

# William Morris' Position between Art and Politics



# William Morris' Position between Art and Politics

By

Grzegorz Zinkiewicz

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



William Morris' Position between Art and Politics

By Grzegorz Zinkiewicz

This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2017 by Grzegorz Zinkiewicz

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-5200-7

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5200-5

# CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	viii
Introduction .....	1
Objectives and methodological approaches: specifications .....	2
The Morrisean universe .....	5
The interrelation between art, nature, and politics: an excursus.....	12
Critical assessment of studies devoted to William Morris .....	16
Biographical perspectives .....	18
Morris in context of Utopian studies .....	21
Approaches towards Morris' art and politics .....	22
<b>Part One</b>	
Chapter One.....	30
Art	
Specifications of the Victorian Age .....	30
William Morris and the Victorian age .....	35
William Morris' response to Victorian art theories and aesthetic systems .....	41
William Morris and Victorian art movements .....	50
Victorian medievalism .....	52
Pre-Raphaelitism .....	70
William Morris' approach to the Aesthetic Movement .....	79
Chapter Two .....	83
Politics	
William Morris' Exposure to Victorian Political Philosophies and Ideologies .....	83
Political Theory and Ideological Frameworks .....	87
Liberalism and Conservatism .....	87
Racism and Racialism in context of British supremacy .....	92
British Socialism .....	97
Pre- and Proto-socialist Movements.....	97
Trade Unionism, Chartism, Owenism, Christian Socialism.....	101
The Fabian Society: Link between British Socialism and Marxism..	107

Early Marxist Movements in Great Britain .....	111
Tab. 2-1 Socialist movements in Great Britain (ca. 1870–1900)....	112
Morris’ Definition(s) of Politics .....	114
Social and Political Implications in Morris’ approach to Art in the Pre-socialist Phase.....	116
The Gothic Revival as the Point of Convergence.....	118
The Firm, Arts and Crafts Movement, Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.....	123
<b>Part Two</b>	
Chapter Three .....	132
From Art to Politics	
The art/politics issue in the pre-Socialist Morris .....	132
Two models of Morris’ transition from art to politics .....	138
The evolutionary model .....	139
“ <i>The Shadows of Amiens</i> ” (1856) .....	140
Implications of social criticism: <i>The Earthly Paradise</i> (1868– 1870) and <i>The Life and Death of Jason</i> (1867) .....	148
Breaking point: translations from the <i>Sagas</i> (1869–1875) and the <i>Icelandic Journals</i> (1871, 1873) .....	152
The revolutionary model .....	166
Chapter Four .....	168
Politics Over Art?	
Introductory remarks.....	168
Critical evaluation of Morris’ socialism .....	170
Morris’ lectures on art from the socialist period: “politicised art” or “aestheticized politics”? .....	176
Morris’ socialist awareness from linguistic perspective.....	188
Chapter Five .....	198
Beyond Art and Politics	
<i>News from Nowhere</i> as a transdiscursive narrative .....	198
The narrative structure in context of Morris’ views on art and politics ...	202
The narrative voice as purposeful replication.....	202
Narrative frame(s): main storyline vs. added discourse .....	203
Conceptual and/or generic classification of <i>News from Nowhere</i> .....	204
<i>News from Nowhere</i> as a romance .....	207
Arcadian elements in <i>News from Nowhere</i> .....	209
<i>News from Nowhere</i> : a political Utopia without politics .....	209

<i>News from Nowhere</i> and the Earthly Paradise concept .....	209
<i>News from Nowhere</i> as an advanced socialist Utopia .....	216
(Anti-) Ideology: the narrative as a circumvention .....	219
The narrative's reflections on language and socialist consciousness .....	221
<i>News from Nowhere</i> as a transdiscursive exposition of the Morrisean Universe .....	222
Conclusion.....	225
The process of (creative) production .....	225
Points of convergence (Chapters three, four).....	228
Conceptions of time (Chapters four, five).....	228
Linguistic aspects (Chapter three, four, five).....	229
Epilogue.....	232
Works Cited.....	235
Index of Names.....	247

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Krystyna Kujawska Courtney, head of the British and Commonwealth Studies Department at the University of Łódź, for her supervision and guidance. It is hard to list the multitude of fields and disciplines which Professor Kujawińska Courtney and I have discussed; their range certainly transcends the confines of the subject of this book. I would also like to express my gratitude to Professor Kujawińska Courtney with regard to the motivation she has offered, as well as for providing the opportunity to visit the places connected with William Morris, in particular Kelmscott House in London.

Another person whose help has been invaluable is Dr. Jörn Münkner, at that time employed at Universität Kassel, Germany. Dr. Münkner and I have repeatedly exchanged thoughts and opinions concerning the contemporary methodology and research avenues on William Morris as well as the Victorian period, which, I believe, is reflected in my general strategies in this monograph. Of special significance was the chance to visit the University of Kassel. Thanks to Dr. Münkner, I have not only managed to gather new materials but also benefitted from the intellectual discussion held there.

Very important for the work's progress was my visit to Kelmscott House in Hammersmith, London. During my stay at the place where Morris spent the last years of his life I encountered both the employees and Morris enthusiasts whose expertise was, to say the least, highly impressive. They helped me with the selection of various materials, both primary and secondary, as well as gave me the chance to acquire those publications I would otherwise have searched in vain for. My deep gratitude goes to them.

I am particularly indebted to Dr. Owen Holland who happened to be at Kelmscott House at that time. Our conversation on William Morris and socialism clarified my viewpoints and opinions concerning not only the socialist phase of Morris but also the unique character of British socialism as a whole. Back then, I was unfortunately unaware of Dr. Holland's article on *News from Nowhere* that I will subsequently refer to in this publication.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their constant support in almost every respect imaginable.



## INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this book is to demonstrate how William Morris (1834–96) extrapolated from different areas and disciplines, art and politics in particular, so that he could realise his vision of an “expressive,” i.e. happy and fulfilled, life. Since his socialist engagements did not concur with his activity in the sphere of art—Morris’ first art endeavours preceded his political activity by over 20 years—I have also attempted to present the complex network of avenues that led him from one field to the other. Conversely, I place special emphasis on the points of convergence and modes of transposition.

The next task is to explore the interrelation between the political and the aesthetic in the art-focused texts by Morris from the time of his socialist agitation. In chapter four, which investigates Morris’ art from a socialist perspective, I try to establish the cross-influences and intersections between them. Respectively, the issue of Morris’ endeavours to expose politics, incorporating his former aesthetic beliefs, becomes essential. The first part comprising chapters one and two is rather descriptive and synthetic in character, presenting William Morris in the broader perspective of the Victorian age, while the second part, and chapter four in particular, is predominantly analytical. As a consequence, in the second part I concentrate on specific texts by Morris, exercising their close reading as the methodological procedure. Chapter three, which deals with Morris’ transition from art to politics, uncovers the possible social and political potential in his art productions and literary texts from the period preceding his involvement in socialism. I draw upon the art perceptions in the general theories of aesthetics, thus showing the feasibility of the art/politics juxtaposition without relapsing into the practice of their dissociation.

Ultimately in the fifth chapter I will discuss the most famous text by Morris, namely his utopian narrative *News from Nowhere*, and diverge from the previous patterns and corresponding methodologies. My primary objective is to present *News from Nowhere* as a unique political utopia—an outstanding text transcending the very notions of art and politics. I carry out research in that section on the basis of the Utopia/Golden Age generic classification. In the absence of the systemic superstructure, the London of the future at first glance resembles a “land of plenty,” and in

this respect may appear to be Morris' transposition of the concept of Earthly Paradise. I subsequently demonstrate that this similarity mainly exists in the surface structure of the text.

## **Objectives and Methodological Approaches: Specifications**

My first objective is to show the interrelation between art and politics in Morris' works as well as the correlation and reciprocity of the artistic/aesthetic and the political in general. Conventionally we can choose whether art and politics are perceived as autonomous and unrelated disciplines which exclude each other, as for instance in the famous essay by Walter Benjamin, "A Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936). Alternately, we are entitled to regard both art and politics as the disciplines of mutual interaction and interdependence. As far as the latter is concerned, I attempt to establish possible points of convergence and intersection.

The art/politics relationship appears to be quite complex with regard to William Morris who, in different phases of his life, and even in different publications from the same period, presented and articulated contradictory or ambivalent stances towards the issue. On the whole, he seemed to have wavered between both of the abovementioned approaches. In this monograph I will promote the second option, respectively seeking the unifying agents and the vantage points between the aesthetic and the political, in some aspects also the vanishing points from which Morris deliberated the nature of their reciprocity. I discuss art and politics in the highly diverse contextual frameworks and circumstances of Morris' art premises and praxis, including literary works and political lectures informed by the aesthetic. The "broad perspective" that encompasses both art and politics requires a universal methodological approach and a multi-layered theoretical frame, thanks to which a unilateral perspective focusing on these domains one by one can be extended. I refer to the original theory of general aesthetics by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–62) rather than the contemporary definition of aesthetics as the branch of philosophy dealing with such issues as beauty, art, and taste. The extensive semantic scope of the aesthetic determines the position from which emerges the notion of beauty, standing in conjunction with the ethical and moral, and thus providing the basis for the implicit social criticism engendered by and enacted in and through politics. In this context, the political action of Morris can be perceived as the means to realise his aesthetic postulates instead of an abrupt breach of his former engagements.

Another procedure which leads in a similar direction derives from the postmodern practice of dismissing various forms of overgeneralisations, artificial divisions, and ubiquitous compartmentalisation—in contrast to tendencies to divorce art from politics and study them individually. The latter approach can be defined as the classical, i.e. dominant throughout the greater part of the twentieth century. Reflecting on the contemporary materials, I shall align with scholars like Peter Smith, who reconnects both art and politics to the notion of “creative labour,” as well as the alternative put forward by Caroline Arscott, who proposes studying the political engagements of Morris from the aesthetic perspective rather than vice versa.

The correlated task is to demonstrate the process of Morris' transition from art to social action and, ultimately, to the political arena. In general, we can speak of two strategies. In the first, the critic recreates the possible avenues leading from art to politics in different phases of Morris' life, showing the implicit socio-political pronouncements in his texts and art productions from the period preceding his political involvement. Another option is to ignore the transitory period altogether. In this respect, Morris' conversion to socialism can be deemed a spontaneous, *ad hoc* decision. Since, at a deeper level, these two approaches do not contradict each other, I attempt to expound both.

I examine the notion of the “creative process,” which to Morris appeared to be as equally important as the finished product, and which seemed to be crucial in all phases of his creation (Morris insisted on supervising each stage of production, and also taught himself new skills). This viewpoint is also consistent with the Marxist theory of alienation, in particular the alienation of labour, as well as the exclusion from the extra surplus value.

This issue is one of the most intriguing, charging and impregnating all enterprises by Morris, who drew a parallel line between the processes of the socialist education of workers, socialism in general, and the act of making art objects. We can single out individual phases in that course. Namely, Morris would commence with the literary genre of the Romance perceived as a continuous streak of loosely bound adventures, and then proceed with the more general concept of *storytelling*. Subsequently, he would show the interdependence between storytelling and *crafts production* (viewed both literally and conceptually), interchange *crafts* with *arts* as in his lecture “The Lesser Arts,” and finally transgress the artistic sphere to *the social domain* and *political agitation*. The very notion of the process can therefore be regarded as the unifying agent of Morris' oeuvre as well as the quintessence of his viewpoints on art and politics.

The parallel procedure can be observed in Morris' general preoccupation with language, particularly the processes of meaning construction and meaning production. Profoundly aware of the linguistic aspects of connotation/denotation as the constituents of social consciousness, he searched for the original sources of customary terms and redefined them according to his own understanding. The practice which was antecedent to Deconstruction enabled him to spot the artificiality and ideological bias (i.e. the "transcendental signified") in seemingly neutral words, including art and politics. In turn, the methodological procedure exercised by Morris is crucial for the general reception of all his enterprises, an issue which does not appear to have been thoroughly explored in the secondary materials. The comprehension of these facets will shed light on the actuality and relevance of his thought in the contemporary world.

The linguistic development was symptomatic of the larger phenomenon which occurred in the Victorian age. Namely, one could observe a high volatility of meaning over a relatively short period of time—the simultaneous narrowing and expansion of previously well-established semantic values of given terms. This seemed to have been conditioned by the fast development of technology contradicted by the attempts to achieve at least an illusion of stability in the surrounding world. In consequence, linguistics merged with the cultural and social spheres, eventually affecting the dominant political ideologies of the Victorian era: Liberalism and Conservatism. I demonstrate their mutual interdependence as well as points of convergence in the conventional and newly-emerged denotations of such words as: "art," "gentleman," "progress," "hope," "socialism," and "barbarism." Once the basis is established, it is possible to juxtapose their position in the Victorian episteme with Morris' definitions. The complex chain of reactions in which one can notice frequent contextual transactions between what are generally considered as unrelated spheres, along with the opposed processes of meaning contraction and separation, could explain the difficulty with the application of popular terminology faced by Morris and his contemporaries. The problem appears to lie not so much in the signifier as in the signified.

It is important to anchor William Morris in the broader context of his era also on account of his unique treatment of spatiotemporal questions, summarised by me under the label of the "past-oriented future reworked through the present." Respectively, his pre-socialist apotheosis of the past, especially the early Middle Ages, is shown in relation to the future direction of his thought, prominent after his conversion to Marxism. In this respect, the present constitutes the point of reference for the past and the future, rather than being the genuine object of observation *per se*. This

approach results in the instrumental treatment of the Victorian age by Morris: his present is reduced to the function of a filtering device that blocks a great part of the past residue and, subsequently, permits the passage of only those elements which are considered by him to be of future relevance. The most detailed analysis of that process is devoted to *News from Nowhere* in chapter five.

I present Morris' unique view of temporal problems in two distinct manners. Firstly, I analyse the contexts and preconditions of the Utopia genre and the concept of the Golden Age/Earthly Paradise. Utilising the theoretical materials of Jerzy Szacki et al., I concentrate on the fundamental differences between them. As a result, some doubt is cast on the popular belief that they are only variations of one and the same construct. By so doing, I relate those differences to the general issue of *tempus* in Morris. In other words, I attempt to determine whether *News from Nowhere* represents the past-embedded literary concept of the Earthly Paradise or is an advanced Utopian narrative that is embedded in historical circumstances, but in fact written from the eschatological perspective, i.e. from the position of "the end of history."

Last but not least, I take up the issue of the "in-between-ness" that stands in the title of this book. My objective is to define the territory which lies between art and politics, appearing to be central to Morris' entire production and worldview. Borrowing the label of "Beauty of Life" from one of his socialist lectures, I display the notion of an expressive (i.e. fulfilling and beautified) life as one which subordinates both his artistic enterprises and political agitation. Simultaneously, the term expands beyond the conventional associations of life as merely an organic process in nature and beauty viewed as the paramount value in aesthetics: the "Beauty of Life" denotes the totality of Morris' beliefs.

## **The Morrisean Universe**

One of the most intriguing problems connected with the comprehension of Morris' thought in its encompassing and rich diversity is the wide range of meanings and significations applied by him to seemingly well-established terms, among them the programmatic art and politics. The most prominent example of the practice of "Art" acquires a plethora of referents and semantic overtones in different phases of Morris' life, being converted by him to the specifications and the minutia of the literary and critical texts from a particular period. Furthermore, the chronological classification is not entirely reliable either—it is a simplification to claim that the definition of art was fixed and prescribed to a specific time in Morris' life

with a corresponding phase of his art production. Under these circumstances, we shall inevitably encounter numerous contradictions since, depending on the audience's expectations or text's requirements, he frequently employed his previous definitions or referred to the conventional associations of the term.

Another issue concerns the discrimination between the genuine perceptions of Morris and those which he borrowed from others. Undoubtedly, Morris was profoundly influenced by the writings of the Victorian sages, with a paramount role played by John Ruskin (1819–1900). The core values which Morris owed to the latter included the exposition of art as the agent in the elevation of society, and the exploration of the affinities between different forms of artistic expression.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, even after a precursory study it becomes evident that Morris' views had distinct marks of originality: insofar as Ruskin's theory could be labelled "eclectic," Morris' was characterised by a higher level of authenticity and coherence. Thus, the particular phases of his creation could be compared to the gradual discovery of the territories he might have been unaware of but which always existed in his universe. In that respect, we do not need to discuss his passage from art to politics in terms of the abrupt change. And we neither have to contemplate the possibility of aberration, since Morris' arrival on the political scene could be considered consistent with his previous engagements in art, followed by the growing awareness of social matters (see chapter one)

Likewise, we can observe an important difference in positioning art in specifically axiomatic configurations. If Ruskin concentrated on art as a starting point and the ultimate referent, Morris would rather emphasise the interrelation of life and nature in the first place, with art being in a subordinate position—the "province of art" as he labelled it in his essay

---

<sup>1</sup> Originally, e.g. in *Modern Painters*, Ruskin focused on the correspondence between literature and painting as "sister arts," i.e. closely related to each other. He did so, however, from a different perspective than Horace's notion of *ut pictura poesis*, which had been established in English art criticism since at least the Augustan age. Ruskin rejected the view that both arts are related on the premise that they imitate reality, which is central to the mimetic theory of art. He rather held a Romantic belief according to which literature and pictorial arts are allied in their presentation of the inner emotions of the artist (see chapter one). Respectively, this belief could derive from the neo-Platonic philosophy of Plotinus that inspired the Transcendentalist movement represented by Carlyle in Great Britain and Ralph Waldo Emerson in the United States. Undoubtedly, Morris was indebted to Transcendentalism as well, although it is likely that he was only acquainted with the British variation proposed by Thomas Carlyle and, to an extent, Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

“How I Became a Socialist” (1998, 383).<sup>2</sup> As a result, Ruskin’s trajectory of thought was not identical with Morris’, even though at some point their beliefs converged. In both cases, art constituted the basis for the subsequent social criticism, with political agitation being the natural consequence of them, that is the last link in the complex chain of reactions.<sup>3</sup>

The reconstruction of Ruskin’s intellectual evolution appears relatively easy on account of the fact that it is well documented in his writings. With Morris, though, the classic evolutionary explanation fails—the primary theoretical materials from his youth and the middle phase of his life are too scarce to reconstruct the exact course of his transition from the admiration of nature to art production and, ultimately, political agitation. As mentioned, these particular disciplines seemed to be inscribed in his holistic worldview from the very beginning. If this book were to deal with Ruskin, then the more appropriate title would be “John Ruskin, Art *and*

---

<sup>2</sup> Neither the issue of the relation of art to life nor the expression “the province of art” is unique to Morris. On the contrary, they seem to be two of the most debated and contested problems of the Victorian age, apparently initiated by the more profound theoretical texts on art and literature produced in France. Perhaps the issue was more clearly expounded by Henry James (1843–1916) who, in “The Art of Fiction” (1888), states that there is no difference between “the province of art” and life. In other words, art is not so much the representation of life as it should possess the qualities of life itself. At this point, though, we encounter the problem of priorities: if art and life are indeed identical, which one is the foundation? It appears that, to James (as to Ruskin), art constitutes the basis; to Morris, on the other hand, art is at first an extension of life, with the two subsequently merged in one concept. Yet, before the process is complete Morris goes through such phases as nature, architecture, culture, etc. (see Conclusions). On this account, James’ inferences are only a starting point for Morris who, respectively, utilises a whole gamut of sources and theories to justify his point. It may also explain Morris’ interest in the linguistic significations of such words as “art” and “beauty,” leading to his own perception of the aesthetic (see chapter one and Conclusions)

<sup>3</sup> The specific phases of those reactions could be as follows: art-nature-life-social criticism-politics (Ruskin) vs. life-nature-art-social criticism-politics (Morris). As we can observe, the last two phases are identical, yet the preceding ones are not. This explains the evolutionary theory of Ruskin as well as his eclecticism in contrast to the holistic and interdisciplinary approach of Morris. The next issue appears to lie in axiology: the breach from art to the subsequent social criticism is more discernible in Ruskin than in Morris, who would absorb the elements of reciprocity into his viewpoint on art and politics—the extended meaning of life is in that respect the ultimate referent. Nevertheless, under the broader perspective of his holism, the very idea of axiomatic gradation appears somewhat artificial.

Politics,” with the conjunction “and” instead of the preposition “between,” respectively.

At this point, we must once again raise the question of the application of such terms as “art” and, to a lesser degree, “politics” by Morris. While in some specific examples he would use the word “art” in the sense of “fine arts,” as proposed by Matthew Arnold, on other occasions the term was consistent with the aesthetic definition in which “beauty” was the paramount value. Yet, from the mid-1870s onwards, art tended to transcend all hitherto known semantic qualities and instances of denotation, absorbing a multitude of seemingly unrelated disciplines, eventually becoming the universal key to Morris’ life-world (see chapters one and three). Respectively, Morris not only employed the Arnoldian concept of art from *The Studies in Poetry* (1865) and *Culture and Anarchy* (1868), where Arnold draws a parallel line between fine arts, poetry and culture, but he extended it to the point that it eventually comprised almost any known form of expression and field of inquiry. In consequence, art acquired the qualities and characteristics we normally associate with a full and fulfilled life, sharing one and the same conceptual framework.

The most adequate among the different definitions put forward by Morris is, in my opinion, the one from the alternative opening to his lecture “The Relations of Art to Labour”:

I must ask you to understand that by the word art, I mean something wider than is usually meant by it: I do not mean only pretty ornament though that is part of it: I do not mean only pictures and sculptures, though they are the highest manifestations of it; I do not mean only splendid and beautiful architecture, though that includes a very great deal of all that deserves to be called art: but I mean all these things and a great many more, music, the drama, poetry, imaginative fiction, and above all and especially the kind of feeling which enables us to see beauty in the world and stimulates us to reproduce it, to increase it, to understand it and to sympathise with those who specially deal with it. In short, by art I mean the intellectual and therefore specially human pleasure of life, distinguished from the animal pleasure, and yet partaking of its nature in many ways, and which pleasure is produced by the labour of men either manual or mental or both. (Morris 1890 [2004], 41)

In the context provided by Morris, “art” transcends the conventional associations as well as the limitations of the Victorian episteme. Namely, it expands into the aforementioned heterogeneous terrains of meaning: first to all forms of creative activity, then to the modes of personal perceptions and feelings, eventually becoming synonymous with “pleasure in labour.” In this configuration, along with the extension of the notion of



art, we can observe the parallel process in the case of “pleasure” which, in Morris’ definition, transgresses from the aesthetic sphere to the natural domain (see chapter four). And in the same fashion he develops the notion of “labour,” which is perceived as the first constituent, the primary agent, and the ultimate referent of human existence. Although that specific sense of labour could be traced back to Ruskin, who in his later texts made no distinction between work and art (Wilmer 1998, 415), the whole process of meaning production by Morris occurred independently. As a result, the interdisciplinary definition of art also manifests Morris’ holistic *Weltanschauung*: it is the essence of his lifelong objectives and, simultaneously, the vantage ground for all his endeavours.

The interpenetration of the seemingly unrelated significations of the multilayered term “art” in different texts by Morris may appear ambiguous, especially when the reader is not acquainted with Morris’ oeuvre: i.e. art=ornamentation, art=aesthetic concept of beauty, art=sensibility, art=pleasure in labour, art=conscious pleasure of life, or, as Morris pointed out in “The Relations of Art to Labour,” art and labour=history. “Art,” therefore, instantiates the confluence of such a wide range of disciplines that the aesthetic sense of beauty recedes into the background. Simultaneously, beauty acquires qualities normally associated with ethics; i.e. the beautiful denotes the noble, the moral, the good, etc. For that reason, Morris was often misunderstood by the Victorian audience, since in their opinion these seemingly well-established terms (art, politics, life, nature) rendered the impression of inconsistency and ambiguity. Respectively, the Marxist thinkers of the Victorian era as well as contemporary critics have focused on Morris’ set of priorities, the main issue concerning either the aesthetic (e.g. Christine Sypnovich) or the moral/ethical (May Morris) foundations of his socialism (see chapter four)

Such a tendency to use the customary terms in an extensive and more universal dimension is reflected in the special emphasis Morris placed on the concept of nature, which also appeared to have several distinct meanings and functions. Even if the signifier remained unchanged, the signified was all but stable and fixed.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the critic faces formidable challenges if not irreconcilable dilemmas: at times, Morris would employ the neo-Platonic—more precisely the Romantic/Transcendentalist—concept of nature as a mirror of the inner feelings of the observer, as for instance in his early texts collected in the book of poetry *In Defence of Guenevere* (1858). Yet, to Morris, “nature” also meant any natural formation or manifestation: trees, rivers,

---

<sup>4</sup> For Morris’ perception of art and nature in the socialist context see chapter three.

mountains, etc. In the latter case, nature came to be synonymous with the environment.<sup>5</sup> To Morris, landscape and environment also denoted those things which were produced by humans but which fitted the aesthetic sense of beauty, the most prominent example of which was the early Gothic architecture. From this vantage point, not only is the culture/nature binary put in doubt, but the very definition of nature may overlap with that of culture. Due to that unorthodox approach, Morris often encountered problems in delivering his message through the vehicle of conventional language. On the one hand, he could exclusively utilise those means available in the Victorian episteme; on the other, he realised that the channels of expression at his disposal were inadequate for the proper articulation of his beliefs.

For the reasons highlighted above, Morris attached special attention to language and linguistics, as only in this way could he bridge the gap between the intended message and the task of its conveyance. Since he found his contemporary lexicon, characterised by the high volatility of meaning, insufficient (see chapter one), as well obviously having no possibility to access the language of the future, he attempted to communicate his views with the aid of archaisms—the practice which was not always understood, having been perceived as over-stylisation, mannerism, or idiosyncrasy (see chapter three). Obviously, such a predilection for archaic vocabulary and syntax could derive from Morris' fascination with the past, the early Gothic in particular. Nevertheless, archaisms also had a practical purpose. Having been perceived by Morris as still uncorrupted by the aggressive, profit-oriented course in his contemporary world, they appeared to be rooted in nature. Respectively, locating his vocabulary in the realm seen as permanent and impervious to

---

<sup>5</sup> Some of Morris' concepts bear a strong resemblance to R. W. Emerson's seminal essay "Nature" (1836). The similarities include: the notion of the observer and the spectacle, the symbolic as well as metaphorical sense of nature's existence, the impossibility of its ownership, and the unfeasibility of cognising the natural world in the course of scientific exploration. Also, an inclusion of human-made objects by Morris, as with the architecture of the early Gothic, in the natural domain corresponds in the two. On the other hand, the spiritual aspect of nature, as well as the belief in the perfect harmony in the universe—the tenets which are the basis of Emerson's theory—are not exposed in Morris, perhaps with the exception of his earliest texts. They can nevertheless be discovered in the broadly conceived general course of his thought. In my research I have at no point come across any information about Morris' acquaintance with Emerson's work. The similarity may therefore have resulted from the Romantic tradition underlying their beliefs; analogously to Emerson, Morris could have drawn conclusions indirectly, "second hand" from his readings of Ruskin and Carlyle.

the vicissitudes of the civilisational progress, Morris could stabilise the sense and the meaning of words he employed.<sup>6</sup> Eventually, on account of the fact that those words and expressions were no longer in popular usage, their significations did not multiply, ultimately leading to the corruption of language reflected in an excess of vocabulary, which Walter Benjamin labelled “overnaming.” Morris could impart his message without being involved in the constant challenge of the contested meaning.

Respectively, I have attempted to reconstruct Morris' original sources of influence and the methodology of meaning production so that I can map out his universe without relapsing into selective approaches to his art, crafts, and subsequent political involvement. This outline has also clarified various possible contexts and significations informing the concepts of art and nature, in the end offering the possibility of establishing the connection to Morris' definition of politics (see chapter two). As a navigation tool, I have opted for the notion of a map rather than a paradigmatic or syntagmatic structure since the latter suggests a hierarchical model of interdependence that Morris would probably not agree with. We need to be aware that such a map is by no means complete; furthermore, due to the open-endedness of Morris' universe, it would appear to be against his intentions. Although each point can be considered a self-contained entity, Morris simultaneously left room for the possible extension and implementation of his macrocosm.

This book endeavours to depict the world of William Morris as a uniform construct in which different elements are interchangeable and reciprocal. Analogously to the actual universe, where the particles are constantly in flux—converging, diverging, and permeating the limitless space between them—the Morrisean universe is by no means static either. The emphasis, therefore, is to be placed on various processes in Morris' artistic production, the practice which is parallel to the formation of his political beliefs. Conversely, the notion of the creative process applied to various forms of activity—artistic, political, social, or cultural—seems equally as important as the study of finished products. Hence, I not only concentrate on Morris as a representative of his epoch, but also attempt to situate his work in the broadest possible spectrum that transcends the specifications of the Victorian age. In the last chapter that focuses on *News from Nowhere*, with the exception of the introductory passages, I eschew the direct references to Victorianism, and utilising Marxist concepts and

---

<sup>6</sup> For analogies and comparisons see, for instance, the speculations about the origins of language in Emerson's Transcendentalist essay “Nature” (1836).

terminology I expose the non-descriptive and universal character of Morrisian London. In other words, my aim is to demonstrate that the microcosm of Nowhere is also the macrocosm of Morris' holistic convictions.

### **The interrelation between art, nature, and politics: an excursus**

To present the affinity between art, nature, and politics in Morris it is necessary to properly understand his use of these terms, otherwise the nexus and mutual reference between them will not be established, resulting in the ambiguity, even obscurity, of the two realms. This exercise will, in turn, lead to the discovery of the deepest layer of the Morrisian worldview—the starting point and the ultimate referent: the fact that it was not so much art, let alone politics, but the notion of an expressive, i.e. complete and fruitful life,<sup>7</sup> that was the driving force of all his enterprises and endeavours. “The Beauty of Life” can therefore be considered as the departure plane as well as the centrepiece of Morris' universe; in other words, the key to the fullest ever appreciation of his holism.

Also in this case, though, like with politics and art, we can observe the extension of the popular meaning of life. Similar to the abovementioned “art” and “politics,” or “pleasure” and “labour,” Morris perceived life in a most comprehensive manner, almost in a universal dimension, rather than at an individual level. “Life” meant to him more than just the act of leading a happy existence (see chapter four). In consequence, we can see the close affiliation between the concepts of life and nature.

It is in the broadly conceived nature alone, then, in which the roots of his art should be searched for (see chapter one). This conviction may in turn explain the emphasis Morris placed on the early phases of Western culture—the time when art was not yet isolated and ascribed to a separate category, but when it appeared to grow in symbiosis with natural forms. Conversely, of significance to him were the periods of transition when prehistory converged with the first written records, regardless of the actual epoch. Morris would repeatedly return to such “border regions,” for instance in his translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (the beginnings of

---

<sup>7</sup> The connection between life and art in Morris was noted in the early reviews, but it was subsequently lost in the numerous discussions and statements concerning his aesthetic and/or political beliefs. W. B. Yeats, for example, opined that, “[William Morris] tried to change the life of his time into the life of his dream,” while Arthur Clutton-Brock claimed in his article “The Prose Romances of William Morris” (1914) that Morris not so much attempted to change literature as life (in Latham 2010, 192)

Greek culture), in the fantasy novel *The House of the Wolfings* (the earliest phase of Germanic culture), the translations of the legendary Icelandic *Sagas*, including the *Volsunga Saga* (the paradigm of Norse culture), or in the rendition of *Beowulf* (the origins of English/Anglo-Saxon literature).

Morris' interest in the "in-between" epochs and territories stemmed from the fact that in those periods the production of the first historical records concurred with the emerging cultural practices of social formations, perhaps even of culture techniques. Morris realised that the cultural formation was originally reflected in the crafts rather than the arts or, alternately, both were inseparable (see chapter one). For that reason, in his lectures and articles, most notably in "The Lesser Arts" (1877), he attempted to reunite the two modes of culturalisation, i.e. culture production, by questioning their conventional discrimination between the intellectual character of the arts and the practical faculty of the crafts.

In the specific case of the Western culture, such a situation first occurred in ancient Greece in the period approximating pre-history and the earliest written records. Homer's eposes, i.e. the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which Morris translated into English,<sup>8</sup> were considered by him the literary manifestations of the time when nature, culture, and art were still in a state of equilibrium and constituted one entity. Respectively, Morris' preoccupation with the pre-Socratic episteme, which would parallel the subsequent more-comprehensive studies of the origins of Western culture by Heidegger,<sup>9</sup> could derive from his disapproval of the growing culture/nature polarisation, which concurred with the emergence of Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy, or rather from their (mis)interpretations. Other schisms and crises manifested in divisions resulting from the almost complete culture/nature binary that had a direct influence on the presumably wrong course of civilisation Morris observed in his epoch. On that account, despite superficial conclusions, Morris would turn to the pre-history/history period, not with the intention to find the ends in the past, but to define the critical moment. Only in this way could he identify the means to overcome the contemporary world's ailments and calamities. Such an improvement could be made in the sole process of the reunification of artificially dissociated faculties: the bonds between art and

---

<sup>8</sup> Morris' translation of the *Iliad* exists only in fragments. Whether he actually rendered the whole epos into English is a matter of speculation.

<sup>9</sup> In "The Question Concerning Technology" (1956), for instance, Heidegger preoccupies himself with the problem of the essence of technology resting, to a large extent, on Pre-Socratic concepts. Plato and Aristotle are perceived by him as the continuators of the philosophy that preceded them, rather than, as they are conventionally seen, the founders of the modern outlook of the world.

culture had to be forged again, along with the realisation that both realms are founded in nature. This could only be achieved with the concerted effort of entire communities rather than at an individual level. Peter Faulkner comments:

From this it is clear Morris does not value “Literature” so much as the traditional stories of all cultures. These have everything in common with the works of Gothic architecture he admired, created not by individuals, but by communities. (Faulkner 1994, 28)

It is no coincidence that, when asked about his literary canon, Morris enumerated those books which are known not so much for their literary qualities, but which represent the collective lore of a particular social formation. His selection provided for *Manchester Examiner* in 1886 is made up exclusively by the works which possess cultural rather than artistic value (see chapters one and three). Given the criteria of his selection, he opted for those texts which are possibly closest to the natural world: they either explain natural phenomena through the mythological narratives or they focus on broadly conceived human nature. Such an aversion to the dissociation of life from nature, subsequently leading to severing culture from nature, and ultimately obscuring the roots of art, could also explain Morris’ fascination with the period of the early Gothic. As mentioned, according to Morris the architecture of that period could be considered the extension of natural formations: it was not imposed on the landscape, but was a part of it (see chapter one).

The pattern life-nature-culture-arts/crafts remained unchanged in all phases of Morris’ creation. His critical remark concerning Swinburne’s poetry, namely that “it always seemed to me to be founded on literature, not on nature” (in Drabble, 999), can therefore be translated as the latter’s amnesia concerning the true roots of art. Such was Morris’ original stance reflected intuitively in his early writings, and subsequently located by him in the conceptual framework in the socialist lectures.

More problematic are the years when Morris, influenced by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82), was immersed in the Pre-Raphaelite movement. In that period he was prone to aestheticise his beliefs and, as a result, he came to perceive life itself in aesthetic terms. In this sense, the holistic concept of the “Beauty of Life,” which is also the title of his well-known lecture delivered in Birmingham in 1882, appears an aesthetic one in the context of his art production from the middle phase. It points to the previous influences and art engagements informed by the specifically aesthetic perception of the notion of beauty. Yet, under the holistic perspective, beauty would simultaneously transcend the specific field of

aesthetics. In this case, the “Beauty of Life” becomes the epitome of Morris’ convictions about the strong alliance of life, nature, culture, and art itself. Since Morris seemed to struggle with giving a new name to that amalgam, he simply labelled it “art” which, in consequence, became an umbrella term for a plethora of different domains. When he ultimately placed art in yet another context of a political discourse on social relations, the already extended signification of the term merged with one more sphere—ethics.

Respectively, the critics and scholars located Morris’ socialism along different lines of priority. May Morris, for instance, claimed that her father’s political engagement was first and foremost motivated by his ethical and moral beliefs, while Peter Stansky, Christine Sypnovich, et al. would rather seek the primary reasons in Morris’ aesthetic convictions (see chapter four). Yet, were we to accept the holistic approach, the very notion of prioritising appears irrelevant since both ethics and aesthetics were the components of the open-ended and non-hierarchical structure of the Morrisian universe.<sup>10</sup> It is not coincidental that in the better world of the future emerging after the socialist ideals had been realised, as depicted by Morris in his utopian narrative *News from Nowhere* (1890), the narrator avoids the term “art” altogether, speaking instead of beautiful objects which complement the happy existence of London residents. And when Old Hammond is asked about politics, he plainly answers that “we have none” (Morris 1998, 116).

---

<sup>10</sup> The issue of importance of ethics in Morris’ conversion to socialism is quite complex. It seems that he, as Kant, managed to at least partially resolve the “is/ought” problem known as Hume’s law. Namely, as observed by David Hume (1711–76), all moral philosophies tend to propose an ideal system of ethics based on what is and ought not be. Yet Hume claims in *The Treatise on Human Nature* (1739) that he sees no direct connection between “is” and “ought,” in this manner questioning the very foundation of ethics as a separate branch of philosophy. In other words, it is a common error to derive universal moral postulates from specific observations of the wrongs and ills of the world. Kant’s response was the objective and independent of external conditioning principle of moral imperative. Given the importance of Kant’s philosophy for Transcendentalism, that also had some bearing on Morris due to his study of early Carlyle works, it is possible to figure out the reason why he attempted to proceed straight into the construct, so different from others produced in his own times that even if it had emerged as the response to the criticism of the Victorian age, it is now in such an advanced stage that the connection is missing or obscure. Another thing is the extent to which it was a conscious strategy on the part of Morris, as it appears to be primarily intuitive.

## Critical Assessment of Studies Devoted to William Morris

The question of the non-separation of life, culture, and art posits some difficulty in view of the more traditional approaches prominent in the Morris scholarship. The conventional methods, the historical dialectic in particular, result in the dissection of his art production from nature first, and subsequently the isolation of his political beliefs. Thus, the individual components of Morris' aesthetic and political viewpoint are studied as separate entities which are deemed unrelated or, at best, vaguely connected with each other. Such an approach determined the focus that dominated the studies on Morris for most of the twentieth century. The sporadic attempts to widen the spectrum and, respectively, to locate Morris in various contexts extended to the territories typically reserved for other fields of inquiry did not significantly change the situation. As a result, the tendency to study Morris' art and his political thought in isolation led to the inevitable polarisation which not only pertains to the critical evaluation of the primary materials, but also affects the general reception of Morris and his work. Consequently, on the one hand we can observe the arrival at the gradual marginalisation of his achievements reflected in the relatively scarce general coverage; on the other, this amounts to the exclusively Morris-focused studies.

As for the general publications on British authors, Morris is not mentioned in *Great British Writers* (1989)—an illustrated companion to the works of the most famous English language authors. Surprisingly, a short note is given on Edward Burne-Jones (1833–98), Morris' friend who is nonetheless considered a less influential representative of the Victorian age than Morris. The *Norton Anthology of English Literature* (Sixth Edition) omits Morris altogether. In *A Brief History of English Literature* Morris appears only once, described as “a poet, designer, writer and socialist [who] attempted to reintroduce a human dimension into a factory-based economy” (Peck and Cole 2002, 190). In *A History of English Literature*, Emile Legouis reserves more space for Morris, but some of his remarks, e.g. that “he is of the lineage of Spenser, not of Keats,” that he represented “a quintessential spirit of Romanticism,” or that “Tennyson became a god to him” (1933, 1175), suggest that the author analysed Morris rather superficially, merely with reference to his other “more important” contemporaries. To do it justice, Legouis' study of *The Earthly Paradise* is more comprehensive, although again he perceives Morris as “the aesthete, imbued to the core with Latin culture” (1177), which appears to be at odds in view of his aversion to classicism and veneration of the Norse. Morris' texts from the socialist period, i.e. *A Dream of John*



*Ball and News from Nowhere*, are shown in a more favourable light, yet their dreaminess is emphasised and their impracticality implied by the author. Obviously, the works provided here are only a narrow selection of publications on English art and literature, but they exemplify a certain marginalisation or a lack of interest when Morris is juxtaposed with other well-known British writers and artists of his era.

Morris' political convictions are not entirely systematised either. Such a situation may derive from the fact that Morris did not generate a synthetic social/political theory, at least not in the mould of his illustrious contemporaries like Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, or Herbert Spencer. Although it is possible to recreate the process of his passage from the Victorian aestheticism to socialism (see chapter three), with the aid of his copious correspondence, as well as pinpoint the main postulates proposed by Morris in the socialist period, the primary sources are scattered over a long period of time, being interspersed with his art production. The absence of a single explanatory text by Morris inhibits the full comprehension of his beliefs in their entirety. In other words, we are obliged to utilise secondary sources which offer the interpretation/exposition of Morris' creed, rather than a first-hand account.

Furthermore, even in the period of socialist agitation, Morris did not draw a clear demarcation between the political and the social—both terms appearing to him as relative synonyms or as having an affinity so close that they could be located within one conceptual framework, perhaps even a single semantic field (see chapter two). Respectively, Morris' statement expressed in his lecture "How I Became a Socialist" (1894) that "there was no transitional period [from art to politics]" (1998, 379) divided the studies of Morris into two separate branches: critics would either ignore his remark and study the evolution of his thought, or they would abandon the evolutionary standpoint by taking up his political involvement as a field not directly related to his former artistic endeavours. The third option is also plausible, however. I propose the conciliatory model of his transition in chapter three.

The choice of priorities, of art/politics as the foundation of Morris' worldview, corresponded with the further critical evaluation of his oeuvre. In general, the critics and scholars associated with the middle-class liberal studies carried out research on his art, including the literary, from the aesthetic perspective. If at all, they attempted to explain his socialism in terms of a not entirely comprehensible fancy of a wealthy and successful artist. On the other side of the spectrum, Morris' political views were the focal point for the critics associated with the Marxist and post-Marxist

schools.<sup>11</sup> The latter saw his art either as independent of his political beliefs or, at best, as a prelude to the proper political action.

## **Biographical Perspectives**

A separate branch of Morris studies consists of biographies and biographical criticism that commenced with the publication of J. W. (John William) Mackail's *William Morris: His Life and Work* (1899). The author utilised a variety of materials, both primary and secondary, resulting in probably the most complete and well-known monograph on William Morris to date. On account of the fact that Mackail knew Morris in person, as well as that he had access to his colleagues and friends, most of whom were still alive at the time of the publication, the text may serve as a natural link between the primary and secondary materials.

Mackail's biography is not entirely neutral, which is especially discernible in the parts discussing the socialist phase of Morris, or in the deliberately tactful omission of some facts from his life.<sup>12</sup> Also, the author's political convictions embedded in conservatism were in many respects antithetical to Morris'. As a result, Mackail devoted a mere two pages to Morris' most famous *Utopia News from Nowhere*, expressing an opinion which, to say the least, could not be described as favourable or flattering. To do it justice, though, unlike most of Morris' contemporaries representing the same social class and similar interests, including his lifelong friend and partner Edward Burne-Jones who perceived Morris'

---

<sup>11</sup> Surprisingly enough, two British scholars who are considered the most prominent representatives of Marxism in the United Kingdom, i.e. Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton, have been quite reluctant to discuss Morris. Perhaps they did so on account of the fact that they preoccupied themselves with the more scientific aspects of Marxist criticism carried out under the wider perspective of Marxist contexts and theories. A short review of Morris' biography by Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time*, appears to be the only text by Eagleton, at least known to me, which focuses on Morris. In addition, he devotes some passages to *News from Nowhere* in his article "Utopia and its Opposites" (2000). In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990), Morris is hardly mentioned, even if the subject should be appropriate to discuss his aesthetics-informed social beliefs. Apparently, another reason may be Eagleton's general interest in the European, especially French and German, socialist criticism rather than the British. Nevertheless, particularly in chapters one and four, I will make a wide use of Professor Eagleton's explications on aesthetics and culture since they are in many respects compatible with Morris' original viewpoints.

<sup>12</sup> Apart from some scarce in-text allusions, Mackail entirely omits Jane Morris' love affair with Gabriel Dante Rossetti, which had a big impact on Morris.

conversion to socialism as idiosyncrasy, aberration, or an inexplicable fancy of a wealthy entrepreneur, Mackail did not ignore that period. On the contrary, he attempted to remain as faithful to the original thought of Morris as only he could. Of lesser importance are the inaccuracies concerning particular locations and events. For instance, Mackail's descriptions of Red House are so different from the actual place that they raise the suspicion that he never visited it in person, relying instead on second-hand reports.

The contemporary trends in the critical studies of Morris, particularly in the biographical and political criticism, are to a large extent determined by the famous political biography of Morris by E. P. Thompson: *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (1955). As a matter of fact, we can speak of two independent biographies by the same author written in two different periods. The alterations in the second edition of his work (1976), in which Thompson introduced a significant number of corrections and amendments to the previous one, resulted in a different reception of Morris' socialism as well as an opposite set of priorities. The key factor seemed to be the privileged position of either aesthetics or politics that, in consequence, determined the vantage point and the contents. Namely, in the first edition Thompson focused on "politicizing aesthetics"; i.e. he attempted to "mark Morris off the literary tradition" (Goode 1995, 195) and to place him within the socio-political framework of the Victorian age. In his second publication, Thompson reversed the original arrangements and "aestheticized politics" (Goode 1995, 195). In the latter text, Morris was presented as a direct continuator of the Romantic anti-capitalism, in the context of which he could be regarded as the precursor of the subsequent aesthetics-based political theories informed by the postulates of the movement.

In the first edition of Thompson's biography, the aesthetic element is to a large degree downplayed, while in the second, by giving priority to aesthetics over politics, he inadvertently questions Morris' Marxism/scientific socialism. As a result, he attributes Morris' political beliefs to the pre-socialist and proto-socialist schools (see chapter two). Thompson's work could therefore be perceived as the transposition of his own Marxist postulates tested against those of Morris, rather than vice versa.

Nevertheless, *Romantic to Revolutionary* is still considered the most prominent among the political biographies of Morris, and is ranked second to Mackail's in the entire biographical oeuvre. The important contributions included the location of Morris in the broader spectrum of the early socialist movement in Britain, as well as the indication of the social/socialist potential in Morris' art production, especially his literary texts. Regarding

the significance of the work in question, it may appear underrepresented in this publication. I make but sparse references to it and to the rather less salient passages. Leaving aside the fact that the biography has generated a number of critical responses, having been analysed in-depth and extensively discussed, such a strategy is my deliberate choice. Otherwise, contrary to my original aims and intentions, I would inevitably become involved in a polemic with Thompson's standpoints.

Other "major" biographical sources on Morris frequently referred to in this book include: *William Morris: His Life, Work and Friends* (1967) by Philip Henderson which, on account of the similarities with Mackail's, falls into the category of classic works in the genre; *William Morris: His Life and Work* (1975) by Jack Lindsay—representing political biographies, but also enclosing the hitherto unpublished, often controversial materials on Morris' private life (including a detailed description of Jane Morris' affair with Rossetti); Ian Bradley's *William Morris and His World* (1978), where biographical material is interspersed with the analysis of Morris' literary texts conducted in the spirit of the New Criticism (the inclusion of an essentially anti-biographical method to a work focusing on a private life seems peculiar, yet simultaneously contributes to the originality of Bradley's text). I mainly utilise these publications to implement the biographical information which I could not find in Mackail, rather than for the specific opinions and analyses.

The most outstanding biography of late is *William Morris: A Life of Our Time* (1994) by Fiona MacCarthy. It can be considered the third in importance after those by Mackail and Thompson. The author has located Morris in various contemporary frameworks and contexts standing in relation to his holism; in this respect, it is the most advanced of all works of the kind. Additionally, MacCarthy has inserted an impressive amount of primary materials, including a previously unpublished poem from the journey to Iceland. Due to a wide variety of sources as well as the impressive analyses of art productions and texts by Morris, *A Life of Our Time* presents the most profound psychological portrait of Morris as a human being. Although the holistic approach which dominates MacCarthy's text is in many ways compatible with the interdisciplinary discourse of this work—or perhaps exactly for that reason—I have decided to eschew the direct references. In consequence, I will utilise it only occasionally, mainly in the biographical context.

Oddly enough, I have not come across critical materials which discuss Morris' biography from the position of Freudian psychoanalysis, although some elements of that approach can be found in Lindsay's and MacCarthy's texts. In other words, unless I am not aware of such a publication, the

psychobiography of Morris seems to be missing. These aspects should have been at least of marginal interest in view of the fact that Morris lost his father at a young age—Morris' admiration for Ruskin could therefore be explained in terms of his search for a substitute father-figure whose opinions he eventually rejected, yet whose importance he never denied. Also, Morris' early obsession with death and love, first mentioned by Mackail, is in tune with the Freudian concept of Eros and Thanatos. It appears in Carole Silver's analysis of Morris' early poems and romances, but she avoids the direct references to the biography of the author of "The Defence of Guenevere." The frequent fits of passion and uncontrolled behaviour which Morris attempted to overcome through his involvement in different kinds of labour, on the other hand, could translate into the notions of sublimation and repression which play a prominent role in Freudian criticism.

### **Morris in the context of utopian studies**

The second approach to Morris, which can be considered a separate category not directly related to either biographical criticism or the analysis of his oeuvre, derives from the utopian studies. In general, a majority of its representatives who otherwise belong to different schools of literary and cultural theory start from his most popular narrative *News from Nowhere*. I would venture the opinion that they are at first not interested in Morris *per se*, but only in his seminal text considered as a milestone utopia among the nineteenth-century works in this genre. Obviously, this does not exclude the critics who specialise in Morris scholarship, such as Peter Faulkner, from analysing the utopia under discussion from various perspectives. In this particular field one can observe the sole focus on *News from Nowhere* as the starting point and ultimate referent. Respectively, the scholars who locate Morris in the utopian/utopic tradition tend to utilise his other texts, especially the socialist lectures, mainly as the background explanation for the specific problems raised in connection to the microcosm of the title "Nowhere", i.e. London of the twenty-second century. The most valuable publication of recent years representing this approach appears to be *William Morris's Utopia of Strangers* (2006) by Marcus Waithe, where the author draws attention to the problem of the unfeasibility of the full integration between William Guest and the Nowhereians.

Despite the fact that the primary focus here is a specific utopia, some conclusions and inferences, inadvertently or not, pertain to the general perception of the Morrisean universe. For instance, Owen Holland's observation in his article "Utopia and the Prohibition of Melancholy"

concerning the non-prescriptive character of the text (see chapter five) is parallel to the open-endedness of Morris' life-world. It leaves room for an individual exploration resulting in new discoveries as well the possibility of its implementation. Furthermore, the fact that Morris did not eliminate the melancholic malcontents from Nowhere, as discussed by Holland, or the Nowhereians' implications that Guest can feel "disappointed" with their life and customs pointed to by Tom Pinkey in "Versions of Ecotopia in *News from Nowhere*," may question the utopic character of the future London. Perhaps, after all, Morris did not drive at the presentation of a perfect/good society, nor attempt to show a land governed by an ideal system.

### **Approaches Towards Morris' art and politics**

The criticism of Morris' literary and artistic output was already abundant during his lifetime (see chapter one) when Morris was generally considered the leading authority in the fields of craftsmanship and design, as well as one of the most acknowledged poets of the Victorian age. His works were analysed by Charles Swinburne, John Ruskin, and George Herbert Wells, for example. The first comprehensive monograph that aimed at the study of his oeuvre rather than individual compositions was *William Morris: His Art, His Writings and His Public Life; A Record*, usually referred to as *The Art of William Morris* (1897), by Aymer Vallance, a supporter of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The word "record," used in the sense of a register written with the intention to preserve Morris' knowledge and achievements rather than a record of the events from his life, appears significant and not coincidental. It aptly summarises Vallance's priorities and objectives, namely a critical analysis of Morris' art exclusively. Already in the opening passage of the "Introduction" he points out that "it makes no claim to be a biography or a record of any of his private and family affairs" (vii). Respectively, particular chapters discuss various endeavours and enterprises by Morris, not only artistic, but also political and social, arranged in a chronological order.

As a result, the text offers an insight into Morris' art works and literature while providing an extensive commentary on his socialism. Given the critical conventions at the time of the Record's production (1897), the tone and register are surprisingly neutral and impersonal, in some fragments resembling the methodology of the New Criticism and