"As If It Were Myself": Unnatural Narratology and Utopian Affects in

News from Nowhere

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How do we read a perfect fictional world? Should it be understood as a political treatise proposing radical change, or as an aesthetic object simply to be enjoyed? Bertrand de Jouvenel proposes that an author writes in the literary utopian mode because "the fiction of a journey commit[s] him to lively descriptions, and allow[s] him to paint pleasing pictures of daily life in utopia, whereby he prepares us to accept the institutional scheme he advocates…. Such is the mode of persuasion characteristic of and essential to utopian writing" (439). For de Jouvenel, the genre functions to advocate for the author's political beliefs in a more pleasurable (and thus palatable) fashion than an actual treatise, and so its ultimate basis is persuasion. By contrast, Ruth Levitas argues that one might instead "usefully think of utopia as a method, a means of exploring and interrogating potential alternative futures rather than developing and implementing political plans" (8). Unlike de Jouvenel, Levitas describes utopia as designed to critique existing political structures, rather than implement new ones. For both scholars, however, utopian literature functions primarily within the political realm.

What neither de Jouvenel nor Levitas point to in their respective claims is that if the utopian literary tract is intended to persuade the reader of institutional schemes, or speculate on better possible futures, then one of the most fundamental aspects of the text is the narrator, through whom the utopia is relayed—and whose perspective is principal to interpreting the world presented. More broadly, narratology scholar Mieke Bal has noted that "the narrator is the most central concept in the analysis of narrative texts. The identity of the narrator, the degree to which and the manner in which that identity is indicated in the text, and the choices that are implied lend the text its specific character" (18). This suggests paying close attention to the literary form even while thinking about the politics of utopia, as the two are deeply entwined. The structural

details of the narrator, for Bal, are what define the text itself, suggesting that it is the narrator to whom one may turn in order to understand the endgames of utopian fiction. One such novel which reinforces Bal's point—along with de Jouvenel and Levitas's—is William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890; 1891). As is typical of the utopian tradition, the reader of *News* is presented a new world through the view of the narrator; however, Morris constructs a narrator whose voice is immensely complex, and this complexity ultimately speaks to the socialist message of the text, as it is in essence a multiplicity of voices speaking as one. Thus, narratology, particularly with respect to the narrator, provides a lens through we can appreciate the politics of Morris's utopia in a way which goes beyond the "pleasing pictures" of its content.

The collectivist quality of *News from Nowhere*'s narration bleeds into the realm of affect theory, as it is the narrator's emotions that mediate his—and our—experience of the utopian world. Indeed, affect theory is a field sometimes considered to hold particular value for the nineteenth century. Rachel Ablow, for instance, criticizes an old myth of the Victorian era, which is that "while emotional experience continued to be valued as a pleasure and benefit of domestic life, the public sphere came to be identified with a form of rationality to which the emotions stood opposed. This is the story most commonly told about the nineteenth century" (375). Ablow argues against this claim, saying, "[E]motions continued to function as a central epistemological tool throughout the era…As a consequence, the emotions cannot simply be relegated to one sphere or another or to one gender or another; instead, they constitute the means by which the distinctions between these categories are made" (375-376). Considering affect in texts such as *News* thus offers an opportunity to recognize the formulation of knowledge—of new worlds— through feeling. This is useful for rethinking how one might read utopian literature in the context

of its affective qualities, since the realm of politics, as Ablow points out, is understood to be a sphere of rationality, not emotion.

Although narratology and affect are two distinct critical fields unto their own, I believe postclassical narratology, defined largely by its interest in cognitive experience, provides an opening to consider the overlap of affect and narratology—in particular, how the narratological structures themselves, rather than simply the novel's content, produce affect. In this essay, after defining and establishing key narratological features of *News*, I identify three affective categories—interest, disappointment, and sympathy—that prove to be fundamentally utopian affects, as is illustrated by Morris's use of them; it is through the narratological unorthodoxy of the narrator, William Guest, that Morris enables us to *feel* his utopia, rather than merely see it.

I.   Interest: Aesthetic Judgement and Morris's Unnatural Narrator

Concepts of natural and unnatural narrative theory emerge from the postclassical era of narratology, which Genevieve Liveley summarizes in her comprehensive examination of narratology's evolution from Plato and Aristotle to the present day. Liveley describes postclassical narratology as "a plethora of inter-disciplinary neo-narratologies…not only exposing the limits but also exploiting the possibilities of older, classical models, rethinking their conceptual underpinnings and scope of applicability" by "reconsidering the psychological and emotional interactions between stories and audiences" (Liveley 236, 236). In other words, postclassical narratology repurposes older models of narratology in the context of the cognitive reading experience. When Monika Fludernik—a pioneer of postclassical narratology—discusses natural narratology, she focuses on "a more specifically cognitive perspective" (Fludernik 12), which is to say that Fludernik's interest lies in the reader's cognitive response to a text. She writes that "[r]eaders actively construct meanings and impose frames on their interpretations of

texts, just as people have to interpret real-life experience in terms of available schemata" (12).

Simply put, Fludernik claims that readers will construct meanings around a narrative to reshape

it in a way that reflects something familiar—something "natural." Problematically, this approach

inevitably proposes a dichotomy of normative and non-normative cognitive behavior. Despite

Fludernik's focus on reader response, rather than the classification of *texts* as natural or

unnatural, unnatural narrative theory developed as an objection to what were seen to be the

limiting parameters of examining narratives in the context of traditional, "natural" structures.

Indeed, unnatural narratology emerges from the philosophy that what feels unnatural in a

text should be valued for that estranging feeling. Henrik Skov Nielson's essay, "Unnatural

Narratology, Impersonal Voices, Real Authors, and Non-Communicative Narration," provides a

particularly useful explanation of unnatural narration, using *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius as an

example. Nielson points out how, immediately after telling the Cupid and Psyche story, the ass

(the narrator) informs the reader that he regrets that he did not have material to document the

story when he originally overheard it being told by an old woman (Nielson 74); therefore, "[t]he

passage makes it clear that when we 'hear' the story about Cupid and Psyche there is no

temporal distance and afterwards, the ass cannot possibly remember it. Thus the story, as the old

woman told it, is forever forgotten and lost, and yet it is there in front of our eyes" (Nielson 74).

In other words, the ass quite explicitly cannot remember the story precisely as it was told, and

yet the reader is presented the story as if it were so—thus creating a paradox. However, Nielson

writes that "it is not a question of the first-person narrator lying or being untrustworthy since he

renders what he cannot remember, nor is it a question of the ass making up the details missing in

memory" but rather "the reader is requested to believe both that the old woman told the story

exactly as we read it for thirty pages and that the ass cannot remember it. This is unnatural in the

specific sense that both things could never be true at the same time in any naturally occurring storytelling context" (Nielson 74). The narrator explicitly states that he cannot remember the story he has just recounted, and thus the story could not exist as it is presented according to the bounds of the traditional ("natural") mode of storytelling. Rather than simply perceiving the ass as lying, or unreliable—as a cognitively "natural" structure would suggest it must be—there is something more complex at play. There is an "unnatural" quality produced by the paradox of the narrator and his style of narration, and there is value in analyzing this feature of the narrative, instead of reducing it to fit into a more logical schemata.

Brian Richardson provides yet another definition of unnatural narrative theory, one which is particularly useful in my analysis of *News*. Richardson classifies unnatural narratology as "fiction that displays its own fictionality" and "works that break (or only partly enter into) the mimetic illusion" (385). For Richardson, an unnatural narrative is that which exposes and engages with its own artificiality. Rather than attempt to captivate the reader through the illusion of realism, unnatural narrative subverts the conventions of realist narrative. When Richardson speaks of unnatural narrative, his primary focus is postmodern fiction, but he also acknowledges that British and American literature of the nineteenth century "provides numerous examples of the unnatural" (397). In terms of genre, Richardson also refers to the ambiguous area that science-fiction and fantasy inhabit in terms of mimetic, nonmimetic, and unnatural narrative categories. Richardson defines nonmimetic narratives as "fiction that invoke magical or supernatural elements. Such narratives employ consistent storyworlds and obey established generic conventions or, in some cases, merely add a single supernatural component to an otherwise naturalistic world" (386). The notion of nonmimetic structure aptly describes the utopian literary genre, which is also often considered a subset of science-fiction. Frequently the

utopian narrator is a traveler—sometimes traveling physically, at other times traversing across time—who finds a world utterly unlike his own, yet one that still functions in a natural (albeit improved) state.

Such utopian fiction was very popular at the end of the nineteenth century, a popularity perhaps best exemplified by Edward Bellamy's literary utopia, *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (1888), which utilizes nonmimetic narrative in its attempt to construct a realistic—"mimetic"— vision of future Boston. Beyond the "single supernatural component" of time travel (Richardson 386), the novel ultimately conforms to "an otherwise naturalistic world" (Richardson 386). The narrator, Julian West, is briefly introduced by a speaker who refers to himself only as the author, and, addressing an audience of twenty-first century citizens wishing to learn about the backwards and foolish nineteenth century, quickly "steps aside and leaves Mr. Julian West to speak for himself" (Bellamy 46). The novel then uses the pronoun "I" for the first time in the opening phrase, "I first saw the light in the city of Boston in 1857" (Bellamy 47). This opening line serves two functions. Firstly, it marks the shift to autodiegetic narration, with the protagonist as the primary narrative voice. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, this first line also introduces the nonmimetic component: the novel is specifically set in the year 2000, but West introduces himself by stating that he was alive almost one hundred and fifty years prior. Thus, this chronologically-based disruption of reality introduces Richardson's "single supernatural component."

Although *News from Nowhere* may seem to fall under Richardson's nonmimetic category rather than the unnatural, given that it follows Bellamy's trope of a time traveler finding a new but natural world, the novel's narration—as opposed to simply its content—brings the text one step beyond, and into the realm of unnatural. Richardson writes that "unnatural texts do not

attempt to extend the boundaries of the mimetic, but rather play with the very conventions of mimesis" (386). That is to say, unnatural narrative does not simply add magical or supernatural elements to a realistic narrative, but instead attempts to disrupt realism itself. This disruption of reality is found in the immensely complex structure of the narrator, William Guest. *News* begins with the deceptively simple phrase, "Up at the League, says a friend, there had been one night a brisk conversational discussion" (43). Although it may seem like a straightforward opening line, Morris's narratological complexity begins here. The interjection of "says a friend" immediately produces two simultaneously narrating voices, neither of which are named. One voice is the unnamed narrator, with the second voice being "a friend." And indeed, the friend proceeds to describe the experiences of "a man whom he knows well very indeed" (43), a skeptical member of another sect of the Socialist League who is also unnamed. This deliberate layering of voices climaxes into utter confusion in the concluding paragraph of the first chapter: "Our friend says that from that sleep he [the skeptic] 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" (45). It is at the second "he" that the pronouns become uncertain in a way that shapes the rest of the paragraph's narration. Suddenly, it becomes difficult to ascertain whether it is the narrator, the friend, or the skeptic being spoken about in regard to each subsequent pronoun. Is it our friend or the skeptic who proposes to tell the story now? This question is never answered; rather, it is made even more complicated when the narrator says, "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" (45). The mention of "as if it were myself" reinforces the idea that the narrator has not undergone the experience which he will soon be relaying, while fully collapsing the three narrative voices of the narrator, friend, and skeptic into the (seemingly)

singular identity of William Guest. From here, the novel permanently takes on the form of an autodiegetic narrator, and never again returns to this complex narratological structure. However natural the world of Nowhere might be, the entangled triage of unnamed voices produces an unnatural narration, as it is the overarching narrative structure which purposely and permanently plays with "the very conventions of mimesis" (Richardson 386).

This playful and brain-teasing narrative set-up has been discussed in many Morris-related essays for quite some time. Alexander MacDonald, for instance, sees the narratological structure to be a reflection of the novel's vision of reality and history: "The structure of the novel is not linear but dialectical….The dialectical play of present and future, of despair and hope, is reflected in Morris's use of point of view. This narrator is a slippery character and his approach to telling his own story introduces many contradictions and ambiguities" (22). For MacDonald, the prose of the text itself produces tensions which keep *News* engaging, even in a genre sometimes considered dull for its lack of action. Further, MacDonald states that the end of the novel actually does produce some form of culmination to the narrative structure: "The resolution of the narrative voices into what is clearly the single narrative voice at the end—the Hammersmith dreamer's—perhaps suggests the individual integration of self which anticipates the social integration to come" (23). Thus, the novel's narrative style propels the ultimate collectivist goals of socialism. Similarly, Andrew Belsey analyzes the purposes of Morris's unorthodox narration as a mirror to the novel's political endgame. He writes, "Boundaries between persons and identities are ultimately left unresolved…but in ways which will leave the alert reader both delighted and puzzled, and more susceptible, therefore, to becoming the text's political accomplice" (Belsey 344). For Belsey, the puzzling qualities of the text are "only a project towards the ultimate project, which is political and revolutionary…the strategy is to

intrigue the reader into becoming an agent of the text, and to provide the requisite motivation for the political struggle" (348). In other words, the purpose of the unnatural narrative—although Belsey does not call it that—is to produce some form of interest in the reader, a rhetorical strategy to further the text's political intentions.

Belsey asserts that *News from Nowhere*'s narratology seeks to inspire interest, but does not offer a definition of "interesting" in affective terms, so as to use it as a non-subjective descriptor, and consider why it matters as a cognitive response to a utopian text. In Sianne Ngai's book *Our Aesthetic Categories,* she defines "interesting" as a category of aesthetic judgment: "What is striking is the consistency of the judgment's function: that of ascribing value to that which seems to differ, in a yet-to-be-conceptualized way, from general expectation or norm whose exact concept may itself be missing at the moment of judgement" (112). In other words, the function of interest centralizes around classifying a concept which does not yet *have* a concept. This echoes Ablow's suggestion that emotions serve as a foundation for epistemological and categorical distinctions. That which is interesting must by default be in some way new— although at least vaguely similar to a preexisting expectation. The strange and unexpected frame narrative of *News from Nowhere* intrigues and puzzles, as Belsey says; but further, it also allows for the making of different sorts of judgments throughout the text than if the narrative was more straightforward and direct.

On a larger scale, Ngai's definition of "interesting" is perhaps the epitome of what a utopian romance strives to do: to construct a new world which has no place in the present. Guest's experiences in Nowhere have elements of familiarity, but largely differ from his expectations. Nowhere's beautiful suspension bridge (which has replaced the ugly one that bothers Guest so much in his own time) provides an early and explicit example: "[M]y eyes

naturally sought for the bridge, and so utterly astonished was I by what I saw, that I forgot to strike out" (46). The new and improved bridge is, in Guest's view, so interesting that he forgets to swim. In keeping with Ngai's definition, Guest's judgement is aesthetic in nature—he has "perhaps dreamed of such a bridge" (Morris 48), and he judges it based on his own emotional response to its beauty, struck by admiration. Similarly (although on a far larger scale than Guest's bridge), a utopian world is rooted in that which the reader is familiar with, but with these familiar things deemed better and more beautiful based on an aesthetic judgment. For this reason, it is arguably the goal of utopian authorship to produce interest as an aesthetic and psychological function. Ngai also says that "the interesting thus seems to be a way of creating relays between affect-based judgment and concept-based explanation" (116). "Interesting," then, is the bridge between affect and concept, emotion and idea, literary creation and political message—and a narratological structure which produces interest allows for aesthetic and affective judgments, rather than simply practical, political comparisons.

II.   Disappointment: Departure, Violence, and Reflection

There is something to be said as well about Guest's character himself as "interesting," as he is described in the text, and not in a light-hearted sense. During his stay at the Guest House, Guest catches the attention of a man called Mr. Boffin; in response, Dick warns Guest, "[Boffin] is a capital fellow, and you can't help liking him; but he has a weakness: he will spend his time writing reactionary novels… and as he thinks you come from some forgotten corner of the earth, where people are unhappy and consequently interesting to a story-teller, he thinks he might get some information out of you" (60). This seemingly offhand comment draws attention to a curious facet of Guest beyond his unnatural narratological structure: his underlying melancholy. Despite having woken up to find the utopian world of Nowhere, from start to finish of the novel,

Guest continually feels himself to be separate from it. As *News* approaches its end, Ellen tells Guest, "You have begun again your never-ending contrast between the past and the present" (222). This question of unhappy people as interesting poses a unique paradox for the utopian genre—a world where no one is meant to be unhappy.

Indeed, the unhappy moments of *News* are perhaps some of the most striking in a novel so otherwise full of bliss, especially since the avoidance of disappointment is all but inherently built into the literary utopia's very structure. In their cross-cultural comparison of literary utopias, Sana Mahmoudi and Fatemeh Azizmouhamdi observe that "description is given priority over narration, that is, it literally eliminates the narration: the plot, the action and the hero's adventures exist only before and after the utopian event, not in the course of it" (165). This is quite evident in Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), where Book 2 consists entirely of a monologue in which the narrator, Raphael, describes the land of Utopia. This trope of static description appears in *Looking Backward* as well, in that the thrust of the novel is Dr. Leete describing the functions of twenty-first century Boston to Julian West. The narrative Bellamy provides admittedly includes more plot than More's, mostly because in the interim of these dialogues, the reader is shown West's emotional adjustment to living in the year 2000. One sees how West's feelings change from "the horror of strangeness" to comfort with the idea of becoming "a permanent citizen of this century" (Bellamy 90, 148). However, even in this example of plot movement, West does not experience disappointment. Rather, the plot is his transition *away* from disappointment and into happiness.

Regardless of whether one considers this avoidance of disappointment to be a strength or a weakness of the genre, it certainly makes Morris's own literary utopia stand in notable contrast against More and Bellamy, as *News* includes several striking moments of disappointment—a

tactic which, I argue, reveals that disappointment is actually a fundamentally utopian affect. This is evidenced by exploring a newer model of disappointment's affective qualities, as posited by Lisa Ottum in "Feeling Let Down: Affect, Environmentalism, and the Power of Negative Thinking." Ottum acknowledges that disappointment has been historically treated by affect scholars as a negative feeling. However, she argues that "as it is represented in literature, disappointment is seldom the paralyzing affect described by many detractors. In *The Prelude*, for example, Wordsworth's disappointment with particular settings is figured as the catalyst for reflection, both at the instance of disappointment and at quite some distance in the future" (258). Although Ottum is speaking in reference to Wordsworth and ecocriticism, her model is also well suited to William Guest in its theorization of unmet expectations and ensuing reflection; indeed, in every possible way, Guest's description of becoming invisible to his friends at the end of the novel embodies Ottum's description of disappointment. Just before realizing that he is invisible to them, Guest says, "I stood on the threshold with the expectant smile on my face of a man who is going to take part in a festivity which he is really prepared to enjoy" (227). Fundamental to Ottum's model of disappointment is the fact that Guest is expecting to enjoy the party. Ottum asserts, "Similar to its inverse—elation—disappointment reveals a disjuncture between something we expected to feel and something that we actually feel. In order to transpire in the first place, disappointment must be preceded by memory; to arrive at the physical experience of feeling disappointed, we must have first formed expectations" (260). Simply put, in order to be disappointed, one must have expected something else; in this moment, Guest is expecting to continue to spend time with his friends, and he is about to be let down. Guest continues, "I turned to Dick, expecting him to lead me forward, and he turned his face to me; but strange to say, though it was as smiling and cheerful as ever, it made no response to my glance…A pang

shot through me, as of some disaster long expected and suddenly realized" (227). Expectations appear explicitly once again, this time in Guest's anticipating Dick to lead him into the party. Thus, Guest experiences the "disjuncture" of his expectations encountering actuality. In a way, the disappointment is doubled in that Guest has subconsciously been expecting this loss all along, and only in a moment where he is explicitly *not* expecting it, the loss occurs.

Guest's comment about "a pang" further correlates with Ottum's explanation of disappointment. Ottum says, "Similar to other affects, disappointment is registered initially by the body—the telltale sting of 'letdown' with which we are all familiar…. From there disappointment can proceed in any number of directions—the initial moment of affective intensity exhausted, one might, if disappointed by a visual scene, turn again toward the scene to confirm its disappointingness" (261). And indeed, Guest does look to Clara, and to Ellen, and reports having "hung around about a minute longer" (Morris 227), before finally departing into the night. Guest's departure from Nowhere is made particularly powerful specifically because of the disappointment he experiences at losing his friends. As Ottum says, "Disappointment arrests us" (258), and that is perhaps the point. Guest's loss of Nowhere is fundamental to the steps which follow disappointment as laid out by Ottum—"the catalyst for reflection" both in the moment and in the distant future. For in addition to the fact that both utopia and disappointment involve expected projections of the future which are destined to be unfulfilled, it is also reflection and the resulting action which make disappointment utopian.

This reflection is evidenced when Guest wakes up to find himself in his bed, and his initial thought is that it had all been a dream; the one thing that convinces him otherwise, however, is the melancholic feeling which dogged him for his entire duration in Nowhere. He says, "Or indeed was it a dream? If so, why was I so conscious all along that I was really seeing

all that new life from the outside, still wrapped up in prejudices, anxieties, the distrust of this

time of doubt and struggle?" (228). Here Guest comes to realize that the disappointment he had

been feeling—rather than the pleasure—is what makes Nowhere most real for him. The

melancholic feelings prove to be most crucial to his reflection. Furthermore, it is this same sense

of having been an outsider, of non-belonging, that inspires him. When he recalls Ellen's final

parting glance, he imagines that it was meant to say: "No, it will not do; you cannot be of us; you

belong so entirely to the unhappiness of the past that our happiness even would weary you…Go

on living while you may, striving with whatsoever pain and labour needs must be, to build up

little by little the new day of fellowship, and rest, and happiness" (228). In Guest's reflection of

his disappointment, he determines that his only option is to take what he has seen and strive to

achieve it. Disrupted expectations serve as the catalyst for Guest's change. Importantly, also as

Ottum's model dictates, this catalyst is not limited to the moment of disappointment; rather it

extends, in her words, "at quite some distance in the future" (258).

It is through unnatural narration that this distant future reflection is secured. One can be

quite certain that Guest has not let his loss consume him, but rather is still "striving with

whatsoever pain and labour needs must be" to achieve this dream. After all, the story is not told

by Guest, but by two comrades who have heard the story. Through the multiple points of

narration—where the past is seen as if it is happening now, but in reality, is being recounted at

some unknown point in the future—the experience of "future" reflection and reaction is not

something to merely be hoped for. Because of Morris's unnatural narration, this moment of

disappointment is being experienced across multiple points in time. Even as Guest expresses

disappointment that he has been forcibly returned from utopia, there exists the undeniable fact

that the narrator is actually a comrade of Guest's who "understands his feeling and desires better

than any one" and who is in this very moment passing on the messages of Nowhere to the nineteenth century reader. Even if Nowhere has yet to be achieved, it has been seen precisely as Guest has seen it—and one is assured through the narrative structure that others have as well. Thus Guest has, at least in some small part, achieved the goal stated in the concluding line of the novel: "Yes, surely! and if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream" (228). Because of his disappointment, Guest has put forward the steps toward change. This reveals the *motivational* quality of disappointment, which helps explain why disappointment is a fundamentally utopian affect. Whether the potential goal of a literary utopia is to imagine better futures or inspire radical change, perhaps it does not need to end in the expected forms of happiness and bliss, but instead with reflection upon unmet expectations.

More complex to grapple with in the context of disappointment is the novel's depiction of the Trafalgar Square massacre. "Disappointment" may seem like too mild of a word to describe such a bloody outcome, but when analyzing the narrative style and affective function of the scene rather than only considering the content itself, the massacre falls in line with Ottum's model of disappointment as an affect. On some level, this is because such an extreme representation of violence may not accord with utopian expectations, and thus it is more likely to produce the feeling of "being let down." However, the violent and unpleasant depiction of the scene also opens up a dialogue which allows for reflection, an important component of Ottum's concept, again suggesting how disappointment becomes utopian. Importantly, it is both components of disappointment—defied expectations and the subsequent reflection—working in tandem that makes Morris's handling of "how the change came" so meaningful.

One way that the literary utopian genre has historically avoided disappointment is by working around the subject of "how the change came." In More's *Utopia,* Raphael discovers the

island in its current state, and merely describes it as it is. This is part of Mahmoudi and
Azizmouhamdi's point: the adventures and the action are skipped over for a pleasing picture of
the utopian world. Adventures and action, after all, frequently include danger. In the case of
Looking Backward, addressing the change is done briefly and pleasantly. When Julian West
assumes, "Such a stupendous change…did not, of course, take place without great bloodshed"
(77), Dr. Leete very easily assures him that "there was absolutely no violence…as [the people]
came to realize [the great corporations'] necessity as a link, a transition phrase, in the evolution
of the true industrial system" (77). Meanwhile, in *News from Nowhere*—perhaps even as direct
response to Bellamy—Guest asks Hammond, "Tell me one thing, if you can…Did the change,
the 'revolution' it used to be called, come peacefully?" (133). In response, Hammond informs
him, "It was a war from beginning to end: bitter war, till hope and pleasure put an end to it"
(133). From there Hammond begins a lengthy account of the nineteenth century civil discontent,
which reaches a climax in the description of the Trafalgar Square massacre.

Paramount to this scene's affective function is the fact that Morris's depiction
strategically uses unnatural narration to prevent overwhelming the account with the violence and
carnage—thus remaining at a level of reflection. Hammond relays the story to Guest in what the
overarching narrative structures as present time, but the actual event was experienced many years
ago by an unnamed stranger, referred to only as an eyewitness. In the retelling, Hammond-as-
the-eyewitness describes the gathering of protesting citizens, unarmed, who then have guns
turned on them by soldiers and are brutally slaughtered. Echoing the structure of the novel's first
chapter, Hammond takes over for the unnamed eyewitness through autodiegetic narration when
he says, "It was as if the earth had opened, and hell had come up bodily amidst us…the dead and
dying covered the ground, and the shrieks and wails and cries of horror filled the air, till it

seemed as if there was nothing else in the world but murder and death" (144). This vivid description follows Ottum's model of disappointment as being something which represents a disjunction between what the utopian genre typically provides and what is delivered. This vision belongs more to a dystopia than a utopia, and thus there is something arresting about the horror; but this arresting dystopian image is also being delivered from a place of reflection: it is a story being recounted in a better time, a better place.

Certainly, the ability for reflection is rooted in the unnatural narrative's inherently unstable sense of temporality. In his examination of *News from Nowhere*'s frame narrative, Mario Ortiz-Robles writes, "[T]he positing of the 'I' as a multiple, ongoing event becomes a condition of possibility of time travel insofar as it stages the displacement of the present into a future as a sequence of always inaugural acts of subject constitution" (234). Although Ortiz-Robles is pointing to the original frame narrative structure from the beginning of the novel, his description of displacement applies here as well. Just as with Guest's departure, the massacre is experienced across multiple points in time, combining the characters of past, present, and future. The use of "the 'I' as multiple" is in and of itself a form of time travel; although Guest and Hammond do not physically move into the past, Hammond's autodiegetic narration situates them equally in both spaces. Indeed, the Trafalgar Square massacre's narration *encourages* degrees of narrative and temporal distance—or, to use Ortiz-Robles's term, displacement—even as the voices are collapsed together. Hammond's appropriation of the unnamed eye-witness's "I" narration, instead of bringing the voices into unity, creates a wedge of distance between the narrators. Each "*I* saw," "*I* went," "*I* was" functions narratively as if he were saying "*I* witness," and yet positions the carnage with the (perhaps quite cleverly named) eyewitness. As a result, the narration displaces the actual experience of "shrieks and wails and cries of horror" to a safe

distance from Hammond and Guest. If taking into account the pre-existing frame narrative, there are five potential levels to the framed narrative: the eyewitness, Hammond, Guest/the skeptic, the friend, and the narrator. Thus, there is not merely temporal distance at play, but narrative distance as well, reinforcing the idea that this vivid passage is coming from a place of reflection.

In addition to increasing the number of narrative voices, Morris further displaces the disappointment by interjecting the eyewitness's story with divisional phrases to reinforce this sense of narrative displacement. Throughout the vivid descriptions of the massacre, Hammond reasserts his own identity by adding phrases like "says this eye-witness" or "says an eye-witness" (144, 144), constantly situating both the reader and the familiar characters away from the carnage. Crucial are the two concluding lines of the account: "I went, not feeling the ground under me, what with rage and terror and despair" (144), spoken in the eyewitness's voice, followed immediately by Hammond's conclusion: "So says our eye-witness" (144). The emotions which should close the account are quite clearly framed so that they belong to the eyewitness alone, not to Guest or Hammond. In this way, Guest experiences not "rage and terror and despair" but disappointment instead. The expectation that Nowhere might have been achieved without bloodshed is let down. Indeed, Guest is being told of this massacre as if it has happened in the past, but for Guest, it is a *future* event. In this time-traversing retelling, told in a strange middle ground between past, present, and future, the temporality of the scene is fractured in several different ways, all of which include unmet expectations and thus produce disappointment.

However, the fractured temporality of the scene also embodies the second half of Ottum's model of disappointment: reflection. While the account of the slaughter is preserved in its most vivid and arresting form by the unnatural narration, it is also arranged in such a way that Guest

and Hammond are able to reflect upon the events. Certainly, returning to a comparison between Morris and Bellamy reveals that whereas West and Dr. Leete drop their conversation about how the change occurred almost immediately after Dr. Leete assures West of how simple it was, Guest and Hammond spend much longer reflecting on how the change came. After hearing about the Trafalgar Square massacre, Guest assumes "that this massacre put an end to the whole revolution for that time" (145), and Hammond replies: "No, no…it began it!" (145). From here, Guest and Hammond continue to discuss how the change came; after all, one cannot simply bring up a massacre and end the conversation there, whereas in Bellamy's version of how the change came, there is no need for reflection because there is nothing to be disappointed about. This point is crucial to understanding how disappointment functions as an impetus for change within *News from Nowhere*. Without the unanticipated violence of the massacre, and thus the ensuing disappointment that a utopian future comes at such a cost, there can be no reflection. Further, the reflection caused by the violence extends even further into the past as well, returning to Ottum's idea that disappointment's reflection spans across time. Hammond tells Guest, "Terrible as the massacre was, and hideous and overpowering as the first terror had been, when the people had time to think about it, their feeling was one of anger rather than fear" (145). Thus it is made evident that both in the time of Guest hearing the story and in the time of the massacre as well, negative experiences ultimately became the reason for change, rather than something "paralyzing" (Ottum 258). In this model, disappointment becomes a useful—and too often unutilized—utopian affect.

III.　　**Sympathy: Narrative Collectivism and Aggregate Ideology**

Although "sympathy" in its most colloquial sense—compassion and pity—seems fairly straightforward as a reader response to Guest's moments of disappointment, to see how

sympathy functions as a utopian affect requires both a closer look at the narratology of *News* and a newer affective model of sympathy. I have stated that the unnatural frame narrative of *News from Nowhere* is useful because it is interesting, and thus allows for deeper aesthetic judgment, but from a logical standpoint of conveying information, it makes little sense. The more people through whom a story passes, the more liable the story is to change. (This is the premise of children's games, like "Telephone.") It is presumably for this reason that the speaker at the beginning of *Looking Backward* "steps aside and leaves Mr. Julian West to speak for himself" (46). The idea of speaking for oneself is valuable from a rhetorical standpoint as it suggests that the story is being told in its purest form. Julian West is a time traveler from the past who speaks of his experiences coming to the year 2000. He speaks for himself because, based on notions of traditional storytelling, this adds credibility to his experiences.

Meanwhile, the narrator(s) of *News* speak for Guest, and the value in deviating so strikingly from this norm can be found in the justification for the multi-layered frame narration— for indeed, Morris does give such a justification. He writes: "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 the more natural to me, since I understand the feelings and desires of the comrade of whom I am telling better than anyone else in the world does" (45). This clearly articulates that what strings the narrating voices together into unnatural unity is an emotional closeness—specifically the understanding of another's "feelings and desires" in a fashion so intimate that even the most personal style of narration (the first person) may be thusly appropriated from the real protagonist. What results here, in contrast to Bellamy's narrative structure, is an experience of aggregation rather than individual experience. The value becomes not reliability of the narrative in a traditional sense, but rather the formation of narrative

collectivism. The narrative does this by utilizing sympathy, based on the affective model proposed by Tara MacDonald.

In establishing her model, MacDonald acknowledges that the modern conception of sympathy regards it as "an emotion that can be put into words, while empathy is an affective response experienced in the body…Thus empathy is not always a compassionate emotional response: think of sexual arousal, anger, or anxiety moving between bodies" (123). In other words, sympathy is often interpreted as "feeling with," whereas empathy is about "actual feeling." However, MacDonald also points out that this distinction between sympathy and empathy was not the case in the nineteenth century: "Victorian uses of the word sympathy encompassed both our current concepts of sympathy and empathy, with writers often moving freely between sympathy as a primarily ideological or rather physiological response" (123). It is this notion of sympathy as both "ideological" and "physiological" which MacDonald uses for her model, when she states, "I would like to consider historical sympathy as 'the influences of one organized body upon another' rather than as only synonymous with pity, compassion, or an intellectual exercise in bridging human difference" (122). This sense of sympathy as being a matter of both the mind and the body—not merely feeling *with*, but actually feeling in all senses of the word—is important to understanding the function of unnatural narration in *News*. What the narrator of the novel is suggesting is that he does more than take over as Guest's voice; rather, Guest's physical experiences during the novel have an influence on the narrator's own body. The narrator is able to recount not only Guest's emotions, but also his physiological responses. Returning to the moment where Guest sinks under the water after seeing the suspension bridge, the narrator says: "I was quit of the slumberous and dizzy feeling, and was wide-awake and clear headed" (46). By repeating the story through autodiegetic narration, the narrator claims to feel *as*

Guest feels, even the physiological aspects; thus the narrator understands Guest's "feelings and desires" through the bodily affect of sympathy, similar to MacDonald's sense of "the influence of one body upon another."

Morris's idea of a shared body and sympathy is not unique to *News*. In Mark Allison's essay "Building a Bridge to Nowhere: Morris, the Education of Desire, and the Party of Utopia" he connects the narrator of *News* to a speech Morris gave titled "How Shall We Live Then?" The speech was edited and published by Paul Meier in 1971 as "An Unpublished Lecture of William Morris," but was originally presented to the Fabian Society in March of 1889 (Meier 217), less than two months after the first chapter of *News* was published. The speech describes Morris's vision of a utopian future, reflecting the ideas present in *News*. Key to note, however, is when Morris's speech conflates the body with shared feelings:

> It is true that as some of you may have anticipated my paper must necessarily under these conditions take a personal character and be somewhat egoistical. I do not offer an apology for that but I may offer an explanation. I have some 55 years experience, I won't say of the world, but of myself; the result of which is that I am almost prepared to deny that there is such a thing as an individual human being: 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 very much…it 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. 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. (Morris, *How Shall We Live* 223)

Rather than protest the argument that his utopian vision is too personal, Morris acknowledges it, and appeals to an aggregate ideology. In his rejection of the individual body, and his claim that there are "types" of men, Morris takes notions of Victorian sympathy as both ideological and physiological one step further. For Morris, one body is an assemblage of many bodies, and any individual is indeed far less unique than one imagines—we are instead "types of many others." Thus, bodily sympathy is not merely something humans are capable of; rather, it is most natural

to us, just as the narrator of *News* claims this style of aggregated narration is most natural to him. Indeed, in Morris's strikingly memorable assertion about his "valuable skin cover[ing] say about a dozen persons," Morris turns MacDonald's model of sympathy into something quite literal, as well as when he describes the influence of each of these bodies upon each other (the "long alliance" in which these bodies "occasionally astonish each other"). And certainly, Morris's address of "desires and hopes" has a familiar echo in the phrase "feelings and desires."

To be sure, this speech is incredibly valuable to read in the context of *News.* Mark Allison does not apply affect theory in his analysis, but he does suggest that this disavowal of the individual self in the speech is reflected in the construction of Morris's narrator: "[I]t 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" (62). For Allison, the narrator of *News* is Morris, applying his theory of himself as containing multiple people. However, affective notions of sympathy may be utilized to take Allison's claim further. Rather than simply Morris assuming a "multifarious personality," the narrator of *News* is actually an aggregate body, experiencing sympathy on a visceral (and therefore affective) level. This subverts the traditional sense of narration in that here, first-hand experience of what is witnessed does not matter. Rather than relying on the need to recount the utopian world in its purest form, the narration focuses on the collectivism that comes from shared "hopes and desires" or "feelings and desires." A precise replication of the content relayed is not the point of Morris's utopia; the point is the ultimate production of sympathy made by the narratology.

In terms of sympathy and narrative collectivism, there is one potential flaw which appears in the structure of comradeship between the narrator and Guest: evidence of what at first seems to be exclusion. When the narrator claims to understand Guest "better than any one else in the world does," this provides a paradox. In this line, the narrator stakes the claim that they have such an intimate understanding of their comrade that they can assimilate their voice, and thus assume their identity. This leans toward the kind of aggregate ideology that Morris's novel ultimately calls for; however, "better than any one else" makes the statement exclusive. It appears to suggest that the narrators are all in unity, but in a way that the outside world cannot quite touch. This seeming dilemma, however, becomes solved in the manner through which Guest is addressed: "Guest" is quite obviously an allegorical pseudonym. Indeed, the novel does not give a name to the narrator until he is introduced to Dick, who says, "Guest, we don't know what to call you: is there any indiscretion in asking your name?" (55). Promptly, Guest answers, "I have some doubts about it myself, so suppose you call me Guest, which is a family name you know, and add William to it if you please" (55). The text wastes no time by being coy; Guest all but openly refuses to give himself an actual name, but rather adopts a title already presented to him by Dick. Importantly, while he says that Guest is "a family name," vaguely seeming to imply a surname, Guest does not actually say that it is *his* family name, and thus revokes any concrete connection between the statement and his actual identity. Likewise, despite his offer of a first name, no one in the text ever refers to Guest as "William." In fact, throughout the novel, "Guest" is more frequently addressed as "guest." For instance, when Hammond and Guest are left alone, Hammond addresses him as "my dear guest" (88). Notably, never once does Hammond ask for his guest's name, further reinforcing that "Guest" is more a place-holder for a name than an actual identity.

While many scholars have suggested that this interchangeable use of "guest" and "Guest" is meant to imply that Guest is simply a stand-in for Morris, I posit instead that the ambiguity is actually the text extending bodily sympathy to the audience: Guest's anonymity means anyone could be Guest—including Morris, but also including the reader. In the ambiguity of Guest's identity, the text offers the opportunity to understand these "feelings and desires" just as much as the narrator does through narrative collectivism. In this way, the shared body of Guest and the narrator also comes to be "influenced" by the reader, seen when Hammond acknowledges the presence of an external reader while he and Guest are discussing matters of Nowhere. As Hammond says, "I have not been talking to thin air; nor, indeed, to this new friend of ours only. Who knows but I may not have been talking to many people?" (161). Crucially, this reference to "many people" specifically addresses a *plurality* of readers, and does so as if all were experiencing the story at the same time. In doing so, it suggests an experience of collectivism through readership, strangers amalgamated across time and geography. Thus, what seems to be an exclusionary statement actually becomes a promise: should one listen to Guest's news from Nowhere, anyone can join in the aggregated sympathetic body. This echoes the moment in "How Shall We Live Then?" when Morris says some of the men whom his skin covers might be "but types of many others in the world, and probably even some of those are in this room at present" (223), suggesting that his bodily sympathy is not exclusionary at all, but instead open to anyone interested in it.

IV.   Conclusion: On Reading Utopia

The unorthodox narratological structure of *News*'s narrator is not simply a strange fancy of Morris's; rather, the unnatural narration of the text plays a fundamental role in conveying Morris's political message through various affective structures. Through interest, the text allows

for the creation of new categories and aesthetic judgments; importantly, we see how this suggests that epistemological foundations are rooted in feeling, not practicality. In disappointment, one finds that utopias are largely about projections of the future which are not destined to come to pass, but nevertheless provide a catalyst for reflection on current and potential political structures. Therefore, we realize that the *unmet* expectations of future projections are crucial to radical change. Lastly, in the visceral affect of bodily sympathy, the narrative offers the opportunity for collectivism and aggregate ideology— revealing a rhetoric whose influence openly relies on shared desires, rather than pragmatism. In this way, considering affect in *News* may also help us understand the novel as Morris insisted we read Utopia: as an "expression of the temperament of its author" ('Looking Backward' 354), a vision of the future driven by emotion, rather than a logically drawn-up plan for a perfect world.

News suggests that literary form and function are just as important as content when considering the politics of a text; it also proposes that affect produces the capability for radical political change, thus indicating that politics are not something which belong only to the realm of rationality. Just as Guest's immediate judgement of the suspension bridge is based on how it makes him feel, rather than its practical function, perhaps there is merit in reading utopian politics for the literary aesthetic pleasure they are capable of producing, even as we consider the utopia's more obvious social and economic structures. Importantly, all of this is made possible through the vehicle of William Guest and the triage of voices which entwine to create him, in the narrator's words, "as if it were myself."

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