

# The Attainment

## The ‘Doubled Troubled’ Conclusion of William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones’s ‘Holy Grail’ Series

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In spite of their numerous collaborative and individual reinventions of the medieval romance, both William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones found Thomas Malory’s version of the Holy Grail legend to be one of their most cherished aesthetic ideals. When the pair were still young, Morris had a copy of Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur* (1485) bound in white vellum after Burne-Jones had ‘discovered’ the Southey edition in a bookstore in Birmingham shortly after the two had decided to dedicate their lives to art.<sup>1</sup> But although both venerated author and tale, these Victorian artists, nevertheless, entertained quite different visions from one another of what the story offered to the modern reader and spectator.

In 1895, Morris declared the story of the Grail ‘to be the most beautiful and complete episode in (Malory’s) legends, but (also) in itself a series of pictures’.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in April 1898, and nearing his death, Burne-Jones rapturously wrote, ‘Lord! how [*sic*] that San Graal story is ever in my mind and thoughts continually. Was ever anything in the world beautiful as that is beautiful?’<sup>3</sup> Morris read the tale as a paradigm of social renewal, but Burne-Jones thought of it as an interior, never-ending quest. Morris preferred his own literary work to commence ‘his tale[s] at the beginning and go on steadily to the end [...]’;<sup>4</sup> Burne-Jones wished in contrary fashion to stall his ‘images’ on the cusp of transmutations, both disastrous and sublime. A reader might reasonably expect, though, that this tapestry rendering of the Holy Grail legend, designed and woven late in both artists’ careers (1891–1895), would resolve their contrapuntal narrative and visual urgencies—each coursing with its own idiosyncratic ethical passions—at last into a newly harmonious aesthetics.

But after much looking and reading, I discovered no such thing. This is partly because the extravagance of Stanmore Hall, the newly built 'ancestral' home of the nouveau-riche Scotsman and diamond mogul William Knox d'Arcy who commissioned the tapestries, disgusted Morris. Also, at the time that Morris requested the designs, Burne-Jones was suffering from a bout of his lifelong pervasive melancholy.<sup>5</sup> But far more to the point, each artist's response to the Grail legend only highlighted the glaring, but usually tamped down, political and aesthetic tensions between the two. Burne-Jones weakly undertook the assignment of designing the series seemingly in the spirit of both the visual continuity and narrative closure desired by his friend and collaborator. He designed the 'Holy Grail' tapestry series as five chronological scenes: *The Summons*, *The Arming and the Departure of the Knights*, *The Failure of Sir Gawaine and Sir Uwaine*, *The Failure of Sir Lancelot*, and *The Attainment*, as well as a ship and several verdures. But as the consummatory *Attainment* clearly shows, the series does not offer any kind of aesthetic or narrative closure, much less political accord.

Designed to indicate its conceptual centrality, *The Attainment* (Figure 1) is, at 96½ x 273" (" = inches; 2.45 x 6.93 m), about twice the size of the two next largest tapestries, the inaugural *Summons* (96½ x 131½"; 2.45 x 3.35 m) and the somnambulistic *Arming and Departure* (96 x 146½"; 2.44 x 3.72 m). The tapestry is divided vertically into two distinct halves. On the left, Sir Bors humbly watches behind the kneeling Sir Percival, their access to the chapel holding the Grail barred by three standing angels with scarlet wings. To the right, Galahad kneels amidst lushly blooming lilies, designed by John Henry Dearle. Inside the solidly built but excruciatingly narrow chapel, an oversized Grail rests on a tiny altar as it catches droplets of blood falling from the swirling winds of the Holy Spirit. Three more angels kneel behind this altar, balancing the guardian seraphim.

In concert with his collaborator, Burne-Jones does follow faithfully Morris's injunction that 'heads in a decoration ought to be of exactly the same size, and go one just behind the other like shillings in a row'.<sup>6</sup> Even though the chapel and its furnishings, especially the altar, are constructed in single-point perspective, neither the Grail nor the interior seraphim are. The winged figures behind the altar are of the same size and inhabit the same visual plane of the foreground as do all three knights and the guardian angels. For Burne-Jones, this was clearly a concession to the medium, in which the over use of perspective would produce the effect of smudging or obscuring background detail. But Morris's refusal to use perspective concerning heads, and indeed entire figures, functions as an aesthetic and political emblem for his medievalising socialist ethics. Without the foreshortening effects of perspective and the clear delineation of foreground and background, all figures demand the spectator's attention equally, thus visually embodying the egalitarianism which Morris espoused in his verse epics and in his socialist essays. In his written work, kings and chieftains appear as 'characters' in



the myths and legends of works such as the early *The Earthly Paradise* (1868–70), but they never tell the tales of the collective. More often than not, they are presented as cautionary examples of bad behaviour and disastrous hubris, as in 'The Man Born to Be King'.

Burne-Jones's design also reflects Morris's extreme egalitarianism in another more subtle way: Sir Bors takes up the 'reader's' position on the far left on the tapestry, visually miming the spectator's own interpretative readiness before the art object. As Florence Boos observes, 'Morris began to take a personal comfort in a paradoxical, near-mystical belief in isolated instances of selfless action, ... and to see such lost epiphanies, in effect, as a form of secular redemption'.<sup>7</sup> But such redemption could not occur without someone's witnessing and telling of the deed. Morris's desire to put individual salvation in its proper social place is in keeping with Malory's tale. Whilst half his court has gone looking for the Grail, Arthur is reduced in *Morte d'Arthur* to a passive figure, as his Round Table falls apart. The Quest damages Camelot's harmonious unity and social purpose every bit as much as Lancelot and Guenevere's adulterous trysting. For Galahad's deed to redeem Camelot, even partially, Bors must return with the good news needed to rally the forlorn remnants of the Round Table to fight the last battle.

For Morris, any mysticism must end in narrative closure with a literal re-rendering of ineffable visionary experience into time-bound text in the service of a greater social purpose, if only that of restoring the worker's energy. But Morris's focus is not on the private and ascetic rigours of the nostalgic and existential re-imagining of the individual soul. Instead, it is on the collective rescue of the Grail, always the quintessential embodiment of lost redemptive treasure from an imaginary art-historical past, as a means of communal renewal for the late-Victorian here and now. As such, Morris's epics are always tales of a collective spoken to a collective, the sense of the individual submerged in what appear to be almost agentless stories.<sup>8</sup> Told in leisure, these tales are unconnected to action of any kind yet improbably connect each member of both groups, as well as their readership, in what is always conceived of as a shared, heroic venture of remembering their cultural past(s).

Such sirs, are ye, our living chronicle,  
 And scarce can we be grieved at what befell  
 Your lives in that too hopeless quest of yours,  
 Since it shall bring us wealth of happy hours

*Figure 1: Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones for William Morris & Co (1898–9): 'The Attainment'; from the 'Holy Grail' tapestry series. By permission of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.*

Whiles that we live, and to our sons, delight,  
And their son's sons.<sup>9</sup>

The 'Earthly Paradise' Morris creates is brought into imaginary being, which is still being nonetheless and therefore possesses moral vitality, through the reciprocal telling of tales. Their stories offer glimpses of mythical Golden Age(s), when men were sturdy, loyal, and noble, moving through fantasy landscapes unscarred by industrialism and hard-hearted individualism—or any kind of individualism at all. Individual loss submerged in collective gain, the tales constitute a new type of communal immortality created through the handing down and sharing of cultural memories. Through reading the book of *The Earthly Paradise* itself, which Morris apostrophises directly in his 'L'Envoi' to his verse epic, contemporary Victorian men and women will become not only part of a living chronicle of shared memory, but also part of a larger, more harmonious whole which will pass those values on to future generations.

But for Bors's public testimony, therefore, Galahad's completion of the Quest would be a 'lost epiphany'. The spectator's extra-textual knowledge of Bors's desire to return to a world of vigorous action and manly deeds, balances and completes Galahad's effeminate prostration and incipient self-immolation before the Grail. According to Morris's own social logic, Bors accomplishes a feat of heroism arguably superior to Galahad's. Given the numerous other licenses taken with Malory's tale, one might reasonably have expected the series to end with a scene of Bors's return to Camelot, which would have balanced the collective *Summons*. It is little wonder then that Morris scarcely mentioned the series in his letters, or that his daughter May frostily suggested that if her father had placed more faith in his powers of draughtsmanship, instead of entrusting the designs to Burne-Jones, 'the result would have been something different in atmosphere, with perhaps a certain rough vigour well in accord with the tapestry technique'.<sup>10</sup>

As May Morris shrewdly observed, the awkward balance struck between the upright Bors and the kneeling Galahad, does sap the narrative energies from both Malory's tale and from Morris's own unspoken textual desires. But she failed to analyse exactly why and how Burne-Jones short-circuits the power of this supposedly triumphal scene. Burne-Jones envisioned this garden space as fundamentally different from the one Morris had in his mind's eye. Galahad's beatific completion of the Quest, nevertheless, posed a problem equally serious for the more reclusive artist. Unlike Burne-Jones's best paintings, the image of the Grail's manifestation does not pleasure its reader with a rush of mystical, melancholic eroticism, which is always paradoxically stalled. Completion always whispers from off stage. Possessing none of the heady, wind-tossed, curvilinear contortions of paintings such as *The Beguiling of Merlin* (1874) and *The Tree of Forgiveness* (1880), both of which freeze the moment before tragic, erotic entrapment,

the claustal chapel stands lumpenly, the tempest of the Holy Spirit squashed into its ceiling. The pastel wings of the seraphim behind the altar literally pale in comparison to the ruby ones of their cohorts in the centre of the tapestry. Burne-Jones purposively and defensively shunts off to the far side of the tapestry and drains of colour that which the spectator might have expected to be its centrepiece, thereby compromising its aesthetic force. Consequently, the Grail, the Holy Spirit, and the three angels behind the altar offer up a fairly rote and washed out version of mystical plenitude, which for Burne-Jones can never be pictured. Just as the narrative closure and public reading of the tale predictably entraps and renders its unruly mysticism socially safe and productive for Morris, the chapel unexpectedly contains and robs it of visual and erotic force in order to maintain the puissance of the ineffable—the beyond where human cognition leaves off.

As another protective mechanism, Burne-Jones suspends the narrative finale against a ghostly forest, which lies in wait beyond what appears to be roiling mist, a tactic which makes the tapestry's illuminated surface burn more shrilly, yet less completely. What engages Burne-Jones's interest becomes immediately apparent: not the chapel or its Grail but the third centre seraph to the spectator's right (Figure 2). That angel, alone of all those in the tapestry, possesses not only the spear which pierced Christ's side and eternally bleeds but also a pin-wheeling, upside-down left wing, evocatively similar to those possessed by the musical angels which Burne-Jones designed for stained-glass windows for Morris & Company. Between this angel and Galahad, the actual centre of the tapestry emerges as a series of darkened ovals framed by the spectral grey-green barren trees. Like collapsed stars, their weighty emptiness and spectral allusiveness slows and pulls the spectator's eye away from following the direction of Galahad's transfixed gaze into the enigmatic opacity of the tapestry's twilight background. Just as the standing Bors, narratively, if not visually, forms a pair with the kneeling Galahad, the third angel and Galahad visually, if not narratively, do so as well.

In this coupling, Burne-Jones creates an inverse diptych similar yet antithetical to the one formed by Gabriel and the Virgin in his Botticellesque *Annunciation* (1879). In this painting, the angel's physis also bears the stigmata of metamorphoses – both the Virgin's and his own. His greenish-blue feathers appear to grow into the glossy leaves of the tree behind him. His hand truncates the Old Testament bas-relief of The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, releasing semiotic visual and textual resonances not imagined by the Victorian rigours of Christian typology. The Virgin gazes out past the spectator as if trying to descry her new future proliferating in its seemingly endless possibilities before her eyes. This 'literal' *Annunciation* re-vivifies Mariological discourse as an art-historical language of unlimited riches, defying historical, narrative, and visual closure. Likewise, in *The Attainment*, we can see that the protean seraph protects Bors and Percival, not to mention the spectator, by withholding from them the coveted



Figure 2: Detail from *The Attainment*. By permission of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

finale of mystical *jouissance* promised by the culmination of the Quest. Calamitously in this tapestry, Galahad's gaze fastens not on the angel, who straddles the borderland between the human side of the image, which holds Bors and Percival, and the semiotic possibilities of its vanishing point, but rather on what he sees in the chapel before him. Unlike Burne-Jones's mournful Virgin, whose future of unlimited polysemy inspires a yearning for something forever beyond the borders of the canvas and the culturally visible, Galahad is narratively and materially consumed within the tapestry, the work of art itself leaving the spectator at a literal 'dead' end. As Burne-Jones succinctly summarised to Helen Gaskell in the autumn of 1890, 'And then comes Galahad who alone may see it—and to see it is death, for it is seeing the face of God'.<sup>11</sup>

Once again Burne-Jones has pulled the spectator back from the Quest's completion, by allowing absence to resonate and hinting at metamorphoses to come, which may or may not have anything to do with the scene at hand, or even with the narrative to which it putatively belongs. The work struggles against itself to buoy the spectator aloft in the pleasures of unconsummated desire. Morris, however, would allow the unfolding and closing of the tale. For him, both the undertaking and the completion of the Quest follow one another as naturally as spring

ends in winter. As a thinker fixated on humankind, and not on any individual man, Morris does not mourn overlong a singular death. Whether imaginary or actual, it is no more than an instance of narrative or seasonal resolution. More stories will be written; more men will be born to take the places of those who have passed. Immortality inheres in the societal transmission of memory as a 'living chronicle'.<sup>12</sup> But the melancholic Burne-Jones remains riveted to the individual quester's inevitable death, which hangs heavily in the dense atmosphere of the painter's work, collaborative or not. For him, the perpetually *unfulfilled* Quest is the point: it is as his wife, Georgie, observes 'an explanation of life'.<sup>13</sup> Like Bors, the spectator is permitted to draw ever closer to that moment of mystical rapture, in an attempt to recover a lost maternal ideal, figured by that blood-filled chalice, but can never be allowed to experience satiety. When the hero's journey ends, so do the illusions of human immortality and multiplied consciousness the text weaves for the spectator. Galahad's completion of the Quest is an image not only of narrative closure, but also of existential *enclosure* – an imaginary and claustrophobic *telos* uncomfortably close to Merlin's imprisonment within the hawthorn brake. It is little wonder then that Burne-Jones took such pains to ensure that Galahad's vision should not be more visually compelling.

Burne-Jones also designed a small series of four stained-glass panels based on this same tale, for his house at Rottingdean. Here, in an earlier work intended for his own private display, he moves past what is the culminating scene of the tapestry series by creating another one in translucent, jewelled glass which lacks the former's unbearable finality. Its title is inscribed in lower-case letters on the bottom of the leaded panel: 'how the sangreal abideth in a far country which is sarras the city of the spirit'. In this darkly glimmering window, Burne-Jones re-designed the chapel as an unsubstantial baldachin, a stone canopy impossibly suspended in the clouds, even though patches of grass can be glimpsed at its base. Tossed by elaborately curved winds which surround it, the chapel is guarded by Malory's four angels. Within its dark interior, the chalice can scarcely be glimpsed, and Galahad himself is absent. It is as if the vision of the last panel takes place not only within Galahad's contemplative mind, but ours. But the view is purposefully partial and requires continued looking into the chapel's mystical depths from the more or less safe precipice of the spectator's position in human reality before the perilously 'open' work. The spectator, nevertheless, has been returned to imaginings of the interior, timeless, borderless 'far country' of the spirit, and away from the narrative closure of the tale. True always to this vision, the artist, nearing his own death, expressed a longing to rework the legend of the Grail again: 'If I might clear away all the work that I have begun, if I might live and clear it all away, and dedicate the last days to that tale—if only I might'.<sup>14</sup>

In the would-be Edenic garden of *The Attainment*, the scraph, with its bleed-



ing spear and flightless wings, moves the narrative both toward and away from closure. Its alien asymmetrical wings provide an ambivalent emblem for Morris and Burne-Jones's unfulfilled contradictory impulses, which simultaneously expel spectators into a mystical ex-stasis outside of time, and compel them into a time-bound self-reflective ekphrasis—and beyond to action. The climax of the 'Holy Grail' series does not end in its proper place for either artist. For Morris, the tale ends too early; the social and critical dialectic remains incomplete without a final conclusive image of the tale's re-telling. For Burne-Jones, it ends too late; a pictured plenitude is an oxymoron. Such an image can record only the inevitable death of the quester and, even worse, the potential demise—through either the medium's inherent frailty or future cultural irrelevancy—of the art object itself. The 'Holy Grail' series does not reinvent the art-historical past as either a timeless breviary for contemplative praxis, or as a practical model for political renewal. Rather it reads as an uneasy and an incomplete double reenactment of both Burne-Jones's mystical, interior time and Morris's cyclical, communal time within the space of an imaginary twilight garden.

And yet any foray into time out of time, or the retreat into an alternative reality, implicitly raises the question of the ethics of such a journey. It could be argued that the artists' retreat into the bowers of beauty's past reinforced the tendency to regard the aesthetic, especially in its nostalgic presentation, as a feudal or quasi-classical dreamland, as merely decorative or worse, irrelevant to the demands of middle-class Victorian society.<sup>15</sup> And yet, in spite of Morris's very real Aesthetic leanings, his legacy as a committed if eccentric utopian thinker remains unimpeachable. Burne-Jones's work, however, has not fared as well. Unlike Morris's texts, Burne-Jones's paintings have been pilloried as escapist, effeminate, unwholesome, bizarre, and, less pejoratively but no less erroneously, as Neoplatonist.<sup>16</sup>

Yet Burne-Jones's angel, in this series as well as elsewhere, speaks to his longing for that thing which was no longer proved materially or adequately imagined for the late-Victorian artist: the soul. His angels, such as Gabriel, do bear tidings from another world—the imaginary past. Morris himself refers to his own verse in his 'Apology' to *The Earthly Paradise* as 'winged': 'Let it suffice me that my murmuring rhyme / Beats with light wings against the ivory gate'. His allusion to lulling his languid readers with false tales strikes the same ironic note, as do his epistrophic variations on the refrain, which describe the indefatigable author himself as 'The idle singer of an empty day'. The tales are only false when read within Morris's contemporary context of living within 'six counties overhung with smoke'. His deft use of the refrain, which repeats only its final words consistently, here and in 'L'Envoi' (with notable exception of line 35 which ends evocatively and appropriately 'that December day,') not only heightens the dreamy rhythm of his verse. It also indicates the poet's self-awareness that

his voice is belated on the socio-political stage, as well as within the great epic tradition in which he is writing in order to preserve what he sees as the collective consciousness and conscience of the western European canon contained within its folktales and mythologies.<sup>17</sup> The reader would do well also to remember and heed Morris's early poem 'Golden Wings' (1858), which details the disaster of waiting for such a companion who never comes; his failure to appear results in the ruination of a utopian world.<sup>18</sup>

It hardly matters whether Burne-Jones's angel or Morris's winged verses or his anonymous knight, who bears the emblematic wings on his shield, actually bring *bona fide* messages from an actual Elsewhere.<sup>19</sup> It is the annunciation, or more aptly the enunciation—the work of it, figured by that stern angel with his bleeding spear—which creates the gardens of the soul—individual or collective. In his design, 'The Heavenly Paradise', created for the Kelmescott Press edition (1892) of *The Golden Legend* (1260–75) by Jacobus de Voragine, Burne-Jones offers us an image of a flurry of androgynous angels who help long-robed pilgrims over the crenellated walls surrounding a flower-filled garden; each soul takes the hand of a different angel as they all enter heaven together. The promise the angel embodies on behalf of both the individual soul's creation and its social continuity finds not only its figural completion in this busy garden teeming with multiple angels and questers but also its ethical consummation as an image of communal creation. Both Morris and Burne-Jones exhort their readers and spectators to work with the sacred relics of the art-historical past in order to ensoul themselves and their societies—to transform their worlds according to their individual callings.

If each artist found himself a little disappointed in the 'Holy Grail' series, we can see how their creative chiasmus catches fire. Even though the series does not produce a complete synthesis of text and image, or an easy resolution of individual desire with communal redemption, it does offer a vision of contraries touching, perhaps even embracing, within the gardens of this tapestry romance. Regarding art's power to heal, Julia Kristeva writes: 'The beautiful object that can bewitch us into its world seems to us more worthy of adoption than any loved or hated cause for wound or sorrow'.<sup>20</sup> She might well have been following both Morris and Burne-Jones in believing the beautiful to be a means of transcending spiritual loss and social division, both individual and collective. Their collaborative art objects body forth what late-Victorian society could not: a vision of a double utopia, in which the loss of faith in the individual soul and national character are redeemed and reconfigured, however humanly and temporarily, within the bowers of the beautiful. Here, in these glimmering gardens, impossible meetings, paradoxical ideals, and ineffable mysteries flower into being, if only evanescently. Still, these ephemeral efflorescences promised—and continue to promise—futures far brighter than the dull reality which both artists inhabited, and which we have inherited.<sup>21</sup> The last six lines of *The Earthly Paradise*, in which

Morris apostrophises his Book, might well have been written to his lifelong best friend and collaborator:

In some old garden thou and I have wrought,  
 And made fresh flowers spring up from hoarded seed,  
 And fragrance of old days and deeds have brought  
 Back to folk weary; and all was not for naught.  
 —No little part was it for (us) to play—  
 The idle singer(s) of an empty day.<sup>22</sup>

## NOTES

1. Penelope Fitzgerald, *Edward Burne-Jones*. Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 1997, pp. 37–38. (Afterwards Fitzgerald).
2. A.B. Bence-Jones, *The Holy Grail Tapestries*. National Art Library (Great Britain). Manuscript. MSL/1938/3525; as quoted in Stephen Wildman & John Christian, eds, *Edward Burne-Jones: Victorian Artist-Dreamer*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998, p. 298.
3. This quote derives from a letter Georgie Burne-Jones recalls in her *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*. II vols, New York: Macmillan 1904, II, p. 333. (Afterwards *Memorials*). Even though she mentions the letter in a chapter devoted to Burne-Jones's last winter and spring in 1898, it is, nevertheless, difficult to identify exactly the letter's date or its recipient. It does seem likely, within context, that Burne-Jones wrote the letter from Rottingdean to Georgie before she returned from Bordighera. Both had left the Grange during the winter months because of ill health.
4. Mary Lago, ed, *Burne-Jones talking, his conversations, 1895–1898 / preserved by his studio assistant, Thomas Rooke*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982, pp. 93–94.
5. Fitzgerald, p. 235.
6. *Memorials*, II, p. 331.
7. Florence Boos, 'Introduction', Florence S. Boos & Carole G. Silver, eds, *Socialism and the Literary Artistry of William Morris*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990, p. 3.
8. J.W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*. New York: Benjamin Blom 1968, II vols (vol. I, 375 pp., vol. II, 364 pp.). Mackail recalls that Burne-Jones described Morris's desire to represent only the abstract or elemental in

human nature, a desire which extended far beyond his own love of the 'typical':

Sir Edward Burne-Jones told me that Morris would have liked the faces in his pictures less highly finished, and less charged with concentrated meaning or emotion of the painting. As with the artists of Greece and of the Middle Ages, the human face was to him merely a part, though no doubt a very important part, of the human body. [...] He was quite satisfied with the simple and almost abstract types of expression that can be produced in tapestry; and he thought that the dramatic and emotional interest of a picture ought to be diffused throughout it as equally as possible. Such too was his own practice in the cognate art of poetry and this one reason why his poetry affords so few memorable single lines, and lends itself so little to quotation. Either quality would have been a merely incidental merit, and perhaps even a defect, in the view of his art which he himself held. (Vol. II, p. 286)

9. William Morris, 'Prologue', *The Earthly Paradise*, vols III–VI of *The Collected Works of William Morris*, XXIV vols, Introduction and notes by May Morris, New York: Russell & Russell 1966, III, p. 81. (Afterwards *Collected Works*).
10. May Morris, 'Supplement' to *William Morris. Artist, Writer, Socialist*, II vols. New York: Russell & Russell 1966; Vol. I, p. 53.
11. *Memorials*, II, p. 209.
12. See note 9.
13. *Memorials*, II, p. 209.
14. *Ibid.* II, p. 333. See note 3.
15. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, p. 63. Eagleton observes: 'As far as the Victorian bourgeoisie is concerned, the nostalgic neo-feudalism of a Carlyle or a Ruskin can be neither credited nor entirely disowned: eccentric and risibly unreal though such visions may be, they are nevertheless a source of ideological stimulus and moral edification which the market place, at least for the lower orders is distressingly unable to provide'.
16. For a discussion of Burne-Jones as a Neoplatonist, see John Franklin Martin 'Sir Edward Burne-Jones's "The Legend of Saint George and the Dragon": A Neo-Platonic Quest'. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Louisville, Kentucky, USA, 1997, 192 pp.
17. 'Apology', *Collected Works*, vol. III, p. 1; 'Prologue: The Wanderers', vol. III, p. 3; 'Apology', vol. III, p. 2.
18. Morris certainly expressed his own idiosyncratic and wayward aestheticism, helplessly in love with beautiful objects, particularly illuminated books,

throughout his whole adult life. Always honest, he also acknowledged the limits of this love of the beautiful objects perhaps nowhere as clearly as in the early poem 'The Defence of Guenevere'. In this dramatic monologue, the adulterous queen creates, as part of her defence, an angel, a much more ambiguous creature than any of those in the 'Holy Grail' series, who offers her a moral choice completely based on the visceral pleasures of colour and sensation. When she chooses adultery, she implies, she has done no more than declare her favourite colour or flower.

19. Surely it is not too much to think of Oscar Wilde's forlorn and loyal swallow of 'The Happy Prince'. The tiny bird befriends a statue of a prince which has been erected on a plinth in a town square, where it watches over the miseries of the city's people. The kind-hearted swallow carries out the gilded prince's orders to pluck the gilt and jewels from his body to give aid to the poor. Then, instead of abandoning the selfless prince in the winter, the swallow dies in the snow at his feet after kissing him.
20. Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, p. 100.
21. *Memorials*, II, p. 253. Here, Georgie records her husband's pointed quip to his friend Dr Sebastian Evans when the scholar accused of the artist of holding anti-Christian and amoral views:

E. It was *Sartor Resartus* who first made me think about it. But I soon found that he wanted patching again himself—or rather, that he wanted a new suit altogether, for Sunday best, at all event. He says: 'Work at what lies nearest thee, it doesn't matter what, only work at it in earnest [...]. Which is, or may be, sheer atheism. It is neither morality nor religion.'

S. Well, you have given the cue, but I don't hear the rustle of any wings.

E. Don't you? I do. You are a little deaf of one ear, my dear.

22. 'L'Envoi', *Collected Works*, VI, p. 333.