Slow Print

Literary Radicalism and
Late Victorian Print Culture

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“More pleasant and profitable reading can scarcely anywhere else be found in so small a compass as in these few pages.” Still, the review, published just after the 1888 edition of *John Ball* first appeared in print, objects that the novel was not published in a cheaper edition.

The price is 4s. 8d., and this places it beyond the reach of those who would be most likely to buy it. It would be well if Mr. Morris could see his way to publish a shilling edition; if roughly printed and simply stitched together it would not interfere with the sale of the dearer volume which after all will be read by those who can spare 4s. 8d. chiefly for the charm of its style, rather than for the doctrines it puts forth. (9)

The Kelmscott edition of *John Ball* was even more expensive (30s.), but unlike the 1888 edition, it was able to emphasize the interconnectedness of its style and doctrine.

**Orality and Print in News from Nowhere and A Dream of John Ball**

In both of their print forms, *News from Nowhere* and *A Dream of John Ball* express an antiprint sensibility, as though the technology of print is hopelessly bound up in capitalist formations. These novels are saturated with subtle irony, but perhaps the deepest irony of all is their skepticism concerning their own form. The novels’ denigration of books and newspapers seems to diverge from Morris’s commitment to changing the politics of print, evident in his labors for the *Commonweal* and Kelmscott Press, but in both works Morris builds on antiprint sentiment to innovate new print forms and genres.

As the editor of the *Commonweal*, Morris argued that education through print and oral propaganda would precede the revolution, preparing the masses to assume power when the change came. He wrote in the newspaper’s inaugural issue: “To awaken the sluggish, to strengthen the waverers, to instruct the seekers after truth; these are high aims, yet not too high for a journal that claims to be Socialistic, and we hope by patience and zeal to accomplish them” (February 1885: 1). Print, in this hopeful proclamation, does crucial preparatory work for the revolution. Given such a theory of print, it is perhaps unsurprising that no newspapers exist in the utopian socialist society Morris creates in *News from Nowhere*. If socialist organs of change, then they are no longer needed, for the society of Nowhere has achieved a cyclical, self-sustaining, and historical dialectic that has reached the end of progress.

The nineteenth-century Guest, learns from Old Ha society, that public debate is textual. When a social distaste is raised at the “meeting on the ancient tong Bureaucracy is considered very effective.” First Mote, “there is an end of all argument pro or at least so that everybody knows it together again there is a return of hands” (184). When disp the debate might be printing on,” but this happens at the expense of dying out, along with the first Mote. Tellingly, the novel’s on “How the Change Came,” Nowhere to its utopian state of mind that were to great harbinger of the 1984 mass expropriation of all productive means with more panic than the 1984 keeping order at the sack of fire,” the newspapers “deteriorate” or unless the people, the first Mote of unless ‘order’ were at one account, the papers are the first Mote only after “a number of”
volume of Morris's lecture *Gothic Architecture* was printed in public at the 1893 Arts and Crafts Exhibition in front of large crowds and sold for 2s. 6d. (Peterson, *Kelmscott Press* 182, 318). The books were part of a broader anticapitalist counterculture, and their influence extended beyond those who could afford to purchase them. For example, the *Labour Leader* used Kelmscott-style initial letters in its special issue for Christmas 1897 (see Figure 11). The Kelmscott books were artifacts from the future, material and aesthetic reminders that after the revolution labor and production would no longer be the alienating, repetitive industrial enterprise that mechanized mass print so neatly symbolized.

News from Nowhere and A Dream of John Ball: *The Commonweal* and Kelmscott Editions

To better conceptualize the continuities between the *Commonweal* and Kelmscott Press—which are not generally thought to have much in common—let us turn to Morris's dream vision novel *A Dream of John Ball* and his utopian novel *News from Nowhere*, both of which appeared in Kelmscott and *Commonweal* editions. Both works were written at the height of Morris's career as a socialist agitator, and both express an antiprint or even antitextual sensibility. In *A Dream of John Ball* the narrator goes back in time, or dreams that he goes back in time, to experience firsthand the primarily oral culture of fourteenth-century peasants; the book suggests that the oral means of communication that sparked the Peasants' Revolt were better equipped to ch media of the nineteenth century prosperous future society well as an information revolution in favor of oral communicative pia and because Morris was no print in the world of out of an antiprint sensibility moment. In this way both formal feature of utopias. A terrogation of the dilemma texts' functions to remind us a space apart (*Archaeologies*) print within the context of tique in a manner that prefigy us that his fiction is not an intellectual realization from historical possibil

The publishing historie *Ball* reveal Morris's commitment. Both novels originally reprinted as Kelmscott editions *Commonweal* from 11 January such topics as the labor struggle in Siberia, and the brut novel resonated with and as embedded. For example, the *Commonweal* delivered a bl Morton Stanley (see Figure paper suggested, had obsce Stanley was widely reviled i other socialist papers, objec civilising the African races of partial and absolute star very next page *News from A chapter that describes ho
were better equipped to channel revolutionary discourse than the print media of the nineteenth century. *News from Nowhere* depicts a peaceful, prosperous future society that has undergone a socialist revolution as well as an information revolution, having virtually abandoned print in favor of oral communication. Because utopias are unnecessary in Utopia and because Morris wants to render print as a utopian space, there is no print in the world of his utopias. Instead, the two works generate out of an antiprint sensibility new forms of print suited to their socialist moment. In this way both works exhibit the ironic reflexivity that is a formal feature of utopias. As Jameson argues, utopian novels' ironic “interrogation of the dilemmas involved in their own emergence as utopian texts” functions to remind us of their unreality, to secure their borders as a space apart (*Archaeologies* 298). When Morris critiques the medium of print within the context of print, ironically deconstructing his own critique in a manner that prefigures Derrida's reading of Plato, he reminds us that his fiction is not an attempt to predict the future and should not be read as such. Its unreality constitutes its revolutionary quality, breaking from historical possibility and destabilizing the future altogether.

The publishing histories of *News from Nowhere* and *A Dream of John Ball* reveal Morris's commitment to two distinct theories of radical printing. Both novels originally appeared in the *Commonweal* and were later reprinted as Kelmscott editions. *News from Nowhere* ran serially in the *Commonweal* from 11 January to 4 October 1890, alongside articles on such topics as the labor struggle, the abuse of Russian political prisoners in Siberia, and the brutality of African colonization. The serialized novel resonated with and against the newspaper items with which it was embedded. For example, the front page of the 29 March 1890 issue of the *Commonweal* delivered a blistering verbal and visual critique of Henry Morton Stanley (see Figure 12), whose hypocritical Christian piety, the paper suggested, had obscured his profit-driven exploitation of Africa. Stanley was widely reviled in the radical press, and the *Commonweal*, like other socialist papers, objected that “England has the hypocrisy to talk of civilising the African races,” even though it has “hundreds dying yearly of partial and absolute starvation in her great cities and towns.” On the very next page *News from Nowhere* picks up in the middle of Chapter Ten, a chapter that describes how the slums of London were cleared after the
revolution, with the residents resettling in the roomy and comfortable buildings of what used to be London’s “business quarter.”

Similarly, *A Dream of John Ball* was serialized in the *Commonweal* from 13 November 1886 to 22 January 1887 and created a dialogue about utopianism through print context. Its opening chapter ran on the front page opposite Morris’s regular column, “Notes on Passing Events,” which focused in this issue on the Liberal Party’s failure to sponsor effective legislation for Irish home rule: “That the assembled Liberals did not think of or wish for the results of the political freedom of Ireland is not a matter of guess, but is proved by the barrenness of the programme put forward by them—a programme at re-enactment of Magna Charta” (18 forms an ironic juxtaposition with novel that could be said to “reenact the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, by se witness it.” The section of the next issue appeared alongside the poem Leeds poet Tom Maguire, who is d like *A Dream of John Ball*, challenge on earth for a reward in heaven. It o Pay your tithe-dues, pay your rent; Shall have mansions in the skies.”

Be content! be content!

Till your dreary life is spent!

Lowly live and lowly die,

All for mansions in the sky.

Castles here are much too rare:

All may have them—in the air. (18 Dec

The poem’s point (also made by Workers of the World song “The pie in the sky when you die—that John Ball, the excommunicated pre-Revolt, in a speech from Morris’s said that ye shall do well in this may live happily for ever; do ye we on earth and in heaven; for I say to two but one” (51). The novel and tity and capitalism alike depend on the future: of determining presentions about the future (future prof contrast, call attention to their un of the future, not its predictability Marxist notions of progress.

The *Commonweal* editions of *Ne Ball create a utopian print context*
forward by them—a programme about as valuable as a proposal for the re-enactment of Magna Charta" (18 November 1886). Morris’s comment forms an ironic juxtaposition with the opening chapter of John Ball, a novel that could be said to “reenact” another medieval political event, the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, by sending the narrator back in time to witness it. The section of the novel that ran in the 18 December 1886 issue appeared alongside the poem “Be Content” by the working-class Leeds poet Tom Maguire, who is discussed in Chapter 4. “Be Content,” like A Dream of John Ball, challenges the idea that the poor must suffer on earth for a reward in heaven. It opens: “Said the parson, ‘Be content, / Pay your tithe-dues, pay your rent; / They that earthly things despise / Shall have mansions in the skies.’” The closing stanza reads:

Be content! be content!
Till your dreary life is spent!
Lowly live and lowly die,
All for mansions in the sky.

Castles here are much too rare;
All may have them—in the air. (18 December 1886: 299)

The poem’s point (also made by Joe Hill in the famous Industrial Workers of the World song “The Preacher and the Slave”: “You’ll get pie in the sky when you die—that’s a lie!”) is likewise articulated by John Ball, the excommunicated priest who helped foment the Peasants’ Revolt, in a speech from Morris’s novel: “Forsooth, ye have heard it said that ye shall do well in this world that in the world to come ye may live happily for ever; do ye well then, and have your reward both on earth and in heaven; for I say to you that earth and heaven are not two but one” (51). The novel and the poem remind us that Christianity and capitalism alike depend on a particular means of appropriating the future: of determining present conditions on the basis of speculations about the future (future profits or a future afterlife). Utopias, by contrast, call attention to their unreality to suggest the indeterminacy of the future, not its predictability à la Christian, capitalist, or rigidly Marxist notions of progress.

The Commonweal editions of News from Nowhere and A Dream of John Ball create a utopian print context for Morris’s work by means of the
resources conventionally available to periodicals: juxtaposition, editorial tone, and design. Still, these editions depend on industrial forms of literary production, such as cheap print (the paper sold for a penny) and the serialized novel (a nineteenth-century print form perhaps formally tied to capitalist ideology, as discussed in the next chapter) to provoke a changed consciousness against industrial capitalism. The Commonweal had a small countercultural readership but relied on the template of mass mediation; as Glasier notes, Morris did attempt “to make the paper in some degree a good example of typographical art, designing for it a simple but beautiful title block, and insisting on good, readable type and consistency of headings and spacing throughout” (William Morris 179), but nonetheless William Peterson calls it “a typographically unimpressive periodical” (Kelmscott Press 65). In transferring his labors from the Commonweal to Kelmscott, Morris refocused his attention on questions of mediation and production, with the effect of making his print works more expensive and less accessible. Yet as Crane has argued in Morris’s defense, “The cheapness of the cheapest things of modern manufacture is generally at the cost of the cheapening of human labour and life, which is a costly kind of cheapness after all” (William Morris 39).88

After founding the Press, Morris published a Kelmscott edition of A Dream of John Ball in 1892 and a Kelmscott edition of News from Nowhere in 1893.89 These editions embody a process-based rather than an outcome-based approach to radical print and textuality; production of the book becomes an end in itself rather than a means, exemplifying Morris’s call for a Ruskinian anti-industrial revolution in labor and creativity. With Kelmscott Morris skipped over historical process altogether to make books “in the future already.” Some of Kelmscott’s titles suggest this utopian vision for the Press. For example, a Kelmscott edition of More’s Utopia was published in 1893, and Morris even began designing a map of Utopia for it, although the book was published without the map (Peterson, Kelmscott Press 154). Kelmscott likewise produced all manner of antirealist texts, including Morris’s romance tale The Story of the Glittering Plain, the first book produced at the Press. Such books are not transparent vehicles of political enlightenment or information but rather express their politics in their life and production as objects, embodying in the present a future disruption of industrial progress.

Figure 13. Frontispiece to the Kelmscott Illustration drawn by C. M. Gere a Book and Manuscript Library, Yale

Kelmsscott’s News from Nowhere begins with the rigorously literalism of its caption the object at hand: “This is the to which the people of this story, which is called News from Nowhere William Morris.” The caption’s representations, even as it uses j and concreteness of “the picture artifacts from the future. The companies this caption, drawn Hooper, echoes this literalism readers to walk right into the News from Nowhere engages w ent,” which is “at some level the culture under capitalism.”
periodicals: juxtaposition, editorials, depend on industrial forms of the paper sold for a penny) and by print form perhaps formally in the next chapter to provoke capitalism. The Commonweal it relied on the template of mass attempt “to make the paper in raphical art, designing for it a ting on good, readable type and roughout” (William Morris 179), it “a typographically unimpressive transferring his labors from the used his attention on questions effect of making his print works as Crane has argued in Mor-eapest things of modern manu-heaping of human labour and after all” (William Morris 89). Kelmscott published a Kelmscott edition of Kelmscott’s News from Nowhere has been designed to supply a process-based rather than an textual productivity. production of the art means, exemplifying Moral revolution in labor and creativity: historical process altogether to one of Kelmscott’s titles suggest example, a Kelmscott edition of and Morris even began design; the book was published without the Kelmscott likewise produced all Morris’s romance tale The Story produced at the Press. Such books have enlightenment or information our life and production as objects, interruption of industrial progress.

Figure 13. Frontispiece to the Kelmscott edition of News from Nowhere (1891). Illustration drawn by C. M. Gere and engraved by W. H. Hooper. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
present is finally present to itself" ("News" 86–87). Although Beaumont does not address the print context of *News from Nowhere*, Morris's attempt to simulate the presence of the future is all the more obvious in the Kelmscott frontispiece, which reminds us of its alterity to highlight our own alienation from the present it depicts.

Similarly, the frontispiece for *A Dream of John Ball*, drawn by the Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones, takes a famous catchphrase of John Ball as its caption: "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman" (Figure 14). In a radical commandeering of art for the working classes, the words and picture stress the book's materiality, challenging the reader to consider the labor at the heart of all production. The caption omits the question mark in a sentence that is obviously a question, rejecting orthographic signs of meaning in favor of an implied intonation, necessarily also denaturalizes leisure as quite uncharacteristic of aesthetic socialist art of the peric laboring body" as "an aesthet socialist aesthetics and honors the same time the image relies on ideological critique of class."8

Burne-Jones originally conceived the Kelmscott edition, which was block illustrations.8 W. H. H and Norris designed the lette

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**Figure 14.** Frontispiece for the Kelmscott edition of *A Dream of John Ball* (1892). Drawn by Edward Burne-Jones and engraved by W. H. Hooper. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

**Figure 15.** Frontispiece for the 1888 **Burne-Jones.**
plied intonation, necessarily oral—rather than print-based. The image also denaturalizes leisure rather than obfuscating labor, in a manner quite uncharacteristic of aestheticism, but as Ruth Livesey suggests of much socialist art of the period, the image also renders the “masculine laboring body” as “an aesthetic site”—a central link between Morris’s socialist aesthetics and homoerotic aestheticism (“Morris” 608). At the same time the image relies on traditional gender divisions to mount an ideological critique of class.88

Burne-Jones originally composed this illustration for the first book edition of A Dream of John Ball in 1888, and he revised the image for the Kelmscott edition, which was the first Kelmscott book to include woodblock illustrations.89 W. H. Hooper engraved the Kelmscott illustration, and Morris designed the lettering and border. Figure 15 reproduces the
Although Beaumont "Anne from Nowhere," Morris's attitude is all the more obvious in its alterity to highlight its presence. The image of John Ball, drawn by the presses, takes a famous catchphrase—"Adam delved and Eve span," who was adical commandeering of art for the book's materiality, labor at the heart of all productivity in a sentence that is obviously as of meaning in favor of an implied intonation, necessarily oral—rather than print-based. The image also denaturalizes leisure rather than obfuscating labor, in a manner quite uncharacteristic of aestheticism, but as Ruth Livesey suggests of much socialist art of the period, the image also renders the "masculine laboring body" as "an aesthetic site"—a central link between Morris's socialist aesthetics and homoerotic aestheticism ("Morris" 603). At the same time the image relies on traditional gender divisions to mount an ideological critique of class.

Burne-Jones originally composed this illustration for the first book edition of A Dream of John Ball in 1888, and he revised the image for the Kelmscott edition, which was the first Kelmscott book to include wood-block illustrations. W. H. Hooper engraved the Kelmscott illustration, and Morris designed the lettering and border. Figure 15 reproduces the frontispiece for the 1888 edition of A Dream of John Ball. Drawn by Edward Burne-Jones.
earlier frontispiece; note that it is a photogravure illustration, whereas
the Kelmscott frontispiece is a wood-block print, just one of the key
differences that reveal a great deal about Kelmscott's aesthetic project.
Wood-block engraving had become obsolete “almost overnight” with
the onset of photographic means of reproducing images in the 1880s
(Peterson, *K Kelmscott Press 21*). The Kelmscott frontispiece uses capital
letters and sharper, cleaner lines to insist on its material presence, even
as it depicts a prelapsarian scene wholly detached from history.

The leafy border framing the Kelmscott frontispiece functions to
integrate the work of art into organic nature, yet it also demarcates the
image’s artificiality by cordonning it off. Such frames and borders, ex-
emplified in the frontispiece for *News* as well as *John Ball*, were char-
acteristic of all Kelmscott books and are a feature of their utopian form.
They signify that the image is not continuous with phenomenal reality
but exists in a separate space and chronology. Responses in the socialist
press suggest that critics read the works in this light. A review of *News*
in the *Workers’ Cry* claims that the depiction of the postrevolutionary
commonwealth should not be taken as prophetic.

Morris, alike with the true instinct of a poet and artist and the foresight of wise
political judgment, does not attempt to frame together a cast-iron social structure
fixing its height, width, and depth, and filling in all the details of its construction. He knows too well that we cannot quite foresee how all things may be
done when the people’s minds and bodies are set free from the sordid desires and
the industrial servitude of to-day. (18 July 1891: 10)

Some socialists did appeal to *News* as a vision of what a socialist society might look like, but typically they did so to reinforce the point
that a new social order was possible. A poem by F. L. Gortch titled
“The Promised Land (As Shown by Morris’s ‘News from Nowhere’)” ran
in the 14 March 1896 issue of the *Clarion*: “I oftentimes wonder if ‘twill
ever be, / That future visioned by the Poet-seer, / When England’s
children shall in truth be free.” The point of the poem is that the conditions of capitalism have the effect of making alternatives seems impos-
sible: “Amidst the lovely vale now factory’s wheel / Throbs, hammers
clang; the struggle e’er is rife / For food and pelf; there is no Common
Wel.” Playing on the name of the newspaper where *News* originally
appeared, “Common Wel” space of the “Promised Land” stanza suggests, however that the populist, refor-
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The *Clarion* again derives its serial story “A ran from 27 April to 25
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No News Is Good News

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newspaper where News originally

appeared, "Common Weal" connects the space of radical print to the
space of the "Promised Land" Morris's novel imagined. The poem's final
stanza suggests, however, in a self-referential allusion to its own forum,
that the populist, reformist socialism of the Clarion is better suited to
make the promised land actually come true: "But dream not yet. Clear
blows the clarion call / To don our armour. Comrades all, awake!" (81).

The Clarion again drew on Morris's model of socialist utopian nar-
ative in its serial story "A Free Country," by M. B. ("Mont Blanc"), which
ran from 27 April to 25 May 1895. The story begins in homage to Morris:
"In William Morris's 'Dream of John Ball,' a modern Englishman is
carried back to the fourteenth century of our glorious country. In 'News
from Nowhere,' by the same author, a modern Englishman is lifted for-
ward into the twenty-somethingth century." M. B. proposes a variation
on these premises: "I daresay you have often wondered—as I have—what
an English serf of the Middle Ages would think of that freedom which
we are supposed to enjoy in this nineteenth century" (186). The story
focuses on a medieval peasant, Wat Warton, who awakens in present-
day England. Humorous difficulties of dress and language—like those
met by William Guest in News—ensue, but soon Warton is impris-
oned for stealing, after nearly starving from lack of money to purchase
food. Eventually, after a suicide attempt and a workplace injury at an
iron foundry, he dies destitute. The narrative art of "A Free Country"
is rather clumsy—for example, the 11 May 1895 installment abandons
story for exposition: "It would take too long to tell in detail how [Wat]
discovered that freedom, the Englishman's birthright, is little more than
a mockery to the majority of the English people" (149)—but the central
imaginative move of the story suggests how Morris's fictional structure,
built on the defamiliarization of social custom through chronological
juxtaposition, was influential across radical press literature.

Critics of Morris often suggest that his neomedievalism was a form
of political quietism, but a review of A Dream of John Ball by F. Keddel
in the 14 April 1888 issue of Justice argues that the novel, despite its
historical setting, will foment socialist feeling: "To-day ... the more im-
mediate work is the propaganda of Socialism and in this we think this
little work of Mr. Morris will have a good part to play." Of John Ball's
rousing speech to the peasants at the heart of the novel, Keddel writes,