REFLECTIONS OF MEDIEVALISM IN UTOPIAN FICTION: WILLIAM MORRIS'S *A DREAM OF JOHN BALL*[*]

ÜTOPYA ROMANINDA ORTAÇAĞ YANSIMALARI: WILLIAM MORRIS'İN JOHN BALL'UN RÜYASI

Funda HAY

Arş. Gör., Ankara Üniversitesi, Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi, Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı, fhay@ankara.edu.tr

Abstract

As a medievalist utopian, in many of his works, William Morris fictionalised an ideal world in medieval times. According to him, the medieval period reflects a relatively perfect social order since the existence of feudalism hinders the period to be home to an exemplary society because of its hierarchical structure. However, the unity and harmony in the lives of the peasants and the distribution of work among the craftsmen and/or workers in the Middle Ages underlie Morris' understanding of utopia. Although the Peasant's Revolution in 1381 is ultimately an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow feudalism, he also regarded this momentous revolution as an epitome of solidarity. Thus, he believed that people could establish an ideal society within the framework of socialist ideology. In his novel A Dream of John Ball (1888), he tells of a dream where the narrator wakes up in the fourteenth century, the time of the revolt. Through his work, Morris demonstrates to the Victorian proletarians the importance of solidarity to fight against the industrialists. Within this context, this paper will elaborate on how Morris presents the Peasants' Revolt as socialist propaganda to prompt nineteenth-century British society to foster solidarity and to create an ideal world.

Öz

Bir ütopya yazarı olan William Morris, genel olarak ideal dünya düzenini Ortaçağ döneminde geçen kurgularla yaratmıştır. Yazara göre, Ortaçağ, hiyerarşik yapısından dolayı dönemin örnek teşkil edecek bir topluma ev sahipliği yapmasına engel olan feodalizmin varlığından dolayı nispeten ideal bir toplum düzeni sunmaktadır. Ancak yine de köylülerin yaşamlarındaki uyum ve birlik ile zanaatkârlar ve/veya işçiler arasındaki iş dağılımı Morris'in ütopya algısının temelini oluşturmaktadır. Sonuç olarak feodalizmi yenmek için atılmış başarısız bir adım olsa da Morris 1381 yılında gerçekleştirilen Köylü Ayaklanması'nı dayanışmanın somut bir örneği olarak görmekteydi. Böylece insanların sosyalist ideolojiler çerçevesinde ideal bir toplum düzeni kurabileceğine inanmıştır. A Dream of John Ball (John Ball'un Rüyası) (1886) isimli romanında yazar, kendisini ayaklanmanın olduğu zamanlarda, on dördüncü yüzyılda bulan anlatıcının rüyasını anlatmaktadır. Söz konusu eserinde Morris Viktorya dönemi proletaryasına sanayicilere karşı ayaklanmak için dayanışmanın ne kadar önemli olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu bağlamda bu çalışmada Morris'in Köylü Ayaklanması'nı on dokuzuncu yüzyıl Britanya toplumunun dayanışmayı kuvvetlendirmeleri ve ideal bir dünya kurmalarını teşvik etmek amacıyla sosyalizm propagandası olarak nasıl kullandığı ele alınacaktır.

In Britain, the nineteenth century was a period of transition in which the Industrial Revolution began to negatively affect standards of living. The British Empire became one of the most dominant powers because of its industrial development and colonial expansionism as a result of that development. This growth had multidimensional consequences both in the country and abroad. On the one hand, production increased, and industrialists gained more and more profit; on the other hand, mechanisation enslaved the poor in a relatively modern world.

---

[*] This article is a revised and extended version of the paper entitled "William Morris's Utopian Dream of Solidarity in *A Dream of John Ball*", which was presented at the "Solidarity and Utopia: 18th International Conference of the Utopian Studies Society/Europe", University of Gdansk, Gdansk/Poland (8th July 2017).

The employers forced the employees to work long hours in terrible conditions, and there were very few laws protecting the workers' rights. Thus, many artists, authors, and scholars of the period took an anti-industrial attitude on the public's side. Some authors and artists protested against the government policy and explicitly criticised the unacceptable working conditions in their works whereas others preferred to indirectly attack the current social order by setting their works in a different time or place from their society. Their works, in some manner, were the ways to escape from the bitter reality of their present time; therefore, many writers, especially the utopianists in the late Victorian period, fictionalised their societies in an unknown place or in the distant future. In addition to the writers who looked for an ideal world in the future or unreal present, a group of artists and authors took an interest in the Middle Ages and dealt with the medievalist ideals in their works.

The general tendency of this group was to revive the spirit of the medieval time. Apart from literary works, the architecture and interior furnishings of the period were shaped by the aesthetic concerns of medieval times. It is evident that the artists and authors drew attention to the sense of community of those days by taking people to the Middle Ages. Paul Meier emphasises the interest in medievalism in the Victorian era as follows: "*Their medievalism was sometimes pure aesthetic escapism, sometimes a critical weapon, sometimes passionate historical research*" (94). As one of the authors who did not embrace the bare facts of the Industrial Revolution, William Morris created alternative worlds in most of his works and used them as a means of propaganda, underlining the sense of socialist unity. As Meier states, Morris "*passed through all these phases*" mentioned above (94), employed the medieval setting and/or historical events to change the understanding of the Victorian people and to make them protest against what he sees as wrongdoings, especially the way of industrialisation. In his novel *A Dream of John Ball*, the writer brings the unity of the Middle Ages to the fore and offers a solution to the injustice in Victorian society.

Morris was not, in point of fact, against technological or industrial improvement; however, he thought that people were supposed to be the masters of the machines, not their slaves, as they were in the nineteenth century (*Collected Works...* 352). He advocated the guild system of the Middle Ages when people were the masters of jobs, and every member of the guilds worked with equal rights. Thus, in *A Dream of John Ball,* the author creates a "socialist utopia" pointing out the importance of equality achieved by solidarity. His hostility towards tyranny and his strong desire for alliances are the major themes of this work. The contemporary period totally reminds

Morris of medieval times in terms of the unfair working conditions, which paved the way for an association with the Peasants' Revolt. According to Nicholas Salmon,

> The choice of John Ball's rebellion as a subject for dramatic interpretation once more illustrated Morris responding to contemporary historical and political developments. During the 1870s and 1880s the events of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 had undergone a significant historical reassessment: The old view that the rebellion was an uncoordinated expression of discontent gave way to a more sophisticated interpretation of it as a watershed in the consciousness and organisation of ordinary people. (29-30).

Thus, Morris's choice of a medieval setting is not just because of nostalgia; he uncovers the resemblance between the fourteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain. In *A Dream of John Ball,* by renarrating the first great rebellion in English history, the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, Morris establishes the connection between the Middle Ages and the Victorian period, as well as drawing attention to the issue of fellowship. Although the revolt failed, it passed into history as the first act in which many people, suffering from an unjust rule, collaborated to achieve and defend their civil rights. This medieval collaboration encouraged Morris to remind people that injustice could be stopped if and only if people agreed to struggle shoulder to shoulder. As Eisenman states, *"Morris' text […] portray[s] the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 as just such a nodal point, a milestone, or 'a step upward along the spiral', as Morris wrote, that leads from the primitive communist past to postrevolutionary future"* (95). Morris's renarrating a medieval event establishes a bridge between the past and the present and introduces the patterns of that period as a guide for Victorian society.

Like the other Pre-Raphaelites who felt nostalgia for the medieval period, Morris considers the Middle Ages to be the ideal time by reason of the social order that allowed people to live and work together in harmony. The Brotherhood of Pre-Raphaelites emerged as a reaction to the art that appeared after the Italian painter Raphael by claiming the contemporary art lost the spirit of nature and they headed for the past before Raphael.[1] For that reason, William Morris, as the member of the Brotherhood of Pre-Raphaelites and the influencer of Arts and Crafts movement in Britain, establishes his utopian world in a society where the aesthetic concerns have not disappeared, and people live and work in harmony as the consequence of the elegance that dominates the whole society. Even though the Middle Ages had some

---

[1] For the further information see, Robert de la Sizeranne's *The Pre-Raphaelites.*

defaults, such as feudalism, which arose due to imbalanced earnings among the classes, Morris does not give up on the idea that the medieval time is a model of communalism. While building his utopian fiction, the author, in some way, rejects the stereotype about utopian genre that his contemporaries prefer, which is that utopia is a genre depicting the dream-like society established in an unknown country and/or unknown time. As Gregory Claeys reveals in his article "News from Somewhere," "*utopia does not have to be established in a perfect society, in a perfect place or millennium and it does not have to be unattainable, either*" (148-149). When considered from this point of view, Morris's utopia is neither unattainable nor in a far-fetched time. Although, in his well-known novel *News from Nowhere* (1890), he established a stereotypical utopian fiction that narrates twenty-first century England, he did not give up reviving the Middle Ages in his works at all. For Morris, the guild system was the basis of a more humanistic society, and cooperation among the guild members was the inspiration for a "*medievalistic future without feudalism*" (Kegel 212). Thus, in a general manner, besides *A Dream of John Ball*, many of his works guides people to "*remember the history of the past, [to] make history in the present, and [to] teach history in the future*" (M. Morris 285). The past is a means to teach people how to establish a better world where workers would not be exploited, and the author transmits such a view not only through his written works but also through his tapestries and stained glass. His artistic anxiety is based on the understanding that past would offer a deeper meaning of life and beauty.

Morris evaluates the conditions of workers from ancient times to his contemporary times and comes to the conclusion that the guildsmen and labourers of the medieval period worked under better circumstances than those of both previous and subsequent times:

> In one way or another these [ancient] serfs got gradually emancipated and during a transitional period, lasting through the two last centuries of the Middle Ages, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the labour classes were in a far better position than they had been before, and in some ways that *they have been since*; suffering more from spasmodic arbitrary violence than from chronic legal oppression. ("True and False Society" 5; emphasis added)

When considered from the perspective of Morris, the conditions of the labourers of that period suggest the idea of a better society; hence, for Morris, utopia means going back to medieval times when the workers "*were in a far better position.*" The author does not ignore the pain experienced in those days, therefore, as stated previously,

Morris's medievalist utopianism does not cover all the social and political structures of that period. He isolates utopia from the existence of any system establishing the superiority of one class over the other classes. Paul Meier outlines Morris's utopia, shaped by his socialism, and emphasises the restrictive nature of his dream society: *"[h]is leftist formalism and his medievalism lead him [...] to reject* en bloc *the historical contribution of the bourgeois class to human progress, to strike out of history and exclude from utopia four centuries of civilisation"* (36). Morris considers the medieval guild system the best example of communism, and, unlike Marx, he ignores the structural change in the class system after the Middle Ages.[2] The reason for this is that the order in the guilds which is to have a voice in the production, and above all, is the consciousness of alliance, have all been forgotten because of 'civilisation.'

In *A Dream of John Ball*, Morris introduces the struggle of medieval craftsmen and peasants to Victorian society. His fiction consists of a dream in which the narrator, who lives in nineteenth-century Britain, goes back to fourteenth-century Kent. Morris's storytelling through a dream once again manifests the influence of the Middle Ages on the author. Since he takes Chaucer as his model, Morris adopts the allegorical narrative, the dream vision[3] that was one of the most preferred literary modes by Chaucer. The narrator in *A Dream of John Ball* finds himself in the middle of the Peasants' Revolt and meets the leaders of this rebellion, such as Wat Tyler, John Ball, and Jack Straw. He therefore gets the chance to observe the revolt closely and learns all the phases that lead to such an uprising through the rebels' perspectives. The novel includes historical facts and many characters that the narrator meets are the important rebels taking active roles in the revolt. Nevertheless, when one looks at the chronicles, he can notice the anachronistic details in the work as well. It is known that Morris read Lord Berners's translation of Jean Froissart's *Chronicle* (Lambdin and Lambdin) and framed his novel in the light of that chronicle with some changes. The most significant change is the leader of the revolt; although Wat Tyler is admitted as the leader, Morris gives prominence to John Ball in his novel. In the chronicles, John Ball is presented as *"the mad priest of Kent,"* (Oman 41)

---

[2] Karl Marx believes in the social evolution which has stages following one after another; they are primitive communism, serfdom, feudalism, socialism and "classless" society - communism.

[3] The dream vision, known as dream allegory, was one of the most famous literary modes in the Middle Ages. The thirteenth-century poem *Roman de la Rose* is the earliest known example of this mode. In English literature, Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400) wrote many dream visions and became one the pioneers of this mode. In a dream vision, the whole story consists of a dream; an animal or a historical figure becomes the guide to the dreamer. After the dreamer wakes up, he has a revelation concerning his problems.

fighting against tyranny and the corrupt Church that had gained more power during the medieval period. The general focus of John Ball was the peasants' absolute obedience to the landlords and masters and he also drew attention to the social gap between the peasants and the landlords, and naturally the merchants who were getting rich day by day owing to expanding marketing.[4] As stated in the historical records, when the revolt began, John Ball was already imprisoned in London because of his sermons on a classless society and he would be released in mid-June, by a mob under Wat Tyler's control, which means he did not have an active role in the Kent events as Morris narrates in his novel. As a preacher, John Ball led people to rebel through his unconventional sermons focusing on the wrongdoings in society. He had a mission as an orator during the revolt; Morris benefits from this aspect of the priest and distorts some of the historical facts. For this reason, the plot is not built on the action that picturises the battlefield; on the contrary, the dialogues between the narrator and the characters, especially the leader John Ball, form the structure of the narrative. Morris uses the quotes from John Ball's sermons and letters to increase the cogency of his work. The dreamer and John Ball exchange information about their own societies, and the conversation permits the contemporary people to understand the ideological purpose behind the peasants' struggle and helps them to see the parallels between the Victorian and Medieval social orders. As Bukowska states "*Morris holds up a medieval mirror to his Victorian reality […] he not only brings the issue of oppression into focus but also exposes all the aspects of class struggle which he considers desirable*" (76-77). From the beginning of the novel, the author draws attention to the common points between the two societies.

Morris, to a certain extent, puts what he believes into practice by re-telling the Peasants' Revolt that broke out after the king, Richard II, demanded unbearable taxes from his subjects. During those days, the Black Death and the war against France had already worsened living conditions, and the poll tax levied by the government

---

[4] In the late Middle Ages, the economic situation and expectations from the peasants led them to produce more than they need; thus, they transferred their products to the merchants. Most of the peasants were engaged in agriculture for low wages whereas some classes gained prestige. The peasants formed a primitive version of trade unions to demand what they deserve, in return, the lords reduced the number of the labourers and enslaved them. The low wages of the peasants and high taxation increased the gap among the classes, which created social unrest. For that reason, some people such as John Ball tried to evoke the spirit of struggle. Rodney Hilton explains in detail the place of the merchants and production in the Middle Ages in his *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movement and the English Rising of 1381*. Moreover, James E. Thorold Rogers elaborates the history of working conditions of the peasants and the wages that they earned in his *Six Centuries of Work and Wages*.

reminded the subjects that neither war nor death ruined their lives as much as did higher-rate taxes did. Therefore, the serfs rioted under Wat Tyler's leadership to stop this injustice. However, the revolt did not reach its goal, and Richard II dispersed it with the promises which were later rescinded. Although unsuccessful, this revolt paved the way for many beginnings in English history. Moreover, it inspired many people across different times; *"[the] reassessment of the Peasants' Revolt was seized upon by the infant socialist movement in Britain, and subsequently transformed into a powerful revolutionary precedent to be exploited for propaganda purposes"* (Salmon 30). As the first socialist movement in the struggle for justice in English history, the uprising has been an encouragement for years, and Morris uses it as a strong motivation in his novel to lead the Victorian people to stage their own historical rebellion.

The novel opens with the general aspects of the narrator's dreams and it is understood that the narrator usually dreams about the past times that had artistically attractive buildings or landscapes such as Elizabethan houses, sandy woodlands, old and curious churches. He describes the architectural beauty of the structures with an artistic view, the buildings in his dreams are *"some new-seen and yet familiar cluster of houses in a grey village of the upper Thames overtopped by the delicate tracery of a fourteenth-century church; or even sometimes the very buildings of the past untouched by the degradation of the sordid utilitarianism that cares not and knows not of beauty and history"* (Morris, *A Dream of John Ball...* 2). Even though the cities and places vary, the time is always the past in those dreams. From the very first page, the dreams are presented as the escape points, but the first impression about them is architectural admiration for the untouched beauty of those days. The narrator of Morris is depicted as a character who dreams for *"an architectural peep-show"* (1), and the artistic perspective of the author is transmitted through the narrator; that is why it is possible to follow the traces of beauty of nature and architecture before Raphael as Morris himself appreciates. Every dream is a journey to the past, and the dreamer is a time-traveller observing the beauty of the time, which he dreams, from a distance. However, his last dream is different from the earlier ones; instead of looking at the structures as a tourist, he involves in the historical process.

The dreamer describes this journey as an awakening from a dream where he finds himself in a country village in a time when the people speak English that the narrator's audience hardly understands, and when people have already begun to

gather against the king. The general atmosphere in the village reflects the tension between the villeins and lords. The narrator draws attention to the decrease in the number of citizens because of war in France and the plague, which creates an imbalance of the workload and income. Although fewer people work for more working hours, the King and the lords focus on the growth of the peasants and the craftsmen. Morris expresses what the lords think in his novel, "*[w]e are growing poorer, and these upland-bred villeins are growing richer, and the guilds of craft are waxing in the towns, and soon what will there be left for us who cannot weave and will not dig?*" (13-14). Since they believe that the peasants will be richer, and no one will do their drudgery, they support the increase of the poll tax. The unfair rise in the tax leads the peasants to stand up for their rights, and it paves the way for their famous uprising. In the novel, the ballads and talks of the characters demonstrate that they are ready to fight under the guidance of a leader and they expect from Robin Hood, the legendary hero robbing the rich and giving to the poor, to bring them 'John Ball' (Morris, *A Dream of John Ball...* 20). The priest John Ball is presented as the saviour of the peasants, therefore, the dream narrated in the novel actually is not the dream of the narrator and/or the author as the narrator start telling at the beginning of the novel but, in accordance with the title, it is the dream of John Ball who hopes for the success of the peasants in the Revolt to reach a utopian society.

Both the dreamer and John Ball help the author establish his utopian society. It is understood that some ideas and/or improvement of the nineteenth century and the fourteenth century have positive sides that Morris values. For that reason, it is hard to choose only one spokesman who expresses the author's perspective in the work; Morris reveals his views on the medieval and Victorian societies with the voices of both John Ball and the dreamer. The ideas of these characters correspond to Morris's socialism and naturally his utopian society. The adaptation of Morris's narrator to the fourteenth century could be interpreted as the author's convergence on his dreamy era. The dreamer feels familiar with the land where he wakes, he already knows how to communicate with people, especially with the revolutionists and knows all the passwords that he would need to attend the rebellion. These details demonstrate that Morris has read the historical documents and has information on the actions of the participants of the Peasants' Revolution. When the dreamer comes across Will Green, one of the revolutionists in the novel, they exchange a rhyme that was written in John Ball's letter sent to the commons of Essex. At the beginning of the dialogue between Will Green and the dreamer, Green offers food him and asks the master of the foreigner to give a supper in exchange for a song. The narrator says

that he is "his own master;" then Will Green gives the clue for the password, "*John the Miller, that ground small, small, small,*" and the dreamer explains how he responds to Green by stating "*from between my lips without my mind forming any meaning came the words, 'The King's son of heaven shall pay for all'*" (Morris, *A Dream of John Ball...* 10). The answer that the narrator gives unconsciously leads him/"Morris persona to be a member of John Ball's revolutionary Fellowship" (Holzman 103). The chronicler Thomæ Walsingham conveys John Ball's letter in his *Historia Anglicana*, and the same rhyme stands out, "*Johan the Muller hath ygrownde smal, smal, smal; /The Kyngis sone of hevene shalle pay for alle*" (34). Ball's letter includes many names and an allusion to William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and all these details make the scholars have difficulty in deciphering the letter. The same lines are interpreted in different ways by the different critics (Gellrich 164-5). However, the British historian Charles Oman elaborates that the letter was written to establish the unity and "*to urge the multitude to give implicit obedience to their one head, i.e. Tyler - discipline being all important; to bid them beware of being turned from their designs by the townsfolk [...]; and above all to warn them not to take into partnership false brethren who would turn aside to pillage and self-seeking, but only honest partisans of the cause*" (44). The letter is a warning about the false leaders and lords, and a call for solidarity for the medieval people. Morris, by referring to the historical documents, increases the awareness of that Revolt among the nineteenth-century readers and pulls them into the facts that lead the medieval people to rebellion.

The sermons of John Ball are the other details that Morris benefits from the chronicles. In the novel, Morris takes some lines from one of John Ball's sermons; it is seen that the rebels carry a banner on which there are the images of Adam and Eve who are against a background of green trees, which the narrator describes "*man's first contest with nature*" and the words, "*When Adam delved and Eve span, / Who was then the gentleman?*" (24). As before mentioned, the historical John Ball attracted the attention of people on the abuses and misinterpretation of religion with his speeches. The priest was aware of the fact that in a period when the Christian doctrines underlay the lifestyle of the medieval people, the landlords and the aristocrats were away from the understanding of the equality and fairness in Christianity. Ball gave a speech after he was delivered from the prison where he was kept because of his sermon about a classless society,[5] and asked the crowd "*when Adam delf and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?*" (qtd. in Coleman 62). With

---

[5] For the further information see, Richard B. Dobson's *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381.*

this question, John Ball emphasises that God did not create the world in order that some people could be elite or superior; since the creation of the first people, everybody has been born to the same rights and they are supposed to live in this world in harmony and justice. Furthermore, Adam and Eve, in monotheistic religions, are accepted as the mother and father of all human beings, and with this reference, Ball brings attention to the brotherhood of humanity. Thus, in Christianity, everybody is expected to respect his brother's rights. The speech emphasises that everyone is equal by nature and when he addresses to the public, John Ball's "*doctrines gain the applause of the multitude*" at the arena where his followers gather (Walsingham 33). William Morris, with the banner in the hand of the peasants revives and reminds of the enthusiasm of the public who can come together with the socialist goals even in the fourteenth century.

If utopia is the recalling of a better world, then, for Morris, it is equal to socialism. He passionately believes that socialism is the only system which could remove inequality from every segment of society and bring about a classless society. The author explains his political views in detail in his article "How Became a Socialist," depicting what socialism means to him and why he is against the apparently tyrannous stance of industrialists. As is seen in *A Dream of John Ball*, the character John Ball repeats the same opinions in a similar manner to Morris. Apart from the dreamer, it is possible to hear the voice of Morris through John Ball:

> [S]o by undoing of evil laws and making of good ones, that fashion
> would come to an end whereof thou speakest, that rich men make laws
> for their own behoof; for they should no longer be able to do thus when
> all had part in making the laws; whereby it would soon come about
> that there would be no men rich and tyrannous, but all should have
> enough and to spare of the increase of the earth and the work of their
> own hands. (118).

These words reflect Morris's socialist dream, which is to come true only when fellowship is fostered among the oppressed public. It is clear that "*an individual vision cannot be transformed into effective social action unless it is shared by others. Until this occurs, the visionary has no alternative but to remain alienated in the world he wished to transform*" (Salmon 36). Morris's utopian world accepts the understanding of union which enables the citizens to work and live in peace and fair conditions, as medieval people had accomplished.

In consideration of the historical process of the revolt and the primary aims of the rebels, Morris gives voice to the peasants through the medieval rebels, depicting the worthy goals of the peasants with long speeches in the novel. It is clear that if they do not take action, "*the lords and councillors shall fall upon their peace with war, and the peasants' wives and children they shall take from the villeins, some of them the lords shall hang, and some they shall scourge*" (Morris, *A Dream of John Ball...* 71). Although Ball's aims seem to be solving the problems of only one class, it is known that this uprising had a national purpose because "*[l]eaders such as John Ball, looked beyond limited aims and viewed the rebellion as the first step on the way to destroying the feudal hierarchy and replacing it with a new society based on equality and fellowship*" (Salmon 31). Within this context, the character John Ball presents the moral and rational justification of the revolutionists to the Victorian people. As an enthusiastic advocate of fellowship, the priest strongly emphasises that solidarity is life itself. For him, "*fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell: fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death*" (Morris, *A Dream of John Ball...* 29). However, Morris takes the periods into consideration as a whole; his utopian society embraces certain characteristics from both past and present. The fellowship of the medieval society is not the unique aspect of the dream community of Morris. As Anna Vaninskaya reveals that "*the focus on fellowship was not just Morris's way of endowing the medieval uprising with Victorian socialist overtones: the ethical parallel between the fourteenth and the nineteenth century both depended upon and enabled a much broader dialectical model of development*" (123). Solidarity is only one of the features that Morris preferred adopting from the medieval lifestyle and the author believes in a society that consists of the understanding of the medieval unity and Victorian improvement in machinery.

Morris's anti-industrial attitude does not mean anti-technological; on the contrary in the good hands, any advancement could be used for the benefit of the whole society. The words of the dreamer about the technological improvement in transportation or production arouses John Ball's enthusiasm for the future since he believes that people would live in better conditions due the contributions of technology:

> if ever it cometh about that men shall be able to make things, and not men, work for their superfluities, and that the length of travel from one place to another be made of no account, and all the world be a market for all the world, then all shall live in health and wealth; and envy and grudging shall perish. For then shall we have conquered the

> earth and it shall be enough; and then shall the kingdom of heaven be
> come down to the earth in very deed (118-119).

John Ball's expectation from the innovation is what it is supposed to be like. The grounds for hope of a better future present every kind of improvement, and for that reason, the author does not ignore the good sides of the nineteenth-century world. The emphasis on the enhancement in the novel manifests Morris's belief in education and science besides fellowship whereas John Ball and the other medieval revolutionists defend a more utopic social order by focusing on politics. Michael Holzman reveals the difference between the understanding of 'socialism' for John Ball and Morris by stating that "*John Ball's socialism, unlike Morris's own, is utopian, not scientific*" (112). As is seen, Morris appreciates the positive returns of his period as well; the novel declares that technology is supposed to be used to make people's life easy and automation should reduce the working hours so that people could spend more time on learning.

The last chapters revolve around the dialogue between John Ball and the narrator; after a bloody struggle in the battlefield against the King's men, they stop by the church of the village and they start a long conversation in front of the dead bodies. The title of the chapter, "Betwixt the Living and the Dead," ironically foregrounds the coming death of John Ball and the narrator's life; they represent the dead and the living in the church. In this chapter, it is understood that John Ball is aware of the fact that the narrator comes from the future and wants to learn from the time traveller whether their "death shall bear fruit." Ball wonders how the conditions of the workers change after the Revolt. Even though the struggle of the peasants means a lot for the future for workers, the narrator cannot bring him good news at all. He describes the Victorian 'lords' as if they were parts of a dystopian world getting worse and worse: "*the times shall better, though the king and lords shall worsen, the Gilds of Craft shall wax and become mightier; more recourse shall there be of foreign merchants*" (Morris, *A Dream of John Ball...* 98). The news of the dreamer sounds both good and bad for John Ball; even if there is no more famine and the labourers earn relatively more than their previous colleagues in future, some new and worse lords will eke out existence under any circumstances. Nevertheless, the revolutionists' death and efforts will not be fruitless, at all; with the waxing guilds/trade unions, Morris keeps alive his hope for a better future.

The narrator pays attention to the foreign merchants who gain dominance at the market. The increase in the numbers of the merchants at local and foreign markets lead the new lords to appear whereas the poor who do not manage to change their social status continue blindly obeying. He states that "*the labourers shall think that they cannot do without these men that live by robbing them, and shall praise them and wellnigh pray to them as ye pray to the saints, rand the best worshipped man in the land shall be he who by forestalling and regrating hath gotten to him the most money*" (Morris, *A Dream of John Ball…* 120). The problem of Victorian society is that they cannot even imagine a better world where they will not be robbed, or they will not be controlled by those who make the rules according to their own interests. Moreover, the narrator elaborates on the difference of becoming a lord after a long term 'slavery' in the Middle Ages and in the Victorian period. At this point, he remarks the rising of the middle class and their change from the "robbed" to the "robbers." The ethical values of the period are also criticised through these new "lords;" in other words, the industrialists. Thus, Morris foregrounds the fact that so few things such as automation, technology in production and transportation have changed since the Middle Ages, and all these new opportunities are used as a modern way of slavery.

Through the end of the last chapter, John Ball takes leave of the narrator and goes back to the rebellion where he will die, but before leaving, the narrator assures John Ball that his dream will come true one day: "*The time shall come John Ball when that dream of thine that this shall one day be, shall be a thing that men shall talk of soberly, and as a thing soon to come about, as even with thee they talk of the villeins becoming tenants paying their lord quit-rent; therefore, hast thou done well to hope it*" (Morris *A Dream of John Ball…* 124). Even though the peasants could not reach their goals in the fourteenth century, the narrator does not give up believing in the rightness of their revolt. The narrator's promising words demonstrate that people could eliminate the inequal life standards as long as they defend themselves against those robbing the poor people and also those whose eyes be blinded to that robbery. Throughout the novel, the author emphasises that history repeats itself and implies that capitalism is a new version of medieval feudalism; therefore, everything that the contemporary people need to abolish capitalism and to discard the modern serfdom is hidden in the past. In his article "The Society of the Future," Morris states that "*man must and does create the conditions under which he lives*" (qtd. in M. Morris and Shaw 456); the changing conditions of life depend on man himself. The last scene of the novel corroborates the necessity of taking a step to a change; the dreamer wakes up in his own time, he hears the frightful noises of the 'hooters', a call for the

workmen to the factories and he describes his reaction after such a dream as following, "I grinned surlily, and dressed and got ready for my day's 'work' as I call it, but which many a man besides John Ruskin […] would call 'play'" (129). The novel ends with these words and there is no clue that the dreamer makes an attempt to change the ongoing situation of the society. The narrator continues playing the game called life. The open ending of the novel and the title of the last chapter, "Ill would Change be at Whiles were it not for the Change beyond the Change" demonstrate that such a revolutionary change would take time.

In conclusion, since the Industrial Revolution has created a nightmarish society, Morris looks for an ideal world, and he finds it in the medieval period. For him, medievalism offers an ideal communal life for people, and their fight against the stricter enforcement of the feudal system proves the glory of that period. The late medieval time presents an example of the social harmony ruined in time and social gap reached an unbearable point that led people to unite and fight for what they had before. The very first revolutionary movement in the English history resembles a socialist rebellion; therefore, throughout the novel, John Ball's dream, which is the success of fellowship, is established as the heart of Morris's notion of socialism. His *A Dream of John Ball*, is a means to point out that solidarity is the ultimate solution to change society and to establish a new order, carried out in the light of socialist ideals. Morris's return to the Middle Ages is a way to teach the past and by focusing on an uprising against tyranny, he exhibits the sublimity of the peasants' purpose. The author believes that the tyranny created as a result of industrialisation could only be defeated when people collaborate with the same spirit of solidarity as was realised in 1381. From a distance, by evaluating this failed attempt to make a revolution, he yearns for the same unity which would provide success in Victorian society after a long time. As is seen, the re-narration of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 is Morris's socialist propaganda, including both medieval idealism and his utopian dream, which is to come together with people under socialist aims and solidarity. Using his work, he declares his dreams of a socialist rebellion in his time and an unbreakable unity among the labourers.

WORK CITED

Bukowska, Joanna. "William Morris's *Dream of John Ball* and the Victorian Vision of Medieval History." *Studia Litteraria Universitatis Iagellonicae Cracoviensis* 10.2 (2015): 63–78. Web. 16 Nov.2017.

Claeys, Gregory. "News from Somewhere: Enhanced Sociability and the Composite Definition of Utopia and Dystopia." *History* 98 (2013)*:* 145–173.

Coleman, Janet. *English Literature in History: 1350-1400 Medieval Readers and Writers.* London: Hutchinson, 1981.

Dobson, Richard B. *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381.* Ed. Gywn A. Williams. 2nd ed. London: Macmillian, 1983.

Eisenman Stephen F. "Communism in Furs: A Dream of Prehistory in William Morris's *John Ball.*" *The Art Bulletin* 87.1 (2005): 92-110. Web. 30 Mar. 2017.

Gellrich, Jesse M. *Discourse and Dominion in the Fourteenth Century: Oral Contexts of Writing in Philosophy, Politics, and Poetry.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995.

Hilton, Rodney. *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movement and the English Rising of 1381.* London: Routledge, 2003.

Holzman, Michael. "The Encouragement and Warning of History: William Morris's *A Dream of John Ball.*" *Socialism and the Literary Artistry of William Morris.* Eds. Florence S. Boos and Carole G. Silver. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989. 98-116.

Kegel, Charles Herbert. *Medieval-modern Contrasts Used for a Social Purpose in the Work of William Cobbett, Robert Southey, A. Welby Pugin, Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin and William Morris.* Diss. Michigan State University, 1955. *ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.* Web. 2 Jul. 2017.

Lambdin, L. C. and R. T. Lambdin. *Camelot in the Nineteenth Century: Arthurian Characters in the Poems of Tennyson, Arnold, Morris and Swinburne.* Westport: Greenwood, 2000.

Meier, Paul. *William Morris: the Marxist Dreamer.* Ed. Robin Page Arnot. Trans. Frank Gubb. Vol. 1. Sussex: Harvester, 1978.

Morris, May. *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist: The Art of William Morris.* Vol 1. New York: Cambridge UP, 2012.

--- and George Bernard Shaw. *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist: Morris as a Socialist; William Morris as I Knew Him.* Vol 2. New York: Cambridge UP, 2012.

Morris, William. *A Dream of John Ball and A King's Lesson.* London: Reeves, 1923.

---. "How I Became a Socialist." London: Twentieth Century, 1896.

---. *The Collected Works of William Morris.* Ed. May Morris. Vol. 22. New York: Cambridge UP, 2012.

---. "True and False Society." London: the Hammersmith Socialist Kelmscott House, 1893.

Oman, Charles. *Great Revolt of 1381.* New York: Haskell House, 1968.

Rogers, James E. Thorold. *Six Centuries of Work and Wages: The History of English Labour* (1884). Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001.

Salmon, Nicholas. "A Reassessment of *A Dream of John Ball.*" *The Journal of the William Morris Society* 14.2. (2001): 29-38. Web. 28 June 2018.

Sizeranne, Robert de la. *The Pre-Raphaelites.* Trans. Andrew Byrd. New York: Parkstone, 2008.

Vaninskaya, Anna. *William Morris and the Idea of Community: Romance, History and Propaganda, 1880-1914.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2010.

Walsingham, Thomæ. *Historia Anglicana.* Vol. II. Ed. Henry Thomas Riley. London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1864.