

# The Defence of Guenevere: A Morrisean Critique of Medieval Violence

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How can one reconcile William Morris's firmly expressed determination during his last years: 'to say once for all, what I have often wanted to say of late, to wit that the idea of taking any human life for any reason whatsoever is horrible and abhorrent to me',<sup>1</sup> with the eroticised violence of his youthful *The Defence of Guenevere*, whose medieval warriors cut down antagonists without hesitation, and rushed into battle in service to their liege lords?<sup>2</sup> How, likewise, could one reconcile the violent, anarchic world of Morris's *Defence* poems with his implausible assertion in 'The Origins of Ornamental Art' (1886), that

... throughout the middle ages[,] although there was a sharp distinction between the feudal lord and his inferior[,] that distinction was rather arbitrary than real; ... there was no class which was by virtue of its position refined, and none which was mentally degraded by the same virtue ...?<sup>3</sup>

On the one hand, Morris adhered for many years to Ruskin's idealisation of a 'Gothic' society in which

... the separation between the noble and the poor was merely a wall built by law; now it is a veritable difference in level of standing, a precipice between the upper and lower grounds in the field of humanity...<sup>4</sup>

On the other, the principal figures of Morris's *Defence* were trapped in 'wall[s] built by law[s]' whose misogyny and ruthless violence he described in realistic as well as surrealistic detail.

Morris also tempered his love of the medieval past with a strong conviction that attempts to imitate or recreate it were delusive. In an 1895 lecture on 'The

Early Illustration of Printed Books', for example,

He warned those ... who were engaged in art work in any way to guard against the folly of imitating this early [medieval] art ... that time had clean passed away, and however real the continuity of history, they must recognise the enormous gulf between that period and the present ... let them do their own work for themselves, and realize for themselves ... what kind of listening to beauty it was they wanted to express ...<sup>5</sup>

Psychological analyses of Morris's dialectical tensions thus leave open a number of interesting critical and literary historical questions. What should we make of the displacement onto history and stylised conflicts of his best-known early poems in the *Defence of Guenevere*? Should inchoate political or existential convictions be read into them? And if they can, did his later activism break with these convictions, or vary and evolve from them?

#### I. 'UNDERSTANDING' AND CULTURAL MEMORY

Wilhelm Dilthey, the late nineteenth-century philosopher of 'human studies' (*Geisteswissenschaften*), argued that we possess a sense of the 'value' of things in the present, and confront the future with 'purpose', but can only 'interpret' our actions in reconstructions of the past. Actions may determine our fate, but

spontaneous expression[s] of experience ... contain ... more of mental life than can be comprehended by introspection ... [and] lift ... mental life out of depths that consciousness cannot illuminate.<sup>6</sup>

Put somewhat differently, *Einfühlungsvermögen* – projective identification with the mental and emotional life of others – creates higher levels of self-awareness than unaided self-examination, and such projections are not 'true' or 'false', but rather 'sincere' or 'insincere' – language which suggests the hierarchy of interpretations of a good dramatic monologue.

Another passage in Dilthey's writings might have appealed to Morris:

The course of life exercises a determining influence on every man, by which the possibilities which lie within him are narrowed down. ... he finds that the prospects of a new outlook on life, or further inner development of his personal character, are limited. But understanding [*verstehen*] opens to him a whole new realm of possibilities that are not present in his everyday life. ... Man, who is bound and determined by the realities of life, is not only liberated by art—this has often been said—but also by the understanding of history.<sup>7</sup>

In his youth, Morris used an empathetic gift for thought-experimental 'iden-

tification' in order to try to 'understand' the ironies of success and failure, the dissolution of love and trust *in extremis*, and the arduous nature of artistic efforts to convey communal ideals. In middle age, these insights evolved into an 'understanding' of a 'real history which is . . . the living bond of the hopes of the past, the present, and the future',<sup>8</sup> and drove his critique of 'commercial war' and other crass realities of life under Victorian capitalism. In both cases, he believed, only resistance and resolution offered a measure of faith (and it is a faith, or 'belief in things unseen') that solidarity across time exists, in some sense, as a limiting ideal.

Previous commentators have found fault-lines in Morris's ardent historicism. E.P. Thompson, for example, queried Morris's tendency to enter the present backwards, as it were. Alternately, critics such as Jeffrey Skoblow and Margaret Lourie have sought to identify modernist aspects of his work.<sup>9</sup> Along different lines, in his *Critique of Everyday Life*, the mid-twentieth-century Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre reflected on the paradoxical attraction of artistic traditions 'created in conditions which were very different from our own by groups . . . which established themselves using unbridled and limitless violence':

How could we not grasp the works of the past? They interest us, they fascinate us, and we call upon them desperately to give us a sense and a style. In the name of the vast emptiness which is everyday life, our everyday life, we look towards every-thing which could point to or perpetuate a plenitude. . . . We perceive them as art objects, whereas in fact this art was not something external to the everyday or, as is supposed, high above it and trying in vain to enter it, but a *style of life*. What we perceive as theories and philosophies were in fact ways of everyday living.<sup>10</sup>

Morris, I believe, anticipated Lefebvre's view of the 'vast emptiness' in the present, as well as his belief that the art of the past arose from everyday patterns – the 'Lesser Arts' – which survived in the margins and sanctuaries of a violent feudal and early modern society. Like Lefebvre, Morris also believed that 'the link between the tragic and the everyday is profound; the tragic takes shape within the everyday, comes into being in the everyday, and always returns to the everyday.'<sup>11</sup> Most of the soldiers and petty landowners of *The Defence*, and their wives, were ordinary people goaded to passion or violence by the disruption of their everyday lives.<sup>12</sup>

Another of Lefebvre's notions – of 'moments', or passionate mental states which create clarity, motivate risk, and thus specific forms for human aspiration – may possess interpretative relevance for *The Defence of Guenevere*. The choices made in such 'moments' (or their 'constellations') resolve ambiguities, but they also

cannot endure (at least, not for very long). ... [T]his inner contradiction gives [them their] intensity, which reaches crisis point when the inevitability of its own demise becomes fully apparent.<sup>13</sup>

One could formulate a fairly good description of *The Defence's* battles, imprisonments and ambiguously imagined love-scenes in these terms. Like poetry and feudal society, Lefebvre's 'moment' possesses a certain 'form', for it

weaves itself into the fabric of the everyday, and transforms it partially and 'momentarily', like art, like the figure in a carpet ... The moment is passion and the inexorable destruction and self-destruction of that passion. The moment is an impossible possibility, aimed at, desired and chosen as such and its 'impossibility' is 'the tragedy of heartbreak, of alienation, of failure at the heart of fulfillment, of the return to the everyday to start the process all over again'.<sup>14</sup>

Anticipations of such Lefebvrian 'moments' dominate the experiences of the protagonists of *The Defence of Guenevere*, who are forced to make fateful choices *in medias res*, with little knowledge of the 'alienation ... [and] ... failure at the heart of fulfillment' which they might entail. Some of these consequences become clear at the poem's end, but others, in postmodern fashion, remain deferred or enigmatically indeterminate. Many of Morris's protagonists in *The Defence* struggled against death, defeat or violation of cherished ideals, painfully aware that all their psychic victories might be illusory, their failures might destroy those they love, and love itself might be eroded by distance or degraded by time. As they fell prey to desperation, they also became disorientated, lost their bearings in time and space, and/or succumbed to madness or paranoia. No specific agent could be blamed for the injuries and deaths of these characters in poems such as 'The Wind' or 'The Tune of Seven Towers', and the moral identity of embattled speakers in 'The Judgment of God' and 'The Eve of Crécy' remains open to question.

Despite his respect for the spirit of an elusively idealised past, Morris was also rather accurate in his use of the historical records. His indebtedness to Malory for the first four *Defence* poems, and to Froissart for 'Sir Peter Harpdon's End' and 'Concerning Geffray Teste Noire' is well-known, but in her excellent edition of *The Defence*, Margaret Lourie has also identified a surprising number of precise references in the work's twenty-four other poems.<sup>15</sup>

'Old Love', for example, a poem about a middle-aged knight's wistful love of his lord's wife, is set shortly before the fall of Constantinople in 1453, and details in the poem suggest the life of the Duke and Duchess of Burgundy as narrated in the *Chronicles* of Enguerrard de Monstrelet. 'Riding Together', narrated by a prisoner who witnessed the death of his comrade, was apparently based on an incident which appeared in Jean de Joinville's *Life of St.*

*Louis*, and which took place during the Seventh Crusade (CE 1248–1254). Lourie has also found comparable antecedents of motifs and refrains in ‘The Eve of Crécy’, ‘The Sailing of the Sword’, ‘Welland River’, and ‘The Gilliflower of Gold’, and others in carols, folk-ballads, and French *chansons de toile*.

More grimly, many of Morris distraught protagonists become temporarily or permanently deranged or sink into states which recall Ruskin’s notion of the ‘grotesque’.<sup>16</sup> Some of these altered states call forth the volume’s most striking lyrics.<sup>17</sup> Several of the horse-soldiers in Morris’s ‘ignorant armies’ also languished in prisons – in the aptly named ‘Prison’, for example, as well as ‘Spell-Bound’, ‘A Good Man in Prison’, ‘Sir Peter Harpdon’s End’, and ‘Riding Together’. The hero of ‘Shameful Death’ mourned and revenged the grisly death of his liege lord, and the French protagonist in ‘The Eve of Crécy’ unwittingly anticipated the slaughter of his army on the morrow. Other protagonists have been betrayed or deserted, as in ‘Spell-bound’, ‘The Tune of Seven Towers’ and ‘King Arthur’s Tomb’, and the grim fates of their lovers and consorts is addressed in ‘Golden Wings’, ‘The Blue Closet’, ‘Sir Peter Harpdon’s End’, ‘The Judgment of God’, ‘The Haystack in the Floods’ and ‘The Gilliflower of Gold’.

Apart from the Malorian poems, moreover, most of the male protagonists of *The Defence*, unlike the knights of Tennyson’s Camelot, were *soldiers*. We tend to forget that a ‘*Knecht*’ was a ‘boy,’ a henchman or a farm-labourer, and that the ethos of Schiller’s ‘*Raubritter*’ – ‘robber-riders’ – differed little from that of the Younger brothers and their ally Jesse James. As such, they were constrained to defend their livelihoods, and their precarious independence, by killing other *Knechte* who might have grown up a few straits or estuaries away. In Morris’s reconstructions of the Hundred Years War, many of these ‘riders’ were also *estranged* – literally ‘*alienated*’ – from wives and lovers, who dwindled to half-remembered hopes-deferred – ‘dear as remembered kisses after death, / or sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned / on lips that are for others.’<sup>18</sup>

## II. THREE REPRESENTATIVE POEMS

These bleakly poignant patterns, mediated by traces of popular art and song, are particularly striking in ‘The Wind’, ‘Concerning Geffray Teste Noire’, and ‘Sir Peter Harpdon’s End’.<sup>19</sup> Consider first the ‘The Wind’ – pronounced in archaic-poetic fashion to rhyme with ‘the blind’ – an eerily indeterminate, highly symbolic and disconcertingly dreamlike poem. Stricken by fear and unable to move, its unnamed protagonist ‘sit[s] and think[s] of love that is over and past, / O! so long ago ...’, but he can barely distinguish the recent and distant past, and dreads the dawn which once might have cheered him:

If I move my chair, it will scream, and the orange [on a tapestry] will roll out far,  
 And the faint yellow juice ooze out like blood from a wizard's jar;  
 And the dogs will howl for those who went last month to the war. ...  
 I shriek'd and leapt from my chair, and the orange roll'd out far,  
 The faint yellow juice oozed out like blood from a wizard's jar;  
 And then in march'd the ghosts of those that had gone to the war. (ll. 16–18,  
 79–81)

Suspended in a kind of timeless hell, he suffers inexplicably from 'worn old brains', though the events in his narrative occurred when soldiers 'left last month for the war'. His class and occupation, except for a brief mention of the 'arms I was used to paint', are unclear, and the refrain of the poem's lament is deeply and lyrically tormented:

*Wind, wind! thou art sad, art thou kind?*  
*Wind, wind, unhappy! thou art blind,*  
*Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.*

A leveller and destroyer, 'the wind' grieves the destruction it creates, and courses restlessly over the earth in search of a dormant lily-seed.<sup>20</sup>

Modelled on medieval carols,<sup>21</sup> and on lost chords of Shelleyan sublimity, the source and import of the refrain remains unclear. Is it the voice of a chorus? Of an external narrator? The speaker's tortured consciousness? When Morris republished *The Defence of Guenevere* at the Kelmscott Press during the last years of his life, he took care to reprint all of the *Defence's* refrains in a deep, rutilant 'bleeding' red (Figure 1), so that the poem's refrain seems insistent, overpowering the narrative elements of the text.

The traumatic Lefebvorean 'moment' of the anonymous protagonist's life has been the strange and macabre death of his love Margaret:

I held to her long bare arms, but she shudder'd away from me  
 While the flush went out of her face as her head fell back on a tree,  
 And a spasm caught her mouth, fearful for me to see. ... (ll. 40–42)

Who or what killed her remains an enigma, but '[w]eeping she totter'd forward, so glad that I should prevail', and 'kiss'd me on the brow'.<sup>22</sup> As she lay dying he had 'spread her arms out wide' and walked away, but returned to cover her body with daffodils, and recoiled from the

Blood [which] lay in the many folds of the loose ungirded vest ...  
 My dry hands shook and shook as the green gown show'd again,  
 Clear'd from the yellow flowers, and I grew hollow with pain ... (ll. 77, 70–71)

In his altered state, the harmless representation of an orange on the nearby tap-

etry also seems to him to darken and bleed, and he is visited by ghosts, not of Margaret but ‘of those that had gone to the war’.<sup>23</sup>

Who or what murdered Margaret? Was she a victim of the speaker’s troubled passions or an innocent casualty in one of the skirmishes of this war, fomented by ‘Olaf, king and saint’, the device emblazoned on his comrades’ coats of mail? Was it a mark of the speaker’s disorientation that he did not or could not rejoin his fellows in war? Does he belatedly abhor the war’s destruction, and his complicity in it? Is he haunted because he too is guilty, or simply distraught by the loss of everyone he had loved? The only answer given to these questions is that the wind ‘still wanderest the lily-seed to find’.

Needless to say, this poem – like a ‘rhizomic’ web of linguistic illogic of the kind celebrated more recently by Gilles Deleuze or Felix Guattari – broke several unwritten rules of nineteenth-century narrative poetry. Its indeterminacy and disorientation, for example, distance its readers in ways which differ markedly from the calibrated ‘balance of sympathy and judgment’ elicited by Browning’s monologuists.<sup>24</sup> And the dissolution of the speaker’s agitated calm – or its Ruskinian ‘rigidity’, perhaps – leaves the reader with little more than the poem’s dreamlike distortions and the preternaturally vivid, almost hallucinatory intensity of its incantatory refrain.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, the nameless and somewhat distracted elderly speaker of ‘Concerning Geffray Teste Noire’ remembers his youthful discovery of the remains of a man and woman, apparently killed in flight, as well as his spectral image of the woman

... kissing once, like a curved sword  
That bites with all its edge, did your lips lie. (ll. 173–174)

He had commissioned a statue in their memory, and had tried in vain to bring the story of this stark effigy to the attention of Jean Froissart, and hence commemorate the lovers’ fate through a work of art and history. But the sculptor himself is ‘dead now—I am old’, and Froissart’s *Chronicles* are silent.

The title figure of ‘Sir Peter Harpdon’s End’ is a Gascon knight killed defending the British cause at the end of the Hundred Year’s War. After hearing of his death, his lady broods that the street-singers who glorify Launcelot will ignore her lover’s stoic courage.

*Figure 1: ‘The Wind’, from The Defence of Guenevere, Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1892. Image courtesy of the University of Iowa Libraries, Morris Online Edition, <http://morrisedition.lib.uiowa.edu/defenceguenevere.html>.*



The Wind

THE WIND.



H! no, no, it is nothing  
surely nothing at all,  
Only the wild-going  
wind  
round by the garden-  
wall,  
For the dawn just now  
is breaking,  
the wind beginning  
to fall.

**Wind, wind! thou art sad, art thou kind?  
Wind, wind, unhappy! thou art blind,  
Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.**

So I will sit, and think  
and think of the days gone by,  
Never moving my chair  
for fear the dogs should cry,  
Making no noise at all  
while the flambeau burns away.

For my chair is heavy and carved,  
and with sweeping green behind  
It is hung, and the dragons thereon  
grin out in the gusts of the wind;  
On its folds an orange lies,  
with a deep gash cut in the rind.

**Wind, wind! thou art sad, art thou kind?  
Wind, wind, unhappy! thou art blind,  
Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.**

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The Wind

If I move my chair it will scream,  
and the orange will roll out far,  
And the faint yellow juice ooze out  
like blood from a wizard's jar;  
And the dogs will howl for those  
who went last month to the war.

**Wind, wind! thou art sad, art thou kind?  
Wind, wind, unhappy! thou art blind,  
Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.**

So I will sit and think  
of love that is over and past,  
O, so long ago!

Yes, I will be quiet at last:  
Whether I like it or not,

a grim half-slumber is cast  
Over my worn old brains,  
that touches the roots of my heart,  
And above my half-shut eyes,

the blue roof'gins to part,  
And show the blue spring sky,  
till I am ready to start

From out of the green-hung chair;  
but something keeps me still.

And I fall in a dream that I walk'd  
with her on the side of a hill,  
Dotted, for was it not spring?  
with tufts of the daffodil.

**Wind, wind! thou art sad, art thou kind?  
Wind, wind, unhappy! thou art blind,  
Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.**

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*Omnes homines benedicite!*  
*This last fite may ye see,*  
 All men pray for me,  
 Who made this history  
 Cunning and fairly. (ll. 736–39, 744–48)

Morris's homages to 'Peter Harpdon' and 'Geffray Teste Noire' are pleas for empathy and remembrance of all 'who made this history' – Sir Peter, his bereaved lady, and their youthful nineteenth-century champion.

### III. 'STRIVING WELL TO HOLD UP THINGS THAT FALL'

Are there any political under- or overtones of the kind suggested earlier to be found in the haunted images and altered states of *The Defence*? Isobel Armstrong, for her part, has identified refractions of industrial chaos and anomie in the work's 'grotesque' qualities. But the twenty-two year old Morris had told his friend Cormell Price, in an oft-quoted letter of 1856, that

I can't enter into politico-social subjects with any interest, for on the whole I see that things are in a muddle, and I have no power or vocation to set them right in ever so little a degree.<sup>26</sup>

Notice however that the last phrase anticipated the wry modesty of the Prelude of the *Earthly Paradise*'s 'idle singer'.

To his mother, the twenty-one-year-old Morris had expressed the desire to be an architect, but one who would

... by no means give up things I have thought of for the bettering of the World in so far as lies in me – Stanley and Rendal, and Arthur, and Edgar shall keep up the family honour in the World, and perhaps even I myself shall not utterly disgrace it, so may Christ help the family of the Morriss.<sup>27</sup>

Already present in these early responses was a strong measure of detachment from 'the family honour in the World', and a temperamental identification with contemporary counterparts of the medieval underdogs of the *Defence* – anonymous craftsmen, beleaguered warriors, and solitary defenders of lost outposts of the kind recorded in his Froissartian sources.

Obviously pressed by family demands that he undertake a career, Morris also responded with a mixture of cheerful ambition and self-deprecation that

Perhaps you think that people will laugh at me, and call me purposeless and changeable ... but I in my turn will try to shame them, God being my helper, by steadiness and hard work.<sup>28</sup>

Much later in life, Morris averred in somewhat similar language that, like his Froissartian heroes, he had failed in most of his endeavors. To his comrade Andreas Scheu, for example, he wrote in 1889 that

We must get used to such trifles as defeats, and refuse to be discouraged by them. Indeed I am an old hand at that game, my life having been passed in being defeated; as surely every man's must be who finds himself forced into a position a little ahead of the average in his aspirations.<sup>29</sup>

Few, however, would accuse him of a lack of 'steadiness and hard work'.

When Morris left the church, he did not aspire to a place in the Oxbridgean academy – then arguably one of its outliers – much less the more lucrative, but even more compromised world of the law, but instead threw his considerable inherited fortune into the life of a speculative artisan. In *William Morris: Design and Enterprise in Victorian England*,<sup>30</sup> Charles Harvey and Jon Press have assessed the capital risks assumed by 'the Firm', and concluded that it was more poorly capitalised than other enterprises with roughly equal sales. Morris evidently did *not* seek to maximise the Firm's profits, but quickly reinvested its proceeds in new designs and ventures, which – in an ironic turn for the history of British socialism – happened to succeed.

Details of the Firm's finances are perhaps unlikely to interest students of literature, but Morris's experiences of constant risk informed his mature view of monopoly capitalism and its 'commercial war' for the rights to despoil the 'beauty of the earth'. They also offered him certain freedoms from some of the more stultifying constraints of high-bourgeois life. He could wear a blue artist's smock, not a gentleman's suit, as he worked, and saw himself as a mercantile counterpart of his beloved craftsmen of 'the Lesser Arts'.

Several of Morris's more restless protagonists in the *Defence* – Sir Peter Harpdon, for example, who refused to switch sides to save his life because he '... like[d] the straining game/Of striving well to hold up things that fall/So one becomes great. .../Why then, but just to fight as I do now, /A halter round my neck, would be great bliss' (ll. 118–120) – were also driven by an idiosyncratic work-ethic of the kind Morris recalled in 'The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization':

... I tried to think what would happen to me if I were forbidden my ordinary daily work; and I knew that I should die of despair and weariness, unless I could straightway take to something else which I could make my daily work: and it was clear to me that I worked not in the least in the world for the sake of earning

leisure by it, but partly driven by the fear of starvation or disgrace, and partly, and even a very great deal, because I love the work itself ...<sup>31</sup>

#### IV. A POLITICAL CONCLUSION

Alone amongst the major Victorian poets, I believe, the twenty-four-year-old William Morris went out of his way to document the violence and degradation which flowed from feudal abuses of power, and to celebrate the stoic courage of those who struggled to preserve cultural memories against the Lefebvrian tragedy at the heart of the 'everyday'. The *Defence of Guenevere*, for example, portrayed a Hobbesian war of all against all, tempered by a few ethical imperatives and 'moments' of preternatural clarity. Violence was endemic in this 'lifeworld,' and memory and tradition were elusive and ambiguous. Sir Peter's legend, for example, is effaced and distorted; the narrator of 'Concerning Geffray Teste Noire' has nothing to show for his life but an effigy; and the speaker of 'The Wind' struggles in vain to recover and understand a traumatic past which now lies beyond his comprehension. Bleak motifs of this kind also pervade *The Defence's* haunting refrains, its insistent focus on symbolic visual detail, and (since the past is another country) its translations and reconstructions of medieval English, French and German lore into nineteenth-century verse.

But they are not all bleak. In later life, Morris resolutely set about to recreate certain fragments of this 'living cultural memory' – in his poems, of course, but indirectly in his work for 'the Firm', and more directly in his essays, his preservationist work, his ardent defences of the 'Lesser Arts', and his adamant opposition to the forms of social and economic violence which bewilder and corrupt us. And *this*, in the end – his tributes to our tenuous 'cultural memory' – gave Morris his common thread. At both twenty-four, thirty-seven and sixty-one, he understood that we must 'shut the book [of history,] and write it again in [our] own way'.<sup>32</sup>

He also understood that 'spontaneous cultural expression' is a palimpsest. Many of the motifs of *The Defence*, for example, reappeared in the narratives of his Greek 'elders' and Norwegian 'wanderers' in *The Earthly Paradise*. The latter have taken shelter from the Black Death, far from home, on an island in the Mediterranean. There they and their hosts meditate on their lives, make mutual offerings of their cultures' tales, and prepare to die unremembered, as strangers in a strange land.

The singers have sung and the builders have builded,  
The painters have fashioned their tales of delight;  
For what and for whom hath the world's book been gilded,  
When all is for these but the blackness of night? (st. 11)<sup>33</sup>

Morris's personal answer to the 'March Wind' lay in this palimpsest of the 'Less-

er Arts' – song, history, carving, narrative – which endure for a time, before they too are scattered by 'The Wind'. For they and their many sister-'arts' were 'buildd', 'fashioned' and 'gilded' by our *ancestors* – for themselves, of course, but also for *us*. They are the 'lily-seeds' of history.

## NOTES

1. Florence Boos, 'From the archive: "Communism, i.e., Property" a partly unpublished Morris essay'. *William Morris Society in the United States Newsletter*, Summer 2009, p. 20. <http://www.morrisociety.org/newsletters/newsletter-july09.pdf>. (last accessed 1 March 2010)
2. Compare Carole Silver's remark, in *The Romance of William Morris*, that 'life, as Morris sees it ... is made up of treachery and violence, of ambush and surprise, of blood and death'. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982, p. 33.
3. Norman Kelvin, *William Morris: Essays on Art and Socialism*, New York: Dover, 1999, p. 169. (Afterwards Kelvin, *Essays*).
4. John Ruskin, 'The Nature of Gothic', in John Rosenberg, ed, *The Genius of John Ruskin*, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963, p. 179.
5. 'The Early Illustration of Printed Books', a lecture delivered in 1895; William S. Peterson, ed, *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Art of the Book*, Berkeley: University of California, 1982, pp. 22–23.
6. Wilhelm Dilthey, 'The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Life Expressions', in Patrick Gardiner, ed, *Theories of History*, New York: The Free Press, 1959, p. 214.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Kelvin, *Essays*, p. 167.
9. E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, Second edition, New York: Pantheon Books, 1976, pp. 1–2, 133, 765, 769, 807–9 and *passim*; Jeffrey Skoblow, 'Beyond Reading', in Richard Maxwell, ed, *The Victorian Illustrated Book*, Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2002, pp. 209–38; Margaret Lourie, *The Defence of Guenevere and other poems*, New York: Garland Publishing, 1981, 262 pp. Now available in The William Morris Online Edition, <http://morrisedition.lib.uiowa.edu/defenceguenevere.html> (Afterwards Lourie). Specific reference here is to 'Critical Introduction', <http://morrisedition.lib.uiowa.edu/defenceintro.html#criticalintroduction> (last accessed 28 January 2010).
10. Henri Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, vol. 2, trans. John Moore, London: Verso, 2008, pp. 321–22. (Afterwards Lefebvre)
11. Lefebvre, p. 347.
12. Compare Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sarcastic critique of romantic medievalism (*Aurora Leigh*, 1864, Sixth Book, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The*

*Poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1900, p. 327.)

To flinch from modern varnish, coat or flounce,  
 Cry out for togas and the picturesque,  
 Is fatal—foolish too. King Arthur's self  
 Was commonplace to Lady Guinevere;  
 And Camelot to minstrels seemed as flat  
 As Fleet Street to our poets . . .

13. Lefebvre, pp. 344–45.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 346–347.
15. Lourie, 'Editorial Notes and Annotations', <http://morrisedition.lib.uiowa.edu/defencenotes.html> (last accessed 28 January 2010).
16. Isobel Armstrong, 'A New Radical Aesthetic: The Grotesque as Cultural Critique', in *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics*, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 244.
17. Compare also Elizabeth Helsinger's remark that the sharp visual contrasts of *The Defence* possess 'the power . . . to produc[e] an abrupt and unannounced switch in time or place or level of consciousness', and induce an '(appalled) sympathetic identification and reflection . . . [which] comes in part from our positing a profound otherness in the speaker'. *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008, p. 68. (Afterwards Helsinger).
18. Alfred Lord Tennyson, 'Tears, Idle Tears', 1847, in Christopher Ricks, ed., *The Poems of Tennyson*, London: Longmans, 1969, pp. 784–86.
19. *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*, London: Bell and Daldy, 1858, 'The Wind', pp. 187–93; 'Concerning Geffray Teste Noire', pp. 137–47; 'Sir Peter Harpdon's End', pp. 67–109.
20. Observe that the wind does not hope to find a bloom, only the tenuous promise of its 'seed'.
21. Lourie (see Note 15).
22. '[S]o glad that I should prevail' echoes Robert Browning's 'Porphyria's Lover' and its deluded and deranged speaker. (Robert Browning, 1836, 'Porphyria's Lover', in James F. Loucks, ed., *Robert Browning's Poetry*, New York: Norton, 1979, p. 75).
23. In Helsinger's words, 'color . . . "screams", says the unsayable, becoming . . . a potent expressive vehicle for the poem's psychological burdens'; Helsinger, p. 72.
24. Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1957, 246 pp.
25. Similarly, Lourie notes that '[i]t is, moreover, almost entirely a visual world,

- improbably hued and weirdly flat. Not surprisingly, it is a world which corresponds remarkably well to the one Freud describes in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. . . . The psychic energy normally directed outward toward the phenomenal world has been in the Morris poems entirely redirected inward by emotional frustration. . . . Moreover, it is for the sake merely of realizing this hallucinated dreamscape and the emotion that attaches to it that Morris multiplies the details of his descriptions in these poems.' (Lourie, see Note 15).
26. Norman Kelvin, ed, *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 4 volumes in 5, Volume 1, 1984, p. 28. Afterwards Kelvin, *Letters*.
  27. 11 November, 1855: Kelvin, *Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 25. On 5 September 1883, Morris also wrote to Andreas Scheu of his period at Oxford, 'the books of John Ruskin . . . were at the time a sort of revelation to me; I was also a good deal influenced by the works of Charles Kingsley, and got into my head therefrom some socio-political ideas which would have developed probably but for the attractions of art and poetry' (Kelvin, *Letters*, Vol. 3, p. 228).
  28. *Ibid.*
  29. Morris to Scheu, 15 August 1889, on the occasion of the capture of the Socialist League by its radical anarchist faction. As quoted in May Morris, ed, *The Collected Works of William Morris*, London: Longmans Green & Co., 1910–15, vol. 20, p. xlvii. Afterwards *CW*.
  30. Charles Harvey & Jon Press, *William Morris: Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991, 300 pp.
  31. Kelvin, *Essays*, p. 72. In 1855, Morris had also written to his mother 'You said then, you remember, and said very truly, that it was an evil thing to be an idle, objectless man; I am fully determined not to incur this reproach . . .'; Kelvin, *Letters*, Vol. I, p. 25.
  32. *CW*, Vol. 3, p. xxii.
  33. 'The Message of the March Wind', *Poems by the Way*, London: Reeves and Turner, 1891, pp. 33–36.

Medieval studies professors' arguments on white supremacy lead to accusations of doxxing, racial insensitivity, as well as the use of expletives -- all on public forums, with concerns that one side has more power than the other. By Nick Roll. September 19, 2017. Comments. No one -- besides fellow racists, perhaps -- is pleased that white supremacists have been using imagery from the Middle Ages to further their cause. However, as two professors disagreed about what was to be done about that trend, the dispute was laid out for the public to see, resulting in calls for civility from medievalists.

Alternative Title: "The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems". The Defence of Guenevere, in full The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems, collection of poetry by William Morris, published in 1858. The poems that make up the collection, many of which are dramatic monologues, fall into three groups.

Jean Froissart, medieval poet and court historian whose Chronicles of the 14th century remain the most important and detailed document of feudal times in Europe and the best contemporary exposition of chivalric and courtly ideals.

Hundred Years' War. Hundred Years' War, an intermittent struggle between England and France in the 14th and 15th century over a series of disputes, including the question of the legitimate succession to the French crown. Guinevere first appears in written stories about 1325 AD in the Welsh story Culhwch ac Olwen, as Arthur's queen. In later medieval stories, she's the daughter of King Leodegrance, and she marries Arthur when they are both still very young. Arthur needs sons to inherit his throne, but Guinevere does not have any children. This makes her and Arthur very unhappy.

[Carr, Karen. August 2017. Lancelot and Guinevere "Medieval Romance. Quatr.us. Web. <https://quatr.us/medieval/lancelot-guinevere-medieval-romance.htm>]

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