

Morris, Jameson, Utopia

I want in this paper to bring together what is in my view the finest of nineteenth-century utopias, Morris's *News from Nowhere*, and the work of the most important recent Western theorist of utopia, the American cultural critic Fredric Jameson. In the course of his forty-year meditation on utopia as both a literary genre and a political issue, Jameson has many times mentioned Morris's great work, but usually en passant, in the course of a discussion of some other utopian text or topic, never in any full way as a sustained object of attention in its own right. I will in the course of this paper often have recourse to these glancing Jamesonian accounts of Morris, but I will be ultimately endeavouring here to offer something more thorough-going, to effect what I believe is the first full-scale encounter of Morris and Jameson. This will not necessarily turn out to be the essay on *News from Nowhere* that Jameson himself would have written had he ever got round to it; I shall be strongly dependent here on my own sense of what the most challenging dimensions of Morris's text are, and they may or may not coincide with a Jamesonian analysis proper. But I do believe that *News from Nowhere* and Frederic Jameson's theory of utopia can be mutually illuminating, and that the dialectical relationship between them will help us sketch out the ways in which Morris's magnum opus reaches powerfully forwards towards some of the finest postmodern utopias of the cultural epoch just gone.

It is one of the commonplaces of utopian studies that, in the nineteenth century, a major shift takes place within the genre. In the classic texts, such as Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) or Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), utopia exists within one's own time period but in some far-flung corner of the globe; it therefore takes an epic effort of spatial travelling – often involving adverse winds, loss of bearings, and even shipwreck – to get there. From the nineteenth century, however, utopia more typically becomes a future political possibility of one's *own* society: it exists within one's own social space, but not yet, and it therefore involves some complex time-travelling to advance forwards to it. If you are not handy enough to bricolate yourself a time machine for the purpose, as H.G. Wells's Time Traveller does, then other textual devices will have to come into play – the 113-year mesmeric sleep of Edward Bellamy's Julian West in *Looking Backward* (1888) or the dream-vision of Morris's William Guest, which takes him forward from Victorian London to twenty-second-century England.

Utopian journeying, then, becomes a matter of time rather than of space; and this makes perfect sense in a fully historicised period in which utopia has become something one could politically build through a mass movement, rather than just a hypothetical possibility one might serendipitously stumble across somewhere. All well and good, then. Oneiric time travelling gets William Guest from the dysfunctional Socialist League meeting on the first page of *News from Nowhere* to the fully formed post-revolutionary society of the far future; and once there he tours London with Dick Hammond to experience the new world at first hand, and subsequently in the British Museum encounters the Old Man Who Knows Everything (to borrow a nice phrase from H.G. Wells) who can explain to him both the underlying social principles of the new order and how, historically, it came into being in the

first place. Morris's utopia would thus seem to conform perfectly to the new – temporal rather than spatial – model of the genre.

But no sooner has it done so than William Guest is propelled on a further spatial journey: 130 miles up the Thames from the Hammersmith Guest House to Kelmscott Manor. This may not compare with the epic travels of More's Raphael Hythloday or Francis Bacon's anonymous narrator, but it is, quite clearly, a reversion to a mode of utopian voyaging which history, including the history of the genre, seemed to have left definitively behind. And what happens to Guest on this second – spatial rather than temporal – expedition is of unusual intensity, far beyond anything that had occurred to him previously in the transformed garden-city that London has become. As he heads upriver he meets the young woman Ellen at Runnymede, who will subsequently leave her grandfather, pursue Guest and party up the Thames, and attach herself very determinedly to the visitor to her world. As an anecdotal measure of that intensity, we might turn to the memoir by the young Scottish socialist Bruce Glasier, who told Morris enthusiastically that in reading *News from Nowhere* he had fallen in love with Ellen – to which Morris replied that 'he had fallen in love with her himself'.ⁱ

Much of the rest of this paper will be a meditation on the meaning of this curious structural self-division in Morris's utopia, its reversion from a fully nineteenth-century to a much earlier utopian mode and its generation of the extraordinary figure of Ellen in the process. There are, I believe, many theoretical frameworks in which this schizophrenic bifurcation of the text could be discussed: in earlier papers around this topic I have invoked H.G. Wells's distinction between 'static' and 'kinetic' utopias in his *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and aspects the modernism-postmodernism contrast to account for this phenomenon.ⁱⁱ Here, however, my guiding thread will be the challenging theory of utopia which Fredric Jameson has been developing over the last forty years.

Jameson's most notorious claim during that period has been that utopias always *fail*, that far from achieving any satisfactorily full representation of a new society all they can do in the end is tell us something – albeit something crucial and illuminating – about the limits of the society which we already inhabit. This argument can be taken, I believe, both as a neutral descriptive position and, more interestingly for our purposes, as a kind of *ethics* of utopian reading and writing. First, as a descriptive claim, Jameson maintains that however complexly a utopia imagines the institutions of its perfect society and however sensuously it tries to embody the physical and social detail of that world, it will always be shot through with gaps, absences and contradictions. These structural limits of its imaginings will then tell us more about its *own* historical moment, about the constraints which that situation places on thought, than they do about the nature of its would-be perfect new world.

But you can see how that neutral analytic position very soon becomes an ethics of utopian reading. For somebody – that is to say, the analyst – has to demonstrate that an apparently seamless representational surface is in fact cracked and flawed in interestingly unconscious ways; and to do this we will have to read utopia in a peculiarly active, demystifying way, refusing the self-evidence of the smooth surfaces of the text. As Jameson puts it in his review-article on Louis Marin's important study, *Utopiques: Le Jeu d'Espaces*:

To understand Utopian discourse in terms of neutralization is indeed precisely to propose to grasp it as process, as *energeia*, enunciation, productivity, and implicitly or explicitly to repudiate that more traditional and conventional view of Utopia as sheer representation, as the ‘realized’ vision of this or that ideal society or social ideal.ⁱⁱⁱ

On the reader’s part, then, an active hermeneutics of suspicion replaces the old representational hermeneutics of restoration.

But it is only one small further step to argue that this ‘productionist’ ethics of utopian reading should characterise utopian writing too, that utopias themselves should not be content with pure representation, that they should, rather, in sophisticated ways themselves actively expose the limits and absences of their putative ideal worlds – not just wait for the Jamesonian analyst to come along and do this for them. On this showing, a utopia should not only sketch out its would-be perfect society, not just continue the task of utopian representation as the genre has always done, but should also somehow dramatise the *limits* of that world, both thematically and formally, in terms of both its political limits and of the ways in which it has been represented in the text in the first place.

Such an ethic of utopian writing can then become a new literary history of the genre. Once upon a time, all the way from Thomas More through Edward Bellamy to Ernest Callenbach’s very fine *Ecotopia* (1975), say, utopia was a naive, hubristic genre which thought it could perfectly delineate good societies in every last detail – societies which would win immediate consent from the rational reader and, in their achieved ideality, would endure unchanging forever after. At some crucial historical point, however, a fall into Jamesonian generic self-consciousness takes place. Utopia all at once becomes aware of its own frailties, of the impossibility of full representation, technically speaking, and indeed, of its undesirability, politically speaking; for a fully delineated society which allows for no gaps, contradictions or possibilities of change very quickly turns itself inside out like a glove and becomes a *dystopia*. In his excellent study *Demand the Impossible*, Tom Moylan has rewritten the history of utopia in just such terms, and has shown how a new mutation of the genre, what he helpfully terms the ‘critical utopia’, comes into being in the 1970s, with Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man*, Ursula Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed*, and Samuel Delaney’s *Triton* among others.^{iv}

How, then, does my whistlestop tour of the Jamesonian theory of utopia relate to Morris’s *News from Nowhere*, and more particularly to that dual utopian structure which we identified in it: a nineteenth-century time-travelling utopia, which gets William Guest from Victorian to post-revolutionary London, and the subsequent ‘reversion’ to a more classical spatially-travelling utopia, as he heads up the Thames from Hammersmith to Kelmscott and meets the remarkable Ellen on the way? If we put together the fact that Morris’s text seems quite late on in the day obliged to set out on its second utopian journey and Fredric Jameson’s theoretical insistence that utopia always in one way or another fails, then I think we will be required to look back with a sceptical eye over everything in the text which precedes Guest’s late spatial journey up the Thames, which is to say the vision of a transformed London as

revealed to us in the first half of the book and as populated by figures like Dick Hammond, Bob the weaver, Annie, Boffin the Golden Dustman, and so on. Now that new London, which has become a spacious, unhurried, green garden-city which seems to contain as many fruit trees as people, and its new socialist Londoners are entirely preferable to the class-divided city, the slums and the broken-spirited city-dwellers of the late nineteenth century, no doubt at all about that; one has to be altogether supportive of the book's many Great Clearings in this respect. And yet, in the very middle of Morris's depiction of this genial and neighbourly new world, the utopian expositor himself, Old Hammond, suddenly announces to his visitor: 'I am old and perhaps disappointed'.^v It's an obscure remark, which Hammond does not, alas, follow up in any detail in the text; but I want to suggest that, if the Wellsian Old Man who Knows Everything, the very keeper of utopia's conscience and history, is himself disappointed, then utopia is indeed in trouble.

Various critics over the years have argued that Morris's *News from Nowhere*, though it gives a wonderfully invigorating account of 'How the Change Came', of the actual revolutionary process itself, is in the end, in terms of its depiction of the post-revolutionary world, too placid, too pastoral, too benignly quietistic and, well, just ultimately plain dull!^{vi} One can put the point another way, I think, in terms of the history of the book's composition, though in a generic rather than simply biographical sense. *News from Nowhere* comes into being as a point-by-point refutation of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, of which Morris had published a powerfully hostile review in *Commonweal*. But as it does so, as it counters Bellamy's vision of an entirely urban, highly technological and centralised society in the Boston of the year 2000, so it bends the stick too far the other way, throwing out the baby of urban dynamism and excitement (everything that the Italian and Russian Futurists would so passionately celebrate a generation or so later) with the bathwater of urban class division, slums, exploitation and crime. Genial though it may be in so many ways, Morris's garden-city London and its neighbourly inhabitants may well be too limited a vision of what a post-revolutionary world can be. As Fredric Jameson himself has noted, reflecting on the book's subtitle, 'An Epoch of Rest': 'It is as though – after the immense struggle to free ourselves, even in imagination, from the infection of our very minds and values by an omnipresent consumer capitalism – on emerging suddenly and against all expectation into a narrative space radically other, uncontaminated by all those properties of the old lives and the old preoccupations, the spirit could only lie there gasping in the fresh silence, too weak, too new, to do more than gaze wanly about it at a world remade'.^{vii}

Except, of course, that William Guest does not just lie in this placid green London gasping gratefully: he in fact embarks on a *second* utopian journey, spatially rather than temporally, and towards Ellen rather than Dick or Bob or Annie. Let me briefly make this contrast another way, in terms of the very different utopian theories of Herbert Marcuse and Ernst Bloch, before I return to the Jamesonian framework which essentially governs this essay (such Germanic references seem appropriate enough in relation to Ellen, who, as we learn, had been travelling on the Rhine two years ago).^{viii} For Marcuse, utopia is essentially a matter of *memory*, of anamnesis, of the social recovery of a state of happiness which once existed for us in infancy. Now this is surely true too of Morris's transfigured London in the

opening chapters of *News from Nowhere*, though we are talking of our historical rather than personal ‘infancy’ here. Very early on indeed in the book we are told that Dick Hammond’s clothing ‘would have served very well as a costume for a picture of fourteenth-century life’ (ch.II), and quite soon thereafter Guest is pronouncing definitively that ‘I fairly felt as if I were alive in the fourteenth century’ (ch.IV). *Reculer pour mieux sauter*: we have leapt over capitalism - or Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* for that matter – by leaping *behind* it, back to a Marcusean memory of the fourteenth century which has behind it the whole weight of Romantic and Victorian medievalism as Morris inherited it from Walter Scott, Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin.

But no such fourteenth-centuryisms attach to Ellen; this whole medievalist code fades to some extent out of the text as it embarks on its journey up the Thames, and that code has been so ubiquitous in the earlier chapters that this is a resonant relative silence. Moreover, Ellen herself speaks powerfully against a slavish worship of the past in her wrangles with her grandfather in their cottage at Runnymede. She is from the start defined as the unknown, as that which breaks with any of the models Guest brings with him from the past. ‘Strange’ is the epithet that clings to her as regularly as the adjective ‘fourteenth-century’ does to the objects of the first half of the text: ‘her strange wild beauty’ (ch.XXIV), ‘this strange girl’ (ch.XXVII). And Guest very effectively defines the ways in which she incarnates the radically and undefinably new in the book:

of all the persons I had seen in that world renewed she was the most unfamiliar to me, the most unlike what I could have thought of. Clara, for instance, beautiful and bright as she was, was not unlike a *very* pleasant and unaffected young lady; and the other girls also seemed nothing more than very much improved types which I had known in other times. But this girl ... was in all ways so strangely interesting; so that I kept wondering what she would say or do next to surprise and please me (ch.XXVII).

So used are we to thinking of Morris’s Nowherians as colourfully individuated characters in contrast with the anonymous generic figures of so many earlier utopias, that it may come as a shock to hear them described by the text itself as ‘types’ in this way. In a discussion of the anonymity of utopians in general, Fredric Jameson notes that ‘it will be objected that when we get to utopias of the type of William Morris ...this depersonalization will no longer obtain’, but in his view ‘perhaps [Morris’s] formulaic characters are, as Victorians, merely a little closer to us in time’.^{ix} Dick Hammond confirms Jameson’s critical intuition when he describes Bob the weaver, in his persistent questioning of the newly arrived Guest, as reminding him ‘of the radical cobblers in the silly old novels, who, according to the authors, were prepared to trample down all good manners in the pursuit of utilitarian knowledge’ (ch.III). That clearly enough gives us our literary model or derivation for Bob, and it is an account that could, I suggest, be extended to all the Hammersmithians in the book. And Ellen is so far beyond all the other Nowherians, so protean in her own being, that she is capable of seeing Guest himself as a derivative literary ‘type’, as when she accuses him of ‘wanting to nurse a sham sorrow, like the ridiculous characters in some of those queer old novels’ (ch.XXX).

Ellen herself, however, is much more associated with the motif of a radically new *energy* than with the stasis of a known literary archetype; it is as if she incarnates within herself the enigmatic ‘force’ that powers the vehicles and barges that Guest and party pass and are passed by on the Thames. Guest registers ‘her beauty, so delicate, yet so interfused with energy’ (ch.XXI), and that dynamism vibrates through her every least gesture and motion within the book: ‘springing up suddenly from her place without any obvious effort’ (ch.XXVIII), ‘one hand laid on her bosom, the other arm stretched downward and clenched in her earnestness’ (ch.XXIX). Up to this point in her life that dynamism has mostly manifested itself sexually; for Ellen, as she herself admits, has ‘often troubled men’s minds disastrously’ (ch.XXVIII), but it seems to me that such turbulence will cut loose from sexuality and become open for new dispositions in the course of the book. If Marcusean memory is the right utopian-theoretical frame for the early London chapters, then I would suggest that Ernst Bloch is the theorist we need to invoke in relation to Ellen on the waters of the upper Thames. As Phillip Wegner insists, utopia for Bloch is a ‘horizon’ rather than a presence; it is an ungraspable ‘not yet’, rather than a lost Proustian or social memory to be recovered, as for Marcuse.^x Ellen herself appropriately speaks of ‘a feeling of going somewhere, of coming to something strange, a feeling of adventure’ (ch.XXVIII).

What I am inclined to call the ‘Ellen text’ in *News from Nowhere* thus effectively cancels out the garden-city London vision of the earlier sections of the book. Morris’s work implicitly accepts that its first developed sketch of the new, would-be perfect socialist society has (as Fredric Jameson predicted) failed – to the point indeed where even its own expositor in the British Museum is ‘disappointed’ with it. In her enigmatic energy, Ellen marks the moment where Morris’s text shifts, in Jamesonian terms, from a detailed project of utopian representation, with Dick’s tour of London and Old Hammond’s lengthy exposition of its history and underlying principles, to utopia as ‘process ... *energeia* ... enunciation, productivity’, to a new opening towards an unrepresentable future, a Blochian ‘not yet’. No positive content can be given to the Ellen utopia in its own right; we don’t have any institution-building, or what Jameson neatly calls the ‘constructional principle’ of utopia, in the later upriver chapters. Ellen instead represents a pure negative energy which cancels out what has already gone, marks it with a Derridean *sous rature* (under erasure), without substituting for it a positive - and thus equally vulnerable - representation in its own right, which might have been based on a code of memory other than the fourteenth century (the Icelandic, say, or the Italian or Japanese). To reinstate the spatially-travelling utopia in a text initially governed by its Victorian time-travelling successor is in not, in fact, in any full sense to restore the former, to believe that the old Morean or Baconian utopian generic mechanisms can be dusted off and put to work again. The new spatial utopia, the ‘Ellen text’, cancels its garden-city precursor without for all that being a new place or space one could ever finally arrive at. If William Guest, as various critics including myself have argued over the years, is a kind of ghost, the very same is true of Ellen too - though I will go on to suggest later in this paper that we can at least say something about the kind of literary ghost she may turn out to be.

Now I can imagine a strong objection to the kind of reading I have been proposing of the later chapters of *News from Nowhere*, and I must give it some space and attention here before proceeding. For while it is indeed the case that there is no institution-building in the upriver chapters there is, one might argue, a good deal of representational positivity coming through here; and indeed, this has always been felt to be one of the text's most charming features. For we get a very beautiful picture of the life of the upper Thames in these later chapters, its reedbanks, its warblers and corncrakes, its gentle bends and hillocks, its hay-making; and this sensuous specificity then seems to communicate itself to William Guest himself who, as he rows Ellen in the upper stretches, feels himself becoming stronger and more youthful, plumped full of new chunky substance rather than hollowed-out into ever-increasing ghostliness.

I don't imagine any enthusiastic reader of *News from Nowhere* has failed to respond to the magical spell of these later chapters. We could relate this sensuous glamour to Morris's own personal love of the upper Thames landscape; but in the theoretical reading of the book which I am proposing here I would relate it rather to the text's own structural ambivalences about Ellen. On the one hand, she is the negative force, the Blochian 'not yet' which cancels out the earlier garden-city utopia; on the other hand, *News from Nowhere* also holds out the possibility that she is a figure who may, in some obscure way, actually *mend* that failed vision, the knight on a white horse (or multi-coloured rowing boat in her case) who might bring it what it lacks, put it back on its feet and get the whole thing moving again. So Ellen's fierce negativity in the book is indeed counterbalanced by this impulse towards the redemptive, the positive, which then, in displaced fashion, makes itself compellingly felt in the text's nature descriptions, since it cannot be given any actual social substance in the book. Indeed, all Ellen herself can say of her own long-term future in Nowhere itself pertains to the biological rather than the social: 'I shall have children; perhaps before the end a good many' (ch.XXIX).

We, however, as readers of the text within or just after postmodernity, who have experienced that great mutation within the utopian field which Tom Moylan has dubbed the 'critical utopia' of the 1970s, may be able to say rather more of Ellen's future than this, and in ways that are true both to the Jamesonian negativity and failure of utopia, and to the redemptive possibilities that Morris's work wants to keep fitfully circulating around Ellen. 'Books, books! always books, grandfather!' complains Ellen in the cottage at Runnymede (ch.XXII), just as she will later crossly inform Guest that the young men thereabouts 'fell to making stories of me to themselves – like I know you did, my friend' (ch.XXVIII). I am going to fall foul of Ellen myself here in exactly the same way, though we can first of all invoke against her the fact that story-telling is an honoured activity in her society, as we discover when it turns out to be one of the ways in which the utopians at Hammersmith Guest House entertain themselves after Dick, Guest and Clara have returned from the British Museum. Since *News from Nowhere* does not narrate Ellen's future beyond its own textual boundaries, I want to offer some speculations, some *stories*, about her based on the books to which we, as readers of recent postmodern utopias, have had access. 'What is to come after this?' is a question that Guest poses to Henry Morsom in the crafts museum at Wallingford (ch.XXVII), and it is an

issue that genuinely concerns us in relation to Ellen, who, as I have noted, herself speculates about her own future, if only in terms of maternity. I have noted above that Ellen is contrasted in her startling novelty with the known literary and social ‘types’ from whom the other inhabitants of Nowhere derive; but this may in fact only mean that she derives from literary types who have not been invented yet, but who reflect illuminatingly back upon her from a far distant utopian or science-fictional literary future which *News from Nowhere* cannot possibly anticipate in any detail, but for which it holds open a receptive space within itself.

In the cottage at Runnymede Dick Hammond reflects that ‘we have come to a fairy garden, and there [Ellen] is the very fairy herself amidst of it: I wonder what she will do for us’ (ch.XXIII). The question resonates for us as readers too: what *will* she do for them? Let us accordingly try out some retrospective modelling of Ellen’s possible futures within Nowhere from the newer utopias of our own period. It seems certain that Ellen will have a significant political, and not just maternal, role to play within Nowhere. She alone of the younger Nowherians has a sense of the political danger her society faces: so divorced is it from its own history that, as she argues forcefully, ‘we may be bitten with some impulse towards change, and many things may seem too wonderful for us to resist, too exciting not to catch at, if we do not know that they are but phases of what has been before; and withal ruinous, deceitful, and sordid’ (ch.XXIX). Faced with a threat of this magnitude, Ellen will surely have to take action of some kind; and the narrative trajectory of her chapters of *News from Nowhere* charts a progress from isolation in the cottage at Runnymede to reintegration amidst the younger Nowherians in the haysel feast in Kelmscott Church. Ellen, it seems, has realised the need for renewed engagement with her culture, and I like to think that this process will continue to the point where we could perhaps imagine her, like Vera Allwen, the leader of the woman-dominated Survivalist Party in Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia*, as promoting an organised movement for renewal in her own society.^{xi} Ellen’s leadership capabilities are, to be sure, only there in embryo in the book – implicit, for example, in Guest’s description of her as a ‘fairy godmother’; and it is, after all, Dick Hammond who steps into Kelmscott Church with ‘an air of proprietorship’ in the proceedings (ch.XXII). But Dick, as I shall suggest below, is a *false* leader in this context, one who represents worryingly anti-intellectualist trends in his society, and of the other Nowherians whom we meet in the course of the book it is quite clearly only Ellen who has the stature to take him on and defeat and displace him.

Guest realises soon after Ellen has rejoined himself, Dick and Clara at Wallingford that she has divined his status as a visitor from the Victorian past, as a time-traveller, and he then resolves to be fully frank with her about this fact. But how is it she has been so astute? Dick, Clara, Bob and Annie may occasionally be baffled by some of Guest’s more careless remarks, but without getting anywhere near a true assessment of his time-travelling nature, yet Ellen has divined the truth after only an evening’s acquaintance with him. One speculative hypothesis here, which I am not going to argue in full but suggest we just hold experimentally in the mind for a moment or two is that, as Dick says earlier to Bob, ‘birds of a feather flock together’ (ch.III), that she may just possibly be a time-traveller too, but from

the far future rather than from the distant dystopian past. We certainly have examples of this narrative paradigm in some recent utopias, as with Janet Evasion in Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), who travels back in time to earth from the planet Whileaway to try and inculcate utopian values in an oppressively patriarchal present; and Luciente in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) travels back to our present from twenty-second-century Matapoisett to radicalise Connie Ramos as the latter battles social, gender and racial oppression in New York.^{xii} May it be be, then, that Ellen has been sent back by some future Nowhere, its twenty-fourth- rather than twenty-second-century incarnation, say, where force-barges have been superseded by Wellsian time-machines, to do battle with the recidivist tendencies that are alive and active in that earlier moment?

If this were so, then we would have to revalue our sense of the revolutionary time-frames sketched out for us in the early pages of *News from Nowhere*. For the distinction there made for us between the immediate 'Morrow of the Revolution' and the much later 'fully-developed new society' is normally taken to indicate the post-Civil War period in which Old Hammond was a young man and the actual present of Nowhere respectively. But if Ellen is indeed a visitor from a distant utopian future, then the historical time frames become vastly extended. The Morrow of the Revolution, in this longer vista, would be Nowhere itself, the world of Dick, Clara, Bob, Annie and Boffin, and the fully-developed new society would be whatever far-future version of Nowhere Ellen herself hails from. So: Ellen as a Joanna Russian time-traveller from the future attaching herself to a time-traveller from the past - this hypothesis would certainly account for that elusive, enigmatic energy which so distinguishes Ellen from the other Nowherians in the book. I am not pressing this theory hard here, but it might be an illuminating heuristic notion that it is worth holding briefly in the mind, in a spirit of Keastian 'negative capability' in which we don't at once irritably ask ourselves if it is true or not.

But we do have another, and perhaps more plausible, recent utopian narrative paradigm available to us in which to model a possible future for Ellen. For she, it appears, is not entirely alone in Nowhere, however different she seems from Henry Morsom or Walter Allen and their like. In the midst of a discussion of the vulgarity of Victorian architecture with Guest, she announces: 'Yes, friend, I see what you mean. We have sometimes – those of us who look into these things – talked this very matter over' (ch.XXIX). So there are other Ellenists in the post-revolutionary society after all – at which point a helpful analogy might be provided by Shevek and his Syndicate of Initiative in Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974). The anarchist revolution of the Odonian movement on the moon Anarres has in Le Guin's novel gone stale. Though much of value still remains, a narrow-minded intellectual and political conformism now governs that once daring culture; and it is precisely, as in Nowhere, the loss of history, the Odonian exiles' walling of themselves off from their Urrastian-capitalist past, that starts the rot. It is then the younger generation, led by the theoretical physicist Shevek, which grows restive under such philistinism, reopening communications with the home planet Urras, which is still a brutally class-divided society, and eventually setting up a Syndicate of Initiative on Anarres itself to promulgate their new social thinking and scientific discoveries.^{xiii}

Can we not at once see certain parallels between Shevek's research institute, held in the tightly philistine grip of Sabul, and the Hammersmith Guest House as William Guest first experiences it on his arrival in Nowhere? I am not suggesting that Bob the weaver, in his passion for mathematics, is potentially a theoretical physicist of the order of Shevek himself, who in the course of Le Guin's novel develops his path-breaking Principles of Simultaneity; yet it is certainly the case that the restless intellectual curiosity of Bob and Boffin, authors of historical novels and treatises, is held sternly in check by the determinedly anti-intellectual Dick Hammond, who will not let them interrogate the Victorian visitor to their hearts' content. Nor am I quite suggesting that Ellen has returned from the moon to visit the old world back on earth, though we might note that the science-fictional narrative paradigm of a 'being from another planet' is one that floats metaphorically around Guest earlier in the text (ch.IX). Yet she clearly has the intellectual energy and personal dynamism to be the Shevek of her own generation, to reactivate in the placid world of Nowhere the kind of social turbulence represented in the book by the presence of the four anarchists at the Socialist League meeting on its opening page. She will have, in short, to turn her own capacity for 'disastrously troubling' from the sexual to the political sphere. And if there are other Ellenists – 'those of us who look into these things' – then it may be that they are gathering in force in the hay-making at Kelmscott at the close of the book; for as Dick informs Guest, the 'scientific men and close students generally' will be turning up en masse in the next day or two (ch.XXII). So it could be that a Shevekian Syndicate of Initiative is indeed in the making here, and that, led by Ellen, it could generate a sufficient head of intellectual and political steam to revivify the Nowherian revolution, concentrating the assorted discontents of its society, its old Grumblers and Obstinate Refusers, but in ways that propel them dynamically forwards to a new socialist Cultural Revolution, rather than allowing them (as Ellen at one point fears) to backslide towards a restored capitalism.

Late in the book William Guest struggles to 'break the spell she [Ellen] had cast about me' (ch.XXI); and you may well feel, reading this article, that Ellen has cast a spell about me too, leading to all sorts of unlikely ventures into postmodern utopia and science fiction. But such is the role of what I have been calling the 'Ellen text' or perhaps the 'Ellen effect' in *News from Nowhere*: that second utopia beyond utopia, that reversion to spatial rather than temporal utopian travelling, the journey up the Thames and the extraordinary young woman who attaches herself to Guest during it. The first utopia, the garden-city version of London with its neighbourly Hammersmithians, has failed, as Fredric Jameson's theory of utopia had predicted. Utterly preferable though Nowhere is to Victorian London, this first attempt to imagine a future beyond capitalism eventuates in a culture that is too placid, too pastoral, too one-dimensionally the opposite of Bellamy's high-tech centralist urban vision in *Looking Backward*, and which seems moreover, in its neglect of history, to be in some political danger of regression to a past it thought had been left behind for good. But *News from Nowhere* does not end here. Rather does it launch itself into a new utopian project, the invention of Ellen on the Thames journey, not a project of Marcusean memory or a reinvention of the fourteenth century, but a radical openness to a Blochian 'not yet', to a utopian future that cannot be given as a developed representation but instead takes the form of Ellen's protean 'strangeness' and unpredictable energy. She is an open space in the text where the future

might enter, a generative field that prompts multiple new narratives among her contemporaries, who fall to making stories of her, and she does exactly the same to us, as twenty-first-century readers; for we can aptly apply to her Dick Hammond's remark about Guest - she 'makes us think of all kind of things' (ch.XIX). I don't offer any of my own narratives around Ellen – Callenbach's Vera Allwen, Russ's Janet Eason or Le Guin's Shevek – as definitive. They could not be, for Ellen is simply the pure principle of utopian narrativity; she is utopia as process, *energeia*, productivity, to borrow Jameson's terms, rather than utopia as achieved representation. Utopia fails in *News from Nowhere*, as for Fredric Jameson it has to do; but in so doing it generates the figure of Ellen, who is a kind of Jamesonian utopian theory in her own right, and about whom we will be telling open-ended stories, offering speculative analogies, venturing heuristic hypotheses, for a long time to come.

Tony Pinkney,

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ⁱ Cited in Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), p.588.

ⁱⁱ See my 'Kinetic Utopias: William Morris's *News from Nowhere* and H.G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia*', *Journal of William Morris Studies*, vol XVI, 2005, 49-55, and 'News from Nowhere, Modernism, Postmodernism', *A/E Canadian Journal of Aesthetics* (electronic journal), Fall 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱ Fredric Jameson, 'Of Islands and Trenches: Neutralization and the Production of Utopian Discourse', *Ideologies of Theory: Volume 2 Syntax of History* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp.80-81.

^{iv} Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1986), particularly pp.44-6.

^v William Morris, *News from Nowhere*, edited by David Leopold (Oxford University Press, 2003), ch.IX, p.50. Hereafter references are given in my text by chapter only.

^{vi} For a representative instance of this opinion, see Philip Henderson's remark that 'Morris was merely abolishing everything he disliked in the nineteenth century and replacing it by everything he nostalgically yearned for', *William Morris: His Life, Work and Friends*

(London: Andre Deutsch, 1986), p.328. Raymond Williams and Perry Anderson have made a similar case in criticising Morris for attaching the idea of simplicity to achieved socialism.

^{vii} Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), p.279.

^{viii} For an excellent brief contrast of Marcuse and Bloch on utopia, see Phillip E. Wegner, 'Horizons, Figures and Machines: The Dialectic of Utopia in the Work of Fredric Jameson', *Utopian Studies*, 9/2 (1998), pp.58-73.

^{ix} Fredric Jameson, 'The Politics of Utopia', *New Left Review* 25, Jan-Feb 2004, pp.39-40.

^x Wegner, 'Horizons, Figures and Machines', p.59.

^{xi} Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston* (Berkeley, California: Banyan Tree Books, 1975).

^{xii} Joanna Russ, *The Female Man* (New York: Bantam Books, Inc, 1975), and Marge Piercy, *Woman on the End of Time* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976).

^{xiii} Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).