

WILLIAM MORRIS AND THE GREENING OF SCIENCE

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How green was William Morris? The prevalence of natural settings and motifs in Morris's work, as well as his affiliation with early preservationist groups like the Kyrle and Commons Preservation Societies, have made him a likely subject for eco-critical reappraisal. In her influential essay on "Morris the Red and Morris the Green," Florence Boos stresses the abiding relevance of Morris's distinction between "that kindly struggle with nature, to which all true craftsmen are born," and the more aggressive and dominating "striving to attain a complete mastery over Nature" characteristic of capitalist, utilitarian attitudes towards the nonhuman (29). Yet in a provocative reconsideration of Morris the Green, Sara Wills urges caution in applying contemporary eco-critical terms to Morris, arguing that "there was nothing 'eco-centric' about Morris if being 'eco-centric' means caring for landscape, plants and animals more than, or even as much as, caring for human life; or even if it means putting the whole 'eco-system' above its human parts" (140). Although the nuances of Morris's critique of human dominance resist easy assimilation to contemporary eco-critical terms, this may in large part be attributed to the ways in which his diverse concerns reach across arbitrary divisions between issues later demarcated exclusively red or green. Indeed, in the diverse connections and fellowships made during the 1870s and '80s, Morris came to develop a critique of modernity which saw past the artificial divisions between exclusively human and nonhuman concerns.

In his autobiography *My Days and Dreams*, Morris's friend and fellow socialist Edward Carpenter looks fondly back on the shared enthusiasm and sense of purpose amongst social activists in England during the early 1880s, a spirit which drew together a number of disparate groups: "Hyndman's Democratic Federation, Edmund Gurney's Society for Psychical Research, Mme. Blavatsky's Theosophical Society, the Vegetarian Society, the Anti-Vivisection