Poetics of Absence in Morris's 'Concerning Geffray Teste Noire': Between Reality and Visualisation

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William Morris's interest in and involvement with the visual arts is widely known, and numerous examples could be given to prove that not only was he a brilliant versifier but also a remarkable visual artist, even though, officially, he only completed one oil painting. In the field of visual culture, one may refer to his tapestries and textiles but also to the 'word-painting' and the instances of ekphrasis (intense pictorial description of an object) in his collections of poetry. This assessment, however, remains insufficient: Morris's pictorial imagination is also to be found at work in the poetic regions of indefinite reality, daydreaming and visualising. Moreover, the pictures he draws thus are as clear and vivid as the ones representing the physical world; even if they are deemed to be blurred or hazy, the images appear so on account of the poet's choice, not because he lacks vision or skill in depicting reality.

This hovering between the palpable and the imaginary may be a result of Morris's awareness of the new ideas about visual perception in his times. The optical innovations of the Victorian period must have had an impact on contemporary poets' discernment of human sight. Lindsay Smith remarks that 'relations between the visible and the invisible, the empirical and the transcendental' are re-calibrated in the Victorian era by the development of photography; its 'pervasive questioning of the "seen" involves a simultaneous reappraisal of the "unseen"', which reveals one reason why Morris was so keen on addressing various aspects of perception in his poetry.[1] In actual fact, as Smith claims later in her book, Morris's collection *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (1858) is all about the grotesque and the 'new ways of conceptualising sight'; it manoeuvres between the empirical and the transcendental understood according to the innovative approach to visuality of the mid-nineteenth century.[2]

Smith further comments that, for Morris, the historical context of pictoriality is

important 'because, as theorised by Ruskin, it has the grotesque as a naturalised yet conspicuous central component, and because medievalism is shaped by discourses of photography in the process of being conceptualised'.[3] According to Smith, Morris's visual theory is 'inextricable' from his complex account of medievalism which becomes a major vehicle for 'a reliteralising of the visual' in Morris's, Ruskin's and the Pre-Raphaelite works.[4] The vision of the medieval that characterises all those texts, including *The Defence of Guenevere*, 'emphasises for Morris the primacy of perception as an historically and culturally determined component in discourses of poetry and painting', Smith continues. Therefore, medievalism and the problematisation of sight go together while the actual meaning of this coalescence emerges as a constant concern of the above-mentioned authors.[5]

Leaving aside the historical and cultural context, one could risk a statement that Morris's preoccupation with verbal visualisations in his early poetry is grounded on a particular shortcoming to which he freely admitted – namely, his incapability to paint anything outside his physical sight.[6] However, Morris's weakness in 'literary artistic memory', as he called it, concerns the 'bodily eye', that is, the physical capability to imitate, and does not occur as a deficiency in imagination, as Ruskin implied.[7] The poet's verbal creation does not show the smallest sign of such a lack: what he could not achieve in the area of painting, he mastered in the realm of poetry. It seems that drawing verbal images was a field in which he felt more at ease, the field in which one rarely needs the physical eye. This might also be the motive for Morris's reaching to the invisible or the absent ('to that which lies outside the physical capacity of the visual', as Smith puts it) in his poetic worlds as a tool that is used to prove that, at least in this case, the verbal has a certain advantage over the visual.[8]

Accordingly, the aim of this article is to show how Morris gives prominence to portrayals of absence (or lack) rather than physical presence in his ostensibly pictorial dramatic monologue 'Concerning Geffray Teste Noire', the seventh poem in *The Defence of Guenevere*. In his hovering between depictions of real-life scenes, landscapes or objects, on the one hand, and visualisation, hallucination or conjecture, on the other, Morris produces a poetic vision of non-existence. The approach I am going to take here rests on the general visual quality of Morris's poems, which has been referred to in various sources commenting on his Pre-Raphaelite involvement; it has also been noticed in his later works, such as the Norse sagas or *News from Nowhere*.[9] Mostly, however, previous commentators concentrate on the 'direct' visuality of concrete images, natural descriptions or human portrayals, whereas the present article focuses on the 'implicit' visuality of Morris's verse, that is to say, on representations of would-be scenes, imaginary situations and characters, or objects that are actually absent from view. The images are still strikingly pictorial, which means that the

intensity of the visual experience does not depend on the extent of realism in a given depiction; neither is it conditioned by 'the physiological properties of the eye' that are often questioned by Morris in his early poetry.[10] Treating this assertion as one of the leading assumptions in the following analysis, let us proceed to the initial example; for this purpose, I will refer to a work which is not the primary concern of this article, but which also nicely illustrates these introductory remarks.

In Morris's 'Rapunzel', the heroine, singing from a tower, describes a specifically distinguished sword, only to reveal that the picture which she draws is a product of her dreams, and that the object is imaginary:

> Also: *Send me a true knight,*
> *Lord Christ, with a steel sword, bright,*
> *Broad, and trenchant; yea, and seven*
> *Spans from hilt to point, O Lord!*
> *And let the handle of his sword*
> *Be gold on silver, Lord in heaven!*
> *Such a sword as I see gleam*
> *Sometimes, when they let me dream.*

(ll. 168-75)

Elsewhere in the same poem, another character, the Prince, describes the tower, focusing more on absence than presence:

> Now some few fathoms from the place where I
>   Lay in the beech-wood, was a tower fair,
> The marble corners faint against the sky;
>   And dreamily I wonder'd what lived there:
>
> Because it seem'd a dwelling for a queen,
>   No belfry for the swinging of great bells;
> No bolt or stone had ever crush'd the green
>   Shafts, amber and rose walls; no soot that tells
>
> Of the Norse torches burning up the roofs,
>   On the flower-carven marble could I see;
> But rather on all sides I saw the proofs
>   Of a great loneliness that sicken'd me […].[11]

(ll. 79-90)

The Prince's description concentrates primarily on the features that are *not* in view, physically absent, presenting them quite accurately; this is followed by a vague reference to what is actually seen: 'proofs of a great loneliness', which is by no means a precise indication.[12] Morris particularises the invisible to the extent that when it achieves visibility, it becomes demanding to distinguish between the real, or physical, and the imaginary in either of the quoted sections. Consequently, both quotations from 'Rapunzel' reveal one method of visualising the absent in Morris's work, which is particularisation, but the reference to this poem also generalises the claims about poetics of absence that are going to be made in further parts of the present article; in other words, the phenomena discussed with reference to 'Concerning Geffray Teste Noire' are more general, deliberate poetic strategies that Morris used in his early works.

The first citation from 'Rapunzel' proves how easily Morris switches between dream and reality. This being the case in much of his early poetry, it is not an extraordinary phenomenon in the context of any medievalised writing: the Pre-Raphaelites often employed dream visions because of their indebtedness to the style and the genres of the medieval period. My main concern here, however, is with the concept of *visualising*, *hypothesising* or even *hallucinating*, not merely reproducing dream visions; the difference, no matter how negligible it may seem, is to be inferred in the following analysis in three areas. Firstly, in the aspect of the production of a narrative, visions are predictable, ready-made stories, though presented as journeys or spiritual adventures related by a character or a narrator (a 'guide'), whereas visualisation carries an element of uncertainty, dynamism and unexpectedness in its active production of a narrative. Secondly, dream visions give the reader a feeling of an accomplished act as they usually present performed actions or reports on past events (real-life or dream-like).[13] This 'perfective aspect' characterising a dream vision also surfaces in the use of allegory – a device that at one level entails an unambiguous, one-to-one relationship between an idea and its representation. In contrast to that, visualisation develops and expands progressively as hypotheses, references to would-be acts or events. The third point, which relates to my approach rather than to the structural differences between these kinds of representation, concerns the *visual* element in the word 'visualisation' that is to be emphasised in the study with reference to one of the meanings of the verb 'to visualise': to make things visible. In other words, I intend to show how Morris makes poetic images perceptible, notwithstanding the conceptual region that they are taken from (dream, hallucination or reality); or rather, I will demonstrate that the visual character of his poetry is more noticeable in the un-real than in physical reality.

Before disclosing the specifics of Morris's visualisation and hovering between fantasy and reality in 'Concerning Geffray Teste Noire', let us reflect on the overall

structure of the narrative.[14] In this poem, as in 'The Haystack in the Floods' or 'Sir Peter Harpdon's End', Morris borrows characters from Jean Froissart, the fourteenth-century French chronicler of the Hundred Years' War.[15] Both the eponymous Geffray Teste Noire (an outlaw who plundered French villages in the 1370s, taking advantage of the French weakness following the wars with the English) and the narrator, John of Castel Neuf (John of Newcastle), appear in Froissart's *Chronicles*; however, in Froissart's rendition, Teste Noire is said to be of Breton, not of Gascon, origin as in Morris's version where he is referred to in the opening stanza as 'a Gascon thief' (l. 5).[16] The poet's innovation with the source material is actually more wide-ranging as, in the closing lines of the poem, the narrator openly states that 'John Froissart […]/ knoweth not this tale just past' (ll. 190-91) and invites the imaginary interlocutor to compare his story of setting out to ambush Teste Noire to Froissart's account. The title of the poem is a misleading one, though, as the text only marginally concerns Geffray Teste Noire. It develops, instead, into John of Castel Neuf's internal discourse, interspersed with his personal memories, reminiscences and visions.[17] This interior monologue, reminiscent of Browning, centres around Castel Neuf's discovery of human bones while waiting in ambush; the two skeletons revealed in Verville wood prompt a series of digressions that scatter the narrative into seven parts.[18]

The first episode to be spotlighted is the preparation for the ambush; its pictorial quality arises from the description of Verville wood, which is the setting of the ensuing events:

> [...] through it the highway runs,
> 'Twixt copses of green hazel, very thick,
> And underneath, with glimmering of suns,
> The primroses are happy; the dews lick
>
> The soft green moss.
>
> (ll. 65-69)

The visuality of the image is very specific as it expands in the process of *verbal* 'zooming in': the description begins with a general view of the wood with the traversing highway, continues by reference to hazel copses and, finally, enumerates the primroses and the moss which are the smallest objects visible.[19] The following lines of the poem include a reference to *visibility* as well as to visuality because, to keep their position secret, the knights hide their shiny armour that could be noticed by the oncoming enemies:

> [...] 'Put cloths about your arms,
>   Lest they should glitter, surely they will go
> In a long thin line, watchful for alarms,
>   With all their carriages of booty, so –
>
> 'Lay down my pennon in the grass [...]'.

<div align="right">(ll. 69-73)</div>

Preparing thus for the ambush, John of Castel Neuf notices a pair of skeletons lying on the sod, the sight of which proves to be the trigger for his later visions. First, however, further details of the bizarre view are provided, followed by hypotheses concerning the skeletons' 'fleshly' past:

> [...] 'This was a knight too, fold
>
> 'Lying on fold of ancient rusted mail;
>   No plate at all, gold rowels to the spurs,
> And see the quiet gleam of turquoise pale
>   Along the ceinture; but the long time blurs
>
> 'Even the tinder of his coat to nought,
>   Except these scraps of leather; see how white
> The skull is, loose within the coif! He fought
>   A good fight, maybe, ere he was slain quite.'

<div align="right">(ll. 76-84)</div>

Specifically, this hypothesis relates to the knight's death: after what was *probably* a good fight, he was killed on the spot.[20] Also, as Castel Neuf adds in the next stanza, 'truly without scathe/ His enemies escaped not' (ll. 87-88), which obviously confirms the supposition with respect to the knight's bravery. The period separating the knight's death and Sir John's discovery of the remains is visualised in the trappings of the story, too: the passage of time is shown by the rusting mail, vanished plating and faded colours of the attire; the fact that the skull is white corroborates the idea that the man died many years ago.

Sir John's speculation is interrupted by the sudden realisation that the other skeleton, the smaller one, is female. One of his comrades, named Aldovrand, notices this fact and immediately makes Castel Neuf discern 'a woman's bones':

'Under the coif a gold wreath on the brow,
    Yea, see the hair not gone to powder, lie,

'Golden, no doubt, once—yea, and very small—
    This for a knight; but for a dame, my lord,
These loose-hung bones seem shapely still, and tall,—
    Didst ever see a woman's bones, my lord?'

<div align="right">(ll. 91-96)</div>

The leading attribute of the second skeleton is the wisp of golden hair looming from underneath the coif, which makes Sir John draw the natural conclusion that her hair was 'once' golden, but due to the passage of time and decay, it is not so anymore, although the hair is 'not gone to powder' either.

In the above fragments, Morris delineates the physical reality with all the possible details, eventually focusing his gaze on the dismal sight of the two skeletons, and this gives him an occasion to begin the visualisation of their history. The human remains are seen here as a consequence of a past; in other words, they restore the past of those who they once were, in their living, bodily form. Thus, the detail with which they are described does not only serve the visual aspect of the story: the meticulousness of depiction helps revive the past and prompt speculation about it; simply, the more details about the current condition that are provided, the more hypotheses about the past they can instigate. As Ingrid Hanson notes, the material remains 'are only *given meaning* by imagination'.[21] They serve as a source for Sir John's visualisation of the story behind the bones or, as Hanson nicely puts it with reference to the ensuing part of the narrative, what the narrator does here is to 'speak […] flesh onto the bones'.[22]

In the next part, the female skeleton becomes the immediate trigger for John of Castel Neuf's memories. The sight in the wood reawakens his adolescent memories of an episode in Beauvais during which time he saw female corpses burnt in the church where the women had been taking refuge. Although this particular part of the narrative is not notably visual (but rather olfactory at times: 'I, being faint with smelling the burnt bones…' (l. 113)), it contributes to the current discussion in two interrelated ways. Firstly, the reminiscence is instigated by the view that Sir John perceives, so it is a visualisation directly 'generated' by the physical reality. It is, in fact, another point in the poem at which Morris switches between the two realms: the real and the visualised. Additionally, and consequently, the skeleton that he is observing in the present gets overshadowed by what he saw years ago: by the cadavers of the burnt women, which are absent from the view but remain very much existent in the

poem's narrative. Morris invokes absence again to reinforce the apparently incompatible pictoriality of his verbal account, making the invisible crucial to the structure of the poem; thus, it is actually the non-existent that forms the narrative at this point, which is what Hanson sees as 'speaking flesh onto the bones', or what Amanda Hodgson considers as covering 'bones with metaphorical flesh'.[23] However, so far, the flesh cannot be regarded as having been once attached to those bones; in fact, the narrator just associates the skeleton that he can see with the ones that he once saw a long time ago, in a 'brutal recollection' of a sight that he wants to erase from his memory.[24] Clearly, this visualisation differs from the others in 'Concerning Geffray Teste Noire' in one crucial respect: it is a reminiscence that rests on memory, not on imagination.

The flashback is followed, and, to a large extent, obliterated by a reconstruction of the skeletons' story as another way of creating the 'narrative flesh'. After acknowledging the female skeleton's arrow-pierced neck and broken wrist, the story of the lovers comes to Sir John 'clear without a flow' (l. 120). The conjectured, romanticised story of the last moments of the lovers' lives is described over the next five stanzas. According to Sir John, the lovers were ensnared by some 'murderers' (l. 124), and the knight, trying to protect his lady, clothed her with his war-coat; next, in the fight, he received his mortal wound, although many of the murderers 'did fall/ Beneath his arm' (ll. 124-25). Still conscious enough to escape from the battlefield, he did not notice that an arrow had reached the lady; he assumed her fainting to be caused by the broken wrist, which seemingly could be deduced by Castel Neuf from the positioning of the woman's wrist bones. Unaware of his lover's death, the knight perished in the wood which is now the setting of the ambush for Geffray Teste Noire.

In lines 136-46 of the poem, another transition in the narrative perspective occurs, as Castel Neuf returns to his personal experience. After noting with disbelief that he has overlooked the 'small white bones' (l. 143) for hours while hiding in ambush, Sir John actually begins to 'see' much more when he starts visualising the deceased lady:

> But evermore I saw the lady; she
>
> With her dear gentle walking leading in,
> By a chain of silver twined about her wrists,
> Her loving knight, mounted and arm'd to win
> Great honour for her, fighting in the lists.
>
> O most pale face, that brings such joy and sorrow
> Into men's hearts—yea, too, so piercing sharp

> That joy is, that it marcheth nigh to sorrow
> > For ever—like an overwinded harp.

<div align="right">(ll. 144-52)</div>

Even though, initially, the prolonged portrayal accurately refers to the dead knight's dame, with each succeeding line it progresses to a vision of someone who could be the narrator's beloved. Alternatively, one may venture an assertion that Sir John starts falling in love with the visualisation he has himself produced.[25] Each verse also brings more details of the lady's face:

> Your face must hurt me always; pray you now,
> > Doth it not hurt you too? seemeth some pain
> To hold you always, pain to hold your brow
> > So smooth, unwrinkled ever; yea again,
>
> Your long eyes where the lids seem like to drop,
> > Would you not, lady, were they shut fast, feel
> Far merrier? there so high they will not stop,
> > They are most sly to glide forth and to steal
>
> Into my heart; *I kiss their soft lids there,*
> > *And in green gardens scarce can stop my lips*
> *From wandering on your face, but that your hair*
> > *Falls down and tangles me, back my face slips.*

<div align="right">(ll. 153-64)</div>

It is a face that 'hurts' in the sense that its memory is heart-breaking for the narrator; he simultaneously wonders whether it was equally painful for the lady to stay smooth, 'unwrinkled ever' (l. 156) and open-eyed. Such pondering on immortal, or at least immutable, beauty evokes the Romantic depictions of the eternal frozen in art works, as in drawings on an ancient urn, for example. Morris's potential allusion to Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' melts into a highly personal and extremely sensual fantasy about an encounter with a woman, and it is disputable whether this is the skeleton-woman whose story has been previously reconstructed by John of Castel Neuf, or some other person whom he now recollects. Nonetheless, Keats's urn is concrete, almost palpable, whereas Morris's woman, no matter whether she is an imaginatively revitalised skeleton or a revived memory, is a visualisation, an image that appears in the mind's eye of the narrator, thus being absent from the general field of vision. Her

invisibility becomes doubly interesting when the remainder of the depiction of the woman's face is quoted. The narrator's specification of body parts expands even though no physical referent is in view; that is to say, the narrator simply particularises his mental picture of the woman:

> Or say your mouth—I saw you drink red wine
> Once at a feast; how slowly it sank in,
> As though you fear'd that some wild fate might twine
> Within that cup, and slay you for a sin.
>
> And when you talk your lips do arch and move
> In such wise that a language new I know
> Besides their sound; they quiver, too, with love
> When you are standing silent; know this, too,
>
> I saw you kissing once, like a curved sword
> That bites with all its edge, did your lips lie,
> Curled gently, slowly, long time could afford
> For caught-up breathings; like a dying sigh
>
> They gather'd up their lines and went away,
> And still kept twitching with a sort of smile,
> As likely to be weeping presently,—
> Your hands too—how I watch'd them all the while!
>
> (ll. 165-80)

The focus of this section is the woman's mouth, and the visualisation consists in presenting this particular detail in different situations – while drinking, talking, kissing and, potentially, smiling and weeping. This set of 'visual contexts' lets the reader see the visualised image of the particular part of her body somewhat more clearly than if it were described in a detailed but one-dimensional manner.[26]

A key point needs to be made about the last verse (l. 180) of the section quoted above. The lady's hands are only fleetingly mentioned in this line, in comparison to the preceding long reference to the eyes and the mouth, as if the fantasy were to be abruptly interrupted. Indeed, the next line brings Aldovrand's interjection: 'Cry out St. Peter now' (l. 181), which materialises as the initial sign of the ambush coming to its realisation; Sir John reacts accordingly and the fighting begins. Since the portrayal of the lady is discontinued as the battle commences, it is incomplete. Consequently,

the full visualisation of the non-existent lady's hands is also missing, which produces the impression of twofold absence: the woman, as a fantasy, is at first only visualised by Sir John, so she is absent bodily, but the visualisation itself is deficient due to the interrupted depiction of her hands. The double void is only apparently counterbalanced by the remainder of the same line: 'how I watch'd them all the while!'. Evidently, the narrator believes in the reality of his vision; he comprehends it in terms of existence rather than non-being and, accordingly, reality rather than fantasy. Therefore, at a deeper level, the exclamation in the aforementioned verse serves as another channel of the assumed hovering between reality and vision in the story, only seemingly as this reality is just a matter of the narrator's perception of events, not the reader's. At the surface level, technically, the line abruptly ends the visualising and turns the course of events to the physical and real – the ambush taking its due course.

The last section of the poem, clearly revealing a new temporal perspective, relates how unsuccessful the ambush was, since Geoffrey Teste Noire was not captured then, and continues by revealing that he died 'months after' (l. 186), killed by 'a steel bolt in the head/ And much bad living' (ll. 188-89). The transition to the future, however, does not conclude the story of the skeletons found by Sir John. It emerges that he preserved the bones, took them to his castle and built a little shrine for the dead lovers:

> In my new castle, down beside the Eure,
>   There is a little chapel of squared stone,
> Painted inside and out; in green nook pure
>   There did I lay them, every wearied bone;
>
> And over it they lay, with stone-white hands
>   Clasped fast together, hair made bright with gold;
> This Jaques Picard, known through many lands,
>   Wrought cunningly; he's dead now—I am old.[27]

(ll. 193-200)

Castel Neuf commemorated the anonymous lovers by putting their remains in a chapel and having their likenesses sculpted on the cover of the tomb by one Jacques Picard. Again, the visual detail is crucial. The figures hold each other's hands, and the woman's hair is purposely made golden as if the sculptor followed his client's visualisation of the couple's fate and his idea of the lady's physical appearance, presented in the earlier parts of the narrative. As a result, the real meets the visionary again, and the absent becomes present in the effigies carved on the sepulchre. David

G. Riede sees John of Castel Neuf's story in escapist terms: the narrator, living 'in an age as corrupt and devoid of genuine values as Morris considered his own to be', loses interest in the present and turns, first, to his own past, and, failing to find beauty in it, then 'to an invented past that exists only in his own mind'.[28] Still, the tribute to the lovers is not only the case of how the past becomes personal, on the one hand, and invented, on the other, but paradoxically Morris shows the possibility of making somebody's personal and fabricated past become real and physical – through art, as a sculpture. For W. David Shaw, the narrator, in his praise of the stone effigy, rebuffs psychological introspection and speaks merely as 'a connoisseur of art'; yet, this may be just a pose which results from the narrator's imitation of Froissart's objectivity.[29] As mentioned above, the tomb serves symbolically as a meeting point between visualisation and material existence; it is also the point at which the absent figures become present, a place in which a story becomes history.

The symbolic fusion of visualisation with reality and absence with presence on the sarcophagus also ties together the threads of the present analysis. The sculpture, as a form of visual art, is the node through which all the visualised, recollected and reconstructed parts of the narrative become palpable. But it is rather the constant hovering between the material and the imagined that fascinates the reader in 'Concerning Geffray Teste Noire', to the extent that one is not able to discern the difference. As has been shown, reality as such is not attractive either to Morris or to his readers. In the numerous clashes between the real and the visualised, Morris seems to elaborate on the latter, giving the former an auxiliary role, as a stimulus to memory, for instance. The main aspect of the allure of the visualised is its potential pictoriality. As mentioned before, Morris's 'physical' painterliness is noteworthy, but the visuality in the region of the unreal is what captivates. It is also the realm that stimulates Morris to show that he, as a poet, is superior to painters in this respect, which might have been his motivation at this point of his career: after all, a painterly image cannot exploit the absent to the extent that a poetic account can, if at all. In 'Concerning Geffray Teste Noire', the poet builds a series of scenes that expose that which is missing in terms of time (the period separating the death of the lovers and the discovery of their remains); the past (in the narrator's recollection of an episode from his youth); the hypothetical (in the reconstruction of the lovers' moment of death); and the imaginary (in the invented portrayal of the lady's face). No matter what term is used, all those scenes visualise a *mode* of absence; that is, they appear as a diversion from the plotline of the narrative to the area of that which lies beyond the narrator's perception, though not beyond his imagination. In view of this, one might conclude that to call Morris's poetry merely descriptive, picturesque or ekphrastic is far too cursory an appraisal.

NOTES

1. Lindsay Smith, *Victorian Photography, Painting and Poetry: The Enigma of Visibility in Ruskin, Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 3. (Afterwards Smith).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

5. *Ibid.*

6. 'I should have painted well as far as the execution is concerned, and I had a good sense of colour; but though I have so to speak the literary artistic memory, I have not the artistic memory: I can only draw what I see before me, and my pictures, some of which still exist, lack movement'. Morris quoted in Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Times* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), p. 181.

7. Ruskin's implication is referred to by Smith, p. 24.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

9. Béatrice Laurent, 'The Landscapes of Nowhere', *JWMS*, 18: 2 (Summer 2009), 52-64; Constance W. Hassett, 'Esthetic Autonomy in the Sister Arts: The Brotherly Project of Rossetti and Morris', *Mosaic*, 25: 4 (1992), 49-62; Robert N. Keane, '*Ut Pictura Poesis*: Rossetti and Morris: Paintings into Poetry', *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 7: 2 (May 1987), 74-79; J.B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 79-86.

10. Smith, p. 156.

11. William Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1921), pp. 118-23. (Afterwards Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere*). Line references as printed in *The Pre-Raphaelites and Their Circle*, ed. by Cecil Y. Lang (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 216-19. (Afterwards Lang).

12. For a discussion of both fragments of 'Rapunzel' in a wider, Pre-Raphaelite context, see my *The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood: Painting versus Poetry* (Czestochowa: Wydawnictwo Wyzszej Szkoly Lingwistycznej, 2010), pp. 171-72. (Afterwards Zasempa). The poem is also analysed from the perspective of 'optical aberration' and 'figurative blindness' in a chapter from Smith, pp. 135-53.

13. However, J. Stephen Russell claims that 'the "events" reported in dream visions are probably not events at all but, as Augustine and others might have said, are gratuitous, random representations of thoughts and memories given imaginary life in the figmenta of the dreamer's brain'. See J. Stephen Russell, *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988), p. 116. This, however, simply means that the events or 'representations of thoughts and memories' are hazy, obscure and 'ambiguous' as Russell states elsewhere (pp. 33, 36), not that they can be characterised as hypotheical or speculative.

14. Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere*, pp. 137-47. Line references as printed in Lang, pp. 225-30.

15. John M. Patrick, 'Morris and Froissart: "Geffray Teste Noire" and "The Haystack in the Floods"', *Notes and Queries*, 5: 10 (October 1958), 425-27; John M. Patrick, 'Morris and Froissart Again: "Sir Peter Harpdon's End"', *Notes and Queries*, 6: 8 (September 1959), 331-33.

16. Margaret Lourie, 'Explanatory Notes', in William Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*, ed. by Margaret Lourie (New York & London: Garland, 1981), pp. 216-17. (Afterwards Lourie).

17. Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 239; Smith, p. 170.

18. The resemblance to Browning's monologues has been noticed by, among others, Lourie, p. 216, and Ingrid Hanson, *William Morris and the Uses of Violence, 1856-1890* (London: Anthem Press, 2013), p. 53. (Afterwards Hanson).

19. Zasempa, p. 191.

20. However, the placement of the adverb 'maybe' in this way does not exclude its connection to the last part of the sentence; thus, the line can also be paraphrased as 'He fought a good fight, and it was

probably here where he was slain'.

21. Hanson, p. 54. The emphasis is mine.

22. *Ibid*.

23. Amanda Hodgson, *The Romances of William Morris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 47.

24. David G. Riede, 'Morris, Modernism and Romance', *English Literary History,* 51: 1 (Spring 1984), p. 90. (Afterwards Riede, 'Morris, Modernism and Romance').

25. The critical comments on those lines are not consistent: the notes to the 1981 publication explain that the lady was 'his own past love' (Lourie, p. 220) whereas more recent accounts refer to the process of reconstructing the skeleton. Riede suggests that the narrator, after 'reassembling' the bones of the skeleton, starts 'falling in love with it (her)'. See David G. Riede, *Allegories of One's Own Mind: Melancholy in Victorian Poetry* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005), p. 22. See also: Riede, 'Morris, Modernism and Romance', p. 91; David Latham, 'Haunted Texts: The Invention of Pre-Raphaelite Studies', in *Haunted Texts: Studies in Pre-Raphaelitism in Honour of William E. Fredeman*, ed. by David Latham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 4-5.

26. Zasempa, p. 173.

27. The closure of the poem resembles Browning's 'My Last Duchess' in which the Duke muses over the portrait of his late wife '[l]ooking as if she were alive'. Browning's speaker also mentions the creator of the work of art, in this case a painter, Fra Pandolf. The similarity has been also noticed in W. David Shaw, 'Arthurian Ghosts: The Phantom Art of The Defence of Guenevere', *Victorian Poetry*, 34: 3 (Autumn 1996), 299-312 (309). (Afterwards Shaw). This special issue of *Victorian Poetry* was dedicated to Morris.

28. Riede, 'Morris, Modernism and Romance', p. 93.

29. Shaw, pp. 308-9.