



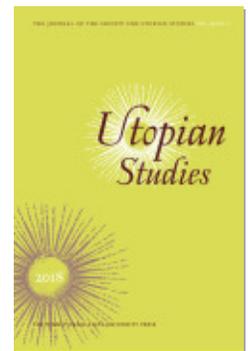
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Building a Bridge to Nowhere: Morris, the Education of
Desire, and the Party of Utopia

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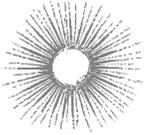
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Building a Bridge to Nowhere: Morris, the Education of Desire, and the Party of Utopia

Mark Allison

ABSTRACT

*Is a utopian text best understood as a blueprint for building a better society or as a catalyst for educating the desire of its readers? Since Miguel Abensour's interpretation of *News from Nowhere*, scholars have favored the latter view. This article contends, however, that the "catalytic" approach to utopian texts created an antinomy within utopian studies. When William Morris composed *Nowhere*, he was confronting a practical manifestation of the same antinomy. Consequently, studying Morris's utopia sheds valuable light on this methodological problem. This focus also reveals *Nowhere's* governing metaphor—the bridge—and suggests the significance of Morris's neglected contemporaneous lecture "How Shall We Live Then?" This article concludes that attention to the programmatic and rhetorical content of utopian texts is necessary to balance the dominant emphasis on utopia as an impulse and pedagogical process.*

KEYWORDS: *News from Nowhere, William Morris, Miguel Abensour, education of desire, utopian hermeneutics*

If you are planning a trip to utopia, I recommend avoiding the example of William Guest. For, on the first morning of his utopian holiday, the protagonist of William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890) nearly drowns. As he enjoys a swim in the Thames, Guest momentarily loses his orientation: "My eyes naturally sought for the bridge, and so utterly astonished was I by what I saw, that I forgot to strike out, and went spluttering under water again."¹ Instead of the "ugly suspension bridge" (CW 16:4) he anticipates, Guest sees a cause for wonder:

I had perhaps dreamed of such a bridge, but never seen such an one out of an illuminated manuscript; for not even the Ponte Vecchio at Florence came anywhere near it. It was of stone arches, splendidly solid, and as graceful as they were strong; high enough also to let ordinary river traffic through easily. Over the parapet showed quaint and fanciful little buildings, which I supposed to be booths or shops, beset with painted and gilded vanes and spirelets. The stone was a little weathered, but showed no marks of the grimy sootiness which I was used to on every London building more than a year old. In short, to me a wonder of a bridge. (CW 16:8)

"In short"? The lovingly thorough description that precedes this phrase makes a mockery of Morris's belated gesture toward concision. To be sure, the bridge conveys a great deal about the mentality of the utopian society that *Nowhere* depicts: its neo-medieval sensibility, fusion of practicality and whimsy, and transcendence of the quarrel between humankind and nature. But the very profuseness and idiosyncrasy of the bridge's delineation threatens to interfere with the communication of these social facts. Readers may find themselves responding to—or reacting against—these details, rather than attending to the utopian values they emblemize.

Frivolous though this vignette may appear, it helps me to introduce a question that has polarized interpretations of Morris's seminal utopia—and, indeed, utopian hermeneutics as a whole. Does the utopian text present a "good place" that readers are encouraged to adopt as their own sociopolitical ideal? Or is a utopian work better understood as an expression of its author's subjective tastes, which is intended to inspire readers to reflect upon their own preferences—and engage in their own utopian projections?² In other words, is the utopian text best conceived as a *blueprint* for building a superior

social order or as a *catalyst* that educates desire and stimulates the utopian imagination? These two views need not be mutually exclusive, of course. But there is an elemental tension between them, and they lead, ultimately, to antithetical views on interpretation and praxis.

It is particularly fitting, I submit, that we ponder these alternatives with the aid of *News from Nowhere*, because it was scholarly engagement with Morris's seminal utopia that led to their codification in the first place. In a deeply influential interpretation, Miguel Abensour argued that *Nowhere* was the harbinger of a new kind of utopian text. Rather than provide blueprints for a better society, these works were exploratory and prompted "the education of desire." Abensour's insights facilitated a methodological reorientation within utopian studies.³ Over the last several decades, scholars have concentrated less on the programmatic content of utopian texts than on their diagnostic and pedagogical functions; they have devoted more attention to utopia as an impulse and a process, rather than as a social blueprint. Abensour's terminology, or concepts that derive from it (such as Raymond Williams's distinction between "systematic" and "heuristic" utopias), is ubiquitous.⁴

While I am broadly sympathetic to this interpretative turn, I believe that it created an antinomy within the field of utopian studies. Scholars have only addressed this problem fitfully—in part, I will show, because the field assimilated Abensour's ideas in a form that masks the starkness of the contradiction. The antinomy might be framed, preliminarily, as follows: A heuristic and pedagogical understanding of utopia(nism) is clearly more in keeping with the normative values of an egalitarian and pluralist modernity. However, such an understanding comes at the expense of a sociopolitical ideal that is *common* and *concrete*—which are the very qualities necessary to motivate and focus the struggle for utopia's realization. By conceiving of the utopian text as a catalyst (rather than a blueprint), we democratize utopianism. But we do so at the cost of making utopia that much more difficult to reach.

Fortunately, this is where *Nowhere* can assist us. When Morris published his utopian romance in *Commonweal*, the organ of the Socialist League, between January and October 1890, he was contending with a practical manifestation of the same antinomy that now confronts utopian studies. Returning to *Nowhere* will enable us to gain a more precise understanding of this problem and to learn from its author's effort to overcome it. At the same time, reading Morris's utopia in this context reveals some striking new

facets of a familiar text. *Nowhere* has been well served by critics. Surprisingly, however, the text's master metaphor has never been identified (the task of my second section), and it has only been brought into fleeting contact with what is arguably its most pertinent intertext (the work of my fourth). It is worth stating at the outset that Morris's solution to the antinomy is imperfect, particularly when measured by twenty-first-century standards. But it is compelling enough to suggest that renewed attention to the *content* of utopian texts—and to the rhetorical strategies employed by their authors to win readers' assent—is warranted.

I.

Miguel Abensour was not the first critic to claim that *News from Nowhere* constitutes a watershed in the Western utopian literary tradition. But the conceptual framework he developed to make his case abetted a paradigm shift within utopian studies. Unfortunately, this framework entered the field secondhand. There was a twenty-three-year lag between E. P. Thompson's laudatory synopsis of Abensour's argument and its appearance in an English translation.⁵ By then, what I will call the "anglophone interpretation of Abensour" was entrenched. Thompson endeavored to describe Abensour's position faithfully; nevertheless, the mediated transmission resulted in a subtle, but deeply significant, modification to the French scholar's thought. While this modification opened up intriguing methodological possibilities, it also precipitated the antinomy that now troubles utopian studies.

Thompson introduced Abensour's ideas to the anglophone scholarly world in 1976, in a fulsome, if succinct, summary.⁶ According to Thompson, Abensour argues that *Nowhere* is the preeminent example of "a new kind of utopian writing" that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This new utopian mode self-consciously departs from the "juridico-political model-building" of classical utopianism, in favor of "a more open heuristic discourse."⁷ Avoiding the "systematic description of the future society," Morris and his artistic kindred offer "alternative values sketched in an alternative way of life" and engage in "open exploration" of possibilities that lie beyond the compass of theoretical precision. Readers of a new utopian text are thus launched upon an "adventure," an exploration of values and modes of being that parallel the protagonist's own.⁸

It is in this context that Thompson introduces Abensour's most celebrated concept. "The education of desire," Thompson explains, "is not the same as 'a moral education' towards a given end: it is, rather, to open a way to aspiration, to 'teach desire to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and above all to desire in a different way.'"⁹ The new utopian discourse takes the education of desire, rather than programmatic social modeling, as its vocation. It is thus absolved of complicity in totalitarianism and rescued from charges of obsolescence. Thompson declares that "to vindicate Morris's Utopianism"—as Abensour has done—"may at the same time be to vindicate Utopianism itself, and set it free to walk the world once more without shame and without accusations of bad faith."¹⁰

To turn from this enthusiastic gloss to the opening sentences of *Nowhere* is rather like plunging into the chilly morning waters of the Thames. "Up at the League," the (unnamed) narrator reports, "there had been one night a brisk conversational discussion, as to what would happen on the Morrow of the Revolution, finally shading off into a vigorous statement by various friends of their views on the future of the fully-developed new society" (*CW* 16:3). The meeting begins with "a brisk conversational discussion" about the utopian future—an activity that exemplifies the open and adventurous spirit that Abensour discerned in *Nowhere*. But within the span of a single sentence, "discussion" devolves into "vigorous statement":

Considering the subject, the discussion was good-tempered . . . if they did not listen to each other's opinions (which could scarcely be expected of them), at all events did not always attempt to speak all together, as is the custom of people in ordinary society polite when conversing on a subject which interests them. For the rest, there were six persons present, and consequently six sections of the party were represented, four of which had strong but divergent Anarchist opinions. (*CW* 16:3)

Because each discussant is wholly committed to his own view, the Leaguers do not even "listen to each other's opinions," and the heuristic investigation of utopia is stymied before it can truly begin.

What went wrong? Like most utopians, the Leaguers have definite, passionately held ideas about "the fully-developed new society" to which they aspire. Consequently, they are unable to suspend their beliefs long enough to engage in fruitful exploration of alternative possibilities, much less to learn "to desire in a different way." The vanity of small differences—exhibited by all the

participants but exemplified here by the four Leaguers who espouse “strong but divergent Anarchist opinions”—wreaks its customary havoc. In short order, open inquiry into utopian ideals degenerates into an unproductive cacophony.

Morris’s darkly comic depiction of the Socialist League bespeaks his disillusionment with the organization for which he had sacrificed so much.¹¹ Five years earlier, he had spearheaded the league’s break from the Socialist Democratic Federation, Britain’s first socialist party. Morris and his fellow schismatics sought a democratic and ideologically inclusive alternative to the federation’s autocratic leader, Henry Mayers Hyndman, and the rigid, nondialectical Marxism that he espoused. Hyndman insisted upon party discipline and ideological orthodoxy. Ironically, Hyndman was himself an inveterate schemer who was always ready to sacrifice principle for short-term advantage.

In a pointed contrast to Hyndman’s opportunism, the Socialist League manifesto insisted upon congruity between means and ends: “We are working for equality and brotherhood for all the world, and it is only *through* equality and brotherhood that we can make our work effective.” Morris and his comrades committed themselves to “the education of the people in the principles of this great cause.”¹² The pressing task was (in Morris’s oft-repeated phrase) “to *make Socialists*”—doctrinal and institutional niceties could wait.¹³ In sum, the Leaguers pursued the socialist future in a manner consonant with Abensour’s “new utopian spirit”: they emphasized process rather than outcome, education rather than discipline, and inclusivity rather than conformity.

But having escaped from the dogmatic and authoritarian Hyndman, Morris and his comrades soon found themselves confronting the opposite problem: atomization. While the Leaguers share a nominal fealty to revolutionary socialism, the meeting with which *Nowhere* opens reveals that this label papers over incommensurate opinions about the future for which they struggle. For a debating club or an academic conference, the genial pandemonium into which their discussion descends would be a perfectly acceptable outcome. But for a political organization whose very *raison d’être* is to work for the realization of a qualitatively improved social order, it is slow death.

For a party to operate efficaciously, some agreement about ultimate goals, however modest and provisional, is necessary. Means and ends are never wholly separable. Consequently, the absence of this minimal consensus makes it impossible to formulate strategy and agree upon tactics—much less to implement them in a disciplined fashion. The fact that only half a dozen Leaguers attend the meeting is perhaps just as telling as the squabbles into

which the participants descend; it suggests that dissension and low morale have already vitiated the party ranks.

The league's disintegration spotlights the crucial difference between the anglophone interpretation of Abensour (deriving from Thompson) and Abensour's own theoretical outlook. Here we may draw upon the work of Christine Nadir, which carefully disentangles the French scholar's position from its subsequent redescriptions. For Abensour, the new utopian spirit is self-critical and deconstructive; it calls into question the very institutions and laws it proposes. If properly educated, this spirit "dislocates utopian promises before they settle into authoritative blueprints and political models." The education of desire is thus "an imperative toward process without destination"—an unceasing agitation and excess that prevents utopia from betraying its emancipatory promise by rigidifying into a system of domination.¹⁴ Abensour praises Morris for making the modern utopian text "the place of an endless experimentation and incompleteness"—a site for lateral play rather than teleological development.¹⁵

In marked contrast to Abensour's essentially deconstructive perspective, utopian studies scholars have generally understood the education of desire to be generative and goal-oriented.¹⁶ Indeed, the field has seized upon this concept as a mechanism by which utopia can eventually be achieved. In her foundational *The Concept of Utopia*, for example, Ruth Levitas approvingly glosses Abensour's ideas before concluding that "there is plainly no point in the education of desire for its own sake, and if the function of utopia is the education of desire, the function of the education of desire is the realization of utopia."¹⁷ She thereby replaces Abensour's self-negating circle with a positive feedback loop, by which the education of desire eventually produces individuals who, working together, are capable of instantiating utopia.

It is easy to understand why the field adopted Abensour's theoretical vocabulary so enthusiastically. As presented by Thompson, it annuls many of the dangers of classical utopianism: top-down authoritarianism, insensitivity to diversity and pluralism, fixation on institutional structures rather than the human beings who inhabit them. Prospectively, the education of desire even solves the fiendish paradox of Marx's third thesis on Feuerbach: Who educates the educators? If "changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing," Marx points out, enlightened educators are needed to establish the "other circumstances" and oversee the "changed upbringing."¹⁸ But such educators could only be the products of the very

social arrangements that they are now called upon to instantiate. How is it possible to escape this infinite regress?

The anglophone reading of Abensour solves Marx's paradox by modifying the temporality of classical utopianism. Classical utopias frequently locate the origin of utopia in a wise lawgiver (or -givers). The lawgiver(s) establishes utopian institutions, which in turn produce the greatly improved human beings who populate utopia. In contrast, the anglophone interpretation of Abensour begins with human beings, who undergo the education of desire. Once they have learned to "desire otherwise," they are equipped to collaborate on a social blueprint to which they all subscribe and, finally, inaugurate utopia. Not only does this solve the problem of "educating the educators," but it democratizes the founding of utopia by making its creation a collective and freely undertaken act.

This manner of construing the education of desire is exceptionally promising. (Indeed, it offers more resources for hope than Abensour's original armature, which, in the name of preventing the emergence of new forms of unfreedom, endlessly defers utopia's realization.) But the tragicomic Socialist League meeting with which *Nowhere* opens reveals that it is, quite literally, only the beginning of the story. The league's fate illustrates an unpalatable truth: once "systematic utopia" is relinquished, the party begins to decompose into so many irascible sects of one. If a party dedicated to utopia's realization is to be reconstituted, a means of spanning the gaps between manifold individual ideals must be discovered.

2.

And this returns us to bridges, and the vignette with which this article began. It is no accident that Guest's recognition that he has awoken in utopia is triggered by a bridge. Handsome bridges appear so often in *Nowhere* that a reader might be forgiven for concluding that they are Britain's primary manufacture during its "epoch of rest." Moreover, they appear at the pivotal moments in the narrative, underscoring their figurative significance. The bridge, I contend, is *Nowhere's* governing metaphor, a multivalent symbol for utopian desire—and, prospectively, a way of satisfying it.

In the earlier texts of Morris's socialist triptych, *The Pilgrims of Hope* (1885) and *A Dream of John Ball* (1886–87), the bridge served as a symbol for the

interconnected problems of revolutionary commitment and party-building. In the second section of *Pilgrims*, “The Bridge and the Street,” the lovers’ decision to relinquish their pastoral idyll out of solidarity with the urban proletariat is signaled by their crossing of a bridge into London (CW 24:371–74). In *John Ball*, the threshold of London Bridge represents the achievement of insurrectionary critical mass: “And at London Bridge,” Ball demands rhetorically, “who shall stay our host?” (CW 16:255). In both texts, the traversal of a bridge represents commitment to a collective (and ultimately revolutionary) struggle for liberation.

Unlike *Pilgrims* or *John Ball*, *Nowhere* is set in the future; consequently, the bridge takes on added depth of meaning. It now connotes what Nietzsche was soon to call the “longing for the other shore”: the yearning to cross from a corrupted present to a redeemed future.¹⁹ The individual may make this traversal by dreaming, as Guest does. But if utopia is ever to be reached in actuality, Guest’s (and *Nowhere*’s) final words remind us, the dream must be held in common: “And if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream” (CW 16:211). Only collective adherence transforms a “dream” into a “vision,” a goal for which men and women struggle—and which they may eventually realize. Without shared commitment, utopia remains the stuff of dreams: fortifying and critically salient but powerless to come into being.

The achievement of utopia, Morris suggests, requires consensus, a shared “vision” of the desirable society to orient contemporary struggles. This vision need not be exhaustive, nor need it be “closed.”²⁰ But it must be substantial enough to inspire and sustain a party that will work toward utopia’s realization, safeguarding it against aimlessness and fragmentation. To invoke the terminology I used earlier in this article, we might conceive of a vision as a middle term that lies between a catalyst and a blueprint. A vision, in other words, is a kind of schema: it is more codified and programmatic than a catalyst but less definitive and detailed than a blueprint. It provides a vivid image of a better social order, in which many of the nuts-and-bolts details remain diaphanous and indistinct.

Because it sidesteps knotty and polarizing institutional questions, a utopian vision is, by its very nature, more inclusive than a blueprint. But I suspect that this greater inclusivity is purchased at the cost of weaker collective bonds. In other words, we should not expect a group organized around a vision to exhibit the same degree of discipline or commitment as an effective

political party. Rather, a vision inspires a looser coalition that we might call a “Party of Utopia.”

“The Party of Utopia” is a term coined by Fredric Jameson and further developed by Matthew Beaumont. Beaumont argues that “Utopian fiction . . . seeks to recruit its readers to a notional party of potential activists, a Party of Utopia.” By virtue of their shared fealty to the ideal society that a work of utopian fiction presents, these readers become a “collective, abstract subject”—a Party of Utopia—in which the text vests its hope that the “utopian program” it adumbrates will be implemented.²¹ Beaumont is highly skeptical of this strategy on two grounds: First, it is (philosophically) idealist, ignoring that class society “has to be altered by *acting* together and not merely by *thinking* together.”²² Second, the conceit of a Party of Utopia “posits as homogeneous and unified a readership that is in fact heterogeneous and conflicted.”²³ The idea that a work of fiction could muster a Party of Utopia is less a viable strategy, Beaumont concludes, than a form of utopian dreaming in its own right.

Crucially, however, Beaumont argues that Morris represents a partial exception among utopian fiction writers, a recognition that I seek to build upon to rehabilitate the concept of the Party of Utopia. He points out that *Nowhere* includes a virtuoso chapter, “How the Change Came,” that chronicles the revolutionary struggle by which class society was destroyed; it thereby avoids the idealist fallacy that “the diffusion of progressive ideas” through a work of fiction is itself sufficient to instantiate a utopian society.²⁴ Following Abensour closely (and quoting him repeatedly), Beaumont maintains that Morris did not write for an amorphous, diffuse public, as other contemporaneous utopian authors did. Rather, he intended *Nowhere*, above all, for the readership of *Commonweal*, a theoretically sophisticated and politically engaged audience. He was thus addressing “a concrete rather than an abstract collective.”²⁵

Given Morris’s fatalism about the future of the Socialist League, I find Abensour’s and Beaumont’s contention that the readership of *Commonweal* was the primary audience for Morris’s utopian romance unpersuasive. Increasingly, Morris wrote with a different audience in mind: his like-minded comrades (most of whom accompanied him when his Hammersmith branch broke from the league later that year) and, especially, the mass audience that awaited *Nowhere* once it appeared in book form.²⁶ Nevertheless, his goal was the same: to persuade his readers to “see it as I have seen it” and thereby

transform the “dream” adumbrated in *Nowhere* into a “vision” of a possible future. If Morris succeeded at this task, his ideal would become the basis for a new Party of Utopia devoted to its realization. In keeping with the looser (indeed virtual) bonds of such a party, this entailed accepting a much longer time frame for the advent of the “Great Change”—the revolution would, necessarily, be a long one (*CW* 16:179). But this was an adjustment to which Morris was increasingly resigned.

Thanks to *Nowhere*'s parting words, then, the figure of the bridge accrues one final layer of meaning: it becomes a metaphor for the task of “bridging” the distance between heterogeneous dreams so that they converge upon a shared utopian vision.²⁷ Morris did not rest content with theorizing this process, however. As I will argue in my next section, *Nowhere* undertakes it.

3.

It will be helpful to begin by recalling the design of Morris's utopian romance. As Krishan Kumar has demonstrated most systematically, Guest's sojourn in utopia is structured by two journeys and, concomitantly, his interactions with two guides. Guest's first excursion takes him from Kelmscott House to the British Museum, where he receives a history tutorial from Old Hammond. The second, also originating at Kelmscott House, follows the Thames upriver and terminates at Kelmscott Manor. The beguiling Ellen presides over this river voyage and provides the somatic and affective correlative to Hammond's highly didactic instruction.²⁸ The bridge plays an essential—and complementary—role in Guest's interaction with both mentors, underscoring its figurative centrality.

During his lengthy conversation with Guest in the British Museum, Old Hammond describes the “Mote,” the local administrative unit that has superseded the state bureaucracy. He approaches the subject by positing several hypotheticals: “Some neighbours think that something ought to be done or undone: a new town-hall built; a clearance of inconvenient houses; or say a stone bridge substituted for some ugly old iron one,—there, you have undoing and doing in one” (*CW* 16:88). Once Hammond begins explaining the communal decision-making process, however, the other examples fall away, and what he calls the “matter of the bridge” is the illustration that he and Guest explore in detail (*CW* 16:90).

For *Commonweal's* readership, bridge-building was not an innocent example. Morris had introduced it in a tetchy exchange with the Socialist League's Anarchist bloc mere months before.²⁹ Lest the allusion to this prior debate be missed, Hammond and Guest's conversation climaxes with them "laughing very heartily" at the idea of conducting a society on Anarchistic principles (CW 16:89). This is, admittedly, something of a cheap shot.³⁰ By chiding the Anarchist Leaguers in this fashion, moreover, Morris was burning bridges, not building them. His willingness to antagonize the very faction with which he needed to find common ground is yet another indication that Morris was resigned to the league's deliquescence. Old Hammond's comment is thus apposite: the matter of the bridge entails "undoing and doing in one." The "undoing" of Morris's rapidly fraying ties to the Socialist League occurs in tandem with the creation, the "doing," of new bonds of fellowship: the incipient Party of Utopia that *Nowhere* aspires to recruit.

By virtue of Hammond's advanced age and historical knowledge, Vincent Geoghegan observes, he functions as a "transitional figure" who links the fallen past to the utopian present.³¹ It is thus symbolically appropriate that Morris uses the backward-facing Hammond to deliver a parting blow to his Anarchist interlocutors—and, effectively, to bid farewell to the declining Socialist League. Ellen, too, is a transitional figure: by virtue of her youth and desire for children, she connects the realized utopian present (the "epoch of rest") to a still more advanced stage of historical development to come. Fittingly, Morris pursues the project of building a new Party of Utopia through her. As we will see, Ellen plays an essential role in interpellating readers, educating their desire, and securing their shared commitment to the utopian vision that she emblemizes.

Guest and his traveling companions meet Ellen in Runnymede; to Guest's regret, they leave her behind to continue their journey upriver. However, she reappears unexpectedly—and strikingly—several chapters later: "The bows of another boat came thrusting through the low arch. . . . As it cleared the arch, a figure as bright and gay-clad as the boat rose up in it; a slim girl dressed in light blue silk that fluttered in the draughty wind of the bridge. I thought I knew the figure, and sure enough, as she turned her head to us, and showed her beautiful face, I saw with joy that it was none other than the fairy godmother from the abundant garden on Runnymede—Ellen, to wit" (CW 16:180–81). Morris heightens the moment by presenting one of *Nowhere's* only tableaux: the "low arch" of the bridge frames Ellen as she turns to face

the travelers, the wind picturesquely disordering her dress. Ellen's dramatic reentry initiates the bittersweet romance plot that structures the latter half of *Nowhere*.

Morris is not simply indulging in a Pre-Raphaelite flourish by staging this tableau, however. The next several chapters work to solidify the figurative connection of Ellen and bridges that it introduces. To a degree that verges on the comical, Guest and Ellen's growing intimacy is facilitated by them. No sooner has Guest joined Ellen on her craft than she requests that he "hold the boat while she had a good look at the landscape through the graceful arch" of the Shillingford Bridge (CW 16:183). Her pleasure at this prospect leads Guest to blurt out that he has been on the upper waters many times before, blowing his own cover story. With Guest no longer dissembling about his origins, their relationship is freed to develop on its true basis—the mutual attraction of the residual past and the emergent future—and their courtship swiftly gains momentum.

In the very next chapter, Ellen is delighted by a "beautiful old bridge"—the (confusingly named) New bridge, near the confluence of the Thames and the Windrush (CW 16:189). But she is even more pleased by Guest's familiarity with it from "times agone": "And she stood looking thoughtfully at me still, till she had to sit down as we passed under the middle one of the row of little pointed arches of the oldest bridge across the Thames" (CW 16:189). Here, the figurative connection between Ellen and the bridge comes perilously close to being literalized, as she must "sit down" to avoid striking her head against the New bridge's underside. This literalness is fitting: a "new bridge" is precisely what Morris is endeavoring to construct, and Ellen is instrumental to this ambition.

Indeed, vicarious participation in its romance plot is the central mechanism by which *Nowhere* educates the desire of its readers. As many critics have observed, Guest's passion for Ellen is inextricably bound up with his longing for the society that she epitomizes. It is through falling in love with her that Guest completes the education of his own desire and learns to love the England of the future. By taking part, imaginatively, in this courtship, the empathetic reader, too, comes to yearn for Ellen—and the social order that she personifies.³² The reader's libidinal desire is thereby roused, educated, and alchemized into a utopian desire for the ideal society that *Nowhere* depicts.

For the text to complete its politico-pedagogical work, however, Guest must be wrenched from his beloved and cast back to his own debased era.

Bernard Sharratt ably describes the impact of this anticlimax on the reader: “The reader, *insofar as* he or she has ‘identified with’ the love-relation between Ellen and Guest and has *willed* its consummation (in accordance with the familiar expectations of popular and naïve ‘romance’), is left by the ending with a final feeling of frustration. . . . In a curious but definite way, the desire of the lover (and by transference the desire of the reader) is coupled with, brought into the service of, the political desire that the text seeks to provoke.”³³ The frustration of enflamed, but thwarted, desire becomes the fuel for political engagement. Extending Sharratt’s account, we can specify the “curious but definite way” that readers’ desires are politically inflected. To the extent that they have imaginatively participated in Guest’s adventures—and, especially, his romance with his beloved—readers are bound by Ellen’s parting injunction to Guest: “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” (CW 16:211). These like-minded readers have had the desires educated and, still more important, cathected to a common vision: the very utopian society that *Nowhere* describes.

Nowhere begins with a fractious party meeting, in which there is not even a modicum of consensus about “the fully-developed new society” toward which its members aspire. The Socialist League’s imminent demise is counterbalanced by the text’s conclusion, at which Morris and his sympathetic readers share a new utopian vision. *Nowhere* has completed its task of preparing the members of an incipient Party of Utopia, who will be prepared to work toward their social ideal’s realization.

4.

There is, however, a formidable obstacle to the interpretation of *Nowhere* that I have been developing in this article—an obstacle that returns us, again, to my opening vignette and Morris’s lavish and quirky description of the new Hammersmith bridge. A reader may well be attracted to the society that *Nowhere* depicts. But what of the idiosyncratic tastes and autobiographical details that crowd the text’s foreground and threaten to occlude its socio-political content entirely? “The only safe way of reading a Utopia,” Morris memorably insisted, “is to consider it as the expression of the temperament of its author.”³⁴ In his own attempt at the form, Morris seems to have honored

this dictum with exaggerated scrupulousness, giving forthright expression to even his most controversial preferences (e.g., his veneration of handicrafts and concomitant misgivings about mechanized production) and featuring settings that are imbued with deeply personal significance (e.g., his two homes). The response that such an unabashedly personal work seems destined to provoke is not ideological assent but a counterproposal—just as *Nowhere* began as a riposte to Edward Bellamy’s “cockney paradise.”³⁵

A reading that maintains that Morris was in earnest about the utopian potential of the society that *Nowhere* delineates must confront not only the text’s intensely personal character but its wish-fulfilling ambience—what Thompson termed the “air of a ‘compensation-world’” that envelops the narrative.³⁶ Freud famously argued that the successful writer “softens the character of his egotistic day-dreams” through emendation and dissemblance, lest his wish-fulfilling fantasies evoke a “feeling of repulsion” in the reader.³⁷ Morris, to put it mildly, neither emends nor dissembles. If he indeed sought to persuade others to adopt his own vision as the basis for a new Party of Utopia (as I have claimed), then why did Morris employ such a counterintuitive method?

We might begin to address this question by recalling that there is precedent for Morris’s approach within the utopian tradition itself. In his genre-founding *Utopia* (1516), Thomas More incorporated an authorial proxy within the text—the skeptical “More,” who spars with the utopian evangelist Raphael Hythloday. Morris, a careful reader of More, one-ups his precursor by inviting the reader to identify the utopian visitor “William Guest” as William Morris himself.³⁸ Not only are Guest and Morris dead ringers, but the surname “Guest” (about which I will have more to say presently) is so manifestly an alias that even the Nowhereans refer to their visitor as “Guest” or “the guest” interchangeably. For an author with coalition-building aspirations, this would seem rather autobiographical enough, but Morris populates the text with numerous embodied manifestations of his own personality: Old Hammond, whose “strangely familiar” face Guest feels he has seen before, “in a looking-glass it might be” (CW 16:53); Dick, who appears to be a self-portrait of Morris’s own unbookish youth; Boffin, Bob the Weaver, the Old Grumbler, and other curmudgeons, whose antiquarianism and somewhat theatrical dissatisfaction with the present are partial, and mocking, self-depictions.³⁹ “There are moments,” Michael Holzman observes, “when it appears that in this story there are only projections of William Morris to serve as characters.”⁴⁰

If Morris confined his self-projection to the domain of character, we might interpret it as a mere extension of the self-reflexivity and gamesomeness that More bequeathed to the form. But this solipsistic tendency manifests itself in every facet of *Nowhere*. Darko Suvin suggests that “Nowhere and William Guest are two polar aspects of Morris the author—the healing, achieved hope and the wounded, hoping subject. Both the subject and his hope are in some ways marked by Pre-Raphaelite narcissism and thus very much at odds with modern taste.”⁴¹ This risks overstating the problem; both Morris’s playfulness and his readiness to laugh at himself ensure that his utopian romance does not descend into narcissistic self-absorption. But Suvin is surely correct to characterize *Nowhere* as “marked” by narcissism, at least insofar as the term denotes an intensely self-regarding disposition that is concerned, unapologetically, with its own pleasure.

The self-contemplating and wish-fulfilling mood in which Morris composed his utopia was undoubtedly congenial. However, it also allowed him to confront a vital strategic problem. As we saw, the stubborn independent-mindedness of Guest’s putative allies in the Socialist League is thematized in *Nowhere*’s very opening sentence. The prospective members of any Party of Utopia are likely to be every bit as pugnacious and self-absorbed as the Leaguers themselves. Morris’s task was thus to project a social ideal that would be embraced by a wide variety of strong, opinionated personalities. Rather than presenting a studiously vague utopia in the hope of accommodating everyone, Morris took a more challenging approach. Not despite but *through* his text’s highly individualized and compensatory content, he sought to create consensus around the utopian vision that *Nowhere* presents.

The grounds for this reading are provided by a remarkable, but understudied, text entitled “How Shall We Live Then?” Morris delivered this lecture in spring 1889; he gave it several additional times, before a range of radical audiences, in early 1890.⁴² Its presentation was thus wholly intertwined with the composition of the early installments of *Nowhere*. “How Shall We Live Then?” confirms that Morris believed narcissistic self-projection could provide a means of persuading a disparate audience to adopt his own views—and that, moreover, he could cast his utopia’s protagonist in his own image without lapsing into the representational logic of the bourgeois novel.⁴³

In his lecture, Morris offers “my personal view of the Promised Land of Socialism” (222). He describes a society that has achieved “decentralization and equality of condition” and overcome the inhibitions that prevent

humankind from living as “good animals” that take pleasure in such natural activities as eating and lovemaking (232, 228). The loss of “a great deal of what we have been used to call material progress”—the luxuries afforded by capitalist exploitation—will be more than compensated by the restoration of the environment, the de-alienation of labor, and the renewed ability of the citizenry to take “pleasurable interest in all the details of life” (239).⁴⁴ When the citizens of the future are not engaged in gratifying labor or restorative leisure, they will enjoy other simple pleasures, such as “getting in the harvest by hand” (228)—the rationale for Guest’s trip up the Thames.

As even this cursory summary suggests, “How Shall We Live Then?” is a veritable précis of the principles Morris dramatized in his contemporaneous utopia. Initially, however, it appears to confirm Abensour’s original claims that Morris wished to provoke dialogue and “awaken” desire rather than channel it toward a particular goal.⁴⁵ In a lengthy preamble, Morris explains that he will describe his own conception of achieved socialism “with the hope of eliciting an account of the views of several of this audience” (222). He intimates that this will help his auditors look beyond the “practical and work-a-day side” of socialist activism, in order to get in touch with their “real desires and hopes” (223). Again, this would seem to vindicate Abensour’s intuitions.

However, Morris does not rest there. Having allowed that his lecture “must necessarily under these conditions take a personal character and be somewhat egotistical,” he reframes this concession in a manner that reverses its meaning (223). Morris explains that experience has led him to doubt “there is such a thing as an individual human being” (223). His elaboration of this remarkable conceit is worth quoting at some length: “I have found out that my valuable skin covers say about a dozen persons, who in spite of their long alliance do occasionally astonish each other. . . . [I]t is impossible but that the men inside my skin who go to make up that complexity are but types of many others in the world, and probably even some of those are in this room at present” (223). He then completes his feat of rhetorical jujitsu: “So that when I tell you of my so-called personal desires for and hopes of the future the voice is mine, but the desires and hopes are not only mine, but are those of, I really think, many others, and you as practical men, as I hope you are, cannot afford to disregard them” (223). The dialectical reversals here are breathtaking. By the passage’s end, the “personal character” of Morris’s aspirations has become “my so-called personal desires for and hopes of the future.”

Far from being egotistical or merely idiosyncratic, Morris has become, by virtue of his internal multiplicity, the conduit for the longings and beliefs of “many others.” Insofar as his audience can claim to be “practical men,” they ignore the vision of the future he adumbrates at their peril.

In a final coup de théâtre, Morris switches to the first-person plural before launching into his description of the socialist future: “We, (I will say we now)” (227). This *we* has two distinct referents. First, it denotes the members of the audience, who, by virtue of Morris’s psychic multiplicity, have been drawn within the ambit of his vision. Morris is, indeed, educating the desire of his auditors. But he is doing so in a manner that encourages their longing to converge upon a common utopian vision.

Second, the *we* refers to Morris’s own internal multitude: “the men inside my skin.” He refers to himself as “the corporation which I call I” and as a “complex animal” (224, 223)—the latter a phrase that Morris wielded to great rhetorical effect in the very same *Commonweal* debate with the Anarchists in which bridge-building prominently figured.⁴⁶ It is the use of the first-person plural to refer to himself, moreover, that saves Morris from succumbing to the gravitational pull of the age’s hegemonic literary form. John Plotz has argued that the novel seeks the truths of “a shared human condition” through the *via negativa* of “extreme particularity”—thoroughly individuated characters, settings, and plots.⁴⁷ Morris evades this novelistic logic by particularizing so thoroughly that the individual fragments, revealing multiple, distinct subjectivities who retain their capacity to “astonish each other.” And because Morris is a “corporation” rather than a single individual, he claims the authority to speak on behalf of his audience.

In form as well as content, *Nowhere* picks up where “How Shall We Live Then?” leaves off. The first chapter is narrated in the third person, as an unidentified “friend” describes Guest’s experience of the Socialist League meeting, his return home, and his nighttime restiveness. The chapter’s final paragraph jettisons this cumbersome device:

He heard one o’clock strike, then two and then three; after which he fell asleep again. Our friend says that from that sleep he awoke once more, and afterwards went through such surprising adventures that he thinks that they should be told to our comrades, and indeed the public in general, and therefore proposes to tell them now. But, says he, I think it would be better if I told them in the first person, as if

it were myself who had gone through them; which, indeed, will be the easier and more natural to me, since I understand the feelings and desires of the comrade of whom I am telling better than any one else in the world does. (CW 16:5)

It would be easy to dismiss this as an especially lazy pivot to the first person, a hypothesis buttressed by the fact that the third-person speaker never reappears to “close” the frame narrative. When it is read on the heels of “How Shall We Live Then?” however, it is apparent that Morris is mobilizing his “complex animal” theory of subjectivity. Exploiting the referential amphibology of third-person pronouns (Is the “he” who awoke and experienced “such surprising adventures” Guest or the narrating friend?), he implies that the narrator is simply another component of Guest’s multifarious personality.⁴⁸ Morris is careful, however, not to allow these voices to collapse into identity: the narrator states that he can “understand” the feelings of his comrade (not that he shares them) and that he will relay his comrade’s adventures “as if” they were his own. While we might legitimately question how successful Morris is at sustaining this conceit as his text unfolds, it is clear that he presents his protagonist not as an integrated personality but as a “corporation which I call I.”

And this brings me, by way of conclusion, to the intriguing alias “Guest.” Beaumont has noted that *guest* and *ghost* share an etymological root.⁴⁹ Even as this connection underscores Guest’s untimeliness, it resonates with Morris’s own understanding of the individual as a kind of dwelling—a “valuable skin” haunted by unpredictable, often mischievous, subjectivities. In his correspondence, moreover, Morris frequently employs *guest* as a transitive verb, in accordance with its medieval usage. “To guest” is “to make a guest of; to receive as a guest; to entertain, lodge.”⁵⁰ This is precisely William Guest’s textual function: he receives us, in our manifold particularly, and entertains us during our stay. Like all stories worth telling, the tale he recounts entertains *and* instructs. And we cross the bridge to Nowhere in his care.

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Notes

1. William Morris, *The Collected Works of William Morris*, 24 vols., ed. May Morris (London: Longmans Green, 1910–15), 16:6; hereafter cited parenthetically as *CW* in the text by volume and page number.
2. These antithetical responses divided Morris's contemporaries and reoccur throughout the text's reception history. The former is well represented by Morris's friend and comrade Walter Crane, who noted that Morris called *Nowhere* "Utopian, but, in his view, and granting the conditions, it was a perfectly practicable Utopia" (*William Morris to Whistler: Papers and Addresses on Art and Craft and the Commonwealth* [London: G. Bell and Sons, 1911], 10). The latter is typified by the Guild Socialist G. D. H. Cole, who asserted that "*News from Nowhere* was neither a prophecy nor a promise, but the expression of a personal preference. Morris was saying, 'Here is the sort of society I feel I should like to live in. Now tell me yours'" (introduction to *William Morris: Stories in Prose, Stories in Verse, Shorter Poems, Lectures, and Essays*, ed. G. D. H. Cole [London: Nonesuch, 1948], xvi).
3. Undoubtedly, this methodological shift was overdetermined. Other causes include the ascent of postmodernism (with its distrust of totalizing thinking), the disappointments of "actually existing socialism," and the emergence of identitarian liberation movements, which, as Tom Moylan has shown, spawned a new subgenre, the critical utopia. See Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* (New York: Methuen, 1986).
4. Raymond Williams, "Utopia and Science Fiction," in *Tenses of the Imagination: Raymond Williams on Science Fiction, Utopia, and Dystopia*, ed. Andrew Milner (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 102–3.
5. For a version of Abensour's interpretation of Morris in English, see Miguel Abensour, "William Morris: The Politics of Romance," trans. Max Blechman, in *Revolutionary Romanticism*, ed. Max Blechman (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1999), 125–61.
6. E. P. Thompson's exegesis appeared in "Romanticism, Moralism, and Utopianism: The Case of William Morris," *New Left Review* 99 (September–October 1976): 83–111; and in the postscript to a new edition of his biography of Morris, published that same year. While Thompson was a scholar of the highest caliber, he was endeavoring to summarize Abensour's (French) dissertation within the span of a few pages while simultaneously conducting a multifronted polemic.
7. E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (Oakland: PM Press, 2011), 789.
8. *Ibid.*, 790.
9. *Ibid.*, 791.
10. *Ibid.*, 792–93.
11. A constant refrain of Morris's correspondence in 1889–90 is that the Socialist League was in its death spiral (William Morris, *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, 4 vols., ed. Norman Kelvin [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984–96], 3:46–47, 132–33, 175–76).

12. William Morris, "The Manifesto of the Socialist League," quoted in Thompson, *William Morris*, 737.
13. William Morris, "Socialism and Politics," *Commonweal* 1, no. 6 (July 1885): 61.
14. Christine Nadir, "Utopian Studies, Environmental Literature, and the Legacy of an Idea: Educating Desire in Miguel Abensour and Ursula K. Le Guin," *Utopian Studies* 21, no. 1 (2010): 30. I am indebted to Nadir's meticulous exposition of Abensour's views.
15. Abensour, "William Morris," 156–57.
16. However, several prominent scholars have voiced reservations. Perry Anderson warned that "the catch-word of Desire" was "the expression of a dejected post-lapsarian anarchism" and lamented that Thompson's favorable reception of Abensour represented the introjection of "a fashionable philosophy of Parisian irrationalism" into a hitherto practical English Marxism (*Arguments Within English Marxism* [London: New Left Books, 1980], 161). More subtly, Raymond Williams has suggested that Abensour's "heuristic mode" of utopianism characterizes periods of "constrained reformism" ("Utopia and Science Fiction," 103). He observes that such periods are "always a fertile moment for what is, in effect, an anarchism: positive in its fierce rejection of domination, repression, and manipulation; negative in its willed neglect of structures, of continuity and of material constraints" (102). Both Anderson and Williams recognize what Thompson overlooked: that "the education of desire" is a mode of negation and free play.
17. Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 124.
18. Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," ed. Frederick Engels, in *The Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels*, vol. 5 (New York: International, 1976), 7.
19. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1995), 15. For both Morris and Nietzsche, of course, the "other shore" is conceived in immanent (rather than transcendent) terms. By remaining on the plane of immanence, their envisionings of a utopian future have the added virtue of estranging the present.
20. Here, it is salient to recall the final clause of *Nowhere's* subtitle: "Being Some Chapters of a Utopian Romance."
21. Matthew Beaumont, "The Party of Utopia: Utopian Fiction and the Politics of Readership, 1880–1900," in *Exploring the Utopian Impulse: Essays on Utopian Thought and Practice*, ed. Michael J. Griffin and Tom Moylan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 165.
22. *Ibid.*, 179.
23. *Ibid.*, 165.
24. *Ibid.*, 178.
25. *Ibid.*, 179.
26. Although the Kelmscott editions are justifiably famous, both *John Ball* and *Nowhere* were issued as one-shilling volumes, so as to be affordable to the working classes.
27. Because the bridge articulates the very project that *Nowhere* is designed to accomplish, I consider it the text's governing metaphor. While this is not the place for a full analysis, I would argue that the text's other extended metaphors—including clothes, the river, and the harvest—are ultimately subordinated to the ambition the bridge represents.

28. Krishan Kumar, "A Pilgrimage of Hope: William Morris's Journey to Utopia," *Utopian Studies* 5, no. 1 (1994): 95–99.
29. In the July 6, 1889, issue, the Anarchist James Blackwell offers the "concrete example" of a locality divided over whether its members should live in individual households or build a communal hall ("Anarchy and Communism," *Commonweal* 5, no. 182 [July 6, 1889]: 211). When Morris responded, he replaced Blackwell's example with "the building of a bridge" (William Morris, "Communism and Anarchism," *Commonweal* 5, no. 188 [August 17, 1889]: 261).
30. Notwithstanding his struggles with the Socialist League's Anarchists over the future of their party, Morris's own sociopolitical ideal had considerable affinities with Anarcho-Communism. For a careful discussion, see Ruth Kinna, "Morris, Anti-statism, and Anarchy," in *William Morris: Centenary Essays*, ed. Peter Faulkner and Peter Preston (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), 215–28.
31. Vincent Geoghegan, "The Utopian Past: Memory and History in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and William Morris's *News from Nowhere*," *Utopian Studies* 3, no. 2 (1992): 81.
32. Similar arguments are made in Kumar, "Pilgrimage of Hope," 101; Ady Mineo, "Eros Unbound: Sexual Identities in *News from Nowhere*," *Journal of the William Morris Society* 9, no. 4 (1992): 12; Jan Marsh, "Concerning Love: *News from Nowhere* and Gender," in *William Morris and News from Nowhere: A Vision for Our Time*, ed. Stephen Coleman and Paddy O'Sullivan (Bideford, U.K.: Green Books, 1990), 121–25. Marsh further observes that *Nowhere* is "undeniably and regrettably, a masculine vision of paradise" that is "deeply imbued with the feeling and language of male desire" (121). Morris's presupposition of a male, heterosexist readership marks the (historically conditioned) limits of his remarkable imagination.
33. Bernard Sharratt, "News from Nowhere: Detail and Desire," in *Reading the Victorian Novel: Detail into Form*, ed. Ian Gregor (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1980), 300.
34. William Morris, "Looking Backward," *Commonweal* 5, no. 180 (June 22, 1889): 194.
35. Morris, *Collected Letters of William Morris*, 3:59.
36. Thompson, *William Morris*, 362.
37. Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989), 443.
38. See William Morris, "More's *Utopia*: Foreword by William Morris (1893)," in *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist, vol. 1: The Art of William Morris; Morris as a Writer*, ed. May Morris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 289–92.
39. "In his correspondence," Marcus Waithe points out, "it is notable how often Morris aligns himself with the figure of the grumbler or obstinate complainant" (*William Morris's Utopia of Strangers: Victorian Medievalism and the Ideal of Hospitality* [Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006], 151).
40. Michael Holzman, "Anarchism and Utopia: William Morris's *News from Nowhere*," *ELH* 51, no. 3 (1984): 593.
41. Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 186.

42. William Morris, "How Shall We Live Then?" in "An Unpublished Lecture of William Morris," ed. Paul Meier, *International Review of Social History* 16, no. 2 (1971): 217–40; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

43. For Morris's quarrel with the novel, see Patrick Brantlinger, "News from Nowhere: Morris's Socialist Anti-novel," *Victorian Studies* 19, no. 1 (1975): 35–49; John Plotz, "Nowhere and Everywhere: The End of Portability in William Morris's Romances," *ELH* 74, no. 4 (2007): 931–56.

44. On Morris's ambition to transvalue the everyday, see Antonis Balasopoulos, "Factories, Utopias, Decoration, and Upholstery: On Utopia, Modernism, and Everyday Life," *Utopian Studies* 25, no. 2 (2014): 284–89.

45. Abensour, "William Morris," 145.

46. "When we talk of the freedom of the individual man," Morris reminds his Anarchist comrades, "we must not forget that every man is a very complex animal, made up of many different moods and impulses; no man is always wise, or wise in all respects. Philip sober needs protection against Philip drunk, or he may chance to wake up from his booze in a nice mess" ("Communism and Anarchism," 261). It is on this ground that Morris defends his belief in the necessity of a social authority, "something to appeal to on behalf of those better selves of ours" (261). Morris's *Commonweal* exchange with his Anarchist comrades began about a month after he delivered "How Shall We Live Then?" for the first time.

47. Plotz, "Nowhere and Everywhere," 931.

48. Several critics have made this identification, though their explanations differ from my own. See Sharratt, "News from Nowhere," 293; Andrew Belsey, "Getting Somewhere: Rhetoric and Politics in *News from Nowhere*," *Textual Practice* 5, no. 3 (1991): 343–44.

49. Matthew Beaumont, *Utopia Ltd.: Ideologies of Social Dreaming in England, 1870–1900* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009), 185.

50. OED Online, s.v. "guest" (v.), Oxford University Press, June 2016, accessed August 20, 2016, <http://o-www.oed.com.dewey2.library.denison.edu/view/Entry/82261?result=2&rskey=m5HkBY&>. As Waithe has demonstrated, Morris had an abiding—and ambivalent—interest in "the archaic ideal of unconditional or idealized hospitality" and a conviction in "the benefits of 'guesting'" (*William Morris's Utopia of Strangers*, xii, 10). This interest is inscribed in the very name of *Nowhere's* protagonist, as is Morris's ambivalence: while all readers are invited to identify with some aspect of the "complex animal" William Guest, those with strongly antipathetic temperaments will be unable to do so.