blue-collar manual workers, but included again ‘the workers by hand or by brain’. Although Occupy has come and gone, the theme of the 1 per cent remains current and urgent.

These concerns are more noticeable in extra-parliamentary action – in the anti-austerity movement, and in the movement in which Jeremy Corbyn has been positioned as a figurehead within and beyond the Labour Party. Now all this may evaporate into perennial protest as Corbyn’s opponents claim and, indeed, hope. But what it shows is that there is still a movement and a cause, along with a wide constituency of people looking for some means of articulating their dissent. The failure of political elites to engage with the problems of de-industrialisation, reductions in availability of social housing, lack of decent and secure employment, cuts in benefits and the underfunding (and hence disempowering) of local authorities bears much of the blame for the rage that resulted in the vote for Brexit. The question of how to organise politically under such adverse circumstances was something that occupied Morris a great deal. While Morris was largely anti-parliamentarian (although he was of course writing at a time when there was not universal suffrage), he struggled with this position. Six months before he died, Morris suggested the need for a new socialist party, even for a parliamentary presence, despite the risks of such an organisation being co-opted to sustain the present system:

We have recently gone through a general election in Great Britain, the results of which have made the grossest reactionists (the Tories) jubilant, and I suspect have given some pleasure, even amidst their defeat, to the ordinary Liberal politicians […].

For the rest it was clear that whenever the reactionaries chose to administer such a check to Socialism they could do so with certainty of success,
since there is no Socialist party in England [...]. And to my mind the answer to that attack should be to organize a real definite Socialist party, and, for the sake of the necessary gain, to accept the probable dangers of such a position [...].

This Socialist party must include the whole of the genuine labor movement, that is, whatever in it is founded on principle, and is not a mere temporary business squabble [...].

Here Morris speaks *directly* to our current dilemmas about political organisation and the struggle for livelihoods and for greater equality.

Having said that, both Morris and More are important primarily because they endorse a method of thinking that we sorely need in the present moment. Both are engaged in the imaginative prefiguration of a different, better society in which the needs of all trump the greed of private capital, which has indeed been abolished. This holistic thinking about social alternatives is utopian – not in the sense of unrealistic daydreaming, but as the most serious thought about the possibilities of a better world. We need utopia. But we should above all understand utopia as a method of exploring possible futures. It combines an architectural mode of imagining alternative social possibilities with a critical, archaeological mode that probes the gaps and weaknesses in such speculations. These are combined with the necessary question of what kinds of people are possible or desirable, and how (far) human nature may be shaped by social and historical circumstances – the ontological mode of utopian method. Both More and Morris deploy all three of these modes, and we deploy all three when we explore and criticise the substance of their utopias. But Morris understands also that any utopian vision is the product of its time. Thus it needs to be understood as reflexive and related to the circumstances of its source. It needs to be understood as provisional, because no man or woman can think him- or herself out of his or her own time. It needs to be dialogic, because we must work out what we are going to do in conscious association with each other; and for the same reason, it needs to be embedded in political engagement. The movement should, indeed, make more use of Morris, both in substance and in method. Our own historical conjuncture challenges us to find a way of living within ecological limits while dealing effectively with the consequences of climate change, conflict and the increasing inequalities wreaked by global capitalism. We need all the help that we can get.
NOTES

10. Morris and Bax, pp. 278-79.
26. See note 22, above.
William Morris, *News from Nowhere* and the Function of Utopia

David Leopold

I

*News from Nowhere* (1890) is a book bursting with ideas.¹ Not least, as a serious and informed contribution to the utopian tradition, it provides an accessible and engaging vantage-point from which to reflect on the character and purpose of descriptions of an ideal commonwealth. My aim here is to use Morris’s text to pursue an inquiry into the functions of utopia; to ask: What are utopias for?

My ambition is to illuminate both *News from Nowhere* and the functions of utopia. However, those two targets are conceptually distinct, and readers might variously conclude that I succeed in neither direction, in both directions, in the one direction but not the other, or in the other but not the one.

II

Given the variety of ways in which the term ‘utopia’, and its various cognates, get used, a little clarificatory preamble might be useful. I begin with a route not taken. The function of utopia is often discussed in the critical literature of utopian studies, but much of that discussion takes place in a very particular context, namely that of worrying about how to define utopia. The discipline of utopian studies is preoccupied – some might think *overly* preoccupied – with questions of definition, and there is a familiar and controversial approach which defines utopia in terms of its function(s).

The best-known (at least, most-quoted) exemplar of that approach is the work of the Hungarian-born sociologist Karl Mannheim, who famously defines utopia in terms of its function. In *Ideologie und Utopie* (1929), utopia is said to consist in a set of ‘orientations transcending reality’ which are successful in passing over ‘into conduct’, breaking ‘the bonds of the existing order’, tending to ‘shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at that time’.² The defining characteristic of utopia, on this account, is its capacity to produce social change. In this respect, utopia is
contrasted with ideology, which is said to stabilise rather than undermine the existing social order. Mannheim is not simply saying that one of the functions of utopia is to bring about change, he is claiming that this transformative characteristic is what makes a body of thought utopian. If a set of ideas fail to change the world, then it is not utopian, and if it does change the world, then it is (because utopia is defined by that function).

There is much that we might say about such a view, but my reason for mentioning Mannheim is simply to acknowledge the existence of a well-known approach that I will not be adopting here. My concern with function is not a definitional one. I will define utopia apart from its function, and only then ask what are the functions of utopia so defined.

Of course, functions are sometimes essential to the definition of an entity. For example, it seems plausible to think that the function of protecting a table or bar surface is an essential feature of a beer mat, whereas other functions that beer mats have, even important other functions (such as providing a portable surface for writing phone numbers on, or a means of stabilising wobbly bar tables), might not be. In what follows, I outline some important functions that utopias have, but, on this account, none of those functions are essential to being a utopia (because I am not minded to define utopia in terms of its function).

A reader committed to a functional definition of utopia might still accept much of my account. Not least, they could accept my list of functions, but go on to insist – as I do not – on one, or more, of those functions being essential to the definition of utopia. (Indeed, as will become apparent, Mannheim’s world-changing purpose retains a place in my list).

III

This arrangement of matters seems clear enough, but it does generate a prior question – what do I mean by utopia? – which has to be addressed before we can get to our real subject. My definitional remarks will be brief and unfashionable: brief for reasons of focus and space, and unfashionable since I resist the expansive definitions which – partly under the influence of the German Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, who found utopia almost everywhere he looked – are popular in the utopian studies literature.3

By utopia I will mean a detailed description of an ideal society which does not exist (at least, not yet). That is, I treat utopia as synonymous with what is sometimes called the ‘positive utopia’ or ‘eutopia’; the latter term alluding to the connotation of ‘good place’ in the Utopia (1516) of Thomas More, the humanist scholar and Tudor statesman. Indeed, it should be apparent that my working definition captures both
of the meanings – ‘good place’ and ‘no place’ – playfully combined in More’s original neologism.

By way of clarification – and hopefully still avoiding being overtly preoccupied with definition – I might make four points about this usage. First, the detail here is important. Utopias, in this sense, are not merely articulations of yearning (‘the expression of the desire for a better way of being’ would not, on its own, be enough), but say something about particular values and the kind of social institutions and ethos that might best embody them. Second, although utopias, so understood, are in some broad sense ‘fictions’ – in that they depict societies that do not exist – there is no suggestion here that utopias have to take a particular literary form. Utopias may, but do not have to, take the form of a sustained fictional narrative in which a visitor from the world of the author encounters a superior civilisation in some distant location (the distance here usually being either geographical or chronological). Third, the reference to an ‘ideal’ society is deliberately ambiguous. Utopias are not usually, despite the claims of some critics, depictions of perfection, but they do tend to have demanding conceptions of the good society (we might informally say that they ‘take the ideal seriously’). That said, the definition adopted here is intended to be neutral about how utopias map onto distinctions between social arrangements which are the most desirable, the best feasible, or the best accessible, respectively (my use of these terms is elaborated below). Fourth, and finally, these preliminary remarks are mainly intended to clarify how I will be using the term utopia and its cognates, on this occasion. I am perfectly happy to allow that there are other ways – including other legitimate and illuminating ways – of using the relevant words.

IV

In what follows, I reflect on the functions of providing or promoting a detailed description of an ideal society that does not exist, descriptions of the kind that appear in the texts and tradition that More named but did not invent.

According to my bare-bones list, and in no particular order, utopias typically have some of the following six functions: construction; criticism; clarification; context-revelation; consolation; and cheer. These labels are not all self-explanatory, and in what follows I will utilise examples from Morris’s book to illustrate and illuminate each of these functions in turn.

V

The first of the functions of utopia is ‘construction’. That is, utopias can contribute to building a new society; or, at least, to bringing about changes in the existing social and political order. (Not, pace Mannheim, that this transformational characteristic is
what makes a body of thought utopian, but rather that suitably defined – here without reference to function – utopias may help to change the world). I take it that they might discharge this constructive function in a variety of ways, but perhaps most often by providing targets, illuminating forms of transition, and generating relevant motivation. First, they can provide a goal or target, signposting the direction in which the world might be changed. Second, and perhaps less frequently, they say something about forms of transition, and how one might get nearer to, or even one day reach, that goal. And third, they can help motivate individuals to change the world, inspiring them to involve themselves in struggles to transform society.

The social arrangements of News from Nowhere are often, and not implausibly, treated as providing a goal of some kind. Morris is usually understood as describing elements of (something like) the kind of society that he would like us to move towards. Moreover, this seems a natural way of reading certain threads in the book. It was, of course, Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward (1888) whose combination of ‘serious essay’ on socialism and ‘slight envelope of romance’ provoked Morris into writing his own utopian romance. In his Commonweal review, Morris criticised Bellamy’s treatment of five aspects – work, technology, the state, cities and art – of the ideal society, and, in due course, he presented his own alternative account of these in News from Nowhere. First, Morris suggests that work would be transformed from a necessary evil into a creative and fulfilling activity, in which there is the expectation of pleasure from both engaging in self-realising activity (developing and deploying our own essential human powers) and considering the resulting product (and its usefulness to others). Second, technology would be transformed from being the master into being the servant of humankind, dealing with the small amount of necessary but repulsive labour that might still remain in a future society where the widespread adoption of handicraft – even at the cost of luxury and productivity – had followed dissatisfaction with ‘a mechanical life’ (pp. 153-54). Third, the abstraction called a state would somehow disappear – the institutional arrangements here are only gestured at – in a commonwealth where authority was collective but thoroughly decentralised. Fourth, society would not, as sometimes thought, have eradicated the very distinction between town and country (perhaps in some pastoral uniformity), but rather mitigated the antagonism between the two – introducing something of nature into the city, and something of the vitality and intelligence of urban life into the rural environment. Lastly, this would be a world in which art would have become part of the texture of everyday life, an element of everything we make and that has a form, and not a separate and refined cultural sphere monopolised by a minority.

I do not deny that these are all elements of Morris’s hopes for the future, but some caution is needed here. In particular, note that utopias can play a constructive role
without being what I will call here stipulative blueprints. By *stipulative* blueprints I mean plans which have to be realised in every detail. This point is of significance for reflection on both Morris’s romance and the functions of utopia.

Utopian designs do not have to be construed as a target that you are required to hit, they can rather play the role of guiding lights, a reference point to help you steer where you want to go. To adopt an analogy used by the philosopher John Stuart Mill, in his ‘Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform’ (1859), we might think of an unrealisable or even demanding ideal as like the North Star, in that it can provide a useful guide to navigation even if we can or want to sail no further than Hull. For example, reflection on a more desirable but unfeasible goal might help you decide between two feasible but less desirable alternatives; maybe one of the latter would be closer to the more desirable goal than the other, or maybe one of them would cut off further progress towards that goal in a way that the other might not. We can think of the constructive purpose of *News from Nowhere* as a guiding light (a North Star) without holding that it is possible or even desirable for humankind ever to realise all of its details together.

Interestingly, in his review of *Looking Backward*, Morris remarks that it is a common mistake to think of utopias as complete and final blueprints which require only to be implemented. Both those who love, and those who hate, particular utopias, often treat their ideal descriptions as if they were ‘conclusive statements of facts and rules of action’ requiring only to be put into practice. However, Morris recommends rather that we think of them in a more provisional way, because human progress does not admit of ‘finality’, and because utopian descriptions are bound to contain ‘errors and fallacies’ (reflecting present assumptions or missing or underestimating some factor that will turn out to be crucial). There is no suggestion that he exempts his own work from these judgements.

In *News from Nowhere*, Morris also insists on the open-endedness of his account. The book sketches only ‘Some Chapters’ of the ideal society, and he emphasises that Nowhere has a future which is contestable and unpredictable. Many of the younger generation, for example, fear a ‘work-famine’, a development about which old Hammond is much more sanguine (p. 84). Whilst Henry Morson (the Wallingford antiquary) insists that his confidence in the future is grounded in self-assurance and not knowledge; conceding that he does not know what might follow, or threaten, this epoch of rest, he nonetheless insists that ‘we will meet it when it comes’ (p. 155).

In this recognition of error and open-endedness, some students of utopianism have seen Morris as reflecting, and contributing to, a shift in utopian literature, occurring around the middle of the nineteenth century: a shift from what Miguel Abensour has called ‘systematic’ to ‘heuristic’ accounts of the ideal society, from
stipulative blueprints to the imaginative exploration of alternative social arrangements.10

The second constructive thread identified above concerns transition. Arguments about construction are not only about where we might want to end up, but also about how we might get there. There is a strangely resilient myth according to which utopias depict ends but are peculiarly silent about means; that is, that they have nothing to say about how the ideal society came about. This myth should not really survive a reading of Thomas More, since Utopia has a founding father, the somewhat shadowy figure of ‘Utopus’, who first conquered and then transformed its inhabitants and landscape. The Morrisian version of the myth has it that this was true of the utopian form until News from Nowhere.11 In fact, what is distinctive about Morris’s utopia is not the fact that it addresses issues of transition, but rather what it says about them.

Nowhere has a very specific historical, as well as a geographical and temporal, location. It was not discovered or projected but rather ‘fought for’, and Morris’s account of that struggle is detailed, historically informed, and written with clear political intent.12 The longest chapter of the work, entitled ‘How The Change Came’, draws on Morris’s understanding of past events (including the Paris Commune), and his own political experiences (including of ‘Bloody Sunday’ and the strike wave of 1888-89). The book’s protagonist, William Guest, may have simply woken up in this new world, but he quickly learns that Nowhere itself was not chanced upon but rather emerged out of a long period of class struggle, a difficult and uneven advance through demonstrations, general strike and civil war. Morris portrays this revolutionary struggle as an instrumental and educational necessity. It was the only strategy which could have overthrown the old society, and it also provided the schooling without which the new society would fail. As Hammond explains, it was ‘the very conflict itself’ which helped to develop the required habits of self-reliance and the ‘due talent for administration’ which the new society needed (p. 132).

The third constructive thread concerns motivation. Utopias not only articulate a goal, and discuss how to get there, they also often (seek to) encourage us to move towards it. The detail of utopian description seems important here. On their own, for example, an understanding of the values that socialists seek (equality and community perhaps) can seem too abstract to motivate. One also needs a sense of the kinds of institutions and ethos that would embody those values (the kind of property relations and decision-making procedures that are envisaged, for instance). In the opening paragraphs of the book, when he is still in his own world, Guest appears to gesture at this motivational need. ‘Up at the League’, the discussion of ‘the fully-developed new society’ had been predictably frustrating, and our protagonist’s discontent and unhappiness are articulated in the cry: ‘If I could but
see a day of it [...] if I could but see it!' (p. 3). I understand Guest, here, not as requesting a detailed stipulative blueprint that he might help put into effect, but rather as hoping to renew his motivation for the struggle after the familiar frustrations and unhappiness of the socialist meeting held in the present.

Moreover, that request for renewed motivation seems to be echoed and answered in the book’s closing paragraphs. In what some have seen as an allusion to More’s closing distinction in Utopia (between the ‘wish for’ and the ‘hope of seeing realised’ the ideal commonwealth), Morris contrasts a passive and wistful ‘dream’ with an active and practical ‘vision’ of what might be (p. 182).13 Guest articulates the hope that what he has experienced in Nowhere was no mere reverie, leaving himself and the world unchanged, but rather a premonition that might guide and motivate the striving to bring about a time of ‘fellowship, and rest, and happiness’ (ibid.). Some readers will share in that hope. They will never get to live in Nowhere, but the happiness and understanding gained by visiting it in their imagination might not have left them motivationally unaltered. As old Hammond had earlier speculated: ‘I may have been talking to many people’, since ‘this new friend of ours’ (Guest) might turn out to be an intermediary carrying ‘a message from us which may bear fruit for them, and consequently for us’ (p. 116).

VI

Second, utopia has a critical function. Modern readers sometimes unthinkingly conflate this with its constructive function. To see that they are conceptually distinct, it might help to imagine a pessimist, who holds that social improvement is not possible, responding to a description of the ideal society. The pessimist can, without inconsistency, allow that this description has critical purchase on what exists, without conceding the possibility of social change. Even if the flawed existing world is not open to amelioration or improvement or transformation, utopias can still allow us to see how far what we have has fallen short of the ideal which we can imagine. We can diagnose the illness, the pessimist might say, even where no cure is possible.

The critical function here typically concerns social criticism; that is, utopias help us reflect on the flaws of extant societies, usually those in which the relevant authors and readers live. We might think of utopias as helping to establish the kind of cognitive ‘distance’ from its object that criticism requires. Utopias often seek to shock the reader out of conflating the desirable and the familiar, by presenting us with radically different surroundings. We are like Guest, who is ‘so utterly astonished’ during his opening swim at Hammersmith, that for a moment he ‘forgot to strike out, and went spluttering under’ the water (p. 6).

It is important not to misunderstand the kind of critical distance I have in mind
here. It could be thought that utopias necessarily embody ‘radical detachment’, a complete break with the assumptions and patterns of thought of the world of the author (and reader). This association might be encouraged by Guest’s suggestion that Hammond treat him ‘[a]s if I were a being from another planet’ (p. 47). However, it would be misleading to portray Guest (or indeed Morris) as ‘radically detached’, as emotionally and intellectually cut off from the object of criticism. We have travelled not to Alpha Centauri in the twenty-eighth century, but to the Thames Valley a hundred or so years after the revolutionary upheaval usually placed in 1952. In short, Guest belongs to, just as Nowhere has developed out of, ‘civilisation’, a term that Morris uses with ironical intent – and a nod to the French utopian socialist Charles Fourier – to indicate his own contemporary society. Indeed, the critical purchase of Nowhere seems to depend, in part, on its connections with the world of its author and readers. If we shared nothing with the inhabitants of Nowhere, it is not clear what lessons we might draw from their lives. Nowhere embodies a version of (some of) Morris’s hopes; and his readers listen, in part, because, and to the extent that, they also connect with his aspirations, thinking of these future solutions as relevant to their own contemporary problems. Morris is clearly trying to disrupt smug satisfaction with contemporary society, but he does that precisely by pressing the links between the nineteenth century and this alternative world; he does not simply wish the inhabitants of the latter well, but fights for the success of what he thinks of as the shared enterprise that they are all embarked upon.

Utopias typically contain both direct and indirect criticism. By direct criticism, I mean explicitly identifying a flaw in the present. By indirect criticism, I mean implicitly drawing attention to a flaw in the present by portraying a society that does not contain it. I am inclined to think that it is this latter, the implicit and indirect mode, which is more characteristic of the genre here; the utopian author presents us with a very particular kind of ‘mirror to our failings’; illuminating flaws in our own non-ideal circumstances by describing an ideal society without those weaknesses. The mechanism generating the criticism here is comparison. You might never have noticed the flaw in some familiar thing until an analogue without that flaw is placed alongside it. Presented with an image of an ideal society, you are led to compare it against your own society, and find the latter lacking in some respect.

News from Nowhere contains plenty of both kinds of criticism (direct and indirect). Moreover, there seems no necessary tension here; in Morris’s text, at least, the two threads are structured so as to illuminate and reinforce each other.

Examples of the indirect mode of criticism could be drawn from any of the constructive threads identified above in Morris’s review of Bellamy. Take, for instance, the example of art. An attentive reader will notice that conventional contemporary
tokens of art – such as the paintings, classical music and sculpture that populate Looking Backward – seem to be absent from Nowhere. Instead, the beauty, elevation and pleasure that art once provided for a few, have been reabsorbed into the textures of everyday life; they are now found in the damascened clasp of the brown leather belt around Dick’s waist (p. 7), the curious carvings of the oak chair that Hammond’s father made (p. 47), the ornamented lead-glazed plates in the Bloomsbury dining room (p. 87), and so on. Nowhere reverses the nineteenth-century pattern in which ‘there was so little art and so much talk about it’ (p. 88). Indeed, art is so ubiquitous in Nowhere, a part of everything which its inhabitants have given form, that, Hammond explains, they no longer have a separate word for it (p. 115).

Examples of the direct mode of criticism are also easily found in News from Nowhere. Guest is frequently driven to comment explicitly on negative features of the nineteenth century. These unmediated swipes at ‘civilisation’ include his reflection on the architectural achievement of his own world, which is said to have combined ‘ugly and pretentious’ (p. 35) villas for the better off, with slums for the poor where in a ‘wretched apology for a house’ men and women lived – a memorable image this – ‘packed amongst the filth like pilchards in a cask’ (p. 57). Similarly, we might consider old Hammond’s discussion of the quality of wares on the world-market of the nineteenth century, a discussion which prefigures Morris’s brilliant late essay on ‘Makeshift’ (1894). The critical claim here is that, whilst the nineteenth-century machines that made the relevant wares were undoubtedly wonders of ‘invention, skill, and patience’, their output consisted of ‘measureless quantities of worthless make-shifts’, which were ‘made to sell and not to use’ (pp. 82-83).

The social criticism that I have focused on does not exhaust the critical dimension of Morris’s utopian romance. These other critical threads include: political criticism of other socialists (primarily state socialists and anarchists); some self-criticism (including self-deprecatimg allusions to the shortness of his own temper); some jibes at contemporary literature (for failing to address contemporary life); and so on. In addition, News from Nowhere might be said to prefigure the sub-genre which modern utopists (following Tom Moylan) call ‘critical utopia’. (I say ‘prefigure’, since this sub-genre is classically located during the 1970s revival of literary utopia in the hands of Ursula Le Guin, Marge Piercy and others). Its precise features are sometimes a little loosely drawn, but the critical utopia seems to involve: a rejection of literal ‘blueprints’; a focus on the social conflict between the original world and the utopian society opposed to it; and the presentation of the utopia itself as imperfect, subject to difficulties, liable to change. 16

I have already alluded to some of the adumbrations here. For instance, I have suggested that we should not think of Nowhere as a stipulative blueprint, stressed its
(transitional and other) connections with Morris’s present, and noted some of the uncertainty and open-endedness which marks its future (such as the contested worry about a looming work-famine, which, to be clear, involves the fear of losing a pleasure).

Nowhere is also marked by other kinds of imperfection; some which might be viewed as universal (flaws in all known societies), and some as non-universal (distinctive flaws of Nowhere). An example of universal imperfection – the unreasonableness of ‘love’ – is considered below (in an adjacent context). As an example of a non-universal imperfection consider the failure of the inhabitants of Nowhere to share Morris’s own deep and abiding love for books (their design and physicality as well as their contents).\(^\text{17}\) Morris tells us that they are ‘not great readers’ (p. 121), that they do not encourage early bookishness (p. 27), and indeed that they are apt to tease those who write creatively (p. 19). These attitudes might seem in tension with Morris’s own conviction that creative writing – and I might add the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake – is one of the occupations ‘necessary for a happy community’.\(^\text{18}\) The suggestion here is that this slight shortfall in one of the ingredients of human happiness should be taken, not as reflecting any change in his perfectionist commitments, but rather as embodying Morris’s historical and critical sensitivities. He would have us understand, not endorse, Ellen’s impassioned reaction (a ‘storm of eloquence’) against her grandfather’s literary enthusiasms, expressed in her insistence that it is not ‘books’ but rather ‘the world we live in’ that interests ‘us’ (p. 129). I would expect Morris himself to be suspicious of this simplistic and problematic contrast between books and the real world, and suggest we understand Ellen’s ‘scepticism’ about books as embodying, not the author’s own preferences, but rather the understandable ways in which the inhabitants of Nowhere have come to terms with their own history. This scepticism embodies what Robert the weaver, in a related context, pertinently refers to as ‘a kind of revenge’ for the stupidity of the nineteenth century; an over-reaction, we might say, to the ways in which the latter had despised hand work and disproportionately rewarded head work (p. 19).

VII

So utopias function to change and to criticise the existing world. A third function of utopia is to clarify, to elucidate or illuminate something. In this mode, we might think of utopias as a kind of thought experiment, as imaginative devices which help us understand something better.\(^\text{19}\)

Thought experiments are not, of course, uncontroversial; there are concerns, for example, about their dependence on intuitions, and about their relation to more formal kinds of argumentation. But they are widely used (not only in the philosophy
of mind and philosophy of value, but also in the natural sciences). Thought
experiments can be used negatively to undermine some view (for example, by showing
how it conflicts with other beliefs we hold), or positively to support some view (for
example, by clarifying some advantage that it might have), or heuristically (for
example, to illustrate what precisely a claim involves, or to elicit new or refined
intuitions).

The suggestion here is that utopias often function as a type of thought experiment
which can help us understand something better. I take it that they typically clarify the
character, advantages and disadvantages of particular social arrangements. More
precisely, they ask us to think about values, and about the kinds of institutions and
ethos that might embody those values. In this way they can address questions about
the desirability, feasibility and accessibility of particular social arrangements. What
if, they ask, a community were organised in the following way … where the ‘following
way’ varies according to the author and the text concerned.

That variety makes it difficult to generalise about the strengths and weaknesses
of utopian thought experiments. However, I venture two suggestions here; concerning
possible failings and possible advantages of utopian thought experiments, respectively.
In both cases, it is important to remember that I am concerned, for the moment, only
with the clarificatory role that utopias might have.

A potential failing of utopian thought experiments, in this context, is that they
are not always good at isolating variables. That is, utopias typically raise many issues
in combination, introducing lots of different innovations together. Yet isolating
concerns is often crucial to clarificatory success. For example, utopias do not always
make it easy to understand what underlies the evaluative judgement that they
elucidate. A reader might find Nowhere attractive, but be unclear about the source
of that judgement. Is it the quality of social relations, the distributive arrangements,
their emotional involvement in the romance, the familiarity of the English
countryside, that the sun always seems to be shining, or something else, that is doing
the relevant work? In short, the clarificatory function of utopias is not always helped
by their raising so many issues together. This would seem to be a characteristic, rather
than a necessary, failing of utopias, considered as thought experiments.

A potential strength of utopian thought experiments, in this context, is that they
are often good at interrogating and challenging our brute intuitions. The role of
intuitions here is complex and contested, but most of those who allow that they are
important would insist that the relevant intuitions are not those we might call brute
intuitions (embodying our immediate judgement), but rather their refined and
improved counterparts, what we might call our considered intuitions (our reflective
judgements). The suggestion here is that utopias are often effective at challenging and
questioning our brute intuitions; not least, as suggested earlier, good at shocking us out of confusing the desirable with the familiar. For example, it is clear that Nowhere as a whole, notwithstanding the kindnesses of its population, is a challenge to Guest’s ‘wonted ways of looking at life’ (p. 116). For example, his conventional thoughts about punishment – not least, that the sanctity of life might be at risk from ‘the absence of gallows and prison’ in Nowhere (p. 144) – are challenged, not only by Hammond’s arguments but also by his experience of the aftermath of the death by violence near Maple-Durham.

I want to address here an additional worry about utopian thought experiments. It might be thought that in failing to respect feasibility constraints, the results that utopian thought experiments generate are of little practical use (and that practical results are what we are interested in here). I have already sought to cast doubt on the entailment claim here, in suggesting that non-feasible goals might still guide us. Here, I want to add that it is a mistake to assume that utopias necessarily fail to respect feasibility constraints.

Utopia is sometimes identified with a denial of feasibility constraints, but that is not a feature of my usage here. I have referred to the ideal commonwealth, but insisted that I was neutral about just how ‘ideal’ utopia has to be. In particular, it seems helpful to distinguish between the desirability of social arrangements (that is, whether they are normatively preferable); the feasibility of social arrangements (that is, whether they are compatible with, say, what is known about social design and human nature); and the accessibility of social arrangements (that is, whether they are reachable by us from where we are currently situated). Notice that these categories might not overlap with one another. In particular, the most desirable social arrangements might not overlap with the best feasible social arrangements, and the best feasible social arrangements might not overlap with the best social arrangements that we can get to from where we are currently situated. Utopian social arrangements, on the account offered here, might be concerned with inquiring into the most desirable, the best feasible, or the best accessible, arrangements (or indeed some combination or subset of these).

*News from Nowhere* can be seen, in part, as a complex thought experiment seeking to think through some aspects of the desirability and feasibility of Morris’s account of a communist society. This is not the place to attempt a detailed account of the latter, but its central commitments are to equality (ideal arrangements seem to provide for a rough equality in the balance of amenity and burden in the life of each person), and community (understood crucially as caring about the needs and happiness of others in a non-instrumental way). Other significant threads include Morris’s thoughtful enthusiasm for sustainability, work and art (properly understood); and his
nuanced opposition to asceticism, to luxury and to the use of machinery in 'civilisation'. All these threads are embodied in the narrative of Morris’s book, and his engagement with them is often much more serious than some appearances and much commentary would suggest. Morris is no idle dreamer here, but is rather engaged in serious reflection on difficult questions of socialist design.

The chapter entitled ‘On the Lack of Incentive to Labour in Communist Society’ provides an obvious example of Morris attempting to think through issues of feasibility. In Nowhere productivity may be limited (not least, in conformity with Morris’s conviction that free persons lead simple lives and have simple pleasures), but it is nonetheless clear that there is enough for all essential human needs to be met, and moreover that people are at liberty to take what they need when they need it. There are lots of controversial assumptions here, and lots of questions we might have about them. For example, even in a society which only produces ‘the real necessaries’ which support life, there will also be questions about the supply of labour (p. 80). Simply put, if people can just take what they need, why would they ever engage in production? The difficulty of this question is scarcely lessened by the fact that in Nowhere, not only do the incentives of starvation (and fear of starvation) no longer survive, but also they have not been replaced, either by centralised coercion, or a ‘code of public opinion’ (that does the work of coercion) (p. 50). Not unreasonably, Guest wants to know ‘how you get people to work when there is no reward of labour, and especially how you get them to work strenuously?’ (p. 78).

Part of the answer to Guest’s question involves a denial of the assumption that these absences (of starvation, coercion and social pressure) entail that there is no reward of labour (ibid.). Hammond insists that most productive activity in Nowhere is pleasurable, and identifies several forms that it takes. Most work is now intrinsically pleasurable, in that Morris assumes that it involves self-realisation (the development and deployment of our essential human powers), and that self-realisation is satisfying. This kind of work needs no external incentive; the motivation here is ‘pleasure in the work itself’, the reward of creation which, in a brilliant and illuminating analogy, Hammond describes as ‘[t]he wages which God gets’ (p. 79). The rewards of the remaining work look less intrinsic, but Hammond insists this productive activity is still pleasurable because, variously, it has grown into ‘a pleasurable habit’, or there is pleasure in contemplating one’s contribution to the wealth of the community, or there is a certain ‘honour’ in having so contributed (ibid.). However, where there is work which remains irredeemably ‘disagreeable or troublesome’ to do by hand, it is either given over to ‘immensely improved machinery’ (recall the ‘force barges’ seen on the Thames), or the inhabitants of Nowhere see whether they cannot do ‘without the thing produced by it’ (p. 84). (Elsewhere, Morris willingly entertains the consequences
of giving up ‘a great deal of what we have been used to call material progress, in order that we may be freer happier and more completely equal’). 23

The coherence or plausibility of this account of incentives is not at issue here. The point is rather that Morris is using the utopian narrative to think through issues of socialist design; in this case, clarifying his account of how one might respond to the ‘motivational gap’ that opens up once starvation, and fear of starvation, is eradicated. Pleasurable work is central to Morris’s account of the successful functioning of the ideal commonwealth; not a nice optional extra, but a crucial step in elucidating the purported feasibility of certain threads in his vision of a communist future.

VIII

So utopias can work to construct, to criticise and to clarify. A fourth function is context-revelation; that is, they reflect their own world, telling us something about the context in which they were written. Utopias not only reveal something of the personality and values of their individual authors, but also provide a guide to the social world in which they were created and to which they are often a reaction. Utopias reflect that historical context both directly and indirectly.

Directly, utopias reflect that context by simply incorporating features of the context in which they were written. This can take the form of an explicit acknowledgement that some feature of the author’s own world also appears in the ideal alternative; for example, it might be that said feature is viewed as a permanent feature of the human condition by an author whose ideal is constructed with an eye to its feasibility (hence that feature will reappear in their ideal description). More often, perhaps, this characteristic of utopia reflects the unthinking contamination of the ideal description by non-universal features of the non-ideal context in which they were written. In this case, the original context appears directly, but unwittingly, as an implicit imaginative failure to think through alternatives. In both these cases, the recovery of the historical context requires little in the way of ‘inversion’ (see below).

Indirectly, utopias typically reflect that context ‘inversely’; that is they describe an ideal society which avoids certain features of the world of their author. In this case, in order to recover those aspects of their context, we need to reconstruct the target that they are reacting against. The ideal society is typically offered as a solution to the problematic features of the non-ideal context, and, in such circumstances, the latter can be recovered from the former. The point is illustrated, in another context, by Miriam Eliav-Feldon who has suggested various ways in which the social programmes of a group of renaissance utopias were products of contemporary conditions. For example, their recurring concern with Sanità – not least, the
extravagant praise for the sewage arrangements and public health mechanisms of
the utopias of Thomas More, of the philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon, of
the Dominican Friar and philosopher poet Tomasso Campanella, and others – reveals
something important about the squalor and disease of the renaissance world.24

Both directly and indirectly then, utopias provide us with information about the
non-ideal world in which they were written. Morris recognised the point, drawing an
analogy with historical accounts which, however accurate and judicious, will always
‘be our pictures of the past’; he continues, ‘still more strongly may it be said of the
future’, where there is less data and more uncertainty, that they will be our pictures.25

In the ‘direct’ cases, the contemporary features are simply reproduced in the ideal
description. Two examples from News from Nowhere can be given here. The first direct
element concerns an imperfection in the existing world which Morris appears to
think of as universal, and so includes in his account of Nowhere; namely, the fickleness
of the human heart (the unreasonableness of ‘love’ mentioned earlier). When Dick
says ‘[f]or as you know love is not a very reasonable thing, and perversity and self-will
are commoner than some of our moralists think’, I take him to be making a claim
about the universality of an unreasonable bundle of emotions, the truth of which
the author regards with sympathy (p. 31). The personal unhappiness that can result
from this unreasonableness is accordingly a feature, not only of contemporary
‘civilisation’ (indeed, a feature of which Morris himself had some experience), but
also of Nowhere (in, say, the past uncertainties of Dick and Clara’s relationship as
recounted by Hammond, and in the death by violence that the travellers come across
near Maple-Durham). This purportedly universal imperfection is included in
Nowhere precisely because Morris’s ideal is constructed with one eye on its feasibility.

The second direct example is a case where we might judge that Morris includes
a non-universal feature of his world unreflectively, or, in this particular case, at least
not reflectively enough. It concerns Morris’s attitude towards what his contemporaries
would have called ‘the woman question’. At times, the work strikes some modern
readers as written from a rather masculine perspective. Of course, some of this ‘male
gaze’ might be accounted for by the narrator’s recognition that he was seeing the new
world ‘from the outside’, and that throughout he was conscious of being ‘still wrapped
up in the prejudices, the anxieties, the distrust of this time of doubt and struggle’ (p.
181). However, such an explanation does not appear to be available for the account
of the sexual division of labour in Nowhere. Morris’s vision of a fully emancipated
society – whilst it may have got rid of economic exploitation and marital oppression
– seems to have left some fairly conventional social roles for women. The best carver
amongst the ‘obstinate refusers’ may be a woman, but for every Philippa there can
seem to be at least half-a-dozen happy and well-knit young women taking pleasure
in serving food or in sweeping a floor. Morris seems aware that his account might attract controversy; for example, Guest addresses the issue directly, and, referring to these housekeeping roles, asks old Hammond ‘that seems a little like reaction, doesn’t it?’ (p. 51). Yet Hammond’s response will not convince all modern readers; he suggests that in circumstances of genuine equality and independence ‘women do what they can do best, and what they like best’, and, moreover, that housekeeping is no longer considered ‘unimportant’ or ‘not deserving of respect’ (pp. 51-52). Not all modern readers will be persuaded. At the very least, it seems plausible to think that this particular gendered division of labour constitutes a point at which Morris has allowed contamination of his ideal by some contestable assumptions from his own contemporary circumstances.

In the ‘indirect’ cases, the features of the contemporary world can be recovered by inversion. (There is no suggestion that this is always the only way of recovering knowledge of that context, merely that it can be so recovered). Again, I provide two examples.

The first indirect example concerns costume. Generalising a little, we can say that the clothes in Nowhere are typically practical, classless, simple, well-made, often brightly coloured and sometimes highly decorated. Loose kirtles and flowing gowns, we might note, enable women to row, to carve, and to make hay. Guest notes that ‘the shape of their raiment […] was both beautiful and reasonable – veiling the form, without either muffling or caricaturing it’ (p. 120). (Interestingly, this wording is directly echoed in Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome (1893), where Morris notes that bad costume ‘either muffles up or caricatures the body, whereas good costume at once veils and indicates it’). Invert the picture and you have something of Morris’s account of nineteenth-century costume. The absurdity of top hats, on the one hand, and rags held together by dirt, on the other; the overall picture dominated by drab blacks-browns, and with women in particular ‘bundled up with millinery’ and ‘upholstered like arm-chairs’ (p. 13).

The second indirect example concerns architecture. Generalising is perhaps a little harder here, there being so much variation between the size, locality, function and so on, of buildings. However, we might say that the built environment in Nowhere is typically clean in both senses (that is, not dirty, and possessed of simple lines), distinctive (larger buildings embracing the best of the Gothic with the ‘Saracenic and Byzantine’ without however ‘copying’ any one of them), often delicately ornamented but unpretentious, spacious (plenty of ‘elbow room’ inside) and solidly constructed of stone and other appropriate local materials (houses sometimes of brick, but also timber and plaster). Again, invert the picture and you have something like Morris’s account of the architecture of present-day ‘civilisation’ (not, to be clear, that of an
earlier period when beautiful buildings were typically the norm). In ‘civilisation’, buildings tended to be both dirty and ugly, derivative in design, often vulgar (especially in wealthier properties), of cramped proportions (especially in poorer properties), and ill-built (constructed of poor quality and unsympathetic materials). In Nowhere, Dick explains, that some of these older ugly buildings are kept, not only ‘as a kind of foil to the beautiful ones we build now’ (p. 28), but also as a historical record ‘of what our forefathers thought a handsome building’ (p. 44).

It would be a mistake to think of these two examples as trivial. Dress and architecture are emblematic of the society which produces them; part of the texture of everyday life in which ‘art’ now consists. Moreover, for Morris, it is an important feature of the ideal society that its inhabitants have learnt ‘to take pleasure in the details of life’.27

IX
So utopias function to change, to criticise, to clarify and to reflect historical context. A fifth function of utopia is to console – that is, to offer comfort at a time of difficulty. This function typically concerns the impact of utopia on the prospective reader, and more especially the solace that it might offer them. I suspect that, of all the functions discussed here, consolation is the one that will generate the most suspicion. Consolation has many associations, and not all of them are viewed positively. Two forms of consolation are closely associated with utopia; I will call them ‘escapism’ and ‘hope’, respectively.

By ‘escapism’ I have in mind the phenomena of focusing on something pleasant or enjoyable as a diversion from the harsh realities of the existing world. We might think of utopias as, in part, a repository for our desires, and in particular our ideas about how we would like the world to be. So understood, visiting that world in our imagination provides a diversion or a vicarious gratification. By focusing our attention on something pleasant or enjoyable we escape, at least for a while, the difficulties and failings both of our own lives and of the society in which we live.

Talk of ‘escapism’ often generates a hostile response. Critics emphasise the ‘inadequacy’ of the consolation offered here; after all they suggest, when we return, as we eventually must, from our speculative thoughts, the harshness of our lives and of the world are left unchanged by our dreaming. This might seem a tendentious characterisation; after all, a life and world with consolation (even inadequate and short-lived consolation) looks different to a life and world without. Of course, it might be that the real worry here is that if we are consoled we might not be so inclined to criticise and construct. However, the potential to console does not necessarily ‘crowd out’ the other functions of utopia. Indeed, we might think that solace can stand in a
fruitful relationship to construction, criticism, clarification and so on. Exhausted by our critical and constructive activities, for example, a little escapism might form part of some merited relaxation and metaphorical recharging of batteries.

By ‘hope’ I have in mind the expectation of some desirable thing, or of an increased expectation of that desirable thing. So understood, I take it that hope might be more or less rational, depending on the justification for the belief that the object of one’s hope could obtain. In this form, consolation would also, and perhaps more obviously, appear to stand in a potentially fruitful relationship with, some of, the other functions of utopia. Hope typically provides, not a temporary distraction from the readers’ travails and difficulties, but an injection of meaning and understanding into them (potentially justifying, or further justifying, the relevant expectation).

In short, utopias can offer consolation to their readers, and they often do this in two rather different ways. They can not only provide escape from, but also introduce hope into, our own flawed contemporary lives and world.

In turning to consider Morris, I want to suggest that News from Nowhere can be considered as both a product and a source of escapism. That Morris’s utopian romance is a source of escape seems clear enough. To show Hammond that he understands the way in which the inhabitants of Nowhere live in the present, Guest ventures an analogy with childhood, suggesting that he had perhaps once felt like that himself ‘when I was a happy child on a sunny holiday, and had everything I could think of’ (p. 117). Hammond is not offended by the implication that Nowhere might embody a ‘second childhood of the world’, and tells Guest that ‘[y]ou will find it a happy world to live in’ (more ominously, he continues, ‘you will be happy there – for a while’) (ibid.). His words also apply to some – although, of course, not all – of the audience. Morris’s daughter, May, suggested that some readers – perhaps those sceptical of the economic and political arrangements of Nowhere – might prefer ‘to skip all the explanations of old Hammond and read the tale as a romance, full of the joy of life, full of fun, with sly digs at the author’s self, and gibes at some of the falsities of modern life’. And Morris’s narrative certainly includes numerous episodes in which the reader is invited to escape from the trials of their own world, and share in the ordinary daily pleasures of Nowhere. I might admit to finding some escapist pleasure, not least in Morris’s evocation of the English countryside during summer, in his enjoyment of the forms of the everyday and in his description of the familiar yet transfigured upper Thames.

That the book was also a product of escape may be less obvious. However, May Morris reminds us that the late 1880s were a difficult time (not least, politically) for her father (ending with his Hammersmith branch leaving the Socialist League). During this period, the writing which filled Morris’s leisure hours – which included
News from Nowhere along with The Glittering Plain – constituted ‘his principal solace’; creating these stories, May Morris explains, enabled her father to withdraw ‘from the anxieties of the outer world’. In particular, she continues, his utopian romance was ‘partly written, one must think, to keep up his courage in a time of quarrelling of Comrades’, and was born out of the ‘spirit of discontent and longing’ described in its opening pages.29

Morris’s book also seeks to bring hope, as well as escape, to its readers. Their experience of Nowhere parallels, to an extent, that of the work’s central protagonist. We all get to visit Nowhere, and at the end of the book, we are all returned to this world. Guest himself wakes up in ‘dingy Hammersmith’ and realises that he has been ‘dreaming a dream’ (p. 181). We might well expect that, with this realisation, Guest would be plunged into despair, but surprisingly this does not happen. In the text, Morris offers two reasons why despair does not follow, both of which seem to involve claims about the knowledge (of self and society) his protagonist has gained.

The first reason concerns Guest’s compatibility with the new world which he had been conscious all along of seeing ‘from the outside’ (ibid.). Consider, for example, the observation that the historical understanding of both Hammond and Ellen had throughout functioned as ‘a blanket’ for Guest, offering him some protection against ‘the cold of this very new world’, where he was otherwise ‘stripped bare of every habitual thought and way of acting’ (p. 89). Guest appreciates, that for all the friendship and love that he had experienced, he belongs not to Nowhere but to the present world of ‘doubt and struggle’ (p. 182). Ellen’s last mournful look is an eloquent statement of the point; it had seemed to say ‘it will not do; you cannot be of us; you belong so entirely to the unhappiness of the past that our happiness even would weary you’ (p. 181).

The second reason concerns Guest’s new understanding and appreciation that another way of life is possible. The experience of visiting Nowhere has persuaded him that – in Morris’s doubly-gendered vocabulary – a world in which ‘mastery has changed into fellowship’ is not only feasible, but can also develop out of our own strivings to bring it about (ibid.). It is this knowledge which provides the (increased) expectation of the desirable future, which grounds, we might say, the rational hope. Again it is Ellen who articulates the point, wisely consoling Guest that he can ‘now be the happier for having seen us, for having added a little hope to your struggle’ (pp. 181-82).

So utopias function to change, to criticise, to clarify, to reflect context and to console. Sixth, and lastly, utopias cheer. By which I mean nothing more complicated than that
they entertain and amuse their readers. Of course, entertainment and amusement are not the same thing – we might be entertained by the dramatic narrative without being amused by it – but I will focus on the humour here.

The relationship between utopia and humour is at least as old as Thomas More’s *Utopia*. And humour has remained a central, if perhaps understudied, thread in the utopian tradition.

That pattern of being understudied is largely repeated here. Of all the functions of utopia that I discuss, I have perhaps the least to say about cheer. However, that does not reflect my judgement of the importance of this subject matter. I am certain that humour is a hugely important part both of our lives, and of the good life. I rather regret not having more to say about its character and meaning.

What I will discuss here is the humour of *News from Nowhere*. This might raise a second worry. Having already announced that I have nothing profound to say on the topic, you might now think that I reveal myself as humourless, since I will maintain that Morris’s humour here is not always successful. Of course, tastes in humour are notoriously varied – historically, culturally and personally – and, as a result, you might well discount my own judgment on this issue.

Perhaps the first point to make is that although *News from Nowhere* contains some humour, it is not as central here as in some other utopian works. It would be hard to make sense of a ‘Bowdlerised’, so to speak, version of More’s *Utopia* which removed all the humour; even those who don’t see the latter as fundamentally a work of satire (typically attacking sixteenth-century politics and scholasticism), allow that the irony, satire and other humour of the book are an essential part of it.\(^3\) It would be harder to make an equivalent claim about the centrality of humour to *News from Nowhere*.

That said, the amount of humour within the book should not be underestimated. Dick, for example, laughs: ‘loud and merrily’ at the idea of being paid for work (p. 9); at Bob the weaver’s questioning of Guest (p. 15); at people not liking to work (p. 35); at paying for clothing (p. 119); at Guest’s recognising an allusion to Dickens (p. 19); at the idea of a ‘school’ (p. 25); at the current use of the Houses of Parliament (p. 28); at the Old Grumbler (p. 131); at Guest’s surprise that pound locks are still used (p. 146); and at Guest’s reminding him of trouble and pain (p. 178). Whilst Hammond laughs: at being asked about the ‘woman question’ (p. 51); at Guest’s seeming undervaluation of housekeeping (p. 52); at Guest’s memory of education (p. 56); at being asked about the whereabouts of parliament (p. 64); at some anarchist ideas (p. 77); and at the behaviour of the reunited lovers (p. 118). Similarly Clara laughs: at Guest’s worries about finery (p. 123); at several versions of the Old Grumbler’s favourite refrain (‘you like that, do you?’) (pp. 127, 131); and at the present use of
Eton College (p. 138). And Ellen laughs: at Guest’s joke (p. 157); at her own thoughts (p. 158); at Guest’s attentions (p. 162); and at Guest’s historical knowledge (p. 169). We might also note the variety of reasons that Guest is said to laugh, namely: sometimes to join in (pp. 15, 127); sometimes to disarm (pp. 55, 70); and sometimes simply and authentically (pp. 67, 77, 131). Or, we might also note the frequent association of laughter and work: the road menders laugh as they work (p. 41); as do the women sweeping the Hall at the Hammersmith Guest-House (p. 122); those working the force barges (p. 140); the neighbours of the ‘obstinate refusers’ (p. 148); the ‘obstinate refusers’ themselves (p. 151); and the harvest party at Kelmscott church (p. 179). This is far from a complete account but the point is hopefully made; News from Nowhere contains more laughter than you might remember.

In addition, the laughter here is far from irrelevant to Morris’s thought. I have said humour is not essential to News from Nowhere, but it remains important, capturing an aspect of the ‘demand for the extinction of asceticism’ in its author’s conception of the ideal society.31 ‘Civilisation’, Morris held, would have us ashamed of our animal natures, and yet these are central to our happiness. There is no shame, he insists, in the pleasurable exercise of our energies, and the enjoyment of the rest that such exercise makes necessary; we should not feel the least degradation ‘in being amorous, or merry, or hungry, or sleepy’.32

Notwithstanding the quantity, and import, of the laughter inside News from Nowhere, I do not find all the attempts at amusing the reader outside of the text to be successful. Part of the problem here is a heavy-handedness which perhaps reflects the author’s lack of confidence. I offer three examples. The first concerns the repetitious treatment of the absence of payment for personal services and goods, first introduced when Guest attempts to offer a gratuity to Dick for rowing him out into the Thames. We are told variously that Dick is confused by being asked ‘How much?’; that Guest worries he is offering to pay a wealthy person; that Dick is puzzled (not offended) by the coins; that Dick has heard of the custom, but that it is not used here; that Dick thinks it would be inconvenient to be paid; that Dick laughs at the very idea; that Guest doubts Dick’s sanity; and so on (p. 9). The repetition here is not only unnecessary to convey the idea, it also kills the potential humour of the incident. The second example, which follows something of the same pattern, concerns the occasion when Dick steps in to prevent Henry Johnson interrogating Guest about his origins and appearance. We are told that Johnson is also known as ‘Boffin’; that Boffin dresses showily; that Guest is surprised by the familiar tone of Dick’s address to ‘such a dignified-looking personage’; that Boffin works as a dustman; and that his nickname is shared with a Dickens character (p. 19). Whatever possibilities for humour there might have been in a gentle allusion to Our Mutual Friend (1865), little survives the
lengthy and repetitive explanation. The third example introduces a more political thread, but also exhibits something of the same problem. Morris’s anti-parliamentarian and abstentionist comrades in the Socialist League and elsewhere were presumably amused by the uses to which the Houses of Parliament were put in Nowhere; namely, as a subsidiary market and ‘a storage place for manure’ (p. 28). However, we might doubt whether most readers’ amusement is much increased by being reminded of this scatological joke on a further four occasions (pp. 36, 64, 99, 139).

Which is not to say that I find no humour in News from Nowhere. I offer two brief examples. The first is Guest’s remark, dismissed by himself as scarcely a good joke, that despite not being the best rower he might ‘manage to do a little more with my sculling than merely keeping the boat from drifting down stream’ (p. 157). The second is an observation from the very beginning of the book, and before Guest has left the contemporary world, about the depressing political meeting that he has just attended. We are told that since the Socialist League’s meeting was attended by six people, there were ‘consequently’ six factions of the party represented (p. 3). It seems to me that these more successful moments of humour are made more confidently, and more in passing, as well as having an element of self-deprecation.

XI

I have suggested here that utopias have six main functions. That is, that they typically work to construct, criticise, context-reflect, clarify, console and cheer. In each case, I have sought to say something about the relevant function, before elucidating and illustrating it with examples from News from Nowhere. In these brief concluding remarks, I will comment on the status of these six functions, and offer a final observation about Morris.

Since this list of functions is open to misunderstandings, a little final attempt at clarification might be helpful. First, we know that this is not a list of conditions for being a utopia – since utopia here is not defined by its function – but nor is it a list of functions that all utopias have. Unlike News from Nowhere, some utopias might only do some of these things (indeed, some might conceivably do none of them). Second, this is not a list of functions that were intended by particular utopian authors. I am happy to allow that these depictions of the ideal society might have uses that were never considered by their creators. Third, whilst I do not deny that there might be tensions between (different elaborations of) these different functions, I cannot see any necessary conflicts here. (As a possible ‘tension’ consider the suggestion that clarificatory ambitions require isolating variables by abstraction, whilst construction, perhaps especially in its motivational dimensions, requires a lot of overlapping detail). Fourth,
it seems likely that different people might be interested in utopias for different reasons. For instance: historians might be especially interested in the ways in which utopias reflect their author’s historical context; political theorists are perhaps more likely to attend to the critical and clarificatory functions of utopian thought experiments; radicals are perhaps more likely to be attracted to their potential for changing the world; and the human beings amongst us might enjoy without embarrassment the consolation and cheer that utopias also provide. Fifth, and finally, I do not insist that this is a complete list of functions. Indeed, I am open to further suggestions for additional functions; although, for reasons that will already be apparent, I would prefer any such suggestions to begin with the letter ‘c’.

I conclude with an observation about Morris. If this article reads as an account of the functions of utopia with some examples from Morris’s romance tacked on, then I will have failed to convey something of importance. My ambition here was not to impose a framework on a text which is indifferent (or deeply resistant) to it, but rather to capture some of the things that Morris, as a knowledgeable and reflective utopian writer, is doing in this work. I have written elsewhere about some of his other connections with the utopian tradition. Here, I have sought to suggest that it is precisely the depth and sophistication of Morris’s engagement with utopianism that makes News from Nowhere such a good vantage-point from which to raise these questions about the function of utopia.

NOTES
1. For helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article, I would like to thank Owen Holland and Lucinda Rumsey.
3. Ernst Bloch’s work resists easy summary, but his magnum opus offering a critical history of the utopian impulse is The Principle of Hope, trans. by Neville Place, Stephen Place and Paul Knight, 3 vols (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986). Bloch’s not entirely persuasive discussion of News from Nowhere can be found in II, pp. 613-15. For an introduction to his work, see Vincent Geoghegan, Ernst Bloch (London: Routledge, 1995).
5. I make no great claim to originality here. For example, two and a half of the items on my list are mentioned, albeit in the context of definition, in Levitas, p. 208. My discussion might be seen as adding structure and detail to an account of individual functions which I am surely not the first to notice.
9. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 39.
23. Meier, p. 239.
26. Ibid., p. 311.
28. Ibid., I, p. 505.
29. Ibid., I, p. 503.
32. Ibid., II, p. 457.
33. See my ‘Introduction’ to Leopold, p. xxiii ff.
A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament

David Mabb

A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament is an Arts Catalyst Nuclear Culture Commission. It was first exhibited as part of ‘Material Nuclear Culture’ at KARST, Plymouth, UK, between 17 June and 14 August 2016, and as part of ‘Perpetual Uncertainty: Contemporary Art in the Nuclear Anthropocene’ at the Bildmuseet, Umeå, Sweden, between 2 October 2016 and 16 April 2017, both curated by Ele Carpenter.

A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament is an installation which combines William Morris fabrics with anti-nuclear symbols and slogans. It was made in response to a visit to HMS Courageous, a 285-foot, nuclear-powered submarine decorated with William Morris Tudor Rose fabric. The Courageous saw service in the British Royal Navy for about two decades starting in the early 1970s. The vessel was decommissioned during 1992 after participating in the Falklands War of 1982, and it is now laid up at Devonport naval dockyard in Plymouth, where you can visit free of charge, provided you book in advance, and bring your passport for reasons of ‘security’. Now a museum, the submarine floats in a single dock with thirteen other decommissioned nuclear-powered submarines, awaiting the day when it will be dismantled by the Ministry of Defence in a sort of submarine mortuary.

You climb aboard down a steep ladder just in front of the conning tower and come straight into the officers’ wardroom. All the seat covers and back rests are covered in Rose fabric. The seats go half way round the space: there is a lot of it, not just the odd bit here and there. There are Rose curtains in the officers’ bunk spaces and Rose covers on some of their mattresses. There is even a Rose cover on one of the seats that the sailors used to ‘drive’ the submarine. It covers every single upholstered surface; seats, chairs, even beer barrels. At least in this part of the submarine – the officers’ and senior ratings’ quarters – the fabric is everywhere. But it becomes clear on the tour of the rest of the submarine how hierarchical the use of the fabric is:
there are no Morris fabrics for the ratings who slept in between the armed torpedoes. Lastly, as you exit the submarine you see the future, in the form of a model of the proposed Trident submarine replacement.

The Ministry of Defence commissioned furnishing fabric from Sanderson, who own the Morris and Co. brand, to supply William Morris Tudor Rose for its nuclear submarines for thirty years, from the 1960s through to the late 1990s, including the Vanguard Class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines which are equipped with Trident nuclear-armed missiles. It is these submarines that employ both nuclear weapons and nuclear energy technology that embody all the fears of atomic apocalypse, accidents and radioactive contamination.

To fit a William Morris fabric in these submarines seems in many ways profoundly contradictory given Morris’s politics. During the 1880s Morris became highly critical of Britain’s imperialist ambitions, and became an active campaigning communist, speaking at demonstrations and rallies across the country. He participated in the founding of Britain’s first socialist organisations and wrote many socialist pamphlets, as well as writing News from Nowhere, a utopian romance first serialised in Commonweal, a revolutionary communist newspaper. Morris thought that interior design had a fundamental role to play in the transformation of everyday life. This essentially political motivation, a commitment to the radical potential of design, lay behind much of his work as a designer and craftsman, and the setting up of Morris and Co. Morris’s designs for fabric and wallpaper are highly schematised representations of nature, where it is always summer and never winter; the plants are always in leaf, often flowering, with their fruits available in abundance, ripe for picking and with no human labour in sight. This can be seen as a form of utopian vision. Rose, also a densely schematised design with roses, rose hips, birds, leaves and briars complete with sharp-looking thorns, was originally designed by Morris and printed onto cotton and linen in 1883. The original design is now owned by the Victoria and Albert Museum. The pattern is one of only three printed textile patterns in which Morris depicted birds; the others are Strawberry Thief and Bird and Anemone. For the Ministry of Defence, the pattern was reproduced by Sanderson as a woven furnishing fabric. It is a matter of conjecture as to why Rose was commissioned, as opposed to any other Morris pattern, or any other pattern at all. But they did commission it, and that decision, strange as it is, merits attention. We must ask: what does it mean to see one of Morris’s designs used in the nuclear submarines of the Royal Navy?

The interior space of a submarine is a highly compact metal environment. The Rose fabric is the only point where nature, however stylised, is represented on any significant scale and the only point where fabric is used to soften the experience of living inside the machine. It offers a respite, where domesticity, homeliness, comfort
and normality are introduced: the *Rose* fabric was nicknamed the ‘Birdie’ fabric by submariners. It might also be read as a representation of Britishness, bringing a form of cultural identity into the submarine. However, the use of the fabric is class-based. As mentioned earlier, the fabric is not used in areas where ratings eat, sleep and work, but only in the officers’ and senior ratings’ mess.

The class and economic basis of these uses of Morris’s fabrics goes back to the beginnings of Morris and Co. where Morris’s works were always made for the rich. Morris’s insistence on quality and beauty meant that Morris and Co. products were well beyond the means of nineteenth-century workers. This was something about which Morris was acutely aware in his engagement with his customers, hence his well-known tirade about ‘ministering to the swinish luxury of the rich’. He was one of the most sophisticated theorists of the aesthetic impoverishment of the working class, and he recognised that there was no solution to this dilemma within capitalism. The only solution possible, for Morris, was the dismantling of the capitalist mode of production, and the development of communism.

In response to the uses of *Rose* by the Royal Navy, I have placed the fabric in another nuclear context, that of anti-nuclear protest. This transition is prompted by the work of British Marxist historian E.P. Thompson. Thompson wrote the political biography *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, initially published in 1955, but updated and republished in 1977 when he was a leading intellectual in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. He was also the author of the pamphlet *Protest and Survive* (1980), a parody on the government leaflet *Protect and Survive* (1976), a booklet that claimed to tell you how to make your home and family safe in the event of a nuclear attack.
In the installation *A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament*, anti-nuclear protest signs, quotes, slogans and symbols are painted onto the backs of fifteen old projection screens (not unlike the ones found in officers’ wardrooms on nuclear-powered submarines) where the screen has been replaced with William Morris fabric. By making the paintings on screens, a number of transformations occur. For a start, the works become three-dimensional, acquiring a front and a back. Some of the fronts are plain William Morris fabrics, but most have been painted black or occasionally yellow – colours often appropriated by protest banners from radiation warning signs.

By contrast, on the backs of the screens, anti-nuclear protest slogans and signs are painted onto Morris fabrics, whilst allowing elements of the Morris pattern to poke or surface through. Seen from the back, it is not exactly clear what the viewer is looking at: the protest images look didactic, like a group of projected lectures which are telling the viewer about something. But because Morris’s designs surface through the painted anti-nuclear images, they produce an unstable picture space that is not fixed, where a Morris pattern and the painted image neither merge nor separate. On the screen, where images would normally be ephemeral, requiring projected light, they are now painted, fixed, stuck in time.

![Figure 2: Senior Ratings Mess with William Morris Tudor Rose fabric seat covers, HMS Courageous. Photo: Devonport Naval Heritage](image-url)
The slogans and symbols carry with them a history of struggle, but might now appear to be clichés. Perhaps the Morris fabrics, too, in their contemporary mass-produced form, can seem overly familiar and drained of meaning. Bringing the slogans and signs into the gallery might be seen as a way of rendering them mute, but, at the same time, the slogans resonate, and in the new context of being ‘interlaced’ with the Morris fabrics there is the possibility of reading them afresh. Moreover, the dialogue works both ways: the slogans and symbols cry out, ‘charging up’ and revivifying the political content of the Morris fabrics for a new era.

The Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament reconceptualises what painting might be as part of a political struggle for a nuclear-free world. The Memorial also takes back painting from what John Roberts calls ‘its own retarded conditions of conceptualisation’, where painting ‘has no purchase as social technique and, as such has an attenuated relationship to the extra-artistic real’. The thin-legged and crooked screens in a group look like a demonstration or protest march, with placards jostling or clustering in solidarity. They take back Morris’s fabrics from their appropriation by the Ministry of Defence and reappropriate them for ongoing anti-nuclear protest.

Britain’s Conservative government has, despite opposition, decided to go ahead with the commissioning of a new generation of Trident nuclear submarines armed with up to twelve nuclear missiles with multiple warheads, all many times more powerful than those used at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, at a cost of about £250bn. According to CND, ‘[t]his money would be enough to improve the NHS by building 120 state of the art hospitals and employing 150,000 new nurses, build 3 million affordable homes, install solar panels in every home in the UK or pay the tuition fees for 8 million students’. The British government also recently confirmed that it is going to proceed with the French- and Chinese-financed Hinkley Point C, the first nuclear power station to be built in Britain for two decades. The Memorial is only provisional and it will need to be added to in the near future.

NOTES

Figure 3: David Mabb, A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament, acrylic paint, William Morris fabrics, fabrics/projection screens with tripods. KARST, Plymouth 2016. Photo: Dom Moore.

Figure 4: David Mabb, A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament, acrylic paint, William Morris fabrics, fabrics/projection screens with tripods. KARST, Plymouth 2016. Photo: Dom Moore.
Figure 5: David Mabb, *A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament*, acrylic paint, William Morris fabrics, fabrics/projection screens with tripods. KARST, Plymouth 2016. Photo: Dom Moore.

Figure 6: David Mabb, *A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament*, acrylic paint, William Morris fabrics, fabrics/projection screens with tripods. KARST, Plymouth 2016. Photo: Dom Moore.
Figure 7: David Mabb, *A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament*, acrylic paint, William Morris fabrics, fabrics/projection screens with tripods. KARST, Plymouth 2016. Photo: Dom Moore.

Figure 8: David Mabb, *A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament*, acrylic paint, William Morris fabrics, fabrics/projection screens with tripods. KARST, Plymouth 2016. Photo: Dom Moore.
Figure 9: David Mabb, *A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament*, acrylic paint, William Morris fabrics, fabrics/projection screens with tripods. KARST, Plymouth 2016. Photo: Dom Moore.

Figure 10: David Mabb. *A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament*. Acrylic paint, William Morris fabrics, fabrics/projection screens with tripods. KARST, Plymouth 2016. Photo: David Mabb.
Figure 11: David Mabb, A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament, acrylic paint, William Morris fabrics, fabrics/projection screens with tripods. KARST, Plymouth 2016. Photo: David Mabb
Figure 12: David Mabb, *A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament*, acrylic paint, William Morris fabrics, fabrics/projection screens with tripods. KARST, Plymouth 2016. Photo: David Mabb.

Figure 14: David Mabb, A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament, seat, *Tudor Rose*, William Morris *Tudor Rose* fabric, zip, foam, plinth, 2016. Photo: David Mabb.
In 1888 Morris hired a French teacher at Kelmscott House to prepare himself and other members of the Socialist League for a forthcoming congress in France. He wrote to his wife Jane: ‘Did I tell you there is to be a Socialist Congress in Paris this summer? I suppose I shall have to go: in which [case] I ought to try to improve my French – don’t you think my dear?’¹ Among those who attended the classes were May Morris, W. B. Yeats, Emery Walker and Henry Halliday Sparling, secretary of the League. Other pupils included men whom Yeats referred to as ‘certain young Socialists […] more or less educated workmen, rough of speech and manner, with a conviction to meet every turn’.² The teacher was Cécile Desroches who, with her mother Jeanne, was also a member of the League. One of Yeats’s biographers notes that the class was started because Morris wanted to find employment for a needy old Frenchwoman.³ We should not take this comment at face value, however. Desroches, like Morris, was fifty-four at this point and, furthermore, while his kindness, patience and humanity are well-documented, the employment of Desroches represents far more than an act of charity on his part.

Desroches’s mother was Jeanne Deroin, the renowned socialist, co-founder of the French feminist press and dynamic campaigner who had fought for women’s rights in France since 1830, and by this time the only surviving member of the group of ‘women of 1848’.⁴ She and her children had fled to Britain during 1852 after the disastrous defeat of the Provisional Government, and the crushing of the June Revolution in Paris, which had ushered in a prolonged period of severe state censorship and the suppression of political dissent. This crackdown was soon followed by Napoleon III’s coup d’état. Deroin and her family were among approximately nine thousand political refugees who arrived in Britain and the Channel Islands following the failed European revolutions of 1848.

Through the Social Democratic Federation, and subsequently the Socialist...
League, Morris came to know many international anarchists and socialists. By the 1890s, however, many had passed away and their archives were being lost or destroyed while others have since been forgotten about. Overlooked throughout most of the twentieth century, Deroin’s story before her exile is now better known, particularly in France and the United States, thanks to the upsurge in women’s history during the past thirty years. Accordingly, her role as one of the leaders of the French women’s movement of 1848, and as a world pioneer in her campaign for votes for women during the Second Republic, is now recognised. Yet little documentation remains of her life or that of her family following their flight to Britain where it is often assumed that she not only sank into poverty, but total oblivion, and that her voice was completely silenced. Sparse extant sources and newly discovered archival material provide evidence of her links, and those of her daughter, with the League and with Morris. But the lack of any mention of their membership to date throws light on the limitations of the historiography of the League, and the understatem ent of the role of women within it.

The aim of this article is to underline the political continuity created by the presence of these early socialists in the resurgent movement of the 1880s. The League’s connection with utopian socialism is one that I argue Morris both recognised and valued. Through biographical accounts, I also aim to highlight the differences between the early French and British women’s movements of the 1830s, as well as the divergence between utopian socialism and the feminism of the late nineteenth century.

Before her exile to Britain, Deroin was one of a small but significant group of women in the 1830s, many of whom were in the needle trades of Paris, who found that the ideas of the French utopian socialists offered a route to feminist consciousness. Certain isolated individuals within the French Revolution of 1789 had already given a voice to the women’s movement, but its first organised theories emerged with the Saint-Simonian movement during the late 1820s, viewed as the foundation of French romantic socialism. Charles Fourier was the first to articulate the idea that the amelioration of the state of society depended on that of women in his *Théorie des Quatre Mouvements et des Destinées Générales* (1808). Both Henri de Saint-Simon and Fourier generated an abundance of feminist affirmations and wider societal aspirations that linked the state of society with the status of women. A distinct parallel, reinforced by the writings of Flora Tristan, was thus acknowledged between the struggle for women’s rights and the cause of the working class as a whole. The theories of Saint-Simon and Fourier were part of a wider international movement, however, which included the ideas of Etienne Cabet, the German Wilhelm Weitling, and, in Britain, Robert Owen, who captured the imaginations of thousands of women for the next few decades with his secular dream of a New Moral World of class and sexual equality.
Significantly for Deroin and most of her fellow workers, despite their fervent criticisms of the Church and organised religion, society had to have God at its centre. While they sought to reorganise society along cooperative lines like Owen, a divine core was deemed essential, and the tone of Deroin’s feminism always remained spiritual. Like many early socialists she believed that the world was guided by an omniscient spiritual force, and that the cause of women would lead to the transformation of the world. This conception of theology maintained that a true reading of the Bible revealed radical democratic socialism, abolitionism and feminism. In Britain, the Owenite movement offered a similar but nonspiritual route, promising an Eden of socialist hope by advocating communities of mutual association and promoting ‘perfect equality and perfect freedom’ to both men and women at every social level.

Despite often differing in opinion, particularly with regard to their views on spirituality and Christianity, Fourierists, Saint-Simonians and Owenites shared considerable common ground, generating a strong transnational exchange of ideas. Saint-Simonian ‘missionaries’ first arrived in Britain in 1833 where they directed their propaganda to both women and workers. Consequently, Owenites in Britain and the United States began to be more open to early European concepts of socialism. It was Marx, together with Engels and their followers, who later dubbed them all ‘utopian socialists’, dismissing their ideas as eccentric, irrelevant and unscientific. After 1850, the term was thus used derogatorily, whereby utopianism was seen as ‘bad’ in contrast to Marx’s own ‘good’ brand of ‘scientific socialism’; a socialism that had no more need for utopias. Nevertheless, before 1848, the writings of these visionary thinkers had an undeniable influence on both Marx and Engels. When Marx planned his ‘Library of the best foreign socialist writers’ in March 1845, it included the works of Fourier, Saint-Simon, Cabet, Considérant and Gay. I argue that these figures also influenced Morris, who learnt about them through the writings of John Stuart Mill. A connection can thus be established between the ideas of the French romantic socialists, the Owenites and the socialism of the 1880s, specifically with regard to concepts of fellowship, association and the communitarian tradition.

Born in 1805 to humble working-class parents, Deroin was self-educated. Beginning life as a seamstress, by 1832 she was working as a journalist. During the same year she married the engineer and fellow Saint-Simonian Antoine Ulysse Desroches, with whom she had three children. An ardent advocate for universal education, she subsequently qualified as a primary school teacher. Throughout her life she promoted universal women’s rights, including suffrage, legal protection from husbands’ brutality towards their wives and children, mothers’ rights over their own children, state support for female higher education and job-training to foster economic
independence. One of her earlier contentions was that women should retain their maiden names after marriage. Her first links with Britain began when, with fellow journalist Pauline Roland, she worked with two other young seamstresses, Désirée Véret and Marie-Reine Guindorf, soon to be joined by Suzanne Voilquin, together editing the first feminist journal written entirely by women, *La Femme Libre* (later the *Tribune des Femmes*). Véret, the founder of the journal, had lived in Britain for four years as a follower of Owen, making contact with British Owenites and later marrying fellow-Owenite Jules Gay. During this period Véret and Gay liaised between Owenites, Saint-Simonians and Fourierists. While working for the *Tribune*, Deroin also met Irish Owenite Anna Wheeler, who translated the works of the French utopian socialists into English for Owen’s *Crisis*, as well as Anne Knight, the English Chartist and anti-slavery activist. This group of women demonstrated a high degree of mobility for the time, and an international women’s movement thus began to develop in a limited form in Paris before 1848.

For Deroin and her peers, the revolution of February 1848 temporarily brought renewed hope that the democratic and social ideals of the new regime would usher in economic and political benefits for women. The earlier French feminist movement regained momentum, and, at the age of forty-three, Deroin reemerged as a political activist. With fellow journalists Voilquin, Véret (now Gay) and others, she contributed to the first daily feminist newspaper *La Voix des Femmes*. This new socialist newspaper, aimed at all women, had a wider range of contributors and a wider circulation, even reaching Britain where its influence on Mill is said to have encouraged him to urge his future wife Harriet Taylor to finish her essay on feminism. Convinced that the right to work and the right to vote were indivisibly linked, Deroin defiantly but unsuccessfully stood for a seat in the legislature in the election of May 1849, shocked at the lack of support from her fellow socialists. The same year she initiated a federation of workers’ associations, outlining the plan in her own new paper boldly named *La Politique des Femmes*, soon forced to change its name to *l’Opinion des Femmes* as women were now forbidden to engage in politics. After the June Days, the government reinstituted security bonds for publishers in an attempt to control political opposition and, unable to raise the imposed bond, her newspaper folded. As co-founder of the *club des clubs* she was subsequently arrested and sentenced to six months in Saint-Lazare Prison with Roland for her role in an illegal *clubbiste* meeting.

Following Deroin’s release from prison, the group of women journalists involved in the early feminist press became isolated and dispersed. Roland, who had been transported to a penal colony in Algeria, died immediately following her return to France during 1853. With her newspaper shut down and most of her associates in exile, Deroin fled to London to avoid deportation, arriving in August 1852 with her
two younger children: Caroline, aged ten, and Jules, aged seven, who suffered from hydrocephalus. Her husband, who had developed a serious mental illness, then contracted typhoid fever, and died before he could join her. A year later her elder daughter Cécile joined her mother at the age of nineteen when she had finished her education. Cécile Desroches never married, remaining a constant support to her mother and helping to look after her invalid brother until his death in 1887. Deroin’s younger daughter Caroline married an Italian hairdresser in London, Henrico Biagio Righetti, with whom she had five children.

At the time of their arrival in Britain, Deroin’s name was not completely unknown. The Morning Chronicle had published news of ‘a female socialist banquet held on Christmas Day 1848 attended by Pierre Leroux […] at which Mme Desroches [Deroin] proposed a toast to the “coming of the rule of Christ on earth” in which socialism was enjoined in the name of Christ’. Many papers later published articles reporting her candidacy for the National Assembly, her electoral address, her role as a clubbiste and her subsequent arrest and imprisonment with Roland. Deroin and Roland’s letters written from prison, and published in the Northern Star, were read out at the 1850 National Women’s Rights Convention in Massachusetts. Lucretia Mott, the American women’s rights activist, abolitionist and religious reformer, and Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman doctor on the English Medical Register, at the time living in New York, were subsequently appointed to correspond with them in prison.

Once in Britain, most refugees first headed for Soho, already a centre of British and European radicalism, but Deroin and her family soon found lodgings near the new railway yards around Hammersmith. While they moved several times over the next forty years, they never lived more than a mile from Kelmscott House. Constantly short of money, Deroin and her daughters were forced throughout their lives to rely on the extra income provided by needlework. Her financial hardships were later recorded in her letters to her friend Léon Richer in Paris, to whom she constantly apologised for being unable to pay the subscriptions for the radical papers he sent her, though he continued to send her free copies. Like Morris, Deroin was always convinced that education was the key to social progress, and intermittently ran small schools for the children of French émigrés from her various lodgings aided by her own children, but which ran at a loss. She also continued to edit a new yearly journal begun just before she left Paris, L’Almanach des Femmes. Three issues were published between 1851 and 1854, with the second two being published in London in French and English by the well-known Chartist publisher, James Watson. While a distinct utopian, feminist voice was silenced in France in 1852, it thus revived fleetingly in London.

Produced predominantly for women, the Almanach benefited from fresh
connections forced by emigration. Participants in Deroin’s previous journalistic enterprises, including Knight, formed a new international network of radical feminist journalists, both male and female, seeing themselves at the head of a universal movement for all, advocating peace, anti-slavery and the abolition of the death penalty.²² Articles from it were republished in G. J. Holyoake’s Reasoner, and in the American feminist journal Une.²³ It was also reviewed by Reynolds’s Newspaper and the Athenaeum.²⁴ Notwithstanding their efforts, without funds and with few sales, no further issues appeared after 1854. While remaining a politically active member of the exile community, Deroin found herself no longer part of a feminist network, and henceforth her voice became increasingly isolated.

Self-proclaimed feminists like Deroin and her group of fellow journalists were a small minority, however. They were generally considered eccentric, and their lives deviated from the feminine norm, remaining until recently hidden from history. However, a few names did appear in various articles and feminist histories written in France between the 1880s and the early twentieth century.²⁵ Deroin’s life in Paris was recounted in several articles in the Englishwoman’s Review by the editor, Caroline Ashurst Biggs.²⁶ The same year, the American journalist and supporter of the women’s movement, Theodore Stanton, son of the American feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, with whom Deroin corresponded in later life, also briefly recorded Deroin’s life.²⁷

Figure 1: The Socialist League, Hammersmith Branch, in the garden of Kelmscott House, July 1888. Jeanne Deroin (Mme Desroches) and Cécile Desroches are seated in the front row second and third from the right. Mrs Clara Watt is seated sixth from the right between May and Jenny Morris. Hammersmith Socialist League, c. 1884 (Credit: Victoria and Albert Museum, London)
Adrien Ranvier, son of the Communard Gabriel Ranvier, who had known Deroin in London, wrote one of the first biographical articles in 1895 commemorating her achievements, but claimed incorrectly that she carried on no political action subsequent to 1855.28

In fact Deroin became a member of most major transnational societies formed in London over the next forty years. Although by this time many fellow socialists did not share her utopian views, she earned a reputation as a hard-working and well-respected member of the French community. In 1855, Jules Troubat, a democrat visiting from France, recounted how he came to know ‘a saintly family, that of citizen Jeanne Deroin, a heroic and respectable woman, for whom work and wakefulness had replaced meal times and sleep’.29 Nevertheless, she was increasingly viewed by many within the exile political community as an irritating lone voice, haranguing predominately male associations for ignoring their statutes regarding gender equality. She even courageously but unsuccessfully demanded to join the all-male, secular, radical masonic lodge in London, the Loge des Philadelphes. This was not out of conviction, she later claimed, but for the same reason that she had put forward her candidacy in the 1849 election; because in this male world, she felt she had ‘to knock on every door’.30

In 1856 she joined the ‘International Association’, the forerunner of the First International. Gender equality had been a statute from its inception, something regularly reaffirmed in later manifestos, but not all members were in favour.31 Deroin took the floor at a convention in September 1857 demanding that the association respect its statutes and support the political and social emancipation of women. She pointed out that while the revolution had liberated slaves it had forgotten women.32 Her speech provoked intense disapproval as the members of the German Workers’ Educational Society opposed the emancipation of women.33 When certain individuals proposed to elect women to the central committee, it ‘evoked great opposition’, since most felt that ‘the time was not yet ripe for women’.34 According to the émigré Andreas Scherzer, this was the reason for the association’s eventual split in 1859.35 While the ‘O’Brienites and Cabetists’ favoured the social and political involvement of women, the Marxist faction considered their views to be utopian folly.36

Despite the cessation of her Almanachs, Deroin continued to contribute articles to other French publications.37 In 1857 she set up the ‘Society for the promotion of solidarity of Socialist Women’, aimed at lending mutual assistance for education and work based at the headquarters of the charitable Société fraternelle at 8 Church Street, Soho.38 She also became secretary of Le Projet d’Assurance Mutuelle pour le Travail et le Prêt fraternel, the programme of which stated that ‘it is the right and the duty of socialist women to unite, to educate each other and to […] participate in the struggle for social
emancipation’. No trace of this initiative has been found, possibly having succumbed to fierce opposition from members of the International Association. Eventually, in 1859, she was offered amnesty together with a small pension from the French government, but chose to remain in Britain. A few years later her name appears in the Minute Book of the International Workingmen’s Association: the First International. Again, the statutes clearly stated that ‘FEMALES are eligible as members’. On 3 October 1865, at a meeting of the General Council, a letter addressed to the conference was read out from a ‘Madame Jeanne Deroin by the President in the chair, George Odger’. The letter has since been lost, but it is likely that she was again reminding the committee to honour its statutes regarding gender equality.

When the next wave of French refugees from the Commune arrived in London in 1871, she and other ‘forty-eighters’ who had remained were well placed to welcome and support the three thousand and five hundred Communard refugees who landed on Britain’s shores destitute and shaken from the terrible events in Paris. She soon opened a new school for the children of impoverished exiled Communards charging very low fees and often receiving no payments from those who could not afford to pay. Despite now receiving a pension, life remained a financial struggle. The American feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote in her diary on 15 December 1882 that she had visited Deroin aged seventy-seven, in London, and found ‘a little, dried-up woman, though her face beams with intelligence [living] in great poverty and obscurity in Shepherd’s Bush’. In July 1886, her son Jules was admitted to Grove Hall Lunatic Asylum, probably because his hydrocephalus had deteriorated to a point where she and her daughter could no longer look after him. He died on 2 April 1887. The two women now found themselves with more free time to devote to politics outside the home together. They were proposed for election as members of the Socialist League on 25 July 1886, and elected on 2 August.

In the second half of the twentieth century various commentators attempted to place Morris firmly in the Marxist tradition. E.P. Thompson, however, argues that many of his ideas did not accord with the dominant reforming tendencies. Looking back on his decision to join Democratic Federation in 1883, Morris admitted that ‘I was blankly ignorant of economics; I had never so much as [...] heard of [...] Karl Marx’. He wrote that he had, however, read something of Robert Owen whom he ‘praised immensely’, and also the French Utopian Socialists. Miguel Abensour, in his discussion of *News from Nowhere* remarks that Morris’s novel belonged to a new utopian spirit that arose in the wake of the three great ‘changes of course’ effected by Claude Henri Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier and Robert Owen at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Bernard Shaw had earlier maintained that Morris’s conversion to socialism was inspired by Fourier through the writings of Mill, an
influence which he also claimed ‘is discernable in News From Nowhere’. 49 Morris himself noted that it was reading Mill’s posthumous papers that ‘put the finishing touch to my conversion to Socialism’. 50

While paradoxically it may have been Mill’s critique of socialism that finally convinced Morris to become a socialist, Morris’s thoughts clearly owe a great deal to his reading of Mill, who in turn professed that he had been ‘touched by the philosophic radicals of the 1820s’. 51 Mill confirmed that he had partially learnt his own views on sexual equality ‘from the thoughts awakened […] by the speculations of the Saint-Simonians’, and concluded that ‘the Saint-Simonians in common with Owen and Fourier have entitled themselves to the grateful remembrance of future generations’. 52 Mill admired the philosophical individualism advocated by Fourier, a concept that also later inspired Morris who believed that socialism should allow for different lives and modes of thought. 53 Morris described those systems that subordinated the imaginative utopian faculties as ‘hum bug’ and ‘utilitarian sham socialism’. 54 He acknowledged that his own conception of ‘attractive labour’ as a definition of non-alienated labour was indeed inspired by Fourier’s theory of pleasurable labour; acknowledging that ‘his [Fourier’s] doctrine […] is one which Socialism can by no means do without’. 55

Between 1886 and 1888, Morris co-wrote a series of brief chapters for Commonweal with Ernest Belfort Bax entitled ‘Socialism from the Root Up’. Chapter Thirteen addresses ‘The Utopists: Owen, Saint Simon, and Fourier’. Although heavily borrowed from Mill’s writings, the ‘scientific’ and ‘practical’ views of both Bax and Engels are clearly apparent as the shortcomings of these socialist fathers are discussed. Chapter Fourteen alludes to the ‘unpractical and non-political tendency’ of the teachings of another utopian socialist, feminist and intimate friend of Deroin: Pierre Leroux. 56 Nevertheless, the debt owed to these pioneers of socialism is firmly acknowledged. Although critical of Owen’s utopianism, Saint-Simon’s mysticism and Fourier’s dogmatism, the article mentions that these are ‘three most remarkable men, born within a few years of each other, whose aspirations have done a very great deal to further the progress of Socialism’. 57 Unsurprisingly, there is no mention of ‘the perfect equality of men and women’ essential to utopian socialism, and so strongly endorsed by Mill. This is likely to have been a deliberate omission on the part of the misogynistic Bax. Despite being a collaborator and close friend, Bax was nonetheless critical of Morris’s views, conceding that while his ‘socialist utopia’ in News from Nowhere was ‘the most successful, from the literary point of view’, it remained ‘unproductive of any practical result’. 58 Engels meanwhile categorically dismissed Morris as a ‘sentimental socialist’. 59

Deroin professed in 1886 that she had never attached herself to any specific
utopian socialist school, but she had nevertheless lived and worked among their most devoted disciples. Although her membership of the League may have meant little to Bax, Morris would have valued her presence as the last living link to this pre-Marxist French utopian tradition fundamental to the development of socialism. Furthermore, Deroin was not the only member of the League with roots in utopian socialism. E. T. Craig had been the steward at the Owenite agricultural community at Ralahine in County Clare between 1830 and 1833, and was later a founding member of the Hammersmith branch of the SDF before joining the League. But while Thompson notes Craig’s utopian socialist background, and his significance as a link between first-generation Owenism and the League, he makes no mention of Deroin or Desroches. Nor is there any mention elsewhere of their membership. Minutes show that the French class was in fact planned at a meeting of the League on 15 April 1888 where Desroches, as a member, ‘promised to conduct a class in French’, and where ‘the following gave their names as members and Catterson-Smith agreed to act as secretary: W. Morris, Sparling, May Morris, Howe, Chamberlain, Fry, Tarleton, E. Walker, Mrs Tochatti, Mrs Grove, Catterson-Smith, Joseph Smith, W. Yeats, Beasley’.

The classes began officially in September 1888, running every Friday evening from eight to nine o’clock. They were clearly a success, being regularly advertised in the ‘Lecture Diary’ of *Commonweal* from 22 January 1889 until April 1891, apart from breaks for the summer season. The fees were ‘quite nominal’ and members of the League were ‘invited to join’. Yeats noted that ‘a French class was started in the old coach-house for certain young Socialists who planned a tour in France, and I joined it, and was for some time a model student constantly encouraged by the compliments of the old French mistress’. He recounted:

I have been twice at the French class at Morrices [sic]. A queer jumble it is of all sorts of scholars from Sparling who doesn’t know a word of French to one or two quite instructed. William Morris himself has not joined us yet but may be expected next time or next after. It is rather amusing every one trying to talk French whether they know any or not.

After discussing the classes at home, Yeats’s sisters, Lily and Lolly, for whom such opportunities would have been rare, became interested in joining. Yeats was persuaded by his father to take them, but was anxious about having his sisters in the class. He noted: ‘[h]ow could I pretend to be industrious, and even carry dramatisation to the point of learning my lessons when my sisters were there and knew that I was nothing of the kind?’ Lolly wrote in her diary:
Went to French […] Willie’s dramatic intence [sic] way of saying his french with his voice raised to telling distinctness & every pronounciation [sic] wrong as usual, seemed to amuse Mr. Sparling more than ever, he simply doubled up when Willie commenced. Willie of course divided it up into any amount of full stops where there were not any so Madame said “Mr Yagtes you don’t read poetry like that do you.” “Yes he does Yes he does” volunteered Mr. Sparling & in truth he was rather like his natural way of reading.⁶⁹

While Lily attended the French classes, she also became an embroiderer under May Morris. Yeats wrote: ‘Lily likes going greatly to the Morrices […] Every day he [Morris] has some little joke. The other day he said “all hands talk French” and he began the most comic mixture of French and English”.⁷⁰

As part of Morris’s milieu, Deroin and Desroches would have met a younger generation of British first-wave feminists such as Helen Taylor and Annie Besant who attended Kelmscott House as visiting lecturers.⁷¹ Around this time, Deroin resumed a correspondence with her old friend Hortense Wild with whom she had worked on the Almanachs, and also began to correspond with members of the new secular women’s movement in France such as Hubertine Auclerc, sometimes called ‘the French Suffragette’. Deroin’s outlook always remained spiritual, however, and her feminism, faith and socialism were inextricably linked. But there were other fundamental differences between her position and that of the new generation of feminists. While their ultimate goals were similar, Deroin’s generation had always insisted on gender ‘difference’. A woman’s role was viewed as inherently maternal, and it was this common bond of motherhood that was used to validate their demands for greater benefits for women, including increased financial and job security, education, property rights and the right to vote. These prerogatives were viewed as essential to their vision of a successful interdependent socialist state organised predominantly through cooperative associations.

As members of the League, Deroin and Desroches also came into contact with a new generation of international socialists and feminists through women such as Eleanor Marx and Louise Michel, ‘the red virgin of Montmartre’, now a Communard refugee.⁷² As a schoolteacher, anticalerical and ultra-revolutionary anarchist within the most radical wing of the Commune, Michel believed in the necessity of a violent offensive against the government, and was prepared to kill for her beliefs. Gone was the spirituality, optimism and idealised vision of womanhood of mid-century utopianism, with no longer any trace of the theories of gender ‘difference’. The idealism of French romantic socialism was unsuited to the class-based, pragmatic and militant politics of late nineteenth-century France.
Following Morris’s split with the League in December 1890, the whole Hammersmith branch seceded, forming the Hammersmith Socialist Society (HSS). A photograph taken in 1891 shows Deroin and Desroches seated in the front row of a group of fifty-two members (Figure 2). They had clearly chosen Morris’s socialism over the ardent anarchist faction within the League, which is unsurprising considering that Deroin was a lifelong pacifist totally opposed to any form of violent revolution.

Deroin’s long and full life came to an end on 2 April 1894, having spanned most of the nineteenth century during which she witnessed many changes; as she herself declared, she was born under imperial despotism. She died at home at Myrtle Cottages, aged eighty-nine. Morris, together with many others, attended her funeral, recorded in the West London Observer under the title, ‘A Socialist Funeral’:

The remains of Mdme Jeanne de Roche [sic] the lady who obtained considerable notoriety during the French Revolution of 1848, were laid to rest in Hammersmith Cemetery on Saturday afternoon. There was a large attendance of sympathising friends, including a contingent of local Socialists, who attended the funeral, headed by their banner. Mr. William Morris, Mr. Sparling, and other well-known holders of advanced ideas spoke at the grave-side. At the conclusion of the ceremony, one of Mr. W. Morris’s chants for
Socialists entitled ‘No Master’ was sung.

Mr. E.S [sic] Craig of Ralaheen [sic] Cottages, Hammersmith, writes to us concerning the deceased as follows: My dear old friend prince Kropotkine has received [sic] the following letter:

‘The bright and happy exile from home is dead. Louis the Little feared her more than foreign foes. He sent his bloodhounds to catch her and force her into St. Lazare for twelve long months and more. She fled to the happy Isle of Liberty, there to teach the young how to speak the truth she knew and loved so well. She, like myself, condemned the explosive bomb which hoist me with their own petards’.73

Deroin was laid to rest at Margravine Cemetery in Hammersmith on 7 April 1894 in unconsecrated ground.74

Desroches meanwhile followed in her mother’s footsteps, becoming an elected officer of the committee of the Women’s International Progressive Union (WIPU) in 1898. Her niece Eliza Righetti, the daughter of Deroin’s younger daughter Caroline, was also a committee member. This was an offshoot of the Women’s Social and Political Union of which the socialist and suffragette Annie Cobden-Sanderson was a leading member.75 As well as universal suffrage, the stated aim of the WIPU was to ‘extend and develop’ the freedom of women and place them ‘securely in a position of perfect equality on all points with men’. Annie Besant was a regular speaker. Other branches were founded in Dublin, Belgium and Russia and a new branch was proposed in Scotland. In 1898, the WIPU announced that it had held fifty meetings in the past twelve months.76

Little is known of Desroches’s life over the next two decades other than what the censuses can tell us. Between 1901 and 1911 she lived at 6 Theresa Terrace, Hammersmith where she was a boarder with Andrew and Clara Watt, and their daughter Clara, who had been members of both the Socialist League and the HSS, and who appear in both group photographs (see Figure 1).77 Desroches is registered as a ‘shirt needlewoman’. On 13 December 1920 she was admitted to Nazareth House at the recommendation of her ‘friend’ Annie Cobden-Sanderson ‘of 16 Upper mall, Hammersmith’, who paid £54 and 12 shillings per annum for her maintenance.78 She died on 23 February 1921 aged eighty-six, two months after her admission. She was also buried in Margravine Cemetery in unconsecrated ground.

Despite the grinding poverty in which she lived, Desroches was not merely a needlewoman as censuses would have us believe. Like her mother, she had been a teacher and a member of both the Socialist League and the HSS and a participant in the international suffrage movement. She was firmly part of the group around
Morris, and her friendships with the Watt family and with Annie Cobden-Sanderson indicate that she remained part of this circle until the end of her life. Morris may well have wanted to help her and her mother financially by offering her the job of French teacher, but these women represented much more. Deroin was among the original pioneers of feminism and her courage and uncompromising dedication to her cause in a harsh and inexorably male world was remarkable at that time, in particular her candidacy for the 1849 election; it would be almost one hundred years before women in France would receive the vote. Her voice, along with those of her peers, had been largely suppressed in France after 1851 as these early French feminists became exiled and scattered. But while she remained politically active, and continued her struggle for equality over the ensuing decades in Britain, it was only during the latter part of her life as a member of the Socialist League, and subsequently the HSS, that she was once again part of a political coterie. Morris and his entourage provided Deroin and Desroches with a supportive environment of like-minded people who afforded them friendship, dignity and respect. Here was not only a connection between the League and French utopian socialism, but also a living link between the revolutionary women’s movement of the 1830s and the new generation of first-wave feminists and the early suffragette movement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Florence Boos, general editor of the William Morris Archive; Anne Wheeldon, archivist at the Hammersmith and Fulham Archives; Helen Elletson, curator at The William Morris Society; and Peter Hughes, archivist of the Sisters of Nazareth Convent in Hammersmith, for their assistance.

NOTES


4. ‘Feminism’ is sometimes judged to be an anachronistic term when applied to the women’s movement before 1880. See Karen Offen, ‘On the French Origin of the Words Feminism and Feminist’, Feminist Issues, 8: 2 (Autumn 1988), 132-43. Its first recorded use was by Hubertine Auclert in La Citoyenne, 64 (4 September-1 October 1882).


9. For more on radical Christianity and early feminists, see Anderson, pp. 161-65.
14. Knight co-created the Sheffield Female Political Association in 1851, believed to be the first women’s suffrage organisation in Britain which persuaded the radical Earl of Carlisle to petition the House of Lords demanding the vote for ‘adult Females’.
17. *Morning Chronicle*, 28 December 1848; ‘History and progress of the French Republic’, *Examiner*, 30 December 1848 and April 1849. The *Examiner* was a weekly paper whose contributors included Mill.
18. These included *The Times*, 12 April 1849 and 30 April 1849; *Daily News*, 12 April 1849, 3 June 1850; *Lloyd’s Weekly*, 15 April 1849; *Manchester Times*, 5 June 1850; *Northern Star*, 8 June 1850, 14 June 1850, 2 August 1851 and 9 August 1851.
19. Census records show the following family living at the following addresses: 1861: 12 Woodstock Road; 1864-67: 5 Verulam Terrace, The Grove, Hammersmith; 1881: 4 Myrtle Cottages (later renamed 58 Cobbald Road); 1891: 58 Cobbald Road. Her schools were run from Verulam Terrace and Ashchurch Terrace.
20. Deroin to Richer, 10 December 1874, also undated letter c1875, and 5 January 1880. Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, CP 4247 (afterwards BHVP). Richer was a republican journalist and militant campaigner for equal rights for women and for the cause of women’s freemasonry.
22. As well as Knight, now back in London, these included Angelique Arnaud, Eugène Stourm, Jenny D’Héricourt, Jean Macé (until 1852) and ‘Henriette’ (the pen name of Hortense Wild), who wrote articles for all the issues.
23. *Reasoner*, 1, 8, 15, 22 March 1857. Paulina Wright Davis’s *Una* would serve as the next international women’s forum, appearing from 1853 to 1855. See Anderson, pp. 192-93.
28. Ranvier, p. 317
30. Deroin to Richer, c1875, BHVP CP 4247.
35. Lehning, p. 263.
37. See *L’Homme*, 3 February 1854; Leroux’s *L’Espérance* (9 June, 1858), and later Richer’s *Le Droit des femmes* (1871 onwards).
38. Later renamed Romilly Street.
39. *Le Drapeau*, 8 November 1857; see also *Londoner deutches Journal*, 25 August, 1 September 1855, 7 June 1856, 24 October 1857, 8 May 1858, quoted in Lattek, p. 164.
40. Letter dated 24-25 September 1865. The name index of the Minute Book for 1864-66 includes the name of Jeanne Deroin. See *Documents of the First International*, I, p. 105.
41. Ibid., I, pp. 73-74.
42. Deroin to Richer, undated c1875, BHVP CP 4247.
44. British Library, MS 45891. (Afterwards BL).
47. Thompson, *William Morris*, pp. 269, 207, 306; see also CW, XXIII, pp. 71-73.
50. CW, XXIII, p. 278.
52. Ibid., I, pp. 257, 175.
55. CW, XXIII, p. 73.
57. William Morris, *Political Writings: Contributions to ’Justice’ and ’Commonweal’ 1883-1890*, ed. by Nicholas


59. Letter to Friedrich Sorge, April 1886. Engels described Morris as a ‘sentimental dreamer’ to August Bebel in a letter in August 1886, and as a ‘settled sentimental socialist’ to Laura Lafargue in September 1886. See MECW, XLVII, pp. 471, 484.

60. Deroin to Hubertine Auclert, 10 January 1886, BHVP, CP 4247. Deroin felt that, while they had promoted much good, some leaders had made grave errors. She disapproved of the schools’ hierarchical structures and disagreed with the Saint-Simonians, particularly Prosper Enfantin, on aspects of morality including ‘free love’, something which she believed encouraged ‘the selfish male desire for immorality’.

61. Thompson, William Morris, p. 520.

62. BL, MS 45892.


66. Lily and Lolly, otherwise known as Susan Butler Yeats and Elizabeth Butler Yeats.


68. Hone, pp. 143-44.

69. Lolly’s diary entry for 18 January 1889, reproduced in Kelly, I, p. 64.

70. Kelly, p. 123.

71. Other women who lectured at this time included Beatrice Webb, the American anarchist Lucy Parsons, Edith Simcox, and Charlotte Wilson, the English anarchist who co-founded Freedom with Kropotkin, and who lectured on ‘The Social Revolution’ on 6 November 1887.

72. After several previous visits, Michel – ‘la pétroleuse’ – lived as an exile in London from 1890-95 where she became a member of the Socialist League, writing for Commonweal.

73. The last line of the penultimate paragraph should probably read: ‘Kropotkin has “sent” the following letter […]: ‘Ralahine Cottages’ should be Ralahine Cottage. West London Observer, 14 April 1894, p. 6. No traces of an obituary notice or eulogy have been found.

74. E.T. Craig was also buried in Margravine Cemetery.

75. Cobden-Sanderson, a close friend of the Morris family, had lived at Kelmscott House during the 1880s, and had been a member of the HSS. She was a founder member of the British Women’s Freedom League and the Independent Labour Party. When she married Thomas Sanderson, he adopted her name as well as his own.


77. Later renamed 30 St Peter’s Grove. Andrew Watt was ‘first secretary’ of the Hammersmith Branch of the Shop Assistants’ Union. A list and description of those in the photo of the League was given by Mrs Watt to her daughter Clara (later Sparrow) during the 1930s identifying ‘Madame and Mme De la Roche’ [sic] in the front row, and recounting Deroin’s achievements.

78. Sisters of Nazareth General Archive, Nazareth House, Hammersmith Road, London. This Catholic foundation, founded in 1857, was the first of many in the UK caring for the elderly poor and infirm children.

The debate about craft has been lively in recent years and Stephen Knott’s *Amateur Craft* is a welcome addition that offers analysis of some unlikely subjects in order to reflect on the significance and agency of activities normally considered as ‘hobbies’. The book’s historical scope starts with the ‘self-help’ culture of the later nineteenth century, and ends with the ‘DIY’ culture of the mid-twentieth century. Three chapters, ‘Surface’, ‘Space’ and ‘Time’, divide the subject into conceptual categories, and give a sense of the book’s approach: this is a theoretical account of amateur work that is more concerned with the process and experiential qualities of performing craft than the resulting product.

‘Surface’ puts forward a really interesting argument: during the 1870s and 1880s, materials, tools and advice (described as ‘bases’, ‘carriers’ and ‘arbiters’) provided amateurs with new opportunities to engage in types of work normally carried out by professional tradesmen. Knott’s analysis focuses on amateur painting and drawing. Paint boxes, ready-mixed paints, and eventually ‘paint-by-number’ kits,
demythologised the artistry of painting to the degree that it threatened the élite status of artists and art connoisseurs. Although highly constrained types of craft might imply conformity, this was not the case: ‘even if the rules are strictly adhered to, each paint-by-number cannot fail to be a unique copy due to the inherent idiosyncrasy of the hand’ (p. 36). Knott demonstrates how ‘paint-by-numbers’ was appropriated by artists such as Jasper Johns and Andy Warhol during the 1960s, and more recently by Jeff McMillan. This evidence of how amateur activity fed back into the art establishment provides an example of how an amateur craft had an impact on ‘modern paradigms of artistic production’ (p. 43). According to the author, this is an ignored aspect of the historiography of modernist art, and supplies evidence that study of amateur craft can allow us to reassess modernist art from a new perspective.

‘Space’ proposes that the spatial context within which amateur craft took place is a valid subject for study. At this point Knott links amateur craft to the philosophy of ‘everyday life’ and initiates a discussion of the extent to which amateur craft allowed practitioners to escape or resist the broader structures and restrictions of capitalism. Knott contests the idea of amateur craft as ‘personal self-fulfilment’ and an antidote to ‘mass production’ (p. 45), which he considers exemplified in Matthew Crawford’s book *The Case for Working with Your Hands* (2009). He goes on to describe what he sees as a tradition within philosophy most clearly articulated by Hannah Arendt’s terms *animal labores* (the oppressed labouring animal) and *homo faber* (the intelligent creative worker). He goes on to describe an ‘inter-connected intellectual discourse that has built up around the adulation of the homo faber’ (p. 51), which he sees as having its roots in ‘the Arts and Crafts romanticism of John Ruskin and William Morris’ (*ibid*). He goes on to suggest that object-based study is one of the related problems: “[t]his elevation of the ideals of the homo faber that inherently marginalizes the imperfect configurations of amateur labour is largely dependent upon object analysis: whether the result of labour is considered an authentic addition to the material world or not’ (*ibid*). As a consequence, Knott focuses on the experiential elements of amateur activity: how the practice of performing craft might function as resistance to dominant culture. The study goes on to discuss the way that amateurs organise their tools: fold-away carpentry benches and tools arranged in an orderly manner on ‘peg boards’ show that amateurs exerted a form of ‘quasi-control’ over their labour (p. 71). His point is to minimise the significance of the end-product in favour of celebrating the context of production: ‘I challenge the notion, articulated emphatically by Hannah Arendt, that things produced in free time are largely superfluous, unnecessary and unproductive. Like amateur workstations, the spaces that amateurs create are also differential: they mirror other spaces of everyday life while simultaneously stretching or quietly subverting these structures’ (*ibid*). The analysis then moves on to an
extended case study of poultry-keeping which, too, can be considered as a reprieve from normal work as it ‘performs the function of providing a space of suspension from everyday normative capitalist alienation where an individual can direct labour-power towards self-directed goals’ (p. 83). The discussion then moves on to analysis of contemporary design and art, in particular Simon Starling’s installation _Burn Time_ from 2000, which involved hens using a replica of a former German prison, built in 1829, as a hen house. Knott finds a reflection of amateur production within the artist’s activity, a sense of the amateur’s ‘convoluted inefficient and superfluous processes of production that reflect their subjectivity and freedom’ (p. 86).

The final chapter, ‘Time’, examines the undeniable relationship between amateur craft and ‘free time’. Knott speculates repeatedly about whether ‘free time’ is actually free, particularly in the light of Theodor Adorno’s influential idea that the illusion of free time was one of the most effective illusory effects of a repressive capitalist system. Knott hints at some profound aspects of amateur practice but is always cautious about their agency or permanence: ‘by dictating the pace and conditions of labour’s exploitation, amateurs can create personal, miniaturized utopias and alternative worlds, for a limited time only’ (p. 90). The author goes on to relocate amateur craft within ideas of ‘play’ and ‘flow’ in order to try and define the ways in which it may function to resist dominant modes of labour. An entertaining case-study of the railway modeller closes the analysis of amateurs and describes projects or ‘layouts’, one of which has been thirty-two years in the making and is not yet finished.

This study is an erudite and a valuable contribution to an interesting debate. No single study could adequately explain the scale and range of this phenomenon, and Knott’s case studies are necessarily narrow, but this does raise the question of whether analysis of paint-by-numbers, chicken coops and railway modelling can really give us a sound basis for making generalisations about this vast subject. The book is clearly indebted to Glenn Adamson’s approach to craft. Adamson acted as Knott’s PhD supervisor, and this book is based on his thesis. Knott follows Adamson’s method: a theoretical discussion is followed by some selective case studies and the discussion is then used to generate a reading of some recent art or design. There is nothing wrong with this _per se_ but we might question whether it is valid to draw broad conclusions from this selective brand of cultural analysis. Knott follows Adamson in a simplistic approach to Ruskin and Morris, really just a casual nod towards them as originators of what he sees as a false discourse about craft and labour. This is particularly disappointing considering Ruskin’s own interesting practice as an ‘amateur’ watercolourist and engraver, and Morris’s non-professional activity in areas such as calligraphy. Knott’s main target is what he considers a romanticised idea of non-alienated labour, but perhaps if he were prepared to consider Ruskin and Morris...
within their historical context, a more complex idea of their attitude to labour and life would have emerged. This book has a political tone but carries the inbuilt pessimism of postmodern thought: craft is continuously represented as ‘differential’ or ‘alternative’ but the author never dares to suggest that this constitutes anything more profound or permanent. The author observes that ‘utopian impulses’ may ‘bubble through to the surface’ but apparently they do not offer meaningful or permanent resistance (p. 124).

The form of the book is unusual: it is large, thin and (the paperback at least) floppy, apparently a kind of physical commentary on the amateur instruction manual, signalled most obviously by the ‘paint-by-numbers’ design on the cover. An ‘insert’ provides some good-quality colour illustrations, and black and white illustrations provide examples and interest throughout the text.

Despite the reservations expressed above, I would recommend this book to anyone really interested in the subject. At his best, Knott provides subtle and nuanced analysis and his detailed study of the experiential aspects of craft is productive and instrumental in opening up a fertile area for future research. If we think about the sheer amount of time and effort collectively spent on amateur craft in the last century, its impact on how we perceive the relationship between work and life must have been profound, making the subject of this book all the more worthy of study.

Jim Cheshire


This is a difficult book to review, because it combines a great deal of interesting material about an undervalued member of the Arts and Crafts movement with numerous errors of fact and oddities of presentation.

The attractive cover shows the appealing title with a reproduction of the frontispiece of The Well at the World’s End as the skilled Catterson-Smith adapted it from Burne-Jones’s drawing for William Hooper to make the printing block for the Kelmscott Press edition. Inside, we disconcertingly encounter a loose erratum slip, inviting the reader to read ‘Arts and Crafts’ for ‘Arts and Craft’ throughout, and correcting several ‘facts’ as given in the ‘Who’s Who’ section, only one of which is given a page reference. After the title, we learn that the book has been published by ‘Jones and Sons Environmental Sciences Ltd’. The next page repeats the title and offers an attractive pastel portrait of Catterson-Smith by T. Murray Bernard Blaydon, and the ascription of the text to Ronald Sly. Much of this information is repeated in more detail on p. iii, where we find that the book has been edited by Roger T.K. Jones.
and Dr. Jennifer Jones (née Sly), with design, artwork and images by Roger T. Jones. On p. iv, the editors dedicate the book, on behalf of Ronald, to Morag Catterson-Smith, ‘who’s [sic] family provided the subject-matter for this Memoir and who spent many hours supporting the production of the manuscript’. The following two pages list the Contents of the rest of the book, after which Professor Stephen Wildman, Director of the Ruskin Library and Research Centre, offers a Foreword recommending Sly’s memoir: ‘[it] throws open a window into a life of considerable achievement, much underestimated but deserving more than passive attention’ (p. vii). In an Editors Note [sic] we are told that they have attempted ‘to keep as close as possible to Ronald’s original manuscript’ (p. viii), omitting nothing and retaining Sly’s punctuation; they have added images from the archive to enrich the work – which they do successfully. The editors thank Wildman for his Foreword, and for providing a biographical Postscript, with footnotes and bibliography, placing the memoir in its Pre-Raphaelite context. The following brief Prologue gives some information about the Catterson-Smith family, including the odd statement that Ann and Joseph Catterson-Smith ‘produced 9 children, notably in 1806 at Skipton’ (p. ix). We learn that Ronald Sly and Morag met while taking part in the Adelphi Players, a small touring company offering entertainment during the Second World War. Morag apparently said little about her family to Ronald; she offered him many ‘surprises’, which he took in his stride, ‘the last of which also amazed Morag and forms the basis of what follows’ (p. x).

It is at this point that we move into the main narrative, by Sly (pp. 11-177). This is printed in a Morrisian typeface with headlines in red, in short paragraphs and odd punctuation with tiny stops taking the place of commas, and some unexpected changes of type-size. The setting is loose, a long way from the tightness and solidity that was Morris’s ideal. Throughout, quotations from poems are set with spaces between every line. We learn that it was from the extensive collection of Morag’s Aunt Isabel, the daughter of Robert Catterson-Smith, that the material of the book was derived. After her death, Morag and Sly, a journalist, undertook the demanding task of making this material into a coherent narrative, without themselves having any detailed knowledge of the Arts and Crafts.

We are taken in some detail (and with many helpful illustrations) from Robert’s birth in Dublin in 1853 in an artistic family – both his parents were painters – and his studies at the Dublin School of Art, where he developed his talent as a sculptor. But his father died suddenly in 1872, and Robert decided to try his luck in London, where he soon managed to become apprenticed to the sculptor J.H. Foley. However, Foley died in 1874, and Catterson-Smith recorded that ‘from that time I struggled pretty hard to get the wherewithal to live, trying my hand at many different things’
Fortunately he was both determined and talented. He took an interest in socialism, and came to know Morris through attending lectures at Kelmscott House. He gradually made his way in London as a craftsman, especially as a metal-worker, but Morris enthusiasts will particularly appreciate the detailed account of the ‘little job for William Morris’ undertaken in response to a letter from Morris of 8 January 1894. The reader is made aware of Catterson-Smith’s remarkable skill, which gave Burne-Jones’s delicate drawings the definiteness that enabled Hooper to make them so powerful a part of many Kelmscott Press books, including most memorably in the <i>Chaucer</i>. Catterson-Smith gives a full technical account of his work (pp. 51-53), which is repeated in full by Wildman (pp. 190-91).

An attractive aspect of the work with Morris and Burne-Jones as reported here is the quality of the human relationships developed among this great group of craftsmen, which included Burne-Jones’s studio assistant Thomas Rooke, whose notes on their conversations were recorded, transcribed and published by Mary Lago as <i>Burne-Jones Talking</i> in 1982. Sly records that the first two copies of the Kelmscott <i>Chaucer</i> were handed to Morris on 2 June 1896. He notes: ‘[t]here does not seem to have been any particular celebration, probably because of Morris’s weakness’ (p. 69). Morris died on 3 October, and Catterson-Smith attended the funeral at Kelmscott on 6 October. Catterson-Smith’s services to Burne-Jones continued after the death of the latter in 1898, when Georgiana encouraged him to work on some designs she had found in Rottingdean to make the very attractive small book of twenty-five engravings published as <i>The Beginning of the World</i> in 1902.

Wildman refers to the book as ‘Ronald Sly’s family memoir’ (p. vii), but Sly makes every effort to include in the memoir a full account of Catterson-Smith’s public activities. He moved into a successful career in art education in 1898, teaching drawing and general design at the newly opened Central School of Arts and Crafts and becoming Assistant Inspector of Schools of Art and Art Classes for the London County Council’s Technical Education Board. He was also producing fine metalwork, exhibiting some of it at the fourth Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1893, but he was not to remain in London, and from here on the book’s title becomes irrelevant. In 1901 Catterson-Smith applied for and achieved the post of Headmaster of the Vittoria Street School for Jewellers and Silversmiths in Birmingham, where he successfully brought together the Art School and Technical Room aspects of the institution. Georgiana encouraged him to move to Birmingham if the terms offered were suitable, and had expressed her positive view of her husband’s home-city: ‘[t]here is such a nucleus of right feeling for art in Birmingham that every faithful soul who goes there will strengthen it appreciably – which is a very great thing’ (p. 76). Catterson-Smith continued as a skilled metalworker, cooperating with Philip Webb
in creating a ceremonial mace for the new university of Birmingham, founded in 1900. Birmingham had produced the first Municipal School of Art in England in 1877, with the dynamic E.R. Taylor as Head. Taylor had to retire in 1903, and Catterson-Smith was unanimously elected to succeed him, and proved a great success. One of his initiatives was to develop the idea of Drawing from Memory, an approach introduced in Paris by Lecocq de Boisbaudran during the mid-nineteenth century. In his *Drawing from Memory and Mind-Picturing* (1921), Catterson-Smith argued that his experience of teaching this method had convinced him that it ‘far excels the older method in developing observation, skill of hand and imitation’ (p. 199). The method continued to be employed successfully into the 1930s, but was replaced by the New Art Teaching during the 1940s.

But by then Catterson-Smith had retired. He had been Director of Art Education for Birmingham since 1911, and had his tenure extended by three years in 1917, but had to retire in 1920 (aged sixty-seven). Unfortunately, there seems to have been some acrimony over his pension arrangements; Emery Walker wrote that the municipal authorities had behaved ‘shabbily’ towards him (p. 201). Perhaps for this reason, he did not remain in Birmingham but moved to Twickenham, continuing to do some teaching in Clapham. His wife died in 1922. The tone of Sly’s account of the later part of Catterson-Smith’s life suggests something anti-climactic, although he continued to lecture, and to judge arts and crafts exhibitions. He died at Richmond in 1938. Among the many tributes he received was one from Lady Cockerell, which forms Sly’s concluding sentence: ‘[h]e was without guile and most lovable and I feel honoured to have known him’ (p. 177).

The next part of the book is a section called ‘Who’s Who’ (pp. 178-85) in which the editors try to provide background information about the artists and craftsmen associated with Catterson-Smith. Unfortunately, a number of errors occur in this section, some of them noted in the Erratum list; there are others, such as ‘Ford Maddox Ford’, ‘Rosetti’, and ‘Tennyson, Alfed’; in addition the use of italics for titles is inconsistent. All this is a pity, as any competent scholar could have sorted out all of these matters in half an hour.

We then come to a scholarly account of Catterson-Smith by Professor Wildman, in eleven brief sections, printed in a modern font; no suggestion is made as to how the reader is to relate this to Sly’s account with which it necessarily overlaps. Later in his account, Wildman quotes (on p. 192) a very interesting letter about Morris not previously known to me, written on 12 February 1906 to the furniture designer Percy Wells. Unfortunately the letter is not quoted accurately in the book under review, but Wildman has kindly provided the complete and accurate version quoted below:
As to my personal impression of Morris – One characteristic was his total indifference as to what people thought of him. To be himself completely seemed to possess him utterly. He was as guileless as a 3 year old child – And gave me the same feeling of wonderment when looking at him that one feels on looking at a lion – Guilelessness and strength combined with a faraway feeling. An intense loathing of affectation. I will spew this out of my mouth sort of a feeling to any one tainted with affectation. [t] gave me the impression that he suffered from the idea that a vile state of society hindered him in the complete fulfillment of his being – and that he saw was the curse under which we all live. One saw now and then that he had a deep tenderness – But no fragment of sentimentalism. He hated being asked questions – especially questions which meant an effort at analysing. He appeared to be unable or unwilling to separate his feelings from anything he thought about.

The beauty of the outside of things was enough for his mind, he did not wish to probe to the unseen. Unfairness of any sort was grit in his wheels. He was [singularly?] patient with the working men. And would say if one made a disparaging remark about them – ‘What can you expect?’

This description draws attention to aspects of Morris not frequently emphasised, but quite consistent with what we know of him, in particular his lack of interest in theoretical questions and in the unseen. There are no fewer than ninety-nine footnotes to Wildman’s piece, in contrast to their absence from Sly’s text. A Bibliography is provided in chronological order (without giving places of publication) from Fred Miller in 1898 to an unpublished Cambridge PhD thesis of 2012. Item 4 is given bizarrely as The Collected Works of William Morris. With Introductions by His Daughter May Morris; along with William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist (Longmans, Green and Company, 26 vols, 1910-1915). This conflates the 24 volumes of the Collected Works of 1910-15 with the two volumes published in 1936 by Basil Blackwood at Oxford University Press. Norman Kelvin’s Collected Letters is cited as 5 vols; this should read 4 vols in 5. The Bibliography includes Robert Catterson-Smith: A Forgotten Pre-Raphaelite, an exhibition catalogue of 1998 by Campbell Wilson, but as the Bibliography is not annotated, no indication is given of the importance of this book.

This mixed volume ends at this point, with no index to encourage the scholarly reader, for whom the volume was clearly not intended. It left this reviewer with very mixed feelings, but glad to find Catterson-Smith receiving the attention he certainly deserves.

Peter Faulkner
An index is seldom a text to read for itself, but a functional tail-piece to a non-fiction book, used like a search engine for locating references to people, places, other texts. Possibly, in the digital age, traditional published indices are redundant – any electronically-read book has an inbuilt search facility highlighting names and pages, and so saving us all the effort of either compiling or consulting.

However, this final volume of the Rossetti Letters project, initiated many moons ago by ‘Dick’ Fredeman, is no traditional index, but ‘an analytical and biographical index [...] designed to give researchers the widest possible contextual access to all names of persons, places, works of art, writings, organizations and activities both physical and intellectual mentioned in Rossetti’s letters and in the notes for the years 1835-82’ (p. 1). Moreover, it is also a subject index, with mini-descriptions and subheadings, in chronological order. No wonder then that it fills 564 columns of small type. The remainder of the volume contains forty-three pages of undated, unpublished letters, which are also sadly unnumbered, and, as far as I can see, unindexed, though mostly of the minor ‘come to dine on Thursday’ variety.

The 125 column entry for Rossetti himself therefore reads like a summarised biography, arranged in twenty-one sections, each subdivided by year: Chronology of events, Art, Poetry & Photography, Music, Theatre, Actors & Actresses, Finances, Health, Philosophy, prejudices and idiosyncrasies; Artistic works from Juvenilia through to unexecuted or aborted works and proposals; Literary works from Juvenilia through published works, individual poems, nonsense verses and translations to reading. These sections are fairly simple to follow, though at times they suggest the need for an indexed index.

Initials refer to some eighty-six individuals listed in the prelims (the index may contain more – in the entries I spotted EES[iddal] not in the list). Lesser characters in the soap opera that was Rossetti’s life, or at least his after-life – Barbara Bodichon, say, or Vernon Lushington – are of course outlined only insofar as they interacted with Rossetti. Others have fuller treatment, notably William and Jane Morris, with five and seven columns respectively. In the latter there appears some confusion, under the listing for references in 1870, which after ‘DGR addresses love letter to her reminiscent in sentiment & even phrase of the passionate love-sonnets written during this period’, continues:
WMs visit DGR at Scalands; ‘benefitting greatly’ at Kelmscott; JM spends a longer period there, not at Scalands but an adjacent cottage, Fir Bank […]; Kelmscott better for her than ‘all the mineral baths in Germany’; ‘wonderfully better’; ‘much better’; DGR lends rooms in Glottenham house, ‘so ill again’.

In fact Kelmscott did not feature as a country residence until 1871. And amid the dense entries I daresay there are other minor errors and omissions – I confess to not having read every word – such as the unglossed references to Mike [Michelangelo] and Sandy [Botticelli] in a note to Fairfax Murray. Some readers may be disappointed that there is no visible summary of the famous affair with Janey, though Rossetti’s later letters to her are summarised in detail – thus with letter 375 in 1880:


The wealth of detail is really too much to cover in a review, but contains plums such as this entry, listing citations from 1849 to 1871:


(p. 123)

(pp. 125-26)

(p. 258)
This ought to qualify the now generally received view that Rossetti and all Pre-Raphaelites used the term for female models, when it was chiefly a simple commendation like ‘fab’ or ‘cool’. But it probably will not: the now popular account of the art and artists has far more power than the verifiable facts – which this volume, as culmination to a magnificent project, does much to clarify. As editors, which is a better word than compilers for this meta- and mega-index, Roger Lewis and Jane Cowan deserve the highest praise – a daunting endeavour, stunningly realised.

Jan Marsh


In a letter of 13 May 1889 to Georgiana Burne-Jones, William Morris described a visit to Bradford-on-Avon: ‘The church is a very big and fine one, but scraped to death by G. Scott, the (happily) dead dog’. Although Morris would not have published such an unkind remark, the jibe undoubtedly represents his considered opinion of George Gilbert Scott. It scarcely matters that Morris was wrong: Holy Trinity was restored by J. Elkington Gill of Bath (in 1865-66), and Scott never laid a finger on it. But by 1889, Scott had been dead for eleven years, and his reputation as the prime villain in the saga of Victorian church restoration was almost beyond argument. Scott was not the architect most hated by the SPAB – that title should probably be accorded to J.L. Pearson – but he has an honoured place in its pantheon of the damned because the society traces its foundation to Morris’s celebrated letter to the Athenaeum of 5 March 1877: ‘My eye just now caught the word “restoration” in the morning paper, and, on looking closer, I saw that this time it is nothing less than the Minster of Tewkesbury that is to be destroyed by Sir Gilbert Scott’.

As Gavin Stamp points out in his brilliant, spirited ‘illustrated biography’, Scott’s prominence as a designer of new buildings as well as a restorer of old ones made him a convenient focus for Morris’s attack. He was, as he remains, the quintessential Victorian architect, and judgments of the architecture of his age have often focused on his most prominent London buildings – the Foreign Office, the Midland Grand Hotel at St Pancras Station and, of course, the Albert Memorial, the work that won him his knighthood in 1872. He also seems characteristically Victorian in his
workaholic industry: after Scott died of heart disease, caused in part by exhaustion, his obituarist in the *Builder* listed 732 works produced by Scott’s office, one of the largest in nineteenth-century Europe. Stamp tells us that this was an underestimate – 879 is a more likely number. Inevitably, not all these jobs were of equal significance or merit, and a considerable number have disappeared, so to judge Scott’s achievement it is necessary to make a critical selection from his great output, demolished as well as extant.

This is the core of Stamp’s achievement. His book has an unusual structure. The first half, an extended biographical essay, is especially valuable as there is no full-length biography of Scott, and there has been no monograph since David Cole’s terse, underrated *The Work of Sir Gilbert Scott*, published in 1980. Scott’s work is on the whole well documented, but disappointingly few personal papers have survived. The most important source for his life is his posthumous *Personal and Professional Recollections* (1879), the first published autobiography by a British architect, but in many ways it is a self-serving text that needs to be handled judiciously. Stamp has conquered these shortcomings to produce a vividly convincing account of Scott’s personality, in which fierce ambition and thin-skinned prickliness were combined with gentleness of manner, kindness and a lack of either social or intellectual snobbery that made him loved by almost everybody who worked for him.

Stamp’s skills are no less evident in the second half of the book, a rich selection of illustrations, historic and modern, of Scott’s key buildings, arranged by genre and explained in discursive captions. Here Stamp reveals the fruits of many years of studying Scott, going back to the 1960s, when as a schoolboy he joined the Victorian Society because it was battling to save St Pancras Station. Spread over 110 well-designed pages, the combination of these illustrations with Stamp’s sharp analyses resembles an outstanding lecture. It has much to offer specialist as well as amateur enthusiasts for Victorian architecture, since it ranges so widely, both in building type and geographically. Some of Scott’s most impressive buildings are outside Britain, notably his spectacular Bombay University and fine cathedral in Christchurch, New Zealand, now sadly threatened with demolition after being damaged in the 2011 earthquake. The section on Scott’s churches is particularly valuable, since they have rarely received much thoughtful criticism, and are so numerous that an overview is difficult.

Stamp defends Scott’s reputation as a restorer, but, on the reasonable grounds that restoration is difficult to illustrate, he focuses his section on restorations on Scott’s magnificent fittings for medieval cathedrals – although his illustration of the degraded state of the chapter house at Westminster Abbey before Scott got to work is telling. A fuller analysis of Scott as a restorer is a highlight of a volume of papers given at a
conference at Rewley House in Oxford to mark the bicentenary in 2011 of the architect’s birth. Twelve leading scholars of nineteenth-century architecture – including Stamp, who provides an introduction – examine some of the many aspects of Scott’s career, ranging from country houses (by Peter Howell) to his government buildings in Whitehall (by M.H. Port).

Although in a rather apologetic preface, one of the volume’s editors, P. S. Barnwell, draws attention to the lack of essays on Scott’s commercial and institutional buildings, or on any public buildings apart from his Whitehall schemes, these do not seem serious absences. That is partly because what is here is so good. Chris Miele provides a tantalising taste of the biography of Scott on which he is working, with a paper on Scott’s earliest years as the child of an impoverished Evangelical parson that explains a great deal about his insecure, driven personality. Geoff Brandwood cleverly deals with Scott’s churches by focusing solely on his work in London, where there are significant works from every stage of his career. G.A. Bremner draws on the wide research for his masterly study of the Gothic revival in the British empire, *Imperial Gothic* (2013), to set Scott’s colonial cathedrals in their architectural and religious context. Although Simon Bradley’s study of Scott’s work in Cambridge is based on research for his revision of the *Buildings of England* volume on Cambridgeshire (2014), he goes well beyond that book in an absorbing analysis of the network of patronage that brought Scott such major commissions as the chapel for St John’s College.

However, most readers of the book with an interest in Morris will turn first to the chapter on Scott as a restorer, written by Claudia Marx, a practising architect and author of a major but as yet unpublished 2010 PhD thesis on the restoration of cathedrals and major churches in England during the nineteenth century. She briefly analyses the development of Scott’s approach to restoration and convincingly argues that it became increasingly conservative. She also explains that the debates that prompted the foundation of the SPAB during 1877 went back at least to the 1840s, when Ruskin’s attacks on restoration prompted a riposte by Scott, *A Plea for the Faithful Restoration of Our Ancient Churches*, published in 1850. While urging a cautious approach, Scott argued that if medieval churches are to remain in use, they will have to be adapted for modern liturgical needs. He returned to this argument in his reply to Morris’s 1877 attack on him: ‘Let the Society make up their minds at once that any attempt to banish religious motives from the treatment of churches is suicidal. They were built from such motives, and must ever be treated with like aim’. This was a point that Ruskin, and after him Morris, could never quite concede.

One reason is that Morris, like Ruskin, thought that architects who specialised in church restoration were hypocrites who were doing unnecessary work just for the money. Morris must have looked at Scott’s *Recollections* – or at least read reviews of it
– since he seized on Scott’s admission that he agreed to change his design for the Foreign Office from Gothic to classical after recalling that he had a family to support, and could not afford to lose such a major commission. Scott, ‘the old bird’, wrote Morris to Thomas Wardle on 13 April 1877, ‘is convicted out of his own mouth of having made an enormous fortune by doing what he well knows to be wrong, – he is a damned old thief in short’.

More subtly, Morris argued that Scott translated medieval buildings into Victorian ones. In Concerning Westminster Abbey (1893), Morris wrote that Scott and Pearson’s restoration of the exterior of the north transept was ‘another example of the dead-alive office work of the modern restoring architect, overflowing with surface knowledge of the medieval work in every detail, but devoid of historic sympathy and true historical knowledge’. Morris’s point is all the more telling because he was attacking not Scott’s destruction of a medieval original (an accusation that Pearson’s work invites) but his addition of new sculpture in a conjectural recreation of the transept’s portals. Marx concedes this point, writing that ‘[u]ltimately, rather than enhancing the credibility of the restoration, Scott’s consummate Victorian details have diminished it, undermining his scholarship and his efforts at achieving an accurate reconstruction of the thirteenth-century portals’ (p. 104). While we might admire the portals today as examples of Victorian art, that was not what Scott intended.

However, Morris’s hostility to Scott ignores important issues. Like Ruskin, what Morris really cared about was the surface of medieval buildings, and in particular sculpture and carving. The challenge of making a building stable was of much less interest. As the collapse in 1861 of the crossing tower and spire at Chichester cathedral revealed so dramatically, many of England’s medieval churches were in a parlous structural state by the nineteenth century. Marx enthrallingly describes Scott’s approach to these problems, sometimes in collaboration with engineers, but often not. She explains, for example, how he strengthened the crossing tower of Salisbury Cathedral with ingenious metal ties, and used hydraulic presses to push the tottering south wall of the nave of St Alban’s Abbey back to vertical. ‘I do not covet such work’, wrote Scott wearily in 1877, ‘one sleeps more quietly without it’, but his achievement in ensuring that so many of Britain’s major medieval churches survived without structural failure into the twentieth century deserves far more credit than he has been given.

Scott may have won a knighthood and made a fortune, but it is hard not to feel sorry for the way posterity has treated him. Morris’s choice of target when launching the SPAB was unfair. By 1877 Scott had been at work at Tewkesbury for three years – the notice that had caught Morris’s eye was an appeal for additional funds – and
nobody now would single out Tewkesbury as an example of destructive restoration. But it scarcely matters, since even in Scott’s lifetime, Morris and the SPAB had won the battle of words, as Scott himself conceded, with a generosity of spirit that his opponents rarely bothered to match. He wrote of Morris’s attack that ‘I feel more deeply on this subject than any other, and never lose an opportunity of protesting against barbarisms of this kind, in season and out of season. I am, therefore, willing to be sacrificed by being made the victim in a cause which I have so intensely at heart.’

In 1862 he had written, in words that could almost be from the SPAB’s manifesto, ‘I could almost wish the word “restoration” expunged from our architectural vocabulary, and that we could be content with the more commonplace term “reparation”’. The difference was that Scott was addressing architects, and by implication the clergymen who called the shots in church restoration; the SPAB – with enduring success – addressed the court of public opinion, which long ago found Scott guilty. With Stamp’s splendid book, and this valuable collection of essays, we have persuasive evidence for the defence.

Michael Hall


In this attractive little book, Annie Creswick Dawson sets out to restore the reputation of her great-grandfather, Benjamin Creswick (1853-1946), a currently undervalued member of the Arts and Crafts movement, known mainly for his work in terra cotta. In the Foreword Paul Dawson, the designer of the book, draws attention to the number of craft-workers whom Ruskin helped with money and advice. He remarks that at the time of his death, Creswick ‘was possibly the last surviving craftsman with a direct link to John Ruskin’ (p. 2).

Annie begins her account with an attractive chapter called ‘Personal Recollections of My Great Grandfather’, in which she recalls spending a good deal of time as a girl in the studios of her grandfather Charles, craftsman and artist, and his jeweller wife, both devotees of Ruskin. Indeed, ‘[h]e was present in their family life and Benjamin’s teaching, and he was vital to the life we led in Edinburgh’ (p. 8). The next chapter deals with ‘The Early Years’ in Sheffield, where Benjamin had the misfortune to be apprenticed in the knife-grinding trade. When it became obvious that his health could not stand this dangerous trade, it was fortunate that he had developed crafts interests that gave him the basis for a happy and successful life. He made good use of the Walkley Museum, which Ruskin opened in 1875 to ‘feed the minds of the working men of Sheffield’ (p. 13). The Swans, the curators of the Museum, recommended
him to Ruskin, who invited him to Brantwood to make a portrait bust. Soon after, Ruskin invited him to move with his family to Coniston, and gave him financial support for some four years while his craftsman's skills developed.

Benjamin then moved to London, where he met a number of prominent members of the Arts and Crafts movement, including Arthur Macmurdo, Selwyn Image, William de Morgan, and Frank Brangwyn, who became a lifelong friend. He began to exhibit his work successfully at exhibitions including the Arts and Crafts, and created his best-known work, the terra cotta frieze at Cutlers’ Hall in Warwick Lane in 1887, which celebrates in its thirty-three figures ‘the energy, vitality and sheer hard work of the workers […]. We can learn much about the work process without the need for words’ (p. 37). By this time Birmingham had become an important centre for the Arts and Crafts. The Birmingham Municipal School of Art needed a master for its new modelling department. Benjamin was appointed to the post, and began a new career in teaching in January 1889. He taught in a Ruskinian spirit that emphasised practice over theory, and this occasioned some criticisms from the more academic. But his knowledge and enthusiasm carried the day. Annie records that Benjamin ‘took great delight in teaching, which was reflected in the success of his pupils’ (p. 270). But, unlike Ruskin, he was not a writer. We are told that he published only one lecture, in 1891, in which he argued for the importance of sculpture in making people aware of English history, and so ‘quicken our perceptions and sympathies with all that is noble in our national life, religious, poetic, politic and domestic (pp. 30-31). This view of the public responsibility of artists was typical of Arts and Crafts practitioners, and certainly controlled Benjamin’s practice. He retired from the Birmingham School of Art in 1918, but continued working until 1926, when he retired from the post of Professor of Sculpture at the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists. His last major works were the panels for the Stations of the Cross for the Roman Catholic church of Our Lady and St Bridget in Northfield, completed in 1929. He lived in happy retirement for another seventeen years, dying in 1946.

The author supports her claims for Benjamin by drawing attention to ten ‘Key Works’ in various media. The earliest is the frieze for Cutlers’ Hall, already discussed, followed by the Bloomsbury Library in Nechells Parkway, the Dean and Pitman Building in Corporation Street, Birmingham, the Handsworth Library, two smaller-scale works, a wrought-iron bookstand of 1899 and some repoussé work, a copper casket and a panel from a scheme by the Bromsgrove Guild, several pieces of decorative stonework from Bournville, the Boldmere [War] Memorial of 1921, a large paper frieze for Crouch and Butler of Birmingham, and finally the fourteen panels of the Stations of the Cross at Northfield, described as ‘Cresswick's last and perhaps most dramatic project […] the only major religious work that he produced’ (p. 52).
The Conclusion reasserts the importance to Benjamin of Ruskin's early and continuing support, but argues also for the independence of mind shown in his work in many media. We feel the personal commitment of the author to her great-grandfather, whose career is summarised in a timeline at the end. It is good to learn that this modest book has the support of the Guild of St. George, and that a comprehensive illustrated catalogue of Benjamin Creswick's work is in preparation.

Peter Faulkner


Victorian Connections is an attractive little book, showing on its front cover the poet and writer William Allingham painted in watercolour by his wife Helen, and on its back cover a pencil self-portrait by her. The frontispiece by Helen, an illustration from William's Rhymes for the Young Folk (1887), shows William introducing their son Henry to a leprechaun. The book, designed by Mark Samuels Lasner, is the catalogue of the exhibition at the Grolier Club from 26 March to 25 May 2015, and contains 101 entries by Natasha Moore, giving bibliographical details and information about each entry. Moore also provides a Preface about the networks of personalities within Victorian culture which produced the books and illustrations which made up the exhibition. The catalogue comes in nine parts, ‘Portraits’ (from one of William by Helen c.1880 to a cabinet-card photograph of Henry James by Elliott and Fry in 1890); ‘Early Connections’ (from a presentation copy to William Barnes of Allingham’s first volume of poetry in 1850 to a carte de visite photograph of F.G. Stephens by Cundall & Downes in 1859); ‘The PreRaphaelites’ (from a presentation copy to F.G. Stephens of Allingham’s Poems of 1850 to a presentation copy to Allingham of the 1870 translation of the Volsunga Saga by Æiríkr Magnússon and William Morris); ‘Irish Connections’ (from Allingham’s Laurence Bloomfield in Ireland (1864) to Hugh Allingham’s 1879 Ballyshannon: Its History and Antiquities); ‘American Connections’ (from the author’s corrected copies of Allingham’s Poems: First American Edition (1861) to W.M. Rossetti’s 1868 selection of Whitman’s Poems); ‘Artists’ (from an undated photograph of Richard Doyle to Allingham’s Songs, Ballads and Stories of 1877); ‘Writers’ (from Allingham’s Ye Dirty Old Man, 1870 or later, to a photograph of Turgenev taken in 1884); ‘Family Circle’ (from a presentation copy of Tennyson’s Queen Mary: A Drama (1876?), to Allingham’s Rhymes for the Young Folk (1887)); and ‘Afterlife’ (from Allingham’s 1864 anthology The Ballad Book to The Cottage Homes of England Drawn by Helen Allingham and Described by Stewart Dick (1909)). I hope this will
give some idea of the remarkable variety of material included, although, as a
catalogue, it cannot have the narrative drive of a unified story.

There are 101 entries in all, which attractively demonstrate how Victorian culture
made it possible for a young man from the west coast of Ireland and his talented
watercolourist wife to create what Moore calls an ‘intricate network of friendships,
collaborations, marriages and families’ which left ‘a rich textual record of the larger-
than-life personalities and diverse achievements of a generation’ (p. 5). The exhibition,
which owed much to the scholarship and connoisseurship of Mark Samuels Lasner,
must have been a great pleasure to visit, and this book makes possible a derivative
pleasure for those of us unable to reach the estimable Grolier Club.

Peter Faulkner

_The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer_ (Richmond: Bradford Exchange Press & Charles
Winthrope and Sons, 2015), 554 pp., £395.00 hbk, no ISBN. Reproduction of the first
edition of the Kelmscott Chaucer, leather-bound with golden thread.

For many years there have been no attempts to produce facsimile editions of
Kelmscott Press titles, and suddenly we have three in quick succession: last year’s
exquisite Folio Society edition of _The Odes of Horace_, reviewed in a recent issue of this
Journal, and their recent _News from Nowhere_. The largest and most elaborate of all is
the new _Works of Geoffrey Chaucer_, published by Charles Winthrope and Sons. The
publisher’s stated aim is to produce ‘the most perfect replica of this acclaimed work
ever attempted’ and they have certainly risen to the challenge. Sourcing a replica of
the rich paper stock originally selected by Morris they have been able to reproduce
the deckled edges and gilding of the original, and to recreate the width of the spine,
allowing a ‘lay-flat’ binding, something that previous attempts to produce facsimiles
of the work have failed to manage.

Intense study continues to the painstaking reproduction of the covers, the pigskin
tinted to capture the rich colour and gilded decoration of the original, even to the
accurate measurement of the clasps of the first edition. These unfortunately cut in
slightly to the edges of the paper, a condition I have not been able to compare with
the original.

But what of the printing, so disappointing in other facsimile versions? Here the
type is sharp and the illustrations beautifully reproduced, accuracy continuing to
include the exact shade of red for margins and headings used in the first printing.
Authenticity continues to the stamp of the Doves Bindery on the inside back cover.
All this research, painstaking sourcing of material and attention to detail does not
come cheap and at £395 this is, not surprisingly, the most expensive of modern
facsimiles. In a limited edition of 1,896 (Morris produced 425 copies on paper and fifteen on vellum) it must be hoped that a market still exists for such luxury works.

**Penny Lyndon**


This facsimile of the Kelmscott Press *News from Nowhere*, which was first published in November 1892, is, as one would expect from the Folio Society, a typographical treat, with its decorated wood-engraved frontispiece of ‘the old house by the Thames’ by C.M. Gere, its numerous decorative initial letters, and its shoulder-notes in red. Unfortunately, the cover is gravelly over-decorated. Whereas the original was in limp vellum with silk ties, and the title on the spine in Golden type, Neil Gower has felt entitled to cover both front and spine with weird typography in inlaid gold, departing disastrously from the restrained and Morrisian design provided by David Pearson for the fine Folio facsimile of the Kelmscott *Chaucer*. Its only virtue is the pleasure given by the contrast it provides with the ordered elegance of the rest of the book.

**Peter Faulkner**
Notes on Contributors

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

MICHAEL HALL is the author of several books on Victorian architecture, including George Frederick Bodley and the Later Gothic Revival in Britain and America, published by Yale University Press in 2014. From May 2017 he will be the editor of The Burlington Magazine.

FRANÇOISE KUNKA has recently completed a PhD at the University of Aberdeen on French émigrés from the Revolution of 1848, and their influence on British radicalism. She has published on Alexander Herzen and his Free Russian Press in London during the 1850s.

DAVID LEOPOLD is Associate Professor of Political Theory in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford. His research focuses on contemporary political theory and the history of political thought, and he has published widely on nineteenth-century political thought, including work on Hegel and (left) Hegelianism, Marx, utopianism and anarchism. His recent book The Young Karl Marx: German Philosophy, Modern Politics, and Human Flourishing (Cambridge University Press) was published in 2007. In 2003, he edited Morris’s News from Nowhere for the Oxford World’s Classics series.

RUTH LEVITAS is an Emeritus Professor in the School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies at the University of Bristol. Her research focuses on the history of oppositional and utopian thought, the relationship between utopia and social theory; utopia as a method in the social sciences, utopia and music, and utopia, history, memory and place. She recently published Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society (Palgrave, 2013).
PENNY LYNDON is Librarian at The William Morris Society, currently working on producing a catalogue of the collection which will be available on the website. She has been a Trustee since 2010, and served as Honorary Secretary between 2012 and 2015.

DAVID MABB is an artist and Reader in Art at Goldsmiths, University of London.

JAN MARSH is President of The William Morris Society, and has published extensively on the Pre-Raphaelites. With Frank Sharp, she has edited The Collected Letters of Jane Morris (Boydell & Brewer, 2012).
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