

“A LAND WHICH MEN CALLED THE WASTED LAND”:
A NEW TRANSCRIPTION OF WILLIAM MORRIS’S PROSE
FRAGMENT “THE LADY OF THE WASTED LAND”

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This edition presents for the first time in print a full transcription of William Morris’s early prose fragment “The Lady of the Wasted Land.”¹ The thirteen-page manuscript, composed on Morris’s long blue folios, occupies pages 21-34v of the Fitzwilliam MS. 3 (with folio 27 missing), which also includes seven poems in addition to the prose fragment. The fragment is held at the Fitzwilliam Library at Cambridge University and has been photographed and included in the *William Morris Archive*, edited by Florence Boos.² Boos dates the fragment to sometime between 1855 and 1858, which coincides roughly with the period Morris composed the 1856 *Oxford and Cambridge* stories and the poems that make up *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* (1858). However, the manuscript bears the watermark “E TOWGOOD 1852,” which would indicate that the date of composition is more likely 1853 or 1854. This earlier date follows David Latham’s discovery of the general correspondence between the watermarked dates on the paper Morris purchased for fifty years and the dates of his composition. Acknowledging that watermarked dates can only determine the earliest date for which a manuscript was composed, Latham explains how “those on Morris’s manuscripts may be more useful. In virtually all of his holographs for which the date of composition is known, the date of the watermark is within one year of the composition date” (Latham, “Paradise Lost” 68).³

The only published version of the prose fragment is an incomplete transcription by May Morris included in her introduction to volume 17 of Morris’s *Collected Works* (17:xviii-xix). There she calls the work one of Morris’s “early fragments” and does not yet use “The Lady of the Wasted Land” title