

## REVIEWS

*Wonderlands: The Last Romances of William Morris* by Phillippa Bennett. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015. 223 pp. + 5 b/w illus. ISBN 978-3-0343-0930-1. £60; \$97.95.

In this thoughtful and thorough book, Phillippa Bennett aims to connect William Morris's fantastic romances to the rest of his expansive work as an artist, writer, and socialist. She recognizes the challenges of the task, including Morris's insistence that these works are not allegories, critics' assertions that they are, and readers' continuing uncertainty about how to read them. I may be in a rare position as a reviewer. I first read these works as Ballantine "adult fantasy" paperbacks, published between 1969 and 1974, and as a young teenager I was transported by the vivid covers, archaic language, and forthright expressions of love, loyalty, and lust. Even then these books seemed unusual. The back cover of my 1969 edition of Morris's *Wood Beyond the World* praises Morris's "limpid, singing prose" that creates "a land beyond reality but of humans governed by very real laws," while the introduction by Lin Carter commends Morris for inventing the fantasy novel, "an extrapolation on a grand scale of what was believed to be reality." I was startled to realize, years later, that these adolescent delights were written a century earlier by Morris, whose aesthetic and socialist ideologies, commercial and political actions, still influence the world we inhabit, from art to architecture, to decoration, carpets, wallpapers, and fabrics. Reconciling the late "fantasy" books with Morris's dynamic socialism remains a problem for scholars and readers.

Bennett meets the challenge, and unites these diverse aspects of Morris's work by emphasizing the concept of wonder, claiming that it serves "an inherently political function" and expresses Morris's "revolutionary potential" and "radical response" to social ills. Bennett divides the book into six wide-ranging chapters: "The Reclamation of Wonder," "The Embodiment of Wonder," "The Topography of Wonder," "The Architecture of Wonder," "The Politics of Wonder," and the conclusion, "The Presentation of Wonder." After the introductory chapter's "reclamation" of wonder as – to use Morris's phrase – inherently both beautiful and useful, each of Bennett's following chapters highlights a particular form of wonder, further deepens the concept through a wide array of relevant and often surprising historical, philosophical, and cultural contexts, and explores it in relation to Morris's other writings and work. Bennett focuses on six romances: *Story of the Glittering Plain* (1891), *Wood Beyond the World* (1894), *Child Christopher and Goldilind the Fair*