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In his lecture, ‘Art: A Serious Thing’, delivered on 12 December 1882 at the Leek School of Art, Morris emphasised the importance that he attached to the militancy of the nineteenth-century labour movement:

I have taken note of many strikes and I must needs say without circumlocution that with many of these I have heartily sympathized: but when the day comes that there is a serious strike of workmen against the poisoning of the air with smoke or the waters with filth, I shall think that art is getting on indeed […]..

It hardly needs to be mentioned that Morris’s vision of an ecological strike, in which he imagines workers making general, social demands that go beyond the immediate context of any particular industrial dispute, is hauntingly prescient during the early twenty-first century.

The Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, who has become a figurehead within the contemporary ecological movement, recently urged people to acknowledge the scale of the ‘existential crisis’ associated with the effects of anthropogenic climate change. She has encouraged people to participate in a global climate strike due to commence on 20 September 2019. Climate change knows no borders or boundaries, but its consequences are already, and will continue to be, unevenly distributed along class and colour lines. This concerns everyone, and Morrisians everywhere and nowhere should not hesitate to support the climate strike, as well as related acts of civil disobedience and mass protest.

Extreme and abnormal weather events are now the new normal: hurricanes, tornadoes, heat waves that cause raging wildfires and droughts, bursts of excessive rainfall that lead to flash floods. Merely to list some of the wider effects of the changing climate is to invoke images of an apocalypse: ocean dead zones, shrinking glaciers, melting ice caps and rising sea levels, forced climate migration, tipping points and feedback loops, the sixth mass extinction. But these images do not belong to a dystopian future; they constitute and define our present. Why, one might ask, does it make sense to continue cultivating habits of critical detachment of the kind traditionally associated with academic or scholarly reflection when the situation so clearly and urgently demands collective and political intervention? It is a valid question. And what would it mean for a utopian thinker such as Morris to know that the horizon of the possible is, and has been for some time, structured in advance in a way that we are only now beginning to grasp?

As Elizabeth Carolyn Miller has written in her introduction to a recent special issue of Victorian Studies, such circumstances ‘dictate […] that climate change must move into every
For those with an interest in the literature, culture and politics of the nineteenth century, it is doubly important to recognise Victorian England’s 'unique historical role in cultivating the fossil fuel economy and the resulting surge in greenhouse gas emissions'. Morris was a dedicated opponent of what Andreas Malm has characterised as the regime of fossil capital, created during the nineteenth century, and which ‘has since been reproduced and enlarged’. Malm offers the hopeful reminder that ‘anything built over time can potentially be torn down (or escaped)’, but adds the tempered warning that the ‘famed “window of opportunity” for abolishing the fossil economy within tolerable bounds — even returning it to safer conditions — is still there’, but the ‘point of too late is coming closer by the day, and the closer it comes, the more swift and comprehensive the emissions cuts must be’. Malm’s book was published in 2016, and since that date, the darkening clouds of the political horizon and the further intensification of inter-imperialist conflict have made it less, not more, likely that the rulers of the current social and economic dispensation will see through the necessary changes. Morris’s revolutionary ecosocialism has, of course, long been a topic of concern for this Journal, but new submissions on the subject that take account of the challenges and burdens associated with the present conjuncture are always welcome. Let us, in the meantime, continue to educate, agitate and organise for a ‘serious strike […] against the poisoning of the air’.

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In the current issue of the Journal, I am pleased to introduce three illuminating and historically informed articles that deal with a wide range of Morrisian matters. Anne Anderson’s article on Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s ‘lost’ gifts to Jane Morris combines detailed descriptions of works which were sold at the 1939 Kelmscott Manor Sale with speculation on what these works might have to say about the relationship between the artist and his muse. It builds upon the research presented in her earlier article, ‘“I thank you so much for thinking me still worthy of making so lovely a present to”’: Gifts from Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Jane Morris’, which appeared in the Journal in 2015. Thomas Spray considers the links between the Old English poem Beowulf, the Old Norse Grettis Saga and Morris’s late romances, suggestively outlining the late-Victorian academic and philological contexts of Morris’s various projects of translation and literary creation. Stephen Basdeo, meanwhile, examines the significance of Morris’s references to Robin Hood in A Dream of John Ball, suggesting some of the ways in which Morris laid claim to earlier radical mediations of the outlaw’s legend in the work of the eighteenth-century antiquary Joseph Ritson. Peter Faulkner’s obituaries of John Purkis and Godfrey Rubens follow this editorial.

Owen Holland
Editor

NOTES
2. Jonathan Watts, ‘Greta Thunberg backs climate general strike to force leaders to act’, The Guardian,

3. For a fuller elaboration, if you can stomach it, see David Wallace-Wells, The Uninhabitable Earth: A Story of the Future (London: Allen Lane, 2019).


5. Ibid., p. 539.


7. Ibid., pp. 13, 10.
Obituary
John Purkis (1933-2018)

Peter Faulkner

John Purkis joined The William Morris Society in 1959 when he was an organiser for the Workers’ Educational Association in Nottingham; he later worked for the Open University. In this obituary I will refer to him as John rather than Purkis, as there was nothing formal in his manner, and we were good friends. John joined the committee in 1960 and was encouraged by Ronald Briggs to serve as lecture secretary; John believed this was partly because Briggs did not want the committee to be dominated by its Communist Party members, although Briggs denied this. When the Peter Floud Memorial Prize was established in 1961, John submitted an essay entitled ‘The Icelandic Jaunt’, which won the Prize, and was handsomely published by the Dolmen Press in Dublin; it was reissued in 1991. The essay was a result not of John’s having visited Iceland, but of his having had to spend some time in hospital, where he read Morris’s writings about Iceland with scholarly care. When The Journal of the William Morris Society was established in 1962, he submitted an article, ‘What I expect from the Morris Society’, in which he argued that the idea of Morris as a whole man must be respected and that over-specialisation was to be avoided. This has proved to be the ethos of the Society. Among the Society’s activities during the 1960s, John remembered a garden party attended by the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson. (There is a photograph of this event in Martin Crick’s History of the William Morris Society, a book to which I am much indebted for the information given in this obituary). John continued to be active in the Society throughout the 1970s, and in 1987 John and Hans Brill provided detailed notes for the Society’s Whitsuntide tour of Northern France, which was followed
up with a similar event in 1988. This led, in the same year, to the publication of John’s *Morris, Burne-Jones and French Gothic*. His other publications, over the years, included introductions to Wordsworth, George Eliot and Wilfred Owen, and two books on classical Greece: *Greek Civilization* in 1999 and *Understand Greek Civilization* in 2012.

In 1990 John took over from Peter Preston as Secretary, serving efficiently and courteously until 1993. He then became chair of the sub-committee set up to plan for the forthcoming centenary of Morris’s death, with its full programme of events in 1996. He was always generous in his praise of other Morris stalwarts, remarking of Harold Smith, bibliophile and bookseller, that ‘his catalogues were a joy to read and his conversation amazing to listen to’ (p. 170). The last reference to John in Crick’s *History* (p. 173) is appropriately amusing, and is based on a contribution by him to the *Newsletter* in 2005. It would seem that in 1961 Ronald Briggs encouraged members of the committee to borrow and look after items from the Society’s collection. John chose selected prints of the Holy Grail tapestries, large items which he had to take back to Sawston, near Cambridge. On his way there, around 2 a.m., he suddenly felt the hand of the village policeman on his shoulder. He was severely questioned as to how he had come into possession of the prints, and it was some time before his innocence was accepted and he was allowed to go home. Arrangements in the Society at the time were casual, and it was not until around a quarter of a century later, about 1985, that he remembered that he had the prints on loan from the Society; he then returned them, although nobody seemed to know what they were. He remained on the committee during my time as Secretary from 1997 to 2006, playing an active and constructive part, and contributing jovially to conversations in the Dove. John was one of those who have helped to make *The William Morris Society* so lively and creative over the years.
Godfrey Rubens was a distinguished architectural historian and early member of the committee of The William Morris Society. He was born in Hampstead in 1925, and served in the Royal Navy during World War II. He studied art at Camberwell College, and during the late 1950s set up the Shepherd Mill Pottery in Hampstead. He was secretary to the editorial board of Realism: The Journal of the Artists’ Group of the Communist Party in 1955-56, and contributed to several issues. He taught painting and craft, as well as art history, at a number of London colleges, including the Central School of Art, the London College of Printing and the Woolwich School of Art. He was teaching at the Guildford School of Art during the period of student sit-ins and strikes, and was one of a number of teachers dismissed for supporting the students. He then undertook a PhD on William Lethaby at the Bartlett School of Architecture, which led to his most important publications.

Rubens is recorded by Martin Crick in The History of the William Morris Society as having sold copies of the Daily Worker on the streets with Ray Watkinson – I remember the two men as having been good friends and allies when serving on the committee. Crick also notes that in late 1979 Rubens ‘alarmed the committee’, who had asked him to survey the archives at Kelmscott House, by reporting that ‘there was no inventory of the Society’s possessions, totally inadequate storage facilities, and almost non-existent security’ (p. 90). Characteristically, he took the lead in rectifying the situation: he was both a scholar and a practical man.

Rubens’s publications include an edition of W.R. Lethaby’s Philip Webb and His Work
(1980) and his masterful William Richard Lethaby: His Life and Work 1857-1931, handsomely published, with numerous illustrations, by the Architectural Press in 1986. This is scholarship of the highest quality, enhanced by a powerful prose style. The book runs to ten chapters, covering Lethaby’s early life, his architectural and craft practices, his work for the London County Council, his ideas about architectural education, his time at the Royal College of Art, his work at Westminster Abbey and on other old buildings, his ideas as a theorist and his achievement as a writer; and, finally, a Retrospect. The book includes 143 black-and-white illustrations, and concludes with a thorough bibliography of Lethaby’s publications, and an index. It is also remarkable for its strikingly fine design. Much later, in 1995, Rubens gave the Kelmscott Lecture on the appropriate subject of ‘Morris, Lethaby and the Arts & Crafts’, which was unfortunately never published. Rubens lived near Oxford for the last part of his life, and in 2011 published the useful guide-book The Pre-Raphaelites and Their Friends in Oxford. Rubens is to be saluted and valued for his contributions both to architectural scholarship and to The William Morris Society.
The ‘Lost’ Gifts from Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Jane Morris: The 1939 Kelmscott Sale

Anne Anderson

308 ‘Dante’s Dream, 2 chalk drawings 1879’ (£28)
309 ‘Blessed Damozel, chalk drawing 1879’ (£15)
313 ‘La Ghirlandata, pen and ink study’ (£11)
326 ‘DGR Mrs Morris lying on a sofa, pencil drawing, 1870’ (£16)
335 ‘Bower Meadow, pen and ink study’ (£8)
336 ‘Roman Widow, pen and ink study’ (£9)

In a previous paper published in the Journal of William Morris Studies I traced the relationship between Janey Morris (1839-1914) and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82) as revealed through the gifts that the artist bestowed on his muse. However, I did not include those works which were sold at the 1939 Kelmscott Manor Sale. Many Rossetti relics, ‘chattels and effects’, were lost as well as drawings and photographs; the sale marked the end of an era. As corroborated by her Memorandum dated 1926, which specified those works which were to be bequeathed to the University of Oxford, May Morris did not intend to memorialise Rossetti’s sojourn at the Manor or his relationship with her mother. Basing her selection on their value as true likenesses, May itemised only four drawings of her mother by Rossetti; they can still be seen at
the Manor. Nevertheless the works consigned for sale were intimately linked to the Manor, relating to paintings conceived and executed by Rossetti while in residence; the Manor was Rossetti’s summer retreat and home for some four years (1871-74). Although often modest, being finished drawings, preparatory studies and photographs, their dispersal is obviously a great loss to the history of the Manor. They date to the years before Rossetti’s mental breakdown in 1872, as well as chronicling his recovery at the Manor and the difficulties imposed on his relationship with Janey after his joint tenancy with William Morris ceased.

As well as throwing more light on the relationship between the artist and his muse, the preparatory drawings can also tell us about Rossetti’s practice as an artist. They clearly held great sentimental value for Janey, being hung in her bedroom, her private sanctum at Kelmscott House, Hammersmith (Figure 1). Most of the drawings sold in 1939 are now in public institutions, namely the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and Harvard Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts. In

Figure 1: Mrs. Morris’s Room at Kelmscott House, c. 1896. Hanging over the fireplace, from left to right are: Water Willow, print (Kelmscott Manor); La Ghirlandata, pen and ink study (untraced); Roman Widow, pen and ink study’, 7 1/8 x 6 1/2 in (Ashmolean); Proserpine, pen and ink study’ 8 1/2 x 4 1/4 in (Ashmolean); below, ‘Blessed Damozel, chalk drawing 1879’, 15 11/16 x 36 5/8 in (1876, Grenville L. Winthrop Bequest, Fogg/Harvard Museum of Art). As listed in the Kelmscott Sale, Walthamstow. (Credit: Hammersmith and Fulham Archives)
reconstructing Janey’s collection, Rossetti’s drawings are considered here according to their date of execution thereby revealing their historical and symbolic significance. They were Janey’s personal possessions, hung in the privacy of her room at Kelmscott House; studies for La Ghirlandata, The Roman Widow, Proserpine and Dante’s Dream were arranged over the mantelpiece (Figure 1). Following her death they were relocated to 8 Hammersmith Terrace (Figure 2) and finally hung in May’s bedroom at the Manor:

Sir E. Burne-Jones, Sir Galahad, pen and ink study, 1858 (Lot 333)
Do. Mystical Marriage, pen and ink study (Lot 334)
D.G. Rossetti, Bower Meadow, pen and ink study (Lot 335)
Do. Roman Window, pen and ink study (Lot 336)
Do, Proserpine, pen and ink study (Lot 312)
Do Ghirlandata, pen and ink study (Lot 313)
Do and Mrs Morris, two Daguerreo types [sic] […] (Lot 314)
Do Mrs Morris lying on a sofa, pencil drawing (Lot 326)
Village scene, pen and ink drawing, signed E.H.N. (Lot 318)
Pre-Raphaelite school, two etchings and a lithograph
D.G. Rossetti, A Head, probably of Miss Morris, chalk drawing (Lot 322)
Do. Blessed Damozel, chalk drawing dated 1879 (Lot 309)
Costa, Field and Woodland scene, oil painting (Lot 307)
Watercolour of Old Houses by M. (Lot 310)
D.G. Rossetti, Dante’s Dream, two chalk drawings dated 1879 (Lot 308)\(^5\)

The dressing room beyond was hung with:

Sir E. Burne-Jones Design for a Virgin in the Prioress’s Tale (Lot 319)
Mrs Evelyn De Morgan, Luna, drawing in black and gold (Lot 320)
A Head, probably of Mrs Morris, chalk drawing (Lot 321)\(^6\)

More an art gallery than a cosy bedroom, the space memorialised her mother as Rossetti’s muse: his paintings Proserpine, La Ghirlandata, Roman Widow and the Blessed Damozel were all commenced at Kelmscott. In order to discuss their significance these works are arranged in catalogue form. The autotypes sent to Janey in 1878-79 have been excluded as their production and importance merits further research.

**No. 1/ Lot 326 ‘Mrs Morris lying on a sofa, pencil drawing, 1870’, identified by Virginia Surtees as Mrs Morris 25th July 1870, MFA Boston**\(^7\)
This drawing can be seen hanging in the dining room at 8 Hammersmith Terrace,
in an undated photograph (c.1914?). It was purchased by John Bryson and subsequently acquired through the dealers Colnaghi by the Museum of Fine Arts Boston in March 1958. Intimate and informal, the so-called ‘couch’ drawings date back to their sojourn at Scalands, an estate owned by the suffragist and painter Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827-91). Janey arrived on 12 April, lodging at Fir Bank while Rossetti resided at Scalands Farm; Marsh conjectures they saw each other ‘on a daily basis for three intimate weeks’. Rossetti was afforded ample time to sketch his ‘lady’. After her return from Scalands, Janey remained in London for the summer, joining her mother-in-law at Torquay in November. Drawings dating to July and August are presumed to have been posed on the large cane Regency couch at Queen Square. Janey’s health became precarious around 1869-70. Wendy Parkins has discussed at length the nature of her ‘illness’, which has been viewed as both physically real and psychosomatic, as a means of keeping her husband at a distance or retreating from Rossetti’s demands. Janey’s most cited symptom was chronic back pain, hence the many drawings of her in a semi-recumbent position propped up on pillows. Marking a time when they were in frequent contact, these drawings were clearly charged with romantic sentiment for both parties; they were also largely free from ‘type-exaggeration’, prompting May Morris to bequeath a similar ‘couch’ drawing dated ‘August 12th 1870’.

No. 2/ Lot 335 ‘The Bower Meadow, pen and ink study’ (£8), Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Rossetti hoped to rekindle the intimacy he had enjoyed with Janey at Scalands by taking Kelmscott Manor on a joint lease with Morris. Rossetti saw Kelmscott for the first time on 20 May 1871; his summer sojourn with Janey and her two daughters, May and Jenny, began on 12 July. He was initially enchanted by the beauty of the old Manor: ‘[t]his is a most lovely old place – a desert in solitude and an Eden in beauty – just my idea of a change from hateful London’. In his 1949 biography of Rossetti, Oswald Doughty asserts that ‘[b]oth Janey and Gabriel delighted in Kelmscott […] Gabriel’s love of the old place indeed rivalled Morris’s’; he adds: ‘[t]hese few weeks at Kelmscott, passed in a normal tranquil daily round of work and relaxation such as Gabriel had seldom known, were probably the happiest of his life’. The happiness generated by this ‘Eden in beauty’ perhaps prompted Gabriel to take up an old unfinished canvas that had lain in his studio for some twenty years. Originally painted at Knole, near Sevenoaks, Kent, this landscape had been conceived by Rossetti as a backdrop for the meeting of Dante and Beatrice in Paradise; it now became a foil to a pair of female musicians and accompanying dancers, ‘so that Music and Dance became the correlative of Art’.
1872 and sold to dealers Pilgeram and Lefevre, was a commercial proposition; the artist was in need of ‘tin’, his slang for money. However, the pen and ink study for *The Bower Meadow* was quite different in spirit (Figure 3). Janey appears to have modelled for the figure on the right, while the left-hand figure could be Alexa Wilding or Maria Spartali Stillman, who both appear in the final painting (1872, Manchester City Art Gallery). As Rossetti explained to Frederick Leyland, whom he hoped would purchase the work, the composition centred on ‘two ladies […] playing music, while Love holds a songbird whose music chimes with theirs’.17 Music, conceived as both earthly and heavenly, may allude to love both human and divine. In the large pastel version (c.1872, Fitzwilliam, Cambridge) Janey has disappeared; Alexa Wilding sits on the right, strumming a mandolin.18 A red-winged Cupid now holds an arrow, rather than cradling a dove. With the removal of Janey, the final composition perhaps masked a truth that was best kept private.
**No. 3/ Lot 312, ‘Proserpine, pen and ink study’ (£14), Ashmolean**

This study of *Proserpine*, a pivotal work in Rossetti’s oeuvre, was purchased by Bryson and thence passed to the Ashmolean (Figure 5). Originally conceived in the summer of 1871, Rossetti executed at least eight different versions of *Proserpine*; the subject was begun upon canvas no fewer than four times during 1872. Dating to 1873, this pen and ink drawing may have been created especially for Janey; she did not acquire the initial chalk drawing, dated 1871, until after the artist’s death. The painting was doubled by a sonnet, first in Italian (7 November 1872) and subsequently in English (1875); composed after Rossetti’s mental collapse, the poem takes on a melancholic poignancy:

Afar from mine own self I seem, and wing
Strange ways in thought, and listen for a sign:
And still some heart unto some soul doth pine,
(Whose sounds mine inner sense is fain to bring,
Continually together murmuring,) –
‘Woe’s me for thee, unhappy Proserpine!’

Rossetti explained the subject’s symbolic meaning to W. A. Turner, who bought the ‘sixth version’ in 1878:

The figure represents Proserpine as Empress of Hades. After she was conveyed by Pluto to his realm, and became his bride, her mother Ceres importuned Jupiter for her return to earth, and he was prevailed on to consent to this, provided only she had not partaken any of the fruits of Hades. It was found, however, that she had eaten one grain of a pomegranate, and this enchained her to her new empire and destiny. She is represented in a gloomy corridor of her palace, with the fatal fruit in her hand. As she passes, a gleam strikes on the wall behind her from some inlet suddenly opened, and admitting for a moment the light of the upper world; and she glances furtively toward it, immersed in thought. The incense-burner stands behind her as the attribute of a goddess. The ivy-branch in the background (a decorative appendage to the sonnet inscribed on the label) may be taken as a symbol of clinging memory.

The Proserpine theme, a woman locked in another world, in some place ‘other’, runs through much of Rossetti’s work. While Proserpine is trapped in the Underworld, the Blessed Damozel leans out ‘From the gold bar of Heaven’.

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unobtainable has inevitably been perceived as autobiographical, with Janey destined to live another life (with another man). As construed by Rossetti, caught in a loveless marriage, summertime at the Manor offered refuge and respite: ‘the light of the upper world’ could be recast as a gleam of Oxfordshire sunshine. As Marsh observes, Rossetti appears to anticipate Janey’s ‘winter return to the dark underworld of London with a husband she had not chosen’. The sonnet begins as follows:

Afar away the light that brings cold cheer
Unto this wall, – one instant and no more
Admitted at my distant palace-door.

The theme acquired poignancy as Rossetti failed to save her from this fate; Janey posed for Proserpine before returning to London in the autumn of 1873. His Christmas gift to her was Robert Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy (1621) inscribed with a pen and ink drawing of her. Can we infer from this that the symptom and cure for Rossetti’s melancholy, defined by Burton as a habit, a serious ailment, ‘a settled humour […] not errant but fixed’, was Janey? Janey’s Proserpine might be construed as a parting gift, not only memorialising their time together at Kelmscott but also confirming their separation. Its commemorative status may be inferred by the inscription, top right, ‘Proserpina Imperatrix’. While the incense-burner is omitted (perhaps this goddess is more human than divine), the ivy of ‘clinging memory’ evokes a regretful longing, echoing the last lines of the sonnet: ‘And still some heart unto some soul doth pine […]/ “Woe’s me for thee, unhappy Proserpine!”’.

The hopefulness of that first summer at Kelmscott was dashed by Rossetti’s breakdown and attempted suicide the following year. Robert Buchanan’s attack in ‘The Fleshly School of Poetry’ (1871) eventually provoked paranoia, complete with hallucinations and accusing voices, and manic depression. Although Rossetti recovered, returning to the Manor in September 1872, relations between Gabriel and Janey were never the same. His reliance on chloral and whiskey for his insomnia became entrenched. His friends saw his relationship with Janey as contributing to his distress; they concluded his sense of honour was impugned by his love for another’s wife. With Rossetti in effect an invalid, Jane briefly assumed the role of nurse and comforter; both parties must have realised their ‘affair’ was at an impasse. The prospect of a life together had been dashed. Philip Webb sensitively wrote to Janey: ‘[t]ime has tossed us all about and made us play other parts than we set upon. I see you play yours well and truly under the changes and I feel deeply sympathetic on that account.’ The terms of endearment that Rossetti now coined for Janey mirror those he had invented for Fanny Cornforth, his long-time companion and ‘house-keeper’
at 16 Cheyne Walk, his London residence. Janey was now ‘Moocow’, while Fanny remained ‘Elephant’ to Rossetti’s ‘Rhinoceros’. Yet Rossetti still clearly needed Janey, writing to his brother that everything depended ‘on my not being deprived of the prospect of the society of the one necessary person’.  

Rossetti’s ‘convalescence’ at the Manor almost restored him to his former self; this was one of the artist’s most productive periods. *The Blessed Damozel, La Bella Mano, La Ghirlandata, The Roman Widow* and *Rosa Triplex*, a head in three poses based on May, were all conceived at the Manor. For the watercolour *Rosa Triplex* (1874) ‘Jane made

Figure 3: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Bower Meadow*, pen and brown ink, 1871/2 (4 1/2 x 3 3/8 in.) Kelmsscott Manor Sale 1939, Lot 335. (Credit: Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford)
a dress of crimson silk and May modelled charmingly’ for the features.28

No. 4/ Lot 313 ‘La Ghirlandata, pen and ink study’ (£11), Ashmolean

May, aged eleven, also modelled for the angels in the background of *La Ghirlandata*, the ‘Garlanded Lady’. In a letter to William Bell Scott, dated 31 August 1873, Rossetti wrote that ‘[l]ittle May is growing a divine model, and appears twice, as angels in the plural, in my Ghirlandata’.29 Janey hung the pen and ink study over the fireplace in her room at Kelmscott House (Figure 1). The drawing remains untraced; according
to Surtees, it was in the possession of Lord Sherfield in 1969. Rossetti worked on *La Ghirlandata* alongside *Dis Manibus* or *The Roman Widow*, a painting conceived and entirely executed at the Manor. Janey’s pen and ink study for this was hung alongside her *La Ghirlandata*.

**No. 5/ Lot 336 ‘Roman Widow, pen and ink study’ (£9), Ashmolean**

Both drawings were apparently intended as gifts for Janey upon her arrival at the
Manor on 18 July 1873, although they were initially conceived as a ploy to lure his patron Frederick Leyland: ‘[i]f the little designs I send you should convince you of the certainty of the two pictures pleasing you (and without feeling such certainty, by experience of your tastes, I should not have offered them’.

The drawings were sent to Charles Augustus Howell (1849-90), Rossetti’s ‘general factotum’, who had them mounted and ordered frames for them; in a letter to Howell dated 5 July, Rossetti responded: ‘thanks for the frames for the 2 sketches which are beautifully mounted’. In his letter to Howell dated 16 July, on the eve of Janey’s arrival, Rossetti confirmed ‘the frame for the new Proserpine has just come from F [Foord] and D [Dickenson] and also the 2 charming little frames for the pen & ink sketches’.

La Ghirlandata and Dis Manibus (Figure 4) both feature Alexa Wilding as the principle figure. Wilding’s status at the Manor was strictly that of professional model; as La Ghirlandata and The Roman Widow were intended to appeal to Leyland she may have been deemed the more tempting choice. William Michael Rossetti claimed that Wilding, lauded as the most beautiful of Rossetti’s models, ‘sat at least as often as Mrs Morris for coloured, and barely less often for uncoloured works’. Leyland already owned Veronica Veronese or ‘Lady with Violin’ (1872, Delaware) and Lilith (1872-73, Delaware), which featured Wilding. Veronica Veronese was intended as a pictorial allegory linking sight with sound. A female musician, lost in a trance-like state, is absorbed by the melody of a songbird, while absentmindedly plucking the strings of a violin; Rossetti referred to this as a ‘musical picture’.

With Leyland seeking complimentary subjects, La Ghirlandata and The Roman Widow were conceived as pendants. Rossetti wrote to Howell on 7 March: ‘I have got those two instruments you bought for me down here, Dunn has strung them & set them to rights, & I am going soon to paint two pictures from Miss Wilding with them, about the size of the fiddle one [Veronica Veronese], as Leyland wants others of that kind for his drawing rooms, & a series of musical pictures would look splendid together’. Her service secured by a regular retainer, Miss Wilding was summoned to Kelmscott in April to pose with ‘a queer old harp’ from Rossetti’s stock of studio properties. Wilding was in residence again from 27 June till 16 July, leaving as planned just before Janey’s arrival. According to Allan and Page Life, in their biography of Wilding, ‘Alexa was banned from Kelmscott when Jane was in residence’. However, May Morris, who stayed at Kelmscott without her mother or sister, shared Rossetti’s company with Miss Wilding. ‘A light-hearted model who lacked excitement’, according to May, Alexa was no substitute for her mother, being unable to ‘minster to the needs of lonely Mr Rossetti’. Apparently this was a ‘role young May would gladly have assumed […] for she was infatuated with this strange friend of her mother for whom she herself was modeling – until the stately Miss Wilding arrived to spoil
everything’. 42 According to the artist and author W. Graham Robertson (1866-1948), Miss Wilding ‘fluttered about a good deal at Kelmscott and May Morris hated her’. 43 Evidently May indulged in ‘anti-Wilding diatribes’, as she cherished an ‘early formed but sustained dislike of the lady’. 44 Allan and Page Life conjecture that May’s anxieties stemmed from mixed loyalties, uneasy when Rossetti and her mother were together and equally uneasy when they were apart. This may go some way to explaining why May did not include La Ghirlandata or Dis Manibus in the Oxford Memorandum.

The finished chalk drawing of La Ghirlandata, a ‘stunning study’, was given to Howell in payment for a £70 bill the artist owed. The oil painting La Ghirlandata was offered to Leyland, who objected to ‘three heads in it rather than one’. 45 It was sold to William Graham, Rossetti’s most loyal patron. Rossetti used the sale to Graham as leverage with Leyland, offering him Dis Manibus or The Roman Widow (1874, Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico). In this ‘musical picture’ a white-clad Roman widow laments the loss of her husband; the cinerary urn seen in the background, based on one he owned, is draped with a silver marriage girdle. Her reverie has been induced by ‘a dirge upon two citherns’, one lying at her side, the other in her arm, and ‘fulfilling the appointed mourning rites’. 46 Rossetti intended a ‘lovely effect’, the feeling to be beautiful and elevated rather than maudlin, although he feared ‘the picture is too severe and tragic for his [Leyland’s] taste’. 47 The inscription, which provides the context, reads:

DIS MANIBUS
L. AELIO AQUINO
MARITO CARISSIMO
PAPIRIA GEMINA
FECIT
AVE DOMINE. VALE DOMINE

[To the deities of the underworld: Papiria Gemina has made this for her dearest husband Lucius Aelius Aquinas: hail master, and farewell, master.]

This painting was a double work of art, conjoining not only painting with music but also image with text; both are intertwined, encouraging a myriad of interpretations. As D. M. R. Bentley argues, this Pictura Poesis can be read on many levels, as a beautiful work of art, valued for its effect rather than its meaning, and intended to form part of a decorative scheme within Leyland’s home, or homage to the antiquity of marital love and an ennoblement of the ideals of marriage and wifely devotion beyond the grave. 48 As a reflection of Rossetti’s state of mind following his attempted suicide, the
Roman Widow could even be musing on the ultimate question: what lies beyond the grave? Drawing on post-Roman Christian beliefs, the Roman Widow might be hoping for a reunion with her beloved in Paradise. Bentley argues the Roman Widow is ‘a reflection on both the psychological and physical circumstances of its conception and creation that provides unique and important insights into the content and meaning of the work of Rossetti's final decade'.

Does this work go beyond ‘mere beauty of form and decoration'? As he gifted the study to Janey, can the image be read as an expression of his feelings for her? Reinstalled at Kelmscott, Rossetti may have been determined to prove their relationship was honorable; Marsh contends that ‘his breakdown had yoked her anew to Topsy’. Perhaps sensing that it would be wise to repair their marriage, the Morrises reprised their honeymoon en famille, touring Belgium in July 1874. As chance would have it, in Bruges they were given the same rooms they had occupied on their ‘wedding trip'. Jane’s attention would refocus on her children, especially after Jenny developed epilepsy aged sixteen; she appears to return to the fold as dutiful wife and mother. The Roman Widow could memorialise Jane’s loyalty as a wife or recognise that Rossetti’s love for her could never be consummated in marriage.

Rossetti remained firmly ensconced at the Manor until July 1874, infuriating Morris, who was now denied access to the property. Their rivalry for Janey was apparently displaced by a contest for mastery of the Manor. Rossetti was finally ousted when Morris refused to renew the joint lease. Without the fiction of the shared tenancy, Rossetti was denied the ‘one necessary person'; Janey spent a final week at the Manor alone with Rossetti at Whitsun. Henceforth, Kelmscott ceased to be a haven.

Janey and Rossetti: after Kelmscott
In July 1874 Rossetti suffered another psychotic breakdown, abruptly leaving the Manor, never to return. Back in London, it was actually easier for him to see Janey; soon after her return from Belgium she sat for him. Nevertheless, the so-called Kelmscott Love Sonnets (Bodleian Library), a copied manuscript gifted by Rossetti to Jane in 1874, can be read as marking a watershed in their relationship. This collection includes thirty works, twenty-eight sonnets and two songs (or lyrics), all ‘love poems’. They number ‘Heart’s Hope’, ‘Love Enthroned’, ‘My Lady’s Gifts’ and ‘Without Her’. These poems, which form part of his House of Life project, would eventually be published as Ballads and Sonnets in 1881. Many of these poems were composed in the summer and autumn of 1871, presumably memorialising those idyllic months enjoyed by Rossetti and Janey at the Manor. The manuscript may have been copied in August 1874, shortly after his rapid departure from the Manor and the realisation that he and Janey might never enjoy such prolonged intimacy again.
Janey was still hoping for a cure but it was clear that even her presence could not lift the artist’s spirits. In 1875 she appears to have brought the ‘affair’ to an end. Marsh concludes the break was ‘made firmly and gently’ and that henceforth she saw Rossetti only occasionally. However, it is clear from the letters that have survived that both parties still harboured affectionate feelings for one another. She still sat for him; Janey visited Rossetti at Aldwich Lodge, near Bognor, for a fortnight at the end of 1875 and again in March 1876. A letter dated June 1878 enquires: ‘when shall I have the chance of another visit from you?’. Rossetti needed her in order to ‘do something – even a very little – towards the hands in the drawing I spoke of’. The drawing in question was *The Day Dream*. Moreover, these letters chronicle a succession of gifts from Rossetti to Janey, a series of auto-types including *Silence* and *Perlascura*, a study for the *Blessed Damozel* and the two ‘Dante drawings’, which were sent in August 1879. These gifts, like the *Kelmscott Love Sonnets*, could be seen as a form of ‘closure’.

**No. 6/ Lot 309 ‘Blessed Damozel, chalk drawing 1879’ (£15), Grenville L. Winthrop bequest, Harvard Art Museum**

This drawing is considered to be the *First Sketch for Background*, dating to 1876 (Figure 6). As a ‘double work of art’ the *Blessed Damozel* is unique in Rossetti’s oeuvre, in that it was a poem before it was a painting. First conceived in 1847, the poem constantly evolved. The painting was commissioned in February 1871 by William Graham, who requested the predella on 31 December 1877, after the main part of the picture was complete. Although from the outset Alexa Wilding was the explicit model for the *Blessed Damozel*, Janey literally stands behind her; in the background lovers in a transcendental realm are locked in an eternal embrace. They are based on the
foreground figures, angels joyfully embracing virtuous men, in Botticelli’s *Mystic Nativity* (1500), which entered the National Gallery in 1878 following the death of its then owner William Fuller Maitland of Stansted (1813-76). The painting had already achieved notoriety, being lent by Maitland to the Art Treasures Exhibition, Manchester, in 1857. Viewing the painting at the Royal Academy’s Winter Exhibition of Old Masters in 1871, John Ruskin revised his opinion of the artist. He now admired Botticelli’s ‘mystic symbolism’; referring to the twelve angels who half float, half dance in a circle, he wrote that ‘you feel the whirlwind of their motion’.  Rossetti, one of Botticelli’s earliest admirers among the Victorians, was undoubtedly familiar with his works through photographic reproductions. Echoes of Botticelli’s embracing
couples can be seen in his title-page illustration to his sister Christina Rossetti’s *Goblin Market* (1862). Laura and Lizzie are locked in an embrace that is ‘more like that of lovers than of sisters’.  

The lovers in the *Blessed Damozel* frame an inscription:

> Around her, lovers newly met  
> Mid deathless love’s acclaims  
> Spoke evermore among themselves  
> Their rapturous new names.

The embracing couples express a ‘longed for fulfilment’; in this eroticised paradise the highest spiritual state is reserved for lovers. Emblematically the Damozel may embody an idealised love that transcended the often painful conflicts within the artist’s own love-life.

Rossetti wanted Janey to have the ‘Damozel groups’; the drawing was in her possession by 2 June 1879. He mentions the work in passing with reference to the predellas for *Dante’s Dream*, which he also proposed to give to Janey. The ‘Damozel groups’ can be seen hanging over the mantelpiece in Janey’s room at Kelmscott House in a photograph of May taken by Emery Walker.

No. 7 and No. 8/ Lot 308 ‘*Dante’s Dream*, two chalk drawings dated 1879’, Grenville L. Winthrop bequest, Harvard Art Museum

Was Rossetti trying to curry favour with these gifts, perhaps even attempting to woo Janey back as a model? He wrote to her on 5 June 1879: ‘I am so glad you care to have the Dante sketches. I hope to write again immediately & try for an appointment’ (Figure 7 and Figure 8). He needed her to complete *The Day Dream*: ‘[s]o the old studies of you may go on being useful yet. Best of all if I could manage to paint one again from life in an easy position & by short stages.’ Janey invariably cited her bad back as the reason for not sitting: ‘as to sitting again, I should be but happy to feel myself of use to any human being, but it is scarcely likely, that my back will improve with age. Still I will not despair yet, and you may be quite sure that if at all possible, I shall let you know.’

An earlier missive had gone unanswered, a ‘Jeremiad’, a mournful list of woes, in which Rossetti dwelt on his depression; he had ‘been thinking troublesomely and did not duly reflect that it is one thing unbosoming oneself in words and another putting it in ridiculous black-on-white’. Janey failed to respond as she ‘did not know what to say to such a very sad letter’, ending her reply: ‘[n]o more Jeramiads I beg’. This ‘Jeramiad’ also mentions the predella designs; ‘ere long the two must get painted &
then the sketches will reach you, such as they are. Your sweet faithfulness in the value
you set on what I do is most touching to me […] you are always faithful, & always
will be, I know’. In the letters exchanged between 4 March and 2 August 1879,
Rossetti addressed her as ‘My Dearest Janey’, perhaps reflecting a ‘feeling of special
thankfulness for her loyalty’. Rossetti tempted Janey by sending her a copious description of the Dante sketches:

I am making drawings for the 2 Predellas for Graham’s picture. When done
I shall give the drawings to you. They will be very pretty & full of full-length
figures – each drawing nearly as big as the drawing of the Damozel groups
you have, & done in the same way. The first […] represents the lady at the
head of Dante’s couch watching his troubled sleep while the dream hovers
over his head – on the other side of the composition is a sort of loggia with 4
ladies, one of whom is perceiving the grief of her friend and beckoning to the
others to go to her.

In the 2nd Predella Dante will be sitting up on his couch and relating
the dream to the group of ladies. In the loggia (which is parted by a curtain
from the rest) I shall show the figure of Love standing by himself while a sort
of tabernacle cloud full of wing-points hovers in the midst. I know you will
think them nice compositions – they embody as it were the first and last lines
of the Canzone ‘Donna pietosa e di novella estade’ / &/ ‘Voi mi chiamaste
allor, vostra mercede’. Jane was very pleased with her gift, writing to Rossetti:

I unpacked them myself and carried them carefully to my own room, where
I have finally decided to arrange them over my bed, so that I may always have
the pleasure of feeling them near me in bed, and seeing them when dressing
and undressing. I think them more lovely than ever, you have finished them
so delightfully, they are really more beautiful than I expected to see, even Top
got enraptured with them, especially No. 2. Thank you so much for thinking
me still worthy of making so lovely a present to, it is a great pleasure once
more in this life.

The previous year Rossetti sent an inscribed copy of the Vita Nuova to Janey,
demonstrating a renewed interest in Dante. Scholars have identified Janey with La
Donna Della Finestra or ‘Lady of Pity’, the lady who looked compassionately upon
Dante from a window after the death of Beatrice. Janey may be said to have consoled
Rossetti after the death of his ‘Beatrice’, his wife Elizabeth Siddal. However, the predella panels allude to Dante’s curious dream that opens the *Vita Nuova*, in which Amor (Love) commands Beatrice to eat Dante’s burning heart. Rossetti transformed this imagery into an allegorical figure, *La Donna della Fiamma* (1870, Manchester), one of his most beautiful and mystical images of Janey. Her uplifted right hand holds a blazing flame from which a tiny winged figure of Eros rises. Here Janey confronts the command ‘to eat that thing which flamed in his hand’. In Dante’s sonnet she obeys but in Rossetti’s imagery she appears poised on the brink, an enigmatic and ambiguous figure, analogous to a Sybil or an oracle that holds the fate of the two lovers; Marsh suggests this work relates to his ‘sudden passion’ for Janey. It dates to 1870, a time when Rossetti experimented with many compositions that cast Janey in mythological and symbolic roles. As a source of inspiration, his need for her, as model and muse, never waned. Her response to his last gift betrays a range of emotions; was she still ‘worthy’ of such a present?

**Reuniting Janey’s collection**
This careful mapping of Rossetti’s gifts to Janey reveals a pattern of gift-giving often related to specific projects or to periods when they were most intimate. The inception of their relationship was marked with a gift; the drawing dated October 1857, still at the Manor, commemorates her earliest sitting to the artist. Two drawings relate to Rossetti’s altarpiece *The Seed of David*, Llandaff Cathedral (1858-64) for which Janey sat for the Virgin. It was drawn around Christmas 1860, when Janey was within one month of giving birth to her first daughter, Jenny. Alongside these three drawings, cited in the 1926 Oxford Memorandum, May probably deemed the ‘couch’ drawing dated 12 August 1870 also ‘particularly valuable as portraiture’ in its ‘freedom from type-exaggeration’. Janey appears to have possessed at least five ‘couch’ drawings. These intimate studies relate to an intense period in their relationship; several are inscribed ‘Scalands’, where Janey and Rossetti were able to enjoy a few weeks of seclusion.

Several works dispersed at the Kelmscott sale relate to Rossetti’s sojourn at the Manor; the sketch for *Bower Meadow* probably dates to their first summer together, while the ink drawings of *La Ghirlandata*, the *Roman Widow* and *Proserpine* all date to 1873. These modest ‘replicas’ were perhaps gifted to Janey in recognition of her faithfulness and his gratitude. However, alongside his Christmas present to Janey, Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, they also suggest his state of mind at the time. Was he sending her a message? The pen and ink *Proserpina* looked back to happier times, being a replica of the chalk version dated 1871. Rossetti never gave this up; it was still in his studio at his death. Given the opportunity to select three works from
Rossetti’s estate, Janey chose this chalk version of Proserpine. She also chose Reverie (1868) and Perlascura (1871); Rossetti sent her the autotype of Perlascura in 1878. Rossetti also stipulated in his will that Janey be granted the Day Dream or Monna Primavera, which hung over the mantelpiece in his studio: this was the last work for which Janey modelled. Writing to her on 18 July 1880, Rossetti commented: ‘I feel as if I did not get nearly enough of you last visit […]. Won’t you come again[?]’.  

During the late 1870s Janey was sent a flurry of works that may be seen as the artist’s final attempt to express his ‘deep regard’ for her. These include autotypes of Perlascura and Silence, both sent in 1878, and La Donna Della Finestra or Lady of the Window, sent the following year. Perlascura Twelve Coins for One Queen, twelve autotypes accompanied by a sonnet, was conceived in August 1878 as the ultimate homage to his muse. Whether Janey was the ‘Lady of Pity’, La Pia de’ Tolomei, Pandora, Proserpine, Mariana, Astarte Syriaca or Mnemosyne, she was central to his work; his need for her, as model and muse, never waned. In a letter dated 19 November 1880, Rossetti made it clear that the model for ‘True Woman: Herself’ (1880) was Janey:

How strange a thing to be what Man can know
But as a sacred secret! Heaven’s own screen
Hides her soul’s purest depth and loveliest glow […].  

Despite the passage of time, Rossetti declared that the ‘deep-seated basis of feeling’ was as ‘fresh and unchanged in me towards you as ever, though all else is withered and gone’; if only ‘life and fate had willed to link us together’. For her part Janey enjoyed receiving Rossetti’s sonnets and poems, reassuring him: ‘you must feel sure how welcome your work always is to me – there is little pleasure left one in this world’. Although Janey claimed, in a letter to Crom Price dated 28 April 1882, that she had ‘mourned him [Rossetti] as dead 6 or 7 years ago, when I gave up seeing much of him owing to chloral drinking’, their relationship continued until his death. 

The works gifted to Janey can be read as carrying a personal significance for both parties; they are a complex mix of allegory and private associations. It is this mix of the personal and the abstract that has ensured our lasting fascination with ‘Rossetti’s obsession’.

Kelmscott Manor has itself become emblematic of the intertwined lives of Janey, Rossetti and Morris. It holds a unique position, being a repository of works of art and memorabilia relating to all three protagonists. Referring to the 1934 Morris Memorial exhibition, held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Robertson observed ‘it is merely a present from Kelmscott’:
But if you do not know the Kelmscott treasures, there are many things worth seeing, certainly not among the least being a series of photographs of the Lovely Lady and many Rossetti drawings of her. In fact it is more an exhibition of Mrs Morris than of Morris.84

Visiting Kelmscott in June 1932, Robertson was delighted to ‘find everything there quite unchanged’:

Rossetti and Morris might have been out for a walk and one expected them to return at any minute […] Morris’ books and manuscripts are all about, and old boxes are full of Rossetti’s comic drawings and caricatures – gloriously funny, not always beautiful.85

However, writing just after the Kelmscott sale, Robertson lamented:

Did you hear of the fall of lovely Kelmscott? […] The sale seems to have been a clean sweep, even including Mrs Morris’s old clothes, and was conducted in the village hall, like a jumble […] the fate of Kelmscott is heartbreaking. I should have thought that La Lobb might have done something to avert it but she merely goes and dies – a thing that anybody can do and which most people seem to be doing. Oh well, I suppose the world of today does not deserve to have so beautiful a thing on its unpleasant surface, so it has been taken away.86

Despite the losses of the 1939 sale, thankfully Kelmscott has not been entirely ‘taken away’.

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NOTES
1. The residue of May’s estate passed to her companion Miss Mary Vivian Lobb, who was granted a life-interest in the Manor. Further information about Miss Lobb was presented by Simon Evans in a public lecture, ‘Unravelling Miss Lobb’, delivered at Kelmscott Memorial Hall on 26 September 2015. See also Simon Evans, ‘The farmer, the artist, the Princess and the Tsar’, The National Museum of Wales, available online: <www.llgc.org.uk/blog/201405> [last accessed 24 March 2019].

Under the terms of Miss Lobb’s will, her property was to be sold to create a Trust Fund for her brother George Leopold Vivian Lobb. Upon his death, the income from the Trust Fund was to be paid to her sister Arabella Vivian Lobb during her life. Upon her death Doctor Rhys Morgan of St. John’s House, Lechlade, Gloucestershire was to be the recipient.
Her estate was valued at £3495 7/6. Copy of Miss Lobb’s will, Kelmscott Manor archives. Upon Miss Lobb’s death in March 1939, the property and ‘furniture, chattels and effects’ designated in May’s Memorandum passed to Oxford University. Consequently the residual contents of the Manor came under the hammer, being sold by local auctioneers Hobbs and Chambers on 19 and 20 July 1939.


4. May’s will and memorandum, dated 10 July 1929, is reproduced in A.R. Dufty, ‘William Morris and the Kelmscott Estate’, The Antiquaries Journal, 43: 1 (March 1963), 97-115 (110-15). A copy of the 1926 Memorandum, including all May’s bequests, is at Kelmscott Manor; it is not paginated. Acceptance of the bequest was confirmed by a letter dated 16 March 1926 from J. Wells, Vice Chancellor, to May Morris, attached to the will.

Further information can be gleaned from the Inventory and Valuation of the furnishing contents of the residence, oil paintings, books, manuscripts, silver, plate, jewellery, personal and miscellaneous effects at Kelmscott Manor, near Lechlade, Gloucestershire, the property of the late Miss Mary Morris, taken and made between October 31st and December 8th 1938, by W.N. Chambers, chartered surveyor of the firm of Hobbs & Chambers, Valuers & etc. of Faringdon, Berks and Cirencester, Glos for the information of the trustees and for probate purposes, held at the William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow. (Afterwards Hobbs and Chambers, Inventory and Valuation, Walthamstow). The Inventory and Valuation conforms to the sections stipulated in May’s will, dealing in turn with specific bequests, those items set aside to stay at the Manor and the ‘residue’. Fortuitously the inventory of the ‘residue’ itemises the contents room by room.

May’s attitude to Rossetti’s presence at the Manor appears ambivalent. The Memorandum includes several items that had belonged to him while in residence. As these were eventually given to her mother she may have viewed them as simply ‘fixtures and fitting’. They include, located by room: Tapestry Room: Satin wood Sheraton table (DGR’s writing table); William Morris’ Room: Oval Mirror (DGR), One pair small ‘Webb’ candlesticks (DGR); Cheese Room: DGR design for ‘Pomegranate and Lily’ cushion in Panelled room; Staircase: Large Candelabra gilt, two pictures of scenes in a city, a small portrait of a gentleman, a Saint’s death, Parliament clock by Godfrey Poy; Books: Keats inscribed DGR 1859, Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy containing pen and ink drawing of Mrs Morris by DGR, Vita Nuova 1829 inscribed DGR to JM.

The ‘picture by Brueghel (the younger) Tulip Garden’, listed in the Tapestry room is known to have been Rossetti’s. For more on Rossetti’s Old Master paintings, see Anne Anderson, “The Pre-Raphaelite Lovejoy: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Charles Augustus Howell, the eponymous “dodgy dealer””, The Review of the Pre-Raphaelite Society, 28: 1 (Spring 2010), 21-29. See also Julia Dudkiewicz, ‘Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Collection of Old Masters at Kelmscott Manor’, The British Art Journal, 26: 2 (2015), 89-100.

5. Hobbs and Chambers, Inventory and Valuation, pp. 31-32. May, rather than her mother, is now thought to be the subject of an oil sketch by Edward Burne-Jones sold as Lot 321 ‘Rossetti (after) Head of Mrs Morris, oil sketch’ (£3 15/-). This work, dating to the 1880s, was donated to the Manor by John Bryson.

6. Ibid., p. 32. By comparison very few works were located in her sister’s room, just two framed photographs of William Morris and an engraving of Jane Morris (p. 36).

8. MFA, Boston: Accession number 58.735.


10. The large cane Regency couch from ‘Queen Square with embroidered fittings’ has been relocated to Burlington House, London.


13. Surtees, I, p. 129, no. 229B.


18. The study for this figure, dated 1871-72, was sold; Fine Victorian Pictures, Drawings and Watercolours, Christie’s, 11 June 1993.


25. Surtees dates no. 233 R 1 to 1874. It is signed and dated on the bottom left hand corner 1873; this date is confirmed in the Ashmolean register.


27. Ibid., p. 450.

28. Ibid., p. 477. Rossetti also probably used a sequence of photographs now in the National Portrait Gallery; information kindly supplied by Jan Marsh.

29. Fredeman, VI, p. 258


31. Surtees, I, p. 135, no. 236A.


33. Ibid., p.181.

34. Ibid., p. 209.
36. Fredeman, VI, p. 83.
37. Ibid., p. 239.
38. Ibid., p. 11.
40. *ibid.*, p. 627. A ‘local parson’, alarmed by the arrival of two models, was provoked to write a warning letter ‘on the subject of the nude’; it was not right that May had stayed on unchaperoned ‘to be painted’. See Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, p. 482.
41. *ibid*.
42. *ibid*.
44. *ibid.*, p. 276.
47. *ibid*. The painting would be purchased by Thomas Brocklebank of Chester.
49. *ibid.*, p. 60.
50. Marillier, p. 175.
53. For a full discussion regarding Rossetti’s abrupt departure, see Roger C. Lewis, ‘Rossetti’s Relations with the Morrises 1868-75’, Appendix 1, in Fredeman, VI, pp. 583-87.
56. Fredeman, VIII, p. 112.
58. Surtees, I, p. 143, no. 244G. Mrs. William Morris; May Morris; Kelmscott Manor sale 1939 (Lot 309); Grenville L. Winthrop Bequest (1943); Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard University.
64. Mrs. William Morris; May Morris; Kelmscott Manor sale 1939 (Lot 308); Grenville L. Winthrop Bequest (1943); Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard University. The Dante drawings were studies for Dante’s *Dream: Predella 1 and 2* (Surtees, I, pp. 46-47, no. 81 R 2A and no. 82 R 2B) for Dante’s *Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice* (1880, Dundee Museum) commissioned by William Graham.
(Surtees, I, p. 46, no. 81 R 2).

66. Ibid., pp. 297-98. He also relied on the services of Marie Stillman. With his ‘mounting paranoia’, Rossetti preferred to use sitters drawn from his intimate circle. See Life, ‘Monna Innominata’, p. 613.
67. Fredeman, VIII, p. 298.
68. Ibid., p. 297.
70. Fredeman, VIII, p. 294.
73. Bryson and Troxell, p. 108.
77. At Rossetti’s Memorial exhibition held at Burlington House in 1883 Morris is named as lending Portrait of Mrs Morris (59), Head of Miss Jane Morris (62) and Head of Miss May Morris (63) while Mrs. William Morris is given as lending The Day Dream (76) and Proserpina (81). See Pictures, Drawings, Designs and Studies by the Late Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Burlington Fine Arts Club, London, 1883 (London: Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1883).
78. Fredeman, IX, p. 232. The oil version, commissioned by Constantine Ionides, was completed in September 1880.
79. Ibid., p. 316.
80. Ibid., p. 311; Rossetti, ‘True Woman Herself’, in Ballads and Sonnets, p. 218. The ‘True Woman’ trio of sonnets were published in the House of Life (1870-1881).
81. Fredeman, IX, p. 317.
83. Ibid., p.122.
84. Preston, p. 306.
85. Ibid., p. 272. These caricatures, which include Rupes Topseiana (1874), The Ms at Ems (1869) and The Bard and the Petty Tradesman (1868) were not ‘lost’ at the sale; they were deposited in the British Museum through May’s literary executor, Robert Steele.
86. Ibid., p. 426.
Missing Links: *Beowulf*, *Grettis saga* and the Late Romances of William Morris

Thomas Spray

For over a century, scholarly theories have surrounded the relationship between the Old English poem *Beowulf* and the Old Norse *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*. The hypotheses connecting these two works still find favour with a number of modern scholars, and have become part of an established framework for critical discussion of the literature of both languages.1 ‘No one now disputes’, announced Professor G. Smithers of Durham University in his inaugural lecture in May of 1961, ‘that the first part of *Beowulf* is ultimately identical with a story told about one or another hero in several Old Norse sagas’.2 Smithers’s argument highlighted the extent to which two national literary traditions could be productively aligned. *Grettla*’s recent translators also connect its narrative with that of *Beowulf*, although they have generally adopted a more cautious tone.3 Whether or not one subscribes to the theory, it provides an arresting idea of late-Victorian scholarship. It also highlights the hopes and opinions of Britain’s Norse philologists and translators, and William Morris was among the most prominent of these.

The purpose of this article is not to contribute to the substantial extant body of scholarship on the correspondences between Old Norse and Old English. Rather, it is to examine this particular theory in terms of its academic origins, implications for Victorian concepts of the nation and influence on late nineteenth-century medievalism – namely that of William Morris. This article will look at both the personal correspondence of Eiríkr Magnússon and Morris, and their later works, and will argue that the concept of northern society as demonstrated in their translations of Old Norse sagas and Morris’s later works of fiction was heavily influenced by the notions of Anglo-Icelandic cultural interaction from the *Beowulf-Grettla* hypotheses. Specifically, the paper will argue that Morris’s late romance *The Wood Beyond the World* can be read as a double ‘missing link’: between Eiríkr’s political writings and Morris’s fantasy, and between Morris’s own work on *Grettla* and *Beowulf*.
Credit for the origin of the *Beowulf-Grettla* theory is generally given to the Oxford-based Icelander Guðbrandur Vigfússon, who noted the connection in the introduction to his 1878 *Sturlunga saga* edition. Guðbrandur was the first to compare the Sandhaugar episode from *Grettla* with events in *Beowulf*, and was first to outline the *hapax legomena* argument – the similarity between the sole surviving instances of the Old English word *hæft-mēce* (hilted sword) and the Old Norse *hefti-sax*. Guðbrandur’s analysis contained two pertinent points: firstly, that *Grettis saga* was based on an historical narrative of the real-life outlaw Grettir; and secondly, that the ‘[m]ythical portion (chaps. 32-36, 64-67)’ of the saga was ‘most interesting to us as containing a late version of the famous Beowulf Legend’.4 Guðbrandur claimed to have noticed this parallel ‘in the spring of 1873, when he first read *Beowulf* in the original’, and argued that the link demonstrated a clear cultural influence: ‘[t]he old legend shot forth from its ancient Scandinavian home in two branches, one to England, where it was turned into an epic, and one to Iceland, where it was domesticated and embodied in a popular Saga, tacked to the name of an outlaw and hero’.5 As a final point of interest, Guðbrandur highlighted that in each text ‘one word still remains as a memorial of its origin, viz. in the English epic *heft-mēce* and in the Icelandic saga *hefti-sax*, both occurring in the same place of the legend, and both ἅπαξ λεγόμενα in their respective literatures’.6 The philological evidence suggested common roots: ‘Gretti’s fight with Glam, and afterwards with the troll-wife and the monster below the waterfall, is thus the Icelandic version of the Gothic hero’s struggle with Grendel and his witch-mother’.7 Contemporary scholars were content to take Guðbrandur on his word regarding the novelty of his discovery, and modern scholars have followed suit. Nineteenth-century philologists cited the *Sturlunga saga* footnote as a revolutionary concept in the reception of Old Norse and Old English literature.8 Such writers as Hugo Gering (1880) and C. S. Smith (1881) rushed to support it.

Comparison of the two texts quickly became a popular framework for criticism.9 In 1880, Frederick Metcalfe posited that the Old Norse name ‘Glámr’ had etymological links to the Scottish word ‘glamour’, evidence that the tale was ‘common to Iceland and our neighbours beyond the Tweed’.10 Elizabeth Jane Oswald, writing of her third trip to Iceland in 1879, mentioned the link between *Beowulf* and *Grettla* and suggested a lost Old Norse original which inspired both tales. ‘Grettir the Strong was an historical character’, Oswald wrote, ‘but his history is decorated by some legends which were a sort of common property in the north’.11 The terminology implied that the *Íslendingasögur* comprised a shared corpus, and that Britain had a substantial stake. As Magnús Fjalldal notes, while the reasons behind Victorians’ support for Guðbrandur’s theory varied widely, a common factor was the use of philological data to demonstrate a biological relationship between Britain and
Iceland. This ‘genetic’ argument existed in a number of different manifestations. There was the ‘Common Origin’ theory, the model favoured by Guðbrandur, which suggested that there had been a common shared source narrative on which both texts were based. Alternatively, one could opt for the ‘English Hypothesis’, which supported the notion that Grettis saga had its roots in an earlier Old English work. According to this theory, Beowulf, or possibly an older version of that tale, made its way to Iceland where it influenced the story of Grettir.

A peculiar aspect of Guðbrandur’s 1878 announcement was the insistence that he had already noted the connection five years previous to publication, surely something of a moot point considering his was the first (publicly) published account of the theory. This insistence becomes even more intriguing when one considers that Eiríkr Magnússon, the Cambridge-based arch-rival to Guðbrandur, and William Morris’s long-term friend and co-translator, acknowledged the connection between the texts in a lecture entitled ‘On Early Points of Contact, Chiefly Literary, Between Britain & Iceland’, the notes to which are now held at the National University of Iceland, and which was potentially given as early as 1875 following the devastating eruption of Askja.

In this lecture, Eiríkr provided a brief overview of the initial settlement of Iceland followed by the hypothesis that the chief literary treasures of the Scandinavian-influenced regions of Anglo-Saxon England made their way to Iceland and developed into the current models of the Icelandic sagas: ‘[n]ow it is a fact frequently forgotten or overlooked that the most important, the wealthiest & most civilised part of the settlers of Iceland came from Great Britain. […] Nearly all the settlers of the west of Iceland & a large portion of those of the North came from North Britain.’ Furthermore, these men, ‘the noblest by birth & mightiest by position’, were Christians and thus knew ‘refined methods of life’. The Anglo-Saxon church thus provided a civilising aspect to the pioneering settlers of northern Iceland, and many other settlers around the country. Eiríkr named Ketill Flatnose as one such forefather who moved from Norway to Scotland, was baptised, and whose children then settled in Iceland:

It so happened, that of the mighty race of Ketil Flatnose Christian representatives had settled from the beginning, one or more, in each quarter of the land. Queen Aud the deep-minded & her nephew Örlyg in the West, Helgi the lean in the North, Ketil the foolish in the East, & Helgi bjölan in the South. The descendants of these settlers had multiplied considerably by the time Christianity was adopted as a state religion in the country AD 1000, & formed in each quarter a very influential family combination.
British Christianity, in Eiríkr’s view, thus became a ‘superior stamp of civilisation’, a ‘moral heirloom’ of Ketil’s descendants.18

Into this individual contextual understanding, Eiríkr introduced the topic which would intrigue scholars up to the present day: ‘an unsolved problem of mystery in Icelandic literature’, namely the ‘palpable resemblance between the most striking incidents in the poem of Beowulf & the Saga of Grettir’.19 Eiríkr believed that the answer to this question was that the Old English Beowulf narrative had existed in Iceland from the end of the ninth century. This was not a gradual transferral of cultural aspects; rather ‘the story of Beowulf’s great deeds migrated, in the character of tradition, directly from the north of England to the north of Iceland’.20 Eiríkr compared numerous passages of the two texts, and concluded that Grettis saga was indisputably dependent on Beowulf: ‘[c]an it be shown on the evidence of historic probability that the story of Beowulf migrated in a natural manner from England to Iceland & there was woven into the life of Grettir? It can.’21

Eiríkr pointed to Auðunn Skökull, Grettir’s great-grandfather via his father Ásmundr and grandfather Þorgrímr, as the most likely candidate for bringing the text northwards, and provided his audience with a family tree which included King Olaf the Holy, Ragnar Lodbrok, and the entire Hanoverian dynasty.22 The timeline thus joined Old English and Old Norse literature, the founding fathers of the Icelandic Settlement period and the major Royal Houses of Northern Europe. With the tale definitively charted from Northumbria to the northern coasts of Iceland, Eiríkr’s lecture ended on a mystery of his own: ‘I will wind up by a last instance, which is, perhaps, the most remarkable of all, but, unfortunately as fatal to the destinies of Iceland, as it is importantly illustrative of the connexions between the two countries’.23 There, dramatically (and frustratingly), Eiríkr’s account broke off in both drafts. We will potentially never know what Eiríkr’s terminal argument was, nor when, where, or even if the lecture was actually delivered.24

The uncertain dating of these papers, and the fact that there is only Guðbrandur’s word for the fact that he thought of the theory five years previous to publishing it, leaves an intriguing theoretical question: who came up with the theory first?25 It is entirely plausible that both scholars could have stumbled upon the textual similarities at roughly the same time. While they were not on amicable terms with one another, in various colleagues they had mutual friends who could easily have passed on information.26 This then begs the further question, regardless of who came up with the idea first: how early in Victorian reception literature should one look for theoretical links between Grettis saga and Beowulf? Were they already in Eiríkr’s mind when he and Morris began their 1869 translation?

If Eiríkr Magnússon’s theories on Grettla were known during the 1870s there is
little to no reference to them. Hugo Gering, writing in 1880, noted how astounding it was that Eiríkr and Morris had not noticed the connection in their 1869 translation: ‘[d]ass der Zusammenhang zwischen dem Beowulf und der Grettla nicht schon früher aufgedeckt ist, ist sehr wunderbar’ (‘[t]hat the connection between Beowulf and Grettla was not discovered earlier is very extraordinary’). 27 Gering effectively blamed Morris and Eiríkr for not picking up on the issue. Despite a common acceptance of Eiríkr’s familiarity with this theory in modern scholarship, little has been done to investigate the possible ramifications regarding his later work on Old Norse literature or that of his colleague Morris. Considering Morris’s enthusiastic involvement in all things Icelandic, one would expect him to exhibit an equal involvement in the academic discussion surrounding the Beowulf-Grettla theories, particularly since he produced translations of both texts. Yet nowhere in the collections of Morris’s extant letters, diaries and literary works does one find the two texts mentioned side by side.

This absence cannot be ascribed to a lack of knowledge. From the autumn of 1868, Morris complemented his keen study of northern literary culture with in-depth personal tutorials in the language and literature of Old Norse. ‘At last’, wrote May Morris, ‘he comes into touch with the life of the North which hitherto he had had to interpret for himself from somewhat languid or old-fashioned recensions’. 28 The first translation to be published from these sessions, ‘Gunnlaug Wormtongue’, completed in partnership with Eiríkr, appeared as early as January 1869 in the Fortnightly Review. In April of the same year, the pair published The Story of Grettir the Strong, followed in June by the third part of Morris’s The Earthly Paradise, which contained the poem ‘The Lovers of Gudrun’ – based on the story of Laxdæla saga. Of these works, The Grettis saga translation was notable for being the first of the pair’s translations to be published in book format, as well as the first full translation of the saga into English. Morris and Eiríkr continued to collaborate on Old Norse projects of a pedagogical significance for Victorian readers up until the former’s death, yet Morris was also working on the tales of Beowulf and Grettir in some capacity for the majority of his career as a writer. In 1868 (presumably December) Morris wrote to a student in Marburg on his artistic impressions of medieval literature and his current writing projects:

I may say that I am fairly steeped in medievalism generally; but the Icelandic Sagas, or our own Border Ballads, and Froissart […] have had as much influence over me as (or more than) anything else. I have translated a great deal from the Icelandic, a little from old French; and of late have translated Beowulf, for which I have a very great admiration. 29
Beowulf and the Íslendingasögur thus formed two parts of Morris’s extensive pool of source material, and he was engaged in translating both the Old English and Old Norse from the start of his literary career.

Nor can we ascribe the absence to a lack of interest. In Morris’s poem ‘To the Muse of the North’, originally intended as a preface to the Saga of Grettir the Strong, one senses the intense personal engagement of the British poet with his Icelandic subject matter. Although eventually discarded in favour of a shorter poem, it excellently captures Morris’s attachment to Old Norse literature at this time of his life. The language is both tragic and touching; Morris asks the northern spirit to ‘wrap me in the grief of long ago’, and addresses her as mother, lover and sister in one being. This was literature in which high tragedy was inseparable from familial kinship. The bonds of Anglo-Icelandic familiarity were further stressed in the preface, where Morris and Eiríkr introduced their translation as ‘an old story founded on facts, full of dramatic interest, and setting before people’s eyes pictures of the life and manners of an interesting race of men near to ourselves’. While their introductory material was brief (the pair were more concerned with getting their translations into publication than producing scholarly essays as introductory material) Morris would later comment further on the saga in his 1887 lecture on ‘The Early Literature of the North – Iceland’. He described the Icelanders as the ‘representatives, a little mingled with Irish blood, of the Gothic family of the great Germanic race’ and spoke of the Íslendingasögur as being the fossil record of this familial bond. The land itself was to Morris ‘a Holy Land’ and its people ‘cognate to our own dominant race’. Grettis saga, Morris explained, was key to understanding this dynamic as it was a classic example of the spirit of the Icelanders themselves – an ‘intensely Icelandic’ work, which alongside Njáls saga, formed the core of a body of Britain’s Northern antiquity. The ideological prerequisites for picturing the two narratives as a shared heritage were in Morris’s writings.

It seems even less likely that Eiríkr simply did not share his theories with Morris. Across his wide-ranging and often eccentric body of scholarship on the Old Norse sagas, Eiríkr Magnússon steered attention towards Icelandic literature – whether through public lectures or private tutorials – as part of a wider effort to marry Victorian predilections with the Íslendingasögur and other works of his own nation. If taking Morris under his wing was initially an unplanned aspect of this long-term project, Eiríkr quickly realised that through the Englishman’s talents (and fame) translations such as Grettir the Strong would reach a far wider readership. With Morris’s help, Eiríkr imagined that the cultural, familial and ultimately national links demonstrated by Grettla’s journey from the north of England to the shores of Iceland could be revitalised. Beowulf and Grettir could be studied as long-lost siblings, and
Britain’s improved public interest in Iceland could open the door for the latter’s separation from Danish sovereignty. 

Indeed, Morris’s and Eiríkr’s later works on Old Norse displayed an increasing interest in possible ties between the two nations which suggests an unacknowledged awareness of Eiríkr’s ‘English Hypothesis’. Their ambitious multi-volume ‘Saga Library’ was introduced to British readers as an ancestral treasure chest. In the introduction to the first volume, the pair set out their theoretical approach in terms of viewing the Icelanders as part of a great ‘Gothic branch of the Teutonic race’, and accordingly the imputed genetic links between Iceland and Britain. The misunderstood Icelanders, the co-translators wrote, were key to an understanding of the constitution of northern Europe:

Although Iceland is a barren northern island, of savagely wild, though to the eye that sees, beautiful scenery, the inhabitants of it neither are nor were savages cut off from the spirit and energy of the great progressive races. They are, rather, a specially intellectual family of one of the most active of those races, to whom fate, which has deprived them of so much, has allotted the honourable task of preserving the record of the thoughts, the aspirations, and the imaginations of their earliest ancestors.

Morris and Eiríkr proceeded to explicitly link the literature and the lineage of Iceland with those of Britain. The introduction approached the subject of saga translation with the view held in many of Morris’s and Eiríkr’s other works, that the British poet and Icelandic scholar shared a common past, repeatedly referring to ‘our race’. The sagas, they argued, were Britain’s own literature in a different tongue.

Even more strikingly, this concept of a shared Anglo-Icelandic heritage found expression in many of Morris’s later romances, which employed imagery of imagined communities composed of shared Norse and Anglo-Saxon elements. ‘In The House of the Wolfings and in The Roots of the Mountains’, May Morris writes, ‘my father seems to have got back to the atmosphere of the Sagas’. Yet the texts in question are describing intermingled societies, where Old Norse atmosphere clothes more familiar terrain. Thus the character of Thiodolf (an English rendition of Old Norse Bjōð-ulfr – ‘folk/nation-wolf’) of the former text embodies many heroic traits of both literatures. Thiodolf is a formidable and resolute protector of the land. Leading a band of Gothic warriors against the encroaching Roman armies, he elicits fear in his enemies and loyalty in his allies. Thiodolf refers to the Roman forces as ‘aliens’ in his battle speeches and summons up reserves of courage in the face of defeat in a manner particularly reminiscent of the Old English poem ‘The Battle of Malden’; ‘[…] and
lo the company of the Markmen standing stoutly together, though sorely minished; and sure it was that they had not fled or been scattered, but were ready to fall one over another in one band.43

Along with the more gothic-derived community depicted in The Roots of the Mountains, the Wolfings and their neighbouring tribes complemented a vision of Morris’s later Anglo-Scandinavian conceptions of ‘nation’ and ‘folk’.44 These late romances arguably demonstrate Morris’s continuing interest in the shared cultural elements of the Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians; here he could inventively depict an alternative European pre-history in which the tenets of Old Norse philology dictated the plot. Tom Shippey has noted the ominous quality to Morris’s biologically incompatible ethnic communities in these later romances.45 Had Eiríkr written poetry, one might have read of similar pre-histories of the European nations from an Icelandic perspective. The works surrounding Morris’s Beowulf translation, alongside his lectures on the international significance of the Íslendingasögur, thus constitute a peculiar combination of ideas of ethnic race-division, anti-nationalist societies and northern escapism which together suggest knowledge of Eiríkr’s hypothesis.

Perhaps the clearest argument for Morris’s knowledge of Eiríkr’s ‘English Hypothesis’ connecting Grettis saga and the Old English Beowulf and its influence on his thought from this period comes from a prose romance on which Morris was working at the same time as his 1895 translation. The Wood Beyond the World was a late fantasy begun by Morris in 1892 and published in 1894; of all Morris’s later works it stands out for its unexpectedly sinister tone, its peculiar mixture of northern and southern imagery, and its wealth of potential readings.46 The tale tells of a young man who finds himself married to an unfaithful wife and travels abroad to seek solace. After seeing a chilling trio of figures who appear to vanish into thin air, he begins a hazardous journey which leads him to a fantastical mansion in a wooded valley. Here he falls in love with a serving maiden and eventually escapes with her from her sinister and magical mistress. Perhaps the most unnerving feature of this altogether rather disturbing work is the figure of the mistress’s servant – a savage dwarf-like creature who appears to possess traits of both Beowulf’s and Grettir’s enemies.47

Much overlooked by Morris’s early biographers, and dismissed as a simplistic socialist allegory by contemporary reviewers, this late romance nonetheless offers a wealth of saga parallels which would seem to imply that Morris was very much thinking about his earlier efforts in Old Norse translation at the start of the 1890s.48 Several reviewers have courted such a contextual reading – Faulkner remarks that the work’s ‘diction is remarkable for the purity of its Old English emphasis’, as has also been said of Morris’s saga translations, while scholars such as Phillippa Bennett have persuasively championed the late romances as crucial to any understanding of
Morris’s entire artistic process – but the reception from Morris’s early critics was largely negative. A glance at the plot reveals numerous elements potentially derived from Morris’s ongoing work on both Old Norse and Old English literature. While watching a ship being loaded in the harbour, one bearing a banner of a ‘grim wolf ramping up against a maiden’, the protagonist Walter is struck by the apparition of three bizarre figures, the foremost being the most unworldly: ‘[t]hese were three; first came a dwarf, dark-brown of hue and hideous, with long arms and ears exceedingly great and dog-teeth that stuck out like the fangs of a wild beast. He was clad in a rich coat of yellow silk, and bare in his hand a crooked bow, and was girt with a broad sax.’ Whether the ‘sax’ as a weapon had merely struck Morris’s fancy from his work on *Grettis saga* or *Beowulf*, or whether he was also aware of the wider implications of the word for Guðbrandur’s hypothesis, the dwarf in *The Wood Beyond the World* carried one. Walter sees the three mysterious apparitions again, apparently coming from his father’s lodgings, and once more on hearing of the violent death of his father at the hands of his ex-wife’s kinsmen – a passage bearing more than a passing resemblance to saga-style blood feud. In the latter case the apparition of the three figures halts Walter in the midst of his mourning, and interrupts his thoughts of vengeance:

But Walter’s visage from wrathful red had become pale, and he pointed up street, and cried out:

Look! dost thou see?  
See what, master? quod Arnold:  
What! here cometh an ape in gay raiment; belike the beast of some jongleur.  
Nay, by God’s wounds! ’tis a man, though he be exceeding mis-shapen like a very devil.

The devilish nature of the dwarf is further confirmed by the realisation that only Walter and his companion are aware of the figures; the being is both corporeal and ghostly.

With his thoughts shaken off vengeance, Walter sets sail for no particular heading whatsoever and ends up in a distant land, not entirely unrecognisable as a literary version of the North:

When it was broad daylight, they opened a land, a long shore of rocks and mountains, and nought else could they see at first. Nevertheless as day wore and they drew nigher, first they saw the mountains fall away from the sea, and were behind the long wall of a sheer cliff; and coming nigher yet, they beheld
a green plain going up after a little in green bents and slopes to the feet of the said cliff-wall.\textsuperscript{53}

The landscape could conceivably be compared to the land first seen by Victorian travellers coming by steamer to Iceland. Approaching the southern coastline, they would at first be presented by fearsome cliffs off the south-east, before heading westward past Vík and the Vestmannæyar where the mountains would appear to fall back somewhat, revealing the broad slopes and plains inhabited by the characters of \textit{Njáls saga}. Morris’s own accounts follow this self-same pattern of discovery. In a letter written from Reykjavik in 1871, Morris commented on the strange feeling of sailing along Iceland’s coastline, and watching ‘the end of the world rising out of the sea’.\textsuperscript{54} Mackail notes that Morris’s diary entry for 29 July 1871 demonstrates the unsettling effect that the landscape of northern Iceland had on him, writing that it ‘impressed Morris’s imagination with a sense of terror of the land which never quite left him, and which reappears vividly in his descriptions of the mountain journeys in \textit{The Glittering Plain} and \textit{The Well at the World’s End}.\textsuperscript{55} To these one can usefully add \textit{The Wood Beyond the World}.

Walter and his shipmates meet the land’s sole human inhabitant, an old man who tells them of the race of Bears who live over the cliff-wall. According to the old man these people are ‘bears only in name; they be a nation of half wild men’.\textsuperscript{56} Many of the features of this race appear to be taken from Victorian northern antiquity: the importance of the democratic assembly ring (or ‘Doom-ring’) to which all are summoned for judgement; the believed common nature of cannibalism in the Old North; and notions of the gullibility of Old Norse faith. Despite severe warnings from the old man, Walter is keen to explore the lands beyond the cliff wall. He discovers a gap in the cliff – ‘a downright shard’ in the middle of ‘that northern-looking bight’ – and journeys through it into a secret valley on the other side.\textsuperscript{57}

Filled with typical northern fauna – the hare, the fox, the crow, the hawk – the valley is reminiscent of that discovered by Grettir during his period of outlawry and sought by numerous Victorian travellers in Morris’s own lifetime. It is also home to the previously met dwarf:

[Walter] turned around towards the noise, his knees shook and he trembled: this way and that he looked, and then gave a great cry and tumbled down in a swoon; for close before him, at his very feet, was the dwarf whose image he had seen before, clad in his yellow coat, and grinning up at him from his hideous hairy countenance.\textsuperscript{58}
Walter faints, and wakes to find the dwarf sitting by him, and questioning him on his intentions—a scene which when taken with the dwarf’s choice of weaponry seems to parallel Beowulf’s encounter with Grendel’s mother: ‘Then she sat on the hall-guest and tugged out her sax,/ The broad and brown edged, to wreak her son,/ Her offspring her own’. There is a disturbing breach of personal space in both episodes. For the time being, Morris’s villain merely provides Walter with food, but remarks that he detests the bread of the ‘aliens’ and will only consume raw flesh and uncooked food. The creature himself is indicative of the land he was forged in—a product of guile and ‘perilous for anyone that love the [sic] aught of good’.

Walter is later told by the Lady—the ruler of the hidden woodland, who appears to have sinister designs on the protagonist—that the creature is the Dwarf-King, and throughout the tale it is unclear whether there is one or a multitude of creatures following in his shadow. The dwarf, or one like it, continually appears at moments when Walter suspects that all is not as it seems, or conversely the appearance highlights a subterfuge on the part of the Lady. The imagery connected with the dwarf, particularly the yellow hue and creeping posture, is echoed in the image of the lion (a construct of the Lady’s sorcery) which Walter is called upon to defeat: ‘a great yellow creature crouching flat to the earth and slowly drawing nigher’. The defeat of this beast and the subsequent disappearance of the corpse strengthen Walter’s reservations about the substance of the woodland realm: ‘this is a land of mere lies’ he comments to himself, with ‘nought real and alive therein save me’.

Morris’s dwarf was not an entirely original creation. Although clearly separated in both appearance and demeanour from the similarly villainous Regin of Morris’s Sigurd the Volsung, the dwarf had literary predecessors both within and without Morris’s own artistic corpus. The concept of a dwarfish tormentor which appears at times of uncertainty Morris took from De La Motte Fouqué’s 1814 novel Sintram and His Companions. Here the protagonist is hounded by a mental construction, a being of his own imagining which appears to embody the very worst aspects of his persona and advises him to act wickedly in all situations. Yet Morris’s dwarf was a considerably more corporeal creature, both capable of tactile unpleasantries and of being seen by others aside from the protagonist alone. This fiend is something altogether more potent than Sintram’s monster of the mind.

This physicality Morris imposed on his source was distinctly Norse in nature. In chapter twenty-two, when the dwarf is finally bested by Walter, its defeat is notably characteristic of that of an Icelandic ghost, or more accurately of a draugr. Walter’s initial assault seems to fail on account of the dwarf’s unnatural resilience to weapons, a feature shared with many a saga berserkr and grave-walker; his arrow hits the dwarf straight in the chest, but it ‘fell down from him as if he were made of stone’.
Walter overcomes his foe, the Maiden (his lover) comments on the proper mortuary practices: ‘[b]ut first tell me one thing. Hast thou buried this horror and hidden him in the earth? […] first must thou smite off his head, and lay it by his buttocks when he is in the earth; or evil things will happen else. This of the burying is no idle matter, I bid thee believe.’ While beheading is a common feature across heroic literature, it is specifically a noted similarity in the Beowulf-Grettla discussion. Grendel and his mother are of course beheaded in Beowulf, and both Glámr and Grettir are beheaded in Grettla. The placing of the disembodied head by the buttocks (við þjó, literally ‘between/against the thighs’) of the deceased is a unique feature of Old Norse literature, and the most likely episode of inspiration for Morris occurs in Grettis saga.

The fact that the dwarf’s head is cut from its body with its own sax is yet another indication of the writer’s preoccupation with Grettis saga:

So they went both together to where the creature lay. The Maid durst not look on the dead monster, but Walter noted that he was girt with a big ungainly sax; so he drew it from the sheath, and there smote off the hideous head of the fiend with his own weapon. Then they twain together laboured the earth, she with Walter’s sword, he with the ugly sax, till they had made a grave deep and wide enough; and therein they thrust the creature, and covered him up, weapons and all together.

If they had not noticed already, readers familiar with the plot of Morris’s Grettir the Strong may at this point have seen the adaption of the saga. Karl Anderson comments on the passage in his 1940 three-volume thesis on Scandinavian Elements in the Works of William Morris, positing two main points: firstly, that the action was ‘one of the common methods in early Scandinavia of “laying a ghost”’; and secondly, that outside of this one scene there was ‘nothing in this tale which can be traced to Morris’s Scandinavian studies’. The second point of Anderson’s analysis has hopefully already been disproven, but on the first point it should be noted that the significance of the scene is that it can only realistically be a reference to Grettis saga.

The chief grounds for this are the range and availability of possible sources. Firstly, despite what scholars may have written on the subject, cutting off the head and burying it by the buttocks is not the most frequent method of disposal of an Icelandic ghost; they are usually dealt with through a combination of beheading and cremation. In fact, a review of the entire Íslendingasögur corpus demonstrates that amidst a multitude of broken backs, burnings, reburials, drownings and legal procedures, only a select few sagas contain an example of a revenant being beheaded and the head placed next to the buttocks. To be exact, there are three potential
candidates aside from Grettis saga, namely: Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss, Fljótsdæla saga and Scarfíðela saga.

Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss is a saga involving many supernatural beings. Its protagonist Bárðr wrestles and breaks the backs of numerous trolls (chapters 4, 5, 9, and 15). In chapter 20, his son Gestr enters the mound of the mound-dweller Raknarr, having been given a sax by the local king: ‘[s]ax gaf konungr Gesti ok sagði þat bita mundu, ef til þyrfi at taka’. He beheads all of Raknarr’s guards: ‘[g]estr hjó af þeim öllum höfuð með saxinu konungnaút’. He then fights Raknarr himself, and eventually bests him: ‘[þ]á hjó Gestr höfuð af Raknari ok lagði þat við þjó honum’. Fljótsdæla saga uses a similar formula to describe the death of a supernatural being. Þorvaldr, son of Þiðrandi, kills a giant with its own sword, cuts off its head, and then places the head between the giant’s thighs: ‘[…] högg á hálsinn, svó at af tók höfuðit, ok stakk höfðinu milli þjóanna’. The giant is later cremated and thrown into the sea, just to be on the safe side. In Scarfíðela saga the willful Yngvildr has her husband Klaufi murdered, but frustratingly for her he comes back to life: ‘[y]ngvildr fór þá í rekkju sína, em þeir bjuggust brott. Þegar kom Klaufi til sængr Yngvildar, er þeir váru brottu. Hon lét þá kalla á þá breþr, ok hjuggu þeir þá af honum höfuð ok lægðu nedan við íljar nar’. This method does very little to stop Klaufi’s undead activities: he sits astride the roof, recites poetry and carries his own severed head. Later Klaufi reappears as a large creature who battles Ljotolfi’s men, materialises around the battlefield at will and wields his bloody head as a weapon. Karl inn rauði wisely has him disinterred and cremated. Yet even these sagas had major difficulties which made them unlikely as sources for Morris’s Beowulf-Grettla fantasy: they were each either unavailable to Morris during the late nineteenth century or differed substantially from the format represented by The Wood Beyond the World.

All of this may appear an unwieldy diversion from the topic at hand: what do the particulars of a barrow-dwelling king, a maiden-stealing giant and a headless ex-Icelander have to do with Morris and the translation of the Old Norse sagas? As noted above, there are several other features of the work which could potentially derive from Morris’s wider interest in Scandinavia, but that Grettis saga continued to be the Íslendingasaga of choice for Morris, and that he chose to use it in a text alongside Old English elements at the same time as he was preparing Beowulf for publication, has important connotations for our understanding of the position of the sagas in Morris’s understanding of the northern nations. Furthermore, the fact that Grettis saga seemingly remained dormant in his repertoire for all the years in between, only to reappear at this late stage of his corpus, demonstrates that Morris may have been aware of the implications of Eiríkr’s and Guðbrandur’s theories after all. This late reappearance also suggests that rather than Grettis saga being an early work, quickly forgotten, it continued to play an important role in Morris’s Old Norse medievalism.
until the end of his life. Read in this way, *The Wood Beyond the World* can also be seen as an artistic experiment in cultural assimilation in response to the *Beowulf-Grettla* theories.

There is a post-script to Morris’s tale of beheadings and buttocks. In the most substantial scholarly review of *The Wood Beyond the World* included in Morris’s biographies, Roderick Marshall pointed out that the poem ‘Goldilocks and Goldilocks’, written in 1890 and initially published in the 1891 *Poems by the Way*, was essentially a trial run for a number of factors from the later fantasy, including the beheading scene. In this poem it is the wicked Queen who turns into a troll whom the protagonist then beheads.

The parallels with Morris’s later fantasy are obvious. A young man, Goldilocks, is struck by a wave of adventurousness, and sets out from home. He travels to a nearby forest of sinister character, ‘the wild-wood dark and drear […] the mirk, mirk wood’, where he meets an attractive maid, also called Goldilocks; the pair fall in together and are thereafter separately identified as Goldilocks the Swain and Goldilocks the Maid. Further into the forest, the pair catch sight of a Queen in the guise of a beautiful woman. Her appearance quickly changes for the worse (‘Then was there hubbub wild and strange,/ And swiftly all things there ‘gan change’):

The fair Queen into a troll was grown,
A one-eyed, bow-backed, haggard crone.
Out flashed the blade therewith. He saw
The foul thing sidelong toward them draw,
Holding within her hand a cup
Wherein some dreadful drink seethed up
Then Goldilocks cried out and smote,
And the sharp blade sheared the evil throat.
The head fell noseling to the floor.

After the defeat of the troll woman, the Goldilockses must overcome a series of challenges in order to escape from the woods. Enduring a polar bear from the North (which is also beheaded), a southern dragon (stabbed), a pool of poison, a forest fire and several images of women in peril by the side of the path, they come to safety and live happily ever after. The difference both in tone and complexity of this tale compared to its later, darker variant goes hand in hand with the lack of Old Norse elements. In between this text and the publication of *The Wood Beyond the World* Morris had started his *Beowulf* translation and was giving frequent lectures on the significance of Iceland to the British people. Grettir was once more on his mind.
The artistic process on display in the development of Morris’s ‘overnight’ tale very much fits with the wider model of his approach both to medieval sources and to translation itself, as discussed by Ashurst, in which ‘the act of literary creation was primarily and unabashedly one of re-creation, of refashioning received material’. The re-creation at work in Morris’s late works of fantasy was in response to what he perceived as a missed opportunity for the British nation, which, as he argued in his lecture on ‘Feudal England’ (1887), had taken a drastic wrong-turn in 1066:

The development of the country as a Teutonic people was checked and turned aside by this event [the battle of Hastings]. Duke William brought, in fact, his Normandy into England, which was thereby changed from a Teutonic people (Old Norse *theod*), with the tribal customary law still in use among them, into a province of Romanized Feudal Europe, a piece of France, in short; and though in time she did grow into another England again, she missed for ever in her laws, and still more in her language and her literature, the chance of developing into a great homogenous Teutonic people infused usefully with a mixture of Celtic blood.

In *The House of the Wolfings*, *The Roots of the Mountains* and most notably in *The Wood Beyond the World*, Morris could envision alternate histories for the northern nations where no such interruptions of the ancestral line could occur. In his ‘Early England’ lecture of 1886, Morris clearly laid out his views regarding the early Anglo-Saxon settlers in Britain. The incoming men were undoubtedly in his opinion ‘rough, predatory, cruel, or at least of ungovernable passions which led them into cruelty’ but were saved by the virtue of their literature – and specifically that of *Beowulf*. This literary inheritance breathed ‘the very spirit of courageous freedom: to live is good and to die is good if you die valiant and faithful and if you reckon great deeds and the fair fame that comes of them of more account than a few years of a trembler’s life upon the earth. This is the simple ethic of our forefathers.’ As in the introductions to Morris’s and Eiríkr’s translations, medieval literature encompassed a transferable international cultural heritage.

The hard evidence for the extent to which Morris and Eiríkr styled their interaction with the Old Norse sagas on an Anglo-Scandinavian model was in abundance in such individual projects, even if the links between their joint translation of *Grettis saga* and Morris’s and Wyatt’s *Beowulf* are a little harder to discern. Morris’s late prose romances, which have proven to be a productive source of research in recent decades, offer one such missing link. Magnus Fjalldal’s research, mentioned at the start of this article, cautions against accepting such simplistic lineal understandings.
of intercultural transmission, but it also demonstrates the lasting appeal of a tale well told. In *The Wood Beyond the World* one sees not a simple stepping stone but minute glimpses of a much larger debate gripping Old Norse philology. It is tempting to view Morris’s dark woodland fantasy as a far more complex entity, a product, in part, of both his avid deliberations with Eiríkr on the nature of *Beowulf* and *Grettis saga* and his tireless work on those very two texts.

**NOTES**


5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.


9. See, for example, Sophus Bugge, 'Studien über das Beowulfepos', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 12 (1887), 1-112.

10. Frederick Metcalfe, *The Englishman and the Scandinavian; or, A Comparison of Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Literature* (London: Trübner & Co., 1880), p. 199. Metcalfe also cited Guðbrandur as the discoverer of the link (see pp. 118-21) despite the fact he himself had published the theory four years earlier (see note 25 below).

11. Elizabeth Jane Oswald, *By Fell and Fjord; or, Scenes and Studies in Iceland* (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1882), p. 266. Not all scholars were as generous as Oswald in describing the texts as 'common property'. Gregor Sarrazin argued that Beowulf was a Saxon construction comparable to *Hrólf's saga kraka*, and posited that it had arrived in Britain fully formed, ready for Old English translation: '[d]ie Beowulfsage muss schon vollständig ausgebildet nach England übertragen sein' ([t]he Beowulf poem must have reached England fully formed'). See Sarrazin, 'Die Beowulfsage in Dänemark', p. 199.


15. Landsbókasafn Íslands, Reykjavík (hereafter Lbs.), 1860, 4to, pp. 2-3; Lbs. 2196, 4to, p. 2.

16. Lbs. 1860, 4to, p. 3; Lbs. 2196, 4to, p. 2.

17. Lbs. 1860, 4to, pp. 6-7; Lbs. 2196, 4to, pp. 5-6.

18. Lbs. 1860, 4to, p. 7; Lbs. 2196, 4to, p. 6. Elsewhere Eiríkr wrote that Iceland had Christian settlers some 170 years before the Norse settlement. See Eiríkr Magnússon, 'The Conversion of Iceland to Christianity, A.D. 1000', *Saga Book*, 2 (1901), 348-74 (351).

19. Lbs. 1860, 4to, pp. 7-8; Lbs. 2196, 4to, p. 6.

20. Lbs. 1860, 4to, p. 8; Lbs. 2196, 4to, p. 7. Eiríkr adds that 'the most priceless portion of the cargo that each emigrant took over to the new abode was, after all, the memory of the past'. Lbs. 2196, 4to.


22. In the original preface to their *Grettis saga* translation, the pair introduced Grettir as 'a man of high birth and connected with bonds of kin or affinity with all the best families in the land' (Lbs. 405 fol.).

23. Lbs. 1860, 4to, p. 40; Lbs. 2196, 4to, p. 36.

24. In a lecture given in 1909 Eiríkr himself referred to work on the Grettir-Beowulf connection which he had 'printed out before', but as yet there is no evidence of this work outside of his own lecture notes (Lbs. 2196, 4to).

25. In fact, Peter Erasmus Müller first proposed a link between the two back in 1815. See Shippey & Haarder, pp. 98-107. The similarity between the sole surviving instances of the hæft-mece and heftri-sax had already been outlined by the Reverend Frederick Metcalfe in his *The Saxon and the Norseman*;
or, *A Plea for the Study of Icelandic conjointly with Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: [printed for private circulation], 1876), pp. 32-36. An undated letter to Eiríkr from Alfred E. C. Gomme, who was in the process of translating *Beowulf*, suggests a strikingly similar theory and may have been the Icelanders’s inspiration: ‘I imagine I have found (i) the origin of Beowulf – (ii) a new page in the history of North England, which will necessitate rewriting the history of the 9th and 10th centuries in England’, writes Gomme (Lbs. 2187a 4to).

26. The hostility between Eiríkr Magnússon and Guðbrandur Vigfússon is well documented. See B. S. Benediktz, ‘Guðbrandur Vigfússon: A Biographical Sketch’, in Úr Dókum til Dala: Guðbrandur Vigfússon Centenary Essays, ed. by Rory McTurk & Andrew Wawn (Leeds: Leeds Studies in English, University of Leeds, 1989), pp. 11-33 (23-24). In a letter to Edmund Gosse on 17 July 1875, Guðbrandur accused Morris and Eiríkr of plagiarising his own work. See Sir Edmund Gosse’s *Correspondence with Scandinavian Writers*, ed. by Elias Bredsdorph (London: William Heinemann, 1960), pp. 305-6. This appears to have been a genuine mistake, as earlier drafts correctly referenced Guðbrandur’s work (Lbs. 405 fol.). In 1882, while the Mansion House Relief Fund was in full swing, Guðbrandur published an unprovoked attack on the operation, calling into question the need for foreign aid. Eiríkr was furious (see Lbs. 404 fol., Lbs. 1705 4to, and Lbs. 2188 4to).

27. Gering, p. 87.


37. For examples of Eiríkr’s international intentions, see Andrew Wawn, ‘fast er drukkið og fátt lært’: *Eiríkur Magnússon, Old Northern Philology, and Victorian Cambridge* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2000), and the Icelanders’s extensive correspondence held at the Landsbókasafn Íslands, Reykjavík.


41. *CW*, XIV, p. xxv.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 10. See *A Tale of the House of the Wolfings and All the Kindreds of the Mark* (first published in 1888), *ibid.*, pp. 1-208. Many instances of medievalism here pre-empt Tolkien: the Rohirrim are particularly reminiscent of Morris’s ‘men of the mark’ and this is also one of the first manifestations of the Norse-derived ‘Mirkwood’ in a work of fantasy (*ibid.*, p. 4); Morris also uses the name in his poem ‘Goldilocks and Goldilocks’, see below.


50. Morris, *The Wood Beyond the World*, pp. 7-8. The dwarf's yellow coat is made of samite, a costly heavy silk material which was popular in the middle ages (see *ibid.*, p. 154).

51. *ibid.*, pp. 9, 16-17.

52. *ibid.*, p. 16.


54. CW, XXIII, p. xvi.


56. Morris, *The Wood Beyond the World*, p. 28. Grettir and Beowulf are both bear-heroes, the latter's name ('bee-wolf') is even a poetic term for bear.


61. *ibid.*, pp. 64-65.
revenant.

75. Ibid., p. 167.
76. Ibid., p. 168. In a manuscript variant in AM 158 fol., l. 486, the saga specifically mentions that it is the sax konungsbraut with which Gestr kills Raknarr; see ibid., p. 168, footnote.
79. Ibid., pp. 175-80, 207.
81. ‘The morn is fair and the world is wide,/ And here no more will I abide’ (CW, IX, p. 225).
82. Ibid., p. 226.
83. Ibid., p. 231.
84. Ibid., p. 237-38.
86. CW, XXIII, pp. 40-41.
87. LeMire, p. 162.
88. Ibid., p. 163.
89. Out of some 2,400 extant letters of Morris’s correspondence, the present writer has yet to come across a mention of the two texts side by side; see The Collected Letters of William Morris, ed. by Norman Kelvin, 4 vols in 5 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), l. p. xi. Ian Felce’s William Morris and the Icelandic Sagas (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2018) was published after this article was written, but see chapters three and six; The Wood Beyond the World is only mentioned in passing (p. 164).
This article begins by considering representations of the legendary English outlaw, Robin Hood, in the broader English socialist movement of the nineteenth century. By and large, they had very little to say about him. Yet he was not totally absent, for we find the outlaw briefly referenced in William Morris’s *A Dream of John Ball* (1888). I suggest that Morris’s short allusions to the medieval outlaw invoke the radical political sentiments of Joseph Ritson’s *Robin Hood: A Collection of all the Ancient Poems, Songs, and Ballads* (1795) and, to a lesser extent, John Keats’s *Robin Hood: To a Friend* (1818). Morris appropriated Ritson’s revolutionary Robin Hood, conceived at the height of the French Revolution, in order to depict the outlaw as figuratively preparing the way forward for the Peasants’ Revolt. The outlaw’s exploits are depicted as the antecedent of socialism. Just as *News from Nowhere* was situated in the tradition of revolutionary romanticism, so too was *A Dream of John Ball*.

Morris’s enthusiasm for all things medieval can hardly be overstated. As well as *A Dream of John Ball*, medievalism can be found throughout a number of his writings. Although his medievalism predated his conversion to socialism, it was a reading of Henry Hyndman’s *The Historical Basis of Socialism in England* (1883) which convinced Morris that England had an indigenous tradition of socialism from the fourteenth century onwards. Yet in all of his published works, there are only a few references to one of England’s most famous medieval outlaws. In Morris’s private letters, there are no references to Robin Hood, and the reasons for this remain unclear; it certainly seems strange in view of the fact that Robin Hood, as a man who, according to legend, stole from the rich and gave to the poor, would seem to fit well with Morris’s socialist ideology. Morris was not the only early socialist who gave scant attention to the outlaw’s legend. Hyndman made no reference to Robin Hood in *The Historical Basis for Socialism in England*, and neither did Max Beer in *The History of Socialism in
England (1919). Ernest Belfort Bax simply sneered at the early Robin Hood poems, and called them the unworthy literary predecessors of the contemporary penny dreadful and the modern newspaper. Although it must be said that in the series of articles which Bax co-authored with Morris, ‘Socialism from the Root Up’, they wrote positively about medieval Robin Hood poems, arguing that early ballads such as the ‘rough but noble’ *Gest of Robyn Hode* (1495) were notable because they were inspired by the spirit of ‘[r]esistance to authority and contempt of the “Rights of Property”’. Those early poems, according to Morris and Bax, were not in themselves revolutionary or proto-socialist but merely symptoms of ‘the confusion and misery’ caused by the abuses inherent in feudal society.

When it came to choosing their medieval heroes, late Victorian and Edwardian socialists clearly favoured the likes of Wat Tyler and John Ball, Sir John Oldcastle and the Diggers; these were people who had actually led revolts against the establishment. Nineteenth-century socialists’ neglect of Robin Hood may also be due to the fact that, during the Victorian period, Robin Hood had become either an apolitical or wholly conservative figure in popular literature. Stephen Knight describes this process as the ‘gentrification’ of the Robin Hood tradition. The outlaw had been first elevated to the aristocracy during the late sixteenth century in Anthony Munday’s *The Downfall of Robert, Earle of Huntingdon* and *The Death of Robert, Earle of Huntingdon* (1597-98). Somewhat later, conservative biographers of criminals during the eighteenth century emphasised Robin’s wickedness and criminality. The anonymous author of the gothic romance *Robin Hood: A Tale of the Olden Time* (1819) was clearly on the side of the establishment, instructing readers at the end of the book to ‘Fear God – Honour the King – Relieve the Poor – Forbear to Envy the Rich; and do as you would be done by towards all mankind!’ Robin of Locksley in Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe* (1819), far from seeking to overthrow the existing social order, works with Richard I so that the latter can reclaim his kingdom from ‘bad’ Prince John. Moreover, the Tory Scott presents a vision of society, arranged along feudal lines, in which ‘the serf’ should be willing to die for his master, and the master willing to die for the man he considers his sovereign.

The view that, as a folkloric figure, Robin Hood was a conservative or, at best, non-political hero even filtered into academic scholarship. The American folklorist Francis J. Child in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* maintained that ‘[Robin Hood] has no sort of political character in the Gest or any other ballad’. In early ballads such as *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, there is indeed little-to-no political comment; in most stories, from the medieval to modern periods, in fact, Robin’s grievances are fairly parochial as he seeks to thwart the schemes of the Sheriff of Nottingham or the cunning Abbot of St. Mary’s in York. In most of his portrayals throughout history,
Robin Hood is more of a social bandit; these outlaws rarely desire to overturn the existing social order, nor do they attempt to establish a society based on freedom and equality; instead, the social bandit helps out where he can – such as saving a widow from the machinations of a local tyrant or setting free a wrongly imprisoned man – but, as Eric Hobsbawm has observed, he does not have a programme to improve society as a whole. The Robin Hood scholar, James C. Holt, developed Hobsbawm’s ideas and applied them to Robin Hood, saying that:

He does not seek to overturn social conventions. On the contrary, he sustains those conventions against the machinations of the wicked and the powerful who exploit, flout, and undermine them. He keeps his word, unlike the treacherous Sheriff. He is devout, unlike the worldly clerics. He is generous, unlike the avaricious abbot […] he makes his world conform to the principles that are supposed to underlie it.

The ‘historical’ Robin Hood’s activities were therefore limited in scope. He was occasionally appropriated by earlier eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers of radical fiction to promote a specific cause. The young Robert Southey, for example, in his unpublished gothic romance ‘Harold; or, The Castle of Morford’ (1791), depicted Robin as a medieval revolutionary. The depiction of Robin Hood in Thomas Miller’s Royston Gower; or, The Days of King John (1838) can essentially be called ‘the Chartist Robin Hood’, while Pierce Egan the Younger in Robin Hood and Little John (1838-40) used the outlaw’s story to highlights criticisms of Old Corruption. Miller’s Royston Gower quickly went out of print, while the popularity of Egan’s novel by the latter part of the century was eclipsed by retellings of the legend in late-Victorian children’s books.

It is an American children’s book that is credited by Paul Buhle as having influenced Morris’s references to Robin Hood in A Dream of John Ball. This book was Howard Pyle’s lavishly illustrated Merry Adventures of Robin Hood (1883). Yet Buhle’s supposition seems highly unlikely for various reasons: while many works examining Pyle’s life and works state that Pyle won praise from Morris for the illustrations in Robin Hood, there are few references to him actually owning it. Other scholarly works make the point that Morris praised Pyle for his illustrations, though Morris appears to have said little about Pyle’s actual text. Where other academic works on Pyle’s life and works highlight Morris’s praise for the illustrations in The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood, they usually cite Joseph Pennell’s comment in The Graphic Arts which states that:
[Pyle’s] book made an enormous sensation when it came out here, and even impressed greatly the very conservative William Morris, who thought up to that time, 1883, nothing good artistically could come out of America.\(^{18}\)

Moreover, neither Morris’s letters nor the online catalogue of the books which he owned in his personal library contain any evidence that he owned or even read Pyle’s *Robin Hood*.

By contrast, there is evidence from the catalogue of Morris’s library that he was acquainted with Joseph Ritson’s *Robin Hood*. It was originally published by Thomas Egerton in two small octavo volumes in 1795.\(^{19}\) As its full title suggests, it is an anthology of every Robin Hood ballad from the medieval period onwards.\(^{20}\) While the ballads are undoubtedly an important part of the publication, the more important part of it for the purpose of the analysis offered here is the biographical section entitled ‘The Life of Robin Hood’, with which Ritson prefaces the song collection. In the wake of Scott’s phenomenally successful *Ivanhoe*, second and third editions appeared in single volumes in 1820 and 1823 respectively.\(^{21}\) A fourth edition in two volumes was then printed by William Pickering in 1832.\(^{22}\) Many more single editions followed throughout the nineteenth century, and the edition that was owned by Morris was the Bell and Daldy version printed in 1862.\(^{23}\) It contains the full text of the 1795 edition, including Ritson’s biography of Robin Hood and lengthy footnotes. Other antiquaries who came after Ritson published more comprehensive and scholarly collections of the Robin Hood ballads, notably John Mathew Gutch, who published *A Lytell Geste of Robin Hode* in 1847. However, Ritson’s text was the only work dedicated to Robin Hood that, according to current records, Morris owned. In his personal library, Morris also possessed Francis James Child’s *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882-98). However, Child’s text is unlikely to have been a factor in Morris’s inclusion of Robin Hood in *A Dream of John Ball*; the third volume of Child’s anthology, which contains all of the Robin Hood ballads, was not published until 1888, almost one year after *A Dream of John Ball* finished its initial serialisation in *Commonweal*.\(^{24}\)

Although Ritson’s anthology of Robin Hood ballads, at first glance, appears to be a dry and scholarly work, it is highly political. To understand the political sentiments behind Ritson’s work, one must look at his writings on politics. Ritson (1752-1803) was born in Stockton-on-Tees and was a lawyer by trade, but in his leisure time he devoted himself to antiquarian pursuits.\(^{25}\) Alongside Thomas Percy, who published *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* in 1765, Ritson was a leading figure in the ‘rediscovery’ of English medieval romances during the eighteenth century.\(^{26}\) He was also a confirmed radical who enthusiastically supported the French Revolution. After having visited Paris in 1791, he wrote to his friend Mr. Harrison that he was:
highly gratified [sic] with the whole of my excursion. I admire the French more than ever. They deserved to be free, and they really are so. You have read their new constitution? We, who pretend to be free, you know, have no constitution at all [...] as to modern politics, one would think that half the people in Paris had no other employment than to study and talk about them. I have seen a fisherwoman read the journal of the National Assembly to her neighbour [...] you may now consider their government completely settled, and a counter revolution utterly impossible: they are more than a match for all the slaves of Europe.27

Unlike contemporary radicals, such as Robert Southey, who eschewed support for the Revolution after the Reign of Terror began during late 1792, the violence did not deter Ritson.28 His surviving letters show him recommending Thomas Paine’s The Rights of Man (1791) to his friend Mr Wadeson as late as February 1794, and he was still at that point hopeful that a similar revolution would break out in Britain.29 Almost as soon as the Revolution broke out, Ritson began to address his like-minded correspondents as ‘Citizen’, although by mid-1794 he was conscious that the authorities were monitoring him and so toned down his use of the word.30 Perhaps needing an outlet through which he could give expression to his revolutionary sentiments, in Robin Hood Ritson fashions the outlaw into a medieval Thomas Paine.

Morris’s allusion to Robin Hood occurs when the nineteenth-century time-traveller in A Dream of John Ball first finds himself transported back to the fourteenth century. While there he enters a tavern. One villager in the tavern requests another man present to sing ‘a stave of Robin Hood; maybe that shall hasten the coming of one I wot of’.31 The song relates ‘the struggle against tyranny for the freedom of life’.32 The idea that the songs of Robin Hood were stories of ‘the struggle against tyranny’ is directly in keeping with Ritson’s interpretation of the Robin Hood tradition. Ritson says, for example, that Robin Hood was:

A man who, in a barbarous age and under a complicated tyranny, displayed a spirit of freedom and independence, which has endeared him to the common people, whose cause he maintained, (for all opposition to tyranny is the cause of the people,) and, in spite of the malicious endeavours of pitiful monks, by whom history was consecrated to the crimes and follies of titled ruffians and sainted idiots, to suppress all record of his patriotic exertions and virtuous acts, will render his name immortal.33

Robin Hood’s ‘spirit of freedom and independence’ is further manifested by the fact
that, according to Ritson, ‘for a long series of years, [he] maintained a sort of independent sovereignty, and set kings, judges, and magistrates at defiance’. Ritson’s portrayal of Robin Hood as a freedom fighter is clearly where Morris has acquired the idea that the outlaw’s story is one of ‘the struggle against tyranny’. It is a rousing Robin Hood ballad that is sung that day in fourteenth-century Kent, for the traveller says that:

My heart rose high as I heard him, for it was concerning the struggle against tyranny for the freedom of life, how that the wild wood and the heath, despite of wind and weather, were better for a free man than the court and the cheaping-town; of the taking from the rich to give to the poor; of the life of a man doing his own will and not the will of another man commanding him for the commandment’s sake.

In the Commonweal version of A Dream of John Ball, the wording is slightly different, for Morris includes a sharp critique of modern industrial society, speaking of how ‘the wild wood and the heath weather were better than the court and the cheaping-town […] of the life of man rather than the existence of machines’. The disapproval of modern ways of life, expressed more forcibly in this passage in Commonweal than it is in the single-volume edition, bears a passing resemblance to John Keats’s poem entitled Robin Hood: To a Friend (1818). As a book collector, it is unsurprising that a copy of Keats’s poems was in Morris’s library. Keats’s Robin Hood was also reprinted in the Kelmscott edition of The Poems of John Keats (1894). In the poem, Keats idealises a time when ‘men knew nor rent nor leases’, and the speaker observes that:

[…] if Robin should be cast
Sudden from his turfed grave,
And if Marian should have
Once again her forest days,
She would weep, and he would craze:
He would swear, for all his oaks,
Fall’n beneath the dockyard strokes,
Have rotted on the briny seas;
She would weep that her wild bees
Sang not to her – strange! that honey
Can’t be got without hard money!

The critique of capitalism and the cash nexus in Keats’s poem would doubtless have
appealed to Morris.\textsuperscript{41} And it is these sentiments that he may in fact have been drawing upon in the \textit{Commonweal} version of \textit{A Dream of John Ball}. In the one-volume edition of \textit{A Dream of John Ball}, Morris’s idea of forest life correlates to the description of it given by Ritson:

The deer with which the royal forests then abounded (every Norman tyrant being, like Nimrod, ‘a mighty hunter before the Lord’) would afford our hero and his companions an ample supply of food throughout the year; and of fuel, for dressing their venison, or for the other purposes of life, they could evidently be in no want. The rest of their necessaries would be easily [sic] procured, partly by taking what they had an occasion for from the wealthy passenger, who traversed or approached their territories.\textsuperscript{42}

Thus the outlaws in Ritson’s text are truly free men: they live a life of liberty in the forests of Barnsdale and Sherwood. The same forests provide them with everything in life that they require. There are occasions upon which they are forced to steal from people, but Ritson makes sure to tell the reader

That our hero and his companions, while they lived in the woods, had recourse to robbery for their better support, is neither to be concealed nor denied [sic]. Testimonies to this purpose, indeed, would be equally endless and unnecessary […] but it is to be remembered […] that, in these exertions of power, he took away the goods of rich men only; never killing any person, unless he was attacked or resisted; that he never suffered a woman to be maltreated; nor ever took anything from the poor, but charitably fed them with the wealth that he drew from the abbots.\textsuperscript{43}

In Ritson’s brief biography, there is no mention of the town and the court. But upon reading the next part of the book which is the section that contains \textit{A Gest of Robyn Hode}, Morris would have encountered the ‘Eighth Fyte’ of the tale. Robin Hood, having been pardoned by the King, is invited to enter the King’s service and join his court. Robin Hood finds the world of the Royal Court unpalatable, and after having dwelt among the nobles for fifteen months, he desires to go back to Barnsdale forest.\textsuperscript{44} The King grants Robin Hood permission to return to the greenwood for seven days. In what must be one of the earliest literary portrayals of recidivism, Robin Hood becomes an outlaw again and decides to stay another twenty-two years, thereby risking the wrath of the King.\textsuperscript{45} Clearly, for the freedom-loving former outlaw, ‘the wild wood and the heath, despite of wind and weather, were better for a free man
than the court and the cheaping-town’.

The outlaws prefer ‘doing [their] own will and not the will of another man’.

The reader is not given the text of the first ballad which the traveller hears and Morris only describes it in terms of relating the idea of freedom from tyranny. Another villager continues afterwards by singing another ballad, or, ‘more of a song than a story ballad’, praising resistance to a corrupt sheriff and abuses of kingly authority:

The Sheriff is made a mighty lord,
Of goodly gold he hath enow,
And many a sergeant girt with sword;
But forth will we bend the bow.
We shall bend the bow on the lily lea,
Betwixt the thorn and the oaken tree.

With stone and lime is the burg wall built,
And pit and prison are stark and strong,
And many a true man there is spilt,
And many a right man doomed by wrong.
So forth shall we and bend the bow
And the king’s writ never the road shall know.

The medieval justice system presided over by the sheriff, as Morris imagines it, is corrupt and has proved to be the downfall of many a good man. In spite of the sheriff’s gold and superior strength, however, the outlaws ensure that the sheriff never encroaches on their domain, which is a place where ‘the king’s writ’ never shall know. This poem likewise has resonances with the sentiments found in Ritson’s biography which depicts Robin Hood as man who defies corrupt authority: ‘when molested, by a superior force, in one place, he retired to another, still defying the power of what was then called law and government’. Yet there was also a warning for the outlaws and, by extension the villagers assembled in Morris’s fourteenth-century tavern:

Now yeomen walk ye warily,
And heed ye the houses where ye go,
For as fair and as fine as they may be,
Lest behind your heels the doors clap to.

Most late-Victorian Robin Hood novels such as Edward Gilliat’s *In Lincoln Green* (1897)
or Escott Lynn’s *When Lionheart was King* (1908) – and truly to read one of these children’s novels is to read them all – depict the local population as having been nothing but friendly towards the outlaws. Yet in Ritson’s text, and Morris’s *A Dream of John Ball*, outside of the forest, ‘his hand was against every man, and every man [sic] against him’, and it is only the forest which was ‘free from the alarms, or apprehensions, to which our foresters, one would suppose, must have been too frequently subject’. 51 It was truly a brave act to resist authority, as Robin and the merry men do in both Ritson’s and Morris’s texts, but this often came at a price; the forest was the only place where ‘the Sheriff’s word is nought of worth’. 52

After the ‘stave of Robin Hood’ has been heard by the assembled villagers, the men gather in the tavern to hear the church bells begin to ring and they make their way outside. The ballad singer approaches the time traveller and asks: ‘was it not sooth that I said, brother, that Robin Hood should bring us John Ball?’ 53 John Ball has rung the church bells. He has arrived in the village and is about to deliver a sermon to the inhabitants on the importance of ‘fellowship’ and of a future world when there will be no masters; men will work for themselves and ‘shall not lack for the fields ye have tilled, nor the houses ye have built, nor the cloth ye have woven’. 54 In a literal sense, Robin Hood ‘brings us John Ball’ because a song of Robin Hood is heard before John Ball’s arrival. In a figurative sense, Ritson’s radical Robin Hood has prepared the way for the arrival of the proto-socialist preacher, John Ball; Robin Hood fought for freedom against tyranny prior to the fourteenth century, although it is Ball who brings an egalitarian ideology to the struggle against tyranny by preaching of a time when ‘those that labour [shall] become strong and stronger [...] and have the goods of the earth without money and without price’. 55 This mirrors how many nineteenth-century socialists saw themselves: they were heirs to a radical tradition which, while not strictly socialist, at least laid the groundwork for the emergence of socialism. According to Morris and Bax, eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century radical thought was part of the ‘roots’ of socialism in ‘Socialism from the Root Up’. 56

The weekly section in *Commonweal* entitled ‘Revolutionary Calendar’, for example, was one means through which adherents of the late nineteenth-century socialist cause might be made aware of their political heritage through commemorations of the deaths of various radical luminaries, including Thomas Paine. 57 *Commonweal* on occasion republished poems from the 1848 European revolutions, as they did, for example, when the editors included Ferdinand Freiligrath’s ‘Song of Death’ in August 1887. 58 Later periodicals such as *The Social Democrat* would write special features on elderly former Chartists, evinced by that magazine’s publication of an interview with ‘Rex the Chartist’. 59 In effect, Morris was paying his small debt, and that of many other contemporary socialists, to the spirit of Robin Hood and, by extension, early
radicals such as Ritson. Just as News from Nowhere can be ‘situated in another tradition, the tradition of revolutionary Romanticism that finds its fullest statement in the writings of Blake and Shelley’, so too was Morris in A Dream of John Ball situating the history of English socialism in the revolutionary romantic tradition by drawing on the work of Ritson.60 The reason why the reference to Robin Hood was brief, however, was because his main concern in A Dream of John Ball was not to tell a simplistic story of robbing the rich and giving to the poor but to give readers a glimpse into the beginnings of English socialism which began in the fourteenth century.

It would not be until the twentieth century that readers would be given a properly communist portrayal of Robin Hood in Geoffrey Trease’s Bows against the Barons (1934), in which the Merry Men address each other as ‘Comrades’. Trease’s socialist outlaw novel was written as a reaction to conservative appropriations of the Robin Hood legend in late-Victorian children’s books.61 However, Trease’s novel was a ‘one off’, according to Stephen Knight; during the twentieth century, Robin Hood has indeed continued to be portrayed as anti-capitalist, or at least against its most predatory iterations, but he is not a socialist, strictly speaking.62 In choosing their medieval heroes, Morris and his contemporary socialist writers often neglected Robin Hood in favour of other, more revolutionary leaders such as Wat Tyler and John Ball. Yet the evidence above suggests that in writing A Dream of John Ball, Morris was briefly inspired to include a reference to a ‘Ritsonesque’ Robin Hood in order to situate his John Ball’s medieval socialism within a romantic revolutionary tradition.

NOTES

5. Ibid., p. 502.
7. For a critical discussion, see Meredith Skura, ‘Anthony Munday’s “Gentrification” of Robin Hood’, English Literary Renaissance, 33: 2 (2003), 155-80.
20. For critical editions of the Robin Hood ballads, see the following: Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw, ed. by R. B. Dobson and J. Taylor, 2nd edn (Stroud: Sutton, 1997); Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales, ed. by Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000).
28. See Jean Raimond, ‘Southey’s Early Writings and the Revolution’, The Yearbook of English Studies: The
30. Ibid., p. 47.
32. Ibid.
33. Ritson, Robin Hood, I, pp. xi-xii.
34. Ibid., p. xi.
35. Morris, A Dream of John Ball, p. 17.
36. Ibid.
42. Ritson, Robin Hood, I, p. vi.
43. Ibid., p. ix.
44. Ibid., p. 77.
45. Ibid., p. 79.
46. Morris, A Dream of John Ball, p. 17.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., p. 18.
49. Ritson, Robin Hood, I, p. v.
50. Morris, A Dream of John Ball, p. 18.
52. Morris, A Dream of John Ball, p. 19.
53. Ibid., p. 20.
54. Ibid., p. 40.
55. Ibid., p. 98.
56. Morris, Political Writings, pp. 547-53.
57. ‘Revolutionary Calendar’, Commonweal, 4: 125 (2 June 1888), 175.
62. Stephen Knight, ‘How Red was Robin Hood?’, Professor Stephen Knight [blog], 14 July 2012, available online: <http://www.profstephenknight.com/2012/07/how-red-was-robin-hood.html> [last accessed 27 March 2019].
Reviews

Edited by Rosie Miles
Figure 1: David Parr House (photo: David Mabb).
on them – and began to tell me the David Parr story. Parr was employed as a 
decorater for the Cambridge firm of F. R. Leach and Son. The firm worked with 
many of the major architects and craftsmen of the time, including George Frederick 
Bodley, William Morris and Charles Eamer Kempe. David Parr bought the house in 
1886, and for over forty years he lived in and decorated his home, until his death in 
1927. After Parr’s death his granddaughter Elsie Palmer moved into the house, 
initially looking after her grandmother. Palmer continued to live in the house for the 
next eighty-five years until she moved into a care home in 2012. Tamsin Wimshurst 
first saw the David Parr House in 2009, eventually buying it with her partner Mike 
Muller and transforming it into a charity in 2014. Wimshurst is now chair of the 
trustees.

The house is a fairly conventional ‘two up two down’ Victorian brick terrace with 
a small extended back section. On the ground floor it has an entrance hall running 
from the front door into the dining room and kitchen past the staircase up to the first 
floor, with the drawing room off to the right. There is a bathroom at the top of the 
stairs, under the eaves of the extension, and originally there were two bedrooms. The 
bedroom at the back was Elsie Palmer’s and her husband’s. The front bedroom was 
divided to make two smaller bedrooms and a sort of lobby.

The visitor centre opened in May 2019 and occupies the house next door at 184 
Gwydir Street, but when I visited, the visitor centre had yet to open, and the souvenir 
guidebook written by David Parr’s great-great-granddaughter Anna Norman had yet 
to arrive. There were no labels, wall texts or leaflets in any of the rooms, and nor are 
there going to be. Instead, the visitor is led through the house on a tour, providing a 
constantly evolving narrative context and dialogue between the guide and the visitor, 
and special thanks go to Tasmin Wimhurst, who provided me with the tour. Much 
of what we discussed appears in this review article.

The tour starts in the drawing room, and it is a quite extraordinary room. The 
wall to the right of the window is decorated with a large painted Morris decorative 
design, slightly adapted, which runs around three walls of the room, with huge – at 
least in relation to the size of the room – flowers and leaves, and two enormous scrolls 
(Figure 3). It is all painted in dusky greens, pinks and ochres. The design would 
probably have been drawn by pouting, a tracing technique which involves pricking 
tiny holes into paper so chalk or charcoal can be pushed through to create a dot-to-
dot copy on the wall. This would have enabled a large consistent pattern quickly to 
be created around the room. Hanging on this wall are two still life paintings. In front 
of the wall stands a piano with candlesticks from different periods, a mug with a 
Union Jack printed on it, framed photos and a vase of dried flowers.

Moving around the room, passing the back of the faux painted oak and gilded
door with elaborate hinges to examine the wall facing the window (which continues the painted design around the room), there is a large sunburst ornament hanging from the elaborate architrave. Hanging below the sunburst in a glitzy frame is a photographic portrait of what looks like a married couple. Perched on a decorative shelf immediately below this is a teapot in the form of a cottage, with a small medallion containing a portrait hanging off the handle of the lid (Figure 2).

To the right in the alcove is a 1970s record player and speakers with a pile of LPs and singles, and other assorted items including a portrait of Queen Victoria on a cheap white laminated shelf. Next to the alcove on the chimney breast, painted a reddish brown on anaglypta, are chinoiserie decorative wooden shelves with an assortment of ceramics and glass. Below on the mantelpiece are objects that include a vase with ostrich feathers, a small reproduction Christmas tree with baubles, old family photographs, small plates and dishes, two large sea shells and a corn dolly.

On the ceiling there is a huge Morris-inspired decoration with a fleshy painted ceiling rose with ochre and brown tendrils and leaves expanding out across the plaster ceiling (Figure 3). This creates the sense of being under a huge Triffid-like plant.

The overall effect is quite overwhelming in the sense that it is far too much to take in. The description above barely touches on the detail and complexity of Parr’s decoration and just some of the objects in the room. The environment is intensely packed with material from different cultural and historical contexts. There is
Figure 3: Ceiling and wall, drawing room David Parr House (© David Parr House, photo by Howard Rice).
something strangely surreal about seeing this appropriation of decorative designs, usually found in larger houses, in the close proximity of a small room. When Parr works for himself, rather than for his employers, the result is a heady, trippy visual experience, where conventional rules of scale have been surpassed. Spending half an hour in the room is not really enough to get anything but a slight grasp on how the juxtapositions of things and surfaces interface, mingle and collide. It would be possible and desirable to spend an afternoon just looking and reflecting on this room alone.

It is in this mode of very limited selective observation that I will try to describe some different rooms in the house. The dining room is significantly different from the drawing room, the main wall decorations being less flowing and more mechanical. The decoration is painted on a light ground with fruits alternating in deep red and khaki green. Above the picture rail is a beautiful painted shallow strip of rolling flowers, fruits, stems and leaves in golden and dark browns, ochres and yellow creams that are very Morris-like. The architrave has richly painted notches, waves and small flowers in pinks, red, ochre and black. Hanging on one wall there is a dark-framed woodland scene. In one corner a dark wood-polished shelf is fixed directly above the dado rail. Placed on it are family photos and a child’s green toy steam train. The chimney breast is covered in a thick textile paper, which was originally used to cover damp emanating from the chimney (Figure 4). The decorative patterning is like a 1950s modernist abstract painting with crosshatched lines and scratches. On the creamy gloss-painted mantelpiece are an assortment of objects, including a couple
of plain brown pots, two photos, a postcard and a decorative tea caddy.

In the kitchen the most noticeable feature is a beautiful wall painting above the mantelpiece which is reminiscent of Morris’s *Willow Bough* design, but with the addition of large delicate pale blue flowers. Other parts of Parr’s kitchen decoration have been painted over, particularly the dark faux painted wood cupboards, which were painted at a later date, presumably to make the room lighter. The rest of the kitchen has been left as it was after being fitted out in the 1950s and 60s.

Upstairs in what is now the largest room at the back of the house is Palmer and her husband’s bedroom (Figure 5). The walls are painted in a large, bold geometric leaf pattern. The headboard of Palmer’s 1970s bed has a brown smudge where the white fabric got stained with her husband’s hair oil, probably Brill Cream. No real attempt has been made to clean it. On one level it is slightly disgusting; on another it is rather liberating, as lived reality bursts out. Covering the mattress is a 1970s flannel sheet in a modernist Bauhaus-style colour grid in muted pinks, lemon yellows and light baby blues. Resting folded up on the sheet at the bottom of the bed is a crocheted blanket in bright colours.

What becomes apparent is that the house has been very closely preserved to be as it was when Palmer lived in it. Being in the bedroom is like intruding into private space. Indeed, it looks as though Palmer has just popped out the door, not yesterday, nor even last year, but sometime during the 1980s, as that is the period of the latest household objects in the house. The contents of the rooms span from the 1880s through to the
1980s, which distinguishes the Parr House quite significantly from many heritage houses. Most of the house and rooms have not been ‘restored’ to a certain period; instead, the project has been to conserve what existed, interestingly along the lines of Morris’s original idea for SPAB. This conservation is carried out fairly consistently across the house, and indeed the house works best where this principle is rigorously applied, and where no sanitising of the past takes place. What occurs is a layering of one history on, in and around another. One life, that of Elsie Palmer, is nested inside another, that of David Parr – although it is not exactly Parr’s life as much as his decorative interior which Palmer’s everyday life has been layered upon.

The Parr house has none of the calm stability that one can experience in visiting large houses previously belonging to the upper middle or ruling class. Instead there are exhilarating juxtapositions of scale, resulting from large decorative designs being embedded within such small rooms.

There are also strange juxtapositions of decorations and objects from different moments in design and cultural history – but many of these result not from David Parr’s original decoration but from the continued interventions into the house’s visual dynamic by Elsie Palmer and presumably her family.

In presenting Palmer’s lived reality embedded and entwined within Parr’s vibrant decorative appropriation, the visitor is given a feeling of being transported into an often cosy but simultaneously unstable world of possibility. Rather than the visitor passively receiving a distanced, hermetically sealed and lost past, the Parr House asks us to think of ourselves within a constantly evolving past that we both belong to and will continue to be part of. The house suggests that rather than the past being fixed, the past was and continues to be malleable, and that the visitor contributes to this by their presence; or to quote Morris’s Preface to Robert Steele’s *Medieval Lore* (1893): ‘the past is not dead, but is living in us, and will be alive in the future which we are now helping to make’.

**David Mabb**

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In her Preface to this worthy successor to her previous books on Byron, Morris, Burne-Jones, Ashbee, Gill and Spencer, Fiona MacCarthy entertainingly traces the origin of this book to a chair – the Isokon Long Chair she saw and admired in Dunn’s shop in Bromley’s in 1964, designed by Marcel Breuer, a colleague of Walter Gropius in
the Bauhaus. At Dunn’s she met the energetic and attractive Jack Pritchard, and she and her husband (the designer David Mellor) became close friends with him and his wife Molly over the next twenty years. The Pritchards offered lively hospitality at their modernist house in Hampstead, full of art and discussions of such topics as the Bauhaus. When the Bauhaus exhibition came to the Royal Academy in the autumn of 1968, MacCarthy was introduced to the eighty-five-year-old Gropius, ‘small, upright, very courteous, retaining a Germanic formality of bearing, a reminder of how Gropius had once been the glamorous moustachioed officer in the gold-frogged dress uniform of the Hussars’ (p. 3).

At the Bauhaus, Paul Klee had called Gropius the ‘Silver Prince’. MacCarthy describes him as ‘a man of extraordinary charisma [...] from 1910 to 1930, he was at the very centre of European modern art and design’ (p. 3). And he was ‘enormously attractive to women’, as seen in his relationship with the glamorous Alma Mahler. However, in MacCarthy’s view, ‘Gropius has more recently failed to register as the fascinating figure that he was in his own time’ (p. 4). This is partly due to the powerful attack made on him by Tom Wolfe in 1981 in *From Bauhaus to Our House*, blaming him for numerous high-rise monolithic city buildings. Gropius was also denigrated by Alma Mahler in her memoirs, and is represented as ‘wimpish’ (p. 5) in films by Ken Russell in 1974 and Percy and Felix Adlon in 2010. MacCarthy’s view is quite different: ‘I see him as in many ways heroic, a romantic and optimist, a great survivor’ (p. 5). She draws attention to his second wife, Ilse Frank, who helped him at the Bauhaus, where she kept a detailed diary, frequently quoted in this book. On the striking loose cover MacCarthy shows a photograph of Gropius taken in New York in 1948, when he was sixty-five, which gives a very severe impression – an impression which her biography sets out to challenge.

Early on, we come across a reference to William Morris. Gropius has often been compared to Morris, ‘not totally convincingly’ (p. 6), we are told, but they certainly shared ‘a belief in the importance to designers of a knowledge of materials and techniques in evolving new forms of construction. From the start Bauhaus teaching had its basis in the crafts’ (p. 6). In her defence of Gropius, MacCarthy criticises the accusation arising in the 1970s that he was a Nazi sympathiser. He was not Jewish, but his progressive views made him an obvious target for the Nazis. Thus he had little choice but to go into exile in 1933, first to England, then to America. Nevertheless, ‘he never lost his sense of his European past’ (p. 7). MacCarthy became increasingly interested by the question asked in the title of the documentary film by Roger Graef in 1967, *Who Is Walter Gropius?* This book provides an authoritative answer to that question.

It does so in three sections. The opening section is called ‘First Life. Germany’,
and consists of ten chronological chapters: ‘Berlin 1883-1907’, and ‘Berlin 1908-10’; ‘Vienna and Alma Mahler 1910-13’; ‘Bauhaus Weimar and Maria Benemann 1920-22’; ‘Bauhaus Weimar and Ise Gropius 1923-25’; ‘Bauhaus Dessau 1925-26’; ‘Bauhaus Dessau 1927-28’; ‘America 1928’; ‘Berlin 1928-32’ and ‘Berlin 1933-34’. The text is supplemented and enriched by the numerous illustrations. Those in colour in this section show the Fagus factory at Alfeld-an-der-Leine 1913-25; Lyonel Feininger’s preliminary design for the programme of the State Bauhaus in Weimar in 1919; Gropius’s Monument to the March Dead of the Kapp Putsch at Weimar cemetery, destroyed by the Nazis but restored after the Second World War; an isometric projection of Gropius’s office in the Bauhaus in 1923; designs for a tea infuser and a table lamp; an isometric projection of a design for the Törten Housing estate at Dessau; the covers of four Bauhaus books 1925-30; the Bauhaus building in Dessau 1925-26 and the associated Prellerhaus accommodation for students and young Masters; a wall-hanging by Anni Albers in 1926; houses for the Bauhaus Masters 1925-26; Gropius’s design for a communal entertainment space for the Deutscher Werkbund section of the exhibition of the Société des Artistes Décoratifs in Paris in 1930, and Gropius’s car design for Adler in 1931. In this section we are told how the young Nikolaus Pevsner showed a copy of a portrait of Morris to Gropius, who expressed his indebtedness to Morris; but Gropius is said to have gone further than Morris and his followers ‘in aiming at a fusion of art and technology for the transformation of the modern world’ (pp. 121-22). Similarly, in her discussion of the opening of the Bauhaus on 13 May 1925, MacCarthy writes of the influence on Gropius of the German architect and designer Peter Behrens, before suggesting the possible influence of Morris and News from Nowhere and of C. R. Ashbee’s village in the Cotswolds, but she tells us that:

whereas Morris and the Arts and Crafts idealists were consciously backward-looking in their thinking, romantically recreating an imagined past, Gropius was consciously moving forward at the Bauhaus into a modern world of linked-up thinking, in which art and science, technology, psychology as well as advanced studies in visual perception were combined.

(Not all Morrisians will accept this account of Morris’s attitude).

1936-37, and the other the menu and seating plan designed by László Moholy-Nagy for Gropius’s farewell dinner at the Trocadero in London on 9 March 1937. The text offers an account of the welcome speech given by the elderly Sir Raymond Unwin, a follower of Morris in the garden city movement, at the dinner given for the opening of the exhibition at the Royal Institute of British Architects’ premises in Conduit Street on 15 May 1934. MacCarthy remarks that Unwin ‘was not a natural supporter of Gropius’s views on pre-fabricated buildings and communal apartment blocks’, but he generously ‘did his best’ (p. 274). He stated, strikingly, that ‘[i]t is, perhaps, owing to the failure of English architects to appreciate the theories of Philip Webb and Lethaby, which correspond very closely to those of Professor Gropius, that the modern movement is so little understood in this country’ (p. 275). MacCarthy agrees strongly with the idea of the relevance of Lethaby, who had introduced workshop training in the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London in 1894. Gropius was very nervous about his own speech on ‘The Formal and Technical Problems of Modern Architecture and Planning’. His radical ideas created an excited response, and the young architect Maxwell Fry, who was in the chair, recorded that Gropius ‘filled us with a fervour as moral as it was aesthetic’ (p. 276). The young Nikolaus Pevsner, who had recently come from Germany to England, was present and was very impressed. In 1936 Pevsner was to publish his influential *Pioneers of the Modern Movement: From William Morris to Walter Gropius*. MacCarthy shows the cover of the book, with its parallel portraits of Morris and Gropius, and quotes Pevsner’s praise of Gropius, remarking that ‘[a]s a number of critics have commented since, Pevsner’s accolade to Gropius verges on absurdity’ (p. 353). But she judges that by ‘aligning Gropius and William Morris’, he not only showed his dislike of the National Socialist regime in Germany, but was also ‘rather desperately trying to make a role for himself in the country he had fled to’ – a strategy on which he was to prove successful, as *The Buildings of England* series shows (p. 353). MacCarthy has previously written about Herbert Read’s influential *Art and Industry: The Principles of Industrial Design* (1934), and claims that ‘Read transformed Walter Gropius’s early halting words into a model of lucidity’ (p. 324).

The coloured illustrations for this section show the Gropius House at Lincoln, Massachusetts, of 1938, and Ise’s traditional lobster dinner served there at Christmas 1952; the Pan Am Building in New York, 1958-63, and Herbert Bayer’s colourful design for the dust jacket of the catalogue for the 1968 Bauhaus exhibition at the Royal Academy in London. There is also a striking black-and-white photograph captioned: ‘Gropius stands proudly at the Pan Am Building, New York, 1963’.

On the final page of the book, MacCarthy asserts the presence in all of Gropius’s work of ‘a romantic, idealistic undercurrent’:

And here he was indeed like William Morris, imaginatively generous in his beliefs. All his life he continued to see art not as an adjunct to life but a necessity. Like Morris he believed that art is life itself. It was architectural soullessness, the despoliation of nature, the denial of community that brought out his fiercest critical opprobrium.

(p. 486)

MacCarthy closes fittingly with a reference to our present situation: ‘[i]n our age of ever-increasing fragmentation and specialisation his visions of connectedness make Walter Gropius worth listening to still’ (p. 486).

The book concludes in a scholarly way with thirty-three pages of Sources and References, followed by a complete List of Illustrations (thirty-four in colour and many more in black-and-white), and by the Acknowledgments, a list revealing something of the extent of MacCarthy’s sources and contacts which made this authoritative book possible.

Peter Faulkner


There is an exquisite feeling when receiving a book with such strong aesthetic qualities as John Holmes’s *The Pre-Raphaelites and Science*. Yale University Press is well known for publishing finely produced volumes, and they do not miss the mark with Holmes’s book. This would be a lovely edition for any library or home. *The Pre-Raphaelites and Science* is also a robust and valuable academic work that will be of much interest to Morris scholars.

Holmes’s text covers a lot of ground in a very accessible manner which is wonderful to see in a scholarly work. His subject matter addresses many aspects and
influences of science on the Pre-Raphaelites. The book does not simply focus on the inspiration and representation of science in Pre-Raphaelite art, but also expands to architecture and poetry as well, connecting William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones and others to the evolution of scientific thought during the nineteenth century. One of the strengths of the text is the broad range of materials discussed as well as the depth of research and historical coverage including second-wave Pre-Raphaelites.

Another strength is Holmes’s discussion of lesser-known Pre-Raphaelite figures and connected friends such as John and Rosa Brett, the O’Shea brothers and the architects Benjamin Woodward and Alfred Waterhouse, rather than simply focusing on Millais, Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown. Rossetti does, however, become a figure representative of the change of thought around science for he was seemingly ambivalent about it at first and then seems to abandon it completely. However, there are some strong scientific links in Rossetti’s art and poetry. Holmes highlights that there are few of the Pre-Raphaelites and their extended circle who had any formal training in science except for the sculptor John Lucas Tupper who studied anatomy; yet, the scientific observational mode is alive and well in much Pre-Raphaelite art, architecture and poetry.

One of the primary sources that Holmes uses for his study is *The Germ*. From the beginning of the book we understand how *The Germ* addressed and supported a new kind of art modelled on science. The positioning of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in relation to science is primarily centred on Frederick George Stephens’s essay ‘The Purpose and Tendency in Early Italian Art’ which was published in the second issue of *The Germ* in 1850. In this essay Stephens states that science helps the moral purpose of art and he emphasises an observational mode espoused by Ruskin and others in the Pre-Raphaelite circle in the production of art. The duty to record faithfully and accurately that Ruskin would call for is very much present in the Pre-Raphaelites. Stephens’s thought and framing of science becomes what Holmes returns to frequently in his discussion of the theory and practice of science in the Pre-Raphaelites.

John Herschel’s call for experimentation is another framework that has specific scientific valence and Holmes demonstrates this through the convincing example of John Everett Millais’s *Ophelia* (1852). Millais’s need to reproduce physical conditions in order to paint is very scientific in nature and speaks to experimentation in both the artwork and the creation. Holmes also provides a direct example of scientific principles in art by referencing the presence of ether in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *The Blessed Damozel* (1850). Such direct reference to science in art is rare, Holmes reminds us, and many of the examples he offers are of how scientific methods provide a set of guiding principles in the creation of art. One piece that both references and uses
science as a guide is William Dyce’s *Pegwell Bay, Kent – A Recollection of October 5th, 1858* (1858-60) which is an example of geology as a science of precise observation, but also science in practice as the women in the picture are picking shells.

An ecological approach is present in Pre-Raphaelite work where there is an emphasis on the ethical value and experience of the world we live in. Ruskin’s push for artists to be more scientific than scientists is seen in Rosa Brett’s *Thistles* (1860) and John Brett’s *Val d’Aosta* (1858) where *Thistles* in particular highlights a careful ecological study. John Brett’s *The Glacier of Rosenlaui* (1856) is also a wonderful piece of natural science and geology, reminiscent of Ruskin’s *Aiguilles de Chamonix* (1849), and Brett’s work graces the cover of *The Pre-Raphaelites and Science*. Holman Hunt’s well-known *Our English Coasts* (1852) is identified as one of the richest animal studies done by the Pre-Raphaelites and the individuality of each sheep demonstrates that the observational mode is not simply for flora but also fauna.

It is the third chapter that is the highlight of the first section of Holmes’s book providing close readings of art and poetry in relation to facial and bodily depictions to address embodiment and psychology. Two contrasts in this chapter are the studies of Holman Hunt’s *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* (1850-51) and Dante Rossetti’s *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (1849-50) which trace the artists’ changes to bodily and facial expression and how this links to psychological representation. This chapter highlights the need to understand anatomy coupled with psychology in order to paint the embodied mind. There are some great references in Holmes’s work, and one of my favourites is J. W. Jackson’s critique of Holman Hunt’s *The Scapegoat* where he ‘both praised and critiqued Hunt’s painting on scientific grounds, lauding the artist for his thorough “antiquarian research” […] but proclaim[ed] the picture to be a failure nonetheless because of his neglect of the principles of physiognomy’ (p. 109). The laboratory type conditions under which Hunt painted were seemingly not sufficient for him to get the science right.

There is also a lot in this book for those who are interested in architecture. The Oxford University Museum of Natural History (OUMNH) is presented as an example of scientific and artistic collaboration. From its vision to the expressive capitals done by the O’Shea brothers to columns made of a single stone and labelled for teaching purposes, scientific representation abounds in this museum. Ruskin’s love for wrought iron (even though that same material failed as part of the original design of the museum roof) demonstrates the experimental aspect of architecture and design. The OUMNH is presented through many pictures and examples in the text which demonstrate the level of detail present in the museum design and reinforce scientific and ecological symbolism.

Chapter nine on the Natural History Museum is in contrast to chapter five on
the OUMNH to demonstrate scientific influence before and after 1859 on this architectural project. There was no collective build with the Natural History Museum but instead much critique and a movement towards elements being designed by hand but machine made, which was of course very disappointing to someone like Ruskin. What this chapter does well is to summarise how architecture is in the service of natural theology while poetry highlights scientific naturalism.

The tension between science and theology is also an important subject of the book and as such Holmes divides his book into two sections using 1859 and the publication of Charles Darwin’s On the Origin of Species as the demarcation. The second part of the book explores moments where natural theology and scientific naturalism are at odds. Of the post-1859 chapters, chapter seven is of most importance to those interested in Morris as Holmes provides a skilful analysis of the reception of The Earthly Paradise to scientific scholars. Edward Burne-Jones is also framed in this chapter as an investigative artist alongside Morris who investigates the political implications of evolutionary theory through socialism and design. As The Germ is the focus of the first part of the text, Holmes shifts his attention to The Fortnightly Review in this chapter where Morris published four poems and his translation of ‘The Saga of Gunnaug the Worm-tongue’. John Morley also becomes a figure of importance in the second half of the book, as someone sympathetic to Morris and his emphasis on the working class. Some poems highlighted in this seventh chapter do not make direct reference to science but show the influence of scientific naturalism nevertheless and how Morris was respected by those with scientific leanings due to the accessibility of The Earthly Paradise. The critics that Holmes cites in his work ‘explicitly or implicitly identify Morris’s attention to detail as painterly’ (p. 195). The Earthly Paradise is thus a scientific enquiry examining both narrative and nature.

The Pre-Raphaelites and Science demonstrates how the Pre-Raphaelites used art to trace a moral legacy but also how they helped form the ‘physical, emotional and cultural landscape of Victorian science’ (p. 255). The discussion of non-explicit connections to science in art and architecture does not seem tenuous at all due to an abundance of historical and contextual research. Canadians, like myself, will appreciate how The Pre-Raphaelites and Science ends with a nod to Canada and the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). Holmes examines how the ROM uses architectural design to convey a particular scientific philosophy and it is good to see trans-Atlantic connections made. From the excellent close readings and examples of art and architecture, exposition on Morris’s poetry that puts Morris and his work in dialogue with science, Holmes’s book will prove to be a touchstone study and a valuable contribution to Victorian scientific representation and analysis.

Ann Gagné

This book begins with a brief foreword by the distinguished critic Patrick Parrinder in which he claims that it gives us ‘a greatly enriched sense of both the links and the differences between two of our most visionary modern writers’ (p. viii). This seems to me to be a reasonable claim, although the balance of material is tilted towards Wells: of Morris’s writings, only *News from Nowhere* gets much attention, while there is a good deal of discussion of *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *A Modern Utopia* and even the little-known *Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island*.

The book emerges from a conference held at Kelmscott House in September 2013 titled ‘Social Fabrics: Utopias and Dystopias in Relation to the Works of William Morris and H. G. Wells’. Emelyne Godfrey provides an ‘Introduction: Tomatoes and Cucumbers’, which contains plenty of material about utopias, dystopias and anti-utopias, presented with more energy than clarity; I would have preferred a more chronological organisation. This is followed by Michael Sherburne’s ‘Setting the Scene’, which accomplishes its task succinctly and accurately. There follow thirteen articles arranged in five sections: I will focus on the articles that include discussion of Morris.

In her ‘Imaginary Hindsight: Contemporary History in William Morris and H. G. Wells’, Helen Kingstone points out that History was a new academic subject in Oxford and Cambridge during the 1870s, so that historians were wary of writing about recent events, preferring the more definite past. Thus it was left, paradoxically, to writers of utopias like Morris and Wells to write about contemporary history. In this context, Kingstone discusses *News from Nowhere* and Wells’s ‘A Story of the Days to Come’ (originally published in the *Pall Mall Magazine* in 1899), arguing that the two stories are part of an already existing tradition, but that they ‘are distinctive for the explicitness and glee with which, far from skating round the issue, they claim imaginary hindsight in order to write their present as history’ (p. 45). Kingstone argues convincingly that Morris is ‘deliberately hazy’ in his account of the revolution in *News from Nowhere* as he wants to offer ‘a “vision” of an idyllic world rather than a dogmatic blueprint for how to achieve it’ (p. 51).

Tony Pinkney writes with characteristic energy about ‘Problems in Utopia from the Thames Valley to the Pacific Edge’. He begins by considering Wells’s formulation of the idea of the ‘kinetic utopia’ in *A Modern Utopia*, contrasting it with our usual assumption of utopia as ‘a finished society’ (p. 91). For Pinkney, kinesis is a liberating concept, allowing the reader much freedom, although it does not always have positive
reviews – *A Modern Utopia* includes a chapter entitled ‘Failure in a Modern Utopia’ (p. 92). Pinkney draws attention to the scene with the road-menders which Morris added to the 1891 book version of *News from Nowhere*, and which constitutes ‘an indirect tribute to Morris’s mentor John Ruskin’ (p. 94). He then asks what we are to make of a very similar scene on the second page of Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Pacific Edge* (1990), and claims that Robinson’s *Mars* trilogy of the 1990s shows that he was well aware of Morris’s work. We are therefore entitled to see the scene in *Pacific Edge* as referring us back to Morris. More boldly, Pinkney proposes that a later utopia may show the reader ‘problematic aspects of the earlier work that were barely visible before’, and also ‘alert us to untapped narrative resources in the earlier text which might remedy these newly revealed problems and emergent crises’ (p. 95). Pinkney concludes with a demanding question which is far from easy to answer:

> Can we rethink – i.e. conceptually reconstruct and then narratively sequelise – all the classical utopias of the past in the light of Wells’s […] notions of kinetic and critical utopia, and might not that operation be a significant initial part of opening our own imaginations to the ultimate possibility, not just of rewriting the canonical utopias of the past, however interestingly, but of moving beyond them to a fully fledged new utopia of our own?

(p. 104)

An article by Sarah Faulkner (no relation of mine, by the way) entitled ‘Dark Artistry in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*’ opens with a reference to the passage in *News from Nowhere* in which Old Hammond explains to Guest that ‘[e]ach man is free to exercise his special faculty to the utmost, and every one encourages him in so doing’, and contrasts this ‘appealing vision of creative freedom and shared community’ with the vivisections conducted by Moreau, ‘a man who has “exercised his special faculty to the utmost” to horrible effect’ (p. 175). His ‘passion for scientific discovery’ is driven not by concern for the community but by ‘his own individual obsession’ (p. 179).

Maxim Shadurski’s ‘“Flowers and a Landscape were the Only Attractions Here”: The England of Wells and Morris in Aldous Huxley’s Interpretation’ takes an unexpected starting point, Aldous Huxley’s dystopian *Brave New World* (1932). In a letter in May 1931, Huxley wrote: ‘I am writing a novel about the future – on the horror of the Wellsian Utopia and a revolt against it. Very difficult. I have hardly enough imagination to deal with such a subject, but it is none the less interesting work’ (p. 224). Huxley criticises Wells’s belief in the World State, which Wells believed to be the necessary basis for any account of a modern Utopia – the opposite of Morris’s emphasis on England in *News from Nowhere*. Morris’s utopian England had been
replaced by Wells’s dystopian treatment of England in The Sleeper Awakes (1899, 1901), and it is this dystopia that Huxley satirises so effectively.

Clare Holdstock draws our attention fittingly to the built environment in her concluding article ‘Modernist Ideals: The Utopian Designs of William Morris, Peter Behrens and the Social Housing Schemes of Mid-Twentieth-Century Sheffield’. She begins with a description of the negative image given in a short Channel 4 film about the Aylesbury Estate (1963-77) in Southwark, ‘an archetypal British housing estate now subject to a major regeneration scheme’ (p. 241). She then quotes from Ben Campkin’s Remaking London of 2014 on how the media have, since 1980, taken to presenting such housing estates in negative terms. Holdstock refers with evident approval to Campkin’s suggestion that ‘the notion that Modernist social housing encapsulates social ills has been employed as a smokescreen by politicians and media alike as a means to implement laissez-faire governmental approaches to urban planning’ (p. 242). Following the argument of Nikolaus Pevsner in Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius (1936), she is able to show the continuity of constructive thinking from News from Nowhere through the architectural work of Peter Behrens in Germany during the 1920s – influential on Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier – to those creating some social housing schemes in twentieth-century Britain. Holdstock argues that Morris was in the same camp as the Modernists, as against ‘postmodern, hyper-capitalist projects which litter London, such as the Shard’ (p. 245). As such, ‘Morris’s penchant for green space directly influenced a Modernist appetite for the concept of the “garden city”, which is evident in the writing of such figures as Le Corbusier’ (p. 246). She draws attention to a number of recent buildings that embody this ideal: Sainsbury’s 2000 eco-millennium store on Greenwich Peninsula, the High House Production Park in Thurrock and the Royal Opera House’s Bob and Tamar Manoukian Production Workshop of 2010 (p. 246). On a larger scale, Holdstock discusses two housing estates in Sheffield that replaced local slums, Gleadless Valley (1955-62) and Park Hill (1957-61). The models for both estates derived from the ideals of European Modernism, but these estates are problematic in our current economic climate: ‘[c]ompared to the shiny postmodern Shard or the planned pseudo-Morrisian Garden Bridge, they are now being left in a state of decay’ (p. 253). Holdstock concludes polemically:

The alternative understandings of spatial systems in terms of built and social space in the line of Modernism explored here still offer hopeful alternatives to capitalism, especially with regard to the spatial and social problems inherent in the appalling inequality evident in twenty-first-century postmodern projects such as the Garden Bridge or the Shard. Indeed, the enduring fascination
with Morris’s interpretation of medieval spatial practices and Wells’s embrace of both past values and technology in the creation of utopia suggests the spirit of a latent Modernism as a force for good. Arguably there could still be room for these alternative understandings of spatial systems in our present and our future.

(p. 254)

I would like to think that this is not merely wishful thinking. At all events, Holdstock’s essay provides a constructive conclusion to an often interesting (if somewhat uneven) book.

Peter Faulkner


Somewhat surprisingly, in this age of fantasy literature, the tales known in the West as the Arabian Nights, featuring Aladdin, Ali Baba, Zubeida/Zobeide and others have largely dropped to pantomime status. Thanks to Edward Lane’s bowdlerised versions, for decades from 1840 on, the stories enjoyed the kind of popularity associated with Harry Potter today, becoming favourites with all ages. Georgie Burne-Jones described Lane’s book as a ‘priceless treasure’ that ‘entranced all of us’ when given by William Morris to her sister Agnes in 1856, and nine years later Agnes herself wrote home of a ‘jolly evening’ spent with Ned drawing, Georgie sewing and herself reading aloud the ‘most delightful’ Story of Joodar from the Arabian Nights. Like Malory’s Morte d’Arthur, the archaic tales exerted a powerful escapist influence over the whole Pre-Raphaelite generation.

Eleonora Sasso’s book is the first to examine critically these matters. It does so on a basis provided both by Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978) and by the newish discipline of cognitive linguistics, which as far as I understand it studies the reciprocal relationship between language and conceptual thought. The result is a dense and highly theorised analysis including a good deal of what is elsewhere called intertextuality; it is also brisk and compact, at just around 130 pages of main text, with four chapters followed by an appendix. The ‘remediations’ in the sub-title refers to using the same materials in different media.

One of Gabriel Rossetti’s earliest writings, composed at age seven and preserved by his admiring mother, was a short piece dramatising Aladdin; or, The Wonderful Lamp.
In 1840 there came fifteen illustrations featuring several jinn and including episodes from the tale in which Princess Amine is first scarred and then whipped for speaking to an old man. In Sasso’s view, Rossetti, the singer of bodily beauty, is obsessed with dark horrific orientalism. Later, he would compare translation to Aladdin’s search, rejecting ‘precious fruits and flowers’ for the goal or ‘lamp alone’ (e-book, chapter 1, para. 5). He would also draw the Princess Parisade, from the story of two sisters who envied the third, shown holding the magic barrel of golden water that restores life to those bewitched. There follow accounts of *Cassandra, Troy Town, The Girlhood of Mary Virgin, The Beloved, Astarte Syriaca* and *Mnemosyne*, concluding that all Rossetti’s ‘Oriental illustrations, paintings and double works of art are blended spaces combining different visions of the Orient, thereby allowing new insights to appear, along with a new understanding of Orientalism, in order to alter our original cognitive models’ (chapter 1, final para).

The chapter on the cognitive grammar of *Oriental Fairy Tales* by Christina Rossetti and Ford Madox Ford (who was nephew to her sister-in-law, not to Christina, although the Italian word nipote may cover both relations) provides a useful gloss on the story of Zobeide as a source for the petrifaction in Christina’s juvenile poem ‘The Lost City’, which also draws on Sleeping Beauty imagery, and for the profusion of exotic fruits in both that poem and *Goblin Market*. Referencing visits by Zobeide’s sisters to a fruit shop and a silk merchant who demands a kiss in payment, Rossetti ‘lifts characters, plots, settings and themes out of their original Oriental environment’ placing them in ‘her new blended space, to allow new insights and understandings’ (chapter 4, para. 16). While such borrowings and blendings are the bedrock of poetry – and Rossetti’s verse is exceptionally rich in textual allusions – new, precise links add depth and wealth to critical reading.

So, non-academic readers must forgive the brambles of theory that overgrow the simpler literary fields here, with the frequent conceptual metaphors cited as LOVE IS PAIN or THE EAST IS CORRUPTION, always in SMALL CAPS, and curious tables like parallel boxes entitled ‘Function-advancing propositions in the Fourth Voyage of Sinbad and Goblin Market’ (chapter 4, figure 4.2), or an oval diagram representing Ruskin’s ‘mental space configuration’ (chapter 3, figure 3.2) around Aladdin’s lamp. Through these thickets, Sasso’s exploration often resembles Burne-Jones’s *Briar Rose* paintings.

While Lane’s standard Victorian *Thousand and One Nights* inevitably has a sensual sub-text owing to its harems, eunuchs and slave-girls, Algernon Swinburne and Aubrey Beardsley preferred the version written by Richard Burton, traveller and translator of the *Kama Sutra*. Given Morris’s voracious reading, one wonders if he read Burton’s 1885 text, but it was not available when he was writing the *Earthly*
Paradise tales discussed by Sasso under the heading ‘Forbidden Doors, Treasures and Words’. His admiration for Islamic design in Persian carpets and Iznik ceramics also came later. Aladdin, the Fifth Weezer’s Tale and Hasan of Basrah are the Eastern stories reworked in *The Earthly Paradise* – a declared compendium of traditional tales – as are ‘The Writing on the Image’, ‘The Man who Never Laughed Again’ and ‘The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon’, where the chief cognitive or conceptual metaphors invoke suffering caused by love and desire. The expositions are a bit confused, however, and the reader must wait for the sixty-page appendix, which provides simpler summaries alongside long extracts from the Victorian texts – rather redundant as regards the very familiar and easily accessible *Goblin Market*. Comparable examples from the *Nights* would have been more helpful to many of us.

In respect of Morris, then, the book is unsatisfactory, but its subject is full of potential in illuminating his poetry and prose, from the intricate framing and distancing of *Love is Enough* to *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, where Birdalone recalls the Oriental shape-shifting bird-lady, as Sasso notes in passing. Marvels abound in the late romances, while Morris’s narrative style surely has affinities with that of the *Nights*. The volume given to Agnes Macdonald had a lifelong influence, constantly affirmed by his leisurely reading aloud to family and friends.

Beyond literary concerns, responses to the *Thousand and one Nights* intersect with personal and political attitudes towards the ‘East’ – Turkey, Arabia, India – in the Victorian era in ways that are still current today. In this respect Eleonora Sasso opens a lode-bearing seam.

Jan Marsh
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