Postgraduate English
www.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english
ISSN 1756-9761
Issue 30 March 2015

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Caroline Warner

University of Sussex

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> As they circulate through our lives, we look *through* objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature or culture – above all what they disclose about *us*), but we only catch a glimpse of things.[1]

In the early years of the twenty-first century, Bill Brown established a strand of critical enquiry that has become known as 'Thing Theory'. He suggested that objects access complex ideas that exist beyond visible surfaces. Brown makes a distinction between the material composition of an 'object' and the more complex physical and metaphysical make-up of a 'thing'. The 'thing' encompasses ideas and emotion. The 'thing' carries traces of the past and its creation. The 'thing' can seem animate in a way that an object does not. Perhaps then, by looking *through* the imaginary objects in texts we might catch a glimpse of their 'things' and make new discoveries about the parameters of their creation.

Jennifer Sattaur notices that Brown chooses to use texts from the nineteenth century to introduce this approach to literary criticism. She writes '…the nineteenth century offered a range of literary and cultural engagements of unprecedented richness in the exploration of subject-object relationships, and it is for this reason that Brown's study focuses on the literature and culture of the nineteenth century'.[2] Brown takes the well-read things of Victorian texts, for example, Mrs Gereth's collection of antiques in Henry James's *The Spoils*

[1] Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature,* 4.
[2] Jennifer Sattaur, 'Thinking Objectively: An Overview of "Thing Theory" in Victorian Studies', 6.

of Poynton (1897), in order to create powerful illustrations of how Thing Theory can shed new light on literary classics.[3]

As Sattaur notices, the Victorian period lends itself to an interest in things. She wonders 'who could resist the hats, coaches, buttons, newspapers, lengths of ribbon, packets of tea, bits of old lace, sugared plums, ink pots, keys and pocket watches that clutter the pages of Dickens, overflow from Gaskell, and crowd in amongst the characters of Collins, Thackeray, Trollope, Eliot and Bronte?'.[4] However, my project is to look past such Victoriana, in order work with the ideas of two writers who do the same. I plan to consider the things of Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) and those of William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890). In these texts, each writer rejects nineteenth-century commodity clutter and differently establishes new orders of things.

John Plotz suggests that 'Thing Theory' is at its most acute when focus is on the 'cases of which our ordinary categories for classifying signs and substances, meaning and materiality, appear to break down'.[5] It is in the 'failure of meaning or on the slippages'[6] that insight is generated. Arnold and Morris are interested in such failures and slippages, using these texts to explore the gaps and possibilities of things beyond the material reality of the nineteenth century. The things of *Culture and Anarchy* are far from the usual clutter and stuff, the usual object subjects of a literary thing theory approach, and yet, Arnold's recurring idiom of 'seeing things as in themselves they really are', establishes 'things' as a central notion in subsequent discussions about culture. In Morris's novel, useable objects are at the heart of his re-imagining of culture; they segment the old and new orders.

[3] Brown, *A Sense of Things,*145-156.
[4] Sattaur, 2.
[5] John Plotz, 'Can the Sofa Speak: A Look at Thing Theory', 110.
[6] Ibid.

For Arnold, culture occupies an intellectual realm. Culture is accessed via that 'best that has been thought and said in the world'; its goal, to develop the faculty of disinterested thinking by 'turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits'.[7] Arnold borrows 'Plato's words' to describe the reward of this sort of thinking as the ability to see 'things as they really are'.[8] Although Arnold was hardly the first to engage with this phrase from Plato, he is the author who makes 'things' a fundamental part of the culture debate and establishes the notion of 'seeing things as they really are' that is woven through the literature of the later nineteenth century.

These are the metaphysical things of universal truth, vital for achieving clarity of vision regarding humanity. The things of *Culture and Anarchy* are touchstones for employing reason in political and social structuring. Yet, these things are difficult to glimpse, too often concealed by the machinery of everyday life.

With *News from Nowhere*, William Morris created an imaginary future, where the principles of socialist individualism have been realized. This is a culture re-born in a post-revolutionary world where the apparatus of class division has been swept away. The thing-culture of *News from Nowhere* is segmented. The old things of the pre-utopian era have fallen into disuse; they are noticed only as symbols of the class-conflicted culture in which they were created. The things of utopia, meanwhile, are un-conflicted. They are the useable objects of everyday life, made beautiful by artisans who take pleasure in their work.

Morris creates a thing-culture imaginatively in fiction, as Arnold had done theoretically with lectures and essays. Considered alongside Arnold's intellectual things, Morris's thing-culture assumes new dimensions. By looking at these texts in parallel, there emerges an interesting interaction between the earlier 'things' of Arnold's primarily object-

[7] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 5.
[8] Ibid, 104.

less ideas and the later 'things' of Morris's primarily idea-less objects. Brown explains the transition from metaphysical to physical that I suggest is visible by tracing the path from Arnold to Morris: 'The passage into materialism […] requires acknowledging 'things' outside the subject/object trajectory, which means thinking about sensation in its distinction from cognition'.[9] Elsewhere, Brown acknowledges the slippery nature of this sort of categorization: '*things* is a word that tends, especially at its most banal, to index a certain limit or liminality, to hover over the threshold between the nameable and unnameable, the figurable and the unfigurable, the identifiable and the unidentifiable'.[10] These oppositions seem to map well to the distinctions between the things of *Culture and Anarchy* and those of *News from Nowhere*. For Arnold, 'things' are conceptual truths – in Brown's terminology, the 'unnameable', 'unfigurable', 'unidentifiable' substance of metaphysical ideas. For Morris, 'things' are material objects. They are the 'nameable', 'figurable', 'identifiable' stuff of the physical world.

The things of *Culture and Anarchy* and *News from Nowhere* offer alternative cultural ideals. For Arnold, the metaphysical and intelligible is privileged; for Morris, the physical and visible. In this essay, I plan to examine Arnold's intellectual 'things' and then look again at *News from Nowhere* to consider how this text establishes an object bound thing-culture that might interact with the Arnoldian idea.

In considering 'things as they really are' Matthew Arnold acknowledges his debt to *The Republic*, referring to the 'theory of forms' as 'Plato's subtle expression'.[11] In this theory, Plato suggested that there is a distinction between the world as it appears to us, which is mutable and defined by individual viewpoint, or 'doxa', and the world as it really is, which remains unchanging and provides the location for absolute truth, or 'episteme'. These sets of

[9] Brown, 'The Secret Life of Things (Virginia Woolf and the Matter of Modernity)', 1.
[10] Brown, *Things,* 5.
[11] Plato, *The Republic,* 78.

oppositions – doxa and episteme, opinion and knowledge, appearance and reality, things as they seem and things as they really are – speak of a gap. According to Arnold's text, this gap can be bridged only by the gradual expansion of culture. Arnold figures this idea of cultural expansion in the manner of a progressive construction project: 'It is in making endless additions to itself, in the endless expansion of its powers, in endless growth in wisdom and beauty that the human race finds its ideal'.[12] This notion of expansion is important in *Culture and Anarchy*. 'Things' are limitless and progressive, always holding the potential for development. Yet, this also opens up a contradiction. How can things as they are be both progressive and absolute? Once epistemic truth is realised, where is there left to go?

It is relevant that Arnold chooses structural metaphors to ground his metaphysical things in the human world, as this offers a way to lay foundations that make sense of the contradiction. Perfect architecture is never finished. Perpetual repair, restoration and renewal are vital to lasting utility. He encourages men of culture to make 'the frame of society in which we live, solid and seasonworthy'[13] and 'to fill the framework of the State […] to fashion its internal composition'.[14] The effect of this recurring metaphor is to re-enforce the argument that 'things' have practical application in the structuring of political and social frameworks. However, it is the metaphysical idea, the thing as it really is, not the physical format, which holds value: 'the intelligible law of things has in itself something desirable and precious, and that all place, function, and bustle are hollow goods without it'.[15] Without ideas, things are just empty frameworks.

Arnold also employs object-like metaphors of the physical world to visualize the omniscient viewpoint of episteme, the alternative to the single viewpoint of doxa. It is the

[12] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy,* 36.
[13] Ibid., 148.
[14] Ibid., 150.
[15] Ibid., 152.

work of culture to 'turn a free and fresh stream of thought upon the whole matter in question';[16] to see 'more than one side of a thing';[17] to acknowledge the possible perfection of 'human nature complete on all its sides'.[18] Arnoldian things have a specific geometry, difficult to conceptualise as a whole and impossible to see from a single viewpoint. The impossibility of seeing the whole matter suggests that multiple viewpoints are necessary when it comes to seeing things in entirety. It also brings about a sense of turning things around, looking at all the angles, in order that culture may teach people to co-ordinate individual viewpoints into one global vision that can remain under perpetual review. Arnold was building on an established trope, as Ruskin had previously noticed the geometrical potential of intellectual things: in his 1858 'Inaugural Address to The Cambridge School of Art', he said, 'Mostly, matters of any consequence are three-sided, or four-sided, or polygonal'.[19]

And yet, those with the potential to participate in this global vision, and to see the whole matter of things as they are, are also engaged with 'disentangling themselves from [the] machinery'[20] of everyday preoccupations. For Arnold, 'machinery' can get in the way of seeing things clearly. He writes: 'What is freedom but machinery? what is population but machinery? what is coal but machinery? what are railroads but machinery? what is wealth but machinery? what are religious organizations but machinery? Now almost every voice in England is accustomed to speak of these things as if they were precious ends in themselves'.[21]

[16] Ibid., 8.
[17] Ibid., 37.
[18] Ibid., 43.
[19] John Ruskin, 'Cambridge School of Art Inaugural Address', 100.
[20] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy,* 80-81.
[21] Ibid., 38.

Machinery is hard to see through. Nineteenth-century structures and products of industry are machinery, not things as they really are. Arnold criticizes the 'misconception of what culture truly is […] calculated to produce miners, or engineers, or architects, not sweetness and light'.[22] In Arnold's view, all products are the by-products of their culture, and nineteenth-century culture lacks the epistemic viewpoint necessary to see the true shape of things. Rather, the outcomes of production culture are mistaken as ends in themselves.

It might be useful to consider the assumptions regarding 'things' embedded in the idea of 'sweetness and light' here. The term 'sweetness and light' is borrowed from Jonathan Swift's 'The Battle of the Books' (1704). In this text, the spider and the bee are placed in conflict. The spider, a representative of the 'every man for himself'[23] position of modern individualism that Arnold criticises, is compared to the bee, a representative of the virtuous values of a cooperative community. The products of the hive are honey and wax, products that promise sweetness and light. The question of the value of worldly goods is answered somewhat by this borrowing. If products are created within a rightly shaped culture, then perhaps, they are no longer 'hollow goods', but retain traces of ideas. Essentially, by using Swift's phrase, Arnold again finds a way to ground his metaphysical things in the physical world. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the shape of the honeycomb is one familiar to geometry.

Arnold's vision of a virtuous production culture does not map to nineteenth-century industrialism. He takes issue with industrial output being the measure of human success and invites consideration of 'some other criterion of man's well-being than the cities he has built and the manufactures he has produce'.[24] In *Culture and Anarchy*, the products of capitalist economics are not those of sweetness and light. He uses the example that 'the production of

[22] Ibid.,17.
[23] Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of A Tub and Other Works,* 56.
[24] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 137.

silk stockings has wonderfully increased',[25] as the price has decreased. Yet, as necessities such as 'bread and bacon'[26] have not followed a similar price pattern, the comparison indicates that the logic of free-trade economics is faulty. Arnold continues: 'we must not let the worship of any fetish, any machinery, such as manufactures or population, […] create for us such a multitude of miserable, sunken and ignorant human beings'.[27]

The depictions of the outputs of nineteenth-century industry in *Culture and Anarchy* correspond with those of *News from Nowhere*. Morris writes that in the 'Old miserable world of worn-out pleasures',[28] 'the great invention of the nineteenth century was the making of machines which were wonders of invention, skill and patience, and which were used for the production of measureless quantities of worthless makeshifts'.[29] In the essay 'Useful Work versus Useless Toil' (1884), Morris explains his definition of 'makeshift', describing sub-quality goods that the poor must make do with after expending the larger part of their labour resource creating luxuries for the rich: '…coarse food that does not nourish, with rotten raiment which does not shelter, with wretched houses which may well make the town-dweller look back with regret to the tent of the nomad'.[30]

While the idea of machinery is here more literal than in Arnold's text, the effect is similar. Machinery undermines good culture. In nineteenth-century industrial society, resources are wasted providing the upper class with unnecessary goods. Using a similar example to Arnold's 'silk stockings', Morris makes the point using servants' 'breeches made

[25] Ibid., 138.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 141.
[28] William Morris, *News from Nowhere*, 132.
[29] Ibid., 83.
[30] Ibid., 'Useful Work versus Useless Toil', 8.

of worsted velvet'.[31] Meanwhile, the poor must survive with the leftovers, the 'worthless makeshifts'. For Morris, as for Arnold, these are the products of impoverished culture.

Both Arnold and Morris hope to establish a different cultural order, albeit while supporting different tactics: Arnold recommends gradual change and Morris promotes revolution. Quoting Saint Augustine, Arnold looks forward to a time when 'the old order is passed, and the new arises'.[32] Similarly, Morris's stated project in *News from Nowhere* is to imagine a 'new order of things',[33] where the social and political structures of capitalism have been dismantled. There is a clear division between the relics of the nineteenth century and the new things of utopia. Through old objects, now historical curiosities, it is possible to read the state of the production tradition in which they were made. Henry Morsom, the curator of a collection of old objects and historical records, shows Guest how to read the story of the restoration to health of the community, as people began 'showing some sense of pleasure in the making'.[34] Guest concludes: 'I looked, and wondered indeed at the deftness and abundance of beauty of the work of men who had at last learned to accept life itself as a pleasure'.[35] Old objects carry a human trace. By looking through them, Guest learns to read history.

This comes close to Bill Brown's conception that in 'things' dwell the traces of their conception – they are 'not just the physical determinants of our imaginative life but also the congealed facts and fantasies of a culture, the surface phenomena that disclose the logic or illogic of an industrial society'.[36] It is relevant that Brown uses the word 'congealed' here.

[31] Ibid., *News from Nowhere*, 35.
[32] Ibid., 53.
[33] Ibid., 112. The phrase "the new order of things" appears in 'Useful Work vs. Useless Toil'. This essay covers many of the ideas regarding things and production that Morris goes on to explore imaginatively in *News from Nowhere.*
[34] Ibid., 155.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Brown, *A Sense of Things*, 4.

This brings about an allusion to Marx's phrase from *Capital*: 'As values, all commodities are only congealed masses of labour time'.[37] By alluding to Marx, Brown builds on this observation. While things are certainly representatives of the human effort of their creation, they also house more complex cultural indicators.

However, in Nowhere, interpreting the cultural indicators of redundant old stuff is an obsolete skill, exercised only by the old men. It is as if, in a world where there is no currency or property, all symbolic values have been eradicated along with exchange values. The things of utopia are primarily objects fit for use. In the words of Marx, they 'return to this form under which value first appeared to us'.[38] The objects of Nowhere are also beautiful. In Morris's novel, beauty is always the outcome of creative pleasure and speaks of natural harmony. Things, then, are judged only for their usefulness and beauty, by their use value and face value. Relieved of the weight of ideas, Morris re-instates the object status of things.

There are many objects in Nowhere, all of which are useful and beautiful. Indeed, these objects must be useful, as no unnecessary or surplus stuff is welcome in the culture of Nowhere. Furthermore, objects are made beautiful by the handcrafting skills of artisans. The most potent example of such an item is the 'big-bowled pipe […] carved out of some hard wood very elaborately, and mounted in gold sprinkled with little gems'[39] given to Guest at Piccadilly Market.

Guest's reaction to the pipe, and Dick's response, illustrate the major disconnections between the old and new relationships of man and thing, of subject and object. As Guest wonders how he might pay for the pipe, Dick warns him 'against another exhibition of

[37] Karl Marx, *Capital*, 16.
[38] Ibid., 23.
[39] Morris, *News from Nowhere*, 32.

extinct commercial morality'.[40] Later, Guest remarks on the pipe, wondering at this 'elaborate toy'[41] and at why a free society would choose to spend time 'turning out such trivialities'.[42] To Guest, the pipe looks like a high-value collectable that one might risk damaging by using. Yet the pipe is an item designed for everyday use in Nowhere, given freely with no expectation of exchange. Dick's response is instructive. He does not understand Guest's interpretation of the pipe: 'Well, I don't know… the pipe is a very pretty thing, with the little people under the trees so clean and sweet; - too elaborate for a pipe, perhaps, but – well, it is very pretty'. Guest replies: 'Too valuable for its use, perhaps'. Dick responds: 'What's that… I don't understand'.[43] The economics of capitalism seem ludicrous to Dick. The pipe's worth lies in its usefulness and beauty. It is an uncomplicated object, just a pretty thing to be used for smoking tobacco.

The value system at work in this new order of things is evident early in the novel. Guest's first impressions of Dick are ones of confusion:

> …he was dark-haired and berry-brown of skin; well-knit and strong, and obviously used to exercising his muscles, but with nothing rough or coarse about him, and clean as might be. His dress was not like any modern work-a-day clothes I had seen, but would have served very well as a costume for a picture of fourteenth-century life: it was of dark blue cloth, simple enough, but of fine web, and without a stain on it. He had a brown leather belt round his waist, and I noticed that its clasp was of damascened steel beautifully wrought. In short, he seemed to be like some specially

[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 39.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

> manly and refined young gentleman, playing waterman for a spree, and I concluded that this was the case.[44]

This passage serves as an orientation to utopia, as attention is directed through the newcomer's gaze. First person narration firmly establishes the single viewpoint of doxa, in contrast to the omniscient, epistemic view of 'the whole matter' aimed for in *Culture and Anarchy*. This locates the text within an individual field of vision – Guest expects to interpret appearance. Dick's appearance offers a conflicted mix of working and upper class signals. He is performing a working-class job and has the suntanned skin and muscular body of a labourer, yet he is also clean, well-dressed, handsome and polite; the markers of a gentleman. Guest attempts to reconcile what he reads as contradictions by imagining that Dick is not as he seems, but rather, a gentleman playing at being a waterman for his own entertainment. This is not the case. Rather, the class system understood in nineteenth-century terms has been demolished. Guest can no longer rely on his old sign systems. In Arnoldian idiom, things as they appear to be are things as they really are. The gap between visible and intelligible worlds, between appearance and reality, has closed in Nowhere. The Arnoldian framework, along with its ancient philosophical tradition of conflict between appearance and truth, has been dismantled along with class division. There is no gap to bridge and, therefore, no role remaining for the mediation of those 'cultivated people'[45] familiar with Arnoldian things.

In fact, the things of Nowhere tell a new cultural story. Dick's clothes and accessories narrate this story. They mimic fourteenth-century style. This suggests that the values of Nowhere are likely to chime with those embedded in the tradition of Victorian

[44] Ibid., 7.
[45] Ibid., 60.

medievalism.[46] Dick wears a blue garment woven in 'fine web' and a belt with a 'beautifully wrought' clasp of 'damascened steel'. These are the first of the useful and beautiful things of the new culture.

In Nowhere, this value scheme applies to architecture as well as objects. The first example of architecture Guest notices is the Guest-House where '…there ran a frieze of figure subjects baked in clay, very well executed, and designed with a force and directness which I had never noticed in modern work before'.[47] This building is useful as a residential dwelling, and it is made beautiful with the skills of hand-craftsmanship. The effect is one of 'force and directness'. This underlines the importance of unmediated impression over symbol. In the object scheme of Nowhere, the sublime gives way to the beautiful. Everything is available, nothing is mysterious.

Symbolic values no longer make sense. Sign systems have re-aligned in a world where the signifier and signified are more closely positioned. A pipe is just a pipe. Without exchange value codes, it cannot be converted into anything other. In 'Words and the Murder of the Thing', Peter Schwenger looks at how words change the nature of a thing. In this essay, Schwenger is interested in considering the complex relationship between words and things. If a word represents an idea, then by naming something we insert an idea into an object. By doing so, the original object is altered. As Schwenger puts it, 'The death of the thing, then, is the price we pay for the word'.[48]

[46] The revival of medieval values in Victorian artistic culture, recommended the re-institution of simplicity and honesty in art. Handcrafting, intense colour and unique style were all highly valued characteristics. John Ruskin and members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood are remembered as the highest profile exponents of this movement.
[47] Ibid., 12.
[48] Peter Schwenger, 'Words and the Murder of the Thing', 136.

Morris reverses this process by killing words in order to revive objects. For example, the word 'art' becomes obsolete, replaced with 'work-pleasure',[49] an invented compound word that seeks to describe the process of creation, rather than the product, and leaves, therefore, the physical object intact. Furthermore, words associated with art are killed off. The word 'museum'[50] and the phrase 'National Gallery'[51] no longer have currency. This serves to free objects from being collected, owned or looked at without being used. Morris re-works language to free these objects from traces of political bias. In the essay 'Myth Today', Roland Barthes considers the politics of language. He writes 'the oppressed makes the world, he has only an active, transitive language; the oppressor conserves it, his language is plenary, intransitive, gestural, theatrical: it is Myth'.[52] In this view, then, the language of text, especially fiction, is always of the political right. Disentangling politics and language in fiction may prove an impossible task.

Morris attacks this task head-on. The signs of capitalism are dealt with directly. While some words are dispatched, coins, the counters of economic currency, and books, the markers of cultural currency, are retired. Guest soon learns that coins have no use in Nowhere. Dick acknowledges only their face value. Early examples might be considered beautiful, for example, the 'piece of Edward III, with the king in a ship, and little leopards and fleur-de-lys all along the gunwale, so delicately worked',[53] but they are not useful. Coins are just another example of redundant old clutter, interesting only as narrators of history.

Books do not fare much better. Only a few old men remain truly interested in what has been thought and said in the past. The keepers of Arnoldian things are dying out. In response to her grandfather's admiration of books, those 'splendid works of imagination and

[49] Morris, *News from Nowhere*, 115.
[50] Ibid., 139.
[51] Ibid., 39.
[52] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies,* 149.
[53] Morris, *News from Nowhere*, 10.

intellect',[54] Ellen rebukes him: "When will you understand that after all it is the world we live in which interests us […] these are our books".[55] She describes nineteenth-century literature as "dreary introspective nonsense".[56] Here, the implication is that literature is a sort of intellectual 'makeshift', created "when they must needs supplement the sordid miseries of their own lives with imaginations of the lives of other people".[57] In the British Library, Guest finds 'many exceedingly beautiful books',[58] yet there are few visitors. Hammond, 'the custodian of the books for many years',[59] has been around the books for so long that he 'looks upon himself as a part of the books, or the books as part of him'.[60] The imagined consequence of preferring the intellectual to the physical life is atrophy, a becoming of an artefact, a consigning of oneself to history. Dick and Clara, on the other hand, use their time in the library to re-cement their physical relationship, making love amongst the 'medieval books'[61] of Nelson's room. Like coins, books are perhaps notable for their beauty, but they go unread. No longer useful, they too are just outdated junk.

Despite the deliberate scheme to promote usefulness and beauty as the only important values attached to objects, an undercurrent runs through the thing-culture of Nowhere that undermines this. The effect is to suggest that both nineteenth-century capitalist culture and Arnoldian intellectual culture may prove resistant to dismantling.

In Nowhere, men are free to choose the sort of work they prefer, variety is encouraged and assumptions about social and labouring roles are shaken up. Dick is a metalworker, agricultural labourer and water boatman; Bob is a weaver, mathematician and historian;

[54] Ibid., 129.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 130.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 44.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., 46.

Boffin, a dustman, novelist and dandy. Yet there is clear hierarchy in operation, based on the output of labour. Dick commands respect. He makes useful, beautiful objects as a skilled metal worker, enjoys the active, communal thrust of collecting the harvest, and serves others with his physical job on the river as water boatman. The balance is right. He is in harmony with nature and his handsome appearance, and the beauty of the products he creates testify to this. Bob and Boffin, who spend more of their time engaged in intellectual work, do not enjoy such a high level of esteem. As Bob says "I know he thinks me rather a grinder, and despises me for not being very deft with my hands: that's the way nowadays".[62] That Bob is less successful than Dick shows in his physical appearance. Guest comments: "He was not so well-looking or so strongly made as my sculler friend, being sandy-haired, rather pale, and not stout-built".[63] Ironically, this hierarchy suggests that people are only as good as their productive capabilities. Capitalist dictates prove hard to overturn. In Nowhere, as in nineteenth-century industrial society, things are a measure of human worth. Equally, like things, the less useful and beautiful people are the least valued. People have become object-like. Daniel P. Shea argues that Morris portrays the creation of people in much the same way as he portrays the creation of objects. He writes that Morris 'saw human bodies as products of labour, and believed that the reproduction of whole, healthy humans, like the creation of art or well-made wares, depended upon the process of production'.[64]

Comparison with *Culture and Anarchy* may provide further insight into the treatment of human objectification in *News from Nowhere*. Arnold describes the way in which the upper classes have developed a superior physical type to other groups, noticing: '…the care of the Barbarians for the body, and for all manly exercises; the vigour, good looks, and fine

[62] Ibid., 17.
[63] Ibid., 11.
[64] Daniel P. Shea, ' "Abortions of the Market": Production and Reproduction in *News from Nowhere',* 154.

complexion which they acquired and perpetuated in their families by these means'.[65] In Nowhere, this body type, and the potential for its genetic transmission, belongs to the worker. Physical fitness is a sign of status, of productive and reproductive capability. Morris co-opts the Barbarian physical type for his workers and immediately establishes a hierarchy that looks very much like the nineteenth-century class system he condemns.

Also reminiscent of Arnold's Barbarians is the external nature of the culture of Nowhere. Arnold had expressed his concerns regarding this: '…exterior culture mainly: it consisted principally in outward gifts and graces, in looks, manners, accomplishments, prowess […]. Far within, and unawakened, lay a whole range of powers of thought and feeling, to which these interesting productions of nature had, from circumstance of their life, no access'.[66] Like Arnold's Barbarians, perhaps Morris's beautiful human things live an 'unawakened' life.

This concern is subtly explored in the text via the thing-culture. Guest notices a frieze on the walls of Bloomsbury Market which offers an alternative experience to the 'force and directness' of the guesthouse frieze. This is an illustration of Grimm's fairy tales. Hammond declares it an homage to 'the child-like part of us that produces works of imagination',[67] but Guest notices that a 'slight cloud came over'[68] Clara's face. She says, "I wish we were interesting enough to be written or painted about".[69] She longs to incorporate ideas into the object bound thing-culture of Nowhere. Yet the myth-laden fantasies of these stories operate outside of the acceptable values of use and beauty. They employ the symbolism and double-speak that the ancestors of Nowhere worked hard to eradicate. To invoke Barthes again, linguistically and symbolically, the fairy tale frieze celebrates the 'Myth' of the oppressor.

[65] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 76.
[66] Ibid., 76-77.
[67] Morris, *News from Nowhere*, 87.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., 88.

Elsewhere, too, Morris engages with myth. It seems that the best that has been thought and said in the world is hard to silence. Guest alludes to Tennyson in order to describe the weather. 'It was the sort of afternoon that Tennyson must have been thinking about, when he said of the Lotos-Eaters' land that it was a land where it was always afternoon'.[70] This is a strange comparison to draw. It aligns the experience of Nowhere to one of drugged hallucination. Like the lotus land, Nowhere is a place of realisation, of destination, of finality. In this 'Epoch of Rest', the people of Nowhere have nowhere left to go. Perhaps this leaves them stuck in 'the hollow lotus-land',[71] 'A land where all things always seemed the same!'.[72] In *News from Nowhere*, the evocation of 'The Lotus-Eaters' offers an opportunity to re-read this 'new order of things' as an empty project. Just as the sailor who eats the lotus fruit exists in a kind of living death, so perhaps do the people of Nowhere. Without the animating force of ideas, they have no greater interior value than the 'hollow goods' of *Culture and Anarchy*. John Plotz notices this complication and wonders if 'Morris's might have been an experiment not only doomed, but designed to fail',[73] possibly in order to display the frustrating impossibility of reconciling the simultaneous demands of socialist individualism for both uniqueness and equality.

If the fundamental project of 'Thing Theory' is, in John Plotz's words, to 'consist of noting the places where any mode of acquiring or producing knowledge about the world runs into hard nuts, troubling exceptions, or blurry borders',[74] an examination of the unusual Victorian thing-cultures of Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* and Morris's *News from Nowhere* can deliver new insight into the texts. The similarities as well as the differences are striking. Both texts reject the version of nineteenth-century thing-culture preoccupied with commodity

[70] Ibid., 157.
[71] Alfred Tennyson, 'The Lotus Eaters', line 154.
[72] Ibid., line 24.
[73] Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move*, 151.
[74] Ibid., 'Sofa', 116.

production and accumulation, and both re-imagine culture founded on new orders of things. Essentially, the primary story that emerges by looking at these texts in parallel is one of a dialogue between the prevailing cultural assumption of Arnold's, that the best of human nature may be accessed via things that have been thought and said during the history of intellectual endeavour, in contrast to Morris's view that the human condition may be better read by the things (and people) it creates in a specific time-frame. However, the things in each text also defy convenient binary definition. The culture of Arnold's object-less ideas rely on spatial, geometric metaphors to explain themselves, while the culture of Morris's idea-less objects somehow resists its own isolation to re-connect to the cultural heritage of the best that has been thought and said. Things are not easily defined, nor do they stay defined. Something about them points beyond the texts. Bill Brown states that "Things lie just beyond the grid of intelligibility".[75] This rings true for the thing-cultures of Arnold and Morris. While the interrogation of things in *Culture and Anarchy* and *News from Nowhere* offers revealing and complex dimensions to each text, things simultaneously resist binding interpretation.

[75] Brown, *Things*, 5.

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