MICHELLE WEINROTH & PAUL LEDUC BROWNE, EDITORS. TO BUILD A SHADOWY ISLE OF BLISS: WILLIAM MORRIS'S RADICALISM AND THE EMBODIMENT OF DREAMS,

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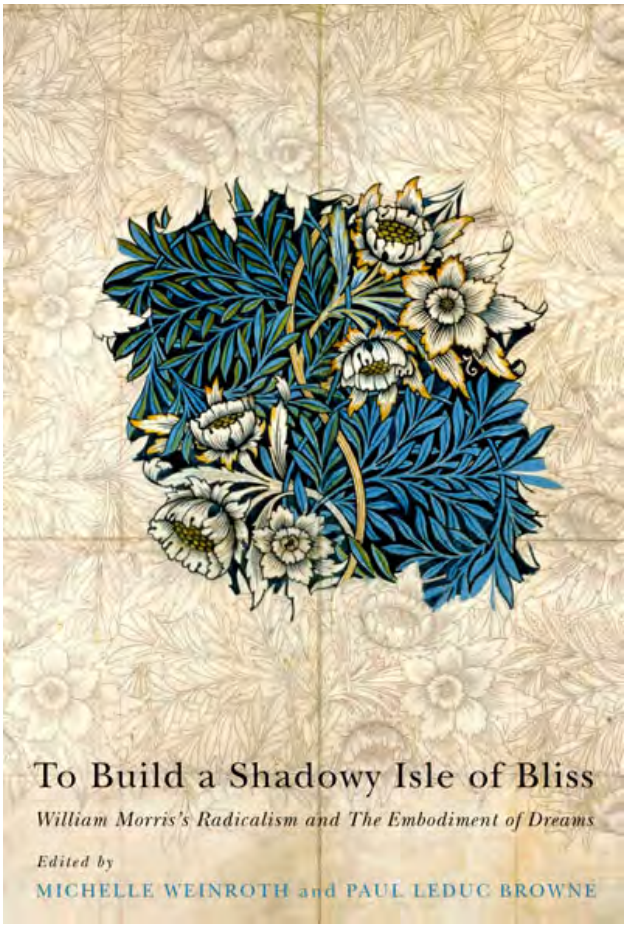
The most significant essay collection on Morris's work to appear in some years, *To Build a Shadowy Isle of Bliss: William Morris's Radicalism and the Embodiment of Dreams,* edited by Michelle Weinroth and Paul Leduc Browne, is the product of a symposium and workshop convened by the co-editors in Montreal and Ottawa in 2010 and 2011. Seeking to reappraise Morris's radicalism "in terms of a number of overlapping discourses," among them Victorian Studies, utopian studies, and print culture, the editors seek to demonstrate that the multiple strands of Morris's work embody issues both "universal and current." Weinroth's introduction explains that *William Morris's Radicalism and the Embodiment of Dreams* explores the dialectical opposition between Morris's aesthetic achievements and his radical politics, "an unstable and transformative tension" which recreates the past through representing "an alternate commonweal." In accord with these aims, most of the volume's twelve essays explore creative manifestations of these apparent anomalies and tensions, and I will here review the eight essays devoted to Morris's literary works.

In "Illuminating Divergences: Morris, Burne-Jones, and the Two *Aeneids*," (56-84), Miles Tittle examines the collaborative edition of this imperial epic, translated and partly illuminated by Morris with illustrations by Edward Burne-Jones. Tittle notes that the artistic preferences of the two men had diverged by the time of this enterprise; whereas Morris strove to emphasize the tale's ambivalent tone and the pain unleashed by disruption and war, the classical harmonies of Burne-Jones's drawings embody a more celebratory view of Aeneas's mission. He postulates that Morris turned from illumination to translation in order to resume greater control of the text, and that his translation seeks to return the epic to its multiply-sourced folk origins and imbue it with "his own misgivings about the hegemonic roots of the warrior hero." The chapter's strikingly handsome images, many available for the first time, confirm Tittle's claims for the divergent approaches of the two collaborators as well as manifest Burne-Jones's subtlety in evoking tonalities of form and color.



Yuri Cowan's "Translation, Collaboration, and Reception: Editing Caxton for the Kelmscott Press," (149-72) redresses the scant attention previously paid to the content of the books published at the Kelmscott Press, as opposed to considerations of design, clarity, technique, and so forth. Cowan views Morris's reprinting of works translated and published by Caxton, the first English printer, in the context of Morris's conviction that all forms of decorative art are collaborative ventures, and moreover, that attempts to remediate past works must preserve some of their essential features of "strangeness" or "otherness." He identifies Morris's criteria for the selection of texts as the desire to provide lively and significant works of the past in accessible form to his late-Victorian readers. A merit of Cowan's approach is that it reconciles Morris's more general views on society and popular literature with his intentions in issuing Kelmscott Press books.

In "Morris's Road to *Nowhere*: New Pathways in Political Persuasion" (172-194), Michelle Weinroth explores Morris's utopia as the culmination of his many years of experimentation in the arts of persuasion. Tracing its antecedents in classical pastoral, Weinroth considers *News from Nowhere* as an expression of the "poli-

tics of disengagement," a place "for thinking through the fundamental principles of a humane social world." Avoiding melodrama and triumphalism, *News* instead offers representations of asymmetry and deferral, and differs from static and prescriptive utopias in confronting "the problem of how we might deliver news about that which we do not know."

In "*News from Nowhere Two*: Principles of a Sequel" (218-240), Tony Pinkney offers a blend of creative and critical response to Morris's famous work. He suggests that, 125 years after its publication, Morris's utopia should be updated for our own time, and such a sequel should "contain built-in principles of change and development" in accord with twentieth-century utopian theory. To this end, he maintains, it should consider some of the alternate narrative possibilities alluded to in the text—among these the suggestion that Morris's utopia itself may be threatened either by outside forces or the complacency of its citizens. Pinkney then constructs an alternative plot in which Ellen and Old Hammond return from idyllic seclusion to lead an army of resistance against a counterrevolution, mounting "a fight for justice at every twist and turn of the river." Fantasy turns serious, however, as the reader recognizes the uncanny resemblance of some of Pinkney's constructions to political events of recent decades.

In "The Politics of Antiquarian Poetics, " David Latham explores the significance of Morris's belief that social relations were intertwined with language itself, and his resultant attempts to change what he saw as degraded linguistic forms into an alternative language appropriate for encouraging community and fellowship. Latham explores Morris's early poetry as a celebration of artistic vision, set poignantly in a medieval world "so newly fallen from the communal ideal of society"; the poetry of his middle period as an attempt to broaden contemporary views of mythology; and his socialist writings as models for inquiry which encouraged reader involvement. He usefully identifies several poetic features of Morris's late prose romances which enabled him to develop "the prose poem as a new genre of art," and concludes that more than any of the other Pre-Raphaelites, Morris articulated fundamental reasons for their pre-Renaissance, pro-medievalist position in "a radical commitment to revolutionizing a hierarchical social order… based on the authoritarian ideology of classical and biblical mythologies."

In "Radical Tales: Rethinking the Politics of William Morris's Last Romances," (85-105), Phillippa Bennett presents a holistic view of the relationship of Morris's late prose romances to his political endeavors. She asserts that rather than directly presenting socialist societies or principles, Morris sought in his romances to explore the challenges of political activism and to define "the values that underpinned his personal engagement with, and commitment to, the socialist movement." Bennett suggests that he chose the romance genre because of its openness to the "contemplation of possibilities" and its embeddedness in a rich and potentially liberatory tradition of storytelling. Her readings of several late romances identify recurrent patterns: the need for commitment under hardship, the wisdom to desire "better, more, and otherwise," and the necessity of hope.

In "Telling Time: Song's Rhythms in Morris's Late Work," (106-123), Elizabeth Helsinger provides the first sustained account of the prosody of Morris's brief socialist lyrics, especially the "Chants for Socialists." Explaining the effects of rhythm, designed to move singers "to desire a common weal," she posits that these songs encourage commitment and activism while simultaneously promoting "reflection on the excitements of the rhythmic power they arouse." Helsinger then considers the effect of song in Morris's prose works, exploring the effects of a historical rhyming password in *A Dream of John Ball* and observing that the interspersed lyrics or "song-speech" of the late prose romances "occupy the place of subjective interiority." Finally, she discusses the use of charms and riddles, which reflect Morris's hope that "when the mastery of men is renounced, the mastery of nature that such lyric forms compel might be harnessed for the commonweal."

In "William Morris's 'Lesser Arts' and 'The Commercial War," (35-55), I consider the creative tensions within Morris's representations of struggle, violence, and the solace of creative memorialization. Noting that even his earliest poems and prose romances convey revulsion and sorrow at the consequences of violence, I examine his increasingly overt opposition to what he saw as the social violence of "commercial war," his many attacks on British imperialism in later life, and his stated abhorrence of even socialist-instigated violence. Athough his later romance protagonists still engage in quasi-allegorical struggles, they also attempt to disengage when possible, and to transmute the conflicts around them into stories, songs, and other artistic expressions of reconciliation and peace.

In all, the essays in *To Build a Shadowy Isle of Bliss: William Morris's Radicalism and the Embodiment of Dreams* belie the self-deprecation of its title (no "shadowy isle") and confirm the unity, complexity, and enduring relevance of Morris's socially transformative aesthetics.