

Visions of Wild England: William Morris and Richard Jefferies

by J R Ebbatson

In recent years there has been a revival of interest in what one critic unkindly categorised as the 'eight somniferous, pseudo-romances in archaic English'.¹ composed by William Morris towards the end of his life. This interest has resulted in reprints of several of these elusive works, and sporadic but increasing critical discussion.² There has undoubtedly always been a public for *News from Nowhere*, but the change in fortune of the romances proper is something of a *volte face*, since they have generally met with denigration even from Morris authorities. It is perhaps in these epic romance works that Morris follows most assiduously Wilde's dictum in 'The Decay of Lying' that 'the two things that every artist should avoid are modernity of form and modernity of subject-matter'. In each romance Morris weaves his rhapsodic tapestries unencumbered by considerations of Jamesian unity, though the early view that these books are an amalgam 'of imagination, fire and beauty' which 'suggest no moral',³ despite the endorsement of Morris,⁴ is possibly delusive. Margaret Grennan's pertinaciously socio-political readings have been extended recently by John Goode, who sees *The House of the Wolfings*, for instance, as an allegory of man's developing consciousness, and *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, as a paradigm of revolution.⁵ That these romances are not without their *longueurs* was ruefully admitted by Morris himself when he described their composition as 'the Holiday of the Reformer', referred

(NB – The footnotes for this article are grouped at the end of it.)

to the most gigantic of them, *The Well at the World's End*, as 'the Interminable'. In placing his picaresque narratives within a highly idealised medieval context, and in resorting to a strange archaic English whose mellifluousness does not always ward off inanity, Morris in some ways succumbs to the lotus-eating aspects of his personality. For the modern reader the encomium of an early critic that the romances 'belong to no time or place', being cast in a language freed 'from all associations of modern ugliness',⁶ is not especially reassuring. As the puritan novelist 'Mark Rutherford' warned Philip Webb, the Middle Ages 'are beyond us; completely (almost) outside us and unrealisable, and he who approaches them with any nineteenth century intent will certainly mistranslate them'.⁷ But such 'mistranslation' was part of the Ruskinian tradition in which Morris was steeped, and it provides the fabric of these romance works.

These stories possess, in the words of John Drinkwater, 'a prodigal diffuseness that belongs rather to nature than to art',⁸ and this lends itself to what other commentators call a debilitating 'feeling of purposelessness'⁹ and a 'faint melancholy'¹⁰ which may dwindle into 'pure self-indulgence in pleasurable reverie or dream'.¹¹ If, in Paul Bloomfield's words, the significance of the romances in Morris' *oeuvre* is that 'they represent his giving way to the temptation he had so long resisted . . . of pursuing perfection',¹² yet they also indicate profoundly meaningful factors in his self-renewing vision of the Earthly Paradise. Yeats, who like C. S. Lewis was deeply influenced by the Morris romances, detected in them 'the vision of the world made perfect that is buried under all minds'.¹³ Thus these tales of Odyssean quest, love, magic, beauty and adventure sound a universal chord in man, whether they are interpreted in the light of the Yeatsian *anima mundi*, or in Graham Hough's Jungian variant as 'one of the archetypes from the collective unconscious of mankind'.¹⁴

What impetus lay behind Morris' turning to the romance form? There can be no simple answer, and a multiplicity of factors needs to be taken into account. They offered a seductive opiate to the machinations of the Socialist League

clagues; they provided an undemanding outlet for his literary creativity during his work on the Kelmscott Press, and were possibly related in his mind with his Chaucer edition; their frequent, though veiled and hieratic eroticism, with the heroines so often appearing *in puris naturabilis*, doubtless offered compensation for his unsatisfactory marriage; and, most important, they offer a synthesis of so much of his earlier work in both medieval and Norse myth and legend. Edward Carpenter asserted that these stories were written by Morris 'for his own recreation, and as an escape from actual conditions'. For the author of *Civilisation*, Morris' speeches 'were a trump of battle, but his imaginative writings moved in the calm of dreamland'.¹⁵ May Morris seems to concur when she classes the later romances as 'holiday work', and traces their origin in 'the old impulse towards pure romance' which 'came over him afresh', 'in a sort of flood of invention'.¹⁶ Yet although we can obviously find links with such early *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* pieces as *Gertha's Lovers* and *Svend and his Brethern*, notably in the handling of battle-scenes, sieges and the like, and in the idealisation of the women, the disparity between early and late romance is not simply one of length. A lifetime's involvement with socialist movements, and commitment to the arts and crafts concept, with its attendant utopian ideology, had left its mark. In this respect we should be wary about accepting the usual critical ploy of detaching the utopian fantasies from the body of romances proper. The later books may not have a palpable and readily discernible message by comparison with the utopian books which preceded them, but they emanate from the same nexus of ideas and concerns. Of course there are differentiations to be made: *The House of the Wolfings*, for instance, is radically removed from the later romances by its vigorous depiction of grim historical struggle and by its pervasive determinist sense of that twilight of the gods, or *ragna rök*, which Morris imbibed from the Norse *Eddas*. This book, indeed, stands apart from the rose-coloured vision of the later romances more unequivocally than do the utopias of *A Dream of John Ball* and *News from Nowhere*. We may, indeed, see *News from Nowhere* as the starting-point of Morris' real work in the romance genre,

since *A Dream* was something in the nature of a trial-run. The genealogy of *News from Nowhere* is complex, ranging as it does from Plutarch and Tacitus, through the Renaissance utopias, to Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888) and Edward Carpenter's *Civilisation* (1889).¹⁷ Yet whilst the sources here and in the romances which followed may be identified in a general way with Morris' immersion in medievalism and Norse mythology, one key source of this whole body of work has gone largely unremarked, though Morris' biographer himself long ago pointed out its significance. A knowledge of this source, and an appreciation of Morris' treatment (or mistreatment) of it, may help to illumine these strange works for the modern reader.¹⁸

In the spring of 1885 Morris was returning from a trip to Scotland and the north of England. Travelling by train from Carlisle to Sheffield (where, significantly enough, he was to meet Carpenter), he read 'a queer book' which, he told Mrs Burne-Jones, he 'rather liked'. His railway reading prompted some heart-searchings: 'absurd hopes curled round my heart as I read it. I rather wish I were thirty years younger: I want to see the game played out.'¹⁹ The book was *After London, or Wild England* (1885) by Richard Jefferies. It was a work, J. W. Mackail tells us, which 'Morris afterwards was never weary of praising', because it 'put into definite shape, with a mingling of elusive romance and a minute detail that was entirely after his heart, much that he had half imagined; and he thought that it represented very closely what might really happen in a dispeopled England'.²⁰ This is very just, and Mackail perceptively goes on to trace the reverberations of *After London* in another letter to Mrs Burne-Jones written some days later, a key document to an understanding of Morris, in which he adopts a somewhat apocalyptic stance undoubtedly prompted by his reading of Jefferies' futurist-medieval fantasy. 'I have no more faith than a grain of mustard seed', he writes, 'in the future history of "civilisation", which I *know* now is doomed to destruction, and probably before very long: what a joy it is to think of! and how often it consoles me to think of barbarism once more flooding the

world, and real feelings and passions, however rudimentary, taking the place of our wretched hypocrisies.' This, as we shall see, is an exact summation of Jefferies' book, whose first part is called 'The Relapse into Barbarism'. The prospect of such a relapse fills Morris with the opposite of gloom:

With this thought in my mind all the history of the past is lighted up and lives again to me. I used really to despair once because I thought what the idiots of our day call progress would go on perfecting itself: happily I know now that all that will have a sudden check—sudden in appearance I mean—"as it was in the days of Noe."²¹

This 'knowledge' to which Morris lays claim surely derives from Jefferies, and the last phrase is indubitably prompted by *After London*, a cardinal feature of 'Wild England' being the great lake which inundates the central counties beloved of both authors. Thus we have persuasive evidence that the seed of Morris' later work was implanted by his reading of Jefferies. The subsequent fertilisation was to produce some characteristically surprising results.

However, before going on to trace the correspondences between *After London* and Morris, as the Jefferies book has been out of print for many years it may be appropriate to offer a brief *resume* of the narrative. It is split into two unequal sections, 'The Relapse into Barbarism' acting as prelude to the story proper, which is titled 'Wild England'. Jefferies completed *After London* in the spring of 1884, the year following *The Story of my Heart*. He described it as 'in no sense a novel, more like a romance', and justly remarked that it was 'original'.²² It is indeed, as W. J. Keith notes, 'the most original and unexpected of all Jefferies' productions'.²³ 'The Relapse into Barbarism' delineates with 'an unsuspected strength of remorseless logic and restraint'²⁴ the recession of England after some aboriginal calamity into a wild state of nature. The landscape becomes clothed with thicket and forest: 'By the thirtieth year there was not one single open place, the hills only excepted, where a man could walk, unless he followed the tracks of wild creatures or cut himself a path.' (p. 4)²⁵ The towns are evacuated and overgrown by woods, and domestic animals run wild and hunt in packs. One result of the

supervention of barbarism to which Morris would have been especially susceptible is that technology gets forgotten. Speaking of such inventions as the railway and the telegraph the narrator explains, 'These marvellous things are to us little more than fables of the giants and of the old gods that walked upon the earth' (pp. 23–4). Man himself reverts to primal origins, the more unruly elements becoming 'Bushmen' and 'Gypsies' who harrass the small agricultural communities which now form the nodal centres of civilisation. Interstate rivalries flourish, and the Welsh, Scots and Irish continually make inroads into the borders of the kingdom. After describing these events in meticulously realistic detail Jefferies closes his first section with a chapter on the lake which is to dominate the action, lying as it does athwart the south of England from the Severn to the Thames estuary. This striking opening gives way to the story of Sir Felix Aquila, a youth closely resembling Jefferies in isolated sensibility, and his journey round the lake. Dissatisfied with the placidly Horatian life on his father's estate, and goaded by his hopeless love affair with the daughter of a neighbouring aristocrat, Aurora Thyma, Felix sets out on a quest which will prove his worth. In the course of his voyage he undergoes various adventures which appear in different guise throughout Morris' romances. First of all he lands at a besieged town, criticises the handling of the attack and impresses the court by his military acumen, till he overreaches himself and is unceremoniously ejected from the camp; after this he unwittingly sails over the poisonous site of London, escaping death by a mixture of luck and intelligence; and finally, meeting a band of shepherds on the downs bordering the lake, he becomes their leader, defeats their enemies, establishes a fortress, and is universally hailed as a hero. As the book closes, somewhat indeterminately, Felix is making his way back to Thyma Castle to confront Aurora with his deeds. Both parts of Jefferies' strange book must have exerted a powerful attraction upon Morris. In the romances we find both the theme of the 'dispeopled England' returning to a quasi-medieval social pattern, and the quest-theme whose insistent presence in the sagas can only have been reinforced by his reading of *After London*.

The biographies of two contemporaneous literary figures could scarcely reveal wider disparities, Jefferies leading a solitary and neglected sub-literary existence, Morris writing and working close to what Arnold called 'the tone of the Centre'. Richard Jefferies (1848–87), the son of a Wiltshire yeoman farmer, began life as a journalist, and later supported his family by his meagre earnings from his writing. After publishing a number of unsuccessful novels at his own expense, in 1877 Jefferies moved from Wiltshire to the suburbs of London and achieved a measure of success with *The Gamekeeper at Home*, a collection of essays on rural life. Later works in similar vein included *The Amateur Poacher* (1879) and *Hodge and his Masters* (1880), and he also produced two notable books for boys, *Wood Magic* (1881) and *Bevis* (1882). In his last years, beset by poverty and disease, Jefferies turned increasingly to a semi-mystical interpretation of nature, and this formed the theme of his spiritual autobiography, *The Story of my Heart*, and of his late essays. Despite the differences between the two men, we may discern some interesting affinities of temperament and attitude. Much of Jefferies' greatest work feeds upon his boyhood at Coate Farm in Wiltshire. This is so, notably, in the unequivocally autobiographical works such as *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *Bevis*, or even the more mystical *Story of my Heart*. But the autobiographical strain is also to be found in *After London*, where the setting, according to Keith, 'is no more nor less than a giant Coate Farm, and the reservoir . . . is now extended to cover a vast section of the south of England'.²⁶ His biographers comment that Jefferies 'found more of interest in the fields and lanes' than at day-school.²⁷ Within a few miles of Coate, though at a different educational and social level, we have Morris' own testimony that at Marlborough he 'learned next to nothing', but the school standing 'in very beautiful country, thickly scattered over with prehistoric monuments', he set himself eagerly to studying these and everything else that had history in it.²⁸ Jefferies shared this fascination with prehistory. As Edward Thomas observed, the young Jefferies 'turned archaeologist and numismatist', and during the eighteen-sixties paid visits to many of the great Wiltshire monuments of prehistoric

culture, such as Avebury, Stonehenge, and Wayland's Smithy, which had fired Morris' imagination twenty years before.²⁹ The image of heroine or hero sailing across a lake, which is so ubiquitous in both authors, also has its roots in a shared boyhood experience. Margaret Grennan noted that in the romances, 'Heroines swim to islands not far from shore and the reader feels the author is thinking too of the happy little island behind Water House'.³⁰ For evidence that Jefferies also associated feelings of happiness and freedom with his adventures on Coate reservoir one need look no further than *Bevis*, with its Wordsworthian delight in the boys' exploration of 'the New Sea'. The archetypal voyage-image seems peculiarly meaningful to both Morris and Jefferies. Indeed Keith judges *After London* to be 'not one of his best books' because 'it is too close to the patterns of his own subconscious'.³¹ As a literary judgement this is questionable, but as a psychological comment it is irrefutable, and it can be applied with equal validity to Morris' world of romance.

In recording an ecstatic communion with nature Jefferies had no peer in England, save Hopkins, in his own time. But something of his passionate love of landscape and natural beauty is also to be met with in Morris, not only in the poems but also in, for example, the glowing peroration of *News from Nowhere*, and at many points in the romances. This passion was nurtured at Marlborough, and Morris attested that this region, with 'the huge barrow of Silbury, the hills about all dotted with graves of the early chieftains; the mysterious Wansdyke drawn across the downs at the back', was 'a familiar place to my boyhood', adding in religious terminology which is often found in Jefferies, 'a holy place indeed'.³² At the end of his life Morris stressed that 'through forty years of my life I have diligently and affectionately *noticed* the countryside in its smallest detail',³³ and this practice yields many of the finest moments in these later works. Alfred Noyes held that in the romances 'the exquisite descriptions of wood and meadow, valley and mountain, stream and fell, are perhaps lovelier than anything from any other hand in our prose literature'.³⁴ This is hyperbolic, but it is true that the celebrations of landscape

in the romances, which in imagery are a curious mixture of Iceland and Oxfordshire, reveal a sensibility attuned to nature in a way which Jefferies might have saluted. In her deft analysis of the pervasive nineteenth-century cult of medievalism Alice Chandler observes that in the Morris romances the Edenic vision 'serves as counterpoise to the ugliness of society itself'.³⁵ There are, therefore, many connexions, both general and specific, between Morris and Jefferies. It remains to be seen how, in detail, the younger man influenced the older.

There are very great, indeed crucial differences between *After London* and *News from Nowhere*, and care must be exercised not to 'process' the one into the other. Indeed, commentators on Jefferies are often at pains to draw out these distinctions. One of the most interesting of these is Henry Salt, who came into contact with Morris via the Humanitarian League and later through the Fabian Society. A Jefferies enthusiast, Salt published a somewhat Transcendentalist study of his 'Life and Ideals' as early as 1894. Here he spoke of *After London* as offering a 'sombre picture of the ruins of a defunct civilisation', in contradistinction to what he termed Morris' 'optimistic description of a ruralised and humanised London' in *News from Nowhere*.³⁶ Edward Thomas made no reference to Morris, but he characterised *After London* as 'a bitter book', and expressed surprise that Jefferies' imaginary regression to a longed-for primitivism 'should have been to a state so far below what he alone dreamed of as the lot of the man in the tumulus on the downs'.³⁷ Keith, who discerns in *After London* a Darwinian 'world of cruelty and injustice' which relates it to *Wood Magic*, goes on to contend that Jefferies' views of the future 'are obviously at the opposite pole from the over-simple optimism of Morris' *News from Nowhere*'.³⁸ Whilst much of this comment is a valid reflection of 'The Relapse into Barbarism' it does not account for the very different effect of the second part. In dealing with Felix Aquila's journey Jefferies' tone lightens, and there is a radical 'opening-out' in the treatment. In any case the differences between *After London* and *News from Nowhere*, though great, are largely a matter of tone and accent. Morris, drawing as he did upon the whole Golden Age tradition, and reacting against

contemporary mechanistic utopias, may still have recalled some key features of Jefferies' story when he came to compose *News from Nowhere* for *The Commonweal*.

The afforestation which Jefferies so graphically delineates in 'The Relapse into Barbarism', for instance, has also overtaken Morris' England, though with happier results, as Dick tells the narrator:

"I must tell you that many grown people will go to live in the forest through the summer, though they for the most part go to the bigger ones, like Windsor, or the Forest of Dean, or the northern wastes. Apart from the other pleasures of it, it gives them a little rough work, which I am sorry to say is getting somewhat scarce for these last fifty years." (p.23)

As Hammond later explains, the inhabitants 'like these pieces of wild nature, and can afford them', so they are retained (p. 62). The tribal struggles which the forests of Jefferies witness are here replaced by activities more in keeping with an epoch of rest. In the woods of Morris the children play 'gipsy fashion' (p. 22), the old educational system having been abandoned. This version of Rousseauist education through natural growth, with its consequent setting-aside of bookish culture, is a theme common to both authors, although again there is a characteristic change of emphasis. In *After London* reading and writing becomes 'the special mark of the nobility' (p. 25), though even they evince little interest in learning. Felix's studious examination of ancient documents is regarded as a quirk by his fellow-nobles, who, 'entirely devoted to the chase, to love intrigues, and war, overwhelmed Felix Aquila with ridicule when they found him poring over these relics' (p. 61). Children in *News from Nowhere* are not encouraged to read until they are fifteen, so as not to encourage 'early bookishness' (p. 25). Here the anti-intellectual animus takes an optimistic form, whereas in Jefferies the decay of learning is part and parcel of a general cultural decline. The same order of contrast, reflecting a fundamental opposition in the cast of mind of the two authors, is observable in the depictions of agricultural society. In *After London* the people have a hard time winning a living from the soil, beset as they are with both

animal and human marauders. In *News from Nowhere* the return to an agrarian economy is envisaged as one of the prime sources of happiness which man can know. As Morris wrote in his essay 'The Lesser Arts', 'in the English country, in the days when people cared about such things, there was a full sympathy between the works of man, and the land they were made for'.³⁹ It is this 'full sympathy', fatally alienated by the industrial revolution and the ensuing worship of a technological Mammon, which Morris tries to resurrect in *News from Nowhere*. The contrast between natural beauty and the starkness of the dark Satanic mills of industry was of course a commonplace of romantic ideology, and Jefferies gives some telling instances of this contrast, as for example in his pastoral novel *Greene Ferne Farm*. Whatever the theoretical objections to political economy, the static image of a rural Arcadia gives rise to some of the finest scenes of *News from Nowhere*. As he and Dick set off upriver towards that paradisaical 'Resting Place on the Upper Thames' which haunts so much of Morris' work, the narrator 'could not help putting beside his promised picture of the hay-field as it was then the picture of it as I remembered it, and especially the images of the women engaged in the work rose up before me: the row of gaunt figures, lean, flat-breasted, ugly, without a grace of form or face about them; dressed in wretched skimpy print gowns, and hideous flapping sun-bonnets, moving their rakes in a listless mechanical way.' The eighteen-seventies and eighties were a period of agricultural depression in the depopulated southern counties, and Morris must often have had occasion to lament that the field-women 'marred the loveliness of the June day' (p. 123). The narrator's longing here 'to see the hay-fields peopled with men and women worthy of the sweet abundance of midsummer' is glowingly fulfilled at journey's end in the Oxfordshire hay-fields, 'all peopled now with this happy and lovely folk', who had paradoxically 'cast away riches and attained to wealth' (p. 173). Morris' passionate outcry at the contrast between the beauty of the harvest-scene and the grotesque poverty of the labourers is a perennial burden in Jefferies, who lived at much closer quarters with the facts of rural existence. The parallel here is so striking that one

wonders whether Morris knew any of Jefferies' agricultural essays, such as 'Walks in the Wheatfields'.⁴⁰ In this piece Jefferies reports how the labourers 'grew visibly thinner in the harvest-field, and shrunk together—all flesh disappearing, and nothing but sinew and muscle remaining'. Oppressed by 'the heat, the aches, the illness, the sunstrokes' the peasants toiled 'in the midst of flower summer', which scourged them 'with the knot of necessity'.⁴¹ Elsewhere Jefferies, in similar vein, reflects that the beauty of Nature gives the reaper no sustenance: 'But why should he note the colour of the butterfly, the bright light of the sun, the hue of the wheat? This loveliness gave him no cheese for breakfast; of beauty itself, for itself, he had no idea.'⁴² Although Morris in *News from Nowhere* is fundamentally concerned to propose answers to the rampant effects of laissez-faire industrialism as evinced in alienation and mass-production, his vision of the revival of true rurality acknowledges the need for a revolutionary new mode of life in the country as well as town. In Jefferies' memorable formulation, 'The wheat is beautiful, but human life is labour.'⁴³ The final resemblance which might be adduced as evidence of Morris recalling *After London* in the composition of *News from Nowhere* is that both works take as a *donnée* the notion of a first cause which has led to the revival of this quasi-medieval social organisation. This is referred to by Jefferies as 'the event', and deliberately left unexplained, and as the 'Great Change' by Morris. In the first case some natural calamity is the cause; in the second it is a revolution in human thought which leads to a rejection of machinery in favour of works of art.

Notwithstanding the wide divergence in tone and intention, we may justifiably identify a number of parallels between *After London* and *News from Nowhere* which show that Morris' reading of Jefferies was a significant part of that matrix of ideas which went into his utopia.

If we turn, finally, to the romances proper, the influence of Jefferies seems unequivocal, though more diffuse. Each one treats of a quest by hero or heroine, in which tests of character mingle with incidents which are less structurally germane. Al-

though Morris' *furor scribendi* allows these works to spread themselves ever more luxuriantly, and the multiplicity of event becomes repetitively tedious, Felix's journey round the lake, and his unrequited love for Aurora, are often called to mind. Thus in *The Sundering Flood* Morris recounts the lengthy search by Osberne for his beloved Elfhild, from whom he is separated by a great river, and in *The Story of the Glittering Plain* we follow an identical pattern in Hallblithe's journeying in search of the Hostage. Walter, in *The Wood Beyond the World*, is equally afflicted with wanderlust: 'now it seemed as if he needs must wander, would he, could he not; and so it was that even this fed his hope; so sore his heart clung to that desire of his to seek home to those three that seemed to call him unto them'.⁴⁴ *The Well at the World's End* is especially notable in its presentation of a Jefferies landscape, those 'downs on downs with never a road to call a road, and never a castle, or church, or a homestead', as the Chapman describes them.⁴⁵ May Morris enables us to identify the locations in this tale: the house is Kelmscott itself; Wulstead is Faringdon, and Uffington and the Forest of Wychwood are also involved. 'All the Wiltshire downland is woven into the story both of *The Well at the World's End* and *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*', she observes, remarking upon her father's 'special pleasure in treeless sweeps of hill-country'.⁴⁶ Earlier, *The Roots of the Mountains* had already shared with Jefferies both the quest-theme and a loving depiction of the Wiltshire downs:

their souls longed for the sheep-cotes in the winding valleys under the long grey downs; and the garths where the last year's ricks shouldered up against the old stone-gables, and where the daws were busy in the tall unfrequent ash-trees; and the green flowery meadows adown along the bright streams, where the crowfoot and the paigles were blooming now, and the hare-bells were in flower about the thorn-bushes at the down's foot, whence went the savour of their blossom over sheep-walk and water-meadow.⁴⁷

It is in *The Waters of the Wondrous Isles*, however, that Morris' romances come closest to *After London*. It traces the escape of the heroine Birdalone from her servitude to the Witch-Wife, and her subsequent adventures in the Sending Boat which ferries her across the great lake. Like Felix Aquila,

Birdalone 'oft found the wood a better home than the house' (p. 9),⁴⁸ and her rapport with nature offers her protection against the wiles of men. As usual in Morris, the weaving of fantasy soon replaces Jefferies' direct narrative style, and there is the standard proliferation of Pre-Raphaelite scene and description. But one incident, Birdalone's visit to the Isle of Nothing seems to owe a good deal to *After London*. This is one of the most haunting passages in the book, and forms part of a sequence of visits which Birdalone makes to the islands in the lake. Birdalone lands upon a flat island with 'nought all growing there, not even the smallest of herbs' (p. 92). Determined to quit 'this ugly isle' she is baulked by the sudden obfuscation of the sun; 'the light growing dull grey overhead, as all under foot was a dull dun' (p. 93). She fearfully recognises that she has walked in a circle round the isle, and falls asleep only to waken into 'a thick dark mist', and 'the master-thought of death drawing nigh scattered all other thoughts, or made them dim and feeble' (p. 94). She is delivered from this miasma by the intercession of her guardian-angel, the Wood-Mother, and sails quickly away from that 'ugly blotch on the fair face of the Great Water' (p. 95). This seems to contain reminiscences of Jefferies' chapter 'Strange Things', where Felix Aquila is stranded upon the poisonous site of London. On this site 'there was not a grass-blade or plant; the surface was hard, black and burned, resembling iron' (p. 261). Although Felix discovers ancient skeletons, he is narcotised by 'the gaseous inhalations from the soil', and does not appreciate that his life is in danger (p. 263). The sun is extinguished, and he is enveloped in a murky cloud and grows feverish. After further *Schrecklichkeit* worthy of Poe, Felix sails away from the hellish site, propelled by underwater explosions rather than by magic interventions.⁴⁹

Whilst the influence of *After London* does not often reappear in the romances in the form of such transparent borrowing, it seems not unlikely that Jefferies' strangely original book was often in Morris' mind in his later years, and this its influence, for good or ill, is to be discerned in theme and treatment in both his favourite genres of utopian allegory and medieval romance.

FOOTNOTES

¹ James Sambrook, 'The Rossettis and other Contemporary Poets', *The Victorians*, ed. Arthur Pollard (Sphere Books, 1970), p. 351.

The works referred to are : *The Roots of the Mountains* (1889); *The Wood Beyond the World* (1894); *The Well at the World's End* (1896); *The Sundering Flood* (1897); *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* (1897); *The Story of the Glittering Plain* (1890); *The House of the Wolfings* (1888). Of the Utopias, *A Dream of John Ball* appeared in 1886, and *News from Nowhere* in 1890.

² The first modern critic to study the romances in detail was Margaret R. Grennan, in *William Morris, Medievalist and Revolutionary* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1945). This pioneering study has been followed by several others including: S. Sokkari, 'The Prose Romances of William Morris', Ph.D. Manchester, 1953; Fred S. Bromberger, 'William Morris' Concept of the Ideal Human Society', Ph.D. Southern California, 1964; C. R. P. Tyzack, 'A Critical Study of William Morris' Prose Romances', B.Litt., Balliol College, Oxford, 1964; Carole G. Silver, 'No Idle Singer', Ph.D. Columbia, 1967; Wilbur T. Albrecht, 'William Morris' *The Well at the World's End*', Ph.D. Pennsylvania, 1970.

³ Lloyd Eric Gray, *William Morris, Prophet of England's New Order* (Cassell & Co., 1949), p. 299.

⁴ Morris reproved *The Spectator*, in a letter of 20 July 1895, for taking *The Wood Beyond the World* as a political allegory: 'If I have to write or speak on social problems, I always try to be as direct as I possibly can be. On the other hand, I should consider it bad art in anyone writing an allegory not to make it clear from the first that this was his intention'. *The Letters of William Morris to his Family and Friends*, ed. P. Henderson (Longman's, Green & Co., 1950), p. 371. Referred to hereafter as *Letters*.

⁵ John Goode, 'William Morris and the Dream of Revolution', *Literature and Politics in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. John Lucas (Methuen, 1971), pp. 265, 277.

⁶ A. Clutton Brock, *William Morris: his Work and Influence* (Williams and Norgate, 1914), p. 183.

⁷ Letter of 29 January 1899; William Hale White (Mark Rutherford), *Letters to Three Friends* (Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 299.

⁸ John Drinkwater, *William Morris* (Martin Secker, 1913), p. 171.

⁹ Paul Thompson, *The Work of William Morris* (Heinemann, 1967), p. 158.

¹⁰ Esther Meynell, *Portrait of William Morris* (Chapman & Hall, 1947), p. 193.

- ¹¹ E. P. Thompson, *William Morris, Romantic to Revolutionary* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1955), p. 785.
- ¹² Paul Bloomfield, *William Morris* (Arthur Barker, 1934), p. 296.
- ¹³ W. B. Yeats, 'The Happiest of Poets', *Essays* (Macmillan, 1924), p. 177.
- ¹⁴ Graham Hough, *The Last Romantics* (Methuen, 1961), p. 112.
- ¹⁵ Edward Carpenter, writing in *Freedom*, December 1896, X, p. 118; quoted in *William Morris, The Critical Heritage*, ed. Peter Faulkner (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 402. Hereafter referred to as *Critical Heritage*.
- ¹⁶ May Morris, Introduction to Vol. XVIII of the *Collected Works* (Longmans, Green & Co., 1915), pp. xvi, xvii.
- ¹⁷ This matter is ably dealt with by James Redmond in the introduction to his edition of *News from Nowhere* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970). All subsequent reference is to this edition.
- ¹⁸ For a suggestive brief analysis of the connexion between Jefferies and Morris see Jesse Kocmanova, 'The aesthetic purpose of William Morris in the context of his late prose romances', *Brno Studies in English*, VI (1966), p. 124. Dr Kocmanova, in the course of a persuasive socialist reading of the romances, identifies *After London* as a key source, and adds that it 'played a part as the suggestive background to some of that atmosphere of heightened reality blended with fantasy which at first sight seems so completely personal to Morris' (pp. 124–5). I am grateful to the editor for drawing my attention to this study.
- ¹⁹ Letter of 28 April 1885; *Letters*, p. 236.
- ²⁰ J. W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris* (Longman's, Green & Co., 1899), II, p. 144.
- ²¹ Letter of 13 May 1885; *Letters*, p. 236.
- ²² Quoted in Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies* (J. M. Dent & Sons, 1938), p. 232.
- ²³ W. J. Keith, *Richard Jefferies: A Critical Study* (Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 115.
- ²⁴ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 233.
- ²⁵ Reference throughout is to the New Reader's Library edition (Duckworth, 1929).
- ²⁶ Keith, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

- ²⁷ S. J. Looker & C. Porteus, *Richard Jefferies, Man of the Fields* (The Country Book Club, 1966), p. 29.
- ²⁸ *Letters*, p. 185.
- ²⁹ Thomas, *op. cit.*, pp. 49–50.
- ³⁰ Margaret Grennan, *op. cit.*, p. 296.
- ³¹ Keith, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
- ³² Quoted by May Morris, *op. cit.*, p. xxiii.
- ³³ Addressing the Ancoats Brotherhood in 1894; quoted in Mackail, *op. cit.*, p. 305.
- ³⁴ Alfred Noyes, *William Morris* (Macmillan, 1908), p. 188.
- ³⁵ Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 228.
- ³⁶ Henry S. Salt, *Richard Jefferies: His Life and Ideals* (Arthur Fifiield, 1905), p. 58.
- ³⁷ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 238. The reference is to a passage in *The Story of My Heart* of some relevance to *After London*, which was composed shortly afterwards: 'I felt at that moment that I was like the spirit of the man whose body was interred in the tumulus; I could understand and feel his existence the same as my own . . . As my thought could slip back the twenty centuries in a moment to the forest-days when he hurled the spear, or shot the bow, hunting the deer . . . so his spirit could endure from then till now, and the time was nothing.' *The Story of My Heart* (Longman's, Green & Co., 1898), pp. 37–8.
- ³⁸ Keith, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
- ³⁹ 'The Lesser Arts' (1878), *Hopes and Fears for Art* (1882), *Collected Works* (Longman's, Green & Co., 1915), XXII, p. 17.
- ⁴⁰ Morris probably knew of this essay from its first appearance in the *English Illustrated Magazine* for July 1887. Joseph W. Comyns Carr, the founder of the magazine, was a close friend of Burne-Jones, and knew Morris well. Another contact was his brother, Jonathan G. Carr, the originator of Bedford Park, which was developed in 1875 when Morris was living at Turnham Green. A copy of Jefferies' *Red Deer* bears the inscription 'J. Comyns Carr Esq. from the author: Jan. 7th 1884'. A further link may have been Emery Walker, another of Morris' close friends, who was appointed an editor of the magazine in 1889.
- ⁴¹ 'Walks in the Wheatfields', *Field and Hedgerow* (Longman's, Green & Co., 1910), pp. 132–33. The essay was collected with others into the posthumous volume *Field and Hedgerow* by Mrs Jefferies in 1889.

In either the original or the collected form both this and many other Jefferies pieces would have been available to Morris.

⁴² 'One of the New Voters', *The Open Air* (J. M. Dent & Sons, Wayfarer's Library, n.d.), p. 97. First published 1885.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁴⁴ *The Wood Beyond the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969), p. 22.

⁴⁵ *The Well at the World's End* (Ballantine Books, 1971), I, p. 14. There is in this book incidentally a curious anticipation of Golding's *The Spire*. Morris describes the ascent of his hero to the top of the minster, whence he sees 'men with torches drawing near to the pile of wood', and further afield a ring of 'Midsummer bale-fires' (p. 27). In *The Spire*, it will be recalled, Dean Jocelin gazes over the evening landscape from his unfinished spire, seeing 'more and more fires round the rim of the world', 'the fires of Midsummer Nights, lighted by the devil worshippers out on the hills'. (Faber edn, 1970, p. 155.)

⁴⁶ May Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. xix–xxiii.

⁴⁷ *The Roots of the Mountains* (Longmans, Green & Co., 1913), II, p. 215.

⁴⁸ *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* (Ballantine Books, 1972). Subsequent reference is to this edition.

⁴⁹ Morris' unusual word 'thole' – 'to suffer' – which occurs several times in this book, e.g., pp. 9, 336, 352, is also to be found in Jefferies. See *The Notebooks of Richard Jefferies*, ed. S. J. Looker (Grey Walls Press, 1948), *passim*.