



# SOCIALISM and the LITERARY ARTISTRY of WILLIAM MORRIS

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## Bellamy, Morris, and the Great Victorian Debate

There are few critical or biographical works about Edward Bellamy or William Morris, or indeed few general commentaries on utopian writing, that do not at least mention the contrast between the utopian visions of these two writers. Some references are strongly and emotionally worded, revealing that the choice between the two visions is perceived as an important one—not merely a squabble about the shape of never-never-land but something more fundamental.<sup>1</sup> That something is the fact that *Looking Backward* (1888) and *News from Nowhere* (1890), the most important utopian novels in a period rich in such books, embody between them much of the great Victorian debate about the future of humanity in modern industrial society. Although Bellamy and Morris did not know each other personally, they certainly knew of each other and recognized that essential issues were involved. After a brief look at the history of this “conflict in utopia,” this essay will focus on these issues as embodied in the two famous novels, relate them to some other works by Bellamy and Morris, and consider, finally, how literary aspects of the novels can aid in understanding the contrast of their authors’ ideas.

We know that Bellamy toyed with certain utopian notions in his notebooks of the 1870s. For example, he contemplated a state in which the government would “take hold of” procreation and manage an “enlightened sort of stock raising” for human beings. He imagined a utopia in which legislation would prohibit

1. For example, Bellamy was described as an “American petit-bourgeois Philistine” whose utopia was “vapid” and “counter-revolutionary” in R. Page Arnot, *William Morris: A Vindication* (London: Martin Lawrence, 1934), 26. Morris was charged with not giving up his “accustomed luxury or the privilege of self-expression made possible by the toil of others” in Arthur E. Morgan, *Edward Bellamy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), 403. An edition of *News from Nowhere* dismissed *Looking Backward* as a “bureaucrat’s paradise”: James Redmond, “Introduction,” *News from Nowhere* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), xxxvi. A Bellamy scholar suggested the problem was Morris’s complete failure to understand Bellamy’s objectives; see Peter Marshall, “A British Sensation,” *Edward Bellamy Abroad*, ed. Sylvia Bowman (New York: Twayne, 1962), 93.

“coffee and tea, drinking, cards, late hours, foolish conversation, all love except matrimonial.”<sup>2</sup> But a more consistent theme was the pouring of scorn upon socialist or utopian scheming,<sup>3</sup> and it was not until the mid-eighties, consequent upon what he termed his “discovery” of the industrial army idea, that he began to write *Looking Backward*, which was published in January of 1888. It soon became a best-seller and provoked Mark Twain to comment that Bellamy had invented a better heaven on earth.<sup>4</sup>

A surprising number of the readers of *Looking Backward* were inspired to write sequels of one kind or other. Some were admiring and emulative, like that by the New Zealander who wrote *Looking Upwards* and merely wanted “to show how we are to reach the state pictured by Bellamy.”<sup>5</sup> There were satirical sequels in which Dr. Leete becomes a Big Brother figure,<sup>6</sup> or the head of the industrial army is General Dick Tator,<sup>7</sup> or in which Julian discovers to his horror that Edith, the consummate flower of the new age, is a laundress.<sup>8</sup> The author of one sequel confused Bellamy with the anarchist dynamiters and reminded us that: “GOD HIMSELF RECOGNIZED THE RIGHT TO HOLD PRIVATE PROPERTY.”<sup>9</sup> There were also many letters, including one from A. L. McWhorter who, by his own account, lived in “a little sod shanty on the arid and poverty stricken plains of South Dakota”; McWhorter wrote: “at one reading I have finished *Looking Backward* . . . to you I bow in humble adoration.”<sup>10</sup> A European correspondent wrote: “I was so struck with the truth and beauty of the ideas in [*Looking Backward*] that I instantly took the resolution of translating it into Hungarian.”<sup>11</sup> Reverend E. Lewis of Ohio edited a “newspaper for the people” called *Plain Talk*, which proclaimed in its masthead, “Do right, Fear

2. Notebook, “Plots for Stories,” no. 1, bMs Am 1181.6(2), 35, 36, Bellamy Papers, the Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

3. In an article in the *Springfield Union* in 1877 he described a concept like the industrial army as “lunacy and something worse.” Quoted in Sylvia E. Bowman, *The Year 2000* (New York: Twayne, 1958), 105.

4. Quoted in W. H. G. Armytage, *Yesterday’s Tomorrows* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 81.

5. Robinson Crusoe (pseud.), *Looking Upwards; or, Nothing New. The Upgrade: From Henry George Past Edward Bellamy on to Higher Intelligences* (Auckland, N.Z.: H. Brett, 1892), 7.

6. Richard Michaelis, *Looking Further Forward* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1890), 27. Dr. Leete points out here that “ideas are little sparks. They may easily cause a conflagration if not watched.”

7. W. W. Satterlee, *Looking Backward and What I Saw 1890-2101* (1890; reprint, New York: Arno, 1971).

8. Julian West (pseud.), *My Afterdream: A Sequel to the late Mr. Edward Bellamy’s “Looking Backward”* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900), 230. In fact, this could have been a response to *Equality*, in which Bellamy modified *Looking Backward*’s patronizing attitude toward women by giving Edith a role as a farm worker.

9. George A. Sanders, *Reality: or Law and Order vs Anarchy and Socialism. A Reply to Edward Bellamy’s “Looking Backward” and “Equality”* (Cleveland: Burrows, 1898), 24.

10. A. L. McWhorter to Edward Bellamy, 6 December 1889, bMs Am 1181(280), Bellamy Papers.

11. Julius Csernyci to Edward Bellamy, 31 October 1891, bMs Am 1181(168), Bellamy Papers.

God and Make Money"; Lewis hailed *Looking Backward* as a "new gospel."<sup>12</sup> And so the novel was indeed taken by those across the United States who involved themselves in the Nationalist Movement by joining one of the many (over one hundred and fifty) Nationalist and Bellamy clubs, which ranged in complexion from ethical discussion groups to Fabian-type social action societies to organizations sponsoring utopian colonies. Some of the clubs were criticized for their snobbishness, for their tendency to attract retired military men with command experience (lured, presumably, by the prospect of high rank in an industrial army), for their exclusion of "the crank and the uneducated foreigner,"<sup>13</sup> and for the number of ladies involved rather than practical men of affairs.<sup>14</sup> Bellamy's own participation in the movement was more indirect than direct, as he put his energies into editorial work and, briefly, into Fabian politics and Populism.<sup>15</sup>

William Morris might not have paid *Looking Backward* much attention had it been only an American phenomenon but, of course, the novel became a British phenomenon as well. It appeared first as a serial, in *Brotherhood*, between January and July of 1889, after which Ebenezer Howard was instrumental in bringing it out in book form.<sup>16</sup> According to the reminiscences of the artist Henry Holiday, "piles" of *Looking Backward* were cleared off the bookstalls every day.<sup>17</sup> No fewer than seventeen printings had appeared by December of 1889, although some reviewers were less than enthusiastic. *The Review of Reviews* saw the novel as a "sign of the times" but found the story "dull as ditchwater."<sup>18</sup> The *Saturday Review* printed two analyses, the first calling it "a stupid book" which was "inexpressibly silly." The second review compared it to a fantasy about an underground race and concluded that *Looking Backward* was "much the more serious, more carefully wrought out, and less worth reading of the two."<sup>19</sup> Despite such carping by the critics it was an enormous popular success, leading to some interest in Bellamy's earlier works and to the inaugura-

12. E. Lewis to Edward Bellamy, 16 June 1889, bMs Am 1181(272), Bellamy Papers.

13. Speech by Cyrus Willard on the first anniversary of the Boston club, quoted in Howard H. Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism: Origins of the Modern Movement* (1953; reprint, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), 85.

14. Nicholas Gilman, "Nationalism in the United States," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 4 (1889-1890): 67.

15. W. D. Howell's claim that Bellamy "virtually founded the Populist Party," quoted in Bowman's *The Year 2000*, 134, was exaggerated. Nationalists were only a small number among the 10,000 delegates at the 1892 convention. See Martin Ridge, *Ignatius Donnelly: The Portrait of a Politician* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 30.

16. See Dugald MacFadyen, *Sir Ebenezer Howard and the Town Planning Movement* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1970), 21.

17. Henry Holiday, *Reminiscences of My Life* (London: Heinemann, 1914), 351. Holiday later visited Bellamy in Chicopee Falls and was an enthusiastic admirer.

18. Unsigned review, "Looking Forward. . .," *Review of Reviews* 1 (1890): 230.

19. Unsigned reviews, "Looking Backward," *The Saturday Review* 65 (24 March 1888): 356, and 67 (27 April 1889): 508.

tion in 1895 of the "Bellamy Library" of radical publications.<sup>20</sup> It touched many individuals, such as Thomas Reynolds, who published his *Preface and Notes. . . to Looking Backward* in 1890, claiming to have held the same ideas himself for many years.<sup>21</sup> It was taken up enthusiastically by Christian Socialists, including the members of the Fellowship of the New Life; the Fellowship is interesting not only because it was the parent group of the Fabian Society, but also because William Morris appears a number of times on its lists of lecturers.<sup>22</sup> Various connections existed between Bellamy and the Fabians, of course, most notable among them the fact that Bellamy later wrote the introduction to an American edition of the *Fabian Essays*. The Nationalist Movement also spread to England, in the form of the Nationalization of Labour Society, with its journal, *The Nationalization News*.<sup>23</sup> This society, like its American counterpart, disappeared into other groups relatively quickly but its existence suggests the importance William Morris could have seen in refuting Bellamy's version of socialism.

It was in May of 1889 that Morris read *Looking Backward* and recorded his well-known reaction in a letter: "I suppose you have seen or read, or at least tried to read, *Looking Backward*. I had to on Saturday, having promised to lecture on it. Thank you, I wouldn't care to live in such a cockney paradise as he imagines."<sup>24</sup> The lecture was given to members of the Socialist League, which at this point was driving Morris out with the increasingly violent sentiments of its leaders.<sup>25</sup> The League's journal, *Commonweal*, had an American correspondent in Boston who kept members up to date on the Bellamy movement. A few weeks after Morris's lecture he wrote:

A new party has been formed in Boston on socialistic principles—the Nationalist Party. Edward Bellamy, who is 'Looking Backward', and L. Gronlund, who is 'Marching Backward', are the leading spirits. The name "Socialism" is too ferocious for these gentlemen, so they prefer to style their "Socialism" as "Nationalism."<sup>26</sup>

The same correspondent reported that a large Boston clothing store had given

20. By Reeves, who had published the first British book edition.

21. Reynolds later wrote to Bellamy to express his "intense admiration" for *Equality*, 5 August 1897, bMs Am 1181(334), Bellamy Papers.

22. After Morris died the Fellowship's journal noted in an obituary signed J. F. O. (J. F. Onkeshot) that the Fellowship had "lost a friend," *Seed-Time* 31 (January 1897): 1. Morris's lecture on "How We Shall Live Then" was announced in *Seed-Time* 2 (October 1889): 12.

23. Bellamy wrote to support the paper and take a subscription, as well as to offer space in the *New Nation*. *Nationalization News* no. 3 (December 1890): 22.

24. *The Letters of William Morris to His Family and Friends*, ed. Philip Henderson (London: Longmans, 1950), 315.

25. *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*, ed. Eugene D. Le Mire (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), 278-79, 314. No text remains of this lecture on Bellamy and Grant Allen.

26. Henry F. Charles, "In The United States," *Commonweal* 5, no. 177 (1 June 1889): 174.

away thousands of copies of *Looking Backward* as a capitalist advertising gimmick. Morris had, therefore, a receptive audience for his review of *Looking Backward* in *Commonweal* in June of 1889. He criticized Bellamy's utopia for its extreme centralization, its regimentation, and for its mechanistic values. But his great fear was that socialists would read *Looking Backward* and, put off by the image of a dull utilitarian future, abandon socialism altogether. It was this, according to the recollection of his friend Andreas Scheu, which prompted Morris to begin *News from Nowhere* as a "counterblast" to *Looking Backward*.<sup>27</sup>

It was less a blast than a volley, however, because *News from Nowhere* appeared first serially in *The Commonweal* from January to October of 1890. Morris left the League then, saying as he went that "the success of Mr. Bellamy's book, deadly dull as it is, is a straw to show which way the wind blows."<sup>28</sup> Over that winter Morris revised *News from Nowhere* for its book publication, making many minor changes and adding several long passages.<sup>29</sup> When it appeared in March of 1891 one reviewer called it "bright as the roses and the sunshine of June."<sup>30</sup> Another described Morris as a member of what he might have termed the fleshly school of utopian writing:

The *English* nation had disappeared. The race was now *Italian*: artistic, not serious; sensuous, not speculative . . . A great Nature-worship has set in; everything points to a deep joy in mere sensation, and to a deeper, vaster ignorance of what underlies it. . . . With him Beauty receives the definition of the *hareem*. Truth is a *façon de parler*, and God disappears.<sup>31</sup>

This illustrates a widely held view of the time, that socialism was no more than "a sublimated feast of the senses."<sup>32</sup> It is worth noting that this sort of charge was not leveled at *Looking Backward*; indeed, the book was endorsed by such

27. Andreas Scheu to A. R. Wallace, 3 February 1909, Additional Manuscript 46440, British Museum, London.

28. Quoted in E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, 2d ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1977), 575.

29. Among the changes made by Morris were: addition of the passage describing the happy road-menders, perhaps in response to the objection that the utopia was too much a fairyland; addition of a section on foreign relations, perhaps to counter criticisms of insularity; many small changes and additions to "How the Change Came," indicating the seriousness with which Morris viewed the process of revolution; addition of "The Obstinate Refusers" to show more necessary work, female workers, and the political and economic freedom of the utopia; and, as if to underline Morris's attitude, addition of "and strange to say, I found that I was not so despairing" to the final page of the book. See J. Alex MacDonald, "The Revision of *News from Nowhere*," *Journal of the William Morris Society* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 8-15. See also Michael Liberman, "William Morris's *News from Nowhere*: A Critical and Annotated Edition" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, 1971).

30. Unsigned review, "A Poet's Vision of a Socialist Millennium," *Review of Reviews* 3 (May 1891): 513.

31. Maurice Hewlett, "A Materialist's Paradise," *National Review* 17 (August 1891): 820-23.

32. W. Douglas Mackenzie, "The Socialist Agitation," *Westminster Review* 133 (1890): 508.

groups as the Woman's Temperance Union and named as a repository of traditional American values in the Sweet Home Family Soap Album.<sup>33</sup> If historian G. M. Young is correct in saying that Victorian socialism meant "everything that a respectable man saw reason to disapprove of or to fear,"<sup>34</sup> then a question, at least, arises about the suitability of applying the term to Bellamy and Morris both.

The comparisons of *News from Nowhere* with *Looking Backward* began almost immediately. Lionel Johnson, writing in *Academy* in May of 1891, saw Morris's vision as "virile and pleasant"; Bellamy's utopia, however, displayed "an ugliness so gross and a vulgarity so pestilent, that it deserved the bonfire."<sup>35</sup> They were also compared by Percival Chubb in the journal of the Fellowship of the New Life: *News from Nowhere*, he wrote,

presents a striking contrast to Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, with which people are naturally comparing it—generally to the disadvantage of *News from Nowhere*. This fact raises the deepest question of the Socialist Movement. "What do we want?" . . . It is quite clear . . . that he that is for Bellamy's idea is against Morris's.<sup>36</sup>

While Morris was still revising *News from Nowhere* an edition appeared in Boston as a reprint from the serial version in *Commonweal*. Bellamy reviewed it in the *New Nation* in February of 1891. Bellamy claimed that there was no central point in Morris's utopia, that its lack of government and administrative structure rendered the kind of prosperity described there incredible. For example, Bellamy wrote, we are given no information about the railroad system, a criticism that tends to lose much of its force when we recall that there were no railroads in Morris's utopia.<sup>37</sup>

These are the main facts of the case. It is hardly one of history's great literary

33. See Bowman, *The Year 2000*, 119, and John L. Thomas, "Introduction," *Looking Backward* (1888; reprint, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 1. Subsequent parenthetical in-text references to Bellamy's novel are to the Thomas edition.

34. G. M. Young, *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age*, 2d ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 169.

35. Lionel Johnson, "News from Nowhere," *Academy* 39 (23 May 1891): 483.

36. Percival Chubb, "Morris's Dip into the Future," *Seed-Time* 10 (October 1891): 2.

37. Bellamy, "News from Nowhere," *New Nation* 3 (14 February 1891): 47. Would Bellamy's review have been different had he seen Morris's revised version? On the whole, probably not. It is unlikely that the inclusion of the road-menders would have convinced him of the workability of Morris's society, and the obstinate refusers would be additional proof of its impracticality in economic or organizational terms. However, it is interesting to note the shifts in Bellamy's thinking between *Looking Backward* and *Equality*, among which are the admission of more violence into the transitional period and the disappearance of the large city he had glorified in *Looking Backward*. In *Equality* the city becomes a locality where population is denser than other places, not unlike the view of cities in *News from Nowhere* as places where people are apt to gather "rather thick." This shift reflects Bellamy's preference for small-town life, although it is tempting to speculate that reading Morris may have helped him revise his "official" thinking on the matter.

battles but it is interesting to note that Bellamy and Morris were themselves quite aware of the significant contrast between their ideas. Morris expressed the view that utopian visions can never be taken seriously as social blueprints but are personal to their authors, and he turned to writing romantic fantasies in his last years. Bellamy, who on the other hand did believe in the utopia as blueprint, went on to refine and expand his ideas in *Equality*, which appeared in 1896 in America, the year Morris died. A consideration of *Looking Backward* and *News from Nowhere*, with emphasis upon transformation from the old to the new societies; the political and economic structure of the new societies, and the values of the new worlds, provides further insight into the disparate utopian visions of Bellamy and Morris.

In most utopian literature there are two problems of transition to be faced: how to transform the existing society into the desired society of the future; and how to get the narrator into that future so he can report on what he sees. Both Bellamy and Morris solve these two problems—one substantive, the other literary—in interesting fashion. Bellamy's Julian West is a coupon-clipping member of the privileged class whose attitude toward strikers and reformers can be generally characterized as annoyance at the inconvenience they cause. An insomniac, he falls asleep one night in 1887 with the aid of mesmerism, and is preserved in a trance until discovered in Dr. Leete's garden in the year 2000. The destruction of West's house by fire, and his discovery, are accidental. Before he goes to sleep he has "absolutely no premonition" of what will happen. During his stay in Dr. Leete's house he admits frequently how unworthy he feels to have been selected of all his generation for this happy fate. And at the end of the book, after dreaming of going back to 1887, he wakes and knows that he may remain in the bliss of the year 2000 and in the arms of Edith, the descendant of his 1887 sweetheart.

Julian West does not have to struggle with others, nor make any hard or irrevocable choice; rather, he is carried on a wave of accident into the future, which reflects rather well the transformation of the whole society. Asked in an interview why he gave so little space to the transitional period, Bellamy replied that "when you want to induce a bachelor to enter matrimony you don't go on with a lot of particulars about the marriage license and the gloves and the ceremony—you just show him the girl and let him fall in love with her and the rest takes care of itself."<sup>38</sup> His argument in the novel is that society, like the reluctant bachelor, would recognize it was half in love with easeful utopia and do what was necessary to go head over heels into social bliss. The transformation of many monopolies into one great monopoly, as described by Dr. Leete, is a rapid, inevitable, nonviolent evolution of social and political structures. Near the end

38. Quoted in Bowman, *The Year 2000*, 118.

of the novel comes a leap of ethical consciousness as people recognize the approaching felicity, but nobody really has to do anything except cooperate with the inevitable. The notion of revolutionary action is explicitly rejected by Dr. Leete; it is, he tells Julian, simply a distraction from the main tendency. The revolutionary model did not fit well with the ethical basis of Bellamy's socialism, summed up in his essay on the "Religion of Solidarity."<sup>39</sup> It was also too exotic, too foreign, too inappropriate to the prosperous American context. "American Socialism" may have suffered shipwreck on "the reefs of roast beef," as one observer put it;<sup>40</sup> it is plain that in *Looking Backward* such individual commitments are seen as irrelevant in the face of the mighty Zeitgeist of industrial consolidation.

Think now of the transition of William Guest into the future. Here is a man actively working for the change of society, who sits in an underground railway carriage muttering "if I could but see it! if I could but see it!" His first morning in the new world he notices an inscription in the Guest-Hall, to the memory of the Hammersmith Socialists, underlining the connection between revolutionary commitment in the present world and the happiness of the future. The world visited by William Guest is only his dream world, the dream of a socialist, and at the end he must wake from the happy dream, find himself back in London, and be prepared to keep struggling for the world which he himself will never see.

And, of course, this captures the essential flavor of Morris's account of the transitional period. The description of "how the change came" is long and detailed. The struggle between owners and workers is hard, bitter, and involves considerable violence—which Morris regrets but argues the necessity for, at least for its purgative effect on the old, rotten society. Whereas Bellamy sees progress occurring along a straight, upward line, Morris's view is dialectical. It originates in that "Crusade and Holy Warfare against the age" he had learned from Carlyle and Ruskin, before he read Marx, and the process itself is revolutionary, opposed to the age and its values at every point. While Bellamy describes an evolution of the existing structures of society, Morris imagines the demolition of those structures.

These two views of social change are anticipated in two historical romances written prior to the utopias: Bellamy's *The Duke of Stockbridge* (1879) and Morris's *A Dream of John Ball* (1885). In *The Duke of Stockbridge* Bellamy describes the revolt of farmers in Shays' Rebellion of 1786. Poor economic conditions provide opportunity and motive for the "squires" to sell out the debtor-farmers, and the story consists of various clashes between the two

39. Bellamy, "The Religion of Solidarity," in *Edward Bellamy: Selected Writings on Religion and Society*, ed. Joseph Schiffman (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1955).

40. Werner Sombart, quoted in David Herreshof, *The Origins of American Marxism* (New York: Monad, 1973), 16.

groups. The novel has been praised highly, but here we need only note the moral that Bellamy draws from the troubles: the rebellious violence of the farmers, though understandable, is not productive, and social reform is more likely achieved by legislative means.<sup>41</sup> Sharply contrasting with this is the conclusion Morris draws in his account of the peasants gathered around the rebel priest John Ball: they win their battle but do not change the essential character of the society, and it is clear that further struggle, along with education for revolution, is the only likely route away from a society of mastership and toward a new society of fellowship.<sup>42</sup>

Bellamy's view that the existing society could evolve into the better society implies a basic acceptance of the former's essential features; on the other hand, Morris's insistence upon revolution repudiates many of those features. This fact implies other major points of difference. The first of these has to do with the structure of the two utopian societies, Bellamy's being thoroughly centralized while Morris's is totally decentralized, a difference which in itself has further ramifications. To create one great capitalist—The State—out of many smaller capitalists is to centralize economic power, while in Morris's utopia the revolution does away with such elements of central power as already existed in 1890—Parliament, the railways, and others.

These opposing paradigms of sociopolitical organization are readily apparent in the two novels. *Looking Backward* describes a state that is a vast pyramid, centralized mechanically by pneumatic distribution tubes and telephone wires, and organized politically into the ranks and grades of a social army with quasi-military rewards such as merit badges.<sup>43</sup> The state governments have disappeared to make way for a supremely powerful national government. All these features are well known, as is Bellamy's explicit use of the image of the pyramid. Bellamy is, of course, reflecting the emergence of the centralized state, evidences of which appeared more and more rapidly in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The urbanization of society and the rise of municipal governments, the centralizing power of railways and telegraph wires, the consolidation of schools and hospitals into education and health systems—these and similar late Victorian developments underline how clearly Bellamy reflected the trend of the times.

41. The "Squires" see in these troubles the "first fruits of those pestilent notions of equality." *The Duke of Stockbridge: A Romance of Shays' Rebellion*, ed. Joseph Shiffman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 304.

42. Morris, *A Dream of John Ball*, in *The Collected Works of William Morris*, ed. May Morris, 24 vols. (London: Longmans, 1910-1915), 16:285-88; hereafter abbreviated as *CW*.

43. Another contemporary British view of the badges was that of M. D. O'Brien of the Liberty and Property Defence League: "Glory! Bits of bronze! *Esprit de corps!* Rather should we not say 'Fudge'? . . . So brilliant an idea deserves the whole lot of them, strung on a ribbon and thrown over the writer's neck." *Socialism Tested by Facts: Being An Account of Certain Experimental Attempts to Carry Out Socialistic Principles and Containing a Criticism of "Looking Backward"*, and the "Fabian Essays" (London: Liberty and Property Defence League, 1892), 38-39.

Morris takes precisely the opposite course, as we know and as Bellamy complains of in his review of *News from Nowhere*. Few features of Morris's utopia reflect contemporary trends. Especially is this true of Morris's gleeful dismantling of the great cities which are, to use Walter Houghton's phrase, "the creation and symbol of liberal-industrial society."<sup>44</sup>

The narrative strategies of the two novels reflect this contrast between centralization and decentralization. Of course, in the technical sense both use the first-person point of view, but in a wider sense they are quite different. In *Looking Backward* Dr. Leete is virtually the sole source of information about society. His daughter Edith is allowed to take West shopping, or play music for him, but she defers to Papa on any matters of substance. Further, the story begins and ends in Dr. Leete's house, which—no doubt significantly—stands exactly where Julian West's former house had stood. At one point Dr. Leete, referring to the industrial army, tells West, "It is easier for a general up in a balloon, with a perfect survey of the field, to manoeuvre a million men to victory than for a sergeant to manage a platoon in a thicket" (p. 215). It is just this sort of view we have in *Looking Backward*, not from a balloon but from the top of Dr. Leete's house—his "favorite resort." So it is hardly surprising that Julian West's description of the city includes phrases like "colossal size," "stately piles," and "architectural grandeur," but puts no definite picture before the mind's eye.

In *News from Nowhere* the only character who comes close to Dr. Leete as "information central" is Old Hammond of the former British Museum. But he appears only for a few chapters and is left behind when the Guest travels upriver. Other characters interpret the new society to the Guest, and do not hesitate to criticize its ways. It would be stretching things to call *News from Nowhere* a hotbed of dissent but it is true that various voices are heard. Further, the long, slow upriver journey strengthens the impression of variety and individuality, which supports the anti-centralist bias. We see houses, fields, and people with a democratic attention to detail that harks back to the principles of Pre-Raphaelite paintings so familiar to Morris. There are many good examples of this attention: the careful description of the Guest House (contrasting with Bellamy's vague "piles"), the attention to nature and the seasons (it is June, but references to the corn harvest at the final feast reflect the Guest's mood before he departs), and the portraits of characters: at one point Guest observes Ellen coming out of a hay field "holding a basket in her hand"—a detail added in revision of the novel which illustrates Morris's concern that the unreal place become real to the reader.

Besides mode of transition and narrative techniques, the novels are very different in terms of values. The standards by which *Looking Backward* judges its own achievement—its values—are essentially quantitative. Throughout the

44. Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1957), 79.

book Dr. Leete's praise of the new order is almost entirely in such terms: more goods produced more efficiently, more people educated at more places, more art, more literature and science, less waste, and so forth. *Looking Backward* is an apotheosis of the values of the nineteenth-century liberal who was the intellectual descendant of Bentham. Consider the distribution system of utopian Boston, which is remarkable, according to Dr. Leete, because it illustrates "the prodigiously multiplied efficiency which perfect organization can give to labor"; it is "like a gigantic mill, into the hopper of which goods are being constantly poured" (p. 211). Such use of the word "mill" as a positive image contrasts very sharply with Morris's use of it as a term of contempt in describing the nineteenth-century education system: "no one could come out of such a mill uninjured," says Old Hammond.<sup>45</sup> So subtle a hint as this identifies Morris with that line of social criticism (from Blake's "Satanic" mills to D. H. Lawrence's portraits of mining country) which opposed the emerging industrial order and its effects on human beings. One such effect was the reduction of whole human beings to "hands." Perhaps Dr. Leete did not intend this sense when he said approvingly that "the machine is truer than the hand" (p. 128), but that most surely is the implication of Bellamy's system.

An interesting reflection of Bellamy's fascination with efficiency was his view that language itself is more an inconvenience than a raw material for art. His 1888 short story "To Whom This May Come" is purportedly the manuscript of a time traveler arrived at a country of mind-readers whose perfect, wordless comprehension of each other renders uncharitableness impossible and provokes an "invincible distaste for the laborious impotence of language."<sup>46</sup> In the less-speculative *Equality* a universal language has come into effect to make communication faster and more efficient,<sup>47</sup> a view completely consistent with the philosophy of *Looking Backward*. In Morris's utopia, however, people speak many languages, including local versions of Gaelic—less efficient than Bellamy's world but certainly more flavorful.<sup>48</sup>

The very marked difference between *Looking Backward* and *News from Nowhere* in terms of the realization of characters and settings is at least a reflection, if not a result, of what might be termed a difference in spiritual orientation between Bellamy and Morris. Although writing about a much earlier period, R. H. Tawney describes a similar distinction aptly:

45. *News from Nowhere*, CW 16:63. Subsequent parenthetical in-text references are to this edition.

46. Bellamy, "To Whom This May Come," in *Future Perfect*, ed. H. Bruce Franklin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 290. The story first appeared in *Harper's*.

47. Bellamy, *Equality* (Toronto: George N. Morang, 1897), 231. The idea may have come from Zamenhof's pamphlet on "Esperanto," which appeared in 1887.

48. H. G. Wells was correct when he singled out Morris as an exception to the rule of utopian blandness, in *A Modern Utopia* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1905), 9.

Where Catholic and Anglican had caught a glimpse of the invisible, hovering like a consecration over the gross world of sense, and touching its muddy vesture with the unearthly gleam of a divine, yet familiar, beauty, the Puritan mourned for a lost Paradise and a creation sunk in sin. Where they had seen society as a mystical body, compact of members varying in order and degree, but dignified by participation in the common life of Christendom, he saw a bleak antithesis between the spirit which quickened and an alien, indifferent or hostile world. Where they had revered the decent order whereby past was knit to present, and man to man, and man to God, through fellowship in works of charity, in festival and fast, in the prayers and ceremonies of the Church, he turned with horror from the filthy rags of human righteousness.<sup>49</sup>

While the theological particulars do not strictly apply to Bellamy and Morris, there is a sense in which the two orientations to the world that Tawney describes are reflected in these authors' visions of utopia. One thinks of Bellamy's description of colonial Stockbridge, including the figure of Parson West; of the young Bellamy's immersion in the Calvinist tradition through his father's ministry; of the metaphysical dualism of "The Religion of Solidarity"; and finally of Julian West himself—a descendant of Parson West in more than name. Bellamy's narrator admits to Dr. Leete that he has been brought up a Calvinist, and he falls into a "profound depression" on the afternoon of his first Sunday in the twentieth century: "the color unaccountably faded out of all the aspects of life, and everything appeared pathetically uninteresting" (p. 286). In sum, Bellamy's outlook, a conviction that the material world of sensation and personality is merely ephemeral, unrelated to the higher or spiritual order, logically implies a disdain for that world with all of its sights, sounds, smells, and physical reality. Bellamy exemplifies that conviction in *Equality* when Mr. Barton, the preacher, observes that the "world was bound to outgrow the ceremonial side of religion . . . with its forms and symbols, its holy times and places, its sacrifices, feasts, fasts, and new moons"; Barton further claims that there now reigns a "wholly spiritual religion."<sup>50</sup>

In contrast with this one may think of Morris's boyhood, over which "a glimmer of Anglo-Catholic medievalism had flickered;"<sup>51</sup> of the influence of Romanticism and in particular the medieval revival on his early life; of his work in *The Firm* as a decorator of churches and maker of stained glass; of the world of John Ball which he imagined, with its rich appreciation of beauty and the expression of this in fine handwork; and finally, of Ellen in *News from Nowhere* itself: "The earth and the growth of it and the life of it! If I could but say or show

49. R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, rev. ed. (1937; reprint, New York: New American Library, 1953), 190.

50. *Equality*, 231-32.

51. Graham Hough, *The Last Romantics* (1947; reprint, London: Methuen, 1961), 89.

how I love it!" (*CW*, 16:202). In this regard it may be significant that the final happy scene of the novel is set in a church:

a simple little building with one little aisle divided from the nave by three round arches, a chancel, and a rather roomy transept for so small a building, the windows mostly of the graceful Oxford-shire fourteenth century type. There was no modern architectural decoration in it; it looked indeed, as if none had been attempted since the Puritans white-washed the mediaeval saints and histories on the wall. It was, however, gaily dressed up for this latter-day festival, with festoons of flowers from arch to arch, and great pitchers of flowers standing about on the floor. (*CW*, 16:208)

It is hardly necessary to point out that this church was a church of the fellowship of man rather than a Christian fellowship. Morris did not share John Ball's religious beliefs, but he did retain a view of the world very unlike that of the Puritans, who saw no gleam of the divine in material creation. Morris expressed this more spiritual concept of the world in his lecture, "The Arts and Crafts of To-day," in which, speaking of dining in the future, he rejected the idea of taking "some intensely concentrated pill once a year" and proposed, seriously, that "the daily meeting of the house-mates in rest and kindness for this function of eating, this restoration of the waste of life, ought to be looked on as a kind of sacrament, and should be adorned by art to the best of our powers."<sup>52</sup> His secular adaptation of the idea of a sacrament is reflected throughout *News from Nowhere*, in which the whole of creation is celebrated as a symbol of the new order of fellowship and its features lovingly described.

The point of these remarks about language and style is not that *News from Nowhere* is a better novel than *Looking Backward*, nor that Morris was the better writer. These are conclusions that few—least of all Bellamy himself—would deny. Bellamy admits in the preface to *Looking Backward* that the story of Julian West is no more than sugar-coating on the economic pill, and there are various statements in his notebooks reflecting a lack of interest in the art of literature, despite his initial reputation as a writer of "psychological romances."<sup>53</sup> The point, rather, is that style reflects content and values. Morris's careful attention to small detail, his use of a variety of speakers, reflects the individualism implicit in his political position—the tolerance for dissent, for grumbling, for obstinate refusal. His use of organic imagery (for example, the image of the garden) allies him with that Romantic anti-industrial tradition for which "organic" (linked by Coleridge with the primal power of Imagination) was a central term, a qualitative standard, something beyond the merely quantitative or

52. Morris, *CW* 22:358.

53. Bellamy wrote in a notebook, "No, to be sure I never tried my pen [at poetry] but it is not a question of pens but of souls. The poet's soul should be his in-listening ear like the oboe with musical multitudinous murmurs of song. Mine, alas, is not." Journal 4, bMs Am 1181.6(2), 9, Bellamy Papers.

mechanical (the lower order, in Coleridge's terms, of mere Fancy). Bellamy's use of language is frankly unpoetic; the extended metaphors that are used, then discarded like anecdotes in after-dinner speeches, or the frequent mechanical images, for example, reflect just as plainly the values of the utilitarian tradition out of which his social vision springs. John Stuart Mill argues in his essays on Bentham and Coleridge that they are the "seminal minds" of the century; it might be suggested that Bellamy and Morris represent a fruition of those two seeds of social and political thought. Their utopian visions may be seen as a microcosm of the Victorian debate about the need to preserve human values in a modern industrial society.<sup>54</sup>

They stand also on opposite sides of one of the great utopian debates about the essence of human nature. Although *Looking Backward* states that "human nature in its essential qualities is good" (p. 282), the strong central authority (represented, for example, by the ominously titled "Inspectorate," a feature added by Bellamy in revising the book) belies that optimism. Morris's more generous estimate of human nature is reflected in the freedom of his imaginary society and its belief that people would in fact cooperate and work hard because such behavior would prove intrinsically satisfying to them. Thus, *Looking Backward* and *News from Nowhere* anticipate what comes after them in our own century: the mechanized brave new world versus the "Kropotkinesque" island of Pala (in Aldous Huxley's famous work) or the emerging bureaucratic centralism of Anarres versus the Odonian ideal of an organic society of free individuals (in LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*).

If it seems that Bellamy is being unduly disparaged it is worth saying that such is not the intent. Bellamy allowed an idea to take hold of him and followed it to its conclusion sincerely and out of the best motives. Morris recognized in his review that Bellamy's criticism of nineteenth-century injustice was "forcible and fervid." It is interesting, however, that the world Bellamy created did not really reflect all his own preferences. He wasn't a man who fitted very well, or wanted to, into systems; for example, he thought independent reading a better education than that provided by school systems and colleges.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, in *Equality* he included the provision that people in some occupations could go on half pay and drop out of the industrial army. Perhaps Bellamy himself would have been happier in Morris's utopia than in his own, if only the place had been a little better organized.

54. Of course this must be qualified. Bellamy shared the values of the Benthamite position (the "liberal utopia" as Chad Walsh has called it) but, writing at the end rather than at the beginning of the century, he did not share the earlier liberal position of laissez faire. Morris shared the values of the Coleridgean position (the organic, qualitative standard which contrasted the mechanistic, quantitative values of the Benthamites) but abandoned the conservatism of that tradition as it was embodied in the authoritarian or paternalistic social visions of Carlyle and Ruskin.

55. Paul Bellamy (son of Edward) to H. W. Schneider, 2 March 1933, bMs Am 1182(49), Bellamy Papers [Morgan Papers].