WILLIAM MORRIS
CENTENARY ESSAYS

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An Aesthetic Ecocommunist
Morris the Red and Morris the Green

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The centenary of William Morris's death suggests a need to reassess the broadly innovative qualities of his writings and achievements, and to consider the ways in which his literary experimentation and his social and aesthetic ideas might offer useful examples and correctives for our own end of century (and end of millennium).

I have written elsewhere on other topics relevant to Morris's cast of mind in the 1880s and 1890s—his revisionist historicism, for example, and his anarcho-communism.[1] In this essay, I would like to focus on what may be a more difficult and elusive topic: his views on the preservation of the environment.

In some modernist as well as post-modernist circles, Morris's writings have been censured for their alleged 'romantic' utopianism—witnessed, for example, by evocations of ideals of counterfactual harmony among humans, and between humans and their natural environment. Manifestly such visionary ideals *are* counterfactual in our world, as they were in the late-Victorian period. They may even be more so now, in indefinitely complex and socio-economically ramified ways. But Morris's prose writings on art and society should still be read, for they are firmly grounded in his own time and relevant to ours.

Morris himself observed more than once the paradox that the most enduring ideals change their labels and modes of expression over time. In *A Dream of John Ball*, for example, his narrator, moved by the rebel priest's eloquent sermon at the crossroads, came to understand that 'the thing that

[men] fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name . . .'[2]

In the last decade, we have seen the eruption of ethnic wars in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Burundi; the collapse of the former Soviet Union into economic and ideological chaos; the apparently unlimited power of 'global capital' to transform governments and shuffle casts of 'major players' without the smallest concern for distributive justice; and the flickering capacity of political democracy to mitigate the consequences of immiseration, greed and hate. Most of us have been insulated from these agonies, but we are aware that we have been witnessing—in effect—a global variant of the industrial revolution that aroused Morris's anger.

Morris had a remarkable ability to focus quickly on essentials, and express some of the 'holistic' interrelations between social and physical processes that still elude precise system-theoretic quantification.[3] His conviction that spoliation of natural beauty leads straight to other forms of deprivation made him an important predecessor of late twentieth-century environmentalism in all of its various hues of green—from 'deep' ecological and ecofeminist 'theorists', to 'pragmatic' activists and resource planners. Morris's views also find analogues in studies of the belief-structures of non-'growth'-driven cultures, such as those of the Native American nations before the conquest, and the recorded views of such societies about proper forms of balance between humans and their natural surroundings.

In this essay, then, I will try to analyse three qualities which helped Morris's writings achieve this relevance: their grounding in historically informed views of 'nature'; their stylistic innovations as models of informal but highly emotive, artistic, and serious prose; and their insights into the relationship between the social and aesthetic evils that beset a post-(or post-post-)industrial, or post-post-colonial society.

In the first section, I will therefore offer a brief retrospective of Morris's literary uses of nature and central ideas about the relation of art to its environment, and consider some sources and partial antecedents for those ideas. In its second part, I will argue that the forms he chose to present these social ideals were not adventitious, for Morris worked to refine an unpretentious prose style for his talks and articles in *Commonweal*, and developed a flexible, quasi-poetic essay style to convey his egalitarian artistic beliefs. In the third and final part, I will reconsider Morris's defence of 'the earth', and argue that his attacks on the maldistribution of its goods and ills anticipated the insights of late twentieth-century 'deep', spiritual, eco-feminist, and socialist ecologists in several concrete ways.[4] In a sense, Morris may have understood these issues as well as he did because he was *not*

primarily a 'nature writer', unlike other nineteenth-century memoirists and naturalists such as Henry David Thoreau, Charles Darwin, and even John Muir. His principal preoccupations were cultural-anthropological—that is, he devoted himself primarily to the relationships between human beings and their social environments and between artistic freedom and work, with special care for the need to preserve material evidence of a people's history.

'Nature' in Morris's Work

Morris's early poetry (*The Defence of Guenevere*, *Scenes from the Fall of Troy*, *The Life and Death of Jason*) and his prose romances ('The Unknown Church', 'Svend and His Brethren', 'Gertha's Lovers') evoked a threatened life within nature: the garden love of Guenevere and Launcelot is opposed to kingly oppression, and the pastoral lovers of the early prose romances are separated by defection and war. Like other poets of the 1850s, however, Morris in his early authorial voice expressed little concern that *nature itself* might fail. The medieval European societies he evoked were hostile, treacherous, and faction-ridden—inimical to youthful idealism, loyalty, and life itself—but their problems were hardly those of forced urbanization, pollution, and near-obsessive industrial exploitation.

The poems of Morris's middle period, 1868–76—*The Earthly Paradise*, *Love Is Enough*, *Sigurd the Volsung*—were notable for their continued projection of social relations onto landscapes, and their open pleasure in descriptions of outdoor settings: human encounters occurred more often in temples, gardens, and palaces than in homes. This was true, of course, of many poets in the Romantic tradition, but it was especially true for Morris, whose narrative landscapes were both allegorical and concrete, and evoked many details of animal and plant life, daily labour and everyday physical sensations.

In the early 1870s, Morris also made two journeys to Iceland, embarking each time from Scotland, and on his first train trip north to Scotland through the coal-mining regions of Darlington and Newcastle, he observed that the region was 'most haplessly blotched by coal. . . .'[5] In 1877, he became a founding member of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (Anti-Scrape), and served as its first secretary. On behalf of Anti-Scrape, Morris travelled to dozens of sites, and wrote hundreds of letters, many of them short essays, protesting the neglect, defacement, and demolition of buildings of historical or architectural worth.

In 1883, Morris joined the Social Democratic Federation, England's only nascent socialist political organization at the time, and began to deliver talks on contemporary art to a wide range of middle-class and work associations.

These talks later appeared in the collections *Hopes and Fears for Art* (1882) and *Signs of Change* (1888); and posthumously in *Architecture, Industry, and Wealth* (1902); volumes 22 and 23 of the *Collected Works of William Morris* (1910–15); *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, compiled by May Morris (1936); and *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*, edited by Eugene LeMire (1969).

In youth, then, Morris turned to history and natural landscapes for psychological reassurance and reinforcement. As he aged, he found more of his history and identity written on the landscape, in the memories and habits associated with the aesthetic face of nature. More and more, also, he saw these associations threatened by the squalor, greed and ravaging industrialization of nineteenth-century England. By the early 1880s, his own level gaze, reading, travels, decorative work and meditations on creative labour and popular art had provided him with the means to understand the underlying causes behind bogus-gothic 'restoration' and the defacement of the countryside he loved.

Some Antecedents

Morris was not the first, of course, to remonstrate at the human and environmental cost of industrial 'development', or suggest that his auditors should join him in protecting their environment, or argue that some parts of earth and landscape are the common property of all humans, including those yet unborn. Since adolescence Morris had always admired a communitarian/communist strain in medieval Christianity, as represented by the teachings of Ambrose of Milan:

> The earth was established to be in common for all, rich and poor; why do ye rich alone arrogate it to yourselves as your rightful property? . . . Why do you delight in what to nature are losses? The world, which you few rich men try to keep for yourselves, was created for all men.[6]

One of Morris's favourite books, moreover—and the chief begetter of the narrative structure of his own 1890 *News from Nowhere*—was Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), distinctive for its vitriolic opposition to the enclosure of once-common grazing lands while the peasantry faced starvation. *Utopia*, of course, was also the most famous early English model of widely dispersed, quasi-agrarian town planning.

More may have had less reason in the sixteenth century to fear that cities might become dangerously and unhealthily overpopulated, but sewerage and hygiene were rudimentary, and everyone recalled the lessons of the Black

Death. He anticipated, at any rate, recommendations of nineteenth-century and later town planners when he advocated that cities should be of roughly equal size and separated by a day's walk (roughly 25 miles), and have about 60,000 inhabitants, who would then have access to the advantages of community and countryside alike.

Radicals active following the French Revolution and in the early nineteenth-century also recalled the teachings of communitarian prophets such as Thomas Spence, whose 1793 *Meridian Sun of Liberty* had taught that all men owned the earth in common, so that none could sell it to another, and advocated a scheme of district-by-district land socialization. Other roughly cognate doctrines current in nineteenth-century social reformist circles included the single-tax ideas of Henry George, who argued in his 1879 *Progress and Poverty* that 'no power on earth can rightfully make a grant of exclusive ownership in land', and espoused a tax on inherited land, which George thought would eventually diminish the power of the British aristocracy and redistribute land into small freeholdings.

After Morris began to preach 'the Social-Revolution', he also read the published writings of Karl Marx. Marx was hardly an ecologist, and tended to accept the dominant economic view of nature and the environment as resources for human appropriation. At one point in *Capital*, however, he did decry their swift use under a capitalism driven by immediate cash gain:

> . . . all progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art . . . of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time, is a progress towards ruining the lasting sources of that fertility. . . . Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combination together of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of wealth—the soil and the labourer.[7]

The 24-year-old Friedrich Engels had also visited Manchester in 1844, and his *Condition of the Working Class in England* included as much detail about the workers' fetid and crowded dwellings and the absence of any planning for adequate sewerage and ventilation as it did about low wages and dangerous conditions in the workplace. In his unfinished *Dialectics of Nature* (according to its editor J.B.S. Haldane, probably written between 1872 and 1882), moreover, Engels specifically challenged the notion that humans can control the natural world, or even predict the consequences of their drastic interventions in its processes:

> Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human conquests over nature. For each such conquest takes its revenge on us . . .

> The people who, in Mesopotamia, Greece, Asia Minor, and elsewhere, destroyed the forests to obtain cultivable land, never dreamed that they were laying the basis for the present devastated conditions of those countries, by removing along with the forests the collecting centres and reservoirs of moisture . . . Those who spread the potato in Europe were not aware that with these farinaceous tubers they were at the same time spreading the disease of scrofula. Thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature—but that we, with flesh, blood, and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst . . .[8]

In his 1894 autobiographical essay, 'How I Became A Socialist', finally, Morris recalled, '[H]ow deadly dull the world would have been twenty years ago but for Ruskin! It was through him that I learned to give form to my discontent . . .'[9] Morris probably continued to follow Ruskin's social pronouncements into the 1870s, and read at least part of *Fors Clavigera*, the series of epistolary conversations/reflections/exhortations Ruskin addressed ostensibly to the 'workers of England', and published intermittently between 1871 and 1884. At its best, *Fors* was a powerful experiment in informal bellettrism, and it anticipated in some ways Morris's later appeals to similar audiences. Ruskin's recurrent allusions to breakdowns, moments of confessional grief, and intermittent leaps into unmediated stream-of-consciousness rendered its tone alternately pathetic and frustrating, but his intense feeling for the natural world itself—not the 'modern landscape' mediated by art—was undeniable, as was the poetic power of his resonantly stated fears that encroachments of technology and 'science' would destroy all that he held dear:

> You cared neither for Gods nor grass, but for cash . . .; you thought you could get it by what *the Times* calls 'Railroad Enterprise'. You Enterprised a railroad through the valley—you blasted its rocks away, heaped thousands of tons of shale into its lovely stream. The valley is gone, and the Gods with it . . .
>
> There are three Material things, not only useful, but essential to Life. No one knows how to live till he has got them.
> These are, Pure Air, Water, and Earth.[10]

Ruskin's critique also broadened out into an indictment of war—in this case the contemporary Franco-Prussian conflicts as (among many other things) a particularly vicious form of environmental pollution—and he appealed for preventive legislation to protect the air and waters from agents of disease:

> You can vitiate the air by your manner of life, and of death, to any extent. You might easily vitiate it so as to bring such a pestilence on the globe as would end all of you. You, or your fellows, German and French, are at present busy in vitiating it to the best of your power in every direction; chiefly at this moment with corpses, and animal and vegetable ruin in war: changing men, horses, and garden-stuff into noxious gas. But everywhere, and all day long, you are vitiating it with foul chemical exhalations, and the horrible nests, which you call towns, are little more than laboratories for the distillation into heaven of enormous smokes and smells, mixed with effluvia from decaying animal matter, and infectious miasmata from purulent disease.
>
> On the other hand, your power of purifying the air, by dealing properly and swiftly with all substances in corruption; by absolutely forbidding noxious manufactures; and by planting in all soils the trees which cleanse and invigorate earth and atmosphere,—is literally infinite. You might make every breath of air you draw, food.[11]

In view of the poor quality of nineteenth-century drinking water and persistently high mortality rates from cholera, typhus and other infectious diseases, it would be difficult to fault his sermonic denunciations of such 'effluvia' as groundless projections or paranoid hysteria.

Morris clearly saw a precedent for his essays and exhortations in his old mentor's attempts to persuade a mixed middle- and working-class audience on broadly social aesthetic concerns, but Ruskin's brocaded style and grandiloquent, voice of 'sage' impersonal declamation was inappropriate for Morris's more systematically revolutionary aims. Morris developed in its place his own way to infuse personal and biblical tones into the careful periodic cadences of his hortatory prose.

The Rhetoric of Fellowship

Academic prose criticism has suffered somewhat under a number of rubrics designed originally to fit a limited range of 'canonical' examples. Influential, for example, in recent years has been George Landow's *Elegant Jeremiahs: The Sage from Carlyle to Mailer* (1986), which captures certain ironic, angry and prophetic features of Victorian prose which apply well to the writings of Carlyle[12] and at times to those of Ruskin, as well as to selected examples of declamatory or sermonic writing by women, such as Florence Nightingale's 1852 *Cassandra*, and Josephine Butler's speech of 1871, 'The Night Before the Dawn'.

A number of recent Victorian critics have now begun to whittle away at the ancient parameters of the corpus of 'major Victorian essays', and added to these works such intertwined and difficult-to-categorize genres as devotional writings, diaries, autobiographies, travel memoirs, letters, biographies, reviews, editorials, parodies, and instructional essays. Such an eclectic, broad-church opening of generic windows was salutary, and in my opinion, long overdue.

Such an expansion can also embrace a proper appreciation of the innovative features of Morris's essays. For his appearances before broad public audiences, Morris required a new style, one that would be less consciously allusive and readerly than his poetry and translations, but retain some of their rhythmic, metaphorical and literary qualities. He had to condense his cadences for clear oral delivery, and find a different, less personal tone which could still elicit complex emotional resonances, as well as ethical and aesthetic assent.

Above all, this new style would have to reflect the values he considered characteristic of 'popular art': friendship, honest, egalitarian engagement and human fellowship. It could not project a class-based voice, which spoke exclusively to his upper-middle-class educated male 'peers' or vested its authority in appeals to that class's certitudes, special knowledge and models of declamatory rhetoric, much less the verities of current political or religious orthodoxy. His secular sermons required a genuinely democratic tone—informal and earnest; one which did not threaten; and one which appealed by example, and with clear examples. Morris did develop such a prose style, for which he had a latent gift. And the emergence of this style, in turn, affected the cadences and manner of his later imaginative writings, especially his prose romances, in clearly marked ways.

In fact, the unpretentiously melodic prose, the 'art of plain speaking' Morris achieved, is as difficult as good poetry.[13] In his essays on art and society, Morris worked in effect toward a free-verse prose line, one which could convey both a timbre of natural conversation, and a sense of the specialness and subjective value of what he described. Declining the voices of 'mentor' as well as 'sage', his speaker sought to persuade through the direct evocation of shared ideals and the essential ethical reasonableness of his convictions. The cadences and allusions of his prose were designed to convey the speaker's interrelatedness with his audience and subject, and embody the moral and aesthetic values that were at stake in political debates.

The style of Morris's earliest pre-socialist essays (from 1878 through 1882) was somewhat less concise than that of his later ones, but these already evinced what would remain characteristic features: the ground-tone of respect for his audience mentioned above, a swiftly shifting rhetorical voice,

and a balance of gradually heightening parallel phrases that culminated in expressions of steady but passionate engagement.

One of his earliest lectures, 'The Beauty of Life', delivered in 1880 to the Birmingham Society of Arts and School of Design, begins unpretentiously, then evokes common expectations and values:

> . . . tonight I . . . must . . . call the faithful of art to a battle wider and more distracting than that kindly struggle with nature, to which all true craftsmen are born; which is both the building-up and the wearing-away of their lives.[14]
>
> As I look round on this assemblage, and think of all that it represents, I cannot choose but be moved to the soul by the troubles of the life of civilized man, and the hope that thrusts itself through them; . . . to call on you to face the latest danger which civilization is threatened with, a danger of her own breeding: that men in struggling towards the complete attainment of all the luxuries of life for the strongest portion of their race should deprive their whole race of all the beauty of life: a danger that the strongest and wisest of mankind, in striving to attain to a complete mastery over Nature, should destroy her simplest and widest-spread gifts, and thereby enslave simple people to them, and themselves to themselves, and so at last drag the world into a second barbarism . . . a thousandfold more hopeless, than the first.[15]
>
> . . . but to be shown the enemy, and the castle we have got to storm, is not to be bidden to run from him; nor am I telling you to sit down deedless in the desert because between you and the promised land lies many a trouble, and death itself maybe: the hope before you you know, and nothing I can say can take it away from you . . .[16].

Morris's allusion to 'struggling towards the complete attainment of the luxuries of life for the strongest portion of their race' may have embodied a critical reference to social darwinism, or at least a momentary backward glance at the author of *On the Origin of Species* and *Natural Selection According to Sex*. Or it may have expressed a distaste for the recrudescence of elitist patterns that Robert Michels later called 'the iron law of oligarchy'. To Morris's listeners, biblical and epic cadences and metaphors would have seemed natural ('and thereby enslave simple people to them, and themselves to themselves . . .'), and he was also willing to resort to more explicit biblical allusions to heighten a sense of the urgent choice between accommodation and resistance ('nor am I telling you to sit down deedless in the desert').[17]

Like Ruskin, Morris also feared—with reason—that the immediate

beneficiaries of 'civilization' and 'progress' might eventually destroy those things which give potential value to these words, and to life itself:

> Nothing can make me believe that the present condition of your Black Country yonder is an unchangeable necessity of your life and position . . . I do think if we were not all of us too prone to acquiesce in the base byword 'after me the deluge', it would soon be something more than an idle dream to hope that . . . those once lovely valleys of Yorkshire in the 'heavy woollen district', with their sweeping hillsides and noble rivers, should not need the stroke of ruin to make them once more delightful abodes of men, instead of the dog-holes that the Century of Commerce has made them . . .[18]
>
> The lack of art, or rather the murder of art . . . curses our streets from the sordidness of the surroundings of the lower classes . . .[19]

For Morris, the term 'art' clearly broadened to encompass all the aesthetic circumstances of ordinary human life, and of our own subjective experience and consciousness. He considered the physical bases of such 'art' as inherent common property, and pilloried an attachment to the derivative beauties of landscape-painting on the part of those whose 'enterprise' and 'management' would destroy the original:

> Well, there are some rich men among us whom we oddly enough call manufacturers, . . .; these gentlemen, many of whom buy pictures and profess to care about art, burn a deal of coal: there is an Act in existence which was passed to prevent them sometimes and in some places from pouring a dense cloud of smoke over the world, and, to my thinking, a very lame and partial Act it is: but nothing hinders these lovers of art from . . . making it a point of honour with them to minimize the smoke nuisance as far as their own works are concerned; and if they don't do so, when mere money, and even a very little of that, is what it will cost them, I say that their love of art is a mere pretence: how can you care about the image of a landscape when you show by your deeds that you don't care for the landscape itself? or what right have you to shut yourself up with beautiful form and colour when you make it impossible for other people to have any share in these things?[20]

Morris's Birmingham audience surely contained a few 'gentlemen' to whom these words quite directly applied.

Space permits only a few more citations of Morris's strictures about the preservation of nature. Some were clearly more aesthetic—in the conven-

tional senses of the world—than ecological. He was a contemptuous foe of placative advertising, for example billboards of the sort that are still less inconspicuous in Great Britain than they are in New Jersey or Nevada:

> I suppose 'tis early days in the revival of the arts to express one's disgust at the daily increasing hideousness of the posters with which all our towns are daubed. Still we ought to be disgusted at such horrors, and I think make up our minds never to buy any of the articles so advertised. I can't believe they can be worth much if they need all that shouting to sell them.[21]

Another of his simpler aesthetic and ecological insights into the need to preserve a sense of the natural settings for human life anticipated the judgment of many later planners, poets, environmentalists and ordinary human beings:

> Again, I must ask what do you do with the trees on a site that is going to be built over? do you try to save them, to adapt your houses at all to them? . . . I ask this anxiously, and with grief in my soul, for in London and its suburbs we always begin by clearing a site till it is as bare as the pavement: I really think that almost anybody would have been shocked if I could have shown him some of the trees that have been wantonly murdered in the suburb in which I live [Hammersmith], amongst them some of those magnificent cedars, for which we along the river used to be famous once . . .[22]
>
> Pray do not forget, that any one who cuts down a tree wantonly or carelessly, especially in a great town or its suburbs, need make no pretence of caring about art.[23]

During the 1880s and 90s other social theorists also sought to find better uses of land for renewable sustenance. In *Fields, Factories, and Workshops*, for example (published in 1898, but assembled from essays that appeared in 1889–90), Peter Kropotkin advocated communal (not collective) farming and intensive but preservationist methods of land use, and argued that small and mid-scale industries are actually more efficient than larger ones, for they benefit naturally from informal planning and experimentation. In 1898 the late-Victorian reformist town planner Ebenezer Howard published *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (revised and reprinted as *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* in 1902). Howard recapitulated *News from Nowhere*'s revulsion from the unreflecting industrial gigantism of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*,[24] and his Garden City Association, founded in 1899, influenced

the design of several English towns (Letchworth and Welwyn, for example), and inspired assorted rivulets of twentieth-century town design in North America.[25] *News from Nowhere*'s voluntarism and near-effortless communion with nature clearly anticipated the peroration of *Garden Cities*, in which city dwellers flock to the country, and slums sprout into gardens, and Howard's blueprints for dispersed, garden-filled communities often amounted to a gradualist cadastre of Morris's ideas.

In their struggles to preserve their forests and livelihoods, the Chipko villagers of northern India bequeathed to us the phrase 'tree-huggers'. Ellen, at the end of *News from Nowhere*, embraces a lichened wall, exclaiming, 'How I love the earth . . . and all that grows out of it [!]', and other late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century poets gave expression to the perception that a tree has life, and can thus in some sense be murdered. 'Binsey Poplars, felled in 1879' by Gerard Manley Hopkins, for example, predated Morris's essay by only a year:

> O if we but knew what we do
> When we delve or hew—
> Hack and rack the growing green!
> Since country is so tender
> To touch, her being so slender,
> That, like this sleek and seeing ball
> But a prick will make no eye at all,
> Where we, even where we mean
> To mend her we end her,
> When we hew and delve:
> After comers cannot guess the beauty been.

A generation later, Charlotte Mew's magnificently cadenced 'The Trees Are Down' (1929) portrayed the depression of a speaker who hears an angelic voice crying 'Kill Not the Trees', and her 'Domus Caedet Arborem' (also 1929) concisely invokes more sinister spirits:

> Ever since the great planes were murdered at the end of the gardens
> The city, to me, at night has the look of a Spirit brooding crime;
> As if the dark houses watching the trees from dark windows
> Were simply biding their time.

Morris expressed the need for simple natural surroundings as the sources and environs of art in 'Making the Best of It' (about 1879), discussing gardens and flowers in colloquial detail; and in 'Art and the Beauty of the

Earth' (1881), an address delivered to potters, he returned to his ground-theme of the hopelessness of life without artistic expression for all. Even if 'art [in conditions of commercial luxury and maldistribution of wealth] is laid in her tomb',[26] he asserted, nature will convict the sham with its own reflected beauty:

> The garment shall be unadorned, though the moth that frets it is painted with silver and pearl. London shall be a desert of hideousness, though the blossom of the 'London pride' be more daintily flecked than the minutest missal that ever monk painted. And when all is done there will yet be too much work, that is to say, too much *pain* in the world.[27]

Morris also linked his appeals for decent surroundings and the preservation of natural beauty to an attack on England's imperial ambitions and foreign wars. Like present-day environmental justice activists, Morris observed that:

> [S]urely there is no square mile of earth's inhabitable surface that is not beautiful in its own way, if we men will only abstain from wilfully destroying that beauty; and it is this reasonable share in the beauty of the earth that I claim as the right of every man [*sic*] who will earn it by due labour; a decent house with decent surroundings for every honest and industrious family; that is the claim which I make of you in the name of art. Is it such an exorbitant claim to make of . . . a civilization that is too apt to . . . thrust her blessings on far-off peoples at the cannon's mouth before she has improved the quality of those blessings so far that they are worth having at any price, even the smallest . . .[28]
>
> If we accept art we must atone for what we have done and pay the cost of it. We must turn this land from the grimy back-yard of a workshop into a garden. . . . Why even the money and the science that we expend in devices for killing and maiming our enemies present and future would make a good nest-egg towards the promotion of decency of life if we could make up our minds to that tremendous sacrifice.[29]

In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* Ruskin had remarked that buildings belong to our descendants, and some of the passages from Morris I have cited echoed rhythms of 'The Nature of Gothic'. But Morris's calls for *communal ownership* of all forms of access to *natural beauty*, to my knowledge, were new.[30]

The perorations of Morris's essays often enjoined commitment to an urgent cause, and 'Art and the Beauty of the Earth' fits this pattern, with its final appeal to the ethical proof of example:

> [T]hat very faith [that art must endure] impels me to speak according to my knowledge, feeble as it may be . . . for every man who has a cause at heart is bound to act as if it depended on him alone . . .[31]

Along the way, Morris also urged his audiences to aid local environmental and preservationist groups such as the Kyrle and Commons Preservation Societies. The London CPS had been active since 1865, and had won small battles for the retention of footpaths, and the preservation of parts of the original Hampstead Heath and Epping Forest, which Morris supported in two letters of 1895 to the London *Daily Chronicle*.[32]

He had always perceived particular issues of natural conservation as part of wider patterns of social justice, however, and in later essays—'The Society of the Future' (1888), for example, and 'Makeshift' (1894)—he argued with asperity it is 'luxury' which alienates most of the population from nature, and 'the war between rich and poor, between the have-alls and the lack-alls' that vitiates the sensibilities of rich and poor alike. Occasional visits to beautiful landscapes—contributions to the World Wildlife Fund, as it were—would never be enough:

> [For the urban poor] [t]heir homes are so devoid of all pleasure of the senses, that they may well long to have a look now and again at the green fields and the sun shining upon them or the wind and the rain sweeping over them. Yet to my mind to go from a weary ugly place to a beautiful one, and to have a look at it and then go back to the weariness and ugliness is but a poor makeshift after all. I want to see the beautiful face of the earth not once a month, or once a week, but every day, but generally. I could no more agree to that other once a month business than I could to dining once a month. The real pleasure of which this tripping [travelling of the leisured class] is a makeshift is making the place in which you live, in which you work, beautiful and pleasant. Then you can stay at home and enjoy yourself, learning as you should and would do the countenance and expression of every tree, and every bough, every little sweep of bank or hollow, till they become dear friends to you . . .[33]

In words often echoed by late twentieth-century 'deep' or socialist ecologists, Morris further excoriated the excesses of 'first-world' consumption:

> What brings about luxury but a sickly discontent with the simple joys of the lovely earth? . . . Shall I tell you what luxury has done for you in modern Europe? It has covered the merry green fields with the hovels of slaves, and blighted the flowers and trees with poisonous gases, and

> turned the rivers into sewers; till over many parts of Britain the common people have forgotten what a field or a flower is like, and their idea of beauty is a gas-poisoned gin-palace or a tawdry theatre . . .[34]

In Morris's utopia, by contrast, the inhabitants of Nowhere are frequent inhabitants of the countryside, and their chief delights lie in their relationship to the natural world around them. The aged historian Hammond in *News from Nowhere*, for example, recounts to Guest that 'when the change came', citizens rushed out from the towns into the country like animals escaped from a cage. In words which anticipated sentiments of modern 'deep' and 'spiritual' ecologists, he explains that: 'The spirit of the new days was to be delight in the life of the world; intense and overweening love of the very skin and surface of the earth on which man dwells, such as a lover has in the fair flesh of the woman he loves . . .'[35] Guest himself observes that the countrypeople he meets 'were eager to discuss all the . . . details of life: the weather, the hay-crop, . . . the plenty or lack of such and such birds . . . taking, I say, real interest in them'.[36] And Ellen, the New Woman of the utopian society, more than once identifies her local countryside and rural home with the earth itself: 'The earth and the growth of it and the life of it! If I could but say or show how I love it![37]

As I have already remarked, Morris's later essays also achieved a new egalitarian tone, which combined the qualities of poetry, argumentative essay and fluent but earnest speech—something analogous in the public sphere, perhaps, to the intimate tone of Charles Lamb's 'private' essays earlier in the century. Other writers of the 1880s and 90s also experimented with forms of poetic prose—Alice Meynell, Vernon Lee, Robert Louis Stevenson, among others—but Morris was perhaps the most successful in his efforts to shape an emotive and personally resonant style to clear reformist ends. All Morris's discussions of design decried vagueness, and everything he wrote in the essays was lucid and straightforward in its tone. 'The art of plain speaking ' could not reach its audience if that 'art' was abstruse, or muffled, or convoluted; or if the members of that audience were overawed, politely browbeaten, or intimidated. Art was truly for *all* the people.

Morris's new style—the rhetoric of fellowship, I have called it—also infused in one way or another all his later writings. In the frames and interspersed poems of *The Earthly Paradise*, Morris had already tried to speak directly to his Victorian audience, and perhaps had experienced an undertow of frustration and failure amid a surfeit of apparent success. After the turn to social activism, he wrote mostly prose, but a lyrical prose tinged with moral directness and distaste for pretence.

The development of this style for use in his essays on art and society thus

helped him bridge the chasm between politics and romance in the style and motifs of his later prose writings: historical-socialist (*A Dream of John Ball*; *The House of the Wolfings*; *The Roots of the Mountains*); utopian anarcho-communist (*News from Nowhere*); and alternate-'historical' quasi-Scandinavian (*The Glittering Plain*; *The Wood Beyond the World*; *The Well at the World's End*; *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*; *The Sundering Flood*). The settings of *A Dream of John Ball*, in particular, blended landscape and history in evocative ways, and *News from Nowhere*'s lovely historic buildings and beautiful natural settings explicitly embodied the social harmony sought in Morris's essays.

The late prose romances also preserved Morris's dual fascinations with rootedness and travel, garden and town. Their erotic motifs—as in *The Wood Beyond the World*, for example,—were apparent, but so were their other aesthetic impulses, including their celebrations of the land and its cultivation. In the cadenced, empathetic prose of the final romances, individual and social selves fused allegorically, as it were, as Morris sought to idealize and recreate essential elements of human experience and communal emotion—pleasure, travel, landscape, the natural interpenetration of country and town in a cultivated social landscape—in forms that have not existed since the industrial revolution, and perhaps never existed at all.

His final romances were therefore not 'escapist', but allegorical representations of ways back as well as forward from the forms of urban degradation he so devoutly hated, through historically sensitive ritual, communal solidarity, the making of useful and beautiful objects, and gratitude for the natural features of the earth. Their natural settings and phenomena lay somewhere between material presence and symbol, as sacralized projections of concrete reality.

Some Native American Views of Earth

A number of parallels can be traced between Morris's belief that 'civilization' was corrupted by its failure to grant the resources of nature and beauty to all people, and arguments by certain nineteenth- and twentieth-century Native Americans that their societies' overriding ethic was to preserve the inviolability of the land and all its sentient inhabitants. Indeed, many late-century ecologists have appealed to tribal and non-'western' societies as models for non-growth-based economies (compare the Chipko 'tree-huggers', mentioned above).

Their critics, in turn, have argued that North American and European ecologists have appealed to Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism and other spiritual

and religious ideals without a proper sense of the social and environmental squalor which the poor in these cultures have faced. In 'Radical Environmentalism: A Third-World Critique', for example, the Indian social theorist Ramachandra Guha argued that US environmentalists have sought to transplant a North American conception of national parks onto Indian soil:

> Until very recently, wildlands preservation has been identified with environmentalism by the state and the conservation elite; in consequence, environmental problems that impinge far more directly on the lives of the poor—for example, fuel, fodder, water shortages, soil erosion, and air and water pollution—have not been adequately addressed.[38]

Most Native American authors, by contrast, have testified that their cultures did traditionally uphold the spiritual powers of all forms of life, and asserted that the sustenance of the earth should be shared and maintained by all members of the group; Native American anguish at the appropriation and contamination of their lands has often taken the form of mourning for mortally injured spiritual presences. Here, for example, are the final stanzas of Simon Ortiz's poem 'Vision Shadows' (1977):

> *But what has happened*
> (I hear strange news from Wyoming
> of thallium sulphate. Ranchers
> bearing arms in helicopters.)
> *to these visions?*
> I hear foreign tremors.
>
> Breath comes thin and shredded.
> I hear the scabs of strange deaths
> falling off.
>
> Snake hurries through the grass.
> Coyote is befuddled by his own tricks.
> And Bear whimpers pain into the wind.
>
> Poisonous fumes cross our sacred paths.
> The wind is still.
> O Blue Sky, O Mountain, O Spirit O
> what has stopped?
>
> Eagles tumble dumbly into shadows

that swallow them with dull thuds.
The sage can't breathe.
Jackrabbit is lonely and alone
with eagle gone.

It is painful, aiiee, without visions
to soothe dry whimpers
or repair the flight of eagle, our own brother.[39]

Morris mentioned Native Americans only in *Prologue: The Wanderers*, the introductory tale to *The Earthly Paradise*, but his lifelong interest in alleged radical-democratic aspects of pre-medieval and early medieval European tribespeople evinced a somewhat parallel search for forms of social organization which might embody human beliefs and desires in more appropriate ways. His own communitarian and agrarian-socialist ideas were well developed before he read Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, which became available in English translation in 1885, but he clearly found kindred preoccupations in Engels' quasi-historicist search for pre- and post-industrial models of more humane social organization.

Engels also cited at length Lewis Morgan's descriptions of the Iroquois *gentes*, and *The Origin* ends—somewhat anomalously for a communist treatise—with a 'backward'-looking concluding citation from Morgan's own *Ancient Society*:

> A mere property career is not the final destiny of mankind, if progress is to be the law of the future as it has been of the past . . . a career of which property is the end and aim . . . contains the seeds of its own destruction. Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education, foreshadow the next higher plan of society. . . . [This] *will be a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes.*[40]

Engels, in fact, was in some ways an even more enthusiastic interpreter of the benefits of Iroquois society than Morgan himself, at least by the time the latter published *Ancient Society* in 1877. As a young lawyer, Lewis Morgan had devoted himself to helping the Iroquois nation defend its remaining lands, and with the help of his friend Ely Samuel Parker, son of a Tonawanda Seneca chief from upstate New York, he drafted and published a lovingly detailed study of *The League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee, or Iroquois* (1851). As a partial response to his efforts, the Tonawanda Senecas adopted him into the tribe before he completed his research.[41]

Morgan's description of the polity of the Iroquois *gens* contained ten features of common life. Among these were the right to elect and depose sachems and chiefs by universal suffrage (the duties of these elective offices were relatively circumscribed—those of the sachem, for example, were confined to peacetime affairs). Other predictable tribal traditions included mutually shared rights of inheritance, obligations to provide mutual aid, redress of injuries and a common defence, common religious rites and a common burial place.[42]

According to Morgan, moreover, the Iroquois's religion was one 'of thanksgiving, with invocations to the Great Spirit, and to the Lesser Spirits to continue to them the blessings of life'. A tribe member who moved to another place could not sell his or her cultivated lands, but had to will it to a near relation. Descent-names marked mythical relationships with animal progenitors, and religious festivals and burial services celebrated seasonal events, and asserted kinship with the sun, earth, and Great Spirit.

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century accounts of Native American conventions of ownership—however oversimplified or overlaid with literary and cinematic stereotypes they might be—uniformly suggest that most Native Americans conceived—and conceive—land and its associated life as indivisible, collective goods, valued for mutually interdependent gifts of sustenance and spiritual value. Jerry Mander, a North American activist in the cause of Native American rights, recently remarked in his book *In the Absence of the Sacred* that

> [Euro-]Americans. . . . have a particularly hard time grasping the notion of a living earth. We scoff at the idea, in fact, and at anyone who speaks of it seriously. I have seen white people laugh aloud when young Indian activists stand at meetings to denounce some mining development as a 'desecration of our mother, the earth'.[43]

The parallels between these Native American ideals and the sense of an ideal society in Morris's later writings—the German romances, in particular—are quite real, and are more extended than I can detail here. Instances of shared ownership, nature-centred festivities, and unanxious and assumed congruence of material and spiritual realities—'magic realism' if you like—parallel traditions which Morris read into the social organization of medieval Germany and Scandinavia, and which animated all the societies of his late prose romances.

Morris, in short, personally shared the care exposed by Native Americans over and over again for the stability and replenishment of the natural environment, and many aspects of his sensibility and values suggest loose but

recurrent analogies with Native American sensibilities—his respect for physical and mental courage in a public cause, and for loyalty to one's fellows; his love of natural processes and cycles, and of myths; his perception of the allegorical nature of rituals; and his belief in the sacredness of an earth possessed by all.

Morris and Late Twentieth-Century Political Ecologists

The biologist Ernst Haeckel coined the term 'ecology' to describe a study of the interrelationships between animals, plants and their inorganic environment, and the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess introduced qualifying adjectives in his brief but influential 1973 article, 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary'.[44] Morris's convictions and ideals anticipated several strands of 'western' and 'first-world' ecological theory and practice—'deep' and 'spiritual' ecologists, ecofeminists and quasi-socialist and anarcho-socialist advocates of environmental justice among them. Conflicts between adherents of these ecological world-views sometimes resemble disputes and accommodations between anarchists, socialists and social democrats in the Socialist League, and Morris would have found *confrères* and *consoeurs* in several of these factions, as he did with their counterparts in the League. On balance, I would assimilate his views most closely to that of 'spiritual' ecologists, ecofeminists, socialist ecologists and advocates of environmental justice.

The 'deep' ecologist Naess argued that the focus of short-term, human-centred and 'progress'-oriented goals found in contemporary environmentalism offered too narrow and superficial a definition of humans' relationship with their surroundings. Evoking an 'anticlass posture,' he called for us to reject the 'man-in-environment image,' and simplify our lives in ways that would yield 'complexity, not complication'. For Naess, 'principles of diversity and . . . symbiosis' apply to species, cultures and ways of life, and the need for 'biospherical egalitarianism' and an 'equal right to live and blossom' apply not only to human beings but to all forms of life.

'Deep' ecologists such as Naess, George Sessions and others also observed that anthropogenic species-extinctions have accelerated from 1,000 or so per year in the 1970s to more than 10,000 in 1992[45]; and dubious and inadequate disposal of radioactive and toxic wastes generated in military bases and weapons plants would likely cost half a trillion dollars *in the United States alone*. Against the background of their plausible conjecture that militarism may be responsible for 20 to 30 per cent of observable environmental degradation,[46] Naess and Sessions further argued that we

must relinquish our self-serving belief that the earth is a form of property, and acknowledge that 'humans have no right to reduce [the] richness and diversity [of terrestrial life forms] except to satisfy vital needs'.[47]

Naess's ideas and terminology found resonance in a generation of social ecologists, spiritual ecologists and ecofeminists,[48] many of whom used his ideas as points of departure, even as they censured his allegedly doctrinaire preoccupation with biological diversity. Naess has since extended and qualified his positions, and called for a convergence of views. In 'The Third World, Wilderness, and Deep Ecology', for example (written 1991, published 1995),[49] he argued that explicit priority must be given to social and distributive justice.

> What we propose is not a shift of caring away from humans and toward non-humans, but rather an extension and deepening of overall caring. It is unwarranted to assume that the human potential for caring is constant and finite, and that an increase of caring for some creatures necessarily precludes caring for others. The next century will see a general increase in caring if the ecofeminists are at least partially right.

Naess has also come to express an almost Morris-like utopian faith that:

> humans have what is demanded to turn things around and achieve Green societies. This is how I, as a supporter of the Deep Ecology movement, feel today: impatient with the doomsday prophets and confident that we have a mission, however modest, in shaping a better future that *is not remote*.[50]

The 'unrealistic pastoralist' of *News from Nowhere* and author of 'The Society of the Future' with its appeals for unforced material simplicity would also have endorsed Naess's exhortations to find pleasure in a great chain of life. Morris's denunciations of monopoly-capitalism, moreover, clearly foreshadowed 'deep' ecologists' excoriations of the devastation wrought by market-driven novelty and conspicuous consumption.

If deep ecologists were the movement's prophets, 'spiritual' ecologists were its mystics, the panpsychists and panentheists of a broad ecological church. In *Radical Ecology*, for example, Carolyn Merchant described assorted forms of 'nature rituals' and 'pagan spirituality' in the United States, including some instances of alleged witchcraft (described in *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries*), and allegorical reenactments of the destruction of non-human life. In roughly the same spirit, John Seed (later director of the Rainforest Information Service in Australia) enjoined himself to 'remember that I am

the rainforest protecting myself, that is, that I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into human thinking',[51] and poets, musicians and ecologists participated in a 24-hour 'ecological service' in San Francisco's Grace Cathedral, whose celebrants played whale and wolf calls on the cathedral's sound system, and projected stained-glass-like photographs of natural scenes on the walls. The poet Gary Snyder and his family also read a Mohawk-based 'Prayer for the Great Family', and celebrants poured water from all the rivers of California into the church's baptismal font.

Parallels and precedents for much of this may also be found in Morris's work. In *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome*, Morris and Bax predicted that socialist societies might construct 'religion[s] of humanity', whose songs and celebrations would reflect new ways of life and forms of harmony with nature, and members of quasi-socialist societies in *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountains* and Morris's later poems and romances affirmed harmony with nature and each other in a variety of quasi-hieratic songs and ceremonies.

Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the term '*écofeminisme*' in her 1974 call for women to reexamine the relations between sexism and human depredation of nature,[52] and her successors in the Greenham Common and other protest movements formulated their own critiques of the 'patriarchal relations' of (re)production[53] as a source of radioactivity, toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes. The black activist Cora Tucker and her Citizens for a Better America energetically publicized a report that 58 per cent of African-Americans and 53 per cent of US Hispanics live in areas where the dumping of such wastes is uncontrolled,[54] and campaigns against uranium mining on reservations by the Women of All Red Nations (WARN) decried the high consequent rates of aborted and deformed babies, and demanded respect for 'our Mother Earth who is a source of our physical nourishment and our spiritual strength'.[55]

More 'spiritually', perhaps, the ecofeminist Carolyn Merchant called for us to see the human community *and* the biotic community as a holistic network of mutual aid, in which 'the greatest good for the human and the nonhuman community is to be found in their mutual living interdependence',[56] and drew on a metaphor redolent of the late romances to express the hope that 'the gaping, void, chaos', Gaia, 'the ancient earth-mother', and their offspring, 'the world and the human race', might once again be reunited.[57]

Morris contributed little in the broad late-century suffragist movement in England, but he did respond warmly to 'socialist-feminist' calls for female reproductive independence.[58] More relevantly, perhaps, he also developed some imaginative sympathies with a kind of ecofeminist myth-making in works such as *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, in which the 'woodwoman'

Birdalone forms an emblematic bond with the tutelary and healing nature-goddess Habundia.

In the end, however, Morris's clearest spiritual heirs among late-twentieth-century ecologists seem to me the advocates of 'environmental justice', who have traced the fault-lines of social deprivation and oppression, and called for more equitable distribution of the life-sustaining resources we continue to plunder.[59] Ramachandra Guha, for example, whom I quoted earlier, argued that

> The roots of global ecological problems lie in the disproportionate share of resources consumed by the industrialized countries as a whole *and* the urban elite in the Third World . . . creation of a 'no-growth' economy . . . requires the creation of alternate economic and political structures—smaller in scale and more amenable to social participation—but it rests equally on a shift in *cultural* values.[60]

The Native American ecofeminist Winona LaDuke cited several more concrete, 'first-world' (North American) examples:

> In the United States today, . . . two-thirds of the uranium resources and one-third of all western low-sulphur coal are on our lands. In the late 1970's four of the ten largest coal strip mines in the country were on Indian lands, and 100 percent of all federally controlled uranium production came from Indian reservations.[61]

Ecological activists of all continents have won very few clear victories, and those only partially,[62] but it seems to be undeniable that their insights have paralled and extended Morris's indictments of nineteenth-century British imperialism, which robbed non-European societies of health and culture, as well as labour and wealth. Consider, for example, the striking prescience of the following passage in *News from Nowhere*, in which Old Hammond observes that:

> The appetite of the World-Market grew with what it fed on . . . When the civilised World-Market coveted a country not yet in its clutches, some transparent pretext was found—the suppression of a slavery different from, and not so cruel as that of commerce; the pushing of a religion no longer believed in by its promoters; the 'rescue' of some desperado or homicidal madman whose misdeeds had got him into trouble amongst the natives of the 'barbarous' country—any stick, in short, which would beat the dog at all. Then some bold, unprincipled, ignorant adventurer was found . . . to

> 'create a market' by breaking up whatever traditional society there might be in the doomed country, and by destroying whatever leisure or pleasure he found there. He forced wars on the natives which they did not want, and took their natural products in 'exchange', as this form of robbery was called, and thereby he 'created new wants', to supply which (that is, to be allowed to live by their new masters) the hapless, helpless people had to sell themselves into the slavery of hopeless toil so that they might have something wherewith to purchase the nullities of 'civilisations'.[63]

I believe passages such as these utterly confute assertions that Morris's political awareness was 'pastoral', 'romantic', or bellettrist, or that he was in other ways naive about the nature of power and its machinations. A Morrisian 'Guest' sent to the waning years of our millennium, might observe that new-model 'bourgeoisies' now form working electoral majorities in most of the world's wealthiest parliamentary democracies, and that 'capitalist realist' publicists and advertising agencies serve wily new forms of philistinism as they 'creat[e] new wants'. Such a transnational 'Guest' might also comment on other, more 'distant' 'people's struggles'—in New Guinea, for example, where land and rivers have been poisoned by copper- and gold-mining conglomerates,[64] or Nigeria, where children's lives and minds have been blighted in entire regions by the smouldering fires of western oil companies' flares.

In 'The Lesser Arts' Morris declared that 'I do not want art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few'.[65] The late twentieth-century 'Guest' might add, 'health for a few, or sentience for a few, or "domain" for a few over the earth'.

Conclusion

I have argued that Morris's prose embodied a deep and resonant late-nineteenth-century critique of contemporary environmental and social devastation. Others had written about urban blight and the need to redistribute wealth, but Morris added a fiercely concrete and immediate sense of the relations between the city and the fields that feed it, art and everyday beauty, and the proper equilibration of natural and social environments. In his syncretic way, he saw clearly that defacement of the landscape by the encroachments of the city results in social as well as physical disruptions at the deepest level.

More than Engels, Ruskin or Darwin, Morris also offered a view of *the environment* as a social *dwelling*, spoke clearly of the need for a proper

harmony of people and the natural order they live in, warned us about the forces which blight and mutilate that harmony, and called fiercely in the last two decades of his life for resistance. To the nascent discipline of urban planning he contributed a moral critique of the social causes of physical and aesthetic squalor, and a radical call for communal ownership not only of 'property' and the 'means of production', but also of aesthetic experience, and the inherent beauty of our common possession of nature—woods, rivers and sky.

There are lacunae, of course, in Morris's model of the future of art: his relative unconcern with the need for women to develop their abilities as artists, designers and architects; or his concentration on 'art' as the creation of aesthetic and useful objects, to the detriment of sister 'arts' such as health-care and childrearing. Morris once described an ideal room, for example, as designed 'neither for cooking nor sleeping', and one senses that such a room would shelter an 'artist writer socialist', alone or with a couple of companions (a room, in effect, of one's own). But extensions of his definition of work to include the provision of human services would fit his model well, all the same. Such activities *are* arts, if they are done well, and they need an appropriate environment for the labour that goes into them.

Morris's reflections also formed a more attractive alternative to the 'sage'-tradition of his time. His fundamental insights were not founded in power or authority, personal or institutional, but in the conviction that human happiness lies in our ability to live in (literal) symbiosis with our environment—understanding it, preserving it, transforming it and sometimes resisting it, in loving and artistic ways.

Few messages could be more harshly counterfactual in our society. Recent newspapers have reported (to take a more or less random sample from the *New York Times*): the destruction of the farm economy in Patagonia by the fallout of industrial and nuclear wastes; widespread deforestation of public and private lands; and industrial pollution in the former 'eastern bloc' so drastic as to shorten lives, and preclude, in some regions, agricultural cultivation of any kind. We too need a sense of the future as a sacred if threatened opportunity, and a secular faith that we may, by present efforts, preserve some aspects of nature for the human beings who will follow us.

I have also suggested that the radical nature of Morris's analyses anticipated most closely late twentieth-century demands for 'environmental justice', of the sort expressed in Robert Gottlieb's *Forcing the Spring* (1993), in which Gottlieb traced with unusual clarity the interrelations between physical destruction and social deprivation. He canvassed a few of the many ways in which these evils potentiate each other, and called in his conclusion for 'an environmentalism that is democratic and inclusive, an

environmentalism of equity and social justice, an environmentalism of linked natural and human [ecosystems], an environmentalism of transformation.[66]

Whatever their present-day analogues may be, Morris's wary idealism, visionary anger, aesthetic humanism and eclectic determination are bitterly needed now, as much as they were then. Toward the end of 'The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization', the 'pastoral' Morris declared that the new art for which he hoped should proclaim our 'joy in the life around us', in

> the scraps of nature the busiest of us would come across; birds and beasts and the little worlds they live in; and even in the very town the sky above us and the drift of the clouds across it; the wind's hand on the slim trees, and its voice amid their branches, and all the ever-recurring deeds of nature . . .[67]

A more immediate 'prospect' drew the 'political' Morris's love of nature and prophetic anger in the same essay, and his words call on us—his descendants—to act, 116 years later:

> Until . . . we have clear sky above our heads and green grass beneath our feet; until the great drama of the seasons can touch our workmen with other feelings than the misery of winter and the weariness of summer; till all this happens our museums and art schools will be but amusements of the rich . . . unless they make up their minds that they will do their best to give us back the fairness of the Earth.[68]