

**Planning Utopia: Control Over Women And Nature In  
Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, William Morris's *News From Nowhere*  
And M.P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud*.**

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B.A., University of Northern British Columbia, 2005

Thesis Submitted In Partial Fulfillment Of

The Requirements For The Degree Of

Master Of Arts

In

Interdisciplinary Studies

The University of Northern British Columbia

July 2008

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*Your file    Votre référence*

*ISBN: 978-0-494-48762-4*

*Our file    Notre référence*

*ISBN: 978-0-494-48762-4*

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### ABSTRACT

Nineteenth-century utopian British literature often articulates the ideal of a society of equals, but it also evinces the problem of control over women and nature. In order to deal with this contradiction, I examine three novels from key moments in the development of utopian fiction. As case studies, I have chosen Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, William Morris's *News from Nowhere*, and M.P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* because each novel evaluates utopian potential as occurring through revolution and enacted by social and city planning. I analyze their representations of prophecy, control over women, and control over nature. While these utopian novels imagine utopia as an alternative to capitalism, I find that capitalist impulses remain in the novels, undermining their articulations of utopia.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First, I would like to thank The University of Northern British Columbia, and particularly, the English department, for providing me with a challenging atmosphere in which to learn and faculty members who have taken the time to offer critical support and feedback. In particular, I have appreciated the members of my thesis committee: Dr. Kristen Guest, Dr. Kevin Hutchings, and Dr. Ted Binnema. While Dr. Hutchings and Dr. Binnema have profoundly influenced my academic development over the years I have studied at UNBC, I would especially like to thank them for providing invaluable feedback on my thesis. Having an extraordinary thesis supervisor makes graduate work much more enjoyable: thanks Dr. Guest for taking me on as a graduate student and teaching me how to be an academic. I am grateful for all the effort she has put into enabling my growth as a student. Finally, I greatly appreciate and thank my spouse Lee Yee for her encouragement and support throughout the process of my thesis work.

### Introduction:

Utopia, which means both a good place and no place, is an expression of an ideal form of society aimed at correcting social inequality. Raymond Williams argues that the ideal of a simpler and rural England was inspired by the Christian concept of the Garden of Eden and the Classical idea of the Golden Age, which together Williams sees as an articulation of “a primitive community, a primitive communism” (42). Fredric Jameson also argues that religious discourse conveyed the desire for community. Religion operated as an evocation of collective unity, which he argues is the basis of utopian thinking (“Unconscious” 70). Furthermore, he argues that religion offered a precapitalist model that imagined “the wholeness of the older organic society” (“Unconscious” 252). As society became increasingly secular, European cultures began to replace previous religious articulations of political hope with scientific ones. In doing so, they shifted the focus from the spiritual to the material.

The Christian tradition advances egalitarianism, but it also evinces a conflicting, and perhaps unconscious, focus on control over women and nature. This control over women and nature is implicitly embedded in the Bible and in millenarian discourse. As historian Carolyn Merchant argues, the domination of women and nature was evident in early modern<sup>1</sup> religious commentary, primarily in Genesis and the Pauline epistles, in which literalist interpretations led to the idea that women and nature should be subservient to men and God (146-148). Although Merchant is referring to early modern commentary, the biblical texts themselves, if read literally, seem to advance male

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<sup>1</sup> The OED defines modernity as “An intellectual tendency or social perspective characterized by departure from or repudiation of traditional ideas, doctrines, and cultural values in favour of contemporary or radical values and beliefs (chiefly those of scientific rationalism and liberalism).” Modernity is the period following the Middle Ages. It should be distinguished from Modernism, which is an early twentieth-century cultural movement.

dominance over women and nature. Nineteenth-century utopian discourse downplayed or eliminated the religious focus of millenarianism. Instead of expressing a culmination of spiritual desire, utopian discourse suggested an earthly fulfillment. That said, utopian discourse maintained the structural or narrative form of millenarianism, which I call the millenarian model. The millenarian model is a process of prophecy, apocalypse, and (new) community. In addition to the millenarian structure, utopian discourse also retained the desire to control women and nature. Science replaces religion as the justification, or inspiration, for the utopian impulse, but the culture continued to use the millenarian model because it was a useful vehicle for articulating the desire for social change.

While expressions of utopia and the desire to control women and nature predate modernity, several scholars have argued that the rise of science and capitalism have led to further control over women and nature. Carolyn Merchant argues that the view of the Earth as a “nurturing mother” gave way to a rationalized and mechanized ideology of control over “female” nature via science and capitalist production, particularly in early modern culture (2). As aforementioned, the desire for social equality predated the rise of capitalism; however, the rise of capitalism led to a persistent desire to find an alternative to capitalism, particularly among utopian thinkers and writers because they saw capitalism as the embodiment of social inequality, especially following the industrial revolution. Using utopian narratives, socialism developed as an alternative to capitalism. Scholar of utopianism, Krishan Kumar, argues that Socialism “is an ‘active utopia’ whose terms clarify the main intent and promise of modern society. Socialism takes the slogan ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’ and shows what would need to be done to make these ideals a reality not just for the few but for the great mass of society” (97).

Socialism becomes a political alternative to capitalism during the nineteenth century, but a great deal of utopian literature is proto-socialist in its desire for community and equality. This thesis will examine three novels that follow a historical trajectory from a Romantic<sup>2</sup> influenced proto-socialism to Victorian socialism and finally a Modernist view of socialism akin to National Socialism. My analysis is on three key British novels that express the desire and vision for an ideal community: Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890-1891) and M.P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* (1901; revised 1929). While the nineteenth-century aspiration for an ideal community, an alternative to *laissez-faire* capitalism and unrestrained industrialization, led to narratives of improvement, the idea of progressive change is not borne out by literary representations of utopian thinking. Although the novels I am studying subvert mainstream (capitalist) ideologies, they do not lead to ever-improving utopian fiction and, therefore, they do not become increasingly realizable or equitable. Following the failure of revolution to enact utopia during the Romantic period, Mary Shelley's novel illustrates the problem of control over women and nature in Romantic discourse. She does this by showing how women are imagined as both the problem and the solution to social inequality in utopian rhetoric by illustrating the two models (coercive force or ideological persuasion) for achieving utopia as conveyed by masculinist impulses. Mirroring Mary Shelley's concerns, William Morris and M.P. Shiel envision achieving

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<sup>2</sup> While J.A. Cuddon argues that the definitions of Romanticism vary wildly, he notes eight common aspects of Romanticism: "(a) an increasing interest in Nature, and in the natural, primitive and uncivilized way of life; (b) a growing interest in scenery, especially its more untamed and disorderly manifestations; (c) an association of human moods with the 'moods' of Nature – and thus a subjective feeling for it and interpretation of it; (d) a considerable emphasis on natural religion; (e) emphasis on the need for spontaneity in thought and action and in the expression of thought; (f) increasing importance attached to natural genius and the power of the imagination; (g) a tendency to exalt the individual and his needs and emphasis on the need for a freer and more personal expression; (h) the cult of the Noble Savage" (769-770).



the solution to social inequality by exercising control over women and nature through ideology and force, respectively. I am interested in the depictions of related concerns regarding the achievement of utopia through control over nature and women via social and city planning. I have chosen these particular texts as representative case studies because Mary Shelley writes her novel following the failure of utopia as articulated by the Romantics, and her insights about control over women and nature remain prescient as utopian discourse develops. Shelley (1797-1851) critiques the masculine bias and egotism of Romantic discourse, while Morris (1834-1896) envisions a neo-Romantic discourse in a late Victorian context through an egalitarian model of social relations, and Shiel (1865-1947) uses neo-Romanticism while advocating straightforward control over women and nature. I have also chosen these three novels because they represent key moments in this desire for change. From her late Romantic vantage point, Mary Shelley expresses her evaluation of the unrealized attempts at utopian socialism in the Romantic era. In the process of offering her interpretation of Romanticism, she also influences neo-Romanticism. William Morris represents the culmination of early Victorian social reform advanced by thinkers such as Thomas Carlyle (1795-1891) and John Ruskin (1819-1900). Shiel continues the discourse of a Romantic-influenced utopian socialism through the lens of the *fin de siècle* and into the Modernist period. Thus, each novel works as a touchstone for developments in utopian socialism, especially as influenced by both Romanticism and idealism.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Idealism refers to philosophies that focus on ideas as the following quotations from the Oxford English Dictionary (online) define. Idealism is “Any system of thought or philosophy in which the object of external perception is held to consist, either in itself, or as perceived, of ideas” and idealism also implies “The practice of idealizing or tendency to idealize; the habit of representing things in an ideal form, or as they might be; imaginative treatment of a subject in art or literature; ideal style or character: opp. to *realism*. Also, aspiration after or pursuit of an ideal.”

Utopian fiction provides an outlet for ways to envision improvements to society by expressing a desire for (or fear of) something that does not yet exist. Rhetorical reconfigurations of society are presented by the utopian himself or herself, or the utopian subject receives a spiritually inspired vision. In each case, the utopian subject articulates or transmits a narrative imagining the present (and corrupted) society renewed: the society becomes an ideal community. The utopian writer focuses on the collective because the ideal requires unity. Collective human destiny has always been the central concern of utopian thought, but the nineteenth-century context of increasing individualism heightened the desire for community. It is within this context of imaginative communal progress that nineteenth-century thinkers and writers attempted to make change.

European culture has evinced a high degree of interest in apocalypse and millennium, but by the nineteenth century, ideas of secularism and progress enabled a vision of utopia in the here and now. In the eighteenth century, secular thinkers such as G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) advocated a model of historical progression through stages culminating in the coming millennium seemingly enacted by the French Revolution. Following the French Revolution's failure to enact the new millennium, Marxism developed as the next major model of revolutionary utopianism. Because of the millenarian focus of European culture, each attempt to deal with the possibilities and pitfalls of modernity led to the production of revolutionary rhetoric, action, and literature. Thinkers such as Hegel and Marx wanted to resolve the problems associated with modernity. Millenarianism provided the perfect model for articulating these desires, especially since millenarianism culminates in utopia. Along with millenarianism, as a

means of giving meaning to their political hopes, these thinkers appropriated the idea of religious faith. Therefore, followers could have faith in secular visions rather than spiritual ones. Above all, millenarianism provided a heuristic for understanding the arc of history and narratives in general. Historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth century explicitly practiced millenarian historiography when they “conceived of history as a grand continuous story – and often a history of inexorable progress, at that” (Balfour 16). Romantic and Victorian writers used the millennial form because it helped to resolve anxieties about the makeup of society, enabling their audiences to work through these problems in a fictional context. The novels each provide a narrative of linear progression from prophecy to apocalypse, which culminates in a (new) community. The literary texts examined in this thesis employ the teleological form provided by millenarian rhetoric. They only differ from each other in the ways in which they imagine the attainment of their utopian “solutions.”

In its religious form, the millenarian model’s teleological narrative culminates in a utopian fulfillment of a New Heaven, New Earth, and New Jerusalem following suffering via an apocalypse. The millenarian model is archetypal. Interdependent religious, historical, and literary articulations replicate this archetype. In religious, historical, and literary contexts, the prophecy sets the stage for the apocalypse. It also offers an interpretation of coming events that become important in the construction of the post-apocalyptic (new) community. The prophecy foretells the apocalypse and the (new) community, making events meaningful through a historical and divinely sanctioned narrative and process. Therefore, the prophetic mode gives weight to the political concerns of the prophet-seer who sees the potential for disaster or the inevitability of

disaster and provides alternatives either to avoid disaster or to limit or lessen it.<sup>4</sup>

Apocalypse is the expression of disaster in the millenarian tradition. It is a literary mode of communication with clear aims and associations. While disaster is a key element of apocalypse, it is not the aim, as “the whole conception of apocalypse has to do with a revelation of ultimate truths” (Paley 2). Importantly, the seer communicates his or her vision through “images and words” – it is not a “pure spiritual transmission” (2-3). The seer’s method of communication underscores the interpretive and cultural processes involved in understanding apocalypse. The fictional author<sup>5</sup> provides this role as seer in the novel through the medium of language, highlighting the fact that the spiritual message requires interpretation, and supplementation through the relationship between the reader and the text.<sup>6</sup> The means by which the prophet receives and interprets the prophecy becomes important to the understanding of that text. The apocalyptic process reveals how authors can imagine destruction and rebirth as a way to discuss anxieties and resolve them, as the new and reformed replaces the old, culminating in an imagined New Jerusalem or an imagined utopia.

Millennial rhetoric in novels that express anxieties about social and state inequalities can be analyzed to reveal the role of systematic social and city planning. As I will argue throughout this thesis, nineteenth-century articulations of both social and city planning derive from millenarian narratives and narratives of control over women and

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<sup>4</sup> Prophecy reflects the political realities of the period in which it is articulated. This political aspect exists in the Old Testament apocalyptic narrative in *The Book of Daniel* (hereafter referred to *Daniel*) as well as the New Testament’s *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (hereafter referred to as *Revelation*).

<sup>5</sup> The fictional author is a construction of the actual author of the text that allows the author to create a sense of realism by providing a seemingly logical scenario for coming across the narrative itself. Often, but not in any of the novels I am studying in this thesis, the actual author presents himself or herself as the “editor” of the novel.

<sup>6</sup> See Tilottama Rajan’s *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* for a discussion of this interpretive relationship (30).

nature; and, as reformers situated the potential for progress in the rationalization of women, the lower classes, and the landscape (especially the wilds), the conjunction between religious discourses traditionally concerned with controlling women and nature merged with (scientific and masculinist) social and city planning. Through the logic of modernity, the hegemonic cultural view of women and nature became such that they were seen as irresponsible, impulsive, or “wild,” necessitating control over women and nature to realize the (masculinist) vision of utopian relations: compliance and restraint on the part of women and nature.

It would seem that those who advanced the masculinist vision did not necessarily consciously set out to restrict and control women; however, the focus on progress, as practiced in the eighteenth century, instead embodied the patriarchal bias of the culture. As the eighteenth-century focus on reason led to material and scientific progress, interest in further developing systematic attempts to control or modify the environment increased in the hopes that such change would allow humans to transcend their limitations. Changes to people’s everyday existence seemed inevitable – particularly to traditional institutions. Those advocating reform considered traditional society as archaic, unequal, and unenlightened. Such hopes not only encouraged eighteenth-century people to anticipate environmental and social changes, they also precipitated revolutionary activity leading to the French Revolution. The French Revolution was the major European millenarian revolution in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, espousing doctrines of freedom, equality, and equal land ownership.<sup>7</sup> For its advocates, the revolution was supposed to create an egalitarian society that other European countries could and would

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<sup>7</sup> While the French Revolution was a complex set of events that historians have not come to many agreements about, they acknowledge that the revolution occurred because of changing class realities: the rise of the middle class.

copy. Optimism about the French Revolution's effects suggested that science and reason would enable the creation of an earthly utopia, since advocates believed in the oppressive hierarchy's elimination. The focus on egalitarianism and on reason enabled a belief in the possibility of social reform. Successfully controlling the landscape would allow for the maximization of population and health as city planning developed over the century to deal with unhygienic and congested cities. If restructured space created new and better conditions of living and encouraged better (middle class) norms of social connections then true reform would occur.

Though often subtle, city planning and reform focus on the idea of human control. These largely utopian desires for equality and community transpired in the context of major social change. In nineteenth-century England, the realities of industrial expansion and the resulting land enclosures counterbalanced such optimism, making the utopian impulses of the French Revolution contrast with those of the industrial revolution. The related processes of industrialization and land enclosure led to displaced populations and substandard living conditions, as hastily built, and often makeshift, housing surrounded industries that used visibly polluting coal-based technologies. Though unhealthy or substandard conditions were evident in the past, the nineteenth century was different from previous centuries because of the extent and rapidity of the changes brought about by the unplanned expansion of cities and the lack of regulations imposed on industries. In order to deal with the problems of unregulated urban expansion, by the early Victorian period, planning models began to emerge.

The movement to create experimental or alternative communities was a response to the problems of urbanization and capitalism. This desire for an alternative community

was a natural outgrowth of literary and religious articulations of a perfect society, a utopia. Although such communities have historical precedents, the nineteenth century saw the rise of such experiments in unprecedented numbers. Planning historian Denis Hardy argues that alternative communities were conceived as “practical utopias” (1); despite this focus, however, “Apart from a few extravagant exceptions, it was commonly a story of the communities collapsing well before they had constructed either their physical or their social utopia” (13). Although there were many attempts to create alternative communities, most new communities were linked to mainstream development that Hardy characterizes as “unplanned collections of houses” illustrating the design principle that the maximum number of houses should be produced for the lowest cost (11). These unplanned communities, Hardy contends, “were communities only to the extent that wage-earners and their families were inextricably bound to their workplace in closely-knit local networks of dependency” (11).

The aforementioned effects of the industrial revolution, land enclosures, and the availability of employment not only made the unplanned community inevitable, but they also made charitable responses from industrialists inevitable. Some reform-minded industrialists recognized the direct connection between factory employment and poor living conditions<sup>8</sup> and they decided to create communities that modeled the link between employment and health.<sup>9</sup> Industrialists created these model communities mainly in the second half of the nineteenth century. While they were healthier places to live, residents were discouraged from questioning the *status quo* (11). Instead of fostering new social

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<sup>8</sup> See discussion of low wages and working conditions (151) in Michael Hugo-Brunt’s *The History of City Planning: A Survey*.

<sup>9</sup> George Cadbury and Titus Salt are two among many nineteenth-century British reform minded industrialists who made the connection between employment and health.

relations, model communities offered better living conditions in exchange for a positive relationship with the industrialists' workforce and reinforced qualities that ensured the perpetuation of capitalism with the industrialist's ultimate goal being the assumption of the feudal landlord role in an idealized village life reworked to reflect an industrialized context (11).<sup>10</sup>

Combining the contradictory motives of the alternative and the model community,<sup>11</sup> the Garden City movement began late in the nineteenth century. The Garden City's intended roles were the realization of the best of both the country and the city and the reintegration of nature within the urban. It was developed by Ebenezer Howard, who was inspired by the Columbia World's Fair of 1893 in Chicago. Utopian novels, such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000 – 1887* (1887) and William Morris's *News from Nowhere*, also influenced him. Despite a persistent faith in progress throughout the Victorian age, Britons associated nineteenth-century cities with increasingly negative images and the countryside with progressively better ones as recent migrants nostalgically longed for the better living conditions they remembered (or imagined as existing in) in the country.<sup>12</sup>

Apocalypse and millennium informs the discussion of city planning in the nineteenth century by providing a model for an ideal city. Attempts to produce New Jerusalems created a city that conforms to the groups' understanding of biblical notions of an ideal city. Creators of utopian cities developed and kept together their communities

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<sup>10</sup> Hardy argues that attempts to replace the capitalist system and create "community" dominate nineteenth-century discourse for reform (9).

<sup>11</sup> The alternative community is an alternative to a capitalist society while the model community reinforces but improves living conditions within a capitalist society.

<sup>12</sup> For a general discussion (of the British context) of nostalgia for the countryside and migration to the city see Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* (44-45, 54).



with tight controls, but in the nineteenth century, these controls extended to landscapes as well as people.<sup>13</sup> Imaginative depictions of apocalypse, millennium, and cities in the nineteenth century reflect these concerns. Central to this thesis is the connection between control over the landscape and control over people because of what it indicates about the role(s) of women. Since population-growth among the poor was a major concern and a cause for anxiety, controlling women would be a means to control both the poor and the environment. If women would produce fewer and “healthier” children, thinking went, then England would prosper. The connection between city planning and gender control is explicit in the ways that planners control the land in order to make it a productive garden, particularly considering the equation between women and nature evident in modernity.

Moreover, as Rita Felski argues:

The equation of woman with nature and tradition, already a commonplace of early modern thought, received a new impetus from the popularity of Darwinian models of evolutionary development, resulting in an explicit contrast between the striving restless masculinity and an organic, nondifferentiated femininity. In the late nineteenth century, scientific theory repeatedly sought to demonstrate women’s lower position on the evolutionary chain, with their development being invariably compared to that of children or savages. (Felski 39-40)

Since scientific theory exposed the supposed evolutionary inadequacy of women and the lower classes, control became necessary to create utopia. Their inferior position revealed

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<sup>13</sup> James Holstun argues that utopian literature as far back as Plato’s *Republic* (circa 380 BC) evinces the desire to control the population in order to create utopia (36). While Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* (1627) advocates the modification of animals, the nineteenth century version of the desire for control differs in its scope and interest because of the influence of Darwinian thought. So, nineteenth-century thinkers imagined the environment producing a particular type of person. The preoccupation with evolution and devolution (or regression) has become common among Victorian scholars.

their lack of capability: “unenlightened” as reformers thought them to be, they required the paternalistic control of social and city planning. Importantly, the connection here is not about control in general, as all societies have forms of social control. Rather, the need for control is specifically necessary to create a utopian alternative to capitalism. While the dominant focus is on anti-capitalism, the discourse of control illustrates the gender and class biases implicit in early socialism, which, by the late nineteenth century, begins to focus on biological production and controlling the race (eugenics). Thus, paternalistic control is necessary because of a belief in the tendency among women and the masses to behave in irresponsible and self-destructive ways.

These historical impulses for control become part of the millenarian narrative in its focus on the new community that follows the apocalypse and subsequent rebirth. The expression of the community is importantly both human and a built environment, a city, biblically the New Jerusalem. The desire for a community that reflects unity, and is not limited by nature or material concerns, highlights the hope for humanity to be in control of its surroundings. Moreover, it offers to place humanity harmoniously in – and in control of – nature (and women). The Christian tradition, inspired by *Revelation*, presents precisely this desire, hope, and vision.<sup>14</sup> Christian millenarianisms vary in the degree to which they represent human action as achieving the millennium. However, Morton Paley distinguishes between the form of millenarianism that is “dramatically inaugurated by the Second Coming of Christ” and the form in which there is “the belief that history, under

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<sup>14</sup> The millennium is, as *Revelation* 20 suggests, a time of equality. *Revelation*, was written in response to Roman persecution of a religious minority and it advocates resistance to Roman dominance with the ultimate reward of becoming saints who will rule alongside Christ (McGinn 32). John advocated a passive resistance to the Roman Empire. In addition, the link between politics and apocalypse is not out of place; instead, even the earliest forms of apocalyptic writing deal with both the perceived political and spiritual realities of their respective periods.

divine guidance, will bring about the triumph of Christian principles, and that a holy utopia will come into being” (3). In each case, Paley’s description highlights the centrality of revolution in millenarian thought. Since John wrote *Revelation* in the first century A.D., various groups have attributed its message to themselves and they have tried to create New Jerusalems.

Revolutionary millenarians were common in Europe. Changing social conditions often lead to apocalyptic responses and, as Norman Cohn has argued, revolutionary millenarians were generally comprised of the poorest and most desperate members of the populace because they found it most difficult to adapt to the change.<sup>15</sup> As a result, these revolutionary millenarians tried to solve social inequality by bringing about the utopian vision of the millennium. Although common across Europe, revolutionary millenarian rhetoric and revolution were particularly prevalent in England. The millenarian English Revolution occurred because of deteriorating social conditions combined with the notion that England was an Elect nation of the Christian God.<sup>16</sup> In his epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667), John Milton (1608-1674) expressed his hopes for this revolution.<sup>17</sup> *Paradise Lost* strongly influenced Romantic conceptions of revolution.<sup>18</sup>

Utopia has made use of the discourse of revolutionary millenarianism, particularly leading up to, and following, the French Revolution. Despite the hope for a utopian

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<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between social deprivation theory and millenarianism see Norman Cohn’s *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (58-60, 87-88).

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of these historical relationships see Christopher Hill’s *The World Turned Upside-Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (21).

<sup>17</sup> See Hill (33).

<sup>18</sup> Tim Fulford notes that Edmund Burke was horrified by the “optimistic interpretation of revolutionary violence” and Burke compared these “subversives” to “the regicide sectarians of Britain’s revolution of the 1640s” (3). After Burke’s comparison “millenarianism, real and accused, became a crucial factor in the vituperative war of words that polarized British politics and precipitated the imprisonment of many opponents of the government” (3).

resolution achieved via revolution, in practice, it has never occurred. Instead, the historical relationship between revolution and utopia seems to reveal the impossibility of utopian fulfillment via revolution. Disillusionment following millenarian revolutions has been a recurring trend among historical millenarian movements because these revolutionaries believed and acted as though change occurred following their revolution, only to later realize the change was illusory. The jarring effect of disillusionment is apparent in history, but revolutionary literature presents a similar realization. The perpetuation of pre-millennial conditions following the revolution, illustrates the historical tendency for revolution's failure in its utopian fulfillment. It also reveals ideological barriers in literary production, because the author reproduces conditions supposedly obliterated by the revolution (in history and literature).<sup>19</sup> Historically, millenarian communities have yet to succeed; however, in attempting to create a New Jerusalem, they created alternatives to the current order, offering the possibility of reorganizing society. Using the utopian mode, nineteenth-century fiction writers imagined and tried to deal with the problems that they saw in their historical and social contexts. In order to evaluate the use of utopian rhetoric, each of the following chapters deal with the movement of utopian thinking as an articulation of social change through social and city planning and the focus on control over women and nature evident in such rhetoric.

In Chapter One I examine Mary Shelley's critique of masculinist impulses in utopian rhetoric. Shelley expresses the gendered nature of her critique by providing a frame narrative in which a prophetess has a vision that is interpreted by a female, which

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<sup>19</sup> Fredric Jameson makes a similar argument about the nature of utopian rhetoric (42-43); interestingly, as I have argued, historical experience backs up his largely theoretical discussion.

illustrates the feminine filter through which the narrative is constructed and interpreted. In direct opposition to masculinist uses of prophecy, Shelley presents a prophecy that illustrates the tentativeness of the mode: she reveals the way that prophecy simultaneously offers insight and deception, even as she critiques prophetic utterances that claim authority. The focus on gender inequality continues in the main narrative of the novel. Influenced by contemporary concerns over the French Revolution (and its Napoleonic aftermath), utopianism, and Malthusianism, Shelley illustrates two models of control (ideology and force) over nature and women as evident in the desire for social and city planning by two of her main characters. Shelley's critique of utopia focuses on masculinist efforts to dominate nature and women.

In Chapter Two I argue that while William Morris tries in *News from Nowhere* to represent a future egalitarian utopia, he expresses the desire for control over nature and women. The genre of the medieval dream vision provides the model for the prophecy. Prophecy is supposed to create the idea of a hoped-for future for the reader, which will culminate in a revolution leading to utopian fulfillment. A male character has a dream, which suggests a male vision of utopia. Despite Morris's desire to challenge hierarchical social structures, the utopian community of Nowhere ultimately replaces the old hierarchy with a new one. Moreover, Morris's attempt to create a utopia in which nature (and women) has been freed instead leads to continued control over nature (and women). Two characters in the novel offer conflicting views about humanity's relationship to nature, which reveals the gender inequality evident in the novel.

In Chapter Three I argue that M.P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* imagines a resolution of social problems by eradicating decadent elements of society in a world-wide

apocalypse and by reasserting masculinist control over (self-destructive) women and nature. The novel's frame narrative provides a prophetess's vision interpreted by men. The masculine interpretive focus reveals the gender dynamic in the novel. While the novel posits control as its resolution to the problems of urban life, women and nature illustrate their ability to resist such control, which calls into question its effectiveness.

In the conclusion, I discuss the three main aspects that I analyzed in each novel in order to examine them as a unit, investigating their focus on prophetic vision through a secular form of millenarianism and the problem of control in creating utopia, particularly over women and nature. In order to make clear the connections between the articulations for utopian reform in the three novels, I analyze the disparate uses of vision and its gendering, control over women, and control over nature. By examining the novels as a unit, I discuss the contradiction between the creation of a socialist and egalitarian utopia and the perpetuation of capitalist impulses in the utopian novels.

Chapter One: *The Last Man*

Mary Shelley's apocalyptic novel *The Last Man* depicts the destruction of humanity in a prophesied future. Most critics assert that Shelley offers a pessimistic view of utopian thinking and political possibilities through her vision of an inevitable dystopian future. Lee Sterrenburg, for example, argues that *The Last Man* is an anatomy, or encyclopedia, of failed revolutions and while it depicts various political systems, it is ultimately anti-political (328). He illustrates that Shelley deconstructs, but offers no resolution to, the problem of social form (343). While most critics interpret the novel as pessimistic, some, such as Anne K. Mellor, recognize that the novel articulates potential for a positive future, making the narrator's tale a "warning" of a possible future.<sup>20</sup> However, even Mellor downplays Shelley's use of the millenarian mode of fiction to articulate utopian possibilities; instead, she tries to situate Shelley's position as female and therefore outside millenarianism. The Romantics, including Shelley, used millenarian narratives to express their political concerns. In reference to the millenarian form, Stephen C. Behrendt argues that the Romantics politicized their writing by turning to history because it offered "a means of addressing current, pressing issues" (16). Shelley's use of Romantic mythmaking, based on commonly held views, such as a millennium following apocalypse, (19), is such that she plays on her audience's expectations in an ironical manner. Critics such as Jan Plug have also argued that Shelley was pessimistic about Romanticism, and that she operated on a "border" position in relation to Romanticism (146). While Shelley reworks the ideals of Romanticism, it would be unwise to see either Shelley's despair or her critique of Romanticism as totalizing. Shelley is critiquing Romanticism not entirely denouncing it. Shelley's position on

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<sup>20</sup> See Mellor's essay "Blake, the Apocalypse and Romantic Women Writers" (144).

Romanticism may be complex, but Shelley is straightforward about her position on gender in contemporary conceptions of utopianism.

In order to illustrate Shelley's critique of gender inequality in utopian rhetoric I will be examining her novel's prophetic frame narrative and its relation to feminine expression. I will also examine the focus on control over nature and women in the narrative itself by comparing contemporary views on urban and social reform to those held by two of the central male characters of the novel. I will articulate how Mary Shelley's criticism of utopian thinking relates directly to her concerns about masculinist dominance over women and nature. Shelley's apocalyptic vision depicts a dystopian future, not because utopia is impossible, but because of the gender bias informing utopian thinking and related measures towards land reform and city planning, which Shelley challenges because of their implicit control over (feminine) nature. Shelley's critique will become explicit through an examination of the frame narrative prophecy. Since this prophecy refers to a potential future, it is both a warning and an interpretation, something offering insight and providing deception. Using the logic of negative philosophy,<sup>21</sup> Shelley questions the notion of controlling the environment and community through the attempts of the two central male characters in the novel, thereby calling into question the ("male") scientific endeavor to control the environment and usher in a utopia at the expense of ("female") nature. Using negative philosophy, Shelley articulates situations within the prophesied future where overlooked utopian potential exists: namely the Godwinian style of negotiation, Adrian's need to combine the ideal with the real and his theory with practice, and the primacy of the domestic, or of the family unit. By

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<sup>21</sup> Negative philosophy defines ideas or things by what they are not rather than by what they are. Therefore, Shelley is expressing all the things that a utopia is not rather than providing an expression of a utopia.



examining the prophetic narrative, its apocalyptic outcome, and the potential for a new community in *The Last Man*, I will argue that Shelley's evaluation of utopianism illustrates the problem of male control over the feminine and nature.

Before examining the novel, it can be helpful to provide a basic description of the narrative. *The Last Man* begins with a frame narrative in which the fictional author describes the process of finding the Sibyl's prophecy during the year 1818. She then compiles it into the narrative of the last man, Lionel Verney. Thereafter, Lionel narrates. It is the twenty-first century. Lionel begins by explaining how his father and mother exile themselves from the social circle of the English King, following his father's disgraceful gambling debt, by moving to Cumberland. Both of Lionel's parents die while he and his sister Perdita are young. Lionel becomes a vagabond, but eventually meets Adrian, son of the former King of England (England has become a Republic in the meantime). Adrian reforms Lionel into a productive member of society through one-on-one discussion. This act heals the rift between the two families. Lionel and Perdita are invited to live in a guest cottage at Windsor Castle, where they meet Idris (Adrian's sister), Evadne (daughter of the Greek Ambassador to England), and Raymond (a hero of the future Greek war with Turkey and a wealthy Englishman). Much of the novel depicts the possibility for love and marriage among these characters. Once Raymond has established that he will marry Perdita, the novel shifts to the political realm. Raymond's desire for political power leads to his success in becoming the Protector of England. He attempts to create utopia in London, but has a disastrous reunion with Evadne (they had not been in contact since Raymond married Perdita). This reunion leads to a rift between Raymond and Perdita. Raymond leaves politics and returns to the Greek wars where he dies. Subsequently,

Perdita commits suicide. To make matters worse there begins to be evidence of a global plague. Slowly the world's human population declines. Adrian has no choice but to become Protector of England. Shortly thereafter, the plague arrives in England and kills the majority of the population, including Lionel's wife (Idris) and all of their children except Clara. Lionel contracts the plague from a "Negro" but recovers. The survivors leave England for France, but a false prophet deceives many. When they reach Italy, only three humans remain (to their knowledge) on the earth: Lionel, Adrian, and Clara; however, Adrian and Clara drown after their boat capsizes. Alone in Rome, Lionel writes his story in the hopes that he can find community in writing and he hopes that by writing potential survivors would know of his existence. The novel ends with Lionel setting out to sail around the world in search of human survivors.

Shelley's critique of utopianism is evident in the prophetic mode depicted in the introduction to the novel. The use of prophecy and the interpretation of prophecy are important aspects of the novel's gender criticism, since the prophecy originates with a female and a female interprets the prophecy. Moreover, Shelley provides a "feminine" expression of prophecy, rather than the "masculine" prophetic mode common among Romantic writers. The fictitious author's Introduction informs the reader that Lionel's narrative is about a possible future. The novel lacks a conclusion written by the same author. This lack of closure in the frame narrative could be read to imply an end of narrative altogether or, alternatively, as Elana Gomel argues, it suggests "a prophecy of the coming end of the world, which is absolute and final" (414). However, the Introduction provides a means by which to interpret the novel and its apocalyptic vision, since the fictional author compiles and writes the prophecy that is Lionel's tale.

Therefore, the novel is predicated on the act of interpretation, specifically the interpretation of prophecy as expressed in the fragmented leaves of the Cumaean Sibyl. The ability to predict the future has always been the Sibyl's feminine vatic power.<sup>22</sup> Despite the elevation of feminine vatic power, Shelley does not provide the reader with a direct prophecy from the Sibyl.

Although the Sibyl may have relayed an accurate prophecy, her prophecy is problematized by the fragmentary nature of its material form (writing on scattered leaves and bark) and by the act of interpretation. While fragmentation could potentially lead to the impossibility of interpretation, this is not the case in *The Last Man*. Instead, Shelley depicts prophecy as an authoritative mode held in tension by its incomplete and frail nature, potentially allowing for profound insights, while simultaneously generating misinterpretations. This overarching dyad between insight and deception is continually in conflict within the Introduction and the novel as a whole because the novel represents each revelation as possibly suspect. The interplay between the two terms of this dyad suggests that, despite the potential for deception, the prophetic vision in the novel also allows for potential insight, though in a limited and qualified sense.

The Introduction begins with the fictional author of *The Last Man* and her companion visiting Naples in 1818. Along with a few guides, the fictional author and her companion enter the "gloomy cavern" of the Cumaean Sibyl (3).<sup>23</sup> In their search for the Sibyl's cave, their guides, unwilling to navigate the difficult passages the companions

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<sup>22</sup> While Shelley only mentions Virgil, she may have been aware of the long history of the Sibyl in Jewish and Christian apocalypse as well. In these cases, the Sibyl predicts the fate of empires. In each context (Ancient Greek, Jewish, and Christian) the notion that the Sibyl can predict the future is always present. For an in-depth historical discussion of the Sibyl in apocalyptic discourse, see Bernard McGinn's *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (17-19).

<sup>23</sup> See Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* for an in-depth discussion on how the cave in *The Last Man* is a particularly feminine space and how it relates to the anxiety of female authorship (96-97).

want to attempt, abandon them (4). Eventually, the companions think that they have found the “real” cave, but a “current of air” extinguishes their torch, leaving them in “utter darkness” just as they realize that they are not in the Sibyl’s cave (4). At this point, the companions grope about in the dark, eventually finding a natural source of light, which happens to be coming from the “real” cave (4-5). Extinguishing artificial light in the wrong cave significantly leads to the “real” cave illuminated by “real,” or natural, light. The natural light is a metaphor for truth and it implies that the Sibyl communicates truth.

Shortly after entering the cave the companions realize that “leaves, bark, and other substances, were traced with written characters . . . expressed in various languages” (5). In the cave they find that they can make out “little by the dim light, but [that the leaves seem] to contain prophecies” (5). The companions quickly realize that the leaves refer to “events but lately passed,” events of “modern date,” and events yet to come (5). Thus, the fictional author has stumbled upon an ancient prophecy that includes reference to the author’s present and recent past, though references to the leaves’ seeming veracity do not lead to concrete predictions. Instead, the challenges associated with understanding fragmentary sources become the primary concern expressed through conflicts between insight and deception.

The binary terms of insight and deception in *The Last Man* highlight the relationship between the prophetic text, represented by the leaves, and its interpreter. Though the fictional author begins to discuss the difficulties associated with interpretation, her search for the “real cave” already evinces these difficulties. Nonetheless, the discussion of the instability of language and interpretation is an apt

correlative of the author's surroundings while in the cave: writing is inscribed on bits of nature (for example, leaves), combining the natural with the cultural (language). The nature/culture dyad correlates with the insight/deception dyad in that the actual is always complicated by how it is understood. As a result, the process of insight/deception mirrors the relationship between the natural and the cultural: what seems to be evident in nature may in fact be an interpretation of nature, a cultural concept.<sup>24</sup> To add to the disconnected and incomplete prophecy, the fictional author must decipher the prophetic vision, an act that further destabilizes interpretation by making the distinctions between insight and deception even less clear. After receiving the vision, the Sibyl represents her prophecy by phrasing it in human languages. Then the interpreter must make sense of the Sibyl's articulation. This process highlights the levels of separation between the original vision and the outcome of the prophecy, especially since she must compose it in her own language and cultural context. Reflecting the difficulties associated with the act of translation, the fictional author says "Doubtless the leaves of the Cumaean Sibyl have suffered distortion and diminution of interest and excellence in my hands" (7). Though clearly a rhetorical device Shelley is employing to apologize for shortcomings in her narrative, this assertion also points to the difficulties of understanding prophecy, especially prophetic fragments, since the pieces (the leaves) need to be reorganized, interpreted, translated, and rewritten. Each of these events alters the original prophecy making it potentially less and less accurate.

To forestall indeterminacy, the fictional author describes how the Sibyl's leaves should be deciphered. This (scientific) process begins with data collection, then

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<sup>24</sup> See Kevin Hutchings's "The Modal Roots of Environmentalism: Pastoral, Prophecy, and Nature in Biblical and Early Romantic Discourse" for a discussion of the relationship between nature and culture in environmental discourse (22).

interpretation, and finally writing. If the process seems scientific, however, in actual practice it is unclear whether the interpreter and her companion consulted all the leaves found in the cave despite “often return[ing] to this cave . . . and each time add[ing] to [their] store” (6). Even after completing their data collection, moreover, the narrator and her companion are still hampered by language barriers made clear by their initial “hasty selection” of the leaves in which they chose only those “whose writing one at least of us could understand” (6). Without knowing all of the languages and without taking all of the leaves into consideration, it is impossible to know if the prophecy contains all of the relevant information from the Sibyl’s vision, since the leaves were “scattered” and “unconnected.” As a result, she has “been obliged to add links, and model the work into a consistent form” (6). The interpreter explains that the reader should excuse her reconstruction because the prophecy is “unintelligible in [its] pristine condition” (7). While deciphering prophetic fragments is a problematic endeavour because the potential for misreading steadily increases as the translator and then the reader interprets them, the fictional author suggests that without her work the pieces would have no meaning (7). Thus, like the cave itself, the prophetic mode continually vacillates between offering insight and engaging in deception. Sometimes moments of insight lead to moments of deception and vice versa.

The necessity and value of understanding the meaning of the leaves becomes apparent in the Introduction, which clearly expresses the insightful side of the binary equation, as any revelation would be beneficial since the source of insight (the Sibyl) implies the authority of its vision. As the interpreter claims, the leaves have been “obtained from heaven” by “divine intuition,” making the original message divinely

inspired (6). Shelley imagines the Sibyl's ability to receive the prophecy as intuitive, therefore signifying a belief that the Sibyl herself is capable of receiving the prophecy. Nonetheless, the prophecy's natural form accentuates the potential for distortion: the speaker refers to the leaves as "frail" and "attenuated," implying that the prophecy itself is also fragile (7). So, as the interpreter adds her own ideas and "peculiar mind and talent" (6), the "real" prophecy is doubly altered both by its natural form and by its interpreter. As the search for the "real" cave occurs in the preface (4), so does the search for the "real" prophecy, though no definitive insight is possible. Instead, narratives of prophecy and apocalypse present all insights as potential insights, not as predestined outcomes.

The female interpreter of a feminine vision is an important aspect of the novel and its articulation of prophecy because Shelley is reworking the general (and masculinist) use of the prophetic mode within Romanticism. Romantic writing often represents prophecy as likely to occur and as the result of the genius of the individual (male). This "feminine" focus is important because it reveals the gendered filter of the novel. Readers, therefore, can interpret the narrative through a feminist lens of critique about the masculinist tendencies within utopian thinking that Shelley is exposing in her novel. Moreover, Shelley's articulation of a tenuous prophecy is important because it avoids the abuse of power via the prophetic mode evident in much Romantic prophecy. Often the abuse of power is associated with an idealism that divorces the material from the visionary, or the real from the ideal. Shelley's use of prophecy avoids the elevation of the visionary over the material: as Kevin Hutchings rightly asserts, "the novel's Introduction subtly affirms the material – as well as visionary – value of *earthly* existence, challenging in the process the efficacy of an idealism based upon a dualistic conception of life" (241).

The Sibyl's (feminine) vision is contrasted with the (masculine and possibly masculinist) idealisms offered by Adrian and Raymond in their attempts at envisioning a utopian England through social and city planning, which is mirrored in the cultural ideals of the day.

British culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries increasingly imagined reforming the environment to achieve utopia. Arguments suggesting that the environment held dystopian possibilities counteracted this utopian desire. In both cases, British culture focused on questions of mapping and population. This cultural milieu was a strong influence on Shelley's *The Last Man* and mapping and population are central to the portrayal of utopian thought in the novel.<sup>25</sup> Several critics have noticed the focus on mapping and population in the novel and cite the debate between Mary Shelley's father William Godwin (1756-1836) and Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834) over the possibility of human progress as its main inspiration. For Godwin humanity could attain utopia, but for Malthus the future could only be dystopian: Malthus predicted that the number of people in England would outstrip the resources necessary for their survival, leading to starvation (Sterrenburg 334). In fact, Malthus wrote *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) to refute the utopian thinking of the time, including Godwin's. Utopian thinkers such as Godwin argued that humans, if they were to adopt rational actions and institutions, could achieve utopian conditions. Malthus responded directly to these claims of utopian fulfillment by arguing that population growth would eat up any

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<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of population and mapping in *The Last Man* see Charlotte Sussman's "'Islanded in the World': Cultural Memory and Human Mobility in *The Last Man*" (287) and Julia Wright's "'Little England': Anxieties of Space in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*" (130-131, 134).



gains that technology or reform might bring and that it would be best to allow natural checks on the population, such as disease and war, to continue.<sup>26</sup>

Even though these two influential thinkers were arguing opposite outcomes, their theories were concerned with deterministic and millenarian approaches to progress. Malthus “had spoken to Briton’s fears about increasing population and poverty among the laboring classes and had voiced their anxieties about national immorality and possible defeat in the war with France” (Fulford 10). Malthus was not alone in seeing the poor as problematic because of their numbers; for example, Edmund Burke believed the poor were poor because they were “numerous” (Harrison 105). Moreover, Tim Fulford articulates that “Malthus’s apocalyptic scenario encouraged Evangelical clerics to reform the poor, while his analysis prompted secular economists to apply statistics to the study of society” (6-7). While Godwin and Malthus were the primary figures in the debate over utopian possibilities and population, Thomas Spence’s utopianism is equally relevant as it influenced both William Godwin and P.B. Shelley (and later in the century William Morris, and perhaps M.P. Shiel). Spence’s connection to both Godwin and P.B. Shelley sheds light on Mary Shelley’s depiction and critique of utopianism and planning in *The Last Man*. Thomas Spence created a millenarian faith in controlling the landscape which would become a utopian fulfillment: “Spence believed that the abolition of property would transform the land into an earthly paradise” which influenced later articulations of revolution and reform (Harrison 114).

What is most interesting about the idea of reform, however, is the focus on improving the poor and nature from both the utopian and dystopian positions. Gary

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<sup>26</sup> Malthus’ ideas were instrumental in the development of conservative economic theory, Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of the Species* (1859), social Darwinism, and eugenics.

Harrison argues that the connection between landscape improvement and class relations is explicit, and he notes that Middle Class reformers saw the poor as unable to restrain their sexuality, thus leading to the problem of overpopulation (105). In order to make change in the lives of the lower classes, both utopians and dystopians advocated enclosure, as “enclosure would remake the landscape with visible signs of order overtaking chaos, of enlightenment defeating ignorance” (106). The sense of immorality and disorder was reflected in notions about the land: “The wastes, especially, but the commons as well, were repeatedly associated with alterity in the forms of disorder, promiscuity, scarcity and disease, while the enclosed lands were associated with their opposites – order, virtue, fecundity and health” (106). This relationship between landscape and reform *mirrors* the relationship between reform and the lower classes, but especially women. Malthus suggested that the poor were “Incapable of rationality,” and that they “must be subjected to the logic of the body, following the simple calculus of sex and hunger” (Harrison 112). Harrison argues that Malthus extended this notion most pointedly at women, noting that “laboring-class women. . . . lacked the modesty and moral delicacy that evolved among their superiors as a preventive check to sexual activity” (112). While Malthus and other dystopians have often been credited as having this negative view of women, the lower classes, and nature, utopians equally replicated this view. The historical relationship between landscape reform and the class and gender associations linked to such reform mirrors Shelley’s literary response to the utopian rejoinder to Malthusian arguments.

Recognizing the historical connection between articulations of landscape and gender allows readers to obtain a fuller understanding of the tendency for idealism to

create a dichotomy between the ideal and the material. Kevin Hutchings explores a falsely constructed dualism of mind/body that divorces humanity from nature in the narrative of *The Last Man*, which leads to Adrian's avoidance of physicality ("Phantasmagoria" passim). Adding the question of gender to Hutchings's examination allows me to extend Hutchings's critique of the avoidance of physicality to include the evasion of femininity. The relationship between the mind/body dyad is not only important in terms of the conceptions of the characters' selves; instead, by examining the mind/body dyad in relation to utopian city planning enacted through imaginative mapping, readers may resituate the utopian/dystopian debate among critical responses to this novel. In order to reevaluate *The Last Man* as Shelley's criticism of gender inequality within contemporary utopian thinking, I will discuss Adrian and Raymond in the context of the mind/body dyad and the novel's representation of nature. Despite the articulation of an ideal in the novel, in practice the ideal acts as a means of controlling nature and human populations instead of leading to improved social relations. Ultimately, the criticism of the exclusion of nature illustrates Shelley's gender critique through the rhetoric of utopian city planning.

Raymond and Adrian each attempt to create utopian conditions in England. Raymond's means of achieving his goal is primarily through physical control over the environment. Adrian also controls the environment, but he does so through ideological means. In each case, these characters employ mental mapping techniques that enable control over women and the environment. Despite, or perhaps because of, their actions England must face an apocalyptic disease that eradicates all human life, save one man: Lionel Verney. The meaning of the apocalyptic disease has been articulated most

persuasively, by critics such as James C. McKusick, as feminine nature enacting her revenge (108), which we will return to after I illustrate the role of city planning in the novel.

Raymond and Adrian both attempt to create a utopian London through city planning. The narrator depicts Lord Raymond as a character controlled by strong desires and ambitions. Lionel describes Raymond as power-hungry and selfish, noting that “His first wish was aggrandizement; and the means that led towards this end were secondary considerations” (39). Raymond provides a coded portrait of the Romantic Poet Lord Byron. Some contemporaries compared Byron to Napoleon I, which was a comparison that Byron liked to highlight, seeing in himself and in Napoleon “a man of extraordinary strengths undone by private weaknesses; Napoleon’s genius for command and his skill in manipulating kingdoms and men [Byron believed] were matched by a crippling inability to discipline or understand himself” (Root 149). Building on the idea of Byron as a Napoleonic figure, Lionel’s depiction of Raymond as a figure who is all-powerful, but utterly out of his own control, becomes a means by which Raymond is both idealized (for his capabilities) and criticized (for his inability to master them). The narrator’s construction of Raymond as simultaneously powerful and unmanageable reveals an important relation between Raymond and nature: Raymond “seemed to govern the whole earth in his grasping imagination . . . [he] only quailed when he attempted to rule himself” (58). Although the narrator presents Raymond as only appearing to have control over the earth, Raymond, in fact, does maintain such control. It is through Raymond’s acquisitive imagination that he is able to dominate nature. He employs mental mapping, or imaginative city planning, in order to maintain control over nature. As will become

evident through my analysis, Raymond's belief that he lacks free will is just an excuse for his behaviour, especially his desire for control.

Despite his ability to maintain control over nature, Raymond insists that he cannot obtain dominion, as he disagrees with Lionel's notion that "there is an active principle in man which is capable of ruling fortune, and at least tacking against the gale, till it in some mode conquers it" (66). Essentially, Raymond sees his fate as predetermined when he suggests that his "dispositions" and "powers" make him unable to alter the person he is (66). Raymond believes that these abilities derive from education and experience, both of which are not distributed equally to everyone (66). Importantly, he uses agricultural metaphors linking the natural with the cultural: "we are educated by others, or by the world's circumstance, and this *cultivation*, mingling with our innate disposition, is the *soil* in which our desires, passions, and motives *grow*" (66; my emphasis). In comparison to his focus on landscape and planning, Raymond's agricultural metaphors will take on new meaning, but within the context of his present argument, he is trying to situate his experience as natural and predetermined. Raymond suggests that he cannot make choices. In trying to determine whether to marry for love by marrying Perdita or for a crown by marrying Idris, he decides to marry for love and find a democratic way of achieving the crown. Raymond proposes that he and Lionel should travel to London to make Adrian Protector of England in the upcoming election, but this proposal turns out to be a thinly veiled attempt at attaining rule himself (96).

Raymond's pondering over "the possession of a crown, and of [Perdita]" illustrates the extent to which he is willing to enact control (67): both are acts of gender control, of possession and appropriation, but one is political and the other is domestic.

The act of control over the domestic is central to Shelley's criticism of society as she "resisted the segregation of the public and private and its hierarchical division and responsibility. . . . [believing] that the sociopolitical iniquities of the larger society were mirrored within the family and the individual. She delineates this thesis by invariably coalescing the private and the public" (Bennet 3). Raymond's possessive desire initially fools Lionel into believing that Raymond had made Perdita's heart his "kingdom" (91).

Raymond's insistence that he lacks choice leads in part to his inability, or perhaps his lack of interest, for practicing self-control. By figuring his own choices as destiny, Raymond becomes an instrument of fate, abdicating responsibility for his decisions; yet Raymond is ultimately and resolutely involved in the creation of conditions that alter the collective fate of Londoners. The narrator expresses Raymond's desire while he had been "wrapt [sic] in visions of power and fame" and ultimate control through his desire for "entire dominion [over] the elements and the mind of man" (117). Once he becomes Protector of England, he initiates city planning to exert his rule over the elements and the minds of his subjects.

Raymond's approach to utopianism illustrates his desire for ultimate control over nature. He aims his "thousand beneficial schemes" at "render[ing] England one scene of fertility and magnificence" (106). The focus on making England "one scene" of fertility is important because it illustrates the fact that England would become entirely productive; moreover, this focus on fertility is connected to the idea of making England (and women) a productive garden. In order to achieve these aims, Raymond essentially promises to create laws intended to abolish poverty (106). More explicitly, he rejects natural hardships, again via the creation of laws, suggesting that "The physical state of man

would soon not yield to the beatitude of angels; disease was to be banished” (106).

Raymond’s focus on disease is also important in the context of land reform, as reformers believed that the unproductive and unenlightened landscape bred disease.

Raymond also uses mechanistic metaphors that illustrate nature’s defeat at the hands of humanity. As Lionel suggests, in reference to a hot air balloon, human technology demonstrates “the power of man over the elements; a power long sought, and lately won” (71). In direct parallel to Lionel’s statement of mastery over the environment, Raymond describes the mechanistic means of mastering the elements, “and the mechanism of society,” which lead to utopia (106). Raymond demotes and replaces nature with machines. Raymond illustrates his role as utopian architect by controlling the environment through mechanization:

The arts of life, and all the discoveries of science had augmented in a ratio which left all calculation behind; food sprung up, so to say, spontaneously – machines existed to supply with facility every want of the population. An evil direction still survived; and men were not happy, not because they could not, but because they would not rouse themselves to vanquish self-raised obstacles. Raymond was to inspire them with his beneficial will, and the mechanism of society, once systematized according to faultless rules, would never again swerve into disorder.

(106)

Raymond clearly articulates his sense of control in his desire to mechanize society following the domination of nature; now only human nature needs refinement. To a modern audience well-versed in science fiction, systemization and mechanization suggest totalitarian dystopias and the novel seems to hint at this notion. The role of class control

is correlated to the control of nature as “faultless rules” will lead the people of England in the ideal manner, since Raymond will “inspire” citizens who fall short of the ideal with his “beneficial will” (106). By enforcing his ideal on the people of England, Raymond is able to create utopia. Raymond’s will and the mechanisms and mechanization of society achieve utopia in England for three years, until his disastrous reunion with Evadne. It would seem that Raymond could have maintained utopia if he had attempted to control himself.

Adrian also approaches nature in the novel through mental mapping, or imaginative city planning and social engineering, which allows humanity to take the “leaden hue” from reality (75). In opposition to Raymond, Adrian does not control nature through primarily physical means; rather, he does so ideologically. Although Adrian desires “reform of the English government, and the improvement of the people” (44), he seeks to realize such desires “afar from the haunts of men” (44). While experiencing what he sees as nature, Adrian develops desires for improving humanity, which suggests that Adrian has a close relationship with nature. His experience implies a direct relationship with the natural environment; however, despite Adrian’s belief that he is part of the whole that is nature, Adrian places himself within nature in such a way that he becomes the “only [focus] of this mighty mirror [nature]” (45). Adrian’s direct connection to nature becomes questionable when it merely reflects back his egocentric view. Adrian’s dubious connection to nature may in fact be more closely allied to his social and political desires than he is willing to admit.

Adrian may wish others to understand him as a selfless and angelic creature, but his focus suggests that he sees nature as a means to achieve his goals of reform. What is



perhaps most telling about Adrian's sense of purpose is the narrator's elevation of him over other characters in the text: the narrator calls Raymond a "politician" and Adrian a "philanthropist" even though both characters have similar aims (45). Moreover, while Evadne likes that Adrian expresses his will, she dislikes his theories, wishing they would be "more intelligible to the multitude" (44). Despite Adrian's love for Evadne, she loses interest in him, choosing to pursue Raymond instead. It would seem that Evadne finds theoretical expressions meaningless outside of practice, or that perhaps she is merely power-hungry. Evadne's critique of Adrian's elitism questions Adrian's theories based on their unintelligibility to the masses, thus revealing his position and role within the text. Since Adrian is an elite figure his "refined sensibilities" would seem to allow him to see beyond the material and into ideal relations for society. However, Adrian's elevated position in relation to nature separates him from any real connection with nature. Rather than coming into physical contact with the environment, Adrian's relationship to nature is mental. Moreover, his denial of his physical self and nature's physicality causes him to dismiss any suggestion that he should put his ideals into practice. Adrian's lack of bodily desires equally relates to his theoretically constructed interest in Evadne and the poor. In neither case is he truly attempting to make any material connections. Adrian behaves as though the articulation of an abstract yearning can bring about one's desires. Although his interest in Evadne does not lead to a reciprocal relationship, Adrian continues to put faith in his notion that the will is enough to enact change. Thus, Adrian avoids acting on his theory because he believes that the imaginative will of man is sufficient for creating utopia: he believes that "death and sickness . . . [can be] banished. . . . let us will it, and our habitation becomes a paradise. For the will of man is omnipotent, blunting the arrows

of death, soothing the bed of disease, and wiping away the tears of agony" (76). Adrian sees will as so powerful that it is omnipotent, and yet, he has already experienced the lack of fulfillment through his will in his unrequited love for Evadne. Moreover, Adrian's will does not allow him to achieve political or social victories.

Although Adrian suggests that he must avoid material concerns because he is an overly weakened body whose "soul appeared rather to inhabit his body than to unite with it" (91), his articulation of will should allow him to achieve his goals outside of the political realm. Adrian deliberately avoids becoming a political leader through much of the novel. When Raymond suggests that Adrian should become Protector of England, Adrian dismisses this notion on the excuse of his poor health (95). Ironically, despite Adrian's republican sympathies, he endorses the "noble" and "warlike" Raymond, who is the antithesis of the type of ruler one would expect the peace-loving Adrian to vouch for (96-97). Adrian's rhetoric suggests more than just poor health, however. Adrian's real reason for avoiding governmental power is instead related to the fact that he believes he is ill-suited to running the country because he is a "poor visionary from the clouds" who should be surrounded by "heavenly rays and airs," not "earthly grandeur" (95). Since Adrian conceptualizes his identity by maintaining that he must be unattached to the earthly because of his attachment to the heavenly, he places his function as outside of the material realm. Lionel rejects Adrian's excuse and suggests that for the "good of others" Adrian should put his "theories into practice" and thereby create the "the perfect system of government which [he] delight[s] to portray" (95). Before the circumstances of the plague force Adrian, he refuses to rule England.

After the plague arrives in England, Adrian shows himself to be a capable ruler who may have been more proficient than Raymond in initiating utopia in England. His successes lead him to believe that “earth will become a Paradise” and as a result “poverty will quit us, and with that, sickness” (219). But perhaps the tragedy of Adrian is his sense of decorum; he does not act when the time is right. Regardless of their differences, both Raymond and Adrian believe that ideal conditions will lead to utopia.

Raymond and Adrian believe that the creation of these ideal conditions should recreate the world as paradise. The ultimate irony is that rather than eradicating disease Raymond helps in its spread by setting off a massive explosion in Constantinople.<sup>27</sup> Adrian’s actions seem to have little effect on the plague, though he does not seem to exacerbate its spread.<sup>28</sup> Raymond’s and Adrian’s attempts to control nature lead to the return of repressed nature. Thus, in response to the deterministic approach of utopia presented throughout *The Last Man*, nature itself rises up in the form of the plague: McKusick aptly illustrates the personification of the plague as a female being (108). “Mother Nature’s revenge” through the plague allows nature to assert control (108).

Once nature asserts her dominion with Plague as Queen (346), human attempts at rectifying the situation become futile. As Adrian affirms his proper place as ruler and

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<sup>27</sup> According to James C. McKusick, the explosion “foreshadow[s] . . . modern technologies of mass destruction” (107). While this is an apt correlative to the present day and the effects of weapons of mass destruction, it seems that Shelley is most likely imagining such a cloud of pestilence because of her adherence to the “anti-contagion” or miasma theory of disease transmission, according to which diseases were spread through the atmosphere (McWhir 23; McKusick 108).

<sup>28</sup> As an alternative to the notion that human action is partly responsible for humanity’s own ultimate destruction in the novel, Kari E. Lokke suggests that the conflict between *Eros* and *Thanatos*, particularly in Raymond and Evadne, accounts for the plague, arguing that “human nature” makes humanity responsible for its own destruction (117-118). However, if humanity, as depicted in the novel, actually had complete control over its own destiny, then following Adrian’s argument that humanity could will the advent of paradise this desire should have led to the realization of paradise. Moreover, the plague is much bigger than these two individuals and it begins before their actions. Shelley asserts in the novel that the plague began in the Nile region of Africa (175) and that it subsequently spread to Asia, then to America, and finally to Europe (223).

moves out of an entirely imaginative role in relation to nature, he does what he should have done earlier in the text rather than endorsing Raymond. The opening of Lionel's narration becomes an ironic "thesis" of the novel: Lionel says, "that man's mind alone was the creator of all that was good or great to man, and that Nature herself was only his first minister" (9). This "thesis" becomes ironic because Lionel later narrates that "In the face of all of this we call ourselves lords of creation, wielders of the elements, masters of life and death, and we allege in excuse of this arrogance, that though the individual is destroyed, man continues forever" (230). The novel illustrates that man's *mind* alone cannot create all that humanity considers "good," which suggests that human agency is possible only when humans work in conjunction with nature. The discourse implies the need to correct gender inequality, as the logic of utopian reform dominates women. In fact, nature's revenge through disease is significant because of the anxiety among reformers, utopian and dystopian, about disease deriving from undeveloped land, and the poor, but particularly women, who lived in these unrefined lands. The significance of the failure of planning in *The Last Man* connects with the fact that planning controls the feminine, which Shelley certainly noticed as is evident in her construction of Raymond and Adrian and their attempts at creating utopia through planning.

The novel does not represent the inability for the actualization of utopia; rather, the potential for utopia, or at least new forms of community, seems to exist throughout the novel. Shelley's writing is highly political and some critics have recognized the relationship between Shelley's arguments and cultural change. Examining Shelley's role as cultural critic, Timothy Morton argues, "For Shelley, culture should be a liberal, dilating space which opens to encompass as many participants as possible" (265). Mark

Canuel, in a similar vein, suggests that Shelley imagines population in order to formulate “less restrictive patterns of social cooperation” (151). While the novel represents both these assertions, the clearest articulation of positive change is Godwinian in nature.

Adrian’s ability to deal with Lionel on a one-on-one basis brings about Lionel’s movement from lawless shepherd to member of the elites. Moreover, this change is long-lasting. Lionel not only does not seek revenge on Adrian, but he also survives the deadly plague. Another example of Godwinian potential occurs when Raymond admits that he could have resolved his political differences with his populist political rival, Ryland, if only the two met one-on-one (65). In opposition to the use of control over either the minds of citizens or the landscape, positive social change occurs through a non-hierarchical engagement.<sup>29</sup> The non-hierarchical nature of this relationship is important because it is both utopian and egalitarian. The novel articulates the potential for utopia in instances where women and nature are not being controlled, making such control anti-utopian.

As much as Shelley complicates contemporary ideas about progress, she also aids in the creation of an ideal and romanticized vision of the Romantic poets, which leads to Victorian misunderstandings of the Romantics and Romanticism. She creates such a view of Romanticism partly through editing her husband’s poems, removing anything that readers might consider shocking so that readers would purchase the edited volumes (Bennet 68). Shelley became instrumental in creating an image of her husband as an

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<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of Godwinian social change and its relationship to the development of middle-class Victorian values see Kristen Leaver’s (now Guest) “Pursuing Conversations: *Caleb Williams* and the Romantic Construction of the Reader” (597).

innocent visionary,<sup>30</sup> thereby aiding in the creation of an idealized Romanticism in the Victorian imagination. In conjunction with the Victorian reconstruction of Romanticism, Neo-Romanticism, the idea of city planning and control continued to develop side by side. Although London would not receive major reconstruction until after the Second World War, both Napoleon I (1769-1821) and his nephew Napoleon III (1808-1873) made systematic attempts at planning Paris.

Paris needed reconstruction as its medieval infrastructure was a disaster waiting to happen for a city of over one million inhabitants (Pinkney 127-128). During the 1790s, Napoleon I made the first substantial changes to Paris, which included street building and slum clearance (127). Continuing the work of his uncle, Napoleon III focused on the reconstruction of Paris from 1848 until the 1870s. Louis Napoleon considered himself an architect (125) and his experiences while exiled in England influenced his architectural sensibilities (126). Of particular importance, “He was in London at a time when that city and others throughout Britain were awakening to appreciation of grave problems of public health and traffic congestion brought on by rapidly growing populations” (126). From an authoritarian ruler’s perspective, the science of cartography held great potential. Antoine Picon argues that the employment of cartography became a way to control the frequent eruptions of political and social unrest experienced in nineteenth-century Paris (140). Furthermore, he asserts, “Understanding how the city was organized and above all how it functioned seemed to be a precondition for its pacification. In order to appear as the true capital of the nineteenth century, Paris had to offer the reassuring image of a

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<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of the problematic elements of P.B. Shelley’s character see Darby Lewes’ “Prophet and Loss: Women and Shelley’s Utopian Experiment” in which Lewes explores in *Frankenstein* the “unhappy souls” and “unhappy fates” of those who had relationships with P.B. Shelley, particularly, but not only, women (143).

totally controlled metropolis” (140). Napoleon’s control was not only physically coercive: “Even though Napoleon was anxious to maintain order, his public works in Paris were not intended solely for the negative purpose of suppressing disorder. He meant also to attach the populace of Paris so securely to his regime that they would not want to resort to violent protest” (Pinkney 133). Napoleon III’s reforms following 1848 were not unique to France nor to his leadership, but rather they were a natural outgrowth of the general calls for reform in Europe beginning in the 1830s (134). The Third Republic continued the emphasis on reconstructing France. In the 1880s a resurgence of Socialism seemed to threaten the focus of urban reform as a means of removing the unwanted (the poor) from Paris (Shapiro 494). By the 1890s, French socialists began to abandon housing reform and instead focused on higher wages (507). In England, however, in the 1890s housing reform took on a new impetus. Despite Shelley’s criticism of masculinist control over women and nature, British novels continued to express an implicit desire for such control, even while attempting egalitarianism as in evident in William Morris’s *News from Nowhere*.

Chapter Two: *News from Nowhere*

As the 1880s and 1890s brought a resurgence of utopian socialism to Western societies, it also brought a resurgence of utopian literature, including William Morris's novel *News from Nowhere*, published in 1890-1891. Since then it has received a great deal of critical attention and critics generally herald it as Morris's greatest literary achievement. Critics who see the novel as a reflection of (sexual) desire, such as Michael Holzman, argue that Morris's novel illustrates Sigmund Freud's (1856-1939) concept of wish fulfillment (31), which is an experience of both the reader and Morris (36). Critics have also noted the strong, and by now well-established, influence of Karl Marx's (1818-1883) ideas, making the novel a political text. Although responses to the evident conflicts between sexual desire and the desire for political change dominate critical debate about *News from Nowhere*, critics have increasingly interpreted Morris's writings as contributing to environmental discourse. Ecocritical responses to Morris's *News from Nowhere* vary significantly. However, they often advocate present-day ideologies as R. Marc Fasanella does in "William Morris: Art and Life," where he aims to "elucidate concepts that in today's terms would make Morris a bio-regionalist, a 'simple life advocate', and a proponent of a new urbanism that would keep the scale of communities small" (56). Critics have also focused on Morris's contributions to Garden City and nineteenth-century city planning, and Morris's relation to the production of art.<sup>31</sup> By examining Morris's intense desire to achieve the utopian vision he articulates in *News from Nowhere*, my aim is to explore the relationship between Morris's desire for utopia,

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Florence S. Boos' "News from Nowhere and 'Garden Cities': Morris's Utopia and Nineteenth-Century Town-Design" (5). And see, Herbert L. Sussman's "The Production of Art in the Machine Age: William Morris" (112), Nathaniel Gilbert's "The Landscape of Resistance in Morris's *News from Nowhere*" (22-23), and Patrick Brantlinger's "News from Nowhere: Morris's Socialist Anti-Novel" (35).



his means of achieving it, and the complications of such an endeavour. My analysis will show that despite Morris's desire for utopia, *News from Nowhere* ultimately reflects the impossibility of revolution's utopian fulfillment, because hegemonic ideologies of control over women and nature from the nineteenth century mirror those in the imagined future that has seemingly evolved beyond nineteenth-century relations. Thus, while Morris attempts to create an egalitarian utopia, he still produces a masculinist vision of control over women and nature.

Building on his understanding of Marx, and on the socialism of his day, William Morris articulated a vision for the development of a society where people practice socialist theoretical principles, thereby allowing the imagined society to live out its socialist utopia. In this socialist utopia, Morris's secularized millennial form highlights the revolution enacted by humans, bringing about a new world order. Drawing on the biblical tradition, especially *Revelation*, Morris critiques the abuse of power and the existence of inequality by creating a second, future, Eden: the New Jerusalem. However, Morris's attempts were not unique to the period: the use of millennial rhetoric was common among nineteenth-century socialists. As Rowland McMaster notes, millennial rhetoric expresses the "Edenic" vision inspiring the socialism of the day (74).<sup>32</sup> Moreover, utopian narratives based on urban planning were relatively common during the *fin de siècle* in Britain and North America, as these narratives reflect fears of degeneration and "race suicide" believed to be the result of cramped, polluted, and unhealthy industrialized cities. While social reformers called for change, socialists

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<sup>32</sup> Morris, in "How I Became a Socialist" (1894), defined what he meant by socialism. He classifies "Socialism [as] a condition of society in which there should be neither rich nor poor . . . in which all men would be living in equality of condition, . . . and with the full consciousness that harm to one would mean harm to all – the realization at last of the meaning of the word 'commonwealth'" (379).

advocated the destruction of cities, which they saw as capitalism's disease. Following the ideas of socialists from his time (especially Marx) Morris advocated abandoning the distinction between country and city. Social Darwinism exacerbated these fears surrounding the effects of cities on the population, by using environmental determinist discourse to articulate class and natural controls.

*News from Nowhere* begins with an argument between the narrator William Guest and Anarchist members of the Socialist League. This argument leads to a loss of faith in the development of Socialism. Guest wishes that he could see such a future. He falls asleep in nineteenth-century London and awakes in a future utopian London of the twenty-second century. When Guest awakes, he notices the absence of pollution and factories and the predominance of beautiful architecture and people. He is particularly happy about the predominance of healthy and attractive women who joyfully perform domestic duties. One of the first characters Guest meets is Dick, who becomes his guide in Nowhere. Guest and Dick travel through London to meet with Hammond who is an antiquarian. Along the way, Guest learns that money no longer exists and people produce their own goods for their own benefit and to share with others. Guest learns that every want is supplied in Nowhere and that those who may be unhappy have a false remembrance of the capitalist past. Dick tells him that people resolve conflicts using reason instead of force. The novel represents love as the only thing that disturbs the peace, as the only murder is one brought on through jealousy. Guest spends most of his time in Nowhere learning from Hammond how England became a utopia. Hammond explains the social customs of Nowhere before Guest heads out with Dick and his lover Clara to go up the Thames in order to harvest hay. Along the journey up the Thames, they

meet Ellen who also travels with them. Guest becomes infatuated with Ellen and he looks forward to enjoying both the harvest festival and Ellen's company, but before he can do either, he awakes in the nineteenth century. In the closing frame of the frame narrative, Guest reminds the reader that his vision could become a reality if only people would consider it as a vision rather than a dream.

In *News from Nowhere* Morris achieves his vision of a utopian future through a prophecy expressed via a frame narrative with the medieval dream vision as its basis. In the medieval dream vision, the protagonist experiences a loss of faith. Thereafter, the protagonist falls asleep and experiences a fulfillment of his or her desire. For example, in the medieval dream vision "Pearl," written by a now unknown fourteenth-century poet, the protagonist travels to Heaven where he regains faith after learning from the spirit of the deceased child that his fears about infant baptism being ineffectual were unfounded. In *News from Nowhere* the protagonist travels to the future after falling asleep. The prophetic purpose is to instill in the main character, and the audience, hope that their labour will lead to a future utopia. *News from Nowhere* begins with the narrator relating the story of a friend named Guest, who loses faith in socialism, but regains it through a vision of Nowhere. Before falling asleep, the narrator's friend repeats that he wishes "[he] could but see a day of it" (44), a day of the eventual triumph of utopian socialism. This vision of the future illustrates that his labours in the late-Victorian present are not in vain. The idea that the reward for one's work will be provided not only in the present but also in the future is an important element of *News from Nowhere*. This idea is partly an inheritance of the Christian concept of working for the Kingdom of God, which will

culminate in the attainment of Heaven. The goal of labour in Morris's secular socialist vision of utopia is the epoch of rest, not a spiritual state. As the awakening Guest muses:

[T]here is yet a time of rest in store for the world. . . . Go back [to the nineteenth century] and be the happier for having seen us, for having added a little hope to your struggle. Go on living while you may, striving, *with whatsoever pain and labour needs must be*, to build up little by little the new day of fellowship, and rest, and happiness. (228; emphasis mine)

Guest's realization implies that only pain and sacrifice will make the epoch of rest a reality. Although potential martyrdom is explicit, his final words suggest the ultimate message of Morris's utopian socialist call to action: "if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream" (228). While Morris envisions labour in Nowhere as an act of pleasure, nineteenth-century working conditions render the notion of striving to enact the epoch of rest, despite hardship and martyrdom, problematic.<sup>33</sup>

Nonetheless, the novel suggests that the nineteenth century and Nowhere are binary opposites and illustrates how different the two epochs are by representing the nineteenth century as winter and Nowhere as summer. What this model provides is a narrative of progress that builds on the notion that one should work for the realization of the coming utopia. The movement from winter to summer implies progress in that winter is considered the most difficult season in which to live and summer the least difficult; when this logic about seasons is applied to epochs it is clear that one must progress from

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<sup>33</sup> See Marcus Waithe (471) for an expanded discussion of this issue. Also see, Rob Breton's "WorkPerfect: William Morris and the Gospel of Work." Although work can be identified as a Victorian value, full employment remains a utopian desire according to some thinkers today; for example, see Fredric Jameson's "The Politics of Utopia" (37).

winter to summer, revealing the cyclical nature of history according to *News from Nowhere*. The linear biblically inspired narrative of working in this life in order to enjoy Heaven in the next implies a process of finality. Once attained, residents can enjoy Heaven thereafter. In *Nowhere* the utopia can, at any time, regress into winter because it is a cyclical narrative.

Prophecy plays an important role in the novel, as it both creates the vision and shows how to achieve it. Building on Marx's articulation that history is a series of class conflicts that end "either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes" (3), Morris believed social revolution would achieve the goals of socialism (382). Morris's vision of the garden becomes the motivation for the social revolution. Importantly, Morris imagines vision as a predictive faculty: the antiquarian, Hammond,<sup>34</sup> suggests that "those who worked for the change . . . could see further than other people" (133). A predictive prophecy is a vision that will happen, as opposed to prophecies of warning or of potential futures. This passage also underscores the way to achieve utopia, since the prophecy suggests a certain future, as long as people labour for the realization of the socialist utopia in the present, resulting in an inevitable apocalypse: a utopian socialist revolution.

Revolution becomes the solution in the text because Morris imagines peaceful protest and change as impossible. Looking backward, Hammond makes the impossibility of a peaceful resolution explicit when he asks, "what peace was there amongst those poor confused wretches of the nineteenth century? It was war from beginning to end: bitter war, till hope and pleasure put an end to it" (133). Given the violence informing the narrator's perception of the nineteenth century, it becomes clear that violent revolution is

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<sup>34</sup> The antiquarian, Hammond, is Dick's Great Grandfather; he is also Guest's Grandson (87).

the only way to eliminate oppression. Hammond argues that the (capitalist) system had been inherently violent and social mobility perpetuated violence as people merely transformed themselves from oppressed to oppressor, saying that, “[such mobility] was nothing more than a remote chance of climbing out of the oppressed into the oppressing class” (133). Though not represented directly, the novel presents revolution as both a human act and an apocalyptic event. The use of apocalyptic language links to the biblical notion that following the apocalypse the Elect will live in the New Jerusalem created by God, providing “divine” sanction and direction to the text.

Though the discourse is spiritual, the purpose and ideology behind the discourse is entirely materialist. The materialist focus becomes clear when the faith of the Middle Ages, which was directed towards heaven, is described as a model to be used by the coming socialist community (158) in which there is no spiritual afterlife, no heaven or hell (159). Thus, as Boos notes, Morris advocated replacing religion with socialism (“Garden Cities” 10). The poignant image of hell coming up to the earth in bodily form (144) sets the stage for the notion that those who died in the following massacre would and could become martyrs for the cause (145). Significantly, this relationship of reward for martyrdom mirrors the circumstances surrounding the “Elect” in *Revelation*. Despite the biblical language and references to decentralized militancy, the workers primarily achieve their revolution through withholding their labour (156), suggesting that the necessity of violent revolution, as depicted in the novel, may not be the only way for revolution to occur. Nonetheless, both violent and non-violent practices of resistance occur within the imagined revolution leading to utopian Nowhere. This distinction illustrates the violent response given by the authorities and the predominantly non-violent

response of the workers.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, Morris imagines “tragedy” as necessary for the “rebirth” of the society (97, 158). *News from Nowhere*’s central concern is the coming reborn society, the long-awaited earthly paradise. It is not the prophetic vision aiding in Nowhere’s production, nor in the apocalyptic events leading to its creation.

As a product of the strivings for social change in the nineteenth century, the novel expresses the new community through its representation of the relationship between humanity and nature. These changes are articulated via physical and cultural alterations: people in Nowhere look different physically from the English of the nineteenth century and they also act differently. Although the novel does not represent the environment as possessing agency, humanity’s new relationship with nature is one of mutual harmony. If emancipating nature and humanity create conditions under which the new community can develop, however, the novel also expresses contradictions surrounding human relationships with nature. According to Hammond, “Like the mediaevals, we like everything trim and clean, and orderly and bright; as people always do when they have any sense of architectural power; because then they know that they can have what they want, and they won’t stand any nonsense from Nature in their dealings with her” (106). This quotation highlights the relationship between architectural control and nature by showing that architectural power allows the architect to get what he or she wants by controlling nature. In contrast to Hammond, Ellen<sup>36</sup> articulates a relationship with nature in which nature should not be controlled, since it was a mistake in nineteenth-century

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<sup>35</sup> Florence S. Boos clearly illustrates that Morris was a pacifist in her article “Dystopian Violence: William Morris and the Nineteenth-Century Peace Movement” (15), which fits with the non-violent action of the workers that I am describing here.

<sup>36</sup> Ellen is a young woman with whom Guest is quite enamored, and she travels with the group for the later part of the novel. Holzman argues that Morris may have been expressing his desire for romantic and sexual fulfillment, particularly in the character Ellen, since he was in the midst of a marriage that had been falling apart (35-36).

thinking to create a dichotomy between humanity and “nature” (200). Expanding on her critique Ellen says, “It was natural to people thinking in this way, that they should try to make ‘nature’ their slave, since they thought ‘nature’ was something outside them” (200). Hammond and Ellen’s contradictory statements reflect the gender politics within the text. Hammond’s sense of control over the environment suggests the same kinds of masculine will over the environment that I argue exist within Raymond and Adrian’s attempts at utopianism in *The Last Man*. The masculine vision of the ideal makes nature do as the visionary architect desires. Ellen’s sense of nature is opposite because she imagines the relationship between humanity and nature in terms of an equal and harmonious whole that does not require domination. Morris manages control by appealing to the ideal of the garden as a natural space mediated by humanity. Contradiction is not only evident in landscape control; it is also evident in human reproduction, as the novel’s depictions of control over the environment and control over the production of children bear striking resemblances.

While the desire for social change is imagined as resulting from the alteration of the social conditions in which the people of Nowhere live and the novel explicitly deals with the changes in social conditions and the development of beauty, the focal point of change relates to environmental production and female reproductive capabilities. In terms of human change linked to reproduction and childbirth, Hammond believes that changing social conditions have changed people’s appearances:

Now, there are some people who think it not too fantastic to connect this increase in beauty [in comparison to the nineteenth century] directly with our freedom and



good sense in the matters we have been speaking of: they believe that a child born from the natural and healthy love between a man and a woman, even if that be transient, is likely to turn out better in all ways, and especially in bodily beauty, than the birth of the respectable commercial marriage bed, or of the dull despair of the drudge of that system. (96)

This quotation illustrates the direct correlation between social conditions and physical appearance as imagined in the novel. This positive view of human control over nature suggests that controlling the environment will lead to improved social conditions and to making the environment a productive garden. Interestingly, this kind of discourse was common among, and appealing to, those who advocated eugenics.<sup>37</sup> When Guest remarks that the workers in the field are such beautiful women he adds to his commentary a lengthy description of its nineteenth-century equivalent. He describes nineteenth-century female field workers as “gaunt figures, lean, flat-breasted, ugly, without a grace of form or face about them; dressed in wretched skimpy print gowns, and hideous flapping sun-bonnets” (169). He sees them as a blight on the landscape as he remarks “How often [they] had . . . marred the loveliness of the June day to me; how often had I longed to see the hay-fields peopled with men and women worthy of the sweet abundance of midsummer, of its endless wealth of beautiful sights, and delicious sounds and scents” (169). While Morris intends his vision of the future to replace oppressive social conditions prevalent in the nineteenth century, it is difficult to miss the eugenic arguments implicit in Guest’s statements, especially when he suggests that the nineteenth-century workers were not merely malnourished or poor, but unworthy of

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<sup>37</sup> Eugenics, utopia, and planning have strong historical connections even before Germany’s Third Reich. See, for example, Wolfgang Voigt’s “The Garden City as Eugenic Utopia” (295).

working in the fields. Moreover, the disparity between the male view, articulated by Hammond, of controlling nature and the female view, asserted by Ellen, of being part of nature reflects the continued correlation between women and nature and points in particular to the reproduction of culture and society and man's continued domination of the feminine. Morris is perhaps articulating a sense of women common at the end of the nineteenth century: women in the *fin-de-siècle* became "erotic-mythic creature[s], an incarnation of elemental and libidinal forces that exceeded the bounds of reason and social order. In the modern yearning for a preindustrial world, she embodied everything that modernity was not, the living antithesis of the ironic self-estrangement of urban man" (Felski 50).

*News from Nowhere* reveals the limits of imagining and reproducing an ideal future community in spite of Morris's desire to represent utopia because the nineteenth-century conditions he lived in are ultimately replicated in the novel. For this reason, the nineteenth century lingers, no matter how hard inhabitants of Nowhere try to disassociate themselves from it. The interplay between the epochs is expressed in the discourse surrounding the difference between Nowhere and the nineteenth century. The nineteenth-century notion of childhood as a period of innocence becomes the model for Nowhere (162), since childhood is a time in one's life when one is divorced from the production of goods and ignorant of how goods are produced.<sup>38</sup> This idea is made explicit when Guest states that "Here [in Nowhere] I could enjoy everything without an afterthought of the injustice and miserable toil which made my leisure" – something which he clearly could

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<sup>38</sup> Childhood is potentially also, a time without responsibility, a time of play, making a future where everyone is child-like potentially a time of intense individualism and irresponsibility, which is precisely the opposite of Morris' argument.

not have done in the nineteenth century from which he came (166).<sup>39</sup> Perhaps more explicitly reflecting the inability to envision an ideal community within the confines of one's present conditions, the narrative directly refers to historical attempts to create a non-capitalist ideal community from within a capitalist society. As Hammond suggests, the social system that existed in the nineteenth century created the Fourierist Phalangsteries<sup>40</sup> (98) living within a society composed of individuals with equal and comfortable living conditions makes such communal living unnecessary. Rather than express the Fourierist experiments as deranged socialist ideologies, Hammond argues that nineteenth-century conditions made alternative communities impossible, except as dysfunctional communities. While alternatives to social structure may have been nearly impossible in his view of the nineteenth century, in terms of its architecture, Hammond describes the model town Hampstead as being "agreeable and well-built," suggesting that some nineteenth-century communities contained ideal qualities despite their surroundings (101).

Aspects of Nowhere, imagined as new, retain nineteenth-century anxieties. Such anxieties are evident in the fear of effeminacy believed to accompany urbanization.<sup>41</sup> Hammond says that those who live in Nowhere "live amidst beauty without any fear of becoming effeminate" (105). Surrounded by beautiful and feminine things, according to the culture, the city would make men effeminate consumers of goods. Several

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<sup>39</sup> Morris tried to apply his theories of production to the day-to-day operations of his design company, but he could not live up to his own ideal as he attempted to compete with other design companies that mass-produced their goods (Sussman 113-115). He ended up using off-site, sub-contracted factories to aid him in production and his products became high-end commodities purchased by the wealthy (118, 121).

<sup>40</sup> François Charles Marie Fourier (1772-1837) was a French Socialist who advocated communal living and the dissolution of social institutions, like marriage and housing, because he believed that they created social problems. These *phalanges* would each consist of 1600 people. The communal buildings were called *phalanstères*.

<sup>41</sup> Effeminacy was a common fear during the late nineteenth century and was partly responsible for the creation of activities that would draw men into the "wilderness," such as boy scouts.

replications of nineteenth-century ideology exist among the inhabitants of Nowhere, especially with Guest. The novel cannot express a single, homogeneous, future community as it expresses several communities from different periods and viewpoints. Guest cannot characterize the nineteenth-century British community as a whole because he actually represents a subsection of that community: *fin de siècle*, British, utopian socialist.

Despite the general ideological agreement between Guest and the future community, negotiations between the two are problematic. The novel depicts an imagined translation between communities in order for contemporary society to understand the future community.<sup>42</sup> However, the act of translation is neither simplistic nor complete. Guest's guide in Nowhere, Dick, exemplifies the future community in the present. When Guest tries to inquire about the poor, for example, Dick understands "poor" as meaning "sickly" and proceeds to discuss how the ill would stay indoors, but he does not know anyone who is presently feeling ill (63). In order for Guest to understand what has happened to the poor, he must find a speaker from a community speaking a language more similar to his own: he needs to talk to an antiquarian and in this case it is Hammond. As Dick articulates, Hammond will understand the ideologies and experiences of Guest more than he can (63). Guest does find Hammond more understandable than Dick, as translation between the future community, expressed through Dick, and the community of the nineteenth-century socialist, Guest, are particularly prone to misinterpretation and miscommunication. Throughout the novel, Guest experiences moments where he cannot articulate an idea because the idea no longer

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<sup>42</sup> Tilottama Rajan has influenced my discussion of communities throughout this section through her idea of a community of readers in *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (193-194).

is part of the language used among the inhabitants of Nowhere: its usage has become archaic and forgotten. In most instances of miscommunication, Guest maintains silence. In a discussion with Dick about the use of coercion in the new society, Guest tries to explain the use of violence. Since physical forms of coercion no longer exist in Nowhere, Dick has no idea what Guest is referring to and when Guest realizes Dick is not following the idea, he narrates that “As I couldn’t explain why, I held my tongue” (79). Guest’s silence illustrates that ideas and practices common to the nineteenth century have changed so significantly by the twenty-first century that some of them no longer exist. It also reveals Guest’s tendency towards conformity. Nonetheless, even if Dick represents a future community in conversation with a past community, represented by Guest, untranslatable disconnections exist between the two. Fortunately for Guest, representatives of an intermediary community exist in Nowhere, thus allowing Guest to understand the new community in language and ideology similar to his own. The mode of the narration of the communities is also significant as Guest’s navigation of the new community is through one-on-one conversation where reason holds sway. This relationship occurs particularly between Guest and Hammond and between the reader and the text. While reasoned discourse is imagined as the primary mode of discourse among the inhabitants of Nowhere, passion (i.e., love) is imagined as being unreasonable and leads to problems and competition. For Freudian critics, love reflects the continued prevalence of id in the novel. It may also suggest that the discourse on love in the novel contradicts the idea that inhabitants can realize desire in utopia, since Guest never fulfills his romantic interest in Ellen. This lack of fulfillment might further reveal placement of women (and nature) as desirable, but unmanageable.

Given that the future community is not an eternal state it requires the inhabitants to continue to exercise reason to maintain its present form. Since the utopian Nowhere is alterable, the novel evinces the fear of the return of conditions prevalent in the nineteenth century following the epoch of rest. However, it is important to stress that the nineteenth century and Nowhere are distinct communities that cannot be bridged, but the potential for a new community exists following the epoch of rest that would resemble some of the characteristics of the nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> While Guest's presence might accentuate, or reveal, the instability of Nowhere, he does not create these problems. Dick admits that Guest is not the source of instability when he says that he has feared winter's approach before Guest came to Nowhere (225). Reflections of the nineteenth century exist within Nowhere because Nowhere still contains these elements, such as factories, though they are shifted to the periphery of the text. New technologies power boats and factories, but there is no description of what creates this power, except that it is not coal.

Morris's model mirrors the Garden City movement, which articulated a perfected society controlling space and moving the unwanted to the periphery. Morris envisioned the idea that destroying (nineteenth-century) city life via low density living would bring about the destruction of capitalism: in Nowhere London's population is spread about the countryside and the city has been reforested within the intervening land (55). For all the downsides of higher density living, F.M.L. Thompson argues that the Victorians essentially created the English countryside, saving a great deal of it from development, precisely because of the increased density of factory and commercial activities (172-174).

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<sup>43</sup> For an alternative view of the relationship between the nineteenth century and the epoch of rest see Marcus Waithe's "*News from Nowhere*, Utopia and Bakhtin's idyllic chronotope." He argues that "cross-pollination" (464) occurs between the periods, making them concurrent influences on each other. Admittedly, as I discussed earlier, Nowhere contains elements of the nineteenth century, which have not been discarded in its cultural evolution.

Moreover, urban planner Jane Jacobs argues that Garden City planning theory confused the problems of overcrowding with density (268). Ebenezer Howard's *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898), argued that his idea, the Garden City, combined the best of the country and the best of the city with none of either's downsides. Importantly, Howard's ideas were non-revolutionary (Boos "Garden Cities" 12). While Morris's *News from Nowhere* was one of Howard's inspirations and Garden City planning reveals some of the problematic elements of nineteenth-century planning theory, no one has truly attempted to create Morris's vision. As Raymond Williams argues, in many respects capitalism co-opted the Garden City movement in Britain. He suggests that the capitalists "arrived earlier" and "settled deeper" by becoming the ultimate anticipators of change. They replicated, but simultaneously reintegrated impulses for reform into the *status quo* (293-294). Moreover, in order to create model cities and Garden cities, profitability was a central concern and potential residents of these communities wanted to maintain class distinctions through house type, size, and location, thereby replicating class distinctions within the model community that mirrored those of society. As a result, the socialistic notions of equality that Morris had hoped to achieve did not take shape. Thus, while Garden Cities and Garden City-inspired urban planning led to better living conditions, such reforms did not live up to Morris's intended purposes.

Morris's utopian vision of a socialist community is an attempt at articulating a vision for the future. He describes how revolution is the only way to achieve his utopia, and he focuses on the rest and pleasure derived from achieving it; however, Morris's utopian vision also replicates the same things he wanted to destroy. His desire for the creation of an egalitarian future instead perpetuates gender inequality. Like the millennial

revolutionaries of the past, his imagined revolution is ultimately illusory. Although Marx articulated the idea that the destruction of the distinction between the country and the city would lead to a new sense of social equality, Morris's literary attempt to achieve this destruction has not succeeded. Despite melding the two terms in the country/city dyad, combining the best of both in order to create a garden and the new social reality of the utopian Socialist future, Morris unintentionally replicates nineteenth-century ideology notwithstanding imagining a time after the destruction of the nineteenth century.

As I have argued, Morris imagines nature as the place from which the articulation of the new community can occur. By reintegrating with nature, humanity can go back to a pre-capitalist and pre-industrialist world. Women also play a similar role, as women, freed from the oppression of capitalism, have taken on their "natural" roles of domesticity. In each case, control works as the means to achieve the desired outcome: a garden utopia. I have also argued that the ultimate achievement of this desire remains unfulfilled, as Guest longs for the coming future. Morris was not alone in imagining women and nature as both problems and solutions to utopia. Women and nature were both central to the discourse of degeneracy. As the 1890s became decadent and experimental, European cultures became increasingly concerned about degeneracy. For example, Max Nordau (1849-1923) articulated these fears in *Degeneration* (1895) where he argued that readers should consider *fin de siècle* as "*fin-de-race*" (2). By the *fin de siècle*, imagining the demise of the British became a common concern represented in their literature. The demise of Britain seemed to be evident in the decline of British Imperialism. Whether writers imagined aliens, Asians, nature, or something else



intervening, the empire, masculinity, and society as a whole seemed to be on the brink of destruction.

Chapter Three: *The Purple Cloud*

M.P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* has not received a great deal of critical attention, but those critics who have examined the novel tend to agree that it is an apocalyptic "last man" narrative that explores contemporary fears of over-population, the decline of the British Empire, male effete-ness, and the fear of Asian invasion. C.J. Keep, for example, argues that *The Purple Cloud* links apocalypticism to desire for closure and unity within the male body achieved via a form of cultural cross-dressing. Similarly, William L. Svitavsky explores the themes of Orientalism and racial conflict in the context of Shiel's decadent influences. Such readings demonstrate strong connections between contemporary fears as they affect the individual; however, the text is largely concerned with humanity collectively. In fact, Shiel believed that the individual human is without meaning, is a "transitory illusion" and that only the collective matters or endures (Spencer 32).<sup>44</sup> The collective that exists following the apocalypse<sup>45</sup> in *The Purple Cloud* is a utopian society in which male control over the feminine and the earth enables utopia.

The apocalypse in the novel reflects the anxieties and perceived problems of the *fin de siècle* world and it provides an imagined solution to those problems: a natural disaster that leads to the extermination of nearly all life on earth followed by a new

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<sup>44</sup> Paul Spencer notes that Shiel idolized Herbert Spencer and similarly endeavoured to "fuse science, religion, and political economy" (31). Shiel was searching for some sort of renewed faith, which he looked for in aspects of Christianity and later in Buddhism (41). The Manichean inspired dialectical powers of Black and White work together in creating the conditions for the "emergence of the new and superior race" by exterminating the current humans (36). Spencer describes that the book depicts this as "God's evolutionary will" (36). It is not only in *The Purple Cloud* that Shiel focuses on the idea of the "overman;" he also, in his 1902 novel *The Weird O' It*, explicitly casts Jesus in this role (36).

<sup>45</sup> The apocalypse in the novel was inspired by the Krakatau eruption of 1883, which led to localized and world-wide effects that lasted for several years. Although these effects were enduring, Krakatau "was a large natural event with extraordinary impact on the atmosphere and oceans . . . [that occurred] at a time of great growth in science, technology and communication, resulting in swift [global] attention" (Simkin 18). Since Shiel's focus in the novel is global, his use of this real global disaster as inspiration is important because the novel's focus is on not only the general decay of England and the desire for a renewed England, but also the world.

beginning for humanity. While the disaster is natural, the novel also depicts it as spiritually ordained. I will now outline the basic narrative of the 1929 version of *The Purple Cloud*. *The Purple Cloud* is a story about Adam Jeffson, a physician and middle-class Victorian gentleman who is coerced by his fiancée, Clodagh<sup>46</sup> into murdering anyone who stands in his way to become the one who reaches the North Pole. A Scottish preacher, Mackay, warns that this quest will bring God's wrath, like in the biblical genesis myth when Adam and Eve eat forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam reaches the pole as the sole survivor of the expedition. This event coincides with the release of a purple cloud, originating in South-East Asia. As far as Adam knows, he is the only human survivor of the purple cloud. The cloud also eradicates most of the other creatures on earth, except ocean-based life forms. In his search for survivors, Adam eventually returns to England and decides to destroy London. Adam subsequently wanders around the world for over twenty years oscillating between building and destroying while slowly devolving. The novel depicts Adam's behaviour as a spiritual battle between the White power and Black power. These Manichean inspired powers are spiritual forces, or gods. The White power is associated with life and construction and the Black power is associated with death and destruction. While destroying Istanbul he inadvertently finds a female survivor of the cloud of gas. At first Adam abuses Leda (Greek for Eve and a rape victim in Greek mythology), but together they redefine the future society as they bring about a "new race." The disaster is spiritualized through Adam's position as Elect and predestined actor in the conflict between the Black and White powers who are battling over him, which enables his

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<sup>46</sup> She says that her favourite historical figure and implied role model is Lucrezia Borgia, a Machiavellian *femme fatale* and murderess who lived in Italy during the Renaissance.

survival of the purple cloud. In decadent and corrupt England, Adam's Other, Clodagh, had controlled and constricted Adam, emasculating him. However, the apocalypse leads Adam into another conflict with a feminized Other, the earth. In the post-apocalyptic milieu, Adam reasserts his masculinity in opposition to the feminizing forces surrounding him. Apocalypse seemingly solves Adam's problems by eradicating the decadent and corrupt elements of society, thereby allowing for the emergence of a renewed and ideal post-apocalyptic society. Adam finds that the apocalyptic process also leads to his alteration, as he becomes animalistic and decadent, characteristics that he later despises.

As the apocalyptic disaster alters him, Adam develops a new sense of community. While Adam is an individual, he is also emblematic of a larger group, a subculture. Adam, as individual and (masculinist) community, sees contemporary society as debased. He desires an ideal society where his sense of community will become dominant. In the logic of binary opposition, Adam can achieve dominance by subjugating an Other, allowing him to become the Self. The Other needs to be one that the Self can control. Therefore, Adam's belief in Leda's status as *tabula rasa* makes her an opportune figure for reconstruction. To create his ideal society Adam needs to eliminate the potential for Leda to control him, as Clodagh does before the apocalypse. The development of an ideal community occurs through a Godwinian-style one-on-one discussion between a man and a re-socialized woman. The control over the feminine extends to the natural environment as the desire to create utopia occurs via social and city planning, which the novel reveals when Adam explains the problems of what was once civilization to Leda: overpopulation and lack of space (245). The aspiration for social and environmental control ties directly to the management of women because control averts male sexual desires and therefore

procreation. For this reason, Shiel imagines the feminine vision filtered through masculine authority. The vision itself illustrates gender control as the apocalyptic process creates the conditions, through eradication of the pre-apocalyptic world, for the development of a new community with realigned patriarchal gender norms, leading to the production of a renewed and superior race. Therefore, the novel is a masculinist fantasy of control over the feminine. In the way that Shelley suggested that masculinist controls lead to destruction in *The Last Man*, Shiel suggests something of an “answer” to Shelley’s view of destructive masculinity by implicating women in social ruin and making a case for (patriarchal) male control. While Shiel advocates masculinist and patriarchal control over the feminine, such control never truly succeeds in the novel.

The frame narrative and its prophetic vision first express male control over the feminine. Prophecy in late Victorian England often occurred within the highly popular spiritualist movement that believed “the living . . . [could] contact and communicate with the spirits of the dead [and that] women were particularly gifted as the mediums of this communication” (1).<sup>47</sup> Spiritualism was connected to science in that the “Believers assumed that the mind was capable of understanding all that was to be known about the material world, and happily extended their understanding of materiality to include the spirit realm” (Owen xiv). While *The Purple Cloud* presents a prophetess, like the Sibyl in *The Last Man*, the scientific means of accessing and interpreting this message links the power of prophecy to masculinity. To this end, feminist historian Alex Owen recognizes the contradictory relationships between power and powerlessness of women in the spiritualist movement: their renunciation of self made them the most effective mediums

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<sup>47</sup> Women played a profound role in the spiritualism movement, finding in it opportunities to have power denied them by traditional cultural and religious power structures (Felski 134).

(9). It is fitting then that the novel employs the same kind of gender hierarchy with women as spiritually attuned mediums and men as scientific controllers and interpreters of feminine vision: scientific/masculine filters exist in both the transmission of the prophecy and the retelling of the prophecy as it appears in book form. The frame narrative provides a seemingly logical reason for the existence of the main narrative that follows, referring to it as volume III of the prophecy. The transmission of the prophecy is not only a scientific endeavour bridging the spiritual realm and the scientific realm, but it also involves a form of masculine control over feminine vision. Thus the prophetess, Mary Wilson, achieves her prophecies through hypnosis brought about by a male doctor, Dr. Browne, who sends the fragments of prophecy in shorthand to his friend, who publishes them. Significantly, the scientific process of hypnosis and the practice of shorthand are both imagined as male activities.

The male doctor provides the first filter of masculinist control over the feminine prophecy. Dr. Browne has a great deal of power over the prophetess/patient, Mary, as he plays the role of hypnotist, physician, and spiritual aid. When the doctor states, “my organization was found to possess easy control over hers, and with a few suggestions I could expel her Legion” (xiv), he not only controls his patient, but he also frees her from a mental or spiritual disorder. The reference to Legion is important here because it links the act of hypnosis to the biblical story of Christ freeing a man possessed by evil spirits (from Satan) that were so numerous that they called themselves Legion (*St. Mark* 5:1-20). This reference to the biblical story is important because the man possessed by evil spirits is described as being insane prior to the removal of the demons and sane thereafter. The scientific man plays the role of Christ in freeing the woman from her demons, her vision.

Therefore, her vision is like a demonic possession that needs to be expelled and replaced by male control, in the same way that Christ replaces Satan as controller of the man who was possessed by evil spirits. Scientific man replaces Christ as saviour, thereby situating authority in (masculine) scientific ability. Thus, Dr. Browne's strong mind enables him to free her from her demons by controlling her weak (and unscientific) mind: his "organization" allows him to possess her "organization." Since the reference to Legion suggests that the prophecies, not only those compiled into Volume III, imply the presence of spiritual demons, the prophetic becomes demon possession instead of the seer's vision (or insight). While equating prophecy with demon possession further illustrates the unimportance of the prophetess in the prophecy, it also indicates that the prophecy that follows is not an ideal one, as it is a demonic vision.

However, the process of its translation from hypnosis-induced vision to textual narration further complicates the prophecy. The publisher's role further complicates the idea of a reliable prophetic vision in the frame narrative as the publisher finds that "deciphering [the shorthand] has been no holiday" (xiii), illustrating that it was not merely a copy of the original shorthand. This difficulty leads to multiple levels of interpretation: Dr. Browne interprets and compiles Mary's visions and transcribes the visions into shorthand for the publisher to recreate in plain language, though he has no first-hand knowledge of the prophecy and he finds the shorthand difficult to decipher. This process leads to several points of potential misinformation and misinterpretation concerning the prophecy, the accuracy of which is never endorsed by the prophetess. Mary Wilson does not engage in the process of interpretation and transcription of the vision that possessed her, in part because she has died in the interim, but also because the

novel depicts the role of interpretation as scientific and masculine, thus making it impossible for her to engage with the prophecy. Dr. Browne makes this gender hierarchy clear when he says to the publisher that “now she is dead, and, as a writing man, *and a man*, you should be interested, if you can contrive to decipher” (xiv; my emphasis). In other words, the entire process is a masculine endeavour achieved through the controlling of feminine vision.

The doctor’s ability to interpret/control is important because it illustrates a reformed femininity involving prophetic vision without the demons. Yet, the frame narrative presents several moments where it is clear that uncertainty exists surrounding the reliability of the prophecy’s outcome as book. The doctor’s ability to control Mary is not quite as absolute as he implies in his dialogue with the publisher. Despite his insistence that he has complete control over the prophetess, the doctor admits that he “could follow somewhat the trips of her musing and wandering spirit” (xv), which suggests that he has missed or misunderstood a great deal of what she has uttered. The degree to which the doctor inserted his own logical connections and interpretations into the prophetic vision is further problematized when he suggests that though the “spirit-lips of Mary Wilson” may have produced a valuable prophecy, he also found that she was “flighty” and “wayward” in her prophetic utterances and that he needed to *control* what she envisioned by using his “will” to keep her on track (xvii). Not only did he control her focus, but he also decided to write “down her more connected utterances” (xvii). These actions again suggest that two levels of interpretation exist between the prophetic utterance and the published text. Dr. Browne has decided what connects to what and has controlled the prophecy to the best of his ability. If this process were cast within a



scientific framework, it would be impossible to employ something like the scientific method to it, since male authority surrounds the veracity of the prophecy. This need for male control over the prophetess' prophecy is a reflection of the masculinist desire for control over women because women in the nineteenth century were commonly depicted as being flighty. The centrality of men in the production of the prophecies of a woman is clearly evoked throughout the frame narrative: both of the interpreters are male and the doctor controls, or at least tries to control, what the prophetess utters while she is in a trance that he brings about. It is not only important that the interpreters are male, but also that they fit within the masculinist ideal of the strong man. The entire novel deals with related questions of gender and control, making the frame narrative as introduction to *The Purple Cloud* not merely an excuse for the text that follows, but a direct reflection of the concerns articulated by the vision as presented in the remainder of the novel.

Adam clearly suggests that the pre-apocalyptic world is corrupt and that women are emblematic of this corruption. As he explains the past to Leda, Adam calls humanity "not a good race," while misanthropically rejoicing because of humanity's demise, saying that "—the commonness and dullness—of that bungling anthill, [have] now happily [been] wiped out" (225). Not only is he glad that humanity has been destroyed, but he also vows that "Never through me shall it spout and fester afresh" (225).<sup>48</sup> In his responses to Leda, Adam illustrates that he is unwilling to spread corruption by breeding with her. As sole survivor of his society, Adam dubiously separates his own corruption from that of Clodagh and the pre-apocalyptic world in general. Although Adam is

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<sup>48</sup> Remarks about the less than ideal conditions in the pre-apocalyptic world are also reflected in Adam's responses to the environment. Despite Adam's assertion that he does not desire to go on the expedition to the pole because he would rather remain "happy in [his] warm Eden with [his] Clodagh" (12), Adam actually suggests that England's climate is anything but ideal. In fact, Adam later calls England's climate "inconvenient" necessitating his move to the Mediterranean (135).

arguably as corrupt as his contemporaries due to his role in several murders, he, like his biblical counterpart, lays the blame on the woman (Clodagh) who “tempted” him into transgression. In the biblical genesis myth, Adam eats the fruit offered by Eve who had been tempted by the serpent. When God asks how it was that they came to eat the fruit, Adam says that Eve made him eat it. While God, in the narrative, does not accept Adam’s excuse, blaming Eve has persisted in Western culture. The centrality of this narrative, especially as presented in *The Purple Cloud*, lies in situating destruction and apocalypse with the feminine.

Adam depicts the pre-apocalyptic world as entirely corrupted, without redeeming qualities. Adam’s sense that humanity is rotten to the core is explicitly reflected when, after the apocalypse, Adam refers to a smell coming from land, saying that “‘Man . . . is decomposing’: for I knew it well: the odour of human corruption” (71). Adam is making a pun on the word corruption as a signifier of both moral and physical decay. While Adam’s critique initially seems to dwell on the corruption of his contemporaries, he clearly suggests that humanity has always been corrupt, with physical decomposition as evidence of moral corruption. In reference to his contemporaries, Adam is more precise. When Leda tells Adam that there must be some good people, he responds to her query by telling her that books contain only the “best people” and that “there were millions of others—especially about the time of the cloud—on a lower level—common, dull, lubberly, mean, debased, diseased, making the earth a murrain of vices and crimes” (244). His view of corruption is a typical view of the masses from an elitist’s perspective. As Felski argues, “Bourgeois representations of the crowd in the nineteenth century . . . typically resort to feminizing metaphors of fluidity and liquidity; the anonymity of the

mass embodies a labile, chaotic, and undifferentiated force that threatens the boundaries of autonomous individuality” (Felski 73). Moreover, “As Andreas Huyssen has argued, this ‘everyone’ [the masses] has often been gendered feminine in the texts of male modernism; women and the masses merge as twin symbols of the democratizing mediocrity of modern life, embodying a murky threat to the precarious status and identity of the artist” (106). Since mass culture creates mediocrity, women become problematic because they produce children.

Adam’s view of corruption focuses on Clodagh. Adam certainly believes his society is diseased, but his former fiancée fulfills the role of degenerate *par excellence* for Adam and Leda: Clodagh is Adam’s example to Leda of what made humanity greedy and corrupt. After learning about Clodagh, Leda (whose mispronunciation of the letter “r” and “l” implies her linguistic degeneracy) reasons that people like Clodagh ruined the rest of society because

The others had got *spoiled*: the vices and climes must have commenced with those who lacked things, and then the others, always seeing vices and climes lound them, did them too—as one olive in a bottle is lotten the whole lump becomes collupted: and all thlough a little carelessness at the first; but if more men spling now——. (Shiel 247)

Leda’s reasoning illustrates the pre-apocalyptic world’s problem: it is not possible to have an ideal society, since people like Clodagh spoil everyone else. Clodagh creates the situation that leads to Adam’s corruption because the decadent and corrupt England of the pre-apocalypse allows the corrupt to have power over others, making them corrupt as well. More specifically, society at the time of the cloud allowed women to have control

over men, overturning the “natural” order of control. Adam identifies Clodagh with the problems of civilization because she controls and emasculates him. Adam clearly suggests that flipping the hierarchy between the sexes leads to corruption and transgression when he alludes to the biblical genesis myth, referring to Clodagh as an Eve who had given him the forbidden fruit (20). Eating the forbidden fruit, according to critics like Northrop Frye, is a metaphor for sex (109). Fears surrounding excessive population growth made procreation a transgression; in spite of the directive in *Genesis* to be fruitful and multiply (this directive follows the transgression of eating the fruit). Adam’s reference to Eve implies that women, if given the opportunity, will tempt men into transgression, leading to procreation, which indicates the power associated with sex that is at the disposal of women like Clodagh. As Claudia Nelson argues, “while Victorian fantasies may focus on the loving mother’s likeness to God, their Edwardian equivalents often see her as monstrous because of her sexual knowledge” (150). The novel does not depict Clodagh’s desires as innocent or Edenic; rather, she is a decadent member of a decadent society. In response to Adam, Clodagh states about herself that

In these days of ‘the corruption of the upper classes’, and Roman decadence of everything, shouldn’t every innocent whim be encouraged by you upright ones who strive against the tide? I find a sensuous pleasure in drugs—like Helen, for that matter, and Medea, and Calypso, and the great antique women, who were all chymists. To study the human ship in a gale, and the slow drama of its foundering—And I want you to acquire the habit of letting me have my little way—. (Shiel 15)

This passage clearly evokes Clodagh's desire to dabble in science, namely the making of drugs, in order to satisfy her whims. Her whims are poisonous and destructive, however. Because Clodagh has drugged her own cousin in order to kill him, Adam describes her as a murderess and a "godless woman" (11). He suggests that she is doubly immoral since she not only transgresses by being a murderess, but also is an unrepentant and unredeemed transgressor because she feels no remorse for her actions. Adam depicts Clodagh as a temptress and corrupter of the innocent Adam Jeffson, who seems to have no agency. Clodagh suggests that her desires are natural and that people like Adam "strive against the tide" (15). A figure standing in for the debased community destroyed in the apocalypse, she is emblematic of how people were in the pre-apocalyptic world: materialistic, individualistic consumers. Interestingly, figures like Clodagh (consuming women) were common during the period; the development of the department store as a feminized public space led to gender conflict:

Such a feminization of the public sphere was clearly threatening to bourgeois men, whose psychic and social identity had been formed through an ethos of self-restraint and a repudiation of womanly feelings and whose professional status was based on an at-best ambivalent relationship to the marketplace. Thus fears of an uncontrollable female desire converge with a pessimistic view of the hedonistic excess engendered by capitalist expansion to create a dystopian vision of the all-consuming woman. (Felski 90)

The novel depicts Clodagh as such a woman. Importantly, the all-consuming woman can be understood, as Felski argues, as performing an act of female aggression against patriarchal oppression (77). If one interprets Clodagh's behaviour as an act of resistance,

it makes her potentially less corrupt. We may consider her less corrupt if her opposition to masculinist oppression is the source of her behaviour. According to this logic, the “solution” to female self-destructiveness and over-consumption would be less patriarchal domination rather than more – as the inability to control the feminine in the novel bears out. Nonetheless, the novel employs the apocalyptic structure in order to reveal the corruption of humanity. Once the novel presents the undesirable elements, the role of the apocalypse becomes clear. Reflecting the biblical myth that inspires the description of both Clodagh and Leda, Clodagh’s role is that of the corrupted Eve; the Eve who creates the transgression leading to the apocalypse. The apocalypse enables movement beyond the punishment for transgression that hinders the development of humanity. Shiel imagines the apocalyptic solution as a natural disaster exterminating nearly all life on earth. If apocalypse creates the conditions for a new start for humanity, one in which “man’s atrocity to man” will be eliminated (Shiel 265), the apocalypse alone does not create ideal conditions.

While the eradication of society has seemingly “solved” the problem of feminine agency, Adam quickly learns that he must confront another feminized Other, the earth. As Clodagh’s example clearly demonstrates, strong women corrupt the pre-apocalyptic world. The feminized and emasculating Other is one of the central aspects of apocalypse in the novel. Throughout his wanderings after the apocalypse, Adam says that he cannot be himself (Shiel 112). He cannot be himself because of the ongoing effect of Clodagh’s dominance, calling himself a “compliant wife” before his transformation into a modern Western man (201). The Earth is particularly frightening to Adam because he believes that “she” has the power to make him into something new, particularly a feminized and

therefore “low” or devolved creature. Adam expresses his fear of Mother Earth’s ability to remake him when he says: “more and more the earth overgrows me, woos me, assimilates me; so that I ask myself this question: ‘Must I not in some years cease to be a man, to become a small earth, her copy, weird and fierce, half demoniac, half ferine, wholly mystic—morose and turbulent—fitful, and mad, and sad—like her?’” (172).

Adam’s fear of being made into what he sees as feminine is made clear in this passage. The Earth, like Clodagh, achieves her victory over Adam through a kind of wooing. Note that all the references to the Earth reflect notions of femininity common in nineteenth-century culture. More specifically, the similarities between the Earth and the prophetess in the frame narrative are fitting, especially the references to demons and mysticism.

Adam describes how the earth made “primitive” peoples in the pre-apocalyptic world wild, which reinforces the idea that the earth is a feminizing force (175). His obsession with nature’s ability to take away his identity shows his fear of effeminacy and subsequent obliteration, yet he concludes that he would not become effeminate because “Heaven,” which is associated with the dominion of a masculine God, is in him (184).

When Adam becomes lost in a jungle in India he muses on remaining in the jungle, lost, and how the power of the earth in uncivilized regions is so great that a “solitary man . . . would rapidly be transmuted into a tree, or a snake or a cat” (182). Ultimately, Adam cannot make up his mind whether the earth actually has any power (248), but he still fears the potential for his own evolution, or devolution, and the evolution of other creatures from inanimate nature (203). Adam cannot be sure exactly how or to what extent nature has changed. He nonetheless believes the Earth has gained new powers as a result of the destruction of humanity, saying “already everything had an aspect of tending

to a state of wild nature, and I could well divine that for a year at least no hand had tended the land . . . [and these changes] must be due to some principle by which Nature acts with freer energy and larger scope in the absence of man” (96). Significantly, Adam argues that nature without the “subduing or mesmerizing effect” of man would create Hell (169). In fact, humanity is central to both God and nature (164-165). People must populate the earth for it to remain a Heaven rather than a Hell and Adam works in order to control, or at least limit, nature. It is important, however, to recognize that limiting nature clearly relates to controlling population in that limiting sexual desire for women leads to modest population growth, presuming that men’s sexual desire is also limited. While the existence of humanity is necessary for subduing nature, male persons within this discussion are emphasized as the ones who will enact such control.

In the post-apocalyptic milieu, Adam feels as though he is able to reassert his masculinity in opposition to the feminizing forces surrounding him. The discovery of Leda plays an important role in Adam’s redefinition, but without apocalypse to solve Adam’s perceived problems by eradicating the decadent and corrupt elements of society, Adam might not have been able to achieve such a reconstruction of his identity. Apocalypse is an unwanted, yet ultimately beneficial process, though it makes Adam into something that he despises: selfish and individualistic. It is beneficial because it leads to an imagined positive outcome in which Adam is able to redefine community.

The non-European is another feminized Other standing in the way of Adam’s reconfiguration. Before Adam redefines community he expresses contempt for racial others, particularly Asians: he searches the world for a “Chinaman” that he dreams still exists, traveling across the globe to any place where an Asian might still live, with the



desire to destroy him or her (183). His contempt might link with Shiel's view of the "robust young cultures" of Asia growing in population and competing with the effete and dying British culture (Svitavsky 18). Perhaps Adam disdains Asian people so much because he believes that the growth of Asian populations may tie into the notion of feminine irresponsibility. Situating the feminization of Asians within discourse about the Orient was common and "The correlation of the East with an inscrutable, seductive, and sexually available woman has become almost axiomatic" (Keep 140). Rather than embracing Others, Adam glorifies in their destruction, allowing for a fantasy that repairs the sense of male effeteness and general degeneracy of the "race" as the British culture that Adam embodies no longer has competition. The apocalypse, having eradicated degenerates within society, allows for the development of a society without corruption. In short, apocalypse creates a clean slate via a sort of ethnic cleansing.

Prophecy and apocalypse force the protagonist to reaffirm his identity and his communal relationships because, without community, Adam cannot define nor differentiate himself. While Adam is being anti-social and destructive he thinks about setting Istanbul on fire, but ironically, destroying Istanbul is an action that does bring community by freeing Leda. Adam had been roaming around for weeks experiencing a "phantasm" while gazing at the moon. He narrates that,

[I] pore upon the moon for hours and hours, so passionately rapt she soared through cloud and cloudless, until I would be smitten with doubt of my identity: for whether I were she, or the earth, or myself, or some other thing or person, I did not know, all so silent alike, and all, except myself, so vast, the Seraskierat, and Stamboul, and the Marmora Sea, and Europe, and those argent fields of the

moon, all large alike compared with me, and measure and space were lost, and I with them. (196)

Adam finds that he cannot compare himself with the immensity of nature. Instead, compared to nature (significantly feminine) he is insignificant and unable to differentiate himself. In order to differentiate himself and feel significant he needs a human companion. While Adam finds his time as an oriental monarch initially enjoyable, he increasingly recognizes the necessity of community. Adam's jubilation over reaching the pole reveals how meaningless such actions are without community when he realizes there are no people to share his experience (68). He further despairs when the work that he puts into building a temple does not satisfy him. In order to define himself as separate from nature and above the base and animalistic desires of non-human nature (which includes "primitive" human societies and the masses, in Adam's mind), Adam requires a companion who will reflect back to him his own humanity. However, this person cannot be like Clodagh, who expresses her own "base" desires, but someone who will behave in a self-controlled manner. Adam needs someone who will build a new community with him, not aid in its self-destruction.

The idealized relationship that Adam has with Leda provides precisely the needed community member who will work alongside Adam in the construction of a new community. Considered within the context of the gendered relationship between Adam and Leda, community has a humanizing and socializing effect in the novel. After meeting Leda, Adam begins to believe that he has been insane for the past twenty years as he wandered the globe, but that he is improving "owing to the presence of only one other being on the sphere with me" (218). Shortly after first seeing Leda, Adam suggests,

mixing religious language and social theory, that “it may be true, true, that it is ‘*not good*’ for man to be alone” (207; cf. Genesis 3:18). However, Adam links the message to a secular ideology when he says, “There was a religious sect in the past which called itself ‘Socialist’, and with these must have been the truth, man being at his highest when most social, at his lowest when isolated: for the earth gets hold of all isolation, and draws it, to make it fierce, base, and materialistic, like sultans, aristocracies, and so on” (207).

Without society, the novel depicts humanity as becoming greedy and individualistic, thereby reflecting problems associated with social class, feminization, and the masses. In order to articulate a new vision of community, Adam combines community and selflessness using religious sounding language. Adam makes reference to the Bible,<sup>49</sup> appropriating Jesus’s words saying “Heaven is where two or three are gathered together” (207), suggesting perhaps that small numbers of people are a good thing, rather than the masses or greedy individuals. Adam’s critique of the individual is directed toward those “solitary castes” like “Brahmins, patricians, aristocracies, [and] monopolists” who each resist community in order to avoid “intrusion of another into the furtive realm of the self” so that no one can “invade their domain of privileges” (207). Adam makes clear his own connection with the selfish individualism he practiced while alone on the planet as he remarks:

Also it may be true . . . that after twenty years of solitary selfishness a man becomes, without suspecting it, without noticing the stages of evolution, a real and true beast, a Rome-burning Nero, a horrible, hideous beast, rabid, prowling, like that King of Babylon, his nails like birds’ claws, his hair like eagles’ feathers,

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<sup>49</sup> In *St. Matthew* 18:20 Christ is attributed as saying, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

with instincts all inflamed and fierce, delighting in darkness and crime for their own sake. (207)

While Adam proves that he continues to be like the vile beast he denounces by attempting to stab Leda, he nonetheless realizes that his devolution has made him resemble the animalistic King of Babylon:<sup>50</sup> he is conscious of his behaviour even if he perpetuates it.

Shiel's depiction of Leda's level of agency, which he articulates as both subversive and conservative, reveals his inability to imagine male control over the feminine. Adam expresses his control over Leda through his ability to socialize her. At the same time, according to the narrative, Leda socializes Adam. Both attempts at socialization occur through a process akin to a Godwinian one-on-one conversation; however, instead of coming together as equals and talking through issues, Adam asserts control over Leda and becomes a paternal figure for her. Again, this theoretically allows for the process of progress without self-destructive behaviour on Leda's part. The way Adam socializes Leda, and how he imagines her development, illustrates his attempt to dominate and recreate Leda. When Adam first meets Leda she does not talk and he therefore muses on her lack of language: "Not only can she not speak to me in any language that I know, but she can speak in *no* language: it is my belief that she has *never* spoken" (210). In Adam's mind, at least, Leda has no voice, no agency, a view which is reinforced by his references to her as a child, as innocent, even animal (a dog), primitive, evincing animistic beliefs in her sense that every object around her was "a living thing" (210-211). Oddly, although Adam imagines Leda's mother teaching Leda what to eat in their place of confinement, Adam does not imagine the mother teaching her daughter

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<sup>50</sup> The novel implies that the king is Nebuchadnezzar, but does not explicitly say so.

language (224). Or as Leda mentions later in their relationship, Adam does not suspect that Leda has talked with the White power (239).

Adam is largely successful, at least on the surface, in controlling Leda because he takes advantage of the knowledge and power that he has and that Leda lacks. He initially contemplates making her his slave (206). Then he attempts to stab her with his knife, potentially a metaphor for rape. However, the White power stops him with a bolt of lightning limiting Adam's power over Leda. Realizing that Leda is protected by the White power, and after realizing how lonely he is, Adam has a vision of Leda that he will not share with the reader since it is likely sexual, following as it does some desperate yearnings for companionship (212). Though the White power prevents Adam from killing Leda, Adam still calls her "creature," abuses her, and then makes her into his ideal woman by dressing her and even piercing her ears (216-217). Adam's contradictory statements undermine his sense of Leda's femininity: Adam makes Leda conform to his own notions of femininity, and then he suggests that her coquetry is innate, although he also says she is "imitative as a mirror" (219), which suggests that she had learned the behaviour from her surroundings. Despite Adam's claims that Leda exhibits innately feminine behaviours, he makes clear to what extent he has socialized her. Nowhere does Adam make his role in shaping who Leda becomes clearer than when he says: "I shall teach her to steer [the ship] by the compass, and to manipulate liquid-air, as I have taught her to dress, to talk, to cook, to experiment, to write, *to think*, to live: for *she is my creation*, this creature, as it were a 'rib from my side'" (251; my emphasis). Interestingly, Adam's sense of ideal femininity includes conventionally masculine capabilities such as steering the ship. Leda's two favourite books are the Bible and a chemistry book (243).

The Bible in the novel is a book of stories, or legends (243), which is part of her evocation of the angel in the house.<sup>51</sup> Her spiritual alignment with the White power supports the idea that Leda is an angel in the house, because the Victorians saw women as morally pure and religious, and thus capable of providing men with refuge from the corrupting influence of the public and social world (208). The Bible's role as lesson book is important because it presents and generally reinforces patriarchal societal norms, providing Leda with ideological reinforcement of Adam's ideal gender roles (237). However, Leda's interest in chemistry might suggest a fusion of gender roles (and an unacknowledged connection with Clodagh), since science is imagined as being the realm of men. While this potential for synthesis exists, it is contradicted by Adam's binary logic when he wonders, "whether [Leda] is all simplicity, or all depth" (237). Adam sees Leda as an angel in the house, which he expresses as a woman's innately reforming nature when he says, "I have wondered whether a certain *Western-ness*—a growing modernity of tone—may be the result, as far as I am concerned, of her presence with me?" (238) Adam imagines Leda as making him Western in spite of her Eastern origins. Although he suggests that Leda has changed him, it is more likely that Adam has socialized her in a way that reinforces his own preconceived gender norms. In fact, her "housewifeliness" and "instinctiveness" concerning cooking situates Leda as being biologically predetermined to fulfill roles traditionally ascribed to women (241). Adam makes even clearer the gender role that Leda should perform when he says that Leda recognizes the authority of the man, "quietly acquiescing, like a good wife, not attempting to force her presence upon me" (284). Adam derives his role from the biblical Patriarchs with whom he identifies (260). Despite Leda's masculine capabilities and interests she certainly

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<sup>51</sup> Keep makes Leda's evocation of Bourgeois values explicit calling them "seemingly innate" (145).

reflects the Victorian ideology of femininity that prescribes “innate” passivity of women and “de-eroticised sexuality” only realizable within marriage and childbearing (Owen 7). Moreover, “These elements worked together to produce the pervasive creature, a self-sacrificing wife and natural mother” (7). For Leda to play the role of Victorian woman she must do exactly what Adam claims to be unwilling to do: procreate.

Despite Adam’s view of Leda’s role she evokes a certain level of subversion. Leda protests being called Clodagh, as she recognizes that Adam’s use of this name allows him to define her as wicked (253). Upon closer examination, Leda’s ability to control Adam is not so different from Clodagh’s. When Leda suggests that they need to follow Destiny and procreate and Adam calls it irresponsible, she makes it clear that she “could *make* [Adam] come—*now*, if I chose; but I will not; I will wait upon my God” (275). The difference between Clodagh and Leda in this quotation is that Leda avoids the supposedly innate female ability to control and manipulate men. If Leda chooses not to make use of her feminine power over Adam in this instance, she certainly does so elsewhere: one can read Leda’s skill at fishing as a metaphor for her ability to reel in Adam, making her duplicitous like Clodagh. Leda tells Adam about her notion that she is destined to be with him while fishing and, indeed, she is the more successful fisher, suggesting that she is more capable at baiting a fish – and by metaphorical extension a man (239-241). Leda’s ability to reel in a man becomes evident after Leda and Adam have separated (with Leda staying in France and Adam sailing to England). After Adam arrives in England, she calls him on a telephone. She pretends the purple cloud is coming again in order to trick Adam into inviting her over to England (289). In these examples, Leda is certainly being deceptive. It is perhaps the necessity of fitting herself into one of

the two categories available to Victorian women that leads to Leda's duplicity. Since either Victorian women must fit within the decadent or the maternal model of femininity and Leda is not supposed to be like Clodagh (decadent), she must have children to be maternal. Cast within the idealized view of the maternal feminine, it is possible that Leda can avoid the accusation of being decadent, but the problem with Leda is that Adam has socialized her and it is not possible to attribute her actions to any form of agency outside of Adam, as he is her creator. Nonetheless, the community that Adam has built with Leda is one that privileges the masculine over the feminine, at least on the surface.

Through their discussions together, Leda and Adam define what they think the new community should be like. One of the changes that they envision for the new community is the development of an equitable relationship with the environment, which the novel expresses through references to space and planning. In the new community, the arrangement of property will allow for an ideal society. Adam denounces private property when he sees a "trespassers will be prosecuted" sign at a mansion that he comes across while wandering around London. Assuming that the owner is a man, Adam says that he "could not but marvel at this poor man, with his fantasy that part of a planet is his" (113). He calls the man a "poor man" as a way of indicating his self-deception and his moral poverty. Furthermore, he critiques property ownership by comparing owning the planet to "some little duke" who owned fields (140). By making clear the absurdity of one person having ownership of the planet, Adam makes the Duke seem absurd for owning fields. His experience as a solitary human leads to his recognition of the way that humans can become accustomed to new social arrangements: "The arrangement of one-planet-one-inhabitant already seems to me, not merely natural, but the only natural and proper,



condition: so much so, that any other arrangement has now, to my mind, a kind of unlikely, wild and far-fetched unreality, like the utopian schemes of dreamers and faddists" (139-140). Adam's seemingly contradictory statements must be contextualized by way of reference to his state of mind. He is illustrating the extent of his devolution by expressing the extent of his selfishness. In the process, Adam shows that land ownership is not a natural phenomenon; rather, humans merely get used to the *status quo*. Importantly, he compares having to share one planet with another human being with utopian schemes. This comparison is significant because it suggests that utopian schemes may be achievable since they are no less constructs than the contemporary system. By recognizing that wealth distribution is a system devised by humans and for humans, no system can be "natural" and no system impossible. The constructedness of social organization and wealth distribution becomes evident when humanity looks at the question from a distance, which the fantasy of the last man narrative provides. Through the apocalyptic fantasy, Adam is able to articulate the present problem that humanity is experiencing: overpopulation. Adam explains to Leda that humanity "hated because they were numerous," and yet in response to Leda's question of whether enough land existed for everyone Adam states that "There was—yes: much more than enough; but some got hold of lots of it, and, the rest felt the pinch of scarcity" (245). This quotation shows that overpopulation is a concern that the novel addresses, but land reform may be the solution to the problem suggesting an alternative to his hatred of the masses and of biological reproduction.

Should readers wish to avoid the apocalyptic destruction of humanity by averting the apocalypse, land reform and ownership seem to be the implied solution. Leda posits

the only other alternative when she suggests that humanity's cleverness, which enabled them to invent ships and other technologies, should have allowed them to solve the problem (245). However, she answers her own conundrum when she reasons that humans had become dull-witted in their desires for riches at the expense of the poor (273), recognizing perhaps, that humanity needs to start over again. The idea of beginning again illustrates another contradiction in the novel's discourse of racial others. Despite depicting non-Europeans as savage and degenerate, precisely because of their close association with the earth, Leda idealizes the Polynesians. Humanity in its natural state will return to goodness; for she believes humans are not naturally predisposed to wickedness, arguing, for example, that the Polynesians lived with common property until "white slaves" preached to them and corrupted them (274). Adam and Leda play the role of the new Polynesians for their "hearts are not evil" (274). They are uncorrupted, a new Adam and Eve in a new garden of Eden.

Even before Adam finds Leda he argues that the possibility for positive or negative visions of the future is entirely within the hands of humanity and that humans either build heaven or hell on earth. Therefore, utopia or dystopia can exist based on our own approach to social problems (117). But what would heaven look like if it were built? Adam suggests that a more "natural" urban landscape would be preferable when he remarks that "It was wonderful to see the villages and towns reverting to the earth, already invaded by vegetation, scarcely any more breaking the continuity of 'nature', the town as much the country as the country, and that which is not-man becoming all in all with a certain *furor* of robustness" (256). For Adam and Leda, the return to an Edenic urban landscape suggests the possibilities of human potential. For them it is an

opportunity to plan the world again. This time, the world will produce a superior race that will not fail to make and to keep the earth a heaven. This new race will be like Leda, muses Adam, and will invent meat if they desire it because they will be clever (293), unlike the people before the cloud. However, similarly to the Polynesians, the imagined possibilities are a contradiction. The feminizing earth Adam encountered during the apocalypse was precisely the problem. While Adam imagines nature as Edenic, he only does so because he imagines his dominion over it. In the same way that Adam does not truly control Leda, the environment also will not fully succumb to Adam's desires. Shiel articulates, via uniting male, female, east, and west through the vision of a garden, the naturalization of male patriarchal control. Although Adam denounces male control, he also engages in it because he believes it is necessary: it is human destiny and part of God's plan.

*The Purple Cloud* clearly anticipates the goals and concerns of National Socialism: the realization of a hyper-masculine culture focused on a return to nature and the development of racial "purity" in which women are understood as "traditionally" domestic. Considering the utopian goals of early socialists, and of socialists such as Herbert Marcuse who try to distinguish the goals of "real" socialism from the dystopian reality of twentieth-century fascism (389-419), it is difficult not to see the fascist outcome as a parody of the utopian socialist yearning for an ideal community.<sup>52</sup> Yet, as early as the French Revolution, systematic social and city planning evoked elements of control over the feminine, something that Mary Shelley articulates in *The Last Man*.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> For a historical discussion of the development National Socialism see Jost Dulffer's "Bonapartism, Fascism, and National Socialism" (111-112).

<sup>53</sup> She is also dealing with the same concerns in *Frankenstein* (1816).

Conclusion:

Although the three novels span a century, their similar concerns with creating a (socialist) utopia reflect the ongoing desire for an alternative to capitalism. I have analyzed the individual representations of this utopian rhetoric. Now I will discuss the three main aspects that I analyzed from each novel in order to examine them as a unit, highlighting their focus on prophetic vision through a secular form of millenarianism and the problem of control in creating utopia, particularly over women and nature. In order to make clear the connections between the articulations for reform in the three novels, I will analyze the disparate uses of vision and its gendering, control over women, and control over nature. By examining the novels as a unit, I will show how the inability to imagine the achievement of a (socialist) utopia reflects the conflicting desires that undermine such an articulation. Rather than creating an egalitarian alternative to capitalism, the novels evince capitalist impulses. Thus, women and nature not only represent the organic pre-capitalist community that utopian rhetoric articulated as providing an escape from capitalism, but they also represent the focal points of capitalism (as articulated by Felski). It is this contradiction that structures, and ultimately unravels, the utopian texts I examine.

Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* provides a frame narrative that explains the novel's critique of gender relations. By providing a female interpreter of a prophetess's vision, Shelley highlights the gendered lens through which the novel expresses its criticism of masculinist impulses in contemporary utopian rhetoric. A female prophet's vision, free from coercion, suggests a direct and unfiltered expression of the critique of gender exploitation. Despite the role of the female in vision and interpretation, Shelley chose a

male narrator for the main narrative of the novel. This choice suggests that the concern about gender exploitation expressed in the novel is not one of sex, but of gender construction. I have argued that Shelley recognizes that gender is socially constructed and that she shows that characters need not advance gender biases. Hence, her choice of sex for the introduction is significant because it anticipates, or reflects, the tendency to indicate the gender bias of the novel through the sex of the narrator of the frame narrative. In the frame narrative provided in *News from Nowhere*, the gender bias of the novel is decidedly advancing what would be understood as typical male interests: the dream vision is a male's dream of a future in which his libido and conscience will be free as he experiences the utopian community of Nowhere. Ellen in the novel becomes something of a prize or product for the dreamer to consume, though such fulfillment does not ultimately occur in the text. The narrative advances action in the reader's present and the novel implies that the reader is male, making Ellen the reader's prize as well. Hence, while Shelley's frame narrative advances a benefit to both sexes through the achievement of equality, Morris's narrator imagines and experiences his own desire according to his own masculinist sexual conventions.<sup>54</sup> Although Morris's narration, perhaps unconsciously, focuses on male heterosexual desire, the frame narrative in M.P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* articulates male patriarchal control as a solution to the challenges of modernity, and its gender construction is largely an inversion of Shelley's. The novel presents the reader with a woman's vision, but men are the interpreters of that vision. The prophetess's vision is not valued as potential insight, but is instead filtered to remove its "demonic" elements. With the male interpreters of the female vision, it may not be

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<sup>54</sup> Each novel is heteronormative in terms of its construction of sexual preferences among their characters; hence, my heteronormative statement.

surprising that the ensuing narrative focuses on a male character, Adam Jeffson. The frame narrative tells readers that women are valuable, visionary in fact, if kept under the control and interpretation of men. Each text uses vision to express the gender relationships that will follow and in each novel women are controlled by masculinist impulses.

Through two of her main characters, Shelley depicts two types of masculinist control over women in *The Last Man*. She illustrates how men may control women through primarily physical or primarily ideological means. In order to express the physically coercive type of figure, Shelley provides the character Raymond. The novel depicts Raymond's control over women as highly effective: he gains the admiration of at least two of the female characters, Perdita and Evadne. Raymond's ability to control women allows him to consider them as possessions, a tendency which he clearly expresses in his simultaneous desire for Perdita and for the crown. By equating the two as objects of his political advancement, Raymond controls but also dehumanizes them. Shelley articulates the other form of control through her representation of Adrian, who is an example of the type of character who controls women through ideological coercion. Adrian is less successful than Raymond in his attempts to control women. Though he wishes to receive the admiration of Evadne, she ignores him. Adrian's behaviour reflects a desire to control Evadne because he does not actually deal with her as a human and an equal, but rather a beautiful object. Shelley's expression of two visions of utopian males, which she expresses through Adrian and Raymond as different character types, is emblematic of cultural trends in utopian rhetoric. These two models of utopian reformers are evident in the other two utopian novels I am examining. While Shelley has not

influenced the developments of characters in the other two novels, she seems to have clearly articulated the two types of men who advanced utopian rhetoric in the early nineteenth century and who would continue to be depicted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century novels. Considering these two character types as part of a trend in utopian rhetoric allows me to connect Shelley's criticisms of two character types with characters evincing the same qualities.

William Morris's character William Guest is similar to Adrian. Both Guest and Adrian dream of utopia and imagine its achievement through non-violence. They similarly advocate an egalitarian utopia. M.P. Shiel's character Adam Jeffson is similar to Raymond. Both Adam and Raymond imagine utopia as being the achievement of a "great man." They see the achievement of utopia as coming about via strong centralized control. Most importantly, the characters' similarities reflect questions of gender and love. In Morris's novel, William Guest is similar to Adrian in his love for Ellen. Like Adrian, Guest's love is not reciprocated within the narrative; however, Guest suggests that had he been there longer he would have managed to consummate the relationship. Guest believes that his love will be realized in Nowhere because love has been freed from physically coercive control. But if love in utopian Nowhere has been freed from physically coercive control, it has not been freed from the ideological forms of control that still pervade social norms and expectations. For example, females are expected to be domestic because they are "naturally" inclined to domesticity. While male characters in the novel reinforce the females' behaviours through positive reinforcement, characters who have transgressed the social norms of the society receive negative reinforcement, thereby making clear the fate of any female who would question her social roles. In

Shiel's novel, the character Adam reflects Raymond as a character type in his relationships with the two main female characters: Clodagh and Leda. These two female characters represent two Eves. The first Eve, Clodagh, controls Adam, while Adam largely controls Leda, the second Eve. When the purple cloud frees Adam from Clodagh's control, Adam maintains control over Leda through violence and force. Adam's control is limited only by the White Power and Leda's ability to subvert him. While each novel presents distinct relationships between their characters and gender constructions, each also represents the impossibility of controlling women completely, either through physical or ideological coercion. In each novel, women resist oppression. While Shelley's novel is most violent in its vision of *ressentiment*, Ellen asserts herself as an independent thinker, and Leda subverts Adam whenever it suits her.

Just as the novels depict gender control, they also depict control over nature through physical and ideological means. Shelley's novel depicts attempts at controlling nature through mental mapping and city planning, only to quash human attempts at utopia through the (female) earth's revenge. Nature does not submit to domination but instead unleashes a plague that kills almost everyone. The novel suggests that nature has consciousness and will get revenge against those who attempt to dominate "her." In the utopian world of Morris's novel, nature has become a productive garden managed by humans. The novel does not credit nature with consciousness within the narrative, but nature remains personified as female. Moreover, Hammond's approach to nature contrasts with Ellen's in that Ellen sees nature as part of herself. Although nature does not seek revenge in *Nowhere*, conflicting views of nature reveal the continued struggle among humans to work with nature rather than control and dominate it. It must be noted



that the narrative suggests that nature does not need to be completely controlled in Nowhere (some undeveloped lands exist),<sup>55</sup> but a further connection with *The Last Man* is significant in that Ellen's sense of nature is similar to Adrian's: both characters see themselves as part of the natural environment. However, unlike Adrian, Ellen does not merely idealize nature, but engages with it by coming into physical contact with it. The fact that Ellen is female is central to Morris's depiction of her relationship to nature. He advances a romanticized vision of woman's assumed connection with nature. Woman's connection with nature reveals the contradiction within the novel in its articulation of utopia: women and nature continue to function as ideals, while men in Nowhere remain separate from this direct and utopian connection to an organic and precapitalist society. Another significant connection between *The Last Man* and *The Purple Cloud* is the desire for dominion over nature. In *The Purple Cloud*, nature must be subdued in similar ways to that expressed by the character Raymond. In Shiel's novel, unlike in *News from Nowhere*, humans must control nature not only to transform it into a productive garden, but humans must also control nature because the novel depicts nature as a feminizing and devolving force. The novel advances the idea that nature would remake humanity as feminized, if humans did not control "her." In *News from Nowhere*, the beauty of nature does not make men effeminate, but in *The Purple Cloud*, nature is a feminizing force that attempts to remake Adam in her own image. In other words, in each novel nature can provide for human needs, but it can also unleash disease and make men effeminate. The control over nature, as with the control over women, illustrates the masculinist hope placed in both nature and women, but also the fear associated with nature and women. What this conflict reveals about the desire for an alternative to capitalism is that utopian

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<sup>55</sup> See Morris (106-107).

rhetoric expresses a culture at odds with itself. How can the society create a socialist utopia without eliminating capitalist hierarchies and commodification within its own rhetoric?

The utopian desire situates its hope in the precapitalist and organic community. The inspiration for this community comes, in part, from the myths of the Garden of Eden and the Golden Age. As nineteenth-century utopian thinkers tried to re-imagine society, they drew upon this lost connection to a past where humans and nature were thought to have coexisted in harmony. The utopian novels I have examined depict women and nature as providing this link to a “natural” society. Women and nature operate as an escape from capitalism. However, since capitalism also advanced its ideologies by representing women and nature as connecting humans to the “natural,” the meaning of women and nature becomes polysemic. Rather than advancing capitalism or an alternative to capitalism, the discourse of a return to the natural implies both. At the heart of the discourse on returning to the “natural” is the yearning for differentiation. In the utopian sense, women and nature provide differentiation for the (male) characters because they allow men to escape from capitalism through control over women and nature. In the capitalist sense, the return to the “natural” implies differentiation (also for males) through possessing women and nature as prestigious commodities, thereby indicating one’s elevated status. By structuring their novels with representations of women and nature as keys to the achievement of utopia, thus mirroring capitalist impulses that commodify women and nature the novels’ utopian claims become conflicted as the capitalist and the utopianist strive for different ends by employing the same means. Thus, the novels unravel themselves and the utopian desires they advocate.

What is perhaps most conflicting in the constructions of utopia in these novels is the continued failure of men to have a direct connection with the “natural.” Women continue to embody the natural and men the cultural. Men cannot directly experience nature and, therefore, they cannot directly experience an organic society, highlighting the central conflict of the novels.

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