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Introduction

ONE SUMMER RECENTLY, I made a twelve-hour trip from London—by train, ferry, bus, and dinghy—to Erraid, a tiny island in the Scottish Hebrides that lies close by the southwestern tip of the larger island of Mull. Erraid was uninhabited until the late nineteenth century, when the Stevenson engineering firm built cottages for the families of lighthouse keepers. Robert Louis Stevenson, son and nephew of the firm's proprietors, stayed in one of the cottages before he wrote *Kidnapped*, his adventure tale set partly on Erraid. That summer I too stayed in one of the Stevensons' cottages, its thick, beautifully crafted granite walls apparently impervious to the passage of time. The cottages now house a commune—or, to use the currently preferred term, an *intentional community*. I had come to stay for a week with the dozen people who inhabit the island year-round, supporting themselves in frugal but comfortable fashion by gardening, fishing, tending livestock, making candles, and hosting visitors attracted by the chance to experience a Hebridean version of the simple life.

Each morning the residents and guests gathered in one of the cottages to choose work assignments for the day: splitting firewood, cleaning out the chicken coop, painting a room, cooking a meal. Most days, I chose gardening. The residents are justifiably proud of their gardens, which occupy several large, handsome plots just in front of the cottages, surrounded by low stone walls built by the lighthouse keepers to shelter their crops from grazing sheep and the harsh North Atlantic winds. That summer the weather was glorious,

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and every time that I stood up from thinning carrots or picking beans and looked about, I gasped involuntarily at the beautiful vista before me. Directly across was the sparsely settled Ross of Mull, its deep-green, sheep-flecked meadows rising toward rugged Ben More mountain. To the northeast, a mile across the sound, I could just make out the squat, dark tower of the abbey of Iona, the island where Christianity first established a foothold in Britain in the sixth century. There was seldom anyone in sight. I could hear nothing but the bleating of sheep, the cry of gulls, and occasionally—if the wind was right—the bell of the ferry between Iona and Mull. Bathed in sunshine, breathing in the cool, salt-tinged air, I couldn't help saying to myself, "This *is* utopia!"

I knew that, temporarily intoxicated by the salt air and the stunning landscape, I was being foolishly extravagant. I was well aware of the term's etymology: coined by Thomas More in his book of the same name, *utopia* is a Latin term for *no place*. I'd come to Erraid not on an impossible quest to find perfection but because of my interest in the legacy of four once-celebrated writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—a group that I'd come to think of as the "last utopians."

These four writers—Edward Bellamy, William Morris, Edward Carpenter, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman—lived and wrote near the end of an extraordinary period of utopian writing and social experimentation in Great Britain and the United States, dating from roughly 1825 to 1915. Not coincidentally, this period also represented the triumph of industrial capitalism in both countries. Nineteenth-century utopian writers and the founders of the era's communal experiments were among the intellectuals both impressed and dismayed by the era's changes: the disruption of traditional modes of agricultural and artisan labor; the rapid spread of new technologies and the accompanying damage to the natural environment; the immense growth of urban centers; the vast, and vastly unequal, increases in wealth; the alterations to traditional family structures and conceptions of women's and men's roles in the world. The disrup-

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tions of industrial capitalism provoked a variety of intellectual and cultural responses, ranging from Karl Marx's predictions of capitalism's imminent demise to British philosopher Herbert Spencer's embrace of the era's savage inequalities as a necessary feature of an ultimately beneficent social evolution. Along with Marxian socialism and Spencerian social theory, utopianism provided hundreds of thousands of people in nineteenth-century Britain and the U.S. with a means of understanding and responding to the era's wrenching changes.

Marx was particularly aware of the parallels between his own intellectual project and those of utopian writers. He devoted a section of the *Communist Manifesto* to the earliest and most influential of the nineteenth-century utopian writers, Claude Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, and Robert Owen, labeling them as "utopian" socialists. He intended the epithet to be dismissive; these writers had failed to attain the insight of Marx, a "scientific" socialist.[1] Despite Marx's disdain, two of the utopian socialists, Fourier and Owen, were enormously influential in the U.S. and U.K. Both writers imagined that society could be transformed through the establishment of utopian communities, and over a period of three decades, beginning in the 1820s, dozens of Fourierist and Owenite communities were founded in North America and Great Britain.[2]

The enthusiasm for utopian social experiments waned after midcentury, but during the later nineteenth century, utopian literature—both works of social theory and imaginative romances in the vein of More's *Utopia*—proliferated. The self-taught economist Henry George's visionary *Progress and Poverty* (1879) was wildly popular in both the U.S. and U.K., while novelists such as Marie Howland and John Macnie published utopian fictions that reached small but appreciative audiences.[3]

Then, in 1888, the American novelist Edward Bellamy published *Looking Backward 2000–1887*, narrated by a Bostonian who time-travels 113 years into a utopian future. Before the book's publication, Bellamy was a midlist author of cleverly plotted romances with a reputation as a lightweight Nathaniel Hawthorne. By the early 1890s, *Looking Backward* had become one of the most successful books of the century, and Bellamy was transformed from a reclusive

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New England writer into an international political figure. The novel was hailed as the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of the industrial era, a comparison meant to suggest that just as Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel had inflamed the movement against slavery and helped spark the Civil War, *Looking Backward* might well inspire a massive reaction against industrial capitalism. The book in fact sparked a short-lived political movement in the U.S. with the now-unfortunate name of Nationalism, intended to signify its appeal to all sectors of society. In the U.K., where *Looking Backward* was also widely popular, it was embraced by Fabians and others on the political left. Moreover, the book initiated a vogue for utopian fiction that continued for the next twenty-five years. More English-language utopian works—over five hundred—were published in the quarter-century following the appearance of Bellamy's novel than had appeared in the nearly four hundred years between More and Bellamy. Many of these novels directly proclaimed their debt to Bellamy, with titles such as *Looking Forward, Looking Further Forward,* and *Looking Further Backward*.[4]

Most of these derivative fictions reached few readers and quickly receded into well-deserved obscurity. However, one of the novels written as a direct response to *Looking Backward* was widely read when it appeared in book form in 1891 and has come to be regarded as one of the classics of the genre, equal in its imaginative power to Thomas More's foundational text: William Morris's *News from Nowhere*. Morris is the most widely known of the last utopians, although relatively few of the millions of people around the world who recognize his name are aware that he wrote a utopian novel. They know him as a designer of high-end interiors and an inspiration for the Arts and Crafts movement, a sort of Victorian lifestyle guru. During his lifetime, however, Morris was as famous for his poetry and his politics as for his design work. During the 1880s and 1890s, Morris became one of England's most prominent socialists, and he regarded his designs, his narrative poetry, and his prose fictions as elements of an integrated utopian vision. From childhood, Morris had been influenced by Victorian medievalism—the renewed interest, after centuries of neglect, in Gothic architecture, medieval craftsmanship, and tales of courtly love and adventure. In his ma-

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turity, he transformed what was often a nostalgic turning aside from present realities into a critique of capitalism, and he imagined a postindustrial future in which unalienated artisans produced works of beauty while living in a pastoral landscape where labor was indistinguishable from play.

Morris's vision of a de-urbanized future was shared by his acquaintance Edward Carpenter, who was active in the same socialist circles as Morris. Carpenter was England's most famous apostle of the simple life, a British Thoreau whose essays and poems denouncing middle-class civilization led George Bernard Shaw to nickname him the Noble Savage. Morris was more sympathetic to Carpenter. An 1884 chat about Carpenter's farm in rural Derbyshire caused Morris to ruminate, "I listened with longing heart to his account of his patch of ground, seven acres: he says that he and his fellow can almost live on it: they grow their own wheat, and send flowers and fruit to Chesterfield and Sheffield markets: all that sounds very agreeable to me."[5] Morris admired not only Carpenter's nearly self-sufficient rural life but also his partnership with his "fellow," Albert Fearnehough, a former Sheffield ironworker. Morris had no idea that the two men were lovers.

In the 1880s, when the word "homosexual" was unknown in the English language, Carpenter's relationships with a succession of young working-class men were widely admired in his socialist circles as models of cross-class friendships. Carpenter took advantage of the era's conceptual fuzziness about human sexuality to write a series of increasingly bold essays and books about what he called "homogenic love" and the "intermediate sex." He united his contemporaries' interest in utopian projections of the future with his own armchair-anthropologist theorizing to argue that men-loving men and women-loving women constituted the utopian vanguard. In the long-distant past, he believed, members of the intermediate sex had rejected the conventional roles of warrior, hunter, and gatherer and served instead as tribal healers, priests, artists, and visionaries, making possible the advance of civilization. Now, with nineteenth-century civilization breaking down into antagonistic camps—class against class, men against women—people of the intermediate sex could again lead humanity into a transformed future. From their

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positions on the margins of patriarchal capitalist society, homogenic lovers were uniquely suited to model more fluid and equal human relationships and to envision an egalitarian future.

On her first visit to England in 1896, Charlotte Perkins Gilman sought out both Morris and Carpenter. Now best known as author of the protofeminist short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman's reputation at the time rested on her work as an activist and speaker in the Nationalist political movement inspired by Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. Following her return from England, she wrote a series of utopian fictions that climaxed with the novel *Herland* (1915). Like Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, Gilman's novel portrays an egalitarian socialist society; in accord with Morris's and Carpenter's ideas, it depicts a largely agrarian land in which people in comfortable tunics and leggings enjoy days of agreeable labor punctuated by vegetarian meals and wholesome recreations. Unlike the utopias of her male colleagues, however, Gilman's is populated exclusively by women, who reproduce by parthenogenesis, bearing only daughters. Carpenter imagined that homogenic lovers could serve as the utopian vanguard; Gilman believed that emancipated women would play that role.

Edward Bellamy, William Morris, Edward Carpenter, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman are the subjects of this book, which is centered on the flourishing of utopian literature and social thought in the United States and Great Britain from the mid-1880s until 1915. These four figures were not the only significant utopian writers of the period, and, although there were intellectual and personal connections among them, they did not think of themselves as a group. I focus on them because their particular strain of utopianism seems to me not only admirable but also relevant to our current political moment.

Utopia is notoriously difficult to define. In the popular imagination it signifies an impossibly perfect ideal—*no place*. But Thomas More's neologism is a bilingual pun; *utopia* is a Latinization not only of the Greek *ou-topos*, no place, but also of *eu-topos*, good place. Utopia is not necessarily a fantasy of perfection, and utopianism can be seen simply as *the envisioning of a transformed, better world*, which is how I use the term in this book.[6] That's a capacious definition. What unites the utopianism of Bellamy, Morris, Carpenter, and Gilman are four distinctive elements.

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First, all four writers were democratic socialists. Appalled by the widespread poverty and misery engendered by late nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, they sought an egalitarian alternative. Their socialism had distinctive Anglo-American roots. With the exception of Morris, they had little use for Marx. They derived their socialist ideals from a mix of Robert Owen's and Charles Fourier's communal theorizing, Emersonian Transcendentalism, Walt Whitman's proclamations of comradeship, Thomas Carlyle's reactionary anticapitalism, and John Ruskin's aesthetically influenced attacks on the industrial system. Marx and Engels frequently expressed their exasperation at what they saw as the naïve and unscientific nature of this strain of late nineteenth-century British and American socialism, but it was the dominant form of socialist thought at the time.[7]

Late nineteenth-century socialism's roots in Owenite and Fourierist communalism led many adherents, including the last utopians, to a critique of the patriarchal family that was rare among orthodox Marxists, most of whom believed that radicalizing the working class was paramount. The last utopians emphasized women's economic independence as crucial to a transformed society, and they imagined new forms of family and community.[8] Edward Bellamy was the sole exception. He was unable to conceive that women's economic equality might disrupt the insular privacy of the Victorian family. All the others imagined—and in the case of Carpenter and Gilman, lived out—alternatives to lifelong heterosexual marriage. Their works portray a future marked by gender equality and by fluid, alternative forms of romance, family, and community.

All four writers' egalitarianism was shaped by their religious ideas, which constitute the last utopians' third distinctive feature. At heart they were religious more than political thinkers. Bellamy, Carpenter, and Gilman espoused a post-Christian liberal spirituality that was common among late nineteenth-century cultural progressives, while Morris, who claimed to be an atheist, referred frequently to the "religion of socialism." Influenced by a distinctly nineteenth-century combination of Christian evangelicalism, Transcendentalism, and concepts borrowed from Asian religions, the last utopians believed that the self was an illusion, that everyone was united in an inclusive divine spirit, and that humanity was destined to realize

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its oneness. They believed that the utopian future would be achieved through a nonviolent process of mass conversion, not violent proletarian revolution. Political change depended on a process of evangelization. Even Morris, a self-proclaimed atheist and revolutionary, typically spent his Sundays on London street corners addressing passersby, offering them the good news of socialism.[9]

Their immanentist theology—that is, the idea that the divine is immanent within humanity and nature—influenced the last of their distinctive ideas: their reverence for the natural world and commitment to elements of a Thoreauvian simple life. Carpenter, who threw over successive careers as a Cambridge don and a university extension lecturer for life as a market gardener in rural Derbyshire, served as a model. He built a small writing hut for himself, with one side open to the elements, and claimed that he could not have written "Towards Democracy," his breakthrough poetic masterwork, had he not composed it in the open air.[10] Only Bellamy, who preferred not to venture outside the Massachusetts house where he had lived since birth, was immune to the call of the wild. Yet even Bellamy shared the last utopians' concern for the environment, their horror at the unchecked and increasingly severe pollution of late nineteenth-century cities.

Their visions of a socialist, egalitarian future of simple living in harmony with nature qualify Bellamy, Morris, Carpenter, and Gilman as *utopians*. Why were they the *last*? I don't want to suggest that the utopian imagination suddenly dried up after 1915; utopian novels continued to be produced throughout the twentieth century. What's indisputable, however, is that following World War I, the once-large audience for utopian fiction diminished drastically. If *Looking Backward* and *News from Nowhere* were major texts of the 1890s, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) were heralded as masterworks of the twentieth century. Twentieth-century speculative fiction turned from imaginative depictions of better worlds to descriptions of horrors to come. What accounts for literature's dystopian turn?

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To take only the most obvious explanation, the massive violence of two world wars, which climaxed with the Holocaust and Hiroshima, seemed to mock the faith in inevitable progress that lay at the heart of nineteenth-century utopianism. The last utopians were all born during the Victorian era, when an optimistic version of evolutionary theory dominated historical understanding. Human history, it was believed, lay on an upward trajectory, and progress—including its industrial and technological varieties—promised a better world. In the words of novelist Richard Powers, "The nineteenth century . . . held to the doctrine of perfectibility. . . . Most thinkers of the . . . century believed in the upward spiral of rationality, which would at last triumph over the imperfections of nature."[11] World War I seemed, to many, to knock the upward spiral permanently askew. Human rationality and technological progress had led to the industrialized slaughter of the European battlefields, with more than seventeen million deaths during the course of the four-year war.

In addition, the totalitarian political regimes of the twentieth century seemed attributable, at least in part, to utopian imaginings. The Bolshevik Revolution was arguably a utopian project intended to turn tsarist Russian into an ideal Marxist nation; Stalin's brutal repression and murder of those perceived to be enemies of the state could be seen as deriving from his utopian conception of the Soviet Union; and Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge could be regarded as the most powerful, deliberately planned attempt in world history to realize utopia. When Pol Pot assumed power in 1975, he declared it to be the Year Zero. Cambodia would begin anew, and the Khmer Rouge would create a perfect state, a project that would eventually require the elimination of more than one million of their fellow citizens.[12]

Philosopher Karl Popper famously argued in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) that utopian thinking is inherently violent. He identified an "aesthetic" strain in utopianism, a desire to wipe the slate clean and begin society afresh. Popper traced the aesthetic approach to statecraft back to Plato, whose *Republic* lays out a perfect, and perfectly beautiful, society. The idea that a perfect society could be crafted like a work of art leads inevitably, Popper argued, to repression and violence. Popper, whose attack on utopianism

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appeared in 1945, drew directly on his personal experience: in 1938 he had fled his native Austria for New Zealand, just ahead of the Nazi Anschluss. Popper advocated, in opposition to the utopian social engineering that animated Stalin, Hitler, and other despots, what he called "piecemeal engineering," the slow, incremental reforms of liberal democracies.[13]

In the twenty-first century Popper's anti-utopian theories have been amplified and updated by philosopher John Gray in his brilliantly argued polemic *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (2007). Writing after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Gray is less concerned with the discredited utopian left than with what he regards as the utopian right, exemplified by Margaret Thatcher and George W. Bush. Thatcher possessed a utopian faith in the transformative potential of free-market economics; Bush imagined that he could impose liberal democracy on Iraq, a project that Gray regards as utopian in its blindly grand hubris. Gray locates the philosophical origins of the American invasion of Iraq in the French Revolution, when Jacobin radicals conceived of violence as an instrument for remaking humanity. The Jacobins' successors, according to Gray, include not only the Bolsheviks, the Nazis, George Bush, and Tony Blair but also the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Utopias, Gray writes, "are dreams of collective deliverance that in waking life are found to be nightmares." Gray's gift for the memorable apothegm is shared by the French political philosopher Frédéric Rouvillois, who writes, "All utopias are totalitarian. . . . And, conversely, all totalitarian states are fundamentally utopian."[14]

Many defenders of utopia argue that the twisted visions of a Stalin, Hitler, or Pol Pot cannot be labeled utopian, but my own definition—the envisioning of a transformed, better world—can be applied to these murderous tyrants. If you believe, as I do, that the utopian imagination is crucial to shaping a better future, it's important to acknowledge that attempts to impose utopia from above can have devastating consequences. That's why the nonviolent, egalitarian, and democratic values at the heart of the last utopians' visions are so important. The modest playfulness to be found in the utopian imaginings of Bellamy, Morris, Carpenter, and Gilman is antithetical to the totalitarian spirit. What G. D. H. Cole identified as the implicit invitation extended in Morris's *News from Nowhere*—

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"Here is the sort of society I feel I should like to live in. Now tell me yours."—is present in the work of all four.[15] That is not to say that disturbing authoritarian elements are totally absent from their work, and in what follows I explore their many shortcomings. I argue, however, that their imaginative visions are particularly valuable for contemporary progressive political thought and practice.

The early twenty-first century may not seem a propitious moment to revive the work of four utopian writers. Utopian fiction has few readers, but dystopian fiction and film are surging. The wildly successful *Hunger Games* and *Divergent* book series and films are the most obvious examples, but dystopian writing is proliferating in serious literary fiction as well, with critically and commercially successful recent works by Margaret Atwood, Gary Shteyngart, Howard Jacobson, and many others.[16] Defining features of twenty-first-century life in the U.S. and U.K.—terrorism, massive state surveillance, police brutality, widening inequality, ethnic hatred, climate change, life-altering technology—have provided fertile soil for the growth of the coruscating, monitory critiques found in dystopian literature.

Contemporary fiction has little use for the utopian visions of Bellamy, Morris, Carpenter, and Gilman, and I don't argue for a continuing literary legacy. Instead, in my concluding chapter I suggest that their utopian visions are currently manifested in *lived utopianism*, which I define as the effort to live out some portion of a transformed future in the here and now.[17] Utopian studies scholars interested in the contemporary scene often turn to ethnographic case studies, as in Davina Cooper's *Everyday Utopias*, which analyzes six contemporary sites that she calls "hot spots of innovative practice." Cooper's sites include Hyde Park's famous speakers' corner and Summerhill, the celebrated progressive school, as well as "prefigurative practices" including public nudism, which its advocates regard as a means of living out a radical conception of equality. Cooper argues that in contemporary society, with utopian objects such as novels and buildings and communities in relatively short supply, utopianism needs to be reconceived as an orientation, "a way of engaging with spaces, objects, and practices that is oriented to the hope, desire, and belief in the possibility of other, better worlds."[18]

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My final chapter explores contemporary everyday utopias that embrace the last utopians' central values—institutions, sites, and practices that are committed to political, sexual, and spiritual egalitarianism; that promote simplicity and sustainability; and that explore new forms of family and community. The intentional community on the isle of Erraid where I spent a week is one such site. In my last chapter, I describe my visits to Erraid and to two other long-established intentional communities, one in northern Scotland and another in rural Virginia. I also visited a community that was highly intentional but also intentionally temporary: Occupy Wall Street. On a bitterly cold day in October 2011, I stood in the rain and participated in a "mic check" among dozens of people repeating and amplifying a speaker's words. The ritual had been generated by necessity—loudspeakers were not permitted on the site—but it became central to this temporary community's democratic praxis. The Occupy movement was limited to a particular moment, but other temporary utopias repeatedly come together and dissolve. I visited two such contemporary communities inspired by Edward Carpenter: the Edward Carpenter Community, a British gay men's group that holds regular retreats, and the Radical Faeries, a group established by gay American activist Harry Hay that traces its lineage to Carpenter and Walt Whitman.

Progressive schools constitute another site of contemporary utopianism. I spent two days at the Waldorf school in my town, where children devote as much time to gardening, cooking, and knitting as to more conventional academic pursuits. Rudolf Steiner, the early twentieth-century Austrian intellectual who founded the first Waldorf school, was unfamiliar with William Morris, but the schools he inspired would fit easily into the landscape of Morris's antihierarchical Nowhere, where the ability to weave a garment or cook a meal is as valued as any intellectual accomplishment. Waldorf schools are particularly noted for their emphasis on gardening. Steiner advocated what he called "biodynamic" gardening, which goes beyond organic principles to align agriculture not just with the four seasons but with the natural cycles of the moon.

Biodynamic gardening is one part of contemporary food movements, which may be the most widespread form of progressive utopianism in the twenty-first century. Farmers and consumer

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activists in a variety of sites across North America and Great Britain, from inner-city gardens to suburban farmers' markets to rural communities, are working toward a transformed food system. Contemporary food movements envision a future in which profit-driven food conglomerates and massive industrial farms are supplanted by small-scale, community-oriented, sustainable agricultural systems.

The Last Utopians is the first book to focus on the distinctive strain of transatlantic utopianism found within the work of Bellamy, Morris, Carpenter, Gilman, and their contemporary heirs. It builds on a substantial body of work on late nineteenth-century utopianism. Much of this work, influenced by the idea that the United States itself represents a utopian experiment, deals exclusively with American writers: Bellamy and Gilman, certainly, but also William Dean Howells, who wrote a trilogy of novels about the imaginary land of Altruria, along with many lesser-known contemporaries.[19] Other works take a transnational perspective on the period, placing American and British writers in dialogue, as I do here.[20] All these books reflect the vibrancy of the academic field of utopian studies, which has flourished over the past forty years, with its own professional associations and journals.

The Last Utopians differs from earlier studies in significant ways. First, it brings Edward Carpenter into the discussion of utopianism. Carpenter never wrote a utopian novel, so he has been excluded from studies that focus on narrative fiction. I take inspiration from Dohra Ahmad, who in *Landscapes of Hope* analyzes political manifestos alongside novels, and who defines as utopian any text that "proposes and enacts a better order that does not yet exist anywhere."[21] Using this criterion, much of Carpenter's poetry and prose can be understood as utopian discourse that celebrates a not-yet-existing better order. Carpenter, who fell into obscurity following his death in 1929, has received much attention since the 1970s from queer theorists and historians of sexuality. I place his celebration of the "intermediate sex" in the context of works by his utopian contemporaries.[22]

The Last Utopians has fundamentally different purposes from the earlier books I've cited, which are literary and intellectual histories intended for a specialist audience. This book is concerned

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with lives as well as texts, and it centers on a series of narrative biographies that detail the ways these writers tried to live out their utopian commitments. Following the unexpected success of *Looking Backward*, the deeply private Bellamy ventured outside his comfortable haven in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, to drum up political support for the Nationalist political party and, later, for the Populist movement. The Oxford-educated Morris turned his back on his comfortable upper-middle-class upbringing to speak for socialism on street corners and, donning a workman's smock, to labor as a jack-of-all-trades artisan. Carpenter threw over his prestigious post as a Cambridge don and moved to England's industrial north, working first as a lecturer and then as Derbyshire's most highly educated market gardener. Gilman braved scandal to divorce her husband, giving him custody of their young daughter, in order to tour the country as a lecturer for Nationalism and women's rights. Later, she again defied convention by marrying her younger cousin, an attorney who unreservedly supported her career.

This book combines biography and literary analysis in an effort to understand the ways that, just over a century ago, utopianism not only animated important works by Bellamy, Morris, Carpenter, and Gilman but also shaped their lives. I set these writers and their works within the context of their tumultuous times in order to understand why, for a period of some thirty years from the 1880s until the First World War, utopian fiction had an unprecedented success, utopian speculation suffused the era's intellectual life, and a wide variety of cultural radicals experimented with ways to live out their utopian beliefs.

The Last Utopians does not attempt a comprehensive survey of utopianism in either the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries or today. H. G. Wells, for example, produced multiple works of speculative fiction, both utopian and dystopian, around the turn of the twentieth century; however, Wells's utopian vision, articulated most clearly in *A Modern Utopia* (1905), has little in common with the works of the last utopians. His ideal future is technocratic, authoritarian, and hierarchical, with power centered in the hands of an elite class of intellectuals descended from Plato's Guardians. Similarly, my final chapter does not consider twenty-first-century techno-utopianism. Belief in the power of technology and computer

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science to deliver a transformed future is widespread, but the everyday utopians whom I discuss are suspicious of what they see as technological hubris, preferring to emphasize the values of simplicity, sustainability, and community.

These contemporary utopians insist, even if implicitly, on the value of imaginative visions of the future. Milan Šimečka, a philosopher and dissident under Czechoslovakia's Communist regime, published an essay on utopianism during the 1980s, when he was working as a laborer after having been expelled from his university teaching position. Šimečka railed, understandably, against the Marxist utopia, yet he went on to argue that "a world without utopias would be a world without social hope, a world of resignation to the status quo and the devalued slogans of everyday political life." The utopian visions of Bellamy, Morris, Carpenter, and Gilman have not, more than a century later, been realized, but elements of their transformative visions—environmentalism, economic justice, equality for women and sexual minorities—remain central to progressive politics today. Utopian studies theorists and scholars argue that imagined utopias are best understood as heuristic devices, useful tools that serve the dual purpose of critiquing the present and offering possibilities for the future. In the words of Lucy Sargisson, "The function of Utopia is not its own realization." Rather, the purpose of utopia is to stimulate critical thinking and to promote the political imagination. In Karl Mannheim's apt aphorism, "The impossible gives birth to the possible."[23]

In mapping the utopian contours of two historical moments—the period from the 1880s to 1915 and the early twenty-first century—this book implicitly interrogates its own title. After World War I, utopianism never regained the importance it held during the previous century, but neither did it disappear. The title is intended to be provocative, to raise questions about the place of utopian thinking today and to stimulate readers' own utopian imaginings. *The Last Utopians* plunges deeply into the lives and works of four writers active at a high point for utopian fiction and speculation in both the United States and Great Britain, and it briefly surveys some of the varieties of contemporary utopianism in the two nations. In writing about utopianism both then and now, I strive for a stance of sympathetic distance. That is, I acknowledge the flaws in the last

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utopians' grand visions, the ways in which authoritarianism and racism and gender essentialism are woven into the fabric of their dreams, but at the same time I try to avoid the scolding tone of much recent writing about these authors, which seems aimed at demonstrating the current academic community's intellectual and moral superiority. The last utopians, imperfect creatures of their time, dared to publish their dreams, and millions of people in the U.S. and U.K. were thrilled by their visions. A hundred years later, we're rightly fearful of grandiose schemes, and the audience for conventional utopian fiction has shrunk toward the vanishing point. Nevertheless, lived utopianism—contemporary manifestations of what Ernst Bloch called "the principle of hope"—is widespread.[24] Visions of social transformation remain essential to progressive political thought and practice. Millions of people in the U.S. and U.K. are demonstrating through their daily actions the truth of Oscar Wilde's characteristically witty observation: "A map of the world that does not contain Utopia is not worth even glancing at."[25]

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