

## Hope and Change:

### *Teaching News from Nowhere*

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MY FIRST EXPERIENCE with teaching *News from Nowhere* was not at all what I expected. I had scheduled the book as the final text on our Victorian literature course, one intended to provide an inspirational resolution to the complex problems raised through-out the course. Earlier in the year we had read 'The Defence of Guenevere' and 'King Arthur's Tomb,' poems about the triangular love relationships that lead to the decay of Camelot, a Celtic version of the fall from paradise and the hell that follows. With each poem and novel during that year I would repeatedly emphasize that the archetypal fall from paradise is one that each generation experiences, as most of us fall too quickly from hope and idealism to cynicism and despair, a fall that signals our transition from growth to death. The cynical attitude is the resort of those who are too lazy to struggle for more growth and who thus begin dying in their youth.

*News from Nowhere* would provide the antidote; it would inspire us to strive towards the restoration of paradise. But I was not prepared for the depth of cynicism in the class. The students rolled their eyes at the naivety of Morris's dream: 'He can't be serious; it's Nowhere because it will never work; even the sunny weather would scorch the earth; I mean, get real.' Though I had defined the mythical fall as a generational fall from the short growth of youth to the lengthy decay of death, I had overlooked the subtle ways each generation may experience the fall differently. Morris's generation responded to the pessimism of the age by embracing art over

religion, with Morris advocating that we all must live our lives as artists: 'The repulsion to pessimism ... is, I think, natural to a man busily engaged in the arts.'<sup>1</sup> My 1960s generation was ripe for *News from Nowhere*. John Lennon could sound cynical with his mocking of naive revolutionaries 'carrying pictures of Chairman Mao' who 'aren't gonna get anywhere anyhow.'<sup>2</sup> But Lennon echoed Morris in his anthemic 'Imagine': 'You may say that I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope some day you will join us and the world will live as one.'<sup>3</sup> Lennon's lyrics sound like a direct response to Morris's dreamer at the end of *News from Nowhere*: 'I lay in my bed at dingy Hammersmith ... trying to consider if I was overwhelmed by despair at finding I had been dreaming a dream; and strange to say, I found that I was not despairing.... If others have seen it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream.'<sup>4</sup> Both Morris and Lennon anticipate and reject the cynical dismissal of such faith in the effort to pursue our hopes.

But how can a teacher who shares that faith make Morris's romance appeal to the conservative generation of the weary *fin de siècle* '90s decade and of this wary *oh-oh* decade? Yeats's description of the best 'lack[ing] all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity'<sup>5</sup> appears to be taken to heart now as a defence for cynicism rather than a condemnation. Thus, starting with the presumption that students no longer share my faith in Morris's steadfast zeal, I propose to focus on the fundamental nature of hope and change. It is a focus that explores the relationship between the desire to dream and the probability of change, how the force of desire can turn the impossible dream into a probable reality. As Blake protested, 'Every thing possible to be believ'd is an image of truth.'<sup>6</sup> If we recognize the incredible transformations that have occurred in the world since Morris wrote *News from Nowhere* then we may ask ourselves why seemingly less incredible changes have not occurred and why we have failed to pursue such changes.

Where do we find our inspiration for thinking, for living, for improving the world? Not in the routine of our lives, but rather in

the flight of our dreams: we find it self-referentially in the realm of the art we construct, the stories we imagine. Morris turns to the oldest story of our exile from the garden, to the dream of returning from the wilderness of our modern wasteland to the lost paradise of our home. For Morris, paradise is not the overly determined order of a utopian city on a hilltop, but the green Edenic garden in a golden Arcadian valley. The Thames River valley provides Morris with a local image of his dream-vision, while its Edenic and Arcadian qualities provide the mythical context of his dream of a reunion of our brazen nature with the green and golden paradise associated with biblical and classical art.

Cynical readers might think it naive for Morris to ask us to dream of a utopian paradise where the weather is sunny and the people are healthy. But Morris keeps his focus directed on this very discrepancy between reality and dream, never allowing us to forget this 'contrast of the present with the future: of blind despair with hope' (222). Why are some dreams considered credible and others considered incredible? Let's examine five of Morris's envisioned transformations that cynical readers will likely dismiss as incredible, as naive dreams too impossible to ever realize: (1) Who can believe that fellowship might ever replace self-interest, that the principle of self-sacrifice for the good of the community might ever replace the practice of self-assertion of the individual, so that the communal values of socialism may spread from a fringe cult to a mass movement like a worldwide religion? We may just as well ask (2) who can believe that healthy, beautiful people will replace our corrupt social order, (3) that the sunshine will change our dreary weather, (4) that clean fish will renew to our polluted rivers, and (5) that good people will enjoy working without the rewards that distinguish workers from loafers. As the years pass since Morris first raised these five issues in *News from Nowhere*, some of these ideal dreams have become seriously credible as achievable goals despite our growing cynicism.

Morris's choice of genre immediately establishes the serious

framework for his dream. Any Victorian student schooled in the Classical tradition of literature would have known that the two major genres of prose (corresponding to the epic and tragedy in poetry) are the two practised by Plato: the Socratic dialogue narrative and the ideal commonwealth narrative. These are the two elite genres of prose reserved for serious subjects. Morris thus reveals the serious intentions of his dream by combining these two genres, foregrounding the Socratic dialogue technique directly in chapter 11 and more subtly in such chapters as 12, 13, 14, 17, and 18. He thus challenges us to change the world by starting with the most profound of philosophical questions: What would it be like to live in heaven, to live a heavenly life on earth? Morris dares us to consider this as a practical question that every responsible adult should pursue rather than dismiss as a childish dream. The most radical writer in English literature wrote *News from Nowhere* as a revolutionary response to this fundamental question about the way we live our lives.

The subtext of Morris's narrative romance is not so much whether or not a heavenly utopia could ever become a reality; rather what horrifies Morris is that we no longer even wish for it to happen. Too many of us prefer to dream of some technological computer paradise, of new shopping malls, of more cable television choices, of holding the winning lottery ticket. As Herbert Marcuse noted, 'capitalism's real power is to make unthinkable the alternatives.'<sup>7</sup> In a lecture on 'How I Became a Socialist,' Morris explains how the capitalist system has 'reduced the workman to such a skinny and pitiful existence, that he scarcely knows how to frame a desire for any life much better.' Art provides the answer: 'It is the province of art to set the true ideal of a full and reasonable life before him, a life to which the perception and creation of beauty, the enjoyment of real pleasure that is, shall be felt to be as necessary as his daily bread.'<sup>8</sup>

The first and last chapters of *News from Nowhere* frame the desire for this utopian ideal, as the narrator's friend repeats his anxious wish to envision 'what would happen on the Morrow of the

Revolution': 'If I could but see a day of it; if I could but see it' (44). By the last chapter, his despair has turned to an affirmation of hope: 'Yes, surely! and if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream' (228). The transformation is achieved through a complex dream-vision wherein the reader is unsure who is speaking from the beginning through to the end.

Why is the narration so confusingly complex? The eight brief paragraphs of the opening chapter are interrupted eight times by these seemingly awkward phrases: 'says a friend,' 'says our friend who tells the story,' 'our friend says.' The story is thus introduced as a hearsay rumour: the narrator tells us about a friend who tells about another friend – 'a man whom he knows very well' – who returns home one evening after a disagreeable socialist meeting, falls asleep, and dreams about a heavenly future after a successful socialist revolution. The second speaker tells the narrator that he will narrate the third friend's dream 'in the first person, as if it had been myself.' To complicate the narration still further, the friend of the narrator's friend calls himself 'William Guest,' lives in William Morris's residence at Kelmscott House in Hammersmith, and identifies with Old Hammond's Victorian grandfather – 'a genuine artist, a man of genius, and a revolutionist' (127), Morris's accurate but uncharacteristically boastful description of himself. To summarize this narrative maze, Morris the author writes as a first-person narrator about a friend who tells about a friend named William who dreams about Dick and Old Hammond (who are Morris's own hypothetical descendants – his great-great grandson and grandson). Morris may be employing these multiple levels of narrative as part of his utopian strategy: the story of this dream-vision is a story to be passed from friend to friend, each spreading the word from one to another, as an apostle spreading the Word of the Bible, a socialist bible for the Morrow of a new world-order.

Dream-visions are a popular Medieval convention for storytelling, but Morris up-dates his dream-vision by providing psychological explanations for such supernatural elements as time-

travelling into the future. Telling us that after repeatedly wishing he 'could but see' a vision of 'the Morrow of the Revolution,' Guest awakens the next morning 'as if [he] had slept a long, long while, and could not shake off the weight of slumber' (45). But aside from suggesting that Guest is still asleep, Morris grounds his story humorously and linguistically in the all-too-real political quarrels that threaten to surrender the most idealistic dreamer to despair.

The story begins with an argument: a political discussion among six socialists means that there will be six different opinions, with each quarreller shouting damnation at all the others. Morris thus confronts head-on the cynicism of those who would argue that the heavenly ideals of socialism are impossible to achieve because of our selfish human nature. Morris seems to acknowledge that such discord is as inherent in our souls as it is in our language: much of the first chapter is a play on the 'dis-' prefix. 'Sundering betwixt' (92) is a Morris phrase which serves well as the definition of this prefix. Discussion, discontent, discomfort, disgust, disgrace: with discord seemingly at the centre of humanity, how could Morris ever dream of a utopia wherein the capitalist principles of competition are replaced by the socialist principles of cooperation, profit replaced by the principles of sharing, capital replaced by the principles of community, and exploitation replaced by the principles of neighbourliness? Stewing over 'the many excellent and conclusive arguments' which he should have said before leaving the meeting, Guest walks to the riverside where his remembrance of the discussion eventually 'disappears' in the beautiful moonlight, as wind, sky, river, and elm refresh him from the fretful logic of rebuttals, leaving him with 'a vague hope, that was now become a pleasure, for days of peace and rest, and cleanness and smiling goodwill' (44).

Chapter 2, 'A Morning Bath,' is a baptismal submersion in the now clean waters of the Thames, whereupon he enters his dreamland 'wide-awake and clear-headed' (46). Having gone to bed calmed by the winter moon at night, he awakens with the summer sun shining through the morning, an archetypal progression

wherein the natural renewal of the seasons is signifying a spiritual resurrection enabled by the dream of social revolution. Morris's utopia is a radical challenge to virtually every established social institution accepted by many as the irreversible condition of the world. When Guest meets the waterman on the Thames outside his house he finds himself confronted and confused by a new class order and new ecological order. Dick, the working-class waterman, is a handsome, muscular, refined, and well-dressed gentleman; a working-class gentleman is an oxymoron to the Victorian Guest. Despite his familiarity with the polluted docksides of London, Guest finds the Thames now flowing as a clean and healthy river full of salmon. The 'smoke-vomiting chimneys' of the soap-works are gone (48). 'In spite of all the infallible maxims of [our] day' (228), there is nothing supernatural and magical in finding beautiful people, sunny weather, and a salmon-filled river. Northrop Frye provides a rational explanation of the first phenomenon:

Even as late as the First World War, if you looked at the officers and the enlisted men in the British army, they were just two different races of people. The officers had been brought up on protein foods, and they were all big and handsome, and the enlisted men had starved and kept alive on very inferior foods, and they were all stunted and warped, and Morris saw all this around him and realized how much beauty could be in the world if there were more good health, and how much good health there would be if social conditions were equalized.<sup>9</sup>

The second phenomenon – the phenomenal change in the weather – has an equally rational explanation: the infamous London fog has largely disappeared with the coal-smoke from the chimneys that caused it, leaving England with much more sunshine than there was a century ago. Ironically, few of Morris's Victorian readers would have guessed that the weather could be improved more easily than the social conditions of labourers.

The idealistic Morris was not naive about the likelihood of easily

revolutionizing our lives. In the serialized 1890 edition of *News from Nowhere* he cited the date for the new Hammersmith bridge without the 'grimy sootiness' as 1971. When he revised his manuscript for publication as a book a year later, he pushed the date of the bridge forward to 2003. Unfortunately, we need to push the date still further into the future, as we watch the years pass with one generation after another doing so little to affect the change required to bring about a better world. The paragraph that recounts Guest's reaction when he hears this 2003 date provides us with a subtle suggestion as to why successive generations accept our lot in life, too soon abandoning our ideals, our dreams, our responsibilities to improve the world:

The date shut my mouth as if a key had been turned in a padlock fixed to my lips; for I saw that something inexplicable had happened, and that if I said much, I should be mixed up in a game of cross questions and crooked answers. So I tried to look unconcerned, and to glance in a matter-of-course way at the banks of the river. (48)

The moment he realizes how different he is from his neighbours, the moment he recognizes that he does not belong in their world, he shuts up, padlocks closed his sense of difference, and immediately tries to conform, to adapt to the social order, to belong with the majority. This pressure to conform is what discourages each one of us from pursuing our ideals, from revolutionizing the world. Just as Guest tries 'to look unconcerned' with the world he sees as shockingly lovely, we learn to look unconcerned with a world that is shockingly corrupt, an 'ugly characterless waste' (208). We believe it easier to adapt and conform to this waste land in order to avoid 'cross questions and crooked answers.' To carry on an explanation of our own contrary thoughts will too often lead us lazily to lose our resolve: 'I should have begun to doubt myself' (52). Guest belittles 'the service we should do for a fellow citizen' as a trivial matter that requires an exchange of cash (49), whereas the true service for fellow



citizens would require a concerted devotion of our lives to improve the world for our descendants.

The resemblances of utopian Nowhere with fourteenth-century architecture and clothing are not meant as an escape to some nostalgic past. Rather they are part of Morris's radical assault on our conventional ways of thinking, those allegedly 'infallible maxims.' In this case, Morris is challenging our conventional maxims of history and progress. Morris's preference for the Medieval age is a radical reversal of the maxim that modern civilization has been evolving in a progressive line since the Renaissance, when the re-discovery of models of learning from Classical Greece and Rome enabled our emergence from the 'dark ages' of Medieval ignorance. Morris is following the lead of John Ruskin, who argued in 'The Nature of Gothic' chapter of his *Stones of Venice* (1853) that the conventional distinction between the artistic genius of the blueprint designer and the manual labour of the craftsman who carries out the designer's vision is a snobbish distinction which leads to the degradation of both the artist and the art. Ruskin presents the asymmetrical, irregular imperfections of the Gothic style as exemplifying the independence of the craftsman freed from an enslaved conformity to the symmetrical uniformity of the Classical style. The ideal artist carves his own Gothic gargoyle, while the slave copies identical Corinthian columns. For Ruskin, the designer and the craftworker must be one and the same, so that spiritual contemplation and common daily experience are inseparable. Praising 'The Nature of Gothic' as 'one of the few necessary utterances of the century,' Morris developed from it the principles of the Arts and Crafts movement, by which he intended to unify art and work. As Morris explains, 'art is the expression of man's pleasure in labour.'<sup>10</sup> Without such pleasure in our work, beauty cannot be restored to our productions, and we shall continue to toil and live in pain. Thus Morris added a radicalized ideology to Ruskinian aesthetics and Marxist economics. He spent a decade of his life lecturing tirelessly from trade-union halls to Hyde Park

corner, campaigning for a socialist revolution that would save civilization by making art an integral and intrinsic part of life. According to Morris, art cannot continue to be marginalized as the exclusive culture of an elite class; art must not only be essential to the life of everyone, but, as the expression of our joy in living, art must also change from being a way of life for a few to becoming the essential way of all our lives.

Morris's preference for the craftsmanship of fourteenth-century art marked not only his resistance to the sophisticated pretension of the Renaissance; Morris also recognized that the myth of progress is a reactionary ideology, as it supports a passive faith in evolution that resists the need for revolutionary action. He campaigned against this laissez-faire attitude of capitalism, which promoted a passive acceptance of the status quo as if each of us should leave well enough alone so that the world will continue to follow along its progressive course of growth.

*News from Nowhere* is Morris's fictional demonstration of the contrary socialist principles for which he campaigned in his political lectures. One institution after another is no longer functioning in the new socialist society of Nowhere. The Houses of Parliament are now 'a storage place for manure,' as the proverbial bullshit of corrupt politicians is replaced by a legitimate 'dung market,' now valuable as a source for fertilizer (69, 77). The justice system is gone because there is no longer a need for inhumane prisons and gallows designed for punishing the criminal acts of desperate citizens and no need for illogical interference in divorce matters, as if married partners were objects to be bartered over. There does remain the occasional crime of passion, as 'love madness' is not always coped with rationally, but the punishment for such crimes is the burden of remorse (188-89).

It should not surprise us that so radical a thinker as Morris would envision many of his own interests as being no longer important for the society of the future. Much of what he held so dearly close to his heart – literature, paintings, historic architecture – is dismissed as something to be tolerated but scarcely considered important in the

new society. First, an institutionalized education system is no longer needed because children are now allowed to learn whatever interests them, and adults continue to learn at their own pace. Guest worries that the children will never acquire a sense of discipline, but in Nowhere there is no obsession to determine what books children should learn, no effort to impose upon children what adults believe will do the most good. Instead, the adults shrug from worrying over the prospect of studying too many books: 'After all, I don't know that it does them much harm, even if they do grow up book-students. Such people as that, 'tis a great pleasure seeing them so happy over work which is not much sought for. And besides, these students are generally such pleasant people; so kind and sweet-tempered; so humble, and at the same time so anxious to teach everybody all that they know' (68).

Though in his own life Morris founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, in his utopia there is little use for the historic architecture he so passionately defended; the British Museum and St. Paul's Cathedral are merely tolerated in Nowhere: 'You see, in this matter we need not grudge a few poorish buildings standing, because we can always build elsewhere' (69). Morris was a passionate student of history, but history holds little interest in Nowhere. Old Hammond understands why his interest in history is not shared by others: 'I don't think my tales of the past interest them much. The last harvest, the last baby, the last knot of carving in the market-place is history enough for them. It was different, I think, when I was a lad, when we were not so assured of peace and continuous plenty as we are now' (89). Two of Morris's own principal prescriptions for life suggest an equation of architecture and literature:

If I were asked what is at once the most important production of Art and the thing most to be longed for, I should answer, A beautiful House; and if I were further asked to name the production next in importance and the thing longed for, I should

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answer, A beautiful Book. To enjoy good houses and good books in self-respect and decent comfort, seems to me the pleasurable end towards which all societies of human beings ought now to struggle.<sup>11</sup>

For Morris, this advice is intended as the first step for adding some heavenly light to our hellish world. But once a socialist paradise is achieved, then architecture and literature are merely two of the many elements that may interest us in our daily lives as artists. Books are not valued as mass-printed novels, but rather as exercises in beautiful calligraphy. To help us as 'readers' of *Nowhere* to understand why reading is no more important for education or entertainment than 'boating and swimming' (184), Morris introduces the young Ellen as the spokesperson for the new social order. Her grandfather is nostalgic for 'the spirit of adventure' energizing the old novels that he misses in the books of the new utopian age. But as Ellen explains, people no longer need to escape in literature, for they are now free to experience directly the ideals of the world:

'Books, books! always books, grandfather! When will you understand that after all it is the world we live in which interests us; the world of which we are a part, and which we can never love too much? Look!' she said, throwing open the casement wider and showing us the white light sparkling between the black shadows of the moonlit garden, through which ran a little shiver of the summer night-wind, 'look! these are our books in these days! – and these,' she said, stepping lightly up to the two lovers and laying a hand on each of their shoulders; 'and the guest there, with his over-seas knowledge and experience; – yes, and even you, grandfather' (a smile ran over her face as she spoke), 'with all your grumbling and wishing yourself back again in the good old days, – in which, as far as I can make out, a harmless and lazy old man like you would have pretty nearly starved.... Yes, these are our books; and if we want more, can we not find work to do in the beautiful buildings that we raise up all over the country (and I know there was nothing like them in the past times), wherein a man can put

forth whatever is in him, and make his hands set forth his mind and soul.' (175)

The choice of a young woman as the spokesperson for Morris's utopia is yet another radical departure for a nineteenth-century author. Old Hammond serves as the conventional figure of the wise grandfather who guides Guest through a series of questions and answers about the Morrow of the Revolution, but it is the young feminist woman who serves as the climactic embodiment of the utopian future. Ellen is 'as beautiful as a picture' (173), rows a boat much better than Guest does, and is the wisest inhabitant of Nowhere. She is compared to a picture because she is designed to demonstrate her argument that those who inhabit the happy and healthy world of fellowship are living lives that are the embodiment of art. The air they breathe 'is fragrant and clean as the ideal of the old pastoral poets' (177). Dick identifies the scene of Ellen in a hayfield with the fictional garden depicted in the pictures from storybooks: "'Look, guest,'" said Dick; "doesn't it all look like one of those very stories out of Grimm that we were talking about up in Bloomsbury? Here are we two lovers wandering about in the world, and we have come to a fairy garden, and there is the very fairy herself amidst of it'" (179). Novels and fine art are no longer necessary to the lives of those who inhabit a paradisaal garden. In such a paradise the weather and the seasons provide better drama. The theatre of the seasons is a drama wherein people actively participate rather than sit for passive observation. As Dick explains, 'I can't look upon it as if I were sitting in a theatre seeing the play going on before me, myself taking no part of it.... I am part of it all, and feel the pain as well as the pleasure in my person. It is not done for me by somebody else, merely that I may eat and drink and sleep; but I myself do my share of it' (225).

Morris thus redefines art as the central activity of our lives. 'Art or work-pleasure, as one ought to call it' (160), is identified with the skill of mowing hay, carving a pipe, or mending a road. Indeed, the

'gang of men road-mending' looked 'much like a boating party at Oxford would have looked in the days I remembered, and not much more troubled with their work' (82). Dick identifies the 'pick-work' of the merry road-menders as 'good sport' (83). Whereas once 'the aim of all people before our time was to avoid work' (200), there is now in the land of fellowship no longer a distinction between work and play; the activities required for roads, hayfields, and rowboats are enjoyed indeed as a playful sport. The sports analogy reminds us that people do enjoy work, as they share their time in communal exercises without monetary rewards. Old Hammond explains this change in attitude towards labour:

Art or work-pleasure ... sprung up almost spontaneously, it seems, from a kind of instinct amongst people, no longer driven desperately to painful and terrible overwork, to do the best they could with the work in hand – to make it excellent of its kind; and when that had gone on for a little, a craving for beauty seemed to awaken in men's minds, and they began rudely and awkwardly to ornament the wares which they made; and when they had once set to work at that, it soon began to grow. All this was much helped by the abolition of squalor which our immediate ancestors put up with so coolly; and by the leisurely, but not stupid, country-life which now grew to be common amongst us. Thus at last and by slow degrees we got pleasure into our work; then we became conscious of that pleasure, and cultivated it, and took care that we had our fill of it; and then all was gained, and we were happy. So may it be for ages and ages! (160)

Unlike most stories of futuristic worlds, Morris's utopia has no technological wonders. 'This is not an age of inventions,' we are pointedly informed in *Nowhere*. That was the mistake of the nineteenth century, when machinery was considered more important than equality:

This opinion, which from all I can learn seemed as natural then, as it seems absurd now, that while the ordinary daily work of the

world would be done entirely by automatic machinery, the energies of the more intelligent part of mankind would be set free to follow the higher forms of the arts, as well as science and the study of history. It was strange, was it not, that they should thus ignore that aspiration after complete equality which we now recognize as the bond of all happy human society?... They soon began to find out their mistake, and that only slaves and slaveholders could live solely by setting machines going. (200)

Morris envisions a world that has reversed the nineteenth-century effort to invent 'machinery that would supersede handicraft' (200). Enslavement to the machinery of the nineteenth century could produce only 'abortions of the market' (125), whereas the people of Nowhere are artists whose art is the desired product of the pleasure of creation (127). *News from Nowhere* demonstrates that the business of art and fellowship concerns the quality of life that empowers heavenly people like Dick and Clara and Ellen to thrive on Earth.

The pattern of contrasts between the reality of the capitalist present and the dream of the communist future reaches a climax when it threatens Guest's image of Ellen. Guest identifies her as the ultimate embodiment of the new social order. Although Ellen invites him to stay in the future with her, she recognizes that he cannot escape his 'never-ending contrast between the past and this present,' telling Guest that she 'must not let you go off into a dream again so soon. If we lose you, I want you to see all that you can see first before you go back again.' He reminds her that she had invited him to stay with her, but she immediately sees that he is already relapsing: "'Only, what were you thinking of just now?' I said falteringly: 'I was saying to myself, the past, the present? Should she not have said the contrast of the present with the future: of blind despair with hope?'" (222). The contrast between the hellish present of his world and the heavenly future of her world becomes unbearable when it affects Guest's perception of Ellen: 'I was thinking of what you, with your capacity and intelligence, joined to your love of pleasure, and your impatience of unreasonable restraint – of what you would have

been in that past. And even now, when all is won and has been for a long time, my heart is sickened with thinking of all the waste of life that has gone on for so many years!' (222). As reality intrudes upon Guest's dream, he is left haunted by the loss of so many potential Ellens who have been forced to suffer the fate of servants and slaves.

In the first chapter we were reminded that Guest's experiences already 'began to shape themselves into an amusing story' (45). When, in chapter 23, Guest laughs about feeling left out of Dick's 'tale,' Dick replies: 'You had better consider that you have got the cap of darkness, and are seeing everything, yourself invisible' (179). Now in the last chapter at the 'haysel' feast, Guest fades from their view, becoming a distant observer of the future. If we ask ourselves before we start reading *News from Nowhere* why we find the hell of our lives so much more credible than the heaven of our dreams, the answer for our cynical students is obvious: 'Just look around.' But as we reach this last chapter our position should be reversed. It is Guest who fades as a phantom because the heavenly world of Nowhere is the more credible reality than the hellish nightmare into which Guest seems to be drifting. Returning to this hellish world, Guest encounters a Victorian neighbour, a 'grimed'-faced figure, 'eyes dulled and bleared,' 'body bent,' 'feet dragging and limping,' 'clothing ... a mixture of dirt and rags' (227-28). In contrast to the 'joyous, beautiful people left behind in the church' (227), this figure surely must be a phantom from a nightmare. Such an incredible nightmare surely could never be allowed to become the normative reality of a wide-awake world. Most disturbing because it rings so pathetically true in its detailed contrast with Nowhere is the trace of real fellowship that is all but extinguished by the soul-destroying mastery and servility of the class-system: as they cross paths, Guest's Victorian neighbour 'touched his hat with some real good-will and courtesy, and much servility' (228). The indomitable traces of the humanity of fellowship revealed in this nightmarish figure leave Guest 'inexpressibly shocked' (228), and they tear at the reader's heart, as we realize that this nearly broken figure was born with the



same potential as Ellen. Moreover, we realize that Ellen may never have the opportunity to reach such potential unless we in the present work towards a better future.

Morris concludes with Guest imagining what 'Ellen's last mournful look seemed to say.' It is a rallying call for revolutionizing the world by striving 'to build up little by little the new day of fellowship, and rest, and happiness' (228). Significantly, this speech attributed to Ellen is not her own spoken words, but rather is Guest's impression of what someone like Ellen might wish to say but will not be empowered to say aloud until enough readers are inspired to join the struggle for a more heavenly world where future generations of Ellens may thrive. Morris thus appeals to our social conscience to awaken us from the wish for a single dream-lover, replacing the selfish wish with an empathy for all our fellow neighbours so that we will fix our sight on the effort to change the conditions of our world, never abandoning our hope that future generations will enjoy living heavenly lives here on Earth.

We have seen how four incredible transformations can be envisioned concerning the ideals of weather, health, ecology, and labour. The ideal of fellowship is the remaining dream. In his youth Morris said that his 'work is an embodiment of dreams in one form or another.'<sup>12</sup> As his career makes clear, he did not mean a wistful dream from which we may never awaken, but a commitment to spread the word from one friend to another, to inspire others to share his hope for the harmony of fellowship. As Ellen's impatient dismissal of 'books, books, books' suggests, our hopes and fears for art are misdirected towards idle entertainment: towards the escapist nature of Victorian novels in Morris's time and towards modern movies in our own time. Such novels and movies are generally about the selfish desire for a single dream-lover. If we can change the weather and our health and our height, then we may answer, 'yes, surely,' we can find time to consider a different kind of art about a different kind of dream. Turning from the *Commonweal* political lecture to the Kelmscott utopian romance, Morris shifted his

campaign to change the world as he endeavours to show us how the force of a shared desire can transform the realm of the stories we imagine into the reality of the lives we live.

## NOTES

1. William Morris, 'Preface to *Signs of Change*,' in *Collected Works of William Morris*, ed. May Morris (London: Longmans, Green, 1910-15), vol. 23, p. 2.
2. The Beatles, 'Revolution,' *White Album* (London: Apple Records, 1968).
3. John Lennon, 'Imagine,' *Imagine* (London: Apple Records, 1971). Margaret Stetz discusses Lennon's song as an 'appeal to "possibility" and to the visionary, which asked its hearers to think beyond social boundaries and possessions toward a universal fellowship based upon sharing. Its chorus, moreover, collapsed the distinction between dreaming and action, much as had Morris's *News from Nowhere* almost century earlier, and invited the enlightened masses who espoused this utopian vision.' Margaret Stetz, "'Caught in the Trap": William Morris, Machinery, and Popular Film from Charlie Chaplin to Nick Park,' *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, ns 15 (Spring 2006), p. 69.
4. William Morris, *News from Nowhere and Other Writings*, ed. Clive Wilmer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), p. 228. All subsequent quotations from *News from Nowhere* are from this edition.
5. W.B. Yeats, 'The Second Coming,' *Selected Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1964), lines 7-8.
6. William Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,' plate 8. *Selected Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. Northrop Frye (New York: Modern Library, 1953), p. 126.
7. Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1965), p. 141.

8. William Morris, 'How I Became a Socialist,' *News from Nowhere and Other Writings*, ed. Clive Wilmer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), pp. 382-83.
9. Northrop Frye and Christopher Lowry, 'A Conversation with Northrop Frye about William Morris,' *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, ns 10 (Spring 2001), p. 40.
10. William Morris, 'Preface to *The Nature of Gothic*,' *News from Nowhere and Other Writings*, ed. Clive Wilmer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), p. 367.
11. William Morris, *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*, ed. William S. Peterson (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982), p. 1.
12. William Morris, [letter of July 1856] *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, ed. Norman Kelvin (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984), vol. 1, p. 28.