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A QUEST FOR HAPPINESS

**WILLIAM MORRIS'S *NEWS FROM NOWHERE* AND WILLIAM
DEAN HOWELLS'S *A TRAVELER FROM ALTRURIA* AND
THROUGH THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE:**

A THEMATIC AND AESTHETIC STUDY

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I hereby declare that the substance of this dissertation is entirely the result of my investigation and that due reference or acknowledgement is made, whenever necessary, to the work of other researchers.

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Signed :

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*To my grand-parents
To my uncle Bachir.*

ABSTRACT

This research work entitled *A Quest for Happiness* is a comparative study of the utopian romances of the English writer, William Morris (*News from Nowhere*), and his American counterpart, William Dean Howells (*A Traveler from Altruria* with its sequel *Through the Eye of the Needle*). Both writers, in reaction to their 19th century competitive and ugly societies tried to imagine a fairer and more beautiful world. This work is a comparison of the two writers' respective representations of what an ideal society is or should be, with a view to exploring and pinpointing the similarities and differences between the two on the basis of three major ideas which are: Egalitarianism, Agrarianism, and Art. This constitutes our thematic concern in this research. This comparative study will also examine the aesthetic side of the romances as a specific literary genre.

The similarities and differences in the romances are explored in the light of the Cultural Materialist theory (essentially as developed in Raymond Williams's seminal work *Culture and Society*). This approach will enable us to link the romances to their 19th century context, on the one hand, and to open new venues of interpretation more relevant to the 21st century social, economic and even ecological issues, on the other hand.

This study is divided into four chapters. The first chapter entitled "The Egalitarian Land" discusses the egalitarian doctrines, and then moves to a close study of the text showing the two writers' egalitarian views.

The second chapter entitled “The Agrarian Garden” looks at agrarianism in the contexts of 19th century England and America, a doctrine which helps in the establishment of a more egalitarian society to replace the unfair 19th century social system. A study of the text follows to show the agrarian stance of the two utopias as tackled through the dramatization of incidents and situations in the two romances.

The third chapter entitled “Of Beauty and Soul” highlights the artistic side of Morris and his influence by the social and art critic Ruskin. Morris advocated “popular art”, an art performed by, and accessible to the common man. This idea he shared with Howells. This part, on the other hand, insists on Howells’s more markedly religious stance.

The fourth and last chapter deals with the aesthetic study of the two romances. It looks at some major literary devices such as setting and atmosphere, characterization, plot and point of view. It shows how far both Morris’s and Howells’s romances conform to the genre and prove adequate to the presentation of their ideal society.

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INTRODUCTION

The debate in much of 19th century Western literature centred on the issues engendered by industrialism. It was, indeed, the major event of the century causing many changes in society, bringing hardships to the people and disaster to the environment. This led to many reactions among the thinkers and writers of the time. In England, Charles Dickens's realistic bleak novels such as *Hard Times* (1854) or, Thomas Carlyle's angry pamphlets like *Signs of the Times* (1829) and *Past and Present* (1843), or again Mrs Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1853), all denounced the excesses of the industrial capitalistic system. In America, too, works such as Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901) or Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), were reactions to the evils and inequalities brought about by industrialism. Some writers, however, equally eager for reform and action, turned to another kind of literary response, which far from being realistic or naturalistic, was rather escapist in mood as they produced Romances, and more particularly Utopian ones.

This resort to utopian romance comes from a deep feeling of dissatisfaction that led them to imagine a better world. In fact this feeling was not peculiar to 19th century English and American writers, but had run through all ages as if in some inner attempt to regain the Eden from which Man was expelled. The

Delightful Garden of Eden, which is found in the three monotheistic religions, is described in the Book of *Genesis* as the place where the first man Adam and the first woman Eve lived after they were created by God. To the Garden of Eden the just men go after their death, as a reward for their good actions in their lives. This idea of a perfect and just society has been present in literature at least since the Greek Plato's *Republic*; Plato, the philosopher, as early as 400B.C, imagined a rural land, far from the sea, away from any sort of commerce, and the opposite of what Athens looked like in those days.

Utopia became fashionable in the early modern era with Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) (from the Greek "no place" or "no where"), which in fact gave its name to the genre. The happy land of Utopia is an island where he describes economy, urbanism, the relationship between citizens as well as the constitution and the details of the daily life of its inhabitants. By then Utopia had come to mean, a dream of a better world or society. As such it has been used to describe both "intentional communities", that attempted to create an ideal society, and "fictional societies" with an existence free from worry, enjoying a state of bliss and enlightenment, free from sin, pain, poverty and death. In fact, much of the first part of *Utopia* consists of a sharp critical account of the social conditions prevailing in More's England. Against these conditions, More's voyager, Raphael Hythloday sets Utopia where, all goods are held in common and people live for pleasure in friendship and common accord.

Just as Thomas More responded to specific 16th century conditions in England, so utopian writers and reformers of the 19th century in England and

America reacted to the inequities of their own industrial society. Reformers and utopians tried to propose solutions to the preoccupations and dilemmas of their time, either through theories and practical experimentation of men like Robert Owen in England, Fourier and Saint Simon in France or through utopian fiction such as: Robert Pemberton's *The Happy Colony* (1854), Edward Bulwer Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871), Anna Bowman Dodd's *The Republic of The Future* (1887), Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888) and others.

All such writings were attempts to imagine a different and better world in response to the economic, social and moral evils engendered by industrialism and the fierce competitive spirit of the liberal economic philosophy of the 19th century.

My scope in this research work is limited to a comparative study of the two utopian romances: William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1891) and William Dean Howells's *A Traveler from Altruria* (1894) followed by its sequel *Through the Eye of the Needle* (1907). In other words I intend to examine, through their texts, the fundamental ideas that govern their thoughts and yearnings. My analysis centres on three major points which are shared by the two utopias under study. Both writers in their utopias imagined a world where social justice is the norm. They both sought to realise this through the establishment of an egalitarian society based mainly on an agrarian economy. They therefore sought to establish a just and beautiful society in which art will find the best ground for full

expression, as opposed to the unjust and ugly contemporary society into which they both lived.

In England we can speak of two major waves of English social thought in the 19th century. The first one was initiated by Robert Owen in the 1830s with his project of New Lanark, while the second one at the end of the century was best represented by the socialist William Morris (1834-1894), who was a writer, poet and artist. He is particularly remembered today as a socialist who founded the Socialist League in 1883 and who nurtured anti-industrial dreams of a return to a medieval past where beauty will be delivered from the grips of ugly industrialism by means of art and crafts. In the human community he imagined, work becomes a pleasure allowing people to regain their true selves, and leads to a work-loving society where the joy of making beautiful things becomes a necessary part of everyone's life.

His idea of a cooperative society came also under the influence of the socialists Saint Simon and Fourier who claimed that agriculture must be at the basis of any system of production. Morris's intellectual agitation together with his struggle against ugliness and social injustice reached their peak with his utopian romance *News from Nowhere* (1891), probably his best work, which represents an ideal vision of 21st century "communist" England free from the yoke of the machine and its ugly product. It is this vision we endeavour to show in detail when studying *News from Nowhere*.

In America, William Dean Howells (1837-1920) was equally influenced by this socialist trend. He stressed the contradictions and inequities of the

industrial capitalist system. He was an American novelist and critic, at the head of those writers who formulated a detailed theory on American literary Realism. In his career, he was influenced by major writers and great literary figures such as- Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, James Russell Lowell and Walt Whitman. Most of them were idealists or Transcendentalists advocating the divinity of Man and his good natural instincts; they all praised nature but did not loath technology.

Like his predecessor Edward Bellamy, Howells used the Romance as a literary vehicle to present his social views. He said that Bellamy's *Looking Backward 2000-1887* stirred the nation more than any other American work. In his romance *A Traveler from Altruria* and its sequel *Through the Eye of the Needle* his major concern is to present as vividly as possible this contrast between the brutal and ugly environment of his day, on the one hand, and a well adjusted and fair society in which he projects himself, on the other. The latter is possible to achieve if only men show more good will and less greed and selfishness.

Sharing the same fundamental ideas, and taking happiness as the central preoccupation, when delineating their ideal societies, both Morris and Howells in their utopias put special emphasis on a society founded on Egalitarian principles, on an altruistic moral society characterised by absence of private property, and where work is the major social activity to achieve equality. Work in their imaginative societies is no longer toil but a pleasurable activity based on a just and equal division of labour.

But, their imagined societies are also based on Agrarianism as a socio economic ideal. Both Morris and Howells upheld the essentially agrarian character of their ideal society, where people are busy in the fields, cultivating land, sowing, and hay making. Both believed in the superiority of a simple life close to nature, far from their contemporary industrialised society. They loathed the dehumanising mechanisation of their age, without however, disparaging the machine as a helpful invention likely to lessen the burdens of brutalising mechanical activity.

Thirdly, in their eager desire to establish an ideal society, Art is introduced by both writers in their two utopias as a remedy to their ailing societies. For them the art of a society is the only barometer of its healthy state. Observing around them an ailing artistic environment (ugly buildings and bad taste furniture), they reacted to this by proposing good art as a remedy, performed by the common people, on an every day basis.

I have divided my research into four chapters. The first chapter, “The Egalitarian Land”, discusses in a first section, Egalitarianism, as a doctrine with its supporters and opponents. Two main currents will be singled. The first one is in favour of egalitarianism, but displays two different trends regarding the way of practicing equality; either through the equalisation of the means or through the equalisation of the ends. The second view stands against egalitarianism which links with negative ideas like “envy”. Their attitude comes from a biased

understanding of equality as “uniformity” and “monotony”. A second section follows to discuss the principles of the doctrine as articulated in the texts of Morris and Howells through two major points: the abolition of inequality and private property, on the one hand, and the establishment of work as a pleasurable activity, on the other.

Egalitarianism is, in fact, the belief that all the individuals are equal in fundamental worth or moral status, that all citizens in a given state should have equal rights and enjoy equal privileges. It is this intimate connection between equality and justice in the industrialist context which makes it desirable that utopia should be egalitarian. And it is on these grounds that the two works will be analysed, through showing that their egalitarian stance calls for social justice. This idea of equality finds echo and embodiment in the two utopias through many incidents and characters.

The second chapter, “The Agrarian Garden”, studies Agrarianism as a philosophy. In a first step I try to establish the close relationship and continuity between rural and urban social problems in England and the way in which industrialism and capitalism, by promoting mechanized and scientific farming, brought down the slow-paced and peaceful old agrarian way of life. That is why the anti-urban character of agrarianism is worth noting. The countryside was viewed as a refuge from the busy and fast-paced city: there, farming helped protect people from the materialism and spiritual corruptions of the world of the city. In a second step, I discuss agrarianism in the American context where it was

at the core of the political debate between the two major political parties; the Democrats (followers of Thomas Jefferson) and the Republicans (followers of Alexander Hamilton). The anti-urban character of American agrarianism is to be noted as well. In fact, in England as much as in America, the rural simple and peaceful life with its virtues and welfare had become a dream.

A second section is devoted to the study of the texts. There I try to show how agrarianism as a socio-economic principle functions in the dream-land of William Morris and William Howells. Farming and agriculture are presented as the modes of employment which best provide pleasure, and the village as the best model of social organization. Attention will be drawn to their primitivist stance in their utopias through some examples.

The third chapter, "Of Beauty and Soul", is concerned in the first section with art and society. I first point out the similarities between Morris and Howells's ideas, especially their idea of "popular art", which Howells took from his English counterpart, and which basically means an art accessible to all. The second part is concerned with religion. This part will not go as deeply into the state of religion, as dogma, as in the 19th century, secularism, because of the new rational and scientific trends, started to sweep away Christianity. Religion finds its place here in this chapter simply because of the noticeable religious character of Howells's work which is too conspicuous to be overlooked. It is Morris's artistic character, however, which stands out in his romance.

A fourth and last chapter will be devoted to the aesthetic study of the two works. Belonging to a specific literary genre which is the romance, and more particularly, the utopian romance, I have thought it necessary to dwell on the aesthetic devices of the genre, and see how the two authors' works fulfil its specific features which are a loosely structured and magic plot, a flat characterization with little social and psychological interaction between the characters, and a story happening in a suspended time sequence and written in a plain and straightforward style. A first part will be devoted to the comparison between the novel and the romance. A second part, which studies literary devices such as space and time, plot, characterization and point of view, will allow us to confirm that Howells's and Morris's romances belong to the romance genre.

Although there is a fair amount of critical works on Morris and Howells taken separately ¹, there are, to my knowledge, no studies comparing specifically *News from Nowhere* and *A Traveler from Altruria* in a sustained and systematic, thematic or aesthetic way, articulated as is the case in this study, along the three themes of Egalitarianism, Agrarianism, Art, and religion, to a lesser extent. This is the first reason that has prompted me to undertake this research and to hopefully contribute to a different appreciation of these two utopian texts. I have felt all the more encouraged to do so because of the appealing aspect of utopian thinking. In the alarming dystopic age we live in, utopias give us, as readers, renewed and fresh reasons for thought and dream.

The other reason is that W.D. Howells is known for being a realist writer who developed a heart felt theory on Realism as an aesthetic philosophy. Keen as he was to render reality as it exactly is, it is certainly interesting to see how this staunch hard-line realist writer deals with reality in this dream-like vision which is Altruria where he transforms reality into a dream.

Owing to the nature of the problematics at hand, my approach will necessarily be a comparative approach based on a comparative study of texts, stressing the major points I have laid emphasis on, namely: Egalitarianism, Agrarianism, Art and religion. Three potentially relevant literary theories were at hand: Historicism, New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. However Cultural Materialism, for reasons developed further down, proved more pertinent and helped me fulfil my purpose.

Indeed, Historicism uses history as a background for the author's life and work. It is essentially the expression of the powerful ideas and world view of the author's culture and era. Through Historicism, literature provides cultural and historical insight, and makes it possible to see a literary work in terms of historical background and identify the systems of thought and the large historical forces that determine and inform literary expression at a given time.

With New Historicism (unlike Historicism), history no longer serves as a background for the author's life and work and is no longer regarded as a linear chronological sequence of events. The New Historicists offer a larger network of meaning and show how art functions within a culture. This view they share in

common with the Cultural Materialists. In fact, New Historicists and Cultural Materialists overlap significantly as both consider history from a fresh perspective. But they differ in their way of seeing and using history. Literature is not simply reflective of history and ideas; it functions within culture to support and challenge its culture.

Like New Historicism, Cultural Materialism aspires to read texts in tight relationship with the social and the cultural aspects, practices and institutions of their time. It refuses to privilege literary text, and its method is based on the parallel reading of literary as well as non-literary texts such as pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, odd stories and anecdotes, which all constitute and contribute to culture. The theory assumes that the production of meaning is embedded in the social context. Consequently, the diverse facets of culture such as traveller's reports, songs, pamphlets or even architecture, are given prominence to enhance the production of meaning. According to Cultural Materialists, literary texts acquire added meaning through non-literary texts as well as through other cultural expressions. As such, it enables us to link the two works (*A Traveler from Altruria* and *News from Nowhere*) to their historical and ideological background, especially when we try to understand and explain the meaning of their proposals which can also be found in sources other than their two utopias².

In fact, Cultural Materialism was Britain's reply to American New Historicism. Britain, with a more vigorous socialist tradition, displayed a more markedly political stance missing in its American counterpart. So if we speak of

the differences between the two theories, the main difference will be political. One chief reason that makes us lean towards the Cultural Materialist Tradition is the political indeterminacy of New Historicism, judged by some theorists such as Catherine Gallagher as “irritant” and “obnoxious”³.

Cultural Materialists concentrate on the interventions whereby men and women make their own history, while New Historicists focus on the power of social and ideological structure which restrain them. So Cultural Materialism shows political optimism while New Historicism shows political pessimism. This kind of effective political position of Cultural Materialism, involving people as the major agents of change, reveals a Marxist legacy. However, Marxism adheres to a more rigid version of society and politics, more overtly political in its aims. It views literature as part of the material conditions of culture, not just a reflection of them and use it either to reveal or to mystify the truth about class culture, class struggle, political economy and ideology. For the Marxists, literature’s great force lies in its depiction of material conditions which will allow them to raise consciousness about the nature of capitalism and the plight of the workers. Within this general Marxist trend, we have opted for Cultural Materialism because it appears less dogmatic than Marxism and because it shows that culture is no less crucial than economy.

In fact, Cultural Materialism is concerned as much with the culture of the present as with the culture of the past. What matters most is the solutions it can bring in the current political situation. And while New Historicists situate the literary text in the political situation of its own day, Cultural Materialists situate

it within that of our own. Cultural Materialism embraces change, and even if through New Historical analyses works are allowed to be politically ambivalent or progressive in their day, the overriding implication is that they no longer have anything subversive to say to us, since they belong to a bygone buried world. In their analysis they generate readings of the texts deprived of political relevance to our time. But Cultural Materialism seeks actively and explicitly to use the literature of yesterday to change the world today. History to Cultural Materialists is what has happened and what is happening now. They are aware of the dangers of replacing the vital sense of history as continuous transformation, by a vision of the past as a sequence of events devoid of consequence to the present.

The latter point constitutes the very reason why we have opted for Cultural Materialism as a theoretical basis, rather than for New Historicism or any other theory. In fact, Raymond Williams, in *Culture and Society*, observing the constant and dynamic changes of his society and its culture, enhanced the outlook of Cultural Materialism by coining new concepts such as “structures of meanings” (i.e. culture) and “structures of feelings” (i.e. society) ⁴ to account for the new social and cultural realities which are changing and being formed as we live and react to the material world around us, implying thus that these values are organic and non-stagnant. In this context, Williams was to become one of Britain’s greatest post-war Cultural historians, theorist and polemicist. He was a distinguished literary and social thinker and succeeded to understand literature and its related cultural forms not as an outcome of an isolated aesthetic adventure, but as the manifestation of a deeply social process that involved a

sense of complex relationships between authorial ideology, institutional process and generic aesthetic form. These concerns are best theorised in *Culture and Society* (1780-1950) his critical panorama of literary tradition from the Romantics to George Orwell.

Another very important aspect of Cultural Materialists theory is that it hardly gets involved with the verbal detail of texts at all. Texts and quotations are used as broad illustrations or enactments of a conviction that precedes them, rather than as ways to unfold the underlying hidden meanings of the excerpts. This theory is in fact the poorer for its reluctance to meet the complex demands of a text's diction and formal refinements. Nevertheless, it seems to be appropriate for the study of the romance whose main aim is to put forward a broad idea (that of the author) in a simple and straightforward style rather than being an intricate display of the complexities of plot, characterisation, style and hidden meaning we find in the novel.

It is in this, in addition to the sense of the past's answerability to what we are now, and what lies ahead of us, that the theory of Cultural Materialism will prove helpful to us in this study. It will not only allow us to analyse the works by contextualising them within their own time period, but also with our own generation. This enables us to link the authors' ideas with present day concerns such as ecology and globalisation. As such, it shows the permanence and pertinence of these two 19th century utopian works to our own 21st century, opening thereby a horizon of futurity for the works under study. In the conclusion I will show the relevance of both Morris's and Howells's thought in

relation to the issues and claims of environmentalism, ecology, international food insecurity and globalization. Their works, indeed, though written a century ago, are still fashionable and pertinent to the contemporary concerns of our 21st century.

END NOTES:

¹ Most of the critics I read on William Morris and William Dean Howells emphasise the characteristic traits both writers are known for. Morris is generally presented as the Socialist romantic artist and Howells as the Socialist hard-line realist.

Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society 1780-1950*. (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979) brings to the fore William Morris's views on art and his doctrine of "popular art". This is also the concern of "Art and The State", *The Victorian Age: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, Guy. M. Josephine's, ed., (New York: Routledge, 2005). Martin Wiener in "Rural Myth", *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit (1850-1980)* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), reads Morris in the general nostalgic mood of late 19th century England of a return to a rural England. However, Paddy O'Sullivan in "William Morris, *News from Nowhere* and Ecology", *William Morris and News from Nowhere: A Vision for Our Time*, Stephen Coleman & Paddy O'Sullivan, eds., (Bideford: Green Books, 1990), removes Morris from his label (that of the artist) and proposes to read *News from Nowhere*, not as originally received, as a backward looking and hopelessly romantic work, but as a work a head of its time, which has much in common with the views of idealists thinkers of the present day.

As concerns William Dean Howells, Vernon Parrington Jr. devotes a short section of his book *American Dreams: A Study of American Utopias* (New York: Brown University Press, 1975) to Howells as a Christian Dreamer and reads *A Traveler from Altruria* and *Through The Eye of the Needle* as an effort to reconcile his Christian faith with the world about him. However, Barbara Kirk in *W.D.Howells and Art in His Time* (New Jersey: Rutgers, 1965) tackles another aspect of Howells which is his relationship to art. In this work, a short section at the end of the book is devoted to show the influence of William Morris on William Dean Howells on Art.

² Morris expressed himself abundantly in various conferences and magazines particularly in *The Commonweal* (as a matter of fact, *News from Nowhere* appeared first in a serialised form in *The Commonweal*). On the other hand Howells's too expressed himself on many issues and concerns in the *Study*. Moreover, his views on art are to be found in a disparate way through his book *Venetian Life* and his accounts of his trips to York in particular in England. C.f. his travel book *Venetian Life*.

³ Gallagher, Catherine, "Marxism and The New Historicism", in H.Aram Veenser, ed., *The New Historicism* (London : Routledge 1989), p 37.

⁴ Raymond, Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*. (Middlesex,: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), p 13-19.

CHAPTER ONE: THE EGALITARIAN LAND

The purpose of this first chapter is to examine or assess the idea of egalitarianism. It is divided into two main sections. In the first one I attempt to define what is egalitarianism which, despite its apparent French origin from the word “égalité” meaning “equality”, shows a considerable variety of interpretations and applications, thus offering a wide range of definitions. However, my focus here is on two views that seem to me of particular interest because different. The first view stands in favour of egalitarianism and, whatever the variety of the doctrine, shows it in a rather positive light. The second view presents egalitarianism in a negative light through the eyes of those who do not see any value in the practice of equality in any way, and uphold the idea of “inegalitarianism”.

The second section concerns the study of the texts. It examines how the principles of the doctrine are articulated by both William Morris and William Dean Howells in their imagined societies. This will be brought about through two major points: the abolition of inequality and private property, and the establishment of work as a pleasurable activity. These two features show a close interrelation.

1. Egalitarianism: A Complex Definition

1.1. Egalitarianism: Between Equalization of the Means and Equalization of the Ends

Egalitarianism is generally defined as a philosophy, a doctrine, or a current of thought calling for equality among human beings. However, it is not enough to say that this natural condition of man makes equality evident. In modern societies, the term “egalitarian” is often used to refer to a greater degree of equality of income and wealth among persons that form society. Frederick Engels in 1877 puts it clearly,

The idea that all men, as men, have something in common and that to that extent they are equal, is of course primeval. But the modern demand for equality is something entirely different from that; this consists rather in deducing from that common equality of being human, from that equality of men as men, a claim to equal political responsibility social status for all human beings, or at least for all citizens of a state or all members of a society ¹.

Accordingly, egalitarianism calls for equality among human beings especially with respect to their social, economic, legal and political rights. An egalitarian might rather be one who favours equality of some sort; for him, people should get the same, be treated the same, or be treated as equals in some respect. He maintains that people ought to possess equal fundamental worth and dignity.

However, the idea of equality and social justice did not arise in the 19th century with Engels, but is rather a product of earlier history. According to Raymond Williams, the creation of the grounds for equality of condition in England, especially in the sense of equivalence of rank, is already present in the 15th century and becomes common from the 16th century onwards. From that

time on, equality came to indicate a more natural condition. Its new meaning represented a crucial shift because what it implied was not a mere comparison of rank, but an assertion of a much more general, “normative condition”. After the mid 17th century the meaning of “equality” is still not common, in this general sense, and will be articulated by the end of the 18th century, when it was given specific emphasis in the French and American revolutions².

In fact, one of the main statements in all America’s political documents expressing basic principles of American democracy, is the belief that “all men are created equal”. In the Declaration of Independence (1776), Thomas Jefferson asserts the unalienable rights of men. The Declaration opens as follows:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

The same idea is found in the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 which predates the U.S Constitution by seven years. Its first article points out that “All men are born free and equal and have certain natural, essential, and unalienable rights...”³. In fact, these ideas of “natural rights” are ideas we find in the philosophical spirit that characterized the Enlightenment period; they are based on the writings of the English philosopher John Locke who defined these rights as: Life, Liberty and Property, and observed; “No one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions”⁴.

By reforming the previous statutory inequalities in feudal and post feudal ranks and privileges, the United States Declaration of Independence proposes a kind of moral and legal egalitarianism (since “all men are created equal”, each

person is to be treated equally under the law). This makes us think of the existence of other forms of egalitarianism, such as economic egalitarianism, also known as material egalitarianism, political egalitarianism, opportunity egalitarianism, egalitarian individualism, gender egalitarianism, racial equality, to name the most important ones.

Egalitarianism is therefore a philosophy of considerable variety and diversity in the many ways it has been applied in society⁵. The egalitarian individualist, for example, holds the view that each human being is equally worthy of human rights despite his nation, ethnic group or gender⁶. Economic egalitarianism, on the other hand, calls for a society where people have equal access to all economic resources⁷ and uphold the idea of “luck egalitarianism” or as commonly called “opportunity egalitarianism”, which was adopted by some left-wing political philosophers and egalitarians. Accordingly, the political economy of a society ought to distribute positions that confer special advantages, regardless to characteristics of persons as race, colour, ethnicity, gender or religion. They call for a distribution which does not depend on the un-chosen circumstances of the people but on their merit and competence. To use John Rawls’s terms, the attribution of shares must follow a “Distributive Justice”⁸. Generally, those people who hold egalitarianism to be desirable and important, even implicitly, clearly rely on notions of distributive justice.

In fact, Egalitarianism is a doctrine so wide and so intricate in its social, economic, political and even philosophical ramifications that it is very difficult to classify it into distinct categories with clear-cut characteristics. That is why

Raymond Williams's division into two broad meanings proves helpful to us. Williams categorizes egalitarianism (in its two bearings on social thought) into two main senses. In the first one, egalitarianism is seen as a process of constant equalization; starting from the fundamental premise that all men are naturally equal as human beings, though not at all necessarily in particular attributes. In the second one, egalitarianism is described as a process of removal of inherent privileges; starting from the premise that all men should "start equal", though the purpose or effect of this may be that they become unequal in achievement or condition. There is of course considerable overlap between these two applications⁹. In fact, whatever may be the varieties of egalitarian doctrines, they all tend to express the idea that all human persons are equal in fundamental worth or moral status and that the transfer of resources from the better off to the worse off in some circumstances is justifiable by a variety of moral principles and therefore highly valuable.

Thus, Williams's understanding of the doctrine shows that egalitarianism does not necessarily indicate that it is highly desirable that people's condition be made the same in any respect, or that people ought to be treated the same in any respect. The understanding of equality has evolved as the relations of production and conceptions of freedom and universality have developed throughout history. In addition to that, egalitarianism is a multi-faceted doctrine, as there are several types of equality or ways in which people might be treated the same, which might be thought desirable. This makes egalitarianism a contested concept in social and political thought.

Putting egalitarianism into the utopian context, and speaking about the utopians different inherited attitudes to equality, Barbara Goodwin, in her book *Social Science and Utopia*, describes them as superficially conflicting attitudes. She contends that, on the one hand, the followers of J. J. Rousseau's *Discourse*, as the utopian William Godwin, argue that material i.e. economic sufficiency leads to independence, whereas its lack would create dependency therefore leading to inequality and servitude¹⁰. Godwin postulates a Babouvian premise, "that man and man are beings of the same nature, and are susceptible under certain limitations, of the same advantages"¹¹. This makes of Godwin an advocate of the abolition of private property. For Godwin, the economic independence, which will come as a result of equality, secures a greater independence of mind and greater intellectual equality. Robert Owen, too, attacked private property and was in favour of an equal distribution of wealth. In their utopian societies, class divisions and hierarchies will disappear¹². Thus they advocate a process of continual equalization, in which any condition, inherited or newly created, which sets some men above others or gives them power over others, has to be removed or diminished in the name of what Raymond Williams calls "normative principle", and which corresponds to his first sense of egalitarianism¹³ i.e. a process of constant equalization.

Other utopians and egalitarians such as Saint-Simon, Morelly, Restif de la Bretonne¹⁴ and Fourier were in favour of economic equality but still wished to preserve social hierarchies. They argue that inequality is vital to the structure and quality of society. Saint-Simon and Fourier who are said to follow the

inegalitarian school maintained that inequality of talent and reward is not socially divisive, but productive and compatible with social justice. For them, inequality is inherent in the varieties of human different temperaments and psychologies. Speaking about Saint-Simon, William Morris in his article “Socialism from the Root Up” declares,

His socialism was of a vague kind, and admitted the existence of classes of talent as expressed by the motto of Saint-Simonism, ‘from each according to his capacity, to each according to his deeds’.¹⁵

However, it is important to note that the inequalities of talent Saint-Simon (as well as Fourier) speaks about are divorced from wealth and privilege. Even William Morris seems to accept the idea since elsewhere in his article, and still speaking about Saint-Simon, he observes that

he may be said to have set himself the task of learning all life by whatever means and at whatever expense, in order to devote himself to the new religion, ‘whose great aim is the swiftest possible amelioration of the moral and physical condition of the poorest and most numerous class’¹⁶

Fourier and Saint-Simon’s societies rest on equality of treatment and the inequalities which abound in them are inequalities which, according to them, promote wellbeing¹⁷. The redistribution of wealth is gradual, and not total, and admits divergent needs and capacities. Saint-Simon considers the industrial society to be truly egalitarian (his ideal was an industrial society), because based on co-operation, which is a strongly egalitarian idea. His society is opposed to the establishment of any birthright or any other kind of privilege. Thus, Fourier defends a process of abolishing or diminishing privileges, in which the moral notion of equality is on the whole limited to initial conditions, and any subsequent inequalities are seen as either inevitable or right. This corresponds to

Williams's second sense of egalitarianism, i.e. a process of removal of inherent privileges.

1.2. Speaking against Egalitarianism

The second view of egalitarianism is the one held by the opponents to the doctrine. They argue that not only is inequality vital in a society but equality is evil too. Jeff Landauer and Joseph Rowlands (strong advocates of capitalism) in their essay on egalitarianism, "Evil Egalitarianism", argue that though egalitarianism is moral, it does not amount to an ethical system¹⁸. For these advocates of inegalitarianism, egalitarianism's hatred of inheritance, and its angry dislike of the idea that people start off life in an easier position than others, springs out of envy and not out of a desire for equality. They see envy as a factor behind this demand for equality of opportunity and before the law. Alexis de Tocqueville (although he never made an extended analysis of it), in a number of separate comments, came to view envy as the driving force behind the egalitarian impulse. For him Democracy was conceived out of envy and was to be forever tainted with the marks of its birth. Sanford. A. Lakoff, a Harvard University lecturer in political philosophy, emphasizes the point and notes about the French revolutionary period that

from the standpoint of aristocratic ethics the revolution was justified; but, for the mobs which carried it out, the principle motivation was naked envy... [In] attacking the holders of privileges...the populace sought not to protest an imbalance but to despoil the favoured few; to gain for themselves the marks of privilege they professed to find intrinsically unjust¹⁹

Relating egalitarianism with envy gives it a negative connotation. William Marina, a professor Emeritus in History, in his essay “Egalitarianism and Empire” notes that

egalitarianism often has a negative connotation even among advocates of equality,... whether this arises from awareness of a relationship to envy and leveling, or in the minds of Americans, the association of *equality* with the Declaration of Independence and *egalitarianism*, with the violence of the French Revolution, is difficult to establish. It is simply something that one ‘senses’ in surveying the literature, often by the absence of egalitarianism as, for example, in the *encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, or the newer, massive *international encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, both of which discuss only *equality*.²⁰

For the advocates of inegalitarianism, egalitarians have misunderstood the meaning of Jefferson’s “all men are created equal”. For them, while it is one of the most if not the most important idea of the Declaration of Independence, it has nothing to do with equality of results. For them, obviously, it cannot mean that people are identical because Nature creates people as individuals with different characteristics, talents and desires. What the Declaration of Independence actually means is that all people have equal liberty and should have complete freedom to choose how they want to live (free to conceive their lives as they choose). This is a concept with which, according to these opponents, egalitarianism is at odds since it would try to force individuals to accept the dictates of the masses. Indeed, one of their major issues is whether equality of results is really desirable and practicable. They argue that it is a matter of human nature; because people are individuals, each person has different wants and needs, and therefore, people choose different professions and hobbies based on their individual preferences. For them, it is very doubtful that most people,

especially those favouring liberty and freedom of choice, would really see any value in equality of results.

In spite of the fact that those advocating inegalitarianism explain fervent egalitarianism as a misunderstanding and an exaggeration of the idea of equality, it is important to note that the societal version of equality (material) should not be confused with its mathematical version (abstract); equality should be understood as equivalence and not as sameness and uniformity. “The persistence of equal in a physical sense, as a term of measurement, has obviously complicated the social argument” observes Williams. Equality, as a system of relationships where everyone has equivalent privileges, rights and status, is precisely what was sought after by the advocates of egalitarianism and some utopian writers ²¹.

It is worth pointing out that it is the intimate connection of equality with justice which makes it desirable that utopia should be egalitarian. Morris and Howells, as well as some other utopians, imagined societies which pay respect to human diversity and promise equal contentment for all its members. Therefore, equality is achieved in what seems to them the most important area of their policy, i.e. human happiness. For them, all individuals are equally deserving of happiness and equally capable of pleasure. In their utopias, they take need as a basis for distribution which entails redistribution of property, though not total equalization; they made differences of wealth socially unimportant and inconsequential. Consequently, no difference between men would be allowed to give some men power over others.

Thus, in the analysis of Morris's and Howells' egalitarian ways of organizing their respective 21st century London and Altruria, I focus on two major ideas upon which they found this egalitarian principle: the abolition of private property, and the establishment of work as a pleasurable activity.

2. The Egalitarian Nowhere and Altruria

2.1. Abolishing Inequality and Private Property

In the 19th century, as industrialism gained ground, England and America can be said to have gone through an unprecedented time of distress and change. In this era of rapid expansion generated by free market and competition, poverty became in the eyes of the liberal economists a sine qua-non condition of that progress. Side by side with a great increase of wealth was witnessed an increase in social inequality, translated into a great increase of pauperism. Production on a vast scale, as a result of free competition, led to a rapid alienation of classes. This system which made of material production a fetish and the focus of life was not conducive to social happiness and to the establishment of sound moral values. This new industrial system shattered the old social order and was looking less and less morally and/or spiritually supportable. A few benefited, but a great deal more suffered. Englishmen were pushed off their land by the enclosure of commons into blighted factory towns, where poverty and sweated labour in mines and mills was to become the lot of numerous women and children, resulting often in loss of their spiritual and moral values. Working people

frequently endured a fall in their wages, a worsening in the conditions of labour under the factory system exposing them to recurrent periods of economic and moral distress.²²

Indeed, it was the language and ideology of liberal *laissez-faire* that prevailed in the times of William Morris and William Dean Howells, and against which they reacted strongly and unequivocally. Equality being a central idea in their thinking, both Morris and Howells's descriptions of an egalitarian society encompass this value both on the social and economic levels. In their utopias, equality is to be achieved in gender relations as well as through class divides.

The absence of class divides is linked to economic equality and the abolition of private property. For them, private property laws satisfied only a privileged few and was therefore the source of the social inequalities and injustices, leading to inequity and violence. Sharing Rousseau's idea that

the first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying "This is mine", and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. Humanity would have been spared infinite crimes, wars, homicides, murders, if only someone had ripped up the fences or filled in the ditches and said, "Do not listen to this pretender! You are eternally lost if you do not remember that the fruits of the earth are everyone's property and that the land is no one's property. But by that point things had changed so drastically that there was no turning back for this idea of "property"²³

Being sure of the fact that the evident direct cause of these gross inequalities lies in the institution of private property, they tried in their utopias to turn back to the idea of Rousseau.

Thus, William Dean Howells makes Mr. Homos (the Altrurian traveler) come all the way to America to experiment with first-hand everyday life in the country which prides itself on being the spearhead of democracy and equality,

and to see how the principle of “all men are created equal” is being put into practice. The writer shows his awareness of the inequalities pervading his society and the inability of the Americans to get rid of them despite their revolution and their ideals of justice and equality. In fact, right from the first moment of his arrival at the fashionable summer hotel, it becomes evident that Mr. Homos’s behaviour is fundamentally different from that of the other guests. He insists on carrying his luggage himself, helps the waiters in the restaurant and chats “easily” with the employees. This makes him friendly and popular among these working people. In spite of his host’s warnings, he continues to behave towards every human being he meets exactly as if they were his own equals. Mr. Homos’s inability to conceive of that social difference, which difference of occupation creates, strongly embarrasses his host Mr. Twelvemough

when I expostulated with him upon some act in gross violation of society usage, he only answered that he could not imagine that what he saw and knew could actually be. It was quite impossible to keep him from bowing with the greatest deference to our waitress; he shook hands with the head-waiter every morning as well as with me... It was grotesque, and out of all keeping with a man of his cultivation and breeding. He was a gentleman and a scholar, there was no denying, and yet he did things in contravention of good form at every opportunity and nothing I could say had any effect with him. (ATA p137)

These features of class distinction are deliberately emphasized by William Dean Howells who does not fail to mention the contradictions with the Declaration of Independence in a conversation between the host (the narrator) and the Altrurian

yes, there is something terrible, something shocking, in the frank brutality with which Englishmen affirm the essential inequality of men. The affirmation of the essential equality of men was the first point of departure with us, when we separated from them.

The Altrurian seems to approve strongly of what Twelvemough says. He notes that equality is grandly expressed in the American “glorious Declaration”; but Twelvemough tries to enlighten him to the reality of the matter, observing that “of course [they] don’t take that in its closest literality”. His last statement seems to confuse the Altrurian, and makes Twelvemough add,

you know it was rather the political than the social tradition of England that we broke with, in the revolution”

“How is that?” he returned. “Didn’t you break with monarchy and nobility and ranks and classes?”

“Yes we broke with all those things”.

“But I found them a part of the social as well as the political structure in England. You have no kings or nobles here. Have you any ranks or classes?”

Well, not exactly, in the English sense. Our ranks and classes, such as we have, are what I may call voluntary” (*ATA* p07)

Generally, Mr. Homos is surprised to find that neither his host, nor any of his circle of acquaintances – a professor, a businessman, a manufacturer, a banker, and a clergyman- has any social relation with the people who permanently live in the area where they spend a few weeks each summer. The only contacts Mrs. Makely, a businessman’s wife, can speak about are the occasional visits of “charity” paid to an old sick woman living in the countryside with all her family, and nearly starving to death. Her son, Reuben Camp, in one of the scarce visits of Mrs. Makely to them, and as a response to what she said about having the same country America, explains that the America of Mrs. Makely is not his America. For him America is clearly two Americas; the America of the poor and the America of the rich. He replies,

I don't know about that...I don't believe we all have the same country. America is one thing for you, and it's quite another thing for us. America means ease and comfort and amusement for you, year in and year out, and if it means work, it's work that you *wish* to do. For us, America means work that we *have* to do and hard work all the time if we're going to make both ends meet. It means liberty for you; but what liberty has a man got who doesn't know where his next meal is coming from? Once I was in a strike, when I was working on the railroad, and I've seen men come and give up their liberty for a chance to earn their family's living. They knew they were right, and that they ought to have stood up for their rights; but they had to lie down and leek the hand that fed them. Yes, we are all Americans, but I guess we haven't all got the same country, Mrs Makely. (ATA p102).

These passionate words put in the mouth of Reuben Camp by William Dean Howells read as a strong plea for a more just America. Howells makes of Reuben Camp the representative of the less privileged class, and of Mrs. Makely the representative of the well to do middle class. In their words of confrontation, Howells stance and desire for a more egalitarian society is made clear. This passage is inevitably reminiscent of Benjamin Disraeli's "Two Nations" in *Sybil or the Two Nations* where a young stranger speaking to Lord Egremont in a discussion about social differences and conditions, observes,

Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed y a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws...
THE RICH AND THE POOR.²⁴

The Altrurian explains that in his country Altruria there are no poor. His answer to Mrs Makely as to how they manage with the poor in Altruria is; "we have none". Mrs. Makely does not seem to be contented with his answer and insists; "but the comparatively poor—you have some people who are richer than others?". To this the Altrurian answers back; "no. We should regard that as the worst incivism" and explains incivism as being "bad citizenship".

For his part, William Morris exposes these issues and makes his “traveller”, Guest, go to a London free from these gross inequities, imagining a more egalitarian society where the distinctions between rich and poor no longer exist. When visiting the “Nowhere London” with his benevolent and friendly guide, Dick, and passing through the fields, they come across some people about whom Guest asks; “Are these the regular country people?”. This question prompts the following discussion in which it is made obvious that the Nowherian Dick does not at all understand what kind of people Guest is talking about. He is even far from relating “the regular country people” to the “poor”, since it is obvious that he has no notion of what that word means. He replies,

I don't understand... What kind of people you would expect to see; nor quite what you mean by 'country' people. These are the neighbours, and that like they run in the Thames valley.

... At last I said: “What I mean is, that I haven't seen any poor people about—not one”

He [Dick] knit his brows, looked puzzled, and said: “no, naturally; if anybody is poorly, he is likely to be within doors, or at best crawling about the garden: but I don't know of any one sick at present. Why should you expect to see poorly people on the road?”

“No, no, I said; “I don't mean sick people. I mean poor people, you know; rough people”

“No,” said he, smiling merrily. “I really do not know. The fact is, you must come along quick to my great-grandfather, who will understand you better than I do. Come on, Greylocks!” (*NFN* p32/33)

The idea of “Poor people” is something completely beyond the imagination of Dick. To help Guest understand what is going on around him, and to make him feel more comfortable, he resorts to visit his great-grandfather ,a very old man called Old Hammond (105 years old) ,much aware of the 19th century dull life in England and who can better understand Guest and inform him better. On their

way to the Old man they met Ellen a “country girl” who, speaking to Guest about 19th century London, points out the discrepancy between rich and poor that prevailed then: the latter are literally crushed by the class of money and power,

You were going to say that in times of inequality it was an essential condition of the life of these rich men that they should not themselves make what they wanted for the adornment of their lives, but should force those to make them whom they forced to live pinched and sordid lives; and that as a necessary consequence the sordidness and pinching, the ugly barrenness of those ruined lives, were worked up into the adornment of the lives of the rich... (NFN p198)

We can see that William Morris too was deeply concerned with social and economic equality. He equally thinks on the lines of “all men are created equal”, and his reflections on England remind him of similar contemporary American conditions in the 19th century. Old Hammond says,

... for these lands, and I say, especially the northern parts of America, suffered so terribly from the full force of the last days of civilisation, and became such horrible places to live in, that they are now very backward in all that makes life pleasant. Indeed, one may say that for nearly a hundred years the people of the northern parts of America have been engaged in gradually making a dwelling place out of a stinking dust-heap; and there is still a great deal to do, especially as the country is so big. (p107)

Through *News from Nowhere* and *A Traveller from Altruria*, Morris and Howells put forward the idea that Civilisation, because of the competitive spirit of the times, falsely places a premium on the well being of the individuals which they oppose to the well being of the people as a whole. They assail *laissez-faire* ethics and castigate unfair private property; because the freedom to accumulate, in their eyes, turns the propertied man into a selfish and careless individual²⁵. They therefore satirize capitalism as a real source of evil and see in private property the direct cause of these evils and inequalities. This idea is clearly

expressed in their romances, since there is no private property, either in Nowhere or in Altruria. Clearly Morris's definition of private property closely parallels that of Rousseau. Hammond simply describes it as "the clenching the first on a piece of goods, crying out to the neighbours, you shan't have this" (*NFN* p85).

Howells similarly observes that everything in Altruria belonged to everybody since "no man owned anything, but every man had the right to anything that he could use". As soon as "he could not use it, his right lapsed" (*ATA* p175). The Altrurian explains that in Altruria they practice "common ownership", in addition to granting "an allotment of lands to anyone who wished to live by tilling the land". He adds that "not a foot of the land was remitted to private hands for the purposes of selfish pleasure or the exclusion of any other from the landscape" (*ATA* p157).

Clearly, the egalitarianism both writers call for is an egalitarianism which includes a process of continual equalization in the access to the means and products, but in no way equalization in natural gifts and personal leanings and preferences; this nuance corresponds to Raymond Williams's first sense of egalitarianism we saw in the first part of this chapter.

In *TEN*, the Altrurian discusses with Mrs Gray (his future wife's mother), who, as an American, finds it difficult to conceive of a whole nation living on "the same terms as one family",

No one trying to get ahead of another, or richer, and having neither inferior nor superiors, but just one dead level of equality, where there is no distinction except by natural gifts and good deeds or beautiful works. (p79)

This seems to her “impossible” if not at all “ridiculous”. *In ATA* too, the following conversation between the narrator Mr Twelvemough and the Altrurian, about equality of opportunity in America, shows clearly where Howells stands, and which kind of egalitarianism he favours. For the Altrurian, rising above others, using shrewdness and ability to seize advantage and to turn it to one’s own account, is not considered very noble. To this the narrator Twelvemough retorts, caricaturing the Altrurian’s idea of equality,

It is considered smart. It is considered at the worst far better than a dead level of equality. Are all men equal in Altruria? Are they all alike gifted or beautiful, or short or tall? (p15)

To this, the Altrurian answers obviously displaying Howells’s opinion, “no they are only equal in duties and rights”.

In *Nowhere* too, Morris makes Old Hammond explain their conception of equality saying,

In matters which are merely personal which do not affect the welfare of the community—how a man shall dress, what he shall eat and drink, what he shall write and read, and so forth--... everybody does as he pleases. (P 96)

Thus, personal differences do not impede equality but rather help clarify and affirm it.

The abolition of the inequalities, engendered by private property and the acquisitive spirit, is celebrated each year. Morris says that the towns had been regenerated in a program known as “The Clearing Misery”, an event that is still celebrated 150 years later,

On that day we have music and dancing, and merry games and happy feasting on the site of some of the worst of the old slums, the traditional memory of which we have kept. On that occasion the custom is for the prettiest girls to sing some of the old revolutionary songs, and those

which were the groans of the discontented once so hopeless, in the very spots where those terrible crimes of class-murder were committed day by day for so many years. (P124)

This passage shows once again the supreme importance and value of equality in his imagined society.

Indeed, Morris and Howells seem to have understood that equality and justice play an important role in the organisation and well-being of their societies. No life can be free and secure, harmonious and satisfactory unless it is built on principles of equality and justice.

2.2. Work as a Pleasurable Activity

Economic equality can be realised through the satisfaction of needs and wants. Although the mere satisfaction of these needs may not be sufficient to constitute happiness, it is nevertheless a necessary condition. And as production, distribution and communication are the basic sources of existence (upon them rest the power of coercive authority and capital), there arises the necessity of uniting the process of production and satisfaction so as to avoid social and economic alienation. In their utopias, Morris and Howells propose economic solutions which are meant to regulate consumption, and make the necessities of life readily available. The two utopians often equate the contradictions of incipient capitalism with misdirection of the economy and under utilisation of resources, implying that an improvement in productive methods alone would provide enough for all, and would create a situation of abundance. The *laissez-*

faire capitalism and competition will be replaced in their eyes by doctrines of co-operation and benevolence.

Thus, they sought to realise this idea through the conversion of work into play, which is perhaps the ideal solution to the problem of work and need. This concept was conceived by the French social thinker, Charles Fourier, who argued that in order to make labour strongly attractive to people, it has to be different, in every aspect, from the repulsive and hateful conditions which make it so odious. Therefore for him it is necessary, in order for work to become attractive, that it be based on cooperation and pleasure and that it fulfils the following seven conditions

1. That every laborer be a partner, remunerated by dividends and not by wages.
2. That every one, man, woman, or child, be remunerated in proportion to the three faculties, *capital, labor, and talent*.
3. That the industrial sessions be varied about eight times a day, it being impossible to sustain enthusiasm longer than an hour and a half or two hours in the exercise of agricultural or manufacturing labor.
4. That they be carried on by bands of friends, united spontaneously, interested and stimulated by very active rivalries.
5. That the workshops and husbandry offer the laborer the allurements of elegance and cleanliness.
6. That the division of labor be carried to the last degree, so that each sex and age may devote itself to duties that are suited to it.
7. That in this distribution, each one, man, woman, or child, be in full enjoyment of the right to labor or the right to engage in such branch of labor as they may please to select, provided they give proof of integrity and ability.

He adds a last concluding condition which sums up his view,

Finally, that, in this new order, people possess a guarantee of well-being, of a minimum sufficient for the present and the future, and that this guarantee free them from all uneasiness concerning themselves and their families.²⁶

Most of the conditions listed by Fourier find echo in both Morris's and Howells's utopias, since in their societies money has fallen into disuse, and people work only to satisfy their general physical needs. The remuneration of work, in addition to joy and pleasure, is health and food. Moreover, the talents and individual peculiarities of each are respected since the economy of Altruria and Nowhere conform to these individual leanings when attributing tasks. Work, in addition, is performed in clean "Banded workshops" and never exceeds three hours a day. Therefore, it is made clear through the conceptualization of their ideal societies that both of them were no strangers to utopian writings and had read Fourier since their utopias abound with references to his ideas and views.²⁷

But what interests us most, here, is Fourier's concept of 'attractive work' in which work utilises the individual's 'passions', and acquires all the connotations of play. This concept, too, is present in both utopias. Work is presented as causing no physical pain or mental distress. For the worker it becomes an amusement, a free exercise of his faculties. In *A Traveller from Altruria*, the Altrurian, Mr. Homos, speaking to one of the narrator's friends, a professor, says,

"... you must realize that our manual labor is never engrossing or exhausting. It is no more than necessary to keep the body in health. I do not see how you remain well here, you people of sedentary occupation".
(p47)

In *News from Nowhere* and through a conversation between Dick, the narrator's guide, and one of his friends, we are to understand the kind of relationship the 'Nowhere Londonians' have with work.

“well, Dick, what is it this morning ? Am I to have my work, or rather your work? ...”

“All right, Bob,” said my sculler; “you will drop into my place, and if you find it too much, there is George Brightling on the look out for a stroke of work, and he lives close handy to you. But see, here is a stranger who is willing to amuse me to-day by taking me as his guide about our country-side, and you may imagine I don't want to lose the opportunity; so you had better take the boat at once. But in any case I shouldn't have kept you out of it for long, since I am due in the hay-fields in a few days”

The newcomer rubbed his hands with glee, but turning to me, said in a friendly voice:

“Neighbour, both you and friend Dick are lucky, and will have a good time to-day, as indeed I shall too.” (p20)

This reference to work puts the reader in a very joyous atmosphere, far from any feeling of constraint or coercion. Therefore, both writers relieved work from the strong ties it has with pain and toil.²⁸

The rigid division of labour, a source of suffering and alienation, is replaced by multiple specialisation. In their ideal societies, the division of labour becomes specialisation according to talent and inclination which guarantees work satisfaction. They put emphasis on the creative and co-operative nature of the process. In *News from Nowhere*, when the narrator asks about a building which , in his eyes, looked like a factory, Dick answers,

“I think I know what you mean, and that's what it is; but we don't call them factories now, but Banded-workshops: that is, places where people collect who want to work together”

“I suppose” said I, “power of some sort is used there?”

“No, no,” said he. “Why should people collect together to use power, when they can have it at the places where they live, or hard by, any two or three of them; or any one, for the matter of that? No; folk collect in these Banded-workshops to do hand-work in which working together is necessary or convenient; such work is often very pleasant. In there, for instance, they make pottery and glass,—there, you can see the tops of the furnaces.” (p54)

This idea is emphasised by William Dean Howells too. Speaking to a lawyer, Mr.

Homos says,

“... As we all work, the amount that each one need do is very little, a few hours each day at the most, so that every man and woman has abundant leisure and perfect spirits for the higher pleasures which the education of their whole youth has fitted them to enjoy.” (ATA p42)

Co-operation, solidarity and creativity promote integration and cohesion, engendering shared altruistic values. In addition to facilitating work process, it creates a necessarily egalitarian ethic. “No body works for his living in Altruria; he works for other’s living”, that’s what the Altrurian said to the professor (p45). Work helps realise an egalitarian society through an equal division of labour. Activity is the heart beat of these utopias, and idleness (namely bourgeois idleness) is regarded as a social vice, or even a moral disease. And since achievement and reward stand on a non-exploitative relation to each other, consumption will not be tainted with injustices and therefore socially useful work will be performed willingly, whereas abundance becomes easily attainable.

Thus, both Morris and Howells show a real desire to put an end to the inequalities of their respective capitalistic societies. They both condemn the existing ‘stratification’ of society into “rich” and “poor”. For them, the evils of

private property are to be removed by the establishment of egalitarian distributive principles, and by the elimination of the competitive exploitative principles governing their societies. Happiness therefore becomes a meaningful socio-political ideal. With work as a pleasurable activity, and with the products of labour freely available to all workers, there would be an end to alienation and therefore achievement of social equality, which is one of the main pillars of their ideal society.

The period's anxieties, in addition to the wish to establish an egalitarian society, generated the need to respond to the onslaughts of the pervasive industrialism of the day. Many, therefore, defended a return to a life closer to nature which was also, it was thought, another way of claiming social justice and equality. The following chapter looks at what prompted Morris's and Howells's wish to imagine a happy, prosperous and abundant agrarian society, and how this idea finds embodiment in their two utopias.

END NOTES:

1. Despite Engels's calling for equality, he was rather skeptical about the idea since he carried on saying, "Before that original conception of relative equality could lead to the conclusion that men should have equal rights in the state and in society, before that conclusion could even appear to be something natural and self-evident, thousands of years had to pass and did pass".
Frederick Engels "Anti-Duhring" (1877) Part I: Philosophy chapter10: Morality and Law. Equality p.22
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch08.htm>.
2. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, (Glasgow: Fontana, 1979), p 102
3. Other applications of the principle "all men are created equal" in American history are:
When Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others convened in Seneca Falls, (New York July 1848), they drafted and signed a document titled the Declaration of Sentiments. The opening sentence was as follows: "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal". Another example is in Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* against slavery where he said, "Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought fourth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal"
- Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech is a further instance of this: " I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed; 'we hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal'
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_Men_are_created_equal. Category: Political slogans.
4. John Locke carried the phrase "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of property". The expression "pursuit of happiness" was carried by Dr. Samuel Johnson in his 1759 novel *Rasselas*. The words in the Declaration, written by Thomas Jefferson, were a departure from the orthodoxy of Locke and Smith. Locke's phrase was a list of property rights a government should guarantee its people. Jefferson's list, on the other hand, covers a much broader spectrum of rights (possibly including the guarantees of the Bill of Rights such as free speech and fair trial).
5. On a cultural level, egalitarian theories have evolved in sophistication and acceptance during the past two hundred years. Among the notable broadly egalitarian philosophies are Socialism, Communism, Anarchism, and Human Rights, which promote economic, political and legal egalitarianism respectively.
6. This view also forms the basis of much of the 18th century philosopher Emmanuel Kant's work. Kant states that all human beings have equally the right to be treated morally and ethically. *Larousse Encyclopedia*. V.11 (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1975), p 6805.
7. This is a founding principle of various forms of Socialism.
8. John Rawls is a senior lecturer in political philosophy at Harvard's University and the writer of one of the most famous books in the field *A Theory of Justice*. According to

him, distributive shares should not be influenced by arbitrary factors. Distributive Justice concerns what is just or right with respect to the allocation of goods in a society. Thus, a community whose individual members are rendered their due would be considered a society guided by the principles of distributive justice. A theory strongly criticized by his colleague at Harvard, Robert Nozick, who attempts to show that patterned principles of just distribution are incompatible with liberty. Robert Nozick. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p199.

9. Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. (Glasgow: Fontana, 1979), p101.
10. J.J. Rousseau like Hobbes, Locke, Kant and J.Rawls belongs to the social contract tradition. Rousseau in his *Discourse on Inequality* (1754) made use of two men, to prove (axiomatically) that given two men, (A) cannot enslave (B) by force, but only by putting (B) into a position in which the latter cannot do without (A). Frederick Engels. Op.cit. p19.
11. Babeuf François Noël called Gracchus Babeuf (1760-1797), French advocate of egalitarianism and the father of Anarchism.
12. Another socialist who advanced egalitarian thinking is Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), a French anarchist of the 19th century. Proudhon is famous for stating: “property if theft” in his writing “what is property?”
13. The familiar complaint against constant economic equalisation (that it wishes to bring everybody to a dead level), connects with the positive programme of economic equality which, in mid-17th century England, was the doctrine of the Levellers.
14. Morelly Etienne Gabriel (1717-?), author of *The Code of Nature* (1755). He was not for total elimination of private property. However he was opposed to the ownership of property beyond what an individual needed and, especially, to private property used to employ others.
Restif de la Bretonne (1734-1806) chronicler, moralist and philosopher, active in 1767-1806 in France.
15. William Morris and E. Belfort Bax. “Socialism from the Root Up” chapter13- The Utopists: Owen, Saint-Simon, and Fourier.
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1886/sru/ch13.htm>. p02
16. *ibid.* p04
17. Charles Fourier, born in 1772, was in fact a French utopian and social scientist. He advocated the liberation of the passions and defended a theory where labour is a pleasurable activity. Fourier speaking about the divergences in his society states, “if this scale of inequalities did not exist, it would have to be created” and that “man has an instinctual aversion to equality and a penchant for hierarchical patterns”. Barbara, Goodwin. *Social Science & Utopia* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978), p 72

18. Jeff Landauer and Joseph Rowlands, "Evil Egalitarianism". http://www.importanceofphilosophy.net/Evil_Egalitarianism.html. P11
19. Ibid. p 17
20. Marina, William. "Egalitarianism and Empire". January 1, 1975. <http://www.independent.org/publications/article.asp?id=1410>
21. William Morris, *Op.cit.* p03

It is still objected to programmes of economic equality, and even to programmes of legal or political equality (though in these now less often) that men are evidently unequal in measurable attributes (height, energy, intelligence and so on). To this it is replied that what needs to be shown is that the measurable difference is relevant to the particular inequality, in a social sense: height would not be, though colour of skin has been held to be; energy or intelligence might be, and this is where most serious contemporary argument now centres.

22. J.M. Wiener, *English Culture and The Decline of The Industrial Spirit*. (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p178. Frank Thakery. ed., *Events that changed America in the Nineteenth Century* Westport: Green Press, 1997), p 98
23. Rousseau's *Discourse of Inequality*. See Frederick Engels "Anti-Duhring" *Op.cit.* p20
24. Disraeli, Benjamin. *Sybil or the Two Nations*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p67
25. Among the successful weapons in the fight for justice was Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906). Sinclair shows the terrible conditions, experienced by the Rudkuses immigrant family, in Chicago's meat-packing industry, which display to what extent human beings can be heartless when it comes to gain.
26. Charles Fourier "Attractive Labour" chapter 26 p 02 <http://www.marxists.org>
27. Some examples are to be found in *A Traveller from Altruria* p68, and in *News from Nowhere* p.100
28. Raymond, Williams. *Keywords. Op.cit.* p 282 .

CHAPTER TWO: THE AGRARIAN GARDEN

In the eyes of many contemporaries of Morris and Howells, the older simpler agrarian style of life was the way to counter the industrial capitalist and greedy ethos of the day. Agrarianism is, therefore, the main concern of this second chapter which is divided into three distinct sections. The first section tackles agrarianism in its English context. I show how the degradation and break down of the ancestral rural agrarian life was brought about by industrialism followed by the enclosure and engrossing of land to give way to scientific farming. All this had direct consequences on rural as well as urban life. The new urban life, which is another aspect of this industrial period, will also be presented as a concern for social critics as is the case with William Morris.

The second section deals with agrarianism in America where it is presented as being at the core of the political conflict between the two major American political parties (the Republicans and the Federalists). As with Britain, the anti-urban character of agrarianism is presented as a reaction to the prevalent liberal capitalistic thinking.

The third and last section of this chapter is devoted to the study of the texts. It stresses the fundamentally agrarian character of both Morris's *NFN* and Howells's *ATA* and *TEN*, in which they establish societies based on agriculture and farming as a socio-economic organization. This is shown through the representation of farming and agriculture as the modes of employment which

best provide pleasure, and through the establishment of the village as a model of social organization. In these societies, agrarian activities bring people closer to nature. Therefore, we shall also try to draw attention to the primitivist stance of the writers and to reveal it through examples in their utopias.

1. The Disappearance of the Old English Rural Mode of Living

Industrialization was seen as the major cause standing behind the degradation of the ancestral rural agrarian way of life, the destruction of which had heavy consequences on both rural and urban life. With the relentless growth of industrialization, the most striking and alarming social problem in mid-Victorian England was certainly the awful living conditions of the former rural labourers and cottagers who had emigrated to industrial towns and cities and who now found themselves living in an environment of dirt, disease and painful inequalities. Indeed, the degradation of the English working class in industrial England did not arise ex-nihilo; it was the direct by-product of the destitution of the agricultural classes who, losing their lands because of aristocratic and middle class competition, or because of the new mechanized techniques introduced in farming, had begun their desperate rush into manufacturing centres.

The change from an agriculture of subsistence to scientific farming through the extensive use of machinery marked the beginning of great social changes. Traditional agriculture lost its soul and left the ground free for a spirit of competition and acquisition, totally at odds with the founding values and principles of ancestral agrarian life. This feeling of loss had already found

expression in an earlier literary tradition in the writings of late Augustan poets like Oliver Goldsmith in his famous poem “The Deserted Village”¹ in which he laments the disappearance of former rural life characterized, according to him, by social concord and plenty for all. It is also heard in William Cobbett’s *Rural Rides*² which also called for a comeback to the old healthy agricultural life with its sound values and benefits. For Raymond Williams, in this progress of the Industrial Revolution, many voices were raised in condemnation of new developments, in the terms and accents of an older England. He notes that two most important writers and thinkers, namely Edmund Burke and William Cobbett, attacked the new England from their experience of the older England (despite their great differences of opinion in other matters). Accordingly, it is from their work and traditions of criticism of the new industrialism that we can trace some traditions which in the middle of the twentieth century were still active and important. S.E. Buckley too in his introduction to the 1950 edition of Cobbett’s *Rural Rides* observes that,

Cobbett lived in an age of rural depression, and he was a leader of reforms for English farming, advocating new methods and seeking to improve the general condition of trade. Our national Press is full of ideas of country planning, to include the preservation of rural amenities and regulate the growth of urban areas. Cobbett, too, has much to say on the disproportionate spread of towns... so his problems being often the same as ours, we read him with sympathetic interest and not as one whose ideas have been outmoded by the passage of time.³

Cobbett and others pleaded for a return to the pre-industrial England spirit. G.M. Trevelyan, the social historian, himself, observes in *English Social History*,

Agriculture...is not merely one industry among many, but is a way of life, unique and irreplaceable in its human and spiritual values⁴

In fact, in the second half of the 18th century and early 19th century before the industrial revolution reached its full growth, before the massive movements of population towards the urban and industrial centres, the largest part of the English population had derived its living from agriculture. England was essentially a country of agricultural vocation where labour and social activities were still centred in the village which had been for centuries the basic social unit of the English rural community. This agrarian social order which seemed static and not likely to be upset, was however to be disturbed by the introduction of the machine.

In fact, one of the major consequences of the introduction of the machine was the Enclosure movement which was directly or indirectly responsible for a marked growth of poverty in the country side. The cottager, who harvested his own crops, attended to his cattle, made his bread and often his clothes, and whose subsistence depended primarily on what he could get from the soil or make out of domestic craft, saw his life completely disrupted. The old common field system formed a world in which the villagers lived their own lives and cultivated their land on a basis of independence. Before enclosure, the villager was an independent producer. He remained a self-supporting man living from the cultivation of the land and from what he could derive from home handicrafts. Thus, he had a say in his own life. This relative prosperity⁵ had existed for centuries; but when enclosure arrived the village's whole social and economic organization began to feel the wind of change. In fact, this change in the

countryside is well expressed in Cobbett's *Political Register* (1807) in which he contrasts apparent prosperity with actual poverty,

The taxing and funding...system has... drawn the real property of the nation into fewer hands; it has made land and agriculture objects of speculation; it has, in every part of the kingdom, moulded many farms into one; it has almost entirely extinguished the race of small farmers; from one end of England to the other, the houses which formerly contained little farmers and their happy families, are now seen sinking into ruins, all the windows except one or two stopped up, leaving just light enough for some labourer, whose father was, perhaps, the small farmer, to look back upon his half-naked and half-famished children, while, from his door, he surveys all around him the land teeming with the means of luxury to his opulent and overgrown master... we are daily advancing to the state in which there are but two classes of men, *masters* and *abject dependents*.⁶

The enclosure system did away with the small open field properties. Large farms needing a large capital became the necessity. The small holdings were grouped together to become the property of one wealthy landlord or rich businessman, creating in the process an unemployed and landless mass of labourers leading to relentless pauperization. This gradual pauperization of the unemployed and landless labourer went of course side by side with a certain prosperity of the "landed interest"⁷. Thus, inequality was an apparent feature of this new land redistribution which meant that the practice of agriculture as a means of subsistence was coming to its end, making room for large scale capitalized farming. According to Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society*, the old social relations in productive labour, were being replaced by men, reduced to 'hands' in the service of masters.

In the eyes of many agricultural reporters of the time, the society's loss of this community of small peasants was great, and the disappearance of the small yeoman⁸ was regrettable because he was a most useful and valuable member of

the community whose existence gave concord and harmony to society. The social literature of the time laments the disappearance of these men not as farmers but as members of a traditionally based society whose form and significance was put at risk.⁹

Parallel to this, the growth of industrialism, led to an explosive growth of cities, a movement which seemed destined to erode further rural tradition. Because of the huge unemployment caused by the new agricultural mechanized system, peasants flocked to the cities in large numbers in the hope of finding a decent job. However, the industrial cities and towns into which they poured were just as much unprepared to receive them as these people themselves were unprepared to live in an urban environment. These new paupers were often worse off than in their miserable cottage. Speaking about the Victorian city, Richard Altick in *Victorian People and Ideas* observes,

The city, like the rail road, had a profound impact upon the sensibilities. It was at once the supreme triumph of civilization and civilization's most catastrophic mistake.¹⁰

He explains further that

The city's density and expanse bred a sense of captivity, of helplessness, of claustrophobia. Its ugliness finally obscured its grandeur; the wretchedness of most of its inhabitants mocked the luxury of the few.

Lack of proper housing, overcrowding, inadequate environmental sanitation, polluted water supplies and malnutrition combined to make the life of the new city dwellers hard and dangerous. The houses where they dwelt in only met the immediate needs of those new comers whose main requirement as to housing, given the level of their incomes, was that it be cheap and close enough to their

factory. Charles Dickens's Coketown in *Hard Times* perfectly sums up what the industrial city looked like in those times,

It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and to-morrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next. (*Hard Times*, p19)

The physical and mental degradation which went with the deterioration of the environment of the town and city dwellers hardly need retelling. Many epidemic and respiratory diseases spread causing the death of large numbers of men, women and children. Moreover, slums and factory life not only accentuated the physical but also mental degradation of the worker. It often turned him into a vicious and criminal person. As Richard Altik contrasting country life to city life observes,

one of the worst results of existence in factory and slum was the assimilation of the individual into the mass. Hitherto, under the conditions of farm and village life, where the largest social groups were the family and the immediate community people had retained their personal identity. Even if they were object of charity, they were individual objects. Now, hundreds of thousands were packed into long, dismal rows of houses near factory, mill, and mine, and their identity was largely lost.¹¹

Such was the industrial city in the Victorian age which, in Trevelyan's words, had,

witnessed a breakup of the village community, and loss of more natural way of life and rural beauty, for which money alone could not compensate.¹²

If these changes were the subject of many social historians and political economists, they concerned the contemporary literature of the time. From the midst of the new urban society, “ruralism” rose up and the vision of the countryside as a shelter from this storm of change coloured many left-wing attitudes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Martin Wiener in *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* speaks of a “rural nostalgia” which ran through art and sensibility in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

literary historians agree that there was a striking increase in the number and popularity of novels, poems, and essays on country subjects in the last years of the century. The new wave of rural writing usually claimed to reveal the “true” England.¹³

He argues further that “a popular literary image of England took shape that gave a central place to the country side”, and places this reaction at the roots of radical utopianism,

At times, the myth of the changeless country supported a fervent utopian radicalism. Kipling’s reality (“Our England is a Garden”) was William Morris’s hope (to become again “the green garden of Northern Europe”).¹⁴

An ideal of pastoral and agrarian tranquility would be set against the restless industrialism of the day. Wiener observes that such an ideal would be set in the past or in the future, or in both at the same time and that two related messages would be conveyed:

First, that present day society represented a fall from an earlier demi-Eden; and second, that the good society of the future will have escaped from the pressures of modernity, identified with capitalism- simple

instead of complex; in harmony with nature, not alienated from it; cooperative instead of competitive; and tranquil, peaceful, and stable instead of restless and ever-changing.¹⁵

This more tranquil life, which is achieved through an escape from the present day industrial reality, is described by Wiener as a “utopian ruralism”. He argues that it has haunted English radicalism ever since William Cobett inveighed against enclosure and urbanization.

2. Agrarianism at the Heart of the American Political Scene

Agrarianism in England was not a clearly articulate and structured movement with its advocates and followers; it was only the expression of some writers’ nostalgic ideas for earlier times. The case is quite different in America where it was the expression of political and cultural crucial choices, and this is the concern of the second part of this chapter.

After the war of Independence in 1776, independence meant not only the necessity for new political institutions, but also for a new and separate identity. In this context, David B. Danbom in “Why Americans Value Rural Life” explains that in the beginning American rurality was perceived as a sign of inferiority but turned to be, after independence, its force and source of identity. He argues,

... Americans viewed the rural nature of the colonies mainly as a sign of cultural deficiency compared with England... [after the Revolution], what had been a creolized English society became an independent country... those aspects of American life that had set the colonies apart from the Mother country, and had thereby connoted colonial inferiority, quickly became components of a new identity.

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In the hands of American patriots, the new republic's "ruralism" became an essential part of its identity and a sign of its superiority to England. It was expressed in much of the writings of William Bradford and J. Hector St Jean de Crevecoeur in his *Letters from an American Farmer* ¹⁶

Beyond helping America establish its distinctive identity, this agrarian stance, and more particularly the debate it had generated on its superiority over mercantilism, industrialism and capitalism, constituted the core of the American political struggle. Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785) illustrates the American president's belief in the agrarian farmer's virtue,

Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth.¹⁷

Jefferson's words gave structure to a nation which was developing gradually, and were to influence before a long time American culture and politics.

Land was abundant in Jefferson's America and provided the means for a virtuous and independent life to most of the Americans, who were farmers. This was the essence of American agrarianism, a life close to the land where the cultivation of the soil instills in the cultivator such virtues as honor, self-reliance and moral integrity. The American environment and westward expansion turned classical republicanism into an expression of democracy. Whereas the republicanism of the antiquity was an ideology of leisure restricted to men of landed property, Thomas Jefferson and other agrarians argued that republicanism, which had failed in Greece and Rome, would succeed in the United States because it was peopled by farmers, who were by their nature and

by virtue of their surroundings independent, moral and patriotic¹⁸. Jefferson's opposition to the extreme Federalism, mercantilism and elitist tendencies of Alexander Hamilton drew the support of those who favoured equalitarian measures and greater local independence, thus shaping the constitutional questions that have since continued to divide the two American parties. According to V. L. Parrington in his famous book, *Main Currents in American Thought*

a decade of acrimonious debate had made it plain to the common voter that the real struggle in America lay between the rival capitalist and agrarian interests, of which the Federalist and Republican parties were the political instruments.¹⁹

Thus, this makes us observe that agrarianism and capitalism have traditionally been at the centre of a heated debate in American policy and life which was solved only at the 1896 presidential election.

Jefferson was deeply influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment thinkers such as the French Physiocrats Quesnay, Condorcet, Mirabeau, Du Pont de Nemours, who founded an economy that was primarily social rather than industrial or financial. For them, agriculture is the single productive form of labour and from it alone comes the *produit net*. They argued that the bankers, manufacturers and middlemen belonged to the class of sterile workers. They damned cities for their excessive artificiality praising more "natural" styles of living. Jefferson, steeped in the ideals of Rousseau and the Enlightenment thinkers, was afraid that the commercial pressure of city life would destroy man's inherent goodness. For him, "only those who labor in the earth" could be the

basis of a truly democratic society. And the thinking of the Federalists constituted for him a threat to American democracy.

Indeed, the anti-urban character of the proponents of agrarianism is worth noting. Jefferson was quite explicit in his condemnation of cities. As the Revolution faded from memory, and as cities grew and became more significant in American life, this anti-urban aspect of agrarianism assumed increasing prominence. Rural life was being celebrated mainly because of the contrast it offered to urban life. The countryside was viewed as a refuge from the busy and fast-paced city, and farming would help protect people from the materialism and spiritual corruptions of the world of the city in which they lived (economically profitable because of the Frontier). The anti-urban dimension of agrarianism in the 19th century became more prominent as the United States became more urban and industrial²⁰. While the process of urbanization and industrialization was exciting to Americans, and was the source of real pride, it also grew unease and called forth a vigorous counter-reaction. In the 19th century, the perceived ills of urban living –especially the materialism and selfish individualism it inculcated and the mental and physical disorders it inflicted on people- were so widely acknowledged that a great number of thinkers celebrated the natural life as an antidote. David B. Danbom in “Why Americans Value Rural Life” pointed out that 19th century social critics celebrated rural living as “counterweights to an urban existence and the maladjustments that came with it”. He carries on saying that

lurking beneath the surface of 19th century agrarianism was the sense that the countryside represented the true America²¹.

This anti-urban thrust of post- Jeffersonian agrarianism celebrated the countryside in the form of “back-to-the land movements”²² (social as well as literary) which urged city people to take up farming as a counterweight to an urban existence that was artificial as well as physically, mentally and socially destructive.

For the humanists, the self-sufficient owner of the soil was the ideal citizen because he relied on his own property and efforts for his livelihood and was immune from the pressure generated by the industrial order. Commercial enterprise, by contrast, endangered liberty because it fostered dependence on others and, by legitimizing the pursuit of private interest, undermined devotion to the common good. Gilmore argues that *Walden* “is inspired by the agrarian ideals of the past”²³, the ideal found in Jeffersonian agrarianism which retained its anti-market stance and its stress on independence.

For Jefferson, commerce is productive of subservience, and it is the independent husbandman who is uniquely capable of civic virtue. For Thoreau, too, the interactions of exchange breed not independence but servility. Nor does 19th century agriculture offer an exception from the dependencies of the exchange process. Very much like what was happening in England in the same period of history, the land had become investment like any other, and the farmer a participant in the market place. Thoreau argues,

The laborer’s self, his authentic being, has a little chance to survive the exchange process who to satisfy his employer, he has to suppress his individuality and become a mechanical thing.²⁴

Thoreau's labourer lives in a world about which many writers of his time and of later times were nostalgic, as the older, simpler vision of America was still influential. Warner Berthoff in *The Ferment of Realism* argues,

What this other, older society offers in contrasts is a standard that exerts attraction as if in direct ratio to the certainty of its disappearance.²⁵

Indeed, the city, the by product of industrialism and its strongest symbol which made a fetish of capitalism, was the subject of many social and literary critics of the time. In 1893, the exposition year²⁶, Henry Blake Fuller published his realist Chicago novel *The Cliff-Dwellers*, which was set in the business skyscrapers that dominated the city whose citizens' chief object was to make money. Chicago was no longer the frontier city of the past but rather the big commercial megalopolis of a future which did not foretell anything positive. Fuller greatly influenced Theodore Dreiser who considers him as the founder of the modern American city novel. His writings had an influence on Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) in which Chicago is described as a driving modern dynamo where the old standard and morality of the genteel tradition have no longer a place. Rural simple and peaceful life with its virtues and common welfare had become a dream.

Morris and Howells, through their works, implicitly and/or explicitly display their belief that urban life and capitalist thinking destroy the individual's independence and dignity while fostering vice and moral weaknesses within people. In fact, it is this deep dissatisfaction with many aspects of modern socio-economic structures, with its urbanized mass consumerism, that gave birth to their resistance, if not rejection, of contemporary ways of life. For them, as can

be seen through their utopias, the agricultural community can be the remedy or solution to the inequalities and disorders of modern society.

3. The Altrurian and Nowherian Gardens

William Morris in England and William Dean Howells in America view agrarianism as a philosophy or mode of life which calls for the cultivation of the soil and provides close and healthy contact with nature. They look at the agrarian community as the model social organization for mankind. Through their utopias, it seems clear that society should be based on agriculture and farming as its prime means of subsistence, because farming provides the best socio-economic organization. Moreover, it brings more pleasure than other modes of employment, and provides continual novelty and challenges to the mind, therefore meeting the physical, mental and economic needs of the individual at the same time. It employs and feeds people; it also develops the family-friendly tradition through the fellowship of labour and cooperation, as it obeys the rhythms of nature. It is important to stress once more that the agrarianism meant by the two writers is not industrial farming, with its over specialization of products on an industrial scale and its high productivity; it is the values and virtues of honesty, modesty, hard work and cooperation fostered by the cultivation of the soil, that are set forth and exemplified. In *Nowhere* and *Altruria*, farming and the cultivation of the land make all citizens share in an occupation which brings them closer to nature, offering them a purer and simpler

life. In *Through the Eye of the Needle*, Mrs. Homos, the Altrurian's American wife who now lives in Altruria writes, in a letter to her friend Mrs. Makely,

...in Altruria it can hardly be said that one man is more a farmer than another...if it can be said that one occupation is honored above another with us, it is that which we all share, and that is the cultivation of the earth. (P164)

In Morris's society too all work in the fields, busy with haymaking and other agricultural activities.

Work in the fields occupies a very important place and role in their ideal societies and is considered as the best and most liked activity. In *News from Nowhere* we are told that on the Traveller's way to Berkshire with his Nowherian friends, a group of young girls, playing on the grass, want the traveller (William) to have breakfast with them. But they leave after a short discussion since they are only too eager to begin the hay-harvest further up river. This suggests that harvesting is an activity which cannot wait. In the episode of "The Obstinate Refusers" the writer shows that working in the field is valued above all other kind of works. When they come across a group who are anxious to complete some building work and who do not wish to join the harvesting, the wish is respected, with some merriment by the other people of the area. They are derided as "obstinate refusers".

Working in the fields is of course part of the attractive work which is a pleasure. Mrs. Homos (the Altrurian American woman), in one of her letters to her friend Mrs. Makely, explains that there is neither laziness nor overwork,

It is no use my explaining again and again that in a country like this, where everybody works, nobody overworks, and that when the few hours

of obligatory labor are passed in the mornings, people need not do anything unless they choose. (*TEN* p124)

She carries on describing the kind of relation they enjoy with earth. It is no longer drudgery but a real physical and mental pleasure, a real bliss

..., for most of the married women are at home gardening, or about the household work, but men of every age work in the fields. The earth is dear to them because they get their life from it by labor that is not slavery: they come to love it every acre, every foot, because they have known it from childhood; and I have seen old men, very old, pottering about the orchards and meadows during the hours of voluntary work, and trimming them up here and there, simply because they could not keep away from the place, or keep their hands off the trees and bushes (*TEN* p125)

This passage illustrates the gaiety and peace acquired through a life close to the fields and nature and the general euphoria provided by work in the fields.

In fact, throughout their romances we can see that Morris and Howells adopt the village as the centre and basis of their societies²⁷, though with no definite or clear cut distinction between city and country. As argued by Catherine Durieux in “*News from Nowhere* dans la chaîne des Utopies”,

Sur la vision de ce qui est souhaitable, en revanche, Howells s'éloigne de Bellamy pour se rapprocher de Morris. Le modèle de Howells est la société agraire, démocratique et solidaire dans laquelle il est né (il est né en 1837 dans l'Ohio, qui était alors la Frontière)... [Howells] rejoint Morris sur deux points essentiels. Premièrement, les Altruriens, comme les Utopiens de Morris, vivent à la campagne mais sans solitude.²⁸

Indeed, Morris and Howells were in favour of small communities where the utopian inhabitants are active and in constant relation with their fellows, participating in many areas of social life, but more particularly working in the fields.

In his chapter “Questions and Answers”, William Morris makes Old Hammond describe in detail all the changes that have occurred to the urban and

rural landscape of London and the rest of the country, with the gradual breaking down of the rigid distinction between country and town. Howells too, seems to suggest the same idea when making Mr. Homos say,

The farm-work, as well as the mill-work and the shop-work, is done by companies of workers; and there is nothing of that loneliness in our woods and fields which, I understand, is the cause of so much insanity among you. (ATA p168, my underlining.)

Indeed, we can see that both writers' dream world is a society where life is simple and pure, the individuals living in an environment where every activity is performed in a simple and natural way. Old Hammond in *News from Nowhere*, an old man who informs the narrator about what life was like in his society testifies,

...we have simplified our lives a great deal from what they were, and have got rid of many conventionalities and many sham wants, which used to give our forefathers much trouble... (NFN P88)

The same idea is to be found in *Through the Eye of the Needle*. In a letter to her friend, Mrs. Homos, the Altrurian American, explains,

I don't know whether I can make you understand how everything has tended to simplification here. They have disused the complicated facilities and conveniences of the capitalistic epoch, which we are so proud of, and have got back as close as possible to nature. (p115)

This idea of a primeval environment is reinforced by the emphasis of both writers on the friendliness, beauty and purity (as well as the clothes and food) of the people of their agrarian societies. When Mr Twelvemough in *A Traveller from Altruria* met the Altrurian for the first time, he said,

I found it less difficult to say that I was glad to see him than I expected. In fact, I was glad, for I could not look upon his face without feeling a glow of kindness for him. I had not the least trouble in identifying him, for he was so unlike all the Americans who dismounted from the train with him, and who all looked hot, worried and anxious. This Altrurian's

whole countenance, and especially his quiet, gentle eyes, expresses a vast contemporaneity, with bounds of leisure removed to the end of time...
(p 03)

And about the way they dress Mrs Homos adds,

Their working-dresses are very simple, but in all sorts of gay colors, like those you saw in the Greek play at Harvard, with straw hats for the men, and fillets or ribbon for the girls, and sandals for both

This way of dressing to work, in addition to suggesting a very beautiful, gay, non coercive and clean working environment, is also highly suggestive of the countryside. The straw hats and the sandals project us into an agrarian world. In *News from Nowhere* too, the waterman the narrator first meets is also described as a “handsome young fellow with a peculiarly pleasant and friendly look about his eyes” (p14), while in *The Hammersmith Guest House*, he is particularly struck by the disarming fresh and frank character of Annie the country girl.

Unsurprisingly, both writers show some kind of hostility to mechanisation on which industry depends. In *A Traveller from Altruria*, right from the beginning, the railway road is presented as unpleasant and uncongenial. This is obvious because as soon as the Altrurian sets foot in America in the railway station, he expresses his discomfort and unease at being at the station,

May I confess that the meanness of the station, its insufficient facilities, its shabby waiting –rooms, and its whole crowded and confused appearance gave me rather a bad impression? (p06)

The narrator in *News from Nowhere* too refers to the railway road as “...The means of travelling which civilisation has forced upon us like a habit” (p10) and speaks of the carriage as “the stinking railway carriage” (p11) describing it as a “vapour-bath of hurried and discontented humanity” (p10). This parallel may help

us suggest that both writers express here some form of “rejection” of the machine (symbolised by the railway road) and their desire, implicitly, is to come back to a simpler and closer to nature age.

This belief in the superiority of a simple life close to nature, and in the good natural instinct of each individual invites us to think about a potential primitivist stance in Morris and Howells’s works. Believing that the alienating technological world of today has gone too far in its desire to dominate and subdue nature, they therefore believe that a return to the spontaneity and naturalness of early ancestors is desirable if people want to attain satisfaction, if not happiness. With Rousseau’s idea in mind -that if man is inherently good, he must be so in the primitive state of his condition before being exposed to corrupting influences of any sort- as a support, Morris and Howells call for a simplicity of manners and innocence of behaviour which have been known among primitive people before their encounter with the corrupting forces of society like commerce, competitiveness and profit-making. Both of them denounce the evils of private property, the lust for wealth and superfluous luxury, and emphasise the moral superiority of the state of nature. This state of nature in the industrial mechanized world is embodied in life in the country or the mountain i.e. close to nature ,which is to be preferred to urban conditions, because of its simplicity as well as its virtues of independence, self-reliance, courage, fortitude, modesty, piety, frugality; in a word a form of Edenic innocence. Their primitivism calls therefore, without force and compulsion, for a

society living in a primeval environment, where all men shall be equals, live in freedom, peace and harmony, free from the great burdens of social life.²⁹

William Morris found the “leading passion” of his life in a “hatred of modern civilization”. Both his early romanticism and late socialism showed this revulsion of industrialism and the city life and model it offered. In his famous poem “The Earthly Paradise” (1870), he starts as follows,

Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
Forget the spreading of the hideous town;
Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
And dream of London, small, and white, and clean.³⁰

Morris would be quite happy with a pre-industrial and pre-agricultural type of society, with the small and contacted world of a village, with a society of happy looking cottagers where life is simple, natural and happy. It appears that his hope lay in a return to a society of simple life and manners based on an agrarian economy. In fact, he upheld not his own contemporary agrarian and rural situation which was killing country life, but an agrarianism as handled in Goldsmith’s opening lines of “The Revolution in Low Life” where a rural community

lay entirely out of the road of commerce and was inhabited by a race of men who followed the primeval profession of agriculture for several generations. Though strangers to opulence, they were unacquainted with distress; few of them were known either to acquire a fortune or to die in indigence.³¹

Morris, like his predecessors Goldsmith or Cobbett, looked back to medieval England to find the closest realization of his ideal society³². Rural life for him had a “vital” popular culture that present-day England could not equal. It embodied a vital reserve of social values for the nation. To this general zest for a

glorification of old country life can certainly be related William Morris's *News from Nowhere* in which he sees the country side as psychic healing and as refuge from those cities of Dickensian nightmare. This “utopian ruralism” found its greatest prophet in the Leftist, William Morris, the great art and social critic of his age.

Commenting on this tradition of criticism, R. Williams observes that “unnatural” is “the keystone of a continuing tradition of criticism of the new industrial civilization”³³. This explains Morris’s nostalgic romantic side which seeks to revive the traditional, more natural, rural English way of life. In *News from Nowhere*, significantly subtitled *An Epoch of Rest*, he contrasts the “hurried and discontented humanity” of his late Victorian London with the serene, happy people of the agrarian Nowhere where people enjoy life working in their fields, living in harmony with nature.

However, and in spite of the fact that in the two utopias the reader is made to feel that handicraft has increasingly replaced mechanisation in production, as part of the necessity for social equality, and that there is great respect for the natural environment, we cannot speak of a rejection of the machine as an invention, but solely as an instrument of large scale production (which killed the old agrarian order), leading to greedy human behaviour and therefore to injustices, alienation and unhappiness. In fact, neither Morris, nor Howells display a total and/or rigid rejection of technology or the machine. They are against the evils brought by its excess in this great time of mechanisation.

In *News from Nowhere*, in spite of the fact that most manufacturing is performed in small work-shops where goods were made by hand, machines are still used. But they are so only if the workers have more pleasure in using them than in performing tasks by hand, or if the labour involved is too hard.

In *A Traveller from Altruria* too technology is not in contrast with nature. The Altrurians have, according to Mr Homos, befriended the machine. In the following passage, he speaks about manufacturing not as an evil process but as a natural economic and social process,

...but our mills and shops are beautiful as well as useful. They look like temples, and they are temples dedicated to that sympathy between the divine and human which expresses itself in honest and exquisite workmanship. They rise amid leafy boscajes beside the streams, which from their only power; for we have disused steam altogether, with all the offences to the eye and ear which its use brought into the world. Our life is so simple and our needs are so few that the hand-work of the primitive toilers could easily supply our wants: but machinery works so much more thoroughly and beautifully that we have in great measure retained it. Only, the machines that were once the workmen's enemies and masters are now their friends and servants; and, if any man chooses to work alone with his own hands, the state will buy what he makes at the same price that it sells the wares made collectively. This secures every right of individuality. (p168- my underlining)

This passage is quite significant in the sense that it perfectly sums up the writer's attitude to the machine, as an invention and art, and not as an instrument of coercion and injustice. Howells through Mr Homos refers to the machine as a labour-saving invention because that was his conception of it. This is both writers' view who show they are modern minds trying to keep the advantages of primitivist world view.

Thus, William Morris and William Dean Howells have had enough of the evils of "industrialism" and of selfish, if not ruthless attitudes of "capitalism" of

their time, and they imagined worlds where the two were absent. To them this was possible only in a world close to nature, wholly agrarian, where everybody works in the field, enjoying both its fruits and virtues, far from the corrupting whirl of the city and its devastating effects on human nature.

As seen in this chapter, a just and egalitarian society has often been accompanied by nostalgia for an earlier agrarian, simpler and primeval way of life. However, Morris and Howells relate this world view to art and religion each in his own way.

End notes:

1. "The Deserted Village", written by Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774) in 1770, is a poem based on the poet's country excursions. He deplores the country's depopulation of the small farmers due to the consequences of their dispossession of their lands.
2. *Rural Rides* was the name given by William Cobbett (1763-1835) to an account of his series of journeys on horseback across much of Southern England in the years between 1821 and 1830.
3. William Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, introduction by S.E. Buckley (London: G.Harrap, 1950), p 12/13
4. G.M.Trevelyan, *English Social History*. (Middlesex: Pelican book, 1974), p24
5. Rural England was also a place of distress characterised by hard life and acute poverty. Trevelyan. *Ibid*, p38.
6. See William Cobbett *Political Register* 28 February 1807. Raymond, William *Culture and Society*. (Middlesex: Penguin Books. 1979), p 32/33
7. "The landed interest" could be divided into 3 categories:
 - the land lords
 - the gentry
 - the free holders.
8. Yeoman is a word used to describe a person who owns and cultivates a small farm.
9. George Sturt's *The Village* gives a vivid account of English rural situation with a good deal of nostalgia for the past.
10. Richard Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas*, (London:Penguin books, 1974), p77
11. *Ibid*. p245.
12. G.M.Trevelyan, *English Social History*, (London: Pelican book, 1974), p 57.
13. Martin.J.Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980*. (New York: Penguin Books,1992), 82
14. *Ibid*, p81.
15. *Ibid*, p58.
16. William Bradford (1590-1657) one of the greatest colonial Americans, wholly consecrated to a mission in which he regarded himself as an instrument of God. He recalled the early history of Plymouth Colony with a marked puritan stance. Among his writings: *Of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647*.

17. Thomas Jefferson from *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787): *The American Tradition in Literature* (Michigan: Grosset and Dunlap, 1974), p310.

St Jean de Crevecoeur (1735-1813) was one of the most enthusiastic interpreters of the nascent American democracy. As a visiting French aristocrat, the discovery of the New World filled him with great and boundless excitement materialised in his *Letters from an American Farmer*.

18. The frontier, however, created a New World vision of republicanism that allowed a material stake in society for every man who transformed the wilderness into his private property, thereby becoming a middle class citizen.
19. V. L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, Volume II, (New York: Library of Congress, 1987), p13.
20. For antebellum Americans, the countryside became also important because of the natural surroundings. It was in the antebellum period that some Americans, most eloquently represented by Henry David Thoreau, discovered and embraced the wilderness. The countryside as well as the wilderness came to be seen as a refuge and a place of escape.
21. David Bandom, “Why Americans Value Rural Life” from *Rural Development Perspectives* Vol 12, N1, p16
www.ers.usda.gov/publications/rdp/rdp1096/rdp1096d.pdf.
22. This spasm of “back-to the landism” ran its course, but agrarianism sprang back into vibrant life in the 20th century. Many Movements appeared which emerged as a reaction to agrarian unrest; they rested on the equality of land distribution, rather than organic movements which rest on the values and virtues of agrarian rural life.
23. Michael T. Gilmore, *Idem*. P293
24. Quoted in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p296.
25. W. Berthof. *The Ferment of Realism*, Cambridge 1965, p02.
26. The World Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893, was the last and greatest of the 19th c.y’s World Fairs. Nominally a celebration of Columbus’ voyages 400 years earlier. This exposition was the perfect vehicle to explore the immense changes and developments America was witnessing.
27. An idea adopted by most of the utopian thinkers of the 19th century: Owen, Fourier, Godwin and others, except Saint Simon.
28. Catherine Durieux “News from Nowhere dans la Chaîne des Utopies” p19/20 (Univeriste Paris 13).
http://www.univ-paris13.fr/Anglicanistes/poirier/morris/Cth_Drx_Altruria2.pdf.

29. As a philosophical idea, primitivism has had its proponents: Lao Tze, Rousseau and Thoreau, as well as most of the pre-Socratics, argued (on different bases and in different ways) the superiority of a simple life close to nature.
30. William Morris (1834-1896), “The Earthly Paradise” (1868-1870).
“London and Literature in the nineteenth century”
<http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/skilton/poetry/morris01.html>.
31. Goldsmith’s “The Revolution in Low Life”.
<http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/875.html>.
32. The other aspect of Cobbett’s work is his surprising share of responsibility for that idealization of the Middle Ages which is so characteristic of nineteenth-century social criticism. As a literary movement, Medievalism had been growing since the middle of the eighteenth century... Burke made the point, in the *Reflections*; later, Pugin, Carlyle, Ruskin and Morris were all to make it, explicitly and influentially. Raymond, William *Culture and Society*. (Middlesex: Penguin Books. 1979), p37
33. Raymond, William *op.cit*, p 28.

CHAPTER THREE: OF BEAUTY AND SOUL

Nineteenth century social thinkers realised that their inegalitarian industrial societies were also ugly and tasteless, and to them, art became not only the mirror of these ugly and ailing societies, but also, in some way, their therapy. Art, it was felt, provided these societies and their people with a deeper, richer, inner life. In a first part, I show how Morris and Howells both defend art. In fact, in their utopias, they both uphold the idea of “popular art”, i.e. an art accessible to all. However greater emphasis will be given to Morris in this part because of his being primarily an artist, which is clearly displayed in his utopia, especially through his views on the place and role of architecture in society.

A second part explores the place of religion in both utopias. Howells’s romances appear more permeated by religious thought because of his religious “fundamentalist” leanings which, are often displayed and expressed in his work. I must point out that the scope of this section is not to provide any extensive study of the state of religion at the time Howells and Morris were writing, but only to study the issue within the context of their utopias.

1. Art in Morris’s Nowhere and Howells’s Altruria

1.1. A Process for Wholeness of Being

In 19th century England, the prevalent coarse spirit of “utilitarianism” rapidly became the driving ideology of the industrial capitalist middle class. Whatever could not be transformed into a commodity on the open market had

little or no value, and art, therefore, suffered a great deal. The conditions of factory and city life offered little chance for the expansion of the intellect and the gratification of the sense of beauty. As observed by Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society*, the relation between art and society was a nineteenth century intellectual characteristic¹,

...the art of a period is closely and necessarily related to the generally prevalent 'way of life', and further that, in consequence, aesthetic, moral, and social judgments are closely interrelated. Such a hypothesis is now so generally accepted, as a matter of intellectual habit that it is not always easy to remember that it is, essentially, a product of the intellectual history of the nineteenth century.²

In fact, this organic relationship between art and society was among the most important contributions of the social philosophy developed in 19th century Victorian England, from the works of Pugin³ to Ruskin and Morris through Carlyle. In fact Ruskin was a major contributor to the development of the complex idea of Culture, and a major influence on later social thinkers (especially on William Morris). His social criticism would not have been as effective and pertinent if it had not arisen from his insightful argument regarding the purpose of art;

The art criticism and the social criticism, that is to say, are inherently and essentially related, not because one follows from the other, but because both are applications, in particular directions, of a fundamental conviction.⁴

Ruskin's conviction was that any corruption of the artist's nature would blur or distort his capacity for realizing and communicating the ideal, essential beauty, making it impossible for the artist to be good if his society was corrupted⁵. For him, art is not merely the product of an 'aesthetic' faculty, but also a process and an operation of the whole being. He saw the artist's goodness in his 'wholeness',

and the good society in his eyes was the society which was able to offer or create the conditions for 'wholeness' of being. In his eyes, the latter society was at its best in medieval society and taste. Thus, within the forms of Ruskin's thinking, the transition from artistic criticism to social criticism was quite natural.

Despite his leanings towards an aristocratic and hierarchical society⁶, Ruskin is often viewed as a socialist forerunner. His views on the art and criticism of the industrial society and laissez-faire economy were perfectly acceptable to socialists and did influence Morris whose views are nevertheless more of an egalitarian. In this respect, Raymond Williams makes the following remark about Morris's views on society;

The significance of Morris in his tradition is that he sought to attach its general values to an actual and growing social force: that of the organized working class.⁷

For Morris, the organization of economic life had produced misery and vulgarity. He, like Cobbett before him, places the priority on the improvement of the working men's conditions. But unlike William Cobbett, who was conservative and setting his objectives only in terms of a nostalgia for a past society, Morris, like Ruskin and Blake, was forward looking and set his social objectives in terms of the importance of art in life.

For Morris, art depends on the quality of the society which produces it. When he and his friend Edward Burne-Jones⁸ read the works of Ruskin, they realised that they shared the Romantics' revulsion of Victorian capitalism and a rejection of the replacement of all other values by economic ones. They also shared his interest with the art and religion of the medieval past⁹. Morris believed in the essential dignity of useful and constructive labour, but also in the

role of art in expressing moral judgments about the quality of life in the society in which the artist lives. From Ruskin in particular, he learned about the architectural importance of the great medieval Gothic cathedrals of Europe, and how they are a living record of a nobler and purer society, and a nobler and purer art, predating the decadence that had taken place under Victorian capitalism¹⁰.

The place of art in an ideal community was also part of William Dean Howells's concerns. Unsurprisingly, he turned to his English counter-part, William Morris, for inspiration. This influence is due to the fact that the Gilded Age had produced no great social critic. Vernon L. Parrington in *Main Currents in American Thought* points out that,

the Gilded Age produced no critics of industrialism comparable to the great English critics- Carlyle, Kingsley, Ruskin, Morris, Tawney; no social philosophers like the great continental expounders of proletarian ideals- Marx, Engels, Bakunin, Sorel; no left-wing economists like the great French school- Louis Blanc, Bastiat, Proudhon. The genteel culture of America was not better than bankrupt in presence of brutal reality, quite unequipped to interpret the sprawling America that was transforming itself before its eyes into something it hated but did not understand. The time for searching criticism had not come, and would not come until the Industrial Revolution created in America a proletariat such as swarmed in the English black country and amongst the hovels continental cities¹¹.

In fact, on every page of *ATA* and *TEN*, the influence of William Morris is revealed- not only in the rejection of an urban society founded on the machine, but also in the emphasis on the psychology of work and the satisfactions people can have when performing free creative labour. Speaking about Howells's romance sequel, *Through the Eye of the Needle*, Parrington observes that,

Through the Eye of the Needle is curiously reminiscent of *News from Nowhere* and suggests how sympathetically Howells followed English social thought in its reaction against industrialism.¹²

In addition to the two writers' emphasis on a more egalitarian society based on an agrarian economy, both romances stress the importance of the principle of art and beauty, and agree on its superiority over the principle of gain and materialism generated by money and the tyranny of the machine.

It is very significant that they both chose to start their romances with a critique of the industrial space. Both writers criticise the railway station, certainly because the train then was the very symbol of their age, an age of machinery¹³. Thus, Morris makes Guest complain about the "hot room and the stinking railway carriage" in "the shabby London suburb" where he lived before his extraordinary wake up in the serene and magic Nowhere, and Howells makes Traveller say as soon as he sets foot in America,

May I confess that the meanness of the station, its insufficient facilities, its shabby waiting-rooms, and its whole crowded and confused appearance gave me a rather bad impression? (ATA p06)¹⁴

In fact, the meanness of these two stations gives some idea about the prevalent spirit of the time where ugliness was becoming the norm. Therefore art and architecture were to suffer in favour of money and more pragmatic needs. The way architecture adapted to the new contemporary utilitarian needs is criticised by Morris and Howells. According to them, the state of architecture is ugly and vulgar because of the prevalent bourgeois middle-class notorious bad taste of materialistic spirit. In *News from Nowhere*, the 19th century buildings are referred to as "the silly old buildings" which for Morris "were mere blots upon the face of the land". In America too, the "queer and fantastic style not over beautiful" of 19th century English architecture is also present, since the Altrurian,

speaking about the apartment houses of the 19th century, said that “The finer sort are vulgarly fine for the most part”,

Outside, they are the despair of architecture for no style has yet been invented which enables the artist to characterize them with beauty, and wherever they lift their vast bulks they deform the whole neighborhood.
(TEN_p13)

Architecture is another important issue tackled by Morris, as part of his concerns about art and his struggle against ugliness. Perhaps more than in Howells’s romance, the idea is strongly emphasised in *NFN*. Our first encounter with the new architecture in his romance is not in the form of a building, but of a bridge;

I have perhaps dreamed of such a bridge, but never seen such an one out of an illuminated manuscript; for not even the Ponte Vecchio at Florence came anywhere near it. It was of stone arches, splendidly solid, and as graceful as they were strong; high enough also to let ordinary river traffic through easily. Over the parapet showed quaint and fanciful little buildings, which I supposed to be booths or shops, beset with painted and gilded vanes and spirelets. The stone was a little weathered, but showed no marks of the grimy sootiness which I was used to on every London building more than a year old. In short, to me a wonder of a bridge. (P15)

This new structure had been erected to replace the ‘ugly’ suspension bridge at Hammersmith. When we examine the description, we understand that the qualities of this new bridge, which are valuable in the eyes of Morris, are permanence, usage, performance and cleanness which, for him, are part of parcel of its ‘beauty’.

Moreover, in contrast to the previous ugly suspension structure, this bridge appears to support social activity and occupation. It therefore connects rather than divides the communities on either side. Mark Pearson in “William Morris and the Architecture of Nowhere” makes a very interesting observation regarding

the bridge. He gives a pertinent interpretation to the parallel Morris draws between the Nowhere bridge and the Florence's Ponte Vecchio;

the reference to the Ponte Vecchio is perplexing, since although in appearance the Italian Gothic might nearly represent the aesthetic qualities desired by Morris, the high density of occupation in central Florence which has provoked the urban 'colonization' of that bridge seems absent in the revived Hammersmith.¹⁵

Indeed, in contrast to the Ponte Vecchio which connects the banks of the Arno, as does the bridge of London with the Thames, and which has four and five storey buildings forming cliffs tight against the river on either side, the Nowhere bridge's shores

had a line of very pretty houses, low and not large, standing back a little way from the river; they were mostly built of red brick and roofed with tiles, and looked, above all, comfortable, and as if they were, so to say, alive, and sympathetic with the life of the dwellers in them. There was a continuous garden in front of them, going down to the water's edge, in which the flowers were now blooming luxuriantly, and sending delicious waves of summer scent over the eddying stream. Behind the houses, I could see great trees rising, mostly planes, and looking down the water there were the reaches towards Putney almost as if they were a lake with a forest shore, (p16)

This is far from the swelling mood of the 19th century society where commerce and competition made everybody so busy as not to be able to know his next door neighbour. And to paraphrase Mark Pearson again, Morris's thoughts about building represent his thoughts about living relation. In this context he further argues that "it is quite often the poetic and not the prosaic aspects of these relations which, for Morris, generate the architecture"¹⁶. Therefore, the link between the social and architectural structures in *NFN* is not simply causal and pragmatic- but subjective and emotional too. The buildings described are not merely products of the new epoch; they embody its 'spirit';

I need say little about the lovely reaches of the river here. I duly noted that absence of cockney villas ...and I saw with pleasure that my old enemies the "Gothic" cast-iron bridges had been replaced by handsome oak and stone ones. Also the banks of the forest that we passed through had lost their courtly game-keeperish trimness, and were as wild and beautiful as need he, though the trees were clearly well seen to. (p 166)

If those buildings of the 19th century embody the spirit of the age of accumulation in which both writers live, and if in Morris's society "the ugliness and vulgarity of the rich men's dwellings was a necessary reflection from the sordidness and bareness of life which they forced upon the poor people", in *Nowhere*, things are different and architecture offers another aesthetic and moral picture.

In fact, Howells's contemporary society too (especially in city life) was a Boston, New York and Chicago, which were growing dirtier, uglier-more commercial- and impossible to live in year by year. In particular, Howells too brooded on the relation between the houses in which people lived and the kind of civilization they represented. Two socially-minded novels written in the 1880s, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), and *The Minister's Charge* (1887) include meditation on architecture. He therefore, like Morris, proposes in *Altruria* a completely opposite view of the cities of his time; the Altrurian capitals are;

...the centers of all art, which are considered the chief of our public affairs, they are oftenest frequented by poets, actors, painters, sculptors, musicians and architects

Moreover, he adds that as the buildings belong to the whole people, the first requirement is that they shall be beautiful inside and out, saying,

...the dwellings are quite as attractive and comfortable. They are built round courts, with gardens and flowers in the courts, and wide grassy spaces round them. (*TEN* p130)

Morris and Howells want to establish a beautiful society. In fact, Morris's desire is clearly displayed through his artistic and architectural eye. More than in *ATA*, however, and due to Morris's being an architect and designer¹⁷, the artistic touch is markedly present in *NFN*. There are so many details about the architecture and the materials used, and this only shows the professional side of Morris's artistic outlook.

Earlier in the story, we are given a description of the guest house at Hammersmith in which William Guest initially stays. It is described with many architectural details which once again show Morris's skill. After describing the outside of the Guest House, he proceeds to the inside. He notes,

we were presently within doors, and standing in a hall with a floor of marble mosaic and an open timber roof. There were no windows on the side opposite to the river, but arches below leading into chambers, one of which showed a glimpse of a garden beyond, and above them a long space of wall gaily painted (in fresco, I thought) with similar subjects to those of the frieze outside; everything about the place was handsome and generously solid as to material; and though it was not very large (somewhat smaller than Crosby Hall perhaps), one felt in it that exhilarating sense of space and freedom which satisfactory architecture always gives to an unanxious man who is in the habit of using his eyes. (p108)

It is worth pointing out that there are many instances in the book where Morris shows his knowledge and concern for architectural details. In addition to his accurate descriptions Morris shows great skill and mastery through his knowledge of the building materials (as shown in the above passage) as well as the different architectural styles about the environment. The following passage illustrates this;

[it]was a simple little building with one little aisle divided from the nave by three round arches, a chancel, and a rather roomy transept for so small

a building, the windows mostly of the graceful Oxfordshire fourteenth century type. There was no modern architectural decoration in it; it looked, indeed, as if none had been attempted since the Puritans whitewashed the mediaeval saints and histories on the wall. It was, however, gaily dressed up for this latter-day festival, with festoons of flowers from arch to arch, and great pitchers of flowers standing about on the floor. (P 214)

Besides, the idiosyncrasies of individuals are also borne out in their dwelling places. We hear in the story of several types of house but perhaps the most “ideologically” significant is the communal dwelling house (although most people seem to live still in detached houses or cottages)¹⁸. In the main street of Hammersmith, noting the agrarian character of the Nowherian houses, William Guest observes,

There were houses about, some on the road, some amongst the fields with pleasant lanes leaning down to them, and each surrounded by a teaming garden. They were all pretty in design, and as solid as might be, but countryfied in appearance, like yeoman’s dwellings; some of them red brick, like those by the river, but more of timber and plaster, which were by the necessity of their construction so like medieval houses of the same materials that I fairly felt as if I were alive in the fourteenth century. (p 30)¹⁹

The greatest architectural praise is reserved for a truly medieval building.

Ellen, his companion, hugging the old building exclaims herself,

“O me! O me! How I love the earth, and the seasons, and weather, and all things that deal with it, and all that grows out of it,—as this has done!”

Morris seems to suggest that the houses whose door and windows “were open to the fragrant sun-cured air” are as if part of nature. For him, this empathy with the environment is made possible only with medieval buildings²⁰. Nature seems to be the only ornament of the house from whose upper window-sills hung festoons of flowers in honour of the festival, in contrast, of course, with the coarse ornamentation prevalent in the 19th century. The house in its turn seems to

ornament nature too. Describing the inside of the house Morris, through Guest, makes a straightforward critique;

everywhere there was but little furniture, and that only the most necessary, and of the simplest forms. The extravagant love of ornament which I had noted in this people elsewhere seemed here to have given place to the feeling that the house itself and its associations was the ornament of the country life amidst which it had been left stranded from old times, and that to re-ornament it would but take away its use as a piece of natural beauty. We sat down at last in a room over the wall which Ellen had caressed, and which was still hung with old tapestry, originally of no artistic value, but now faded into pleasant grey tones which harmonised thoroughly well with the quiet of the place, and which would have been ill supplanted by brighter and more striking decoration.(*NFN* p208)

A heavenly atmosphere is felt in William Morris's *News from Nowhere* where society is pleasant through both its exquisitely beautiful architecture which "bore upon it the expression of such generosity and abundance of life" (*NFN* p31), and its people's good looks, health and way of dressing.

In fact Morris's medieval leaning does not manifest itself only in the building style but also in the way of living, and more particularly in the style of the Nowherians' clothes. For Hammond, "More akin to [their] way of looking at life was the spirit of the Middle Ages" (p 139). Speaking about the women and the way they are dressed, Guest observes,

I naturally looked at them very attentively, and found them at least as good as the gardens, the architecture, and the male men. As to their dress, which of course I took note of, I should say that they were decently veiled with drapery, and not bundled up with millinery; that they were clothed like women, not upholstered like armchairs, as most women of our time are. In short, their dress was somewhat between that of the ancient classical costume and the simpler forms of the fourteenth century garments, though it was clearly not an imitation of either: the materials were light and gay to suit the season. (p 21)

Indeed, through Guest, Morris gives way to his artistic sensitivity. Guest is dazzled by the beauty of the clothes and their delightful colours. His fine artistic

eye, is delighted with the sight of Dick and Clara who look fresh and “beautiful in a light silk embroidered gown”, which to his unused 19th century eyes was extravagantly gay and bright²¹. Seeing them, as well as most Nowherian people, clad in such an unusual and brightful way, Guest is again taken up by his egalitarian fever and wonders “how can everybody afford such costly garments?”. To this, Clara explains that wearing beautiful clothes is a choice, that an individual can “wear shabby clothes if he pleased,--that is, if he didn't think he would hurt people's feelings by doing so”;

of course we can afford it, or else we shouldn't do it. It would be easy enough for us to say, we will only spend our labour on making our clothes comfortable: but we don't choose to stop there. Why do you find fault with us? Does it seem to you as if we starved ourselves of food in order to make ourselves fine clothes? Or do you think there is anything wrong in liking to see the coverings of our bodies beautiful like our bodies are?--just as a deer's or an otter's skin has been made beautiful from the first? Come, what is wrong with you?

He then, ashamed, reminded himself that he might have known that people who were so fond of architecture generally, would not be backward in ornamenting themselves. Moreover, they can afford to be clad in beautiful and clean clothes when they work simply because work is no longer the hateful drudgery it used to be in the 19th century. Showing his delight, and once again affirming his medieval leaning, Guest describes a worker's dress which looks very different from the workers dresses he was used to see in his own society, saying,

His dress was not like any modern work-a-day clothes I had seen, but would have served very well as a costume for a picture of fourteenth century life: it was of dark blue cloth, simple enough, but of fine web, and without a stain on it. He had a brown leather belt round his waist, and I noticed that its clasp was of damascened steel beautifully wrought (NFN p14)

In *NFN*, under the growing influence of the new social conditions, the new ideal environment has gradually evolved and is said to be safe and freed from the 19th century utilitarian spirit. As a matter of fact, Morris believed that any human being was capable of works of ingenuity and beauty. Morris understands architecture to be the product of a given society.

1.2 Art as Folk-Art

In the many lectures he gave, in England and elsewhere, William Morris emphasized the tendency for human beings to decorate their artefacts. To him, this faculty is something which expresses our essential humanity. This kind of “decorative” work is the true art of the great mass of people. Advancing a purely Ruskinian theory, he argued that the distinction between art and craft, which was set up by the specialization of labour which took place under capitalism, did not exist during the Middle Ages when much of the ‘art’ (medieval art) was created by ordinary people. In *The Lesser Art* he states,

Those treasures of architecture that we study so carefully nowadays- what are they? How were they made? ...who was it who designed and ornamented them? The great architect, carefully kept for the purpose, and guarded from the common troubles of common men? By no means. Sometimes, perhaps, it was the monk, the ploughman’s brother; oftenest his other brother, the village carpenter, smith, mason, what not- a ‘common fellow’, whose common everyday labour fashioned works that are to-day the wonder and despair of many a hard working, cultivated architect. And did he loathe his work? No, it is impossible. I have seen, as most of us have, work done by such men in some out-of-the-way hamlet- work so delicate, so careful, and so inventive that nothing in its way could go further... no human ingenuity can produce such work as this without pleasure being a third party to the brain that conceived and the hand that fashioned it.²²

His conceptions clearly support the idea of the building as folk-art, which is a major theme of his descriptions in *NFN*. Guest in his journey along the river with his companion Dick comes across a theatre which Guest likes very much. He acknowledges this to Dick who reveals he has had a hand in it, since it was he who made the great damascened bronze doors. Everybody has a hand in the building activity. Indeed, the new society has abolished the traditional role of the architect as singular creator in favour of collective decision-making between the crafts-people, demonstrating and putting into practice the idea of “popular art”. Speaking about Philipa, the head-carver, in the episode of the Obstinate Refusers²³, Guest says,

She fell to work accordingly on a carving in low relief of flowers and figures, but talked on amidst her mallet strokes: "You see, we all think this the prettiest place for a house up and down these reaches; and the site has been so long encumbered with an unworthy one, that we masons were determined to pay off fate and destiny for once, and build the prettiest house we could compass here-. (p 181)

There are passages in the romance where Morris says clearly, through Old Hammond or Dick, that one “must not suppose that the new form of art was founded chiefly on the memory of the art of the past”. Indeed, the separation of art from craft under the capitalistic system elevated some arts above others: painting, sculpture, music, drama became more valued than weaving, dyeing, bleaching, interior decoration or stone carving, an idea Morris disapproves of. He sees the only record of the time when all arts were all one, in the ancient medieval buildings of Europe. The old idea of art as being reserved for an elite has completely vanished in *Nowhere*²⁴. In this context Guest notes that the subjects of the wall pictures in the Guest House are

taken from queer old-world myths and imaginations which in yesterday's world only about half a dozen people in the country knew anything about. (p 108)

This clearly shows Morris's desire to establish in his ideal society the idea of "popular art", and depart from the old understanding of what art was, i.e. a refined aesthetic realm reserved for a special category of people who can appreciate and understand it.

In fact, the Nowhere society has been regenerated after the Revolution through the reestablishment of art as a necessary part of life. Old Hammond recalls that the remedy was "the production of what used to be called art", but which has no name amongst them now, because "it has become a necessary part of the labour of every man who produces" (p109). Philipa's masons' group, too, shows that art has become "popular art" and in the hand of everybody in Nowhere. Besides, it points at Morris's definition of art as 'pleasure in labour', the idea at the heart of his doctrine. Old Hammond explains that pleasure in work has been attained after the establishment of an egalitarian society which follows a country-life mode of living, i.e. agrarianism. Once this society has been established, art sprang up and flourished spontaneously from people's hearts;

The art or work-pleasure, as one ought to call it, of which I am now speaking, sprung up almost spontaneously, it seems, from a kind of instinct amongst people, no longer driven desperately to painful and terrible over-work, to do the best they could with the work in hand--to make it excellent of its kind; and when that had gone on for a little, a craving for beauty seemed to awaken in men's minds, and they began rudely and awkwardly to ornament the wares which they made; and when they had once set to work at that, it soon began to grow. All this was much helped by the abolition of the squalor which our immediate ancestors put up with so coolly; and by the leisurely, but not stupid, country- life which now grew (as I told you before) to be common amongst us. Thus at last and by slow degrees we got pleasure into our work; then we became conscious of that pleasure, and cultivated it, and

took care that we had our fill of it; and then all was gained, and we were happy. So may it be for ages and ages! (p 140)

Morris wanted to point out that art is not individualistic but social. It expresses the happiness or the misery of a community. He believed that craftsmanship and art will be recovered under communism where work will become a pleasure allowing people to regain their true selves. In *Useful work versus Useless Toil*, Morris explains what, for him, is the true meaning of “popular art” and argues that in order to have a better and happier society,

we must begin to build up the ornamental part of life- its pleasure, bodily and mental, scientific and artistic, social and individual- on the basis of work undertaken willingly and cheerfully, with the consciousness of benefiting ourselves and our neighbours by it.²⁵

Of course, Morris in his attack on “the mean, the shabby and the dirty” did not merely discuss art. He rather expressed a social philosophy based on his belief in popular art. For Morris, as well as for Howells, it is only once the society is saved from the “old slavery”, and from the strains of the bad and filthy working conditions which give rise only to “false and hideous things to sell”, that beautiful things can be made simply because there will be more leisure to make only beautiful things. Therefore, the people will be “dedicated to beauty”, and the products “honest and useful [become], by the operation of a natural law, a beautiful thing”. Howells clearly acknowledges Morris’s influence and follows on the same lines when he deplores the destruction of artistic creativity following the false relationship of the worker and his product in the Age of Accumulation which destroys any creative artistic initiative.

Indeed, Howells too, like Morris, commented in the same spirit on the conditions of modern life, especially in America, where “vast masses of men are sunk in misery that must grow everyday more hopeless, or embroiled in a struggle for mere life that must end in enslaving and imbruting them” (ATA 102). He found the answer to these preoccupations in the same doctrine of popular art as expressed in the writings of William Morris and John Ruskin. And he acknowledges this clearly,

Art, indeed, is beginning to find out that if it does not make friends with Need it must perish. It perceives that to take itself from the many and leave them no joy in their work, and to give itself to the few whom it can bring no joy in their idleness, is an error that kills. This has long been the burden of Ruskin’s message: and if we can believe William Morris, the common people have heard him gladly, and have felt the truth of what he says... (that) the men and women who do the hard work of the world have learned from him and from Morris that they have a right to pleasure in their toil.²⁶

The belief in the social obligation of art had by then become a fundamental part of his philosophy. And as a result of the social awakening that in the 1880s changed the outlook of both Howells and Morris, Howells grew to understand and appreciate the views of the British Socialist and artist²⁷. As far as is known, Howells and Morris never met to talk over their ideas, nor did they entertain any correspondence²⁸. In fact, Howells at first did not even sympathize with the poetry and painting of Morris. He found Morris’s poetry very dull indeed. His previous taste for medievalism, as it was reflected in his poetry of the seventies, seemed to Howells merely tiresome²⁹. As an American, he deplored the tendency to return to former mental conditions. Morris’s art seemed dull to Howells until he, like Howells, was caught up into the stream of social thought of the 1880s.

In fact, Howells's three social novels – *The Minister's Charge*, *Annie Kilburn*, and *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, written in the second half of the 1880s, all reflected his frustrations about the state of art and the cultivated classes. In these three novels, neither the minister, who attempted to aid a poor young poet, nor Annie Kilburn, who tried to bring leisure and drama to the factory girls, nor the journalist who tried to cope with the conflicting issues of a strike, succeeded in their efforts. Howells's later association with friends such as Norton, Holmes, Bellamy and Garland, enabled him to share with more confidence the idealistic thoughts on social progress³⁰.

Besides, both men seem to agree that the fundamental cause of the destruction of this artistic initiative and creativity lay in the fact that machine had deprived the worker of his ability to create, slowly and lovingly “useful” and necessarily “beautiful” objects. The Altrurian in *A Traveler from Altruria*, explains that,

Once we had not time enough to make things beautiful, we were so overworked in making false and hideous things to sell; but now we had all the time there was, and a glad emulation arose among the trades and occupations to the end that everything done should be done finely as well as done honestly. (p161)

As Dick explains it to Guest in *Nowhere*, people no longer slave on in making useless things merely because they had the habit of making them to sell. Work has “grown into a pleasurable HABIT”, because “there is conscious sensuous pleasure in the work itself; it is done, that is, by artists”. Hammond explains that in these conditions the artist becomes the “normal man” because each man works “in the spirit of the artist”. In *Altruria*, Homos says,

The artist, the man of genius, who worked from the love of his work, became the normal man, and in the measure of his ability and of his calling each wrought in the spirit of the artist. We got back the pleasure of doing a thing beautifully...(p161)

And therefore, in all Altruria there is “not a furrow driven or a swath mown, not a hammer struck on house or ship, not a stitch sewn or a stone laid, not a temple raised or an engine built” which is not done “with an eye to beauty as well as to use” (p 162). Art has become part of the daily work of the people of Altruria and Nowhere. Morris explains this by a “craving for beauty”, which “sprang up almost spontaneously” after work has become a pleasure. In the eyes of both Morris and Howells, any craftsman in any art who has the impulse to do well and happily what he is doing, is an artist. In Altruria, the Altrurian explains that even in the labours of the field and shop, which are obligatory upon all, the inspirations of the artistic temperament are studied, and in the voluntary pursuits they allow it full control. Therefore, any common man is an artist. This philosophy helps the Altrurians in the establishment of their egalitarian society since as Mr Homos explains there are no ranks or social distinctions which are created by differences in occupations,

We do not like to distinguish men by their callings; we do not speak of the poet This or the shoemaker That, for the poet may very likely be a shoemaker in the obligatories, and a shoemaker a poet in the voluntaries.

Therefore, their ideal type is the artist. The Altrurian adds emphasising the artist’s valuable place and role in their society,

With us there is so little ambition for distinction, as you understand it, that your question is hard to answer. But I should say, speaking largely, that it was some man who had been able for the time being to give the greatest happiness to the greatest number—some artist or poet or inventor or physician. (p122)

Dick, in *NFN*, explains that in Nowhere, because each man is an artist in his society, each item is a work of art since there are plenty of people who can make products of art. A good example of this is the pipe Guest receives in the Nowhere market and which seems to him “too valuable for its use”, leading him to point out that,

This pipe is a very elaborate toy, and you seem so reasonable in this country, and your architecture is so good, that I rather wonder at your turning out such trivialities. (p 52)

Both writers grant a special place and value to the artist in general. In *A Traveler from Altruria*, Howells makes the banker compare the work of the businessman with that of the artist, the artist’s work being an end in itself and highly self-satisfactory while that of the businessman is denuded of any noble aim. The comparison is quite pertinent and makes the reader see clearly where Howells stands;

I don't think there can be any question as to which is the highest kind of work; some truths are self-evident. He is a fortunate man whose work is an end, and every business man sees this, and owns it to himself, at least when he meets some man of an aesthetic or scientific occupation. He knows that this luckier fellow has a joy in his work which he can never feel in business; that his success in it can never be embittered by the thought that it is the failure of another; that if he does it well, it is pure good; that there cannot be any competition in it--there can be only a noble emulation, as far as the work itself is concerned. He can always look up to his work, for it is something above him; and a business man often has to look down upon his business, for it is often beneath him, unless he is a pretty low fellow. (p 50)

If the two writers stand by the side of the artist in their works, it is because their 19th century societies by marginalising art, had marginalised the artists who were considered, according to Howells in *A Traveler from Altruria*, “a sort of harmless eccentrics” and looked upon them “as something droll, as weak and

soft, as not quite right” (p41), and who, according to Morris suffered a lot in “this unlucky nineteenth century” (p105). That is why they both tried to rehabilitate the artist’s deserved status. In *Altruria* the artist is even regarded as a god, at his own level. Howells makes Mr. Homos says,

We regard all artists, who are in a sort creators, as the human type which is likest the divine, and we try to conform our whole industrial life to the artistic temperament.³¹

Therefore, peopled by artists, the society will no longer be ugly, and will rather look as some architectural and artistic paradise where everybody is happy and contented, enjoying the fruits of equality. Being neither professional politicians nor economists, but merely men engaged in the social cause and art, Morris and Howells found that the causes of the vulgarities of civilization lay deeper than they had thought. They were driven to the conclusion that all this ugliness is but the expression of the moral baseness into which they were forced by their respective contemporary political and social systems. That is why “popular art” for the two men was the way to salvation, as it educated people, not in the arts of money-making, but in the pleasure of creative work. This can be possible, and the society can be redeemed from the curse of machinery only in cooperative societies, like the ones they imagined, where good quality and excellence, and not commercial success, will become the aim of any “artistic” work. This explains why it was important, for them, to show the close interrelation of art and society in their social thinking, and subsequently in their two utopian romances.

The next section deals with the two writers’ different attitude to religion. Howells shows a clear wish to establish a New Jerusalem, thus, expressing his

Protestant Fundamentalist leaning, while it is Morris's more secular outlook which is to be noticed.

2. Religion in Nowhere and Altruria

2.1. The Altrurian New Jerusalem

The idea of a utopian promised land is present in the Christian tradition through the idea of a "New Jerusalem". It is also called In the *Bible* the Holy City of God, the Celestial City and Heavenly Jerusalem which is a literal (or figurative depending upon the writer's viewpoint) city that is a completely new dwelling for the Saints. As a prominent feature of the *Book of Revelation*, the New Jerusalem holds an important place in Christian eschatology and Christian theology. Many beliefs and traditions, based upon biblical scripture and other writings in the Jewish and Christian religions expect the literal renewal of Jerusalem to some day. In fact, Augustine's New Jerusalem, or City of God, is described as "a Sabbath without end" or "a perpetual Sabbath", where there will be no idle chattering and no sensual diversion. This was an important theme in the Puritan colonies of America and continued to be so even in Howells's times because building a New Jerusalem is probably what was intended by Howells in His Utopia ³².

In Altruria, even if Howells seems to value art because of its beneficial aesthetic contribution, let alone the pleasure it gives in the daily work, he nevertheless presents art as something valuable because of its divine source and origin. In Howells's eyes, the artist is "divine" because he is in a way "a creator",

at his own level, a creator of beautiful things. And since the commonest individual in Altruira is an artist, then Altruria is flourishing with divine blessing;

The artist, the man of genius, who worked from the love of his work, became the normal man, and in the measure of his ability and of his calling each wrought in the spirit of the artist. We got back the pleasure of doing a thing beautifully, which was God's primal blessing upon all His working children, but which we had lost in the horrible days of our need and greed. There is not a working-man within the sound of my voice but has known this divine delight, and would gladly know it always if he only had the time. (*ATA* p161)

This “divine delight” is due, not only to the fact that Altruria is peopled by artists, but because it is peopled by Christians, the first Christians and true followers of Christ as well. Therefore the Altrurian civilisation is presented as “strictly Christian” and dating back “to no earlier period than that of the first Christian commune after Christ” (*ATA* 29). The Altrurians consider themselves “the true followers of Christ”, whose doctrine they seek to materialise in their life as He made it His (*ATA* 172).

Right from the beginning of Howells’s two romances, the religious touch is present. The 19th century capitalistic habit of compelling “people through their necessities” to do “hateful drudgery and to wound and shame them” was satirized as “neither republican nor Christian” (*ATA* p13). Besides, what preoccupies Howells is that in the 19th century conditions of selfish capitalism, it was impossible to be a good Christian. The Altrurian, in a letter to his friend deploras,

In conditions which oblige every man to look out for himself, a man cannot be a Christian without remorse; he cannot do a generous action without self-reproach; he cannot be nobly unselfish without the fear of being a fool.
(*TEN* 09)

Thus, in the eyes of Howells, generous action and altruistic behaviour are intimately related, to the condition of being Christian. The Altrurian tries to explain that Altruria is a nation of brothers, living very much like the first Christian family in a Christian republic;

If you can imagine the justice and impartiality of a well-ordered family, you can conceive of the social and economic life of Altruria. We are, properly speaking, a family rather than a nation like yours. (ATA 165)

He adds with an obvious feeling of relief that,

Now a man is born and lives and dies among his own kindred, and the sweet sense of neighborhood, of brotherhood, which blessed the golden age of the first Christian republic is ours again. (ATA 165)

How much Howells value religion may be noted in several passages in his romance. To attain the dream-like ideal state in which the Altrurians lived, the first thing they reformed after the Evolution³³, and which brought about this ideal world, was a change in religion;

It was so with His message to the world, which we received in the old time as an ideal realized by the earliest Christians, who loved one another and who had all things common. The apostle cast away upon our heathen coasts won us with the story of this first Christian republic, and he established a commonwealth of peace and good-will among us in its likeness. (ATA p149)

This passage, in addition to its puritan phraseology, shows that Howells is really established in the Protestant millennial tradition. The Altrurian apostle coasting in Altruria, represents the Christ's Second Coming. In fact, the millennians hoped for the "Second Coming", believing that Jesus Christ will some day come back to establish a 1000 year reign of Saints on earth (hence the millennium) before the last judgment. This Christ's Second Coming will offer a

time of supernatural peace and abundance on earth, and this is what Altruria offers.

Howells imagined people who were to “renew the evangel”. A few passages from his romance at times sound like religious sermons³⁴. In *Through the Eye of the Needle* the Altrurian says,

If we are to renew the evangel, it must be in the life and the spirit of the First Altrurian: we must come poor to the poor; we must not try to win any one, save through his heart and conscience; we must be as simple and humble as the least of those that Christ bade follow Him. (p92)

Howells seems to be keen on religion and religious teaching and practice; the Altrurian himself is a fervent and devout Christian, and for him, “we had not had nineteen hundred years of Christianity for nothing”. Many instances in the books show Howells’s religious fervor. Another example of this is to be found in the description of the religious service in Altruria which is described in quite some detail, thus showing Howells’s concern about religious service, and the importance, in his eyes, of attending it (as part of daily social life). In Altruria, Mrs. Homos (the Altrurian’s American wife) says,

Religious service is held in the temples every day at the end of the Obligatories, and whenever we are near a village or in any of the capitals we always go. (*TEN* 128)

She explains that “the idea of coming to the temple at the end of the day’s labor is to consecrate that day’s work,” which shows that the Altrurian people are deeply religious and strict observers of religious faith and practice.

Howells contrasts them with the American people of the 19th century whom the Altrurian visits and who, despite their claims to the contrary, seem to him to lack true faith. This makes of every religious action a mere sham and

pretence. Mrs Makely who attends church sermons is generous and charitable more because it is “a fad” than anything else. Her restoration of the church is not motivated by religious zeal, but only because she feels ashamed at being seen in a church in such a poor and ugly state.

Thanksgiving too, complains Howells, has lost its real religious significance and value. He makes Mr. Makely say,

This is the season of the famous Thanksgiving, which has now become the national holiday, but has no longer any savor in it of the grim Puritanism it sprang from. (*TEN* p39)

He comments,

Thanksgiving is now so generally devoted to witnessing a game of football between the elevens of two great universities that the services at church are very scantily attended. (*TEN* p40)

Howells worries about the state of Christianity in his country, deploring the fact that religion has lost its substance and essence and relied only on forms and senseless rituals. Howells, true to the Protestant fundamentalist tradition ³⁵, calls for authentic religious feeling and regeneration from the heart. Therefore he wants to establish in Altruria “The kingdom of God upon Earth” (*ATA* 181), where they no longer celebrate occasional religious feasts (which have lost their real meaning in America) to show their faith, but rather prove to practice it on an everyday basis, and thus, everything in one way or another has a divine dimension and is related to God or Christ.

Thus, the cultivation of the earth, for example, is honoured because it brings people closer to God;

If it can be said that one occupation is honored above another with us, it is that which we all share, and that is the cultivation of earth. We believe

that this, when not followed slavishly, or for gain, brings man into the closest relations to the Deity, (ATA p164)

Communal living too is encouraged because it has been recommended by the Bible. The Altrurian says,

It is not good for man to be alone, was the first thought of his Creator when he considered him, and we act upon this truth in everything. (ATA p168)

Even dancing is given a religious aura; this is to show the religious touch in every human activity in Altruria. Religion is thus present and alive everywhere;

...dancing is the great national amusement in Altruria, where it has not altogether lost its religious nature. A sort of march in the temples is as much a part of the worship as singing, and so dancing has been preserved from the disgrace which it used to be in with serious people among us. (TEN p119).

In this “kingdom of God” or “kingdom of Heaven”, the Bible is the Altrurians’ guiding book in their everyday life, and is used to solve the conflicts that may occur between individuals. Moreover, the whole economy of Altruria is founded on the tenets of a passage from the Bible; “for even when we were with you this we commanded you, that if any would not work neither should he eat” (TEN 149). And the whole romance of Howells abounds with examples from the Bible. The Altrurians follow the sayings of the Bible and strictly conform themselves to it because of their strong belief in the after-life. In *A Traveler from Altruria*, the Altrurian testifies,

We do not need any such testimony. Our life here makes us sure of the life there. At any rate, no extenuation of the supernatural, no objective miracle, has been wrought in our behalf. We have had faith to do what we prayed for, and the prescience of which I speak has been added unto us. (p174)

Being in harmony with traditional Christian doctrines concerning biblical interpretation, the mission of Jesus Christ, and the role of the church in society, Howells displays his “fundamentalist” ideas with a core of Christian beliefs that included the historical accuracy of the Bible, the imminent and physical Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and Christ’s Virgin Birth and his Resurrection. These features, for Morris, were not of such a vital importance in the building of an ideal society. Therefore, he conceptualises a society based more on the ethics rather than on the dogmas of Religion.

2.2. The Nowherian Secular Jerusalem

In Morris’s *News from Nowhere*, there is little or no reference to the practice of religion. And if the church represents an important aspect in the religious life of the Altrurians, in Nowhere it gains its importance only in terms of its architecture and its aesthetic forms. Moreover, it is used for other purposes than its original one. In *NFN*, Morris describes the church as a place in no way different from the Mote-House where people generally meet for a meal.

At the end of the journey, Dick, answering Guest’s query as to where they were going to have their festival dinner, says; “as to our dinner, we are going to have our feast in the church”, he adds,

I wish, for your sake, it were as big and handsome as that of the old Roman town to the west, or the forest town to the north; but, however, it will hold us all; and though it is a little thing, it is beautiful in its way.
(*NFN* p213)

In fact, the whole scene of this last dinner of Guest in Nowhere exhibits some significant elements. Guest inside the church notices a cross formed of two crossed scythes. Describing the inside of the church he says,

It was, however, gaily dressed up for this latter-day festival, with festoons of flowers from arch to arch, and great pitchers of flowers standing about on the floor; while under the west window hung two cross scythes, their blades polished white, and gleaming from out of the flowers that wreathed them. (P 214)

Morris, here, seems to suggest that the new Christian cross, the new religion in Nowhere, is agrarianism, farming and the work of the land. This idea is made more explicit in the speech of Ellen, the beautiful country girl, who seeing her grand-father always recalling what is said in the old books, shouts at him,

Books, books! always books, grandfather! When will you understand that after all it is the world we live in which interests us; the world of which we are a part, and which we can never love too much? Look!" she said, throwing open the casement wider and showing us the white light sparkling between the black shadows of the moonlit garden, through which ran a little shiver of the summer night-wind, "look! these are our books in these days!— (p 156)

A passage like this, in addition to showing that William Morris was forward looking compared to Howells, invites people to rely less on the Bible, but more on their own actual living conditions. This idea is also clearly expressed in one of his famous essays, "How I Became a Socialist", when he says,

...,and, if I may mention myself as a personality and not as a mere type, especially so to a man of my disposition, careless of metaphysics and religion, as well as of scientific analysis, but with a deep love of the earth and the life on it, and a passion for the history of the past of mankind.³⁶

Morris seems to put his trust more on present life than any other form of life, as the after-life. The discussion between Dick and Guest seems to put across clearly Morris's stance in this matter;

-To me you seem here as if you were living in heaven compared with us of the country from which I came.

-"Heaven?" said he: "you like heaven, do you?"

-"Yes," said I--snappishly, I am afraid; for I was beginning rather to resent his formula.

-"Well, I am far from sure that I do," quoth he. "I think one may do more with one's life than sitting on a damp cloud and singing hymns."

Morris, in fact, believes in what can be called "the Religion of Humanity". He makes old Hammond explain to Guest that

[The] assured belief in heaven and hell as two countries in which to live, has gone, and now we do, both in word and in deed, believe in the continuous life of the world of men,...and consequently we are happy... (P139. My underlining)

Despite a markedly secular outlook in *News from Nowhere*, Morris cannot be said to be totally an atheist or non-believer, because in his work, a religious Christian phraseology and tone can be noticed. An example of this idea is with Guest's last meal in *Nowhere*, which takes place in a church, and which is strongly reminiscent of Christ's last supper. Guest's gathering with the *Nowherian*, for the last time before leaving "Nowhere", recalls Christ's gathering with the apostles before his death, and subsequent leaving of his Christian world.

However, compared to Howells's deeply religious romance, Morris's romance shows a more secular outlook. And while Howells calls for a return to the age of the first Christians and to a devout and religious society which follows the forms and rituals of Christianity, Morris seems instead to call for a "religion of humanity"³⁷ where the emphasis is laid more on the ethics of religion, and on the basic principles governing the relationship between individuals, principles of brotherhood, love and altruism, and perhaps that is why, in his ideal society, art

comes in to offer the best substitute in which the Christian religion with its rituals is absent.

End notes:

1. As an idea, the relation between periods of art and periods of society is to be found earlier, in Europe, in the work of, among others, Vico, Herder and Montesquieu. But the decisive emphasis in England begins in the 1830s, and it is an emphasis which was at once novel and welcome. Raymond Williams: *Culture and Society*, (Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1979), p137.
2. Raymond Williams, *ibid.* p137.
3. Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812–1852) was an English architect, designer and theorist of design now best remembered for his work on churches and on the Houses of Parliament. He was a leader of the Gothic revival movement in architecture and an advocate of Gothic architecture, which he believed to be the true Christian form of architecture. He attacked the influence of "pagan" Classical architecture in his book *Contrasts*, in which he set up medieval society as an ideal, in contrast to modern secular culture. The extension from architectural to social judgment was also a key element in his theories.
4. . Raymond Williams: *Culture and Society*, (Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1979), p 143
5. An idea of Pugin too, who stressed the relation between the quality of life in a society and the quality of its art.
6. This was perhaps due to the general trend of the time of which the key figure was Mathew Arnold (1882-1888), an English poet and cultural critic, who worked as an inspector of schools. He moved from literary criticism to a more general critique of the spirit of his age. Between 1867 and 1869, he wrote *Culture and Anarchy*, famous for the term he popularised for the Victorian middle class population: "Philistines", a word which derives its modern cultural meaning (in English) from him.
7. *Culture and Society*, (Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1979), p 153.
8. Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones, 1st Baronet (1833–1898), was an English artist and designer closely associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and largely responsible for bringing the Pre-Raphaelites into the mainstream of the British art world, while at the same time executing some of the most exquisite and beautiful art work of the time. As well as painting, he also worked in a variety of crafts; including designing ceramic tiles, jewellery, tapestries, book illustration and stage costumes.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (also known as the Pre-Raphaelites), founded in 1848 by John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman Hunt, was a group of English painters, poets and critics whose intention was to reform art by rejecting what they considered to be the mechanistic approach first adopted by the Mannerist artists who succeeded Raphael and Michelangelo. They believed that the Classical poses and elegant compositions of Raphael in particular had been a corrupting influence on academic teaching of art, hence the name "Pre-Raphaelite". They have been considered the first avant-garde movement in art, though they have also been denied that status, because they continued to accept both the concepts of history painting and of mimesis, or imitation of nature, as central to the purpose of art.

However, the Pre-Raphaelites undoubtedly defined themselves as a reform movement, created a distinct name for their form of art, and published a periodical, *The Germ*, to promote their ideas. Their debates were recorded in the *Pre-Raphaelite Journal*.

9. As the new industrial society established itself, critics like Carlyle and Ruskin could find the ‘organic’ image only in a backward look; this is the basis of their “medievalism”, and of that of others. It was not, in this tradition, until Morris that this image acquired a distinctly future reference- the image of socialism. Even in Morris,... the backward reference is still important and active. Ruskin, like Carlyle, was one of the destroyers of Liberalism; this may now be seen as his merit. It is for his destructive social criticism that he is important. Raymond Williams, op.cit, p146.
10. Stephen Coleman and Paddy O’Sullivan (eds): *William Morris and News from Nowhere: A Vision for Our Time*, (Bideford: Green Books, 1990) p20.
11. Vernon. L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought V.III*. (New York .Library of Congress USA, 1987), p139.
12. Vernon. L. Parrington, *ibid.* p247.
13. Though both writers were not against the machine, as an invention or a labour- saving device, they were not either in favour of a utopian society where machine will do everything and thus deprive man of any sort of effort in his work. In fact, *News from Nowhere* (1891) was written according to Morris, in reply to Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888). Bellamy’s dream of a materialistic society, overflowing with machine-made gadgets, appealed to neither men since even Howells’s *Traveler from Altruria* (1894) was deeply affected by Morris’s concept of a society founded on a belief in man’s need for creative expression.
14. Later on, in the romance, we are made to know that the train has been disused and was replaced by beautiful bed of flowers. i.e. replaced by nature.
15. Stephen Coleman and Paddy O’Sullivan (eds): *William Morris and News from Nowhere: A Vision for Our Time*, (Bideford: Green Books, 1990), p139.
16. Mark Pearson, “The Hammersmith Guest House Again: William Morris and the Architecture of Nowhere” in Stephen Coleman and Paddy O’Sullivan (eds): *William Morris and News from Nowhere: A Vision for Our Time*, (Hartland Bideford, Devon: Green Books, 1990), p143
17. Previously in the 1870’s , Morris was not only an ardent member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, but he had also set up a shop in Red Lion’s Square, London, where with several members of that group, had for more than ten years been making and designing wall-paper, hangings, carpets and artistic work of all kinds. In 1875, the company dissolved and Morris continued the business with a group of workmen.
18. Mark Pearson in “William Morris and the Architecture of Nowhere” notes Morris’s enthusiasm for Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) and observes that the architectural description of More’s society has some distinct parallels with Nowhere. First, the population is dispersed evenly throughout the country, extensive gardens are a

significant feature of the housing areas and larger communal buildings serve every thirty houses. The dwellings are not privately owned, but are well built and commonly maintained. They are also basic and lacking luxury but comfortable. However, unlike Morris, More sees very little need for individuality to be expressed by the architecture. The three-storey, flat roofed houses are all similar and the towns are identical with a regular and rigorous planning with wide and straight streets. Thus, although much has been borrowed from More, Morris has certainly rejected some central ideas, ensuring that Nowhere demarks itself and is distinct from *Utopia*.

19. We see, clearly stated, the historicist behaviourism which Morris inherited from Ruskin and which was then shared with the Arts and Crafts Movement as a whole.
20. Mark Pearson summarizes this concern in terms of two complementary meta-narratives - 'nature' and 'tradition' - which either together or independently justify each of his proposals, which are seen as 'natural', 'traditional' or both. The architecture in the society proposed by Morris had, therefore, two legitimizing meta-narratives: 'Nature' and 'historical continuity' or 'Tradition'. In so far as the proposals represented a criticism of industrialized nineteenth century society and an advocacy of the craft techniques of the Middle Ages, this corresponded with what former societies perceived as 'naturalness' and with their reliance upon 'tradition'. Thus, by espousing similar principles Morris believed that the production of architecture might serve to re-engage the population with the land and avoid the division of labour which Ruskin so despised.
21. Clothes look rich in Nowhere unlike in Altruria where they show more sobriety. This is probably due to Howells's more religious stance. This point is going to be developed further in the next section.
22. "The Art of the People" (1879) quoted in Stephen Coleman and Paddy O'Sullivan, eds., op.cit p25.
23. It is obvious that the only satisfactory relationship between the designer and the maker, in Morris's *NFN* -as well as in Ruskin's view, expressed in *The Nature of Gothic*- is for them to be co-existent. He seems to consider the architect as a remote designer which is, in fact, the logical conclusion to, and an extension of, Ruskin's views on the subject. There are two further Ruskinian influences upon the architecture encountered in the story of William Guest: 1. Work as a pleasure embodied in Philipa the head carver. 2. We learn that the form of decoration also corresponds to principles which accord with Ruskin "...we want to carve a kind of wreath of flowers and figures all round it". The floral design is therefore taken directly from nature. Stephen Coleman and Paddy O'Sullivan (eds.). op.cit p142.
24. According to Raymond Williams, the positive consequence of the idea of art as a superior reality was that it offered an immediate basis for an important criticism of industrialism. The negative consequence was that it tended, as both the situation and the opposition hardened, to isolate, to specialize the imaginative faculty to this one kind of activity, and thus to weaken the dynamic function. Raymond Williams: *Culture and Society*, (Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1979), p60.
An idea William Dean Howells shares but with regard to his theory of realism, expressed clearly in his essay "Criticism and Fiction".

25. William Morris: Useful Work versus Useless Toil.
[<http://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1884/useful.htm>]
26. Quoted in Clara Marburg Kirk, *W.D.Howells and Art in His Time*. Op.cit. p188.
27. *News from Nowhere* was written at the end of a decade of non-stop writing and lecturing on the subject of popular art. His romance summed up Morris's views on art and society after he had become a fervent socialist. Howells's Altrurian essays (written after his romance *A Traveler from Altruria*) expressed the same beliefs as Morris's and were coloured by the socialistic aesthetics of Morris's utopian dream. Howells however advanced no definite political platform as Morris did.
28. According to Clara Kirk in *W.D.Howells and Art in His Time*, this was probably due to the fact that when Howells went to London, Morris was busy campaigning for his socialistic views, lecturing on art and society. (In the 1870s and 1880s).
29. In fact, as Morris had tried throughout the eighties to make people (especially those who buy) consider the true beauty of a pitcher or a table, which is made with a real sense of purpose by a real individual and not by a lifeless machine, so Howells urged his readers to cultivate a taste for the "real" in literature, as opposed to the romantic and stereotyped. For Howells the tawdry in art was what was the "romantic" for literature, and both were in his eyes an inevitable accompaniment of "civilization" based on selfish greed and ceaseless competition, rather than on altruism and cooperation.
30. Earlier in 1860,Howells was awarded the job of consul in Venice (after he wrote a campaign biography of Abraham Lincoln when the latter had won the American presidency).He arrived in Venice in 1862, aged twenty-five, and lived for three years on the Grand Canal. Howells would use the canal for a morning swim during the warmer months and then, go off to his office. *Venetian Life* is the direct product of his stay there. The book flows from the enchantment of the years Howells spent in that magnificent city dining with the rich, mingling with the humble, and reporting on it all his impressions in a leisurely account full of Howellsian American wit.
31. Industry here is used with its older meaning as explain in Raymond Williams. *Keywords: A vocabulary for Culture and Society*. (Glasgow: Fontana, 1979), p137.
32. William Bradford's aim, too, as expressed in his Puritan writings, was to establish an ideal community. However, Howells's displays more originality through his interest in Art.
33. While Howells advocated Evolution, Morris called for Revolution. In fact, the English and American intellectual preoccupations were very much alike in that period of time. According to Clara Kirk in *W.D. Howells and Art in His Time*, though there was no official connection between the *Dawn*, the famous American socialist review and the *Commonweal*, its English counterpart; it is to be remarked that both publications reflected the ideas of Tolstoy, Henry George, Laurence Grolund, Edward Bellamy, and the Fabian Society. Both reviews were concerned with the place of the church in modern society; and both considered art as of central importance in the regeneration of

society as a whole. For Kirk the range of ideas, the tone of editorials, the very make-up of the two publications, were similar, the main difference being that, whereas the *Commonweal* puts the stress on revolution, *The Dawn* advocated evolution, or the gradual change through education and vote. A point clearly expressed in both Howells's and Morris's utopias in which while on the one hand, the Altrurian speaks of change as being done through Evolution, Old Hammond, on the other hand, in *NFN* explains that change has been achieved through violent Revolution in order to reach the dream-like state in which they were living.

34. This might be reminiscent of some passages from Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* where, at the end of the novel, a socialist speaker preaching equality and justice is presented as a Christ-like figure. After an attentive listening to his speech, Jurgis, the protagonist, is described as being "converted" to Socialism.
35. Christian Fundamentalism: Movement in American Protestantism in the late 19th century in reaction to theological modernism, which aimed to revise traditional Christian beliefs to accommodate new developments in the natural and social sciences, especially the advent of the theory of biological evolution. Fundamentalism became a significant phenomenon in the early 20th century and remained an influential movement in American society into the 21st century.

Christ Second Coming; also called Second Advent, or Parousia, in Christianity, is the future return of Christ glory, when it is understood that he will set up his kingdom, judge his enemies and reward the faithful, living and dead. Early Christians believed in the Advent to be imminent, and most Christian theologians since then have believed that the visible appearance of Jesus may occur at any moment.

36. William, Morris "How I became a Socialist".
www.marxists.org/archive/moris/works/1884/hml/hml.htm.
37. This very term I took from Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. In the 29th chapter of *The Jungle* one finds the following statement: "It was the new religion of humanity — or you might say it was the fulfilment of the old religion, since it implied but the literal application of all the teachings of Christ". This shows that Sinclair's conception of socialism is of an individualistic, utopian, and religious nature. He was preoccupied with religious themes, but as evidenced by later writings; his conception of Christianity was individualistic as well. For him, "fellow-worker Jesus" was a radical, proto-socialist thinker; feeding the hungry, aiding the poor. But Christianity, as he makes clear in his 1922 satire of the Second Coming, *They Call Me Carpenter*, has been transformed into an institution whose members don't recognize "the spirit of Jesus," reducing this message to so much lubricant for the man-devouring gears of commercial society. In his 1935 *What God Means to Me*, which he significantly called "An Attempt at a Working Religion", he said,

Religious faith has, in the past, been taken to mean belief in this or that set of dogmas; and with the discrediting of dogmas has come the breakdown of faith. But I am seeking here to give a broader interpretation

of the word, which no man can reject. My faith is in the well-spring of my own soul, the creative impulses which awaken there, or emerge from there. ... I am sustained by...a trust in the good faith of the process which created me... That process I call God.

www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Jupton.htm

CHAPTER FOUR: THE AESTHETICS OF THE TWO ROMANCES

This fourth and last chapter of this research deals with the aesthetics of the two romances. The romance being a specific literary genre, widely different from the novel and having its own peculiar characteristics, it seems to us interesting to devote some reflection to its technical and rhetorical specificities. We shall first define the genre exhibiting its characteristics, showing in which way it differs from the novel, and, then, show how William Morris's and William Dean Howells's romances work along these characteristics. Therefore, a first part will be devoted to the definition of romance showing what distinguishes it from the novel, and a second part will examine some of the devices (characteristics) we have chosen to lay emphasis on, i.e. plot, characterization, and point of view, to see in which way and to what extent they fulfill the requirements of the genre.

1. Romance vs. Novel

Through their romances, *News from Nowhere*, *A Traveler from Altruria* and *Through the Eye of the Needle*, William Morris and William Dean Howells tried to find a way out of their 19th century capitalistic societies. In their romances they gave a free rein to their imaginative powers to create an ideal enchanting and magic world, providing, thus, fictional relief and escape to themselves and to their readers.

Nevertheless, it is not enough to describe their fictional attempts as escapist, or simply to describe the genre they opted for as escapist and non-realistic. Perhaps a difference between the novel and the romance imposes itself.

Whereas the two forms of prose writing (novel and romance) are not always clearly distinguished, there is, nevertheless, a basic difference between the two which must be brought to light. On the one hand, in the novel, there is generally speaking an attempted realistic portrayal of the world as it actually is rather than as it should or might be. In the romance, on the other hand, we have an unfailingly idealized world which relies more on the powers of the author's imagination rather than on real life. That is why to criticize the romance on the ground that it is not realistic but idealistic is definitely beside the point. Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* points out that literary merit must clearly be seen as independent from an ultra-naturalistic form of presenting reality (which is a criterion imposed by some critics),

A great romancer should be examined in terms of the conventions he chose. William Morris should not be left on the side lines of prose fiction merely because the critic has not learned to take the romance form seriously. Nor, in view of what has been said about the revolutionary nature of the romance, should his choice of that form be regarded as an "escape" from his social attitude.¹

In fact, this difference between the novel and the romance is the result of historical development. The novel has developed from non-fictitious narrative forms and documents such as the journal, the letter or the chronicle. Therefore, as stressed by Frye, it is a form that "tends rather to expand into a fictional approach to history". On the other hand, the romance continues the tradition of the epic

and the medieval romance², which are fictitious narrative forms neglectful of verisimilitude. Frye observes further,

Romance is older than the novel, a fact which has developed the historical illusion that it is something to be outgrown, a juvenile and undeveloped form.³

The fact that Romance has survived the birth and triumph of the novel, simply by adapting its methods and matter to the tastes of a different social background, is an indication of its continuing strength. In fact, its function, which is to provide escape, and its action, which centres on adventure, have not changed; only the externals of the setting have undergone an alteration. The tales of the old chivalrous adventure, with their battles with dragons and their quest for the grail, have largely been replaced by settings which reflect more recent cultural situations. Frye provides us with a good and pertinent example;

In England the romances of Scott and, in less degree, the Brontes, are part of a mysterious Northumbrian renaissance, a Romantic reaction against the new industrialism in the Midlands, which also produced the poetry of Wordsworth and Burns and the philosophy of Carlyle.⁴

He adds that the world of everyday reality is replaced by the picture of an idealized world which appeals to the emotions and imagination of the reader; it invites him to marvel at what is essentially an enchanted world, while the novel, constantly calls him back to reality by questioning the very basis of romance. Some examples of serious romances (according to Frye) are *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and *Moby Dick* (1851). In all these examples we encounter an isolated setting where people seem to be governed by primitive emotions, without the pressure of ordinary social environments to restrain them. Thus, the first distinguishing characteristic or feature of the romance is the special world it

provides the reader with. It consists of a setting away from the ordinary social nexus, with the events occurring in isolation, and much of the patterns of life as we know them are blocked out.

The fictional attempt to give the effect of realism, which is typical of the novel, is thus largely ignored in the romance which includes elements which go beyond the humanly possible. Giving less importance to the form, it tends to display the primal desires, hopes, and subconscious anxieties and terrors which are deep in the human mind. This idea is backed unreservedly by William Dean Howells, himself, who, though a staunch realist, does approve of these characteristics and speaks of the romance in these terms, in “Novel-Writing and Novel-Reading”,

The romance is of as great purity of intention as the novel, but it deals with life allegorically and not representatively; it employs types rather than characters, and studies them in the ideal rather than the real; it handles the passions broadly. Altogether the greatest in this kind are *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Marble Faun* of Hawthorn, which partake of the nature of poems, and which, as they frankly place themselves, are not to be judged by the rules of criticism that apply to the novel...⁵

Consequently, many other characteristics of the novel cannot apply to the romance. According to Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* (as much as to Howells), the most important characteristic of the romance, which perhaps most clearly distinguishes it from the novel, is its conception of characterization;

The essential difference between the novel and romance lies in the conception of characterization. The romancer does not attempt to create “real” people so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes.⁶

Thus, our second identifying feature for the romance is its particularly flat characterization. While the novelist presents “complex characters with mixed

motives, who are rooted in a social class, operate in a highly developed social structure, interact with many other characters, and undergo plausible and everyday modes of experience”⁷, the writer of romance not so much attempts to portray ‘real people’ as use simplified and stylized figures which are larger than life and more intense than any ‘real persons’ ever could be. For Frye,

The novelist deals with personality, with characters wearing their personae or social masks. He needs the framework of a stable society... the romancer deals with individuality, with characters *in vacuo* idealized by revery, and however conservative he may be, something nihilistic and untamable I likely to keep breaking out his pages.⁸

In ‘serious’ romances characters expand into psychological archetypes.

A third characteristic feature of the romance is its suspended time. Time seems not to be measured by the normal standards of social activities and seems to be frozen. The events are not regulated by the realistic time standards simply because of the unrealistic and strange world in which they take place.

The last identifying feature of the romance is the questionable reliability of the narration itself. The events are often related only indirectly, or in a disordered way, perhaps to increase our sense of wonder at the strangeness of what is being recounted. The action itself frequently remains unexplained.

The peculiarity of these four characteristics of the romance is explained by the fact that the focus in a romance is generally different from that in a novel, where the emphasis is laid on social interaction, psychological development, or on ideas and philosophical concerns. In a romance, we are given an abstract vision of the state of human society in its larger forms. Though we are offered insights into the tensions existing within the contemporary social order, the focus

is never only on one problem or one kind of human experience within that society. From the romancer's point of view, the novelist constantly runs the risk of becoming so overwhelmed with meaningless details as to obscure the truth which all art must in a way reveal. That is why Morris and Howells preferred to opt for this particular genre. They wanted to put their ideas in the most straightforward manner possible, which only the romance allows.

Broadly speaking, if we are to evaluate or express a judgment on the romance, we may say that the romance relies on the art of inflation- whereas the novel is "deflationary" in a way. It further shows characters and situations which loom larger than life. This "inflation" of real-life situations is in fact also the point the romance is mainly criticized for, because what may be appropriate enough in the artificial world the writer of romance has created, may be painfully unrealistic in the real world. Thus it is thought wrong to lead people into an unreal land of fancy while it is more useful to prepare them for the process of disillusionment that real life always brings about. However, according to Frye, this is what makes the strength of the romance;

the romance so often radiates a glow of subjective intensity that the novel lacks, and why a suggestion of allegory is constantly creeping in around its fringes. Certain elements of character are released in the romance which make it naturally a more revolutionary form than the novel.⁹

Thus, criticism of the romance is therefore essentially moral rather than literary or artistic. The romance seems to address a higher reality and a deeper psychology than the novel. It is therefore analogous to the materials of dream, myth, ritual and folklore, which present 'truth' in a non-factual and non-realistic

way, and reflect the eternal tendency of the human mind to dream, which is essentially unaffected by change.

Needless to say, Morris's and Howells's choice of the romance was far from being accidental. Works of fiction are never accidents but always have a given and specific purpose, a form and a meaning, all of which are deliberately created by the author. By giving their works a purpose, a form and a meaning, Morris and Howells were forced to make certain decisions, which are displayed in their respective texts, and which enable the reader to identify their narratives as romances. The central idea or purpose of the author is of course "the theme" which the writers dramatize through the use of characters, action and setting, which, in the romance, are used in a way proper to the genre. Thus, the theme of both Morris and Howells which is the loss of real values in the 19th century industrial capitalistic society is going to be brought about through the literary devices we chose to lay emphasis on, namely: setting, atmosphere, plot, characterization and point of view.

2. A Pleasant Atmosphere in A Dream-Like Setting

Before proceeding to the study of the plot, a few words about the setting and the atmosphere are needed. The setting of a narrative can be defined as the environment of its action, the immediate world in which it takes place. The setting is not of equal importance in all fiction and writers use setting in different ways¹⁰. In Morris's and Howells's romance, however, it is one of the most, if not the most important element because behind their dream-like and magic settings

we sense a strong reformist purpose. The ideal, beautiful settings of Nowhere and Altruria are used to expose, by contrast, the faults of the 19th century society they want to attack. Even in, *ATA*, which is set in the 19th century, the setting fulfills the same purpose and is used to attack directly and in a straightforward way contemporary society. In fact, in Morris's and Howells's works, the setting is not just one element of the total structure; it is not the silent background in which the events are acted out. They are invented settings which serve as opposite examples of what their societies were in their time. In *NFN* and *TEN* there is a deliberately exotic setting which helps the reader underline the strange character of the events described. In *ATA* the setting serves rather to bring out the problems and conditions more clearly.

In fact, the physical setting in these romances is an important element in generating the atmosphere of the works. When the setting evokes a definite emotional tone or mood that surrounds the characters, we speak of atmosphere (also known as tone). The "emotional mood" surrounding Morris's and Howells's characters is a very pleasant and serene mood. This joyous and pleasant atmosphere guides our expectations as to the course of events. The atmosphere of exceeding joy, peace and pleasantness that permeates *NFN* and *TEN* (*ATA* is set in the 19th century), not only reflects the state of mind of the characters but most importantly reveals the two writers' message- that of by getting rid of inequalities, classes and injustices, people can really build up a dream-like ideal society. As concerns *ATA*, even if not set in an idealized setting

but rather in the 19th century, the pervading tonality fosters in the reader expectations as to the happy course of events.

3. A Plot Involving Magic

Among the choices the writer has to make in composing his text is the structure of action used to dramatize his theme. Whatever he wishes to communicate, he will have to cast it in terms of action. This dramatization of the theme through a given structure of action is what we call “plot”, which is the backbone of a story and which enables the writer to achieve his purpose.

In the romances under study, the narrative has an episodic plot structure and presents a number of episodes which, put together, form a single narrative about the same central character, Guest and Mr. Homos. Howells, following this model, has chosen in *TEN* to narrate his episodes through letters written, in Part I, by Mr. Homos to his friend in Altruria, and in, Part II, by his wife, Eveleth, to her American friend Mrs. Makely. Unlike *ATA*, and more like *TEN* (which consists of letters), the events in *NFN* can be ordered in a way other than that set by Morris. The chapters can be ordered in another way; this will not alter the coherence of the Romance, because what imports most is the discussion brought about by the events which constitute both a critique of the 19th century and a presentation of the views of the author on some topics.

The aim of the two writers is not to achieve an artistic coherent entity formed necessarily and indispensably by these different episodes. The writers do not attempt to establish a clear sequence of beginning, middle and end- and do

not set out to present a story which moves from the opening situation in the beginning, through the stages of complication, conflict and climax in the middle, to a resolution in the end. None of the characteristics of the conventional Victorian ethical plot, made up of exposition, rising action (complication), climax, turning point (moral crisis), falling action, and denouement (resolution), are to be found in their works. The latter are romances in which there is a minimal plot, with a single story telling about one character's experiences.

For their purpose, which was to expose the ordeals of their epoch and provide solutions, Howells and Morris used the romance; therefore, they did not need several sequences of events or the experiences of the several characters to be logically and consistently interwoven so as not to endanger the unity of the whole.

Nevertheless, as self-respecting writers who intended to give their fictional creation at least a semblance of coherence, they had to impose an order of some sort on their material, because a totally unordered listing of events or scraps of dialogue would simply be chaotic and meaningless and affect their purpose. That is why we can see in their romances an attempt to order events chronologically through the journey of both heroes Guest and Traveler. These events occur within the frame of a day (breakfast, lunch, dinner), despite the different importance given to each one of the moments of that day. For example in *NFN*, half the romance is spent in a discussion with Old Hammond which occurs between breakfast time and lunch time, while only one sentence deals with dinner.

However, in *TEN* there is no chronological order of any sort. The story is but events told by Eveleth to her friend Mrs. Makely in the form of letters and in the way she recalls the events. These elements give the impression of a suspended time sequence lending the romance a mysterious character.

Romances do not give much importance to details. Once again what counts is the purpose of the writer. The reader is often left without answers or fuller details, as is the case with the issue of education on which there is no fuller explanation on how it should be organized. All we know is that no form of constraint must be exercised on children (p73). Many other things are left ambiguous and without answers; many circumstances remain inexplicable, like the fact that old Hammond was not curious enough about where Guest came from (p94). We are only told that he believes that he is a native of another planet (p98). There are no details given about “force vehicles” which is a new means of transport (p169). Nor are we told about how Mr. Twelvemough came to know the Altrurian. All we know is that it is through friends. We don’t know also in which place of America the events take place. It is only specified that it is in the country-side in a luxury hotel for the bourgeois middle class.

Moreover, there is no suspense. Suspense is caused by the plot which raises questions in the reader’s mind and appeals to his curiosity as well as to his hopes and fears for the characters’ fate and for the outcome of the events¹¹. Nevertheless, Howells, the Realist, tries to create a semblance of suspense with the character of Mrs. Strange whom we know at the beginning only through others characters’ statements about her. This increases our enthusiasm to meet

her in the romance and finally to hear her speak. However, nothing of the anxious uncertainty about the future course of events is felt, probably because real suspense is based on verisimilitude (an imitation of life-like situations), and on causality which are absent in the genre. This lack of suspense may perhaps be endeavoured by the writers to help the reader feel the serenity and comfortable security of Nowhere and Altruria, as part of their writing strategy.

Significantly, William Morris, unlike Howells, avoided the trap of the conventional happy ending. The protagonist was not able to solve all the problems, but he has managed to sort out a few things and is now moving in a promising direction ¹². In his romance there is no marriage (happy end marriage) as in Howells's romance. In fact there is no marriage between these two totally different worlds, between the world of dream and the real world. Ellen, as well as the others, seems to tell Guest to go away and that he is not one of them. On the other hand Howells seems to be more enthusiastic about America.

The external action simply provides the frame work for the story and sets in motion the character's train of thought, free to wander freely in time and space.

4. Characterization: Symbolical Figures and Types

Characters indeed, are useful and even indispensable in the articulation of the plot. In fact, characters in a narrative work are fictional representations. They may remain essentially stable, i.e. unchanged in their outlook and dispositions, throughout the course of the narrative, or they may go through various degrees of

change. Irrespective of whether a character remains stable or undergoes some change, he is not credible as a character unless he shows consistency in his behaviour.

As seen earlier in this chapter, the essential difference between the novel and the romance lies in the conception of characterization in which the author does not attempt to describe 'real' men and women in 'real' situations. In fact, in *ATA*, *TEN* and *NFN*, the writers, faithful to the spirit and distinctive characteristics of the romance, created characters which are rather types. Types are easily recognized when they appear, and easily remembered by the reader afterwards, whereas round characters, in the novel, cannot be placed so easily because they are so many-faceted. In fact, these characters are only vehicles by means of which all the most interesting questions are raised; they exist only to serve some particular function. For example, in *News from Nowhere*, each character serves to introduce a given idea. Dick, the waterman and the narrator's companion all along the story¹³ is used solely to illuminate Guest's queries along his journey. So is generally the role of the other characters of the story. Dick's friend (the mathematician and weaver, Bob) role is limited to asking awkward questions, which will give the narrator the opportunity to expound some of his views on the 19th century and in particular about the ugly buildings invading nature(p21). Later in the romance (p61), we are introduced to Clara who is Dick's beloved, and through the conduct of whom Morris tackles the theme of love, marriage and divorce. When Clara joins the narrator and Dick, she did not even greet Guest (the narrator), which is the evidence that the author does not give

much importance to the relational side of his characters. Walter Allen, too, another friend of Dick, serves only to introduce the theme of death by violence (p71). Boffin (whose real name is Henry Johnson) serves to show that in Nowhere personality is respected. Boffin dresses showily, and his friends jest with him about this fact; but they respect this trait of character in him. Apart from the fact that he likes wearing showy clothes, we know nothing about his personality. There is no psychological in-depth analysis of character. Boffin serves also to show that Nowhere is egalitarian since he is both a dustman and a novel-writer.

In fact, instead of experimenting with devices proper to the novel characterization, like stream of consciousness and other devices, Morris puts forward what the narrator feels and thinks, his ideas and views, through discussions, verbal exchanges and chattering all along the story. This is how the reader is informed about the character's feelings and motivations.

Some characters are entirely anonymous: they are mere ideas. The woman of forty two who looks twenty does not have a name. Through her Morris wants to suggest that in his Nowhere ideal society people keep young, beautiful and healthy (p25). The children in the booth (p44) do not have names either; they are used to introduce the theme of education. The old man who accompanied them from their little shopping to Bloomsbury (p46) introduces a discussion on the bourgeois idleness of the 19th century. Nothing is said about him, not even about his physical appearance, except that he is an old man.

In Howells's romance, characters have no psychological in-depth either. They don't even bear names, (unlike Morris's work). They are only designated by their profession, as banker, minister, lawyer, doctor, professor of political economy and retired manufacturer. They are voices rather than individualized characters. The poor farmer family (p59/60) and the young mother with her five children in the country-side, whom the Altrurian met in the American country-side, are here only to show the degree of poverty of the American farmers and peasants in 19th century America, and to display the complacency of the rich towards them. Mr. Twelvemough, the narrator (who is wealthy), enjoys himself by throwing them some coins which the children receive with great eagerness. Other characters in the story come and go, as in *NFN*. They appear once and disappear from the story. Mrs. Bulkham, for example (p144), just says that the rich are greedy and not at all interested in the Altrurian's Talk. One of the guests once speaks about American manners, and the eating habits which are mostly English (p49), however we know nothing at all about him. He is only a means used by Howells to put forward this idea. He is only described as the "facetious gentleman". Mrs. Gray (Eveleth mother) (p79), represents the old generation of Americans who lived happily and did not know what a beggar meant. The anonymous murderer (p121) raises the question of punishment and prison.

Technically, however, Howells's characters are, on the whole, more individualized than Morris's. There are more details about them in their manners, way of speaking and sometimes about their psychology. This is certainly due to the fact that Howells belongs to the Realist School and wants to be the nearest to

reality even in his romance ¹⁴. The way the banker speaks reveals this side of Howells: “said the banker, breaking off the ash of his cigar with the end of his little finger (p31). The lawyer speaks “putting his feet together in a way he had” (p44). Mrs. Makely’s psychology is comparatively more profound than that of the other characters. The reader feels she is the comfortable American middle class lady, full of prejudices but with a good heart. In Part I, the reader comes to know better Mr. Homos, who is no longer the strange character described by Mr. Twelvemough in *ATA*. But there are some indications about what and how he feels and thinks. In this part of the romance he is indeed the narrator, which makes us curious about the way the two writers tell their stories, that is, about the kind of point of view they both use.

5. Point of View: A Trustworthy Narrator

There are many ways of telling a story. Generally speaking we can recognize three ways. One through an omniscient narrator who moves from character to character and from event to event, having free access to the motivation, thoughts and feelings of the character, and introducing information to the reader when and where he chooses. The second one is called the “limited point of view”, in which the (third-person) narrator confines himself to what is experienced, thought and felt by a single character, or at most by a very limited number of characters within the story. The third way is through the first-person point of view, where the story is told by the narrator in the first person “I”. The narrator may be the

protagonist, a minor participant in the story or a fortuitous witness of the matters related.

Among these many ways of telling a story and the one which, for Morris and Howells, suits best their overall purposes, is the first person narrator point of view. It seems in this case to be the most suitable type of narrator from whose point of view the story is told. They both opted for a dramatized narrator who is a character in the story and who is involved in the action. What Twelvemough in *ATA*, Traveler and Eveleth in *TEN* and Guest in *NFN*, know, experience and feel control everything. Through this, despite the genre, the illusion of reality is strengthened. Another important feature about the first person narrator is that it tends, on the whole, to be more intimate and more engaging than the third person narrator. As readers, indeed, we tend to identify more easily with the narrator's experiences if he offers us his own and personal revelations. He is a trustworthy narrator and directs our feelings and our general appreciation of events.

In *NFN*, *ATA*, *TEN*, Morris and Howells use one of the characters as their mouthpiece. They use the first person narrator "I" either as minor character as in *ATA* where the narrator, Mr. Twelvemough (Traveler's host), is more or less involved in the action and his point of view is that of an observer or a witness. Or as a major character as in *NFN* and *TEN*, where the first person narrator is not just used as a simple witness of the events he relates, nor as a minor or peripheral participant in the story, but as the central character of the story. He not only reports but freely comments on the characters (Part I of *TEN*, Traveler comments on the American way of life, in Part II it is Eveleth, his wife, who comments on

the Altrurians), and evaluates the characters' motives. He expresses his views about human life in general and makes authoritative judgments.

William Morris and William Dean Howells used the prose literary devices in a way that enables the reader to identify their works as romances. Through a flat characterization, mysterious setting and atmosphere in addition to an episodic and unconventional plot structure, they created romances whose main aim was to put forward and in the clearest way possible their message.

END NOTES:

¹ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*. (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p305.

² It revived in the period we call Romantic as part of the Romantic tendency to archaic feudalism and a cult of the hero, or idealized libido. This is perhaps too the reason why Morris, known for his strong interest and leaning to the medieval period, has chosen the romance form.

The romance which deals with heroes, is intermediate between the novel, which deals with men, and the myth, which deals with gods. Prose romance first appears as a late development of Classical mythology, and the prose Sagas of Iceland follow close on the mythical Eddas. The novel tends rather to expand into a fictional approach to history.

Northrop Frye. *Op.cit*, p306.

³ *Ibid.* p 306.

⁴ *Ibid.* p 306.

⁵ William Dean Howells, "Novel-Writing and Novel-Reading: An Impersonal Explanation" (1899). In this same article Howells says that: "by beauty of course I mean truth, for the one involves the other, it is only the false in art which is ugly, and it is only the false which is immoral. From Prof. Derek.P.Royal ENG442- Survey of American Literature II.

<http://faculty.tamu-commrce.edu/droyal/Howells%20excerpts.doc>.

⁶ Northrop Frye. *Op.cit*, p304.

⁷ *Ibid.* p 306.

⁸ *Ibid.* p 305.

⁹ *Ibid.* p 304.

¹⁰ Part of the setting is the physical background (the landscape and scenery), part of it is the whole environment in which the events occur (the climate, the customs of the country, the historical period intellectual and cultural life, social levels, the general standards of living and so on). Part of the setting may also be formed by people, such as the members of the social class in whose circles the protagonist moves.

¹¹ M.H, Abrams. *A Glossary for Literary Terms*. (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1981), p138

¹² Curiously, Morris, at times, seems to be more realistic than Howells. In addition to his avoiding the convention of the happy ending (to which Howells succumbs, perhaps because of his optimistic American mind), some other elements, in his romance, show Morris's realistic, or perhaps more reasonable

side. An example is with the weather. While Morris only imagines a constant beautiful weather, Howells goes as far as imagining a process by which the Altrurians have completely modify their weather, seasons and continent. (*ATA* p160)

^{13.} In *NFN* and in *ATA*, the protagonist has a companion all along the story (it is one of the characteristics of the romance, too).

^{14.} Many descriptions in *ATA* and *TEN* show Howells's belonging to the Realist School.

CONCLUSION

In this work which is a comparative study between the two utopian romances: William Morris's *News from Nowhere* and William Dean Howells's *A Traveler from Altruria*, with its sequel *Through the Eye of the Needle*, I have tried to show the contribution of both writers to 19th century social thought, and to analyse the solutions they propose.

Assessing the contribution of Morris and Howells is not an easy task. They served as a bridge between the Romantics, with their moral revulsion against industrialism, on the one hand, and the Marxist revolutionaries of the late 19th century and early 20th century, on the other hand. Both writers see in equality a desirable characteristic, which leads them to imagine societies based essentially on Egalitarian principles. They eagerly desire to put an end to the inequalities of their respective capitalistic societies. Howells and Morris condemn the existing "stratification" of society into "rich" and "poor". For them the evils of private property are to be removed by the establishment of egalitarian distributive principles and by the elimination of the competitive exploitative principles governing their society. The *laissez-faire* ideas will be replaced in their eyes by doctrines of co-operation and benevolence, in opposition to doctrines of individualistic *laissez-faire* and cut-throat competition. In their utopias they propose economic solutions which regulate consumption and make the

necessities of life readily available. In their utopias, they often identify the contradictions of incipient capitalism with misdirection of the economy and underutilization of resources, implying that an improvement in productive methods alone would provide enough for all, and create a situation of abundance.

The conversion of work into play is an ideal solution to the problem of work and need, conceived by Fourier and heartily adopted by both Morris and Howells. In fact, the adoption of this concept justifies their leaning towards an agrarian society, because they see pleasure only in working in the fields, which in fact, is the logical reaction to their contemporary industrial conditions which were unbearable for the workers. This leads the two writers to think of another way of organizing society, economically and socially, through an agrarian agricultural mode. For them, farming provides the best socio-economic organization. It brings more pleasure than other modes of employment. Moreover, it provides continual novelty and challenges to the mind, therefore meeting the physical need of the body, allowing it fuller and richer expression. They see in this pleasurable work a way of creative expression too and this explains their interest in art and more particularly popular art. For them, their prevailing organization of economic life has produced misery and vulgarity. Art reflects the health of a society. If a society is healthy, its art will be beautiful; if it is ill, its art will be ugly and vulgar. For them, industry killed artistic creativity, and in its frenetic run towards gain has discarded, if not killed the slow, peaceful and careful creation of the artisan, thus, destroying beauty and wiping it out of the general environment. Therefore for them, by getting rid of the capitalistic

materialistic 19th century *laissez-faire* spirit, they will put an end to the social inequalities. In a like manner, work will change from an obligatory hard toil into a truly pleasurable activity taking place mainly in the fields, allowing people the full expression of their sense of beauty and creativity.

We have seen that Morris drew much of his philosophical inspiration in *News from Nowhere* from Ruskin, whilst it was Marx's ideology which influenced his political agenda and his claim for a classless society. The architecture of *Nowhere* represented a criticism of industrialized 19th century society and an advocacy of the craft techniques of the Middle Ages. He, like Howells, believed that the production of architecture might serve to re-engage the population with the land and avoid the division of labour which Ruskin despised so much. Taking ideas from apparently separate areas of thought, they produced an original and engaging analysis of society. Their synthesis, in turn, led to further artistic, literary and political movements.

The theory of Cultural Materialism of Raymond Williams has allowed us to analyze the works and to contextualize them within their own time period. But it has further enabled us to link the authors' ideas with present day concerns such as globalization, ecology and world famine, and thus, to affirm the permanence and pertinence of these 19th century utopian works.

In fact, their influence upon 20th and 21st century thought is great. Utopian thinking is still attractive because utopias in general hold up a mirror to the fears and aspirations of the time in which they are written, and that is what makes utopianism always in fashion. In the era in which we live, with greater concern

for issues of environment, a link between Morris's and Howells's ideas and environmentalism or ecology, can be established. Their contribution to a more ecological world is important and apparent. Through their detailed description of the social organization, economy and government of what a small, decentralized society would be, as well as through its landscape, they both sought to achieve a more ecological world by changing the prevalent political, economic and social ideas which nurtured capitalistic frenzy. These changes if brought into any society will allow more consideration not only to the community but also nature.

From their realization of the interrelation of art and society, too, spring some interesting ecological ideas. Therefore, the simplicity of life style, of harmony with nature, of the quality of work and the importance of art, are all themes which can help understand the continuity and permanence of many ecological problems. What they meant by art was not just what could be defined by a narrow use of the word, but all type of human enterprise, the production of human artifact. In a profit-making system, goods may not be of high quality and can never be of the highest quality possible, as profit has to be made and competition imposes its laws. Consequently much work is devoted to unproductive tasks, so that a great deal of surplus wealth is produced. This for Morris and Howells is waste, and prevents the production of goods of real value. William Morris believed in the necessity for goods to be of the highest possible quality, so that they could last for as long as possible (which also minimizes the ecological damage involved in their production). They would also be beautiful

and satisfying to make, so as to allow for individual human expression. This can be considered as a real ecological idea.

The advantages of such a society, are also good health, freedom from diseases, from poverty and from surfeit, an important point from the perspective of the human food chain (eating habit), both in Britain and America and elsewhere. Both thinkers insist that with the abolition of surplus value, food would become more abundant and be of higher quality.

The unpolluted and pleasant environment of small communities, with their pleasant workshops, clear air and water, decent housing, gardens, fields and woods is also at a premium. It is in *News from Nowhere* and in *A Traveler from Altruria* (more particularly *Through the Eyes of the Needle*) that these ideas are fully developed. Most manufacturing is performed in small workshops, where goods are made mainly by hand. There has been a great revival of craft skills, and the decorative art. Machines are still used but only as a labour-saving device. William Morris hints at, but does not explicitly describe, the widespread use of both wind and water power and of electricity, whereas Howells mentions it explicitly. Thus clean energy is to be preferred.

It is the removal of surplus production which enables the societies of *Nowhere* and *Altruria* to lighten the pressure exerted upon the natural environment, and thus, to make for the realization of a truly ecological society because no resources are wasted.

Morris and Howells are probably aware of the effects of these changes on the ecosystems. They are also aware of the fact that woods and forests allow a

definite improvement in the quality of air and the water in the rivers. The clarity of the water in the Thames and in the Altrurian rivers lead us to suggest that there are not only less polluting factories, but also more forests and woods.

Thus, it is clear that both Morris and Howells recognized the importance of nature for the well-being of the human psyche. In this line of thought comes their claim for the establishment of an agrarian economy. Because of the food crisis which is lurking behind this extensive use of agrarian product for other purposes than edible ones, their claim for agrarianism is very relevant today in 2008. Fruits and vegetables are used in the production of oil which serves only industrial purposes, therefore creating a dearness of fruits and vegetables and a shortage of staple agricultural products such as corn, rice, sugar.. etc and which might lead to a world wide food crisis.

Moreover, today's issue of "globalization" has created a situation comparable to yesterday's industrialism and laissez-faire liberal economy which were making the rich richer and the poor poorer. In the case of "globalization" we can no longer speak of poor people and poor classes, but of entire poor nations. As industrialism divided countries in terms of class, alienating whole social categories, "globalization" is likely to divide the whole world into poor and rich nations. Thus, Morris's and Howells's standing against inegalitarianism, and their feverish defense of egalitarianism and agrarianism seemed to predict their application on today's broader and larger international scale. Our "dystopic" age, therefore, allows us to observe the permanence of Morris's and Howells's utopian ideals and to assert both their modernity and universality. By imagining

these “utopian” societies, Morris and Howells certainly pinpointed to their contemporaries what was wrong in their society. But they above all showed them that a better future life is possible. More than a dream-like life *News from Nowhere* and *A Traveler from Altruria* offer the reader hope, a vision.

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News -) -William Morris-

-William Dean Howells- (from Nowhere)

- ATraveler from Alturia, Through the Eye of the Needle-
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- Raymond Williams -

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"The Egalitarian Land "

" The Agrarian Garden" "

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Of Beauty And Soul "

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