

The Living Past of William Morris's Late Romances

Gabriel Schenk

(T)he past is not dead, but is living in us, and will be alive in the future which we are now helping to make.¹

The above quotation becomes more complex the more we think about it: how can past events be in the present, and be used in the future? What does it mean for the past to be 'alive,' and 'living in us'? The answers to these questions can be found most clearly in the invented times and places of Morris's late prose romances, which, like the quotation, are more complex than they first appear. *The Story of the Glittering Plain* (1891), *The Wood Beyond the World* (1894), *The Well at the World's End* (1896), *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* (1897), and the posthumously published *The Sundering Flood* (1897),² are five texts which seem difficult to connect with a living past, all being set in vague medieval settings, and peopled with characters who possess the simplicity of children. It is exactly these points, however, which make the late prose romances so important to understanding the idea of a living and non-linear past: the childlike perception of the characters enables them to experience past settings from a direct and sometimes ignorant perspective, encouraging readers to live through a re-imagined medieval past, free from the limitations of an historical framework. Morris appeals to our personal childlike histories, as well as to our collective, historical narrative, in order to complicate a seemingly simple version of the past, presented in the romance form. The result is a rejection of limited static time, and an embracing of past and present enjoyed together.

Even a brief summary of the romances shows that the passing of a time is an important theme. *The Story of the Glittering Plain* and *The Wood Beyond the World* are progressions from Morris's historically-located romances (*The House of the Wolfings*, 1888; *The Roots of the Mountains*, 1889),³ in that the stories begin at times and settings which seem recognisable, before moving into dream-like locations, outside of time and place. *The Story of the Glittering Plain* follows Hallblithe on a

quest for his lost love, taking him through a land which restores health and youth; *The Wood Beyond the World* describes Golden Walter, the son of a merchant, and his adventure in a forest disconnected from universal time and space. *The Well at the World's End* is more obviously established in a created world, albeit with mixed references to our own history and cultures (such as Rome, and the Christian Church), and tells of Prince Ralph seeking a magic well which bestows health, long life, and charisma to whoever drinks from it. *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* is set over twenty-five years, during which time great changes occur, particularly to the islands of the title – and thus the created medieval world evolves and develops within the story. The plot describes Birdalone escaping from an evil witch, before confronting her fears and accepting past mistakes. Finally, *The Sundering Flood* spans eleven years inside a complex landscape of churches and castles, and follows Osborne in his search for his lover, beginning when he is twelve years old, and ending when he is an adult.

These romances resist classification. What are they, and why did Morris spend part of the last decade of his life writing them? At what point in time, and in what location, are they based? Are they intended for adults or children, and are the characters in them children or adults? In 1969, Ballantine Books remoulded Morris as 'the man who invented fantasy,' when Lin Carter suggested that Morris had previously felt too restricted by a historical setting.⁴ This may be true, but it is also a simplification which ignores the many deliberate links to our own world, and the approach of the romances to time, which does not simply move away from history. Morris was not taking us away from all times and places, but to new times and places, based on the idea of a living past.

The characters themselves allow us to experience this living past. Perhaps the best example is found in *The Well at the World's End*, in which Ralph explores the wider world for the first time. In his first encounter with a host of knights, Ralph notes their 'goodly' armour, and much detail is given of the foreign designs on their tabards. After they have proved only 'somewhat' courteous, in the next chapter he meets another set of knights – and though they are 'clad as those of the company which had gone before,' they are not described as 'goodly,' because Ralph has already ceased to project his limited, adventurous opinion on the part of the world which involves unknown knights, revealing a development of understanding of medieval *topoi*. Morris also describes the exact devices on the tabards and pennons, placing readers in the mind of Ralph, seeing these strange designs of a golden tower and a leafless tree for the first time. No historical or cultural context is given, because Ralph does not know any. The tabards are historical props – but they feel alive in the present, because we are discovering them anew through Ralph.⁵

The land to the south, of which Ralph knows little, seems 'a wondrous place' which he deems 'full of fair things and marvellous adventures,' projecting onto

it the belief that his home is small and restraining, and that the further world must therefore be exciting. The narrator includes some irony in Ralph's opinion of his home, describing a long list of advantages as 'nought but this little,' foreshadowing Ralph's eventual return to Upmeads, when he fights to protect it. By the end of the romance, Ralph has established himself as king of Upmeads, but he is also lord of the Four Friths, captain to Highham, brother to the shepherds, commander of the Dry Tree, and cleanser of the Wood Perilous; by establishing himself in society he has mastered the lands he has previously only travelled through, demonstrating a longer term approach to the world, growing beyond subjective impressions.⁵

It is not simply the case though that Ralph begins as like a child, and grows into the wisdom and responsibility of an adult. At the beginning of the story, Ralph is twenty-one, but is yet to understand his relation to the world he is escaping: he regards himself 'above' the Chapman to whom he speaks at the beginning of the story; 'above', also, a 'stargazer ... a simpler ... a priest, or a worthy good carle', all of whom would be satisfied with Upmeads, whereas he, as a 'king's son', must obtain more from the world. Following these events, Ralph refers to his singular self as 'we,' causing the Chapman to say 'thy talkest big, my lad': and his wife calls him 'king's son', but does so while patting his cheek, an act which establishes herself in the role of mother and Ralph as her child, even though Ralph, by years, is an adult. The status of royalty is demoted to a mere role which Ralph plays, outclassed by the more important mother-child relationship which the dame has created. In the same way that a child might be, in their imagination, both a young boy and a knight, Ralph is both a visiting prince as well as a mothered child. His status between child and adult corresponds to a world rooted neither in the historical past nor in our present, and outside of known space. Consistent with this status is the regular image of Ralph looking down from the top of a valley, between one land and another, which also fits the intermediate nature of the romances, poised as they are between the setting of the medieval past and the childlike discovery of the present.⁷

The immediacy of present discovery is used throughout the romances, appearing most starkly in *The Sundering Flood*, when at times the protagonist is described using the present tense. Osberne stands before us: 'he bears with him shield and spear'. The narrative soon resumes the past tense, but returns to present immediacy later on, when Osberne 'comes to the riverside and turns his face south'. May Morris tells us that the text would have been edited and developed more had Morris lived longer; it is therefore possible that such 'lapses' to the present are merely an error of the original manuscript. Even if this is so, the fact that Morris changed tenses in the first instance suggests that he was trying to convey an immediacy to the world of his imagined past, an intention also present in the initial framing of the narrative. The 'Sundering Flood' itself is a river which

‘once ... ran south into the sea’, but the narrator states that he shall ‘now presently show’ us the meaning of the river’s name, taking us along its path, even though it no longer exists, and the narrator himself is based in present day Oxfordshire.⁸

The combination of times is also found in descriptions of the characters. In *The Sundering Flood*, when Osberne is thirteen, he looks young and feels old: ‘I am a man, but young of years, so they call me a boy’ – but later on, as a twenty-year-old he looks old and feels young, saying ‘thou deemest me old, but I am a young man’. There is progression from past to future, as Osberne wins greater fame and wisdom, and Elfhild returns the magical gift which only works for her as a child – but past and future are not divorced, and exist to an extent inside each other. This is also the case for Birdalone in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, whom the witch observes ‘lookest more towards thy womanhood’ owing to the influence of her ‘woodmother’. But this development towards womanhood never ends, and Birdalone still meets her regularly throughout her later life. At twenty-five she is both an adult, able to act ‘as a mother with a child’ herself, and, on the next page, able to play with her lover ‘like two happy children’. Ralph has shifted between opposing identities throughout *The Well*, but these are brought into harmony by the society of Upmeads gained at the end. Ralph’s father observes that in one sense his son seems a child, but in another way appears as a fearful warrior; Ralph replies that now he is both. The romances are not concerned with progress from child to adult, or past to future, but in change which combines and develops these two states.⁹

The characters also possess an element of simplicity; for instance their names are often intrinsically linked to their identities. Ralph is a king’s son: therefore he travels away from his land and uses the majestic plural. He is also both a mother’s son and a royal hero, one identity reflecting his past origins, the other his present duty and future. The childlike part of his character is also reflected in his title, which he gives early on as ‘Man Motherson’, wishing to hide his real name, but unable to create a new independent identity. Name and description are also intrinsically linked in the case of the King’s Son in *The Wood beyond the World*. His given name, Otto, is only used in one conversation when the Mistress mocks him – his primary title is ‘the King’s Son’, despite this king being far away and anonymous. In fact, it does not matter whether he is a son of a king or a merchant, because all the characters are servants to the Mistress. ‘The King’s Son’ is a role rather than a title, and, like Ralph as the king’s son at the beginning of *The Well at the World’s End*, forms Otto’s identity in the romance. Walter even tries the royal role himself, when he adopts new clothes which make him ‘as the most glorious of kings’, a disguise which does not convince the King’s Son, even though his own identity is only established in much the same way.¹⁰

Naturally there is confusion when these seemingly absolute identities prove to be tenuously established on words and appearance alone. The roles collapse

in *The Wood beyond the World*, when the Mistress kills the King's Son, mistaking him for a traitorous Walter because of a misleading magic spell. The spell itself is a plot device, turning the confusion of identities into something which is physically true – but they were confused long before the magic was cast. The Maid first mistook Walter for the King's Son, and in turn Walter later mistakes the Mistress for the Maid, and then the Maid for the Mistress. The Maid's character in the wood is deliberately basic, acting 'humble and happy', and addressed as 'child', but outside the wood she reveals herself to be very different: a sorceress who can catch fish with her hands like a bear. The identities of the characters in the Wood are as simple, and therefore as weak, as static versions of the past existing in the nowhere and 'nowhen' of the Wood; when the categories change it shows them to be more complicated.¹¹

There are further instances of deliberate simplification in the romances, particularly in the shape of the Isle of the Young and the Old in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*. Here live two three-year-old children and an old man. The children remind Birdalone of her own early life, and the young girl treats Birdalone as her mother. When, at a later date, others visit the island, the old man has no memory of Birdalone. Comparisons here can be made with *Peter Pan*, which contains some similar ideas to Morris's romances, albeit from different perspectives. The old man acts like Peter, who forgets Captain Hook soon after he has died. The children are only an idea, an image of childhood, 'so pleased and merry', like the idea of childhood in *Peter Pan* ('gay and innocent and heartless'); also, the children never age. They are an illusion, of which the old man is part. None of them are part of the living past: the children are not fully alive because they do not develop, and the man is in stasis, unable to remember the past or escape into the future: he begs others to take him away, but they do not. No wonder Birdalone finds the island disturbing: 'the look of the elder scarce liked her, and the children began to seem to her as images'.¹²

Such frozen time is not restricted to images of childhood; it is also experienced in the purely adult *The Story of the Glittering Plain*. In that land, like the old man forgetting Birdalone, the people have forgotten the outside world, and will forget passers-by in the future. The contrast here is between Hallblithe, for whom 'time presses,' and the denizens of the Glittering Plain, for whom 'time is nought'. Though it is a paradise, and called the 'Land of the Living', it is also considered false by Hallblithe owing to its unchanging nature. The text poses the question: what is true living? A speech by Hallblithe describes the importance of 'the sword of thy fathers', the traditions of kindred and place, and the future begetting of children. No such future or past exists in the Glittering Plain. The alternative name of that land is 'The Acre of the Undying', but it is forbidden to speak of such a title, perhaps because it is too near the sinister truth: the people of that land do not live; rather, they do not die.¹³

Morris's requirement of 'an active mind in sympathy with the past, the present, and the future' for a 'decent life' is pertinent to the romances. When Birdalone returns to the Isle of the Young and Old, she finds that the previous inhabitants have vanished. Instead there is now a multitude of children, from five to fifteen years old, all 'goodly ... and merry'. They do not know the meaning of 'old', but wish to learn what it means, demonstrating a willingness to be connected to the future; one of the children also speaks of the past, and what they have achieved since they arrived on the island. Clearly the children are more 'advanced' than the island's previous occupants, building shelter and making bread and raisins from the land – and such advancement, based on knowledge and forethought, depends on a greater awareness of past and future. The children are also like the adults in *News from Nowhere* (1890), who are described as 'like children', because they are more aware of the cycle of seasonal time than modern readers. They are also joyful; for Morris, such joy is an integral part of the child identity. It could be said that Morris is idealising childhood and the past, associating it with happiness. For example, in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, once Birdalone is reunited with Audrey (her mother), her mother is so happy that 'the goodness of her youth came back to her', suggesting that happiness and youthfulness are inextricably bound together. Morris is not always working outside of the *Peter Pan* 'gay and innocent' idea of childhood and the past – but he does at least indicate the advantages of a past which is alive and changing.¹⁴

A review of *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, written the year the romance was published, acts as a stern criticism of Morris, and specifically his use of a past setting. The problem, wrote the reviewer, is that the story falls along the lines of Malory and Spenser, but Morris 'could not get away from his modern environment', and made the characters too 'modern and psychological'. It is true that Morris deviates from the common path of romance, the clearest example being Birdalone's attempt to help her friends resulting in the death of one of them, Baudoin. The happy ending of Baudoin and his lover is lost because of a simple mistake: it is not even any single person's fault, and Birdalone is not blamed for the outcome, creating a moral uncertainty alien to more traditional romances. As May Morris wrote, the format is a fairytale, but the characters are modern, and Morris writes with a modern mindset: but this is not a fault, only a recreation of the past romances, in an age when people's relations to each other were questioned by Morris. Northrop Frye described the combination of the past romance form and the uncertainty of the present age as creating a literary experience which gathers past and future together in the present, an act of 'creative repetition' of which Morris is a notable example. The *Academy* reviewer did not consider that *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* might be an attempt creatively to repeat the past; to update the romance form while still keeping its beauty, which Morris retained in the setting and language of the romances.¹⁵

The reviewer also assumed that fairytales or romances must always be simple, 'as being written for children or primitives'.¹⁶ In that one sentence the personal past of childhood is related both to the ancient historical past, and to 'non-civilised' humanity. In *The Wood beyond the World*, the Maid and Walter encounter the 'Bear-folk', who are clad in 'nought but sheep-skins or deer skins', and for weapons use mere 'clubs and spears, headed with bone or flint'. In contacting this group, Walter and the Maid are visiting the past. The Bear People accept a hierarchy based on power and sophistication, adopting the Maid as their god when she promises them rain water and revives the flowers hanging around her body. It is fitting that the Bear People's god is seen as 'the Mother of their nation', and the Maid makes herself look like 'the Mother of Summer' in preparation for meeting them. The People themselves are called 'Children of the Bear', and later become the children of the Maid. They represent infancy on two levels – of human technology and civilisation, and also that found in the relationship between mother and child. But rather than the romance being directed at their supposedly 'low' level, the Bear People are instead included as an element of a past which is literally alive and developing in the present setting of the romance. They also return in another form in *The Well at the World's End*, as the 'ancient folk' who built 'Bear Castle' and 'Bear Hill'. Although now extinct, they are remembered in names, and in the bear and tree which they carved into the hillside, adding another layer of history to the landscape.¹⁷

Morris also takes us outside of time, for instance in *The Wood beyond the World*, where the titular setting represents an almost timeless space. The story prior to the Wood is concerned with the future: before Walter is shipwrecked, he must travel back to his home in order to avenge his father and to fight in a war. After the Wood, the narrative is concerned with the future, when Walter becomes king of Stark-wall, and we read of his deeds and lineage thereafter. The tale *within* the Wood is, in contrast, unconcerned with the future or the past. References to time are given by the Maid – she remembers every day of the five years she has spent in the Wood, but there are few instances of development or change, unlike the Maid's memory of the world outside, and the importance of 'the year's beginning, the happy mid-year, the year's waning, the year's ending, and then again its beginning'. No seasons or weather are mentioned, and any social change is slow: it takes the Mistress two years, 'little by little', to learn of the Maid's wisdom. The Wood follows time, but only according to its own isolated chronology, like a dream. It also possesses its own points of comparison, being 'Beyond the World', and containing items which are 'beyond compare' to anything else, acting like a dream separated from the external world.¹⁸

C.S. Lewis emphasised the dreamlike 'nowhen' of *The Wood Beyond the World* when, in *The Magician's Nephew*, he turned it into the 'Wood between the Worlds'. In Lewis, the Wood makes people feel as if their previous life has been

a dream, although the Wood itself is also 'dreamy', where one could easily doze forever without realising that any time had passed. It is a setting which must be escaped, which is the same in Morris. Like the Isle of the Young and Old in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, it is not alive, in the sense that it is not a developing part of time, and Walter and the Maid must leave it or be doomed to stasis, which is described as 'death in life'. Unlike Morris's Wood, Lewis's is sinister, because you could fall asleep in it forever, but also warm, peaceful, and 'very much alive'.¹⁹

Lewis returned to the setting in his modern romance *That Hideous Strength*, in which an isolated wood made him feel totally alone, and experience the feeling that 'everyone is a child'. For Lewis, nowhere and 'nowhen' can be positive spaces which are alive, and which can bring us outside of simplistic categorisations of time and childhood. In contrast, Morris's timeless spaces are unreal: the false children of the Wondrous Isles are 'images', and the King's Son appears as an 'image' in *The Wood*; even the trees are 'still as images'. The past separated from the future is only an image: it is not 'alive within us'.²⁰

E.P. Thompson places all of Morris's romances in dreamland, 'a world having its existence only in the writer's imagination, with its own inner consistencies, and its own laws, unlike those of the real world but related distantly to them'.²¹ This thesis is supported by Morris's self-description as a 'dreamer of dreams', as well as by the inclusion of dreamlike spaces such as that found in *The Wood beyond the World*, where time is vague, and people are disconnected from a wider context. However, Thompson admits that at least one dreamlike space, the Glittering Plain, is to be escaped from, not dwelt in, although the same is also true for the Wood, and the Isle of the Young and Old. Lands which are most greatly divorced from external reality, and from universal laws, are not advocated as healthy places, even though they may contain happy people. In addition, even these dream-world spaces conform to some laws which exist outside of themselves: when, in *The Wood beyond the World*, the Mistress kills her lover, she wishes to be rid of the past, and to create her own false future, but finds that she cannot. 'I shall forget, I shall forget; and the new days shall come!' she declares, before saying 'no, no, no! I cannot forget; I cannot forget!' when she admits that the reality of the past cannot be imagined away. The only way she can slip through the events of time is to erase herself from them completely, which she does by killing herself. Repetition of 'forget' echoes the twice repeated lines 'Forget! Forget!' in 'Remembrance,' an anonymous poem, possibly written by Morris, published in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* for 1856. This poem, like the Mistress, concludes that we can never relinquish the past completely, because it exists whether we wish to forget it or not.²²

Thompson's overall criticism is that the romances are nothing more than self-indulgent tapestries, but this does not necessarily affect the existence of a complex and living past at work in the texts. Even if the romances are 'an imaginative

child's day-dream', that does not reduce the past to mere decoration; the limits of the childlike mind only emphasise the excitement of discovery. What is more, the childlike aspects are an integral part of an eventual future. In *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, Birdalone plays 'a game' with her woodmother friend, and the two are like 'children'; the result is Birdalone's discovery of her own beauty and strength.²³ Likewise, Ralph, Osberne, and Walter all return to society to become important leaders, but these endings depend first on a childlike period of exploration, as they discover their identities, and their places in the world.

Thompson also states that the romances are tales of 'desires fulfilled', but this is simply not correct: the romances are in fact full of yearning. An acute example is found in a short scene from *The Sundering Flood*. Here, a damsel adores Osberne to such an extent that she wants never to stop kissing him, while over her shoulder, Osberne secretly longs for a glimpse of Elfhild, the girl who is frustratingly out of reach, on the other side of an impassable river. This kind of feeling is, by its nature, impossible to fulfil. The damsel, in her act of claiming Osberne, nevertheless pines for more – and even when Osberne sees Elfhild again, it is only 'the beginning to him of the longing of a young man'. It is significant that Osberne is a boy by years but calls himself a man; his longing and responsibilities bring him past the simple category of 'child'. Endless yearning runs as a guiding thread throughout all of Morris's romances, from Ralph's longing for adventure in *The Well at the World's End* – intensified by mentions of 'THE WELL AT THE WORLD'S END' in alluring capitals – to sexual longing in *The Wood beyond the World*, which strikes Walter like a 'red hot iron' so that 'he knew not where he was'. As Thompson noted, death is often nonchalantly dismissed – for instance with Birdalone's mother, who is killed in half a sentence – but to linger over a character's death would be to dwell on the finished past, and an emphasis on longing is a singling out of feelings which can never be dead, because they can never be fulfilled. Such an emphasis, together with childlike perception, keeps the medieval setting alive, even if it also appears, as Thompson states, like a tapestry.²⁴

As many have noted, the statement 'Fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death'²⁵ summarises much of Morris's attitude to the world. Therefore, the protagonists of the romances must work to live in fellowship with others. As Amanda Hodgson has pointed out, the paradisiacal image of a living tree surrounded by water is not found in a single location, but rather used for the banner of Upmeads, and the fellowship found there.²⁶ It is also significant that the magic waters of the Well at the World's End do not give eternal life, but only long life, with the freedom to return to one's own place and people, and the past and future contained therein. The opposite of the living tree is the dry tree, surrounded by poison, and in *The Well at the World's End*, this is an actual location devoid of people – but also, crucially, locked in time: filled with corpses wearing ancient armour, preserved by the desert so that one cannot tell how long they have lain there.²⁷ Death is not

just lonely, but timeless.

Morris called *The Wood beyond the World* 'a tale pure and simple', but within its own simplicity, and the apparent simplicity of the other romances, is an attitude to time which forms part of Morris's approach to the world: not in the guise of allegory, but in the very fabric of the storytelling. When the story is told as a romance it is called simple and childlike, but that is only so that we can experience the imagined past in a direct and lively way. Morris spoke of romance in a general sense during a lecture on architectural restoration: 'what romance means is the capacity for a true conception of history, a power for making the past part of the present'.²⁸ This power is certainly at work in Morris's prose romances, and it shows us that the past is not dead when we live in fellowship with each other – and, what is more, when we live in fellowship with time.

NOTES

1. William Morris, Preface, in Bartholomew Anglicus, *Medieval Lore: An Epitome of the Science, Geography, Animal and Plant Folk-lore and Myth of the Middle Age: Being Classified Gleanings from the Encyclopaedia of Bartholomew Anglicus on the Properties of Things*, trans. John Trevisa, ed. and abr. Robert Steele. London: Stock, 1893, p. vii.
2. *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, May Morris, ed, *The Collected Works of William Morris*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., Vol. XIV, 1912, pp. 211–324. (Hereafter CW); *The Wood beyond the World*, CW, Vol. XVII, 1913, pp. 1–130; *The Well at the World's End*, 2 vols, CW, XVIII–XIX, 1913, pp. 1–336; 1–245; *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* CW, Vol. XX, 1913, pp. 1–387; *The Sundering Flood* CW, Vol. XXI, 1914, pp. 1–250.
3. *The House of the Wolfings*, CW Vol. XIV, 1912, pp. 3–209; *The Roots of the Mountains*, CW Vol. XV, 1912, 462 pp.
4. Lin Carter, 'About the Wood beyond the World and William Morris', in William Morris, *The Wood beyond the World*. London: Ballantine, 1969, pp. ix–xv.
5. *The Well at the World's End*, Vol. 1, pp. 44–47, 48–50. (Afterwards *The Well*)
6. *The Well*, Vol. 1, p. 9, p. 1; Vol. 2, p. 243.
7. *The Well*, Vol. 1, p. 13, p. 15; for example *The Well*, Vol. 1, pp. 17, 19 and 23.
8. *The Sundering Flood*, p. 17, p. 30 (Afterwards *Sundering Flood*); May Morris, Introduction, *Sundering Flood*, pp. xj–xii; *Sundering Flood*, pp. 1–2.
9. *Sundering Flood*, p. 32, p. 191, pp. 246–7; *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, p. 43, p. 387, pp. 352–3 (Hereafter *Wondrous Isles*); *The Well*, Vol. 2, p. 215.
10. *The Well*, Vol. 1, p. 63, pp. 44–6; *The Wood beyond the World*, p. 70, pp. 75–76. (Afterwards *The Wood*)

11. *The Wood*, pp. 92–3; p. 31, p. 63, and p. 67 respectively; p. 48, pp. 112–113.
12. *Wondrous Isles*, p. 83, p. 217; J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*. Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1967, p. 209; *Wondrous Isles*, p. 84; *Peter Pan*, p. 220; *Wondrous Isles*, p. 218, p. 90.
13. *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, p. 253, p. 274, p. 268, p. 253, p. 272, pp. 256–7, p. 253. (Afterwards *Glittering Plain*)
14. ‘How We Live and How We Might Live’ (1884), *CW*, Vol. XXIII, 1915, pp. 3–26 (p.25); *Glittering Plain*, pp. 308, 309; *Glittering Plain*, p. 309; *News from Nowhere* (1890), *CW* Vol. XVI, 1912, pp.3–211 (p. 206); *Wondrous Isles*, p. 272.
15. ‘The Prose of William Morris,’ in *The Academy: A Weekly Review of Literature, Science and Art*, London: Vol. 52, (July–December), 30 Oct. 1897, pp. 343–345 (Afterwards *Academy*); *Wondrous Isles*, p. 211; May Morris, *William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1936, Vol. 1, p. 506; Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976, pp. 177–9.
16. *Academy*, p. 344.
17. *The Wood*, p. 99, pp. 107–8, pp. 95–7, pp. 106–9, p. 19.
18. *The Wood*, p. 8, pp. 129–30, p. 86, p. 85, p. 87, p. 38 (a house), p.75 (clothes).
19. C.S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*. London: Collins-HarperCollins, 2005, pp. 33–34; *Wondrous Isles*, p. 91; *The Magician’s Nephew*, p. 65, p. 31.
20. C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups*. London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 13; *Wondrous Isles*, p. 90; *The Wood*, p. 43, p. 75.
21. E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*. London: Merlin, 1977, p. 673–682.
22. *The Earthly Paradise: A Poem*, Volume 1, in *CW*, Vol. III, 1910, p. 1; *The Wood*, p. 93; ‘Remembrance’. *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, London: Bell & Daldy, 1856, p. 258.
23. *Wondrous Isles*, p. 16–18.
24. *The Sundering Flood*, p. 70, p. 71, p. 32; *The Wood*, p. 55; *Wondrous Isles*, p. 275.
25. *A Dream of John Ball*, in *CW*, Vol. XVI, 1912, pp. 213–88 (p. 230).
26. Amanda Hodgson, *The Romances of William Morris*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 191–2.
27. *The Well*, pp. 70–73.
28. To the Editor of the Spectator [1895], in Norman Kelvin, ed, *The Collected Letters of William Morris 1893–1896*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, Vol. IV, 1996, p. 291; ‘Address at the Twelfth Annual Meeting [of Antiscrape]’ (1889), in May Morris, *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1936, Vol. I, p. 146–157 (p. 148).

Peter Stansky, *From William Morris to Sergeant Pepper: Studies in the Radical Domestic* (Society for the Promotion of Science and Scholarship, 1999). E. P. Thompson, *William Morris, Romantic to Revolutionary* (Merlin Press, 1977). Pamela Todd, *William Morris and the Arts & Crafts Home* (Thames & Hudson, 2012). Anna Vaninskaya, *William Morris and the Idea of Community: Romance, History and Propaganda, 1880-1914* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010). Marcus Waithe, *William Morris's Utopia of Strangers: Victorian Medievalism and the Ideal of Hospitality* (D. S. Brewer, 2006).

Credits.

the living past of the late romances-. quest for his lost love, taking him through a land which restores health and youth; *The Wood Beyond the World* describes Golden Walter, the son of a merchant, and his adventure in a forest disconnected from universal time and space. *The Well at the World's End* is more obviously established in a created world, albeit with mixed references to our own history and cultures (such as Rome, and the Christian Church), and tells of Prince Ralph seeking a magic well which bestows health, long life, and charisma to whoever drinks from it. These romances resist classification. What are they, and why did Morris spend part of the last decade of his life writing them? At what point in time, and in what location, are they based? Mr. Morris has, therefore, consented to allow his versions of the Romances to be combined into one volume in a form not unworthy of their excellence but more accessible to those lovers of books whose purses have a habit of varying in inverse proportion to the amount of their love. He has honoured me by asking me to introduce them to that wider public to which they now make their appeal.

the living past of the late romances. Morris's requirement of "an active mind in sympathy with the past, the present, and the future" for a "decent life" is pertinent to the romances. When Birdalone returns to the Isle of the Young and Old, she finds that the previous inhabitants have vanished. The often neglected prose romances of William Morris hold a prominent position in his vast body of work. A chronological survey of these romances in the enlightening company of Carl Jung, with additional guidance from Joseph Campbell and Northrop Frye, reveals an important developing vision of unity. Chapter three examines the dilemma created by Morris's early inability to reconcile a vision of unity with the reality of a transient world. A consideration of the romance patterns which appear in the poetry of Morris's middle period reveals a melancholic rumination over unobtained unity and a concern with heroic confrontation with the malign aspects of the anima. "soul would live alone unto herself."⁶ But Morris was unwilling to construct a palace of art unless all. The central concern of this paper is to defend the romanticism of William Morris's socialism. It focuses on a particular debate about the relationship between his masterpiece, *News From Nowhere*, and one of his late prose romances, *The Story of the Glittering Plain*. I consider the argument, forcefully developed by Roderick Marshall, that Morris's decision to publish the latter book signalled his rejection of the political ideal captured in *News From Nowhere*. This argument rests on the contention that Morris's books treat the same, highly romantic image of socialism in radically different ways. *News From Nowhere* celebrates it as utopia. Discover the world's research. William Morris (24 March 1834 – 3 October 1896) was a British textile designer, poet, novelist, translator and socialist activist associated with the British Arts and Crafts Movement. He was a major contributor to the revival of traditional British textile arts and methods of production. His literary contributions helped to establish the modern fantasy genre, while he helped win acceptance of socialism in fin de siècle Great Britain. "Morris's work as both as a designer and writer on the applied arts revolutionised the taste of the later nineteenth century, not only in Britain but in Europe and America" (Flyer for the William Morris Gallery, London, 1993). The position Morris holds as an icon of the truly socialist artist is without comparison. In Britain he is a household name familiar to almost any people with connections to 'the arts'. He represents ideals of connection to nature, unalienated craft work, utopian vision, Civilised Socialism and a kind of romantic stripped-pine aesthetic which still appeals to many. There ...