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TWO USES OF THE DREAM—FORM AS A MEANS  
OF CONFRONTING THE PRESENT WITH THE  
NATIONAL PAST: WILLIAM MORRIS AND  
SVATOPLUK ČECH

The two works of literature to be dealt with in this article, William Morris's *A Dream of John Ball* and Svatopluk Čech's *The New, Epoch-making Journey of Mr. Beetle Back to the 15th Century* (*Nový epochální výlet pana Broučka tentokrát do patnáctého století*), Prague, 1888, can be said to partake of the nature of the dream utopia, in the sense that both describe in the form of a dream a situation which is historically impossible, therefore fantastic, with the object of offering a contrast to the world of today which the author wishes to criticise. Both draw a contrast between the world of today and a selected moment from the national past; in Morris's case, the Peasants' Revolt of the late 14th century, in that of Čech, the culmination of the Hussite resistance to the Crusading forces under King Sigismund in the 15th century. In both cases the author tells his tale through the eyes of a figure of his own day — late-Victorian England, and Prague under the Austrian Empire respectively. In both cases, the moment of modern time occurs in the eighties of last century. In both books the moment of past time is the climax of one of the most glorious events in the national past.

It will be seen that superficially at least, the two books have much in common. Yet these works cannot be correctly classed as "utopias", since the country and period they describe are not imaginary; nor is the historical period offered as a utopian model for the present, although a certain degree of idealisation is arguable. On the other hand, they are not historical romances, since a vital feature is the actually impossible presence of a character from another age. In both these works the historic scene is presented so realistically and with so much claim to historical accuracy that it would be out of place to term them historical fantasies. I would tentatively suggest the term historical utopian fiction, partly on the analogy of the term science fiction used for the realistically presented fantasies of space travel, with the reminder that the term utopia is here used in a rather special sense referring to the educational or political purpose of the work. This type of romance or satire would appear to be much less common than the purely imaginary or prophetic utopia, although it has, especially since the period in which these two

books were written, been considerably exploited above all in the field of English children's books.<sup>1</sup> Another similar fiction was however published in America about the same time by Mark Twain, his *A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur* (1889). It is just possible that Mark Twain may have been negatively influenced by Morris's work — and he certainly was influenced by his dislike of a romanticising attitude towards the Middle Ages with which he might have confused Morris's standpoint, had he been familiar with his work, since he wrote the *Yankee* after reading Malory and with the intention of directly parodying Malory. With this possible exception, any other mutual relationship of these three works would seem to be ruled out. The purpose of this study is to examine the two books first mentioned, and after analysing their main features, to enquire both into the purpose of the authors, their artistic method of attaining this purpose, and the success or otherwise of their attempt. In this way I hope to arrive at some conclusions regarding the relationship of avowed and conscious purpose to the artistic means at the author's disposal.

What led Morris to write *A Dream of John Ball*? The later 14th century was perhaps not the period which most engaged his creative thought in the eighties. He was, of course, and had been since childhood and youth, steeped in the literature of the period, approaching it initially through Scott and the ballads, later through Malory and Chaucer, and his knowledge of early printed books, while throughout his life he increasingly widened and deepened his expert knowledge of medieval literature, art and crafts. But after having expressed his early ballad mood in the *Defence of Guenevere* and his ripper appreciation of the medieval poetic heritage in *The Earthly Paradise*, his poetic activity found another and more remote field of inspiration, going backwards in time and northwards in space to the Iceland and Scandinavia of the sagas. This reorientation of his interest had a decisive effect on his poetry, as is well known, leading him to a greater realism and a closer relation to life. The fruit of this change was above all *Sigurd the Volsung*; while his later prose romances went back to even more remote and less well documented times than that of the sagas, times which he interpreted in the light of his Marxist understanding of history. His latest creative work ranged from the two opposed poles of the contemporary political struggle (*Pilgrims of Hope*) to the earlier national past (his *Beowulf* translation) and the timeless era of fairy tale, e. g. *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, etc. The choice of the Peasants' Revolt, then, in the eighties, as the theme of *John Ball*, did not follow from the direct line of Morris's poetic development. It was the fruit of his work in the British Socialist Movement and of his endeavour to come to grips with Marxist historical materialism in the light of his own previous understanding of history.

Morris was a "natural" poet, who wrote because he loved writing poetry. He was a "natural" artist, whose fingers fell easily into almost forgotten techniques and craft processes. But Morris was also a historian, and this side of his work is sometimes not sufficiently emphasised. He was certainly by no means an academic historian and doubtless had many formal gaps in his knowledge and not a few prejudices (notably his prejudice against the Renaissance). But history had been his main interest at the University,<sup>2</sup> and he continued to read and consider modern works of critical history alongside what he called the "uncritical history" of such traditional works as the *Heimskringla*, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, William of Malmesbury and Froissart. In the later seventies, the force of contemporary events led him to enter

public life, on the one hand in the liberal-radical peace movement, on the other, in the fight for the historical method in the preservation of ancient buildings. He had become a welcome lecturer on Art and on Politics throughout the country, even before his socialist days. The need to prepare these lectures carefully led him to seek precision in his historical statements, and this precision still increased after he entered the socialist movement, studied Marxism, and became one of the most active propagandists of the growing socialist and communist movement of the eighties.

At the time when Morris began to write his lectures, he had written comparatively little prose, apart from letters. His earlier prose tales were rather tenuous, self-conscious products, very much in the prè-Raphaelite manner. The prose of his earlier letters might have been written by any one of his Oxford friends, except for the occasional vivid picture in colloquial language, dealing with his various enthusiasms. The first signs of a more disciplined and taut style come in his Icelandic diary (1871) and in the letters written about this time, when he began to formulate a more mature philosophy of life; a style worked out partly through the discipline of the Icelandic prose translations he had been doing with Magnússon, and also the result of the mental discipline he was undergoing in the seldom expressed but nevertheless real mental struggle of the man who at Oxford had still intended to be an Anglican clergyman, but now at the age of forty-six or seven had begun to approach a materialist position. We may say that about this time Morris's prose begins to be a medium of deliberate and controlled expression comparable to his poetry.<sup>3</sup> From the end of the seventies onwards it becomes increasingly a deliberately used artistic instrument, with a wide range of expression and purpose. There can be no doubt it was largely Morris's increasing public activity which obliged him to consider and weigh his prose composition.

In the letters and prose tales written as a young man he had been thinking rather of the fullest self-expression than of the effect on his reader. But now his purpose was to achieve the maximum effect, an effect which would be translated into action on the part of his hearers. In preparing his lectures, whether on art, history or socialism, Morris took the greatest of care to express himself clearly, precisely and concretely. His propaganda was never woolly or uninformed, and the prose style he used bypasses the usual models of 19th-century speakers and lecturers. "Classicism", rhetorical periods, and a heavily latinised vocabulary were anathema to Morris. He was, however in many ways more indebted than he knew to the 17th century for his prose, just as his poetry owed much to the 15th century. He himself placed the *Pilgrim's Progress* in his list of the world's best books,<sup>4</sup> and like Shaw's prose, Morris's owes much to the forceful narrative and expository tradition of Bunyan, Defoe and the realist novelists. His preoccupation with saga translation and its appropriate vocabulary led him to prefer the Anglo-Saxon to the Norman-French or Latin derivative; while perhaps the most decisive factor in forming his later prose style was the need to make his socialist lectures intelligible to a wide, often working-class audience. Nothing could be in greater contrast to the all-too-frequent representation of Morris as the "dreamer of dreams" than this reorientation, from the end of the seventies onwards, to an audience far wider than any of his earlier work contemplated.<sup>5</sup>

This turning to a new audience was not confined to Morris's propaganda and educative activity. In his poetry, it first appears in the *Chants*

for Socialists (often arising from the situation of the moment, as in his *Death Song* for Alfred Linnell) and in *The Pilgrims of Hope* (1885). Next year (1886), Morris wrote for serial publication in the *Commonweal* his *Dream of John Ball*. According to a letter to Owen Carroll quoted by Thompson,<sup>6</sup> Morris wrote *John Ball* "with the intention of bringing in the socialistic dialogues at the end rather than dealing with the literary and dramatic side of the story". (This letter was written retrospectively in 1894.) In the period during which *John Ball* was appearing, *Commonweal*, under Morris's editorship, also published the articles written by Morris in collaboration with Bax, *Socialism from the Root up*<sup>7</sup> and he had first written of John Ball to a socialist audience in the year 1884 in an article published in the Social-Democratic paper *Justice*, on The Lord Mayor's Show.<sup>8</sup> *John Ball* is thus the concomitant of this direct propaganda activity. But while socialist propaganda is Morris's serious purpose and conscious intention, "he was very anxious that the literary standards of the paper should be maintained" (Thompson, p. 643) and, considering only the best to be good enough for the workers, endeavoured to reach the widest possible circle of readers without abating a jot of his artistic demands. Though he may write "for the sake of the socialist dialogues", he is concerned to infuse his tale with imagination so that it becomes a poetic re-creation of the half-forgotten national tradition of revolt, which Morris relates intimately to the day-to-day contemporary struggle. Similarly, Svatopluk Čech, while he sets out to satirise the complacent petty bourgeois of his own day, produces much more than a satire. Because of his knowledge of and warmth of feeling for the Czech national revolutionary tradition, he re-creates it for the modern reader in warm and living terms. While this revivifying of the past in the light of the present may be less fully and logically realised in Čech than it is in Morris,<sup>9</sup> nevertheless the transcending of the obvious immediate and extraneous purpose of these two works (in Morris direct expounding of Marxist theory, in Čech direct satire of the contemporary petty bourgeois) and the resulting striking confrontation with the heroic national past, is the main characteristic which they have in common, and the feature which makes both works still a living and valid part of the cultural tradition of their respective nations.

## 2.

*A Dream of John Ball* is about half the length of Čech's book. This roughly corresponds to the plot-time covered by the two books. In the case of *John Ball*, the dream covers the events of one day (or afternoon) and night, and is dreamt during a night's sleep, while Beetle's "dream", although it lasts apparently only a short time, perhaps a few hours, before he is discovered by the landlord in the early morning, takes the hero through a night, a day, a second night, and part of another day, before the disaster that leads to his awakening. The methods of the two books also correspond to this respective tightening up or loosening of the time scheme: Morris's work is taut, concentrated, without irrelevancies, re-creating a few hours' intense experience; while Čech's book is more leisurely, more digressive, and on varying levels of intensity. The *Dream of John Ball* is conceived in one mood or mode, which is sustained

throughout. Only at the very beginning and the very end do we come in direct contact with the conditions of contemporary life which Morris was attacking, and even here, the artistic fabric is entire.<sup>10</sup>

Morris begins relating his dream as unselfconsciously as he related his actual dreams in letters to his family or friends:<sup>11</sup> "Sometimes I am rewarded for fretting myself so much about present matters by a quite unasked-for pleasant dream."<sup>12</sup> He mentions some of these dreams, which reflect Morris's paramount interest in architecture and may very well represent actual dreams which he had. Even this introductory paragraph is significantly placed at the beginning of the work into which Morris poured the results of his whole lifetime's searching and experience: for it was originally by way of the love of architecture — the ruling passion of his boyhood and youth — that Morris came to his wider interests, in art, poetry and politics. But this dream of "the other night", is no mere "architectural dream"; again he appropriately reaches it by way of a confused nightmare arising from his socialist lecturing and open-air speaking. The humour of this passage is so well-managed and acutely expressed, that we may well regret that Morris never wrote the novel of contemporary life which on at least one occasion he began.<sup>13</sup> But this nightmare is so painful that it fades, and the dreamer appears to wake, finding himself "lying on a strip of wayside waste by an oak copse just outside a country village" (p. 216). This induction takes only one paragraph, and is in marked contrast to the elaborate introductions given by many nineteenth-century "utopians" — by Twain in his *Yankee at the Court of King Arthur*, by Bellamy in *Looking Backward* (1888), by Čech in *Mr. Beetle*. Here Morris in fact is following not the example of More or Swift, the rationalised approach to the other world, but the poetic example of his master Chaucer, the medieval dream convention, and he solves the problem as simply and neatly as Chaucer in *The Boke of the Duchesse* or *The Parlement of Foules* — it simply is a dream, and so it can start right away without further rationalisation.

The landscape has nothing dreamlike about it, it is as real as a MS. illumination or Chaucer's own fields and forests. We have a very concrete and detailed description of a medieval English countryside, and the dream-character is only suggested by the slight lack of focus caused by the dreamer's puzzlement over the newness of the tall white church-spire — "I did not understand, new as the spire was, how it could have been designed by a modern architect" (p. 217; cf. Note 12). He is also surprised, "used to the hedged tillage and tumble-down bankrupt-looking surroundings of our modern agriculture", by the "garden-like neatness and trimness of everything". But the surprise leaves him, and he explains that not even the speech of those he met astonished him:

"If I were to give you the very words of those who spoke to me you would scarcely understand them, although their language was English too, and at the time I could understand them at once." (p. 217)<sup>14</sup>

In fact, the language of *John Ball* is one of Morris's more remarkable achievements. "In all his prose work," says Saintsbury,<sup>15</sup> "he used a dialect which, like Spenser's, offended pedants and purists as 'no language', but which was exactly suited for his purpose". It would be wrong, however

to assume from Saintsbury's remark — which applies most closely to the prose romances of his last years — that the language of *John Ball* is oppressively archaic; the vocabulary is distinguished not by archaism, but by its concreteness, by the absence of abstract words of Latin or French origin, and above all by the non-Augustan structure and rhythm of the sentences. It is closer to Bunyan than to Malory.<sup>16</sup> While such language was Morris's preference, and certainly in him was no pose or pastiche, but the prose which came naturally to him, nevertheless he does not lose sight of his purpose in addressing a working-class audience, nor of the necessity to write simply and unaffectedly. While the language may at times be unfamiliar it is rarely obscure, and that almost certainly by oversight. The language is always appropriate to the strong atmosphere of realism and action into which we are plunged:

"Well, as I stretched myself and turned my face toward the village, I heard horse-hoofs on the road, and presently a man and horse showed on the other end of the stretch of road and drew near at a swinging trot with plenty of clash of metal." (p. 217)

The dreamer accepts this, as he accepts his own appearance, that of a medieval scholar. The only symbolic motif which here appears as part of the realistic description, is the hedged close full of white poppies — later repeated as a subtle and unobtrusive reminder that we are onlookers at a dream, at the moments when the dream reality begins to weaken.<sup>17</sup> The appropriateness and simplicity of this device is only one example of the closely woven fabric of the whole work.

The tale now moves quickly, as the dreamer follows the rider into the village, which he describes in rapid detail: but it is no empty, flat picture of medieval stage furniture, and here we see the incorrectness of the contention that Morris's love of the Middle Ages was a utopian or reactionary love of a dead culture: here he is able to contemplate what he would have loved to have seen more of in the England of his own day: both natural beauty, and man-made beauty, not as a mere antiquarian background for romance, but confronted with warm human life, and part of that life. The church is so new "that the dust of the stone still lay white on the midsummer grass beneath the carvings of the window" (p. 218).<sup>18</sup> The scene is so alive that we not only see the bright colours and the sunburnt villagers, but "even now and again when the wind set from that quarter", we hear "the twang of the bowstring and the plump of the shaft in the target" (p. 219).

One of the villagers, "a man some six feet high, with a short black beard and black eyes and berry-brown skin", strides up to the dreamer and addresses him — and surely Morris in his characterisation of the dreamer had in mind some recollection of the host's words to Chaucer in the *Canterbury Tales*<sup>19</sup> — "Well, friend," said he, "thou lookest partly mazed; what tongue hast thou in thine head?" (p. 219) and the dreamer knows that he is a poet, but also can give the correct reply to the peasants' slogan: "The king's son of heaven shall pay for it all." So subtly does Morris interweave his own person, as the dreamer, his pupil's love for Chaucer, who had opened up for him the way into the fourteenth century, his historical knowledge of the organisation of the Peasants' Revolt, factual

knowledge which he is here conveying to his readers, and the motivation of the dreamer's acceptance by the villagers preparing for rebellion, who believe him to be a messenger of the Great Society; while there is even a hint of what becomes more explicit in the later relationship of John Ball to the dreamer, for John Ball in his wisdom recognises him as a messenger from the future. The means by which Morris manages this last difficult relationship between the dreamer and John Ball, without its becoming mystical, and thus disturbing the reality and acceptability of the narrative, arise from the complete naturalness with which he was able to imagine himself in such surroundings, and this again is the result of his expert knowledge of the period, which allows him to describe the scene not as a set piece, but as something he himself has lived through.<sup>20</sup> The ease with which the dreamer finds himself at home in the company, when they enter the inn, the inevitability of his own words of the rising in Essex, which give Morris the opportunity for a rapid historical survey for the benefit of his *Commonweal* readers, illustrate the main characteristic of Morris's convincing artistic method. By so unquestioningly accepting the life of the Kent villagers, by his interweaving of the conversation in the inn with the ballad of Robin Hood, Morris stresses the positive features of the communal village life, and only in occasional, subtly-placed asides contrasts it explicitly with the present day. In the speech of the villagers there is none "of that drawling snarl or thick vulgarity which one is used to hear from labourers in civilisation" (p. 219) and the readers he is addressing "may have read" the ballad of Robin Hood "in an incomplete and degraded form" (p. 224). But such direct contrasts are exceptional: for the most part the effect is gained by the complete acceptance of the scene by the dreamer, and his delight in it. The contrast in method between Morris and Čech will be seen later when we come to the descriptions of fifteenth-century Prague seen through the hostile, timid, and contemptuous eyes of Matthew Beetle, the comfortable petty bourgeois of the nineteenth century.

However, no description of interiors or of ballad-singing is allowed to interrupt the narrative, and the party in the inn are soon brought out by the arrival of John Ball himself. There follows the impressive account of John Ball's speech to the crowd from the village cross, with its powerful characterisation of John Ball, the vivid re-creation of his speech (from the mere hint given by Froissart) and its effect on the crowd. The key-note of the speech is the matter which, at the moment of Morris's writing, was one of the most pressing questions of the socialist movement in England: class solidarity and socialist solidarity — in the effort to attain which Morris undoubtedly sacrificed his health and shortened his life. "Fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death," says John Ball, as he calls on the men of Kent to stand together against the rich. Here again Morris interweaves his interpretation of the significance of the Peasants' Revolt, his pointing of the moral, without interrupting the sequence of the tale or disturbing the atmosphere:

"But while I pondered all these things, and how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fight for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what

they meant under another name — while I pondered all this, John Ball began to speak again in the same soft and clear voice with which he had left off.” (p. 231)<sup>24</sup>

The further part of John Ball’s speech is largely a characterisation of the peasant leader, giving us his thoughts and motives. In drawing the character of John Ball, Morris’s purpose is to give a credible picture of this peasant hero, to point to the truly heroic aspect of his character and stress especially those sides of the ideology of the Peasants’ Revolt which were progressive. Morris, having implicitly rather than explicitly accepted a materialist philosophy of life, does not ignore or hedge on the religious beliefs of John Ball — rather he stresses the progressive aspect of those beliefs in the concrete situation, the idea of the Fellowship of Mankind, the idea that for John Ball is the true meaning of the church he believes in, which is not the feudal Catholic Church. Even here, Morris does not forget to illustrate problems and ideas relevant to his own time — John Ball tells his listeners how in prison he had weakened, and begun to blame himself for not having kept his tongue between his teeth for the sake of his career, which might have enabled him to “have clad here and there the naked back, and filled the empty belly, and holpen many, and men would have spoken well of thee, and of thyself thou hadst thought well; and all this hast thou lost for lack of a word here and there to some great man, and a little winking of the eyes amidst murder and wrong and un-ruth,” (p. 232) — the old Fabian argument, and a commonplace of middle-class sympathisers of Morris’s day and later, that it is better to compromise with capitalism for the sake of palliative remedies, rather than risk “the party” or “the union” or “the movement” by too revolutionary demands. And here Morris in the words of John Ball gives the direct Marxist answer: “Forsooth, I knew once more that he who doeth well in fellowship, and because of fellowship, shall not fail though he seem to fail to-day, but in days hereafter shall he and his work yet be alive, and men be holpen by them to strive again and yet again... So I became a man once more” (p. 233). Morris here directly calls on his readers to note that only by uncompromising attack on the ruling class at any period of class history can the people be benefited either immediately or in the long run — a very necessary lesson for the England of his own day and later. A further passage in John Ball’s speech is as appropriate for England of the late eighties and nineties of last century as it was for England of the fourteenth:

“To the rich men that eat up a realm there cometh a time when they whom they eat up, that is the poor, seem poorer than of wont, and their complaint goeth up louder to the heavens; yet it is no riddle to say that at such times the fellowship of the poor is waxing stronger, else would no man have heard his cry... Forsooth, ye are stronger than your fathers, because ye are more grieved than they, and ye should have been less grieved than they had ye been horses and swine; and then, forsooth, would ye have been stronger to bear; but ye, ye are not strong to bear, but to do —” (p. 234–236)

a direct call to the workers of an England where, as Engels wrote, the English working class was losing its privileged position, and the East End was “an ever-spreading pool of stagnant misery and desolation, of starvation

when out of work, and degradation, physical and moral, when in work".<sup>22</sup>

In tracing out the arguments of John Ball, and in the spirited description of the fight with the band of knights which follows in chapters V—VI, Morris is carrying on the tradition of English working-class journalism, established by Ernest Jones and other Chartists,<sup>23</sup> but with greater historical knowledge, a loving eye for detail, and vivid sensual realisation of the scene.

The afternoon has passed, with John Ball's speech and the fight, and once again the villagers are standing round the village cross to listen to John Ball.

"The moon was half-way up the heavens now, and the short summer night had begun, calm and fragrant, with just so much noise outside our quiet circle as made one feel the world alive and happy" (p. 254).

There is much in the situation of John Ball addressing the handful of peasants to remind us of the hundreds of open-air meetings at which Morris had addressed still smaller handfuls of working men; and it is perhaps a reflection of Morris's experience of the Socialist movement that the moment of the Peasants' Revolt which he chose to illuminate is not a "crowd scene" of the revolt in London or Canterbury, but the preparation of the revolt in an isolated village, one small part of the mass movement which will lead to the great rebellion itself:

"And wot ye well, good fellows, that by then we come to Rochester we shall be a goodly company; and ere we come to Blackheath a very great company; and at London Bridge who shall stay our host?" (p. 255).

Force of circumstance had led Morris to be concerned rather with the making and welding of communist pioneers, the addressing of small gatherings scattered all over the country; by the time the socialist movement of the early eighties was bearing fruit in the mass meetings of the latter part of the decade and early nineties, Morris's health, combined with his disappointment at the continual schisms, backbiting, careerism and anarchy within the movement, was preventing him from taking the active part in these mass movements which he would doubtless have done, had they come sooner when he still retained his full vigour. Morris's whole experience of socialist agitation led him to picture the Peasants' Revolt from the point of view of its immediate outbreak, its initial stage, in one of the villages, rather than to give a synthetic picture of the whole broad movement.<sup>24</sup> This does not mean that Morris does not see the full revolutionary implication of the revolt: he saw the local revolt (or the local socialist meeting) as part of the mass revolt. John Ball's words just quoted express still more forcefully what Morris had said himself in the concluding words of one of his first socialist lectures, the lecture which so shocked the Oxford dons who had expected a mild talk on Art, three years before, in 1883:

"Remember we have but one weapon against that terrible organisation of selfishness which we attack, and that weapon is Union... Organised brotherhood is that which must break the spell of anarchical Plutocracy. One man with an idea in his head is in danger of being considered a madman; two men with the same

idea in common may be foolish, but can hardly be mad; ten men sharing an idea begin to act, a hundred draw attention as fanatics, a thousand and society begins to tremble, a hundred thousand and there is war abroad, and the cause has victories tangible and real; and why only a hundred thousand? Why not a hundred million and peace upon the earth? You and I who agree together, it is we who have to answer that question."<sup>25</sup>

Until the great demonstrations of 1887, when masses of working people united with the socialists behind the demand for free speech, the mass meetings (such as the Hyde Park Franchise Meeting of 1884) had been radical-liberal, with the socialists as a dissident guerilla fraction. Perhaps for this reason Morris did not choose to illustrate in *John Ball* the "peasant-host" described by Ernest Jones in his article of 1848; but although Morris concentrates on the instant when one village adds itself to the momentum of the revolt, he stresses the fact that the revolt is spreading, and that it has been organised beforehand. The villagers were waiting for John Ball; and they accepted the dreamer as a messenger of the organised revolt; and by the end of John Ball's speech a further band of peasants arrives from "this side of Medway", on their way to Rochester and London; John Ball himself describes how he came to hold his opinions, and how he was released from prison by the people. Thus Morris knits up the fate of one village into the whole fabric of the revolt.

After John Ball's speech, those who have fallen in the fight are carried to the church, and John Ball bids the dreamer to wake the dead along with him, after supper at Will Green's: "Forsooth I have words in me that crave to come out in a quiet place where they may have each one his own answer" (p. 256). The character of the dreamer, though, like Morris, he is a man of Essex, would seem in one respect to be the antithesis of Morris's character, for Will Green more than once twits the dreamer on his timidity, and on his "wisdom which lay still under the hedge e'en now when the bolts were abroad" (p. 257) and bids him go "back to the cross, for thou art little of a fighting man" (p. 244). There are many incidents of the socialist struggle in the eighties which prove that Morris was anything but physically timorous. But here his purpose is probably satirical, a glance in passing at what Svato-pluk Čech stresses throughout, the timidity of the modern man in contrast to the direct unequivocal action of the medieval peasants.

At the end of this chapter, a comment on the speech and ideology of John Ball is subtly introduced, to remind the reader not to accept John Ball's words uncritically:

"While John Ball had been speaking to me I felt strangely, as though I had more things to say than the words I knew could make clear: as if I wanted to get from other people a new set of words" (p. 257), a hint, in fact, that only Marxist terminology could explain historical developments adequately — and with this dream-recollection of modern socialism there comes anew the sense of the strange beauty of the scene, the chancel and tower of the church, "snow-white in the moonbeams now", and the "grave, sonorous language" of the men and women, and the dreamer walks along to Will Green's house with the others, "musing as if I did not belong to them"<sup>26</sup>

Morris's description of Will Green's house, like all his other descriptions, is not "antiquarian" in emphasis, but as fully realised as if Morris had really been there. It is no set piece, but a lived-in room, with "flowers in plenty... mostly of the

yellow blossoming flag or flower-de-luce . . . but in the window was a pot full of those same white poppies I had seen when I first woke up . . ." (p. 258). Morris manages very skilfully the mood of the gathering round the table, part sadness for the slain companions, part resolution to face the morning's fight. The clear faint sounds of the countryside, as throughout *John Ball*, pay tribute to the keenness of Morris's sense-impressions and power of conveying them.

"Wide open were the windows, and the scents of the fragrant night floated in upon us, and the sounds of the men at their meat or making merry about the township; and whiles we heard the gibber of an owl from the trees westward of the church, and the sharp cry of a blackbird made fearful by the prowling stoat, or the far-off lowing of a cow from the upland pastures; or the hoofs of a horse trotting on the pilgrimage road (and one of our watchers would that be)" (p. 159).

The whole atmosphere of the scene remains elegiac, while there is a hint of irony — the self-ironising of Morris, the man who had thought the socialist revolution just round the corner, and was beginning to see his mistake — in John Ball's toast: "Ten years hence, and the freedom of the Fellowship!" (p. 260) As the dreamer goes out with John Ball, he already feels he will never see his companions again, and looks back with longing, "at the yellow-lighted window and the shapes of the men that I saw therein" (p. 261).

As the two come into the church, "into the rich gloom of the nave", the confrontation of the dream with reality, or the change from dream state to the rationalising state which accompanies waking, is again symbolised by the white poppy which the dreamer notices for the first time in his hand: "I must have taken it out of the pot by the window as I passed out of Will Green's house" (p. 262).

The scene in the church offers a remarkable opportunity to Morris: by its conception, a fine and striking one, he can use and interweave all his loves and enthusiasms: his early and late love for Gothic art and architecture; his sense that this art and architecture had arisen from the people and that it should serve the people and not the Church; his conception of class and revolutionary solidarity, exemplified in the fineness of character of John Ball; his desire for an all-inclusive philosophy and interpretation of history, which would see the past in the light of the present and the future; his own longing for adequate companionship and comprehension, for "fellowship"; and his intention to expound in a practical and comprehensible way the English revolutionary tradition and historical materialism as applied to English history, in such a way as should convey his meaning most forcefully to his readers. He does all this by conceiving the scene in the church "Betwixt the Living and the Dead", as also a scene betwixt the past (i. e. the present of the dream-scene) and the future.

Morris wrote the *Dream of John Ball*, as he says himself, for the sake of the Marxist interpretation of history which he gives in these chapters. Edward Thompson, in the last section of his monumental book on Morris, has analysed Morris's conception of history, "his scientific understanding of social development" (p. 834) and illustrates it with quotations from Morris's lectures and articles, from *John Ball*, and from *News from Nowhere*. He points out that Morris probably never read *The Origin of the Family, Anti-Dühring, or Feuerbach*, but had read *Capital* very carefully and may have known something of other Marxist works through his socialist colleague the philosopher Belfort Bax. The discovery of historical materialism and the Marxist theory of the class struggle appeared to Morris "to give a new meaning

and dignity to man's whole story. The scientific interpretation of history made possible a great access of understanding and sympathy with the struggles of men in past times, which need no longer be viewed as a series of haphazard accidents" (Thompson, p. 835). And as Thompson points out, it is his artistic realisation and interpretation of the scientific conception of history, "the concrete nature of his artistic perception" (p. 834) that prevents Morris from falling into abstractions, that gives to all his later works, including his last prose romances, but above all to *John Ball* and *News from Nowhere*, their character of effective, realistic evocation of the past, insight into the future. Morris "mastered, and gave a qualitatively new, revolutionary, content to the current of profound social criticism of industrial capitalism which is found in the best English writers of the 19th century" (p. 842). This is the result of the fusion of Morris's literary mastery with his newly-revealed dialectical vision of history. For this reason, the expository chapters of *John Ball* (IX, X, XI, XII, or about one third of the whole book) are not felt as too bulky, or inartistic, inappropriate or boring, as is the case with only too many serious "utopias", such as Belamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), in which ingenuity takes the place of art.

Morris has carefully planned the structure of these chapters. John Ball and the dreamer enter the church, which is described with highly selective detail, stressing the simple masses of the Gothic, the shafts of the arches rising out of the empty floor, "white and beautiful under the moon as though out of a sea, dark but with gleams struck over it" (p. 262). Where Morris quotes a detail of the Gothic in these chapters it is mostly to stress what would be unfamiliar but valuable for his readers, the satirical folk element of Gothic church art — the painting over the chancel arch "in which the painter had not spared either kings or bishops, in which a lawyer with his blue coif was one of the chief figures in the group which the Devil was hauling off to hell" (p. 263). It is not the rich decoration, the ecclesiastical pomp of church Gothic which Morris evokes in these chapters, but the simplicity of the small English village churches, which Morris regarded as the expression of the artistic and creative tradition of the people<sup>27</sup> and valued for their human content. Artistically he is aided in achieving this simplicity of effect by the moonlight, which dims the colours and obscures the rich details. Throughout the chapter light plays a dramatic role, the only artificial light in the whole church being the lamp on the altar before which the peasant dead are laid. The serious talk is punctuated by the gradual coming of the dawn, underlining the pauses of the dialogue and emphasising its significance. Will men think of a remedy in the future? asks John Ball, and the dreamer looking about him sees that

"There was but a glimmer of light in the church now, but what there was, was no longer the strange light of the moon, but the first coming of the kindly day" (p. 276).

When the dreamer assures John Ball that

"in those days shall it be seen that thou hast not wrought for nothing, because thou hast seen beforehand what the remedy should be, even as those of later days have seen it",

then

"We both sat silent a little while. The twilight was gaining on the night, though slowly".

The poppy in his hand reminds the dreamer that he must go back to Will Green's house, but

"the will to depart left me as though I had never had it, and I sat down again, and heard the voice of John Ball, at first as one speaking from far away, but

little by little growing nearer and more familiar to me, and as if once more it were coming from the man himself whom I had got to know" (p. 278). And as the dawn gains on the twilight, and the colours come into the pictures and paintings, the dreamer feels a new urgency to speak to his companion, while he notices that the poppy in his hand seems to have withered. At the moment when he hears clearly the voice of John Ball bidding him farewell, the sunrise comes with a flash, and lights up the whole richness of the church interior — Morris allows himself only a single sentence to catch this wealth of decoration and then "a great pain" fills the dreamer's heart, and in the very instant that he hears the quick steps and loud whistle of Will Green outside the door, his hand rattling the latch, with cruel abruptness the dream ends and the rattling turns into the rattling and squeaking of Venetian blinds in a Victorian London house in the early morning gale as the dreamer wakes up.

This is the emotionally rich framework of the chapters in which Morris gives his exposition of the historical significance of the Peasants' Revolt; the immediate reality of the dialogue is further heightened by the characterisation of John Ball himself and the emotional bond between him and the dreamer. In all Morris's poetry and prose dealing with the past we find this sense that Morris knew how the men of the 14th century, or the Icelandic sagas, or the Germanic tribes on the borders of Rome had felt and thought.

The development of the dialogue is also interesting, for it deals with a variety of problems connected with the form Morris has chosen. One of the difficulties for the writer of a utopia — and still more so of a "historical utopian fiction" — is how to solve the confrontation of the traveller from today with the men of the past or future. Morris in Chapter X combines this confrontation with an exposition of his own philosophical outlook, for John Ball asks the dreamer, whom he addresses as scholar, if evil men such as those who have just been slain in the fight with the peasants, also have souls.<sup>28</sup>

The dreamer finds difficulty in answering him, not knowing how to give a truthful answer without wounding his simple faith, so he says: "Friend, I never saw a soul, save in the body; I cannot tell." John Ball believes he will find his own death in the revolt and that his soul will join "the fellowship of the saints", but he notices that the dreamer keeps silent and asks him, "why do men die else, if it be otherwise than this"? But the dreamer counters with the words, "Why then do they live"?

"Even in the white moonlight I saw his face flush, and he cried out in a great voice, 'To do great deeds or to repent them that they ever were born'" (p. 264).

So Morris skilfully lays stress on the positive side of the ideology of the Peasants' Revolt, allowing his readers merely to glimpse the religious superstition associated with it, while indicating the secondary importance of this for the achievements of the revolt.

As the two approach the chancel where the peasant dead lie, they continue to speak on the subject of death, but John Ball can still not understand the atheistic viewpoint of the dreamer, who tries to explain his conception in language comprehensible to the fourteenth-century believer, who for his part feels that there is something between them like "a wall that parteth us".

“‘This,’ said I, ‘That though I die and end, yet mankind liveth, therefore I end not, since I am a man; and even so thou deemest, good friend; or at the least even so thou doest, since now thou art ready to die in grief and torment rather than be unfaithful to the Fellowship, yea rather than fail to work thine utmost for it... And as thou doest, so now doeth many a poor man unnamed and unknown, and shall do while the world lasteth’” (p. 265).

Such a statement of belief in humanity and denial of supernatural intervention is not merely the dreamer’s answer to John Ball, but equally directed at Morris’s nineteenth-century middle-class and working-class readers, the majority of whom were still in the grip of religious belief.

John Ball and the dreamer then sit down in the stalls in the chancel and in the “twilight of the moon” the priest asks the dreamer: “Brother, how deemest thou of our adventure,” for he thinks that in some way “thou knowest more than we; as though with thee the world had lived longer than with us” (p. 267). He thinks the dreamer may be a heavenly messenger, but the dreamer says he is not dead, and does not know how he has come,

“And this I say to thee, moreover, that if I know more than thou, I do far less; therefore thou art my captain and I thy minstrel” (p. 268).

John Ball asks him to tell him what shall happen to the revolt, and the dreamer warns him: “Surely thou goest to thy death.” But John Ball has no fear of death, for he has died many deaths — “many a day have I been dying” — with his sister who died of famine, his brother who was slain in the French wars, his unwedded wife, expressing in a few words the tragic experience of a lifetime. The dreamer goes on to tell of the future; and Morris outlines the development of the fifteenth century, when the immediate aims of the Peasants’ Revolt — higher wages — will be attained, but the masters will be greedier — “The more that is made in the land, the more they shall crave.” He explains the growth of the national market, the substitution of sheep farming for crops, and the paradox that while there will be no villeins, yet there are no free men, for men must sell themselves to the master that suffers them to work.

“John Ball laughed aloud, and said: “Well, I perceive we are not yet out of the land of riddles. The man may well do what thou sayest and live, but he may not do it and live a free man.’

‘Thou sayest sooth,’ said I” (p. 273).

With this trenchant exposure of the modern world in the light of the old, the lesson to his readers that the workmen of Victorian England are no freer than the serfs of the fourteenth century, Morris concludes the tenth chapter.

Chapter XI, *Hard it is for the Old World to see the New*, points the lesson for the modern reader by showing how absurd the commonplaces of the capitalist system sound when explained to a man who has known only feudalism: unemployment: “never shall the lords lack slaves willing to work, but often the slaves shall lack lords to buy them” (p. 275); crises of overproduction: “Famine enough... yet not from lack of wares” (p. 275). Morris never allows the action of the tale to become bogged down in theoretical explanation, nor does he lower the emotional tension; for John Ball interrupts the discourse to ask: “In those days will men deem that so it must be for ever, as great men even now tell of our ills, or will they think of some remedy?” (p. 276). The dimness of the church is “no longer the strange light of the moon, but the first coming of the kindly day”<sup>29</sup> and John Ball prays for victory in the coming fight. The dreamer asks him directly, if in the light of the future he still thinks it worth fighting and dying for the peasants’ cause; and John

Ball answers again with the question, whether in the days to come men will still seek a remedy. The dreamer tries to explain the cozening of the workers "into thinking that it is of their own free will that they must needs buy leave to labour by pawning their labour that is to be" (p. 277), while their masters have one intent "without knowing it"; and yet the workers

"also shall have one will if they but knew it; but for a long while they shall have but a glimmer of knowledge of it: yet doubt it not that in the end they shall come to know it clearly, and then shall they bring about the remedy; and in those days shall it be seen that thou hast not wrought for nothing, because thou hast seen beforehand what the remedy should be, even as those of later days have seen it" (p. 277).

Further explanation comes in Chapter XII, *Ill would Change be at Whiles, were it not for the Change beyond the Change*, in which the dreamer describes the growth of capitalist power, the development of machinery, the growth of markets and transport, famine in the midst of plenty. John Ball can see no solution for the tyranny of the latter days. But as the dawn widens, the dreamer hastens to give a message of good cheer: the dawn is coming, but it may be the dawn of a day "cold and grey and surly", and yet men shall be determined to be free and shall talk soberly of what is only a dream to John Ball when he envisages the reign of plenty on earth: "therefore hast thou done well to hope it and... thy name shall abide by the hope in those days to come, and thou shalt not be forgotten" (p. 285).

Morris, writing in the turbulent and contentious eighties, can offer no complete solution to the fourteenth-century longing, for the period he lives in is the period in which what seem to be follies to John Ball have become the reality, to which men have become accustomed and cling to.

"And those that see, and that have thus much conquered fear that they are furthering the real time that cometh and not the dream that fadeth, these men shall the blind and the fearful mock and missay, and torment and murder: and great and grievous shall be the strife in those days, and many the failures of the wise, and too oft sore shall be the despair of the valiant; and back-sliding, and doubt and contest between friends and fellows lacking time in the hubbub to understand each other, shall grieve many hearts and hinder the Host of the Fellowship —" (p. 286)

and yet the day will come. The dreamer having thus traversed the whole of history, has come back to his own day, its problems and contentions, the external and internal difficulties of the socialist movement with which the story started, and of necessity the dream fades and the fourteenth century can help him no more. He can only hear the voice of John Ball bidding him farewell, and his farewell suggests that Morris was already contemplating his imaginative creation of a Communist Utopia, *News from Nowhere* (1890):<sup>30</sup>

"I go to life and to death and leave thee; and scarce do I know whether to wish thee some dream of the days beyond thine to tell what shall be, as thou hast told me, for I know not if that shall help or hinder thee." (p. 286)

With the last rich flushing of the sunrise through the windows, the sound of Will Green's whistle,

"the footsteps stopped at the door; I heard the latch rattle, and knew that Will Green's hand was on the ring of it —" (p. 287)

but the door never opens, and instead comes the disenchantment of a dreary morning over the bleak Thames and the "row of wretched-looking blue-slatted houses", the "sooty and muddy" road; the noise of the hooters calling the workmen to the factories, and the realisation that his day's "work" at his beloved crafts is what for most men of his time, condemned to unthinking task work, would be "play" (p. 288). Thus Morris works out the intricacies of his themes and makes his way back to the workaday world with which he started. He has both re-created the forgotten fourteenth-century tradition of revolt, and pointed the moral for the shirkers and laggards and cowards of the modern world; glorified the revolutionary past, and reminded us of its lesson for the present, and all on a sustained level of poetic intensity.

### 3.

As I am here primarily concerned with the assesment of English literature, I do not consider the figure of Svatopluk Čech (1846—1908) from the point of view of Czech literary history, nor from the point of view of his own literary and artistic development, as this would raise too many questions for a short study. I am concerned merely with using *The Journey* of Mr. Matthew Beetle as a contrast in method to Morris. Nevertheless, one or two points should be mentioned. Like Morris's, the bulk of Čech's most important work previous to 1888 had been poetry. He belonged to the literary generation of ardent patriots of the sixties and seventies, such as J. V. Sládek, and also wrote for Jan Neruda's periodical *Lumír*. All his work expresses profound love of his country and a deep feeling for the heroic traditions, especially of the Hussite period. In many poems he expresses the struggle of the simple country people against the land-owning gentry and against German cultural oppression. The Czech proletariat was of course not so far developed at this period as was the case in England, and this results in a less clear definition of political viewpoint in Čech than we have in Morris. Nevertheless he was fully aware of the growing importance of the working masses and his progressive democratic views were merely confirmed by his observation of the betrayal of national interests by reactionary Czech bourgeois circles. "For this reason Čech's culminating works of the eighties and nineties (*Songs of Dawn and New Songs, Songs of a Slave*, and works with Hussite themes — *The Journey of Mr. Beetle Back to the Fifteenth Century* and his unfinished verse tragedy *Roháč on Sion*) spring from a common root: his recognition of the life and needs of the people, his comprehension of the greatness of the people and his belief in their liberated future."<sup>31</sup>

Although *The Journey Back to the Fifteenth Century* is a sequel to *The Journey of Mr. Beetle to the Moon* (a satire on the "niminy-piminy" aesthetes of the eighties), it can stand quite independently and has a distinctly deeper tone, which arises from the fact that Čech does not satirise the Hussites as well as Beetle, whereas in the first work, the aesthetic inhabitants of the Moon are just as much the object of satire as the worthy

bourgeois householder. Matthew Beetle, devoted to his own comfort and peace of mind, is he epitome of petty-bourgeois pettiness.

The book<sup>32</sup> opens ironically with an account of the canny behaviour of Mr. Beetle after his successful return from the celebrated trip to the Moon:

"Paying no heed to all this public coil he continued calmly to collect his rents and spend his evenings as before among his old acquaintances at The Sign of the Cock or at The Vicarage Arms — not so often at the latter hostelry, however, for he was chary of risking himself as far as Würfel's unless the moon was new or the sky was overcast" (p. 31).

This leads to a passage illustrating one feature of Čech's work which is completely opposed in artistic method to that of Morris — the direct authorial appeal to the present. The author steps out of the role of chronicler and makes a direct attack in his own person on the bourgeois careerism of his day. This and similar remarks do lower the artistic intensity of the work and remind us of the original journalistic and topical purpose with which the character of Beetle was created.

The normal tenor of Mr. Beetle's daily life leads to the mention of the one thing which disturbs him — new laws limiting the power of landlords to enforce executions on defaulting tenants. This arouses a train of thought which makes Beetle think fondly of the good old days when debtors could be clapped in prison and there was no taxation for expenditure on national education, which Beetle, a confirmed childless bachelor, considers to be an imposition. Beetle had been a great reader of chivalric romances, from which all his knowledge of the Middle Ages is derived — his uninformed mind accepting the details given in these works quite literally — and he recollects these romances most often when he revisits the scene of his first adventure to the Moon — the romantically situated Vicarage Arms on the Prague Hradčany.

There follows a set piece describing the Hradčany — not as Beetle sees it, but as Čech sees it himself, enriched with the panoply of the Czech past. This acts as an overture to what is to follow, and is as strong a contrast as possible to the narrow vision of the Prague bourgeois, Beetle:

"As soon as I come out on the third castle court before the reverend and mighty pile of the Cathedral, reaching up to heaven out of its forest of carved buttresses, from every corner there rise up the shades of the past thousand years, their gloomy or brilliant images eddying fast through my fancy. From the dim twilight of bygone ages there hovers before my gaze the succession of the early Christian churches; I see the weird mound of Žiži, where perhaps once the sacred flame flared up amid the sacrificial circle of priests; I see the block of stone on which the ancient Premyslids would seat themselves to draw on the plaited shoes of the founder of their race. But all at once these visions fade, and in their place soars up the Cathedral of St. Vitus, the still unfinished choir already solemnly gleaming in the light of its new glory, and Charles the Fourth entering into it, clad in his golden royal robe, surrounded by a brilliant suite of knights and nobles; then comes the grave figure of the preacher of the Bethlehem Chapel, boldly nailing to the cathedral door his challenge to debate on the peddling of indulgences; now the fair curly head of George proudly wearing the shining crown; there Ladislav of Poland stalks in full majesty;

and now the courtyard is full of outlandish figures in Spanish cloaks or the mysterious robes of astrologers; now in carts, surrounded by ranks of mercenaries, the martyrs of the White Mountain take their sorrowful way to the White Tower — so on and on weaves the changing web of joyful and piteous figures, figures reverend, figures full of terror . . ." (p. 36, 7)

The fact that Čech cannot identify himself completely with his hero, as Morris can with the dreamer, means that passages where he shows his sympathy with and understanding of the past must be interpolated rather than integrated in the work; he must even apologise in a serio-comic way for introducing his own person. And from this situation the author can escape only by further irony, the final though unspoken irony being that it is not he himself, the poet who had already written so fervently of the national past, but Beetle, the petty-minded rent-grubbing owner of house property, who is privileged to see the great Hussite past, which of course he cannot comprehend.

On this particular evening, the conversation in The Vicarage Arms turns on the "romantic past", and Mr. Beetle, already sympathetically inclined towards the Middle Ages for their short way with debtors, produces the "knowledge" of secret passages culled from his juvenile readings, and enthusiastically defends the existence of such passages as he consumes pint after pint of beer. The result is that when he at last leaves the pub "with his well-known lunar gait", he takes the wrong direction and suddenly falling down into darkness, finds himself in a dark passage. Somewhat annoyed, but still quite calm, he strikes a few matches and decides he must spend the night in the cellar:

"After all there was nothing terrible in the idea of sleeping once in a while in the presence of those friendly casks, in the arms, so to speak, of such an amiable element, right under the bung, where he would only have to stretch out his hand to bring a draught of delicious Pilsener into his mouth." (p. 48)

But there are no casks to be seen, and he realises it is no mere cellar. He calls for help, but no-one hears, so he sets out along the passage, lighting his way with matches. And now the idea occurs to him that it may well be one of those underground passages whose reputed existence he has just been defending, which may lead under the Vltava to some mansion of the medieval King Wenceslas in the Old Town of Prague. This idea is confirmed when, stumbling along in the dark, striking an occasional match, he hears a dull, rushing sound overhead, and cold drops of water fall on him — obviously he has reached the part of the passage under the Vltava. A flight of moss-grown steps leads to "a small, worm-eaten door, thickly hung with spiders' webs and bound with ornamental iron bands, much destroyed by rust" (p. 52). The door opens with a rusty key, and he finds himself in a chamber filled with sparkling treasures. As he turns round and closes the door behind him, he has a sudden strange and dizzy feeling of being swept into the distance by a whirlwind. But he soon recovers and is merely surprised at the remarkably good state of preservation of all the articles, including the portrait of a king, obviously Wenceslas. He finds his way out into another passage, taking good note of the entrance to the chamber, which he is convinced he has been the first

to discover, so that he will be able to return and claim the treasure. So far he has no idea of what has happened to him, and he walks off complacently down the passage, which is apparently in some town mansion, planning what he will do with the wealth to be realised from the treasure, and of how he will be able to make a figure in entertaining his old pub acquaintances. Still unsuspecting, he makes his way out of the house, grumbling the while at the carelessness of the caretaker who has left it unlocked.

Once outside the house, in the dark streak, he decides to make sure of recognising it again. But something about the street is unfamiliar, although with true bourgeois local patriotism he prides himself on his detailed knowledge of his town.

"Although he knew Prague thoroughly, he failed to make out where he could be. It was dark in the little street, but overhead, silhouetted against the moonlight, rose the sharp outlines of high pointed gables, strange dormers with turrets and balconies, a fantastic scene which Mr. Beetle in vain tried to recollect from his strolls in the Prague streets." (p. 61)

He assumes that this is some forgotten and neglected corner, and goes on his way grumbling about the negligence of the municipal authorities, and when he stumbles into a large puddle in the dark, he goes the length of deciding to write to the papers about it, even if it costs him a ha'penny stamp. He condemns too, the fantastic shapes of the houses, the "idiotic newfangled fashion" of architects who "get foolish people's money out of them" by putting up houses with "turrets, and balconies and pillars covered with all kinds of fandangles". He grumbles still more when he sees in the distance a twinkling lantern coming towards him carried by some pedestrian:

"My word, these are nice doings for Prague! The town'll never get over the shame of it, if it's gone so far that people actually have to carry lanterns in the street as if it were Little Puddlington-in-the-Mud!" (p. 64)

But the pedestrian stops short, and Beetle sees he is, as he thinks, in fancy dress. Matters become more serious when he threatens Beetle with a dagger, and shouts out some strange words. Beetle decides the fellow must be drunk, then that he must be a foreigner, speaking some unfamiliar Slav tongue, which nevertheless Beetle can understand. When the newcomer begins to accuse Beetle of being a spy of King Sigismund's and talks of Žižka, Beetle reminds him that it is the year 1888, but the newcomer, replying that it is 1420 and that he will no longer abide with a madman, goes off into the darkness.

Beetle's next misadventure is to fall over a chain stretched across the street, and next he finds a crowd of shadowy figures round a fire, whom he supposes must be scavengers. But when he sees a large portcullis at the end of the street, he begins to have doubts as to where he really is. Then he makes out the figures standing round the fire:

"They were for the most part stout and sturdy men of wild appearance, clothed some in coarse tunics, some in brightly-coloured garments of strange cut, still others in some kind of iron or chain armour; some had rounded helmets on their head,

others strange round caps or outlandish hats, and still others various coloured hoods, and the awfulness of this gathering, partly lit by the red gleam of the fire, was increased for Mr. Beetle by their terrible weapons: halberds, swords, maces with long iron spikes, flails bound with iron and studded with many nails..." (p. 72)

Beetle in terror backs silently away round the corner, and when it seems to him that the terrible company turn their dreadful faces towards him he flees off until he sinks breathless on a stone causeway post.

"A weird medley of thoughts raced through his brain. Those bruisers at the gate, and their weapons – those Hussite flails so well-known from the Museum – immediately forced on him the monstrous idea that the fellow with the lantern must have been right and that he, Beetle, had now become a contemporary of Žižka" (p. 74).

The summer twilight gradually reveals the surrounding scene:

"He saw houses of various sizes and shapes, some of them half-timbered, with clumsy wide roofs or else with improbable pointed gables, full of all kinds of projections, oriels with turrets and strange stone ornaments, balconies of stone and of wood, open and covered-in passages, in places leading high up from house to house like an aerial bridge, windows of the most varied size and form, often very small, like mere slits, in which for the most part instead of glass there was only some kind of opaque parchment or skin, here and there quaintly fretted iron grills adorned in all manner of ways, while instead of front doors there were often rounded or pointed gates and portals; on the walls of the houses were innumerable carved ornaments and figures, gaily painted, and jutting out everywhere into the street were iron poles on which here swung an iron glove, there an extraordinary hat, there a wooden distaff, and other craft signs, as well as iron pears, stars and similar house signs. All this presented a picture so colourful, varied and strange, that Mr. Beetle could hardly believe his eyes." (p. 75, 6)

Beetle begins to accept the idea that he really is in the past, and even begins to have some notion of his whereabouts, by the position of streets which he seems to recognise. Walking down the street, he comes on the majestic Týn Church:

"He recognised it beyond all doubt, although it was shining in all the freshness of its ornamentation, as if its walls had that moment been finished." (p. 78)

The houses are not those of modern Prague, but they bear signs – At the Wheel, At the Sign of the Ring – corresponding to names which still exist in the city on the former sites of those houses. Moving on, he comes to the Old Town Square, with a well-known house on the corner of Týn Street, bearing the sign of a large white bell. As he is sitting there on a stone seat in despair, he is addressed suddenly:

"Beetle dully raised his eyes and involuntarily rose to his feet. He saw before him a tall, stalwart man of handsome countenance, with a long beard, and dressed in most picturesque garments. His cap was of unusual fashion, he wore a long blue cloak lined with red, thrown open in front to disclose a close-fitting black jerkin, with a red chalice embroidered on the breast, and below it a short kind of skirt reaching to the knees, in white, bordered at the hem with a narrow band of black fur, a silver belt of smith's work slantwise round his waist, with a purse hanging

on the right side, and a long sword on the left, and finally long narrow green hose and low-cut red shoes with long-pointed toes.

'Would you kindly oblige me by telling me if this is really the year 1420?' was Beetle's question by way of reply.

'For sure,' assented the man, looking in surprise to right and left. 'But who askest thou else, when we two are but here alone?'" (p. 82)

Beetle now realises that for these medieval Czechs the form "you" is plural. The newcomer introduces himself as John hight Domšik, called John of the Bell, after the house which belongs to him.

"Mr. Beetle considered that it was highly unsuitable for an owner of house property to dress up like a knight and wear that long spit thing at his side. But it was at least a consolation to him to have met in with a respectable person, a fellow property-owner, and not a mere down-at-heel tenant." (p. 83)

Beetle has some difficulty in explaining who he is and why he is so strangely clothed. He has the idea of saying that he has just come back from foreign lands, and that he was stolen as a child by strolling players, however much such an excuse wounds his pride as a respectable middle-class citizen. After some further misunderstanding, Beetle at length realises that Prague is in a state of siege and that he is in a position of some danger. He has also forgotten to take note of the house where the treasure was, and in any case, his history being rather shaky, he is not quite sure whether King Wenceslas may not be still alive. But the greatest misunderstanding occurs when the Hussite Domšik asks, if Beetle is an Utraquist, i. e. an adherent of the Calixtine Hussites who believed in lay participation in both forms of communion.

"'An ultra-ultra-how much?' repeated Mr. Beetle in surprise, not understanding the question.

'Receivest thou as an Utraquist?' John of the Bell enlarged on his query.

'Receive as a what?' repeated Mr. Beetle once more, scratching his head; he had no idea what was meant.

'Thou dost not comprehend?' cried the other impatiently. 'I ask, receivest thou both bread and wine?'

'Oh, that,' Mr. Beetle smiled with relief, imagining that at last he had understood the question and that John's query was connected with his offer of hospitality. He said to himself that the Old Czech language was remarkably flowery: what a roundabout way of asking, will you have a drink! But he said out loud in a cheerful voice: 'Oh, of course, I receive them both. Both of them, hee, hee — that's a good idea. — You can bet your boots I take wine too, old man; but to tell you the truth, good old beer's the stuff for me.'" (p. 89)

Domšik is indignant at this reply, but excuses Beetle as having been a dweller in foreign parts. Beetle goes on to make the mistake of referring to Hus as a heretic — we must remember that bourgeois Czech nationalists of Svatopluk Čech's day, when the official religion of Bohemia as part of the Austrian Empire was Catholic, did not attribute its true significance to the Hussite movement as a movement of social progress and national liberation, and here Čech is severely satirising that bourgeois nationalism in the person of Beetle — who immediately retracts his statement about Hus when Domšik threatens him.

"Beetle, all trembling, drew back in terror and stammered nervously: 'But it's not me that says Hus was a heretic — it was another fellow that said it once over his beer, when he'd had a bit of an argument with old Chattertooth, that we sometimes call the Hussite just for fun. You see, the other chap's a tailor, and he has a contract for the Catholic Church school — and so you see he's got to keep in with the Catholic clergy when it's the clergy he makes his living off. But I've got nothing against Hus as far as I'm concerned. Why, at The Cock I always used to sit right under his portrait.'" (p. 90)

Beetle promptly gives up even his lukewarm Catholicism in the face of Domšik's insistence, and succeeds at last in satisfying him.

"John of the Bell, however, was completely satisfied with his answer. All the distrust vanished from his countenance, his eyes shone with friendliness and he reached out a willing right hand to Mr. Beetle.

'Why, Matthew, th'art heartily welcome! Th'art ours, and along with us shalt defend the freedom of God's Law. Come with me into my house; later shall I expound more fully to thee the teachings of our masters. — Certain it is thou must needs slumber, that hast waked the whole night through?'

'Well, I must say I could do with forty winks.'

'Thou shalt sleep in my house. But come!'" (p. 92)

The warm and sincere hospitality of the Hussite is contrasted with the petty-minded fault-finding of the nineteenth-century man of property. Mr. Beetle is horrified at the rough finish and furnishing of Domšik's house inside, but he is rather impressed by the appearance of the courtyard, which resembles a miniature farmyard.

"All this seemed a good thing to Mr. Beetle and he could not but envy the freedom with which the Old Czech householder could use his courtyard to the best advantage, a luxury unheard of for the Prague house-owner in the tight-laced nineteenth century." (p. 94)

However, he is thoroughly depressed by the guest-chamber — "a small ill-lighted room with an arched roof, a brick floor, wooden panelling on the lower half of the walls, and containing an extraordinary jumble of rubbish" (p. 94), including an enormous fourposter bed with a ladder to it. Domšik also brings him some brightly-coloured medieval garments, and opens the window-shutter, horrifying Beetle with the draught, a conception completely foreign to the hardy fifteenth century. — "As long as I live I never heard of one that feared God's own weather," (p. 99) says Domšik incredulously. Beetle is now left alone to sleep. As he takes off his boots, he notices that they are in need of repair after his tramping over the cobbles of Old Prague, so he decides he must get them mended. He lies down and falls into a deep sleep.

On waking, he is dashed into despair again to find himself still in the Middle Ages, with the gloomy walls of his medieval cubby-hole round him "instead of the friendly walls of his own bedroom with their pictures of odalisques and the Bay of Naples" (p. 102). He tries to dress in the medieval garments — hose with one leg green, the other red. There follow various experiences with sundry medieval household articles, including an hour-glass, all of which Beetle derides. Looking for somewhere to wash,

he sees a crooked old woman down in the courtyard, who is terrified when he shouts at her, but who at Domšík's bidding brings him water and some primitive toilet articles. Beetle consoles himself with the neat items of nineteenth-century equipment which he fortunately has in his pocket, comb, and mirror, watch, penknife, and so forth. He lights up his cheroot, but when he calls for old Kedruta to take his boots to the cobblers, she is horrified at the smoke issuing from his mouth and runs for her master. There follows some discussion with Domšík about knives, watches, clocks, matches and so on, Domšík being amazed at Beetle's possessions and inclined to think them inventions of the devil. At length Beetle is clothed in the motley and uncomfortable garments and Domšík proposes to choose him a weapon. Beetle is horrified at the idea of personally taking part in warfare, and asserts that he will rather keep out of the fight against Sigismund, but Domšík again accuses him of treason, and the unwilling Beetle is obliged to give in:

"But, my dear old chap — what earthly good would I be to you? An old fellow like me can't fight. Why, they wouldn't even pass me for the army when I was a youngster, because I had flat feet and a thick neck and lord knows what all. I wouldn't be much of an acquisition, not even for ornament. It surprises me that you force civilians to join up; what's the military for?"

"Speakest thou of hired mercenaries, we have them not. We are our own host. All true Prague citizens, craftsmen, tenants, rich and poor, young and old, whosoever can hold a weapon, all have risen to save our town, the Holy Chalice, the honour and freedom of the Czech land. And from the countryside all those of Tábor, Louně and other parts have hastened to our aid, thousands of country folk, binding their flails with iron and turning their ploughshares into spears and lances; women and maids go heartily with them to battle, yea, even the silly children, whose little hands can scarce cast a stone — all are eager to lay down their lives sooner than yield to the enemy. And thou, a strong and sturdy man, wouldst cowardly seek to evade battle?" (p. 117)

Beetle is still further horrified by the realisation that it is not a "proper war" but merely a revolution, and that he is among a "lot of rebels". However he consoles himself with the idea that the revolt will be quickly suppressed, as was the Czech national rebellion of 1848 — again a showing up of Beetle's pseudo-nationalism, since he implicitly approves of the suppression of the nineteenth-century Czech national revolt against Austrian feudal tyranny.

Beetle is now introduced to Domšík's family, his wife Maudlin and daughter Kittok, who makes a strong impression on his bachelor heart.<sup>33</sup> The living-room is minutely described, but of course it does not suit Beetle's conventional taste, although the dinner of chicken and smoked salmon and beer mellows his outlook considerably, in spite of the absence of forks and table napkins. He even begins to contemplate complacently the idea that he might remain in the Middle Ages for good, make an advantageous marriage with Kittok, inherit Domšík's house and make a good thing out of the profession of wine-taster, in spite of the fact that Kittok's grandfather had been beheaded as a Czech patriot, a fact which Beetle of course considers to be a social faux pas.

“To be sure the old man’s more than a bit crazy, and the incident with her grandfather isn’t too savoury — but after all, it’s not her fault. And she’s a peach of a girl, pretty, healthy, sweet, a good cook and housewife; not one of your modern flappers who can do nothing but tinkle on the piano... And the only daughter, too... And the house isn’t bad, two storeys, solidly built, rather oldfashioned, of course, and terribly neglected, — but once I put in a new floor, chip off all that nonsense on the outside and have the front smartly painted, it would fairly stand out among these medieval bird-cages. If only this confounded rebellion was finished and done with. If I am bound to go on living in the fifteenth century, who knows — who knows what it mightn’t lead to... It’s not that I’m too old... And that wine-tasting business wouldn’t be too bad either... hm, hm...” (p. 149, 150)

However, these pleasant reflections are rudely interrupted by the realisation that he is expected to choose a weapon and join the armed crowd outside in the Old Town Square. He does his best to convince his host that he has caught cold from the draught in the lumber-room, as he terms the little chamber, but Domšík considers this an “untimely jest” and insists that he choose a weapon from among the assortment hanging on the wall. The unhappy Beetle rejects a mace, a club, a crossbow and a sword and eventually resigns himself to a large pike, and bidding a gallant farewell to Kittok, struggles out of the room, merely sweeping a few dishes to the floor with his awkward pike.

The next chapter gives a detailed description (according to contemporary maps and illustrations, which Čech had obviously studied exhaustively) of medieval Prague from the Old Town Square as far as the boundary of the Old and New Town at Příklad, giving the author an opportunity to regret the lost beauty of old Prague, neglected and despised by the vandalism of the nineteenth century. Parts of this description are certainly too dependent on local topographical knowledge, which does detract from the artistic integrity of the work as a whole especially in translation. This undoubtedly springs partly from the somewhat improvisatory nature of the book, partly from a certain hesitation and lack of decision as to artistic purpose and meaning.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless any lack of proportion here as elsewhere in the book is redeemed by the justness of the author’s reflections and conclusions.

“If you help yourself out with a little imagination, the whole of the past of Prague will rise from its five-century-old grave, street by street, house by house, in all its medieval picturesqueness and brilliance, with its lively market traffic, its gloomy graveyards round innumerable churches and chapels, many of which have disappeared, many have had their original pure beauty destroyed by the vulgar taste of later ages, while the Gothic majesty of others has been brought to shameful disrepair and disorder to provide warehouses for shopkeepers and hovels for old clothes dealers.” (p. 159)

On the way, Beetle is secretly delighted when they pass the postern gate to the mansion with the treasure, which he recognises by the decorative ironwork, and learns that of course King Wenceslas is dead and the house empty. When they arrive on the banks of the Vltava, he is however horror-struck by the sight of the armed host of the Crusaders on the Letná ridge across the river. He is disgusted at the idea that a

handful of Prague citizens and Taborite peasants have dared to defy the whole force of Christendom. To his terror is added the general discomfort of his clothes and equipment. He is further horrified by the primitive appearance of the New Town across the Prikopy ditch, in nineteenth-century Prague the most fashionable and frequented street, the stronghold of German and German-imitating burgherdom. Again his preference for German bourgeois culture in preference to Czech is stressed. As they proceed further, a happy chance entangles Beetle's pike in some ornamental iron-work, which turns out to be the sign of a hostelry.

"Beetle's face lit up as if by magic. 'That's right, it's a pub!' he cried. 'And it stopped me of its own accord, as if it knew the thirst I had. This is fate, we've just got to drop in.'

'So be it, an thou art thirsty, let us quaff a draught,' agreed Domšík, and I for one am grateful to him, for I feel sure my readers have had quite enough of this dry description of the streets of old-time Prague." (p. 159)

In the rude, humbly-equipped tavern they meet in with three comrades-in-arms — a Prague goldsmith, Vacek Beard the Taborite countryman, and Vojta of the Peacocks, a wealthy New Townsman. Besides them there is a poor but learned scholar. An argument ensues which gives Čech the opportunity of illustrating the conflicting opinions within the Hussite ranks, from the somewhat conservative, bourgeois goldsmith, the more strongly Hussite New Townsman, to the fierce Taborite extremist Vacek. Beetle is only slightly consoled by the excellence of the mead for the lowness of his company, in which he would not care to be seen by his bar-parlour acquaintances from The Vicarage Arms. The argument which arises, in which the scholar takes part against the Taborites, and during which Beetle makes an indiscreet remark in disparagement of the Hussites, is only brought to an end by the sounding of the alarm bell to announce the attack of the Crusaders on the town.

"Immediately the whole company forgot the quarrel and cried almost with one voice: 'Up and at them!' and laid hands on their weapons." (p. 187)

The reluctant and trembling Beetle is unavoidably forced on by the rushing mass of people to the Spittalfields, lying between the river and the Hill of Vítkov, now to be the scene of the memorable battle in which Žižka defeated the hosts of Christendom. He succeeds however in making off from the battle towards the vineyards leading to Vítkov and the Taborites, among whom he thinks he will be safer until the enemy takes Prague and the whole affair quietens down — an eventuality which he regards with complacency. He is saved from the attack of a knight on horseback by falling over his own pike, and is found lying on the ground by two Taborite leaders who accept him as a Brother and lead him to Žižka.

So far the method of contrasting Beetledom with the Hussite past has been lightly satirical, merely with touches of deeper feeling in the set descriptions of the medieval town and medieval surroundings, with occasional bitter undertones of harsher irony and flashes of scathing sarcasm — as for example Beetle's lack of comprehension for the idea that the Prague men are willing to sacrifice everything for their struggle, his contempt for the Hussites as merely a rabble in revolt, his petty-minded

attacks on Czech language and culture in favour of the bourgeois German influence; and moments of more moving characterisation, as in Kittok's spirited defence of the Czech language, Domšík's restrained farewell to his wife. But now, with Beetle's arrival in the camp of the Taborites, the narrative takes on a more serious tone, and Čech confronts us with the inner quality of the Taborite spirit rather than with external trappings. To some extent Čech has been mildly parodying even his historical characters<sup>35</sup> but from now on to the end of the second last chapter, especially in those chapters dealing with the Battle of Vítkov, Čech is concerned to show at once the heroism and the competence of the Taborites. While the figure of the fanatical priest Koranda with his sword and bible may be somewhat caricatured or ironical, there is nothing ironical in the evening scene before the battle when the priest's sermon and the Hussite hymn ring out — even though it is against the background of Beetle's grumbings as he tries to get to sleep on the hard ground. Nor are the figures of the old Taborite warrior Brother Stach or the nameless matron who falls in the fight anything but starkly monumental. It is this aspect of Čech's historical understanding which Janáček in his opera so delicately interweaves with the poltroon absurdity of Beetle.

But while Čech is more than adequate in indicating the profundity of the Hussite idea and conviction, he is less so in presenting Žižka directly. In fact, he deliberately avoids the opportunity, excusing himself by means of Beetle's terror, and by the fact that no authentic portrait of Žižka is known to exist. On his first appearance the character of Žižka remains rather schematical, if we compare it with the more warmly human characterisation of Domšík and Morris's John Ball. This may be symptomatic of a certain reluctance on the part of Čech completely to commit himself, a reluctance which does lessen the artistic completeness of his work. Whether it was creative timidity, distrust of his own powers, or some lack of acceptance of the methods of the Hussites which prevented his giving a complete and full-blooded character-study of Žižka, his work here offers a striking contrast to the deep and moving full-length study of John Ball as a *man* which is among the most valuable of Morris's achievements; and it may illustrate the manner in which a dialectical comprehension of history and the role of the individual can further the artistic realisation of an author's purpose.

If Beetle had been moved to contempt and amusement by the primitive arrangements of Hussite Prague, he is horrified and reduced to dumb misery by the hard living of the Hussites, whom he is obliged to help in the fortification of the hill.

"Never in his life had he done anything so vulgar as manual work and now he was to slave like a miserable bricklayer's labourer! He, Beetle, the owner of a three-storeyed house! Suppose some of his acquaintances were to see him navvying like this! He was on the verge of tears." (p. 204)

After finishing the work he drops down exhausted on the edge of the hill and looks sadly down over the Prague landscape, so familiar and yet so different, and becomes still more depressed when he sees the swarming Crusaders, the bristling spears and fluttering standards. The Hussites must have gone out of their minds to think they could withstand such a host.

The old Taborite, Brother Stach, in charge of the building of the wall, begins to speak suddenly as if he read Beetle's thoughts, of the daring of the Taborites in opposing such an enemy, of the victories already gained against fearful odds, and of his trust that even now they will be victorious

"for we fight not for wealth, riches nor honour, but for the defence of our native land and the sacred truth'." (p. 206)

While Čech gives suitable expression to the simple religious faith of the Hussites, he never misses an opportunity of driving home the truth he was anxious to impress on his contemporaries — that the Hussites succeeded against tremendous odds because they were on the side of truth and justice, and knew for what they were fighting.

But Brother Matthew's thoughts are elsewhere, regretting Maudlin's excellent cuisine and the fleshpots of Prague. Old Stach continues in the same vein of elevated conviction, and this gives Čech the opportunity for one of the most telling moments of confrontation between Stach and Beetle, Hussite conviction and bourgeois pettiness:

"My old hand can scarce raise the flail, and yet in three fields have I already brandished it in the forefront of battle... An inner voice tells me, that I shall see a fight more terrible than any yet, and in it shall I at length find a glorious death in the service of the Chalice and God's Law."

"When's supper going to be?" broke in Brother Matthew somewhat inappropriately." (p. 207)

At last after a scanty supper Brother Matthew settles down on the hard ground — only to be interrupted by the evening sermon of the priest Koranda, which rings out passionately above the brethren. At last even that is over, and the dark falls. But once more the silence is broken by the Hussite chorale, quoted almost entirely by Čech.

"On and on rang from thousands of throats that rude song, full of vital strength and fervent faith, the hymn said to have been made by Žižka himself, the mere far-off echo of which was later to put whole armies to flight — on it thundered, majestically and ardently, from the brow of Vítkov Hill, far out over the countryside in the silent night." (p. 213)

At length Brother Matthew drops off into uneasy sleep, in which recollections of the sermon mingle with sentimental dreams of Domšík's daughter.

The subsequent chapter commences with a heroic apostrophe to the rising sun on the 14th July, 1420, the historic day of Hussite victory, spoken in the author's own person, and this passage may be taken as expressing the innermost purpose of Čech in writing the book. It was so taken by Janáček in his opera based on *Mr. Beetle*, for he not only names the sunrise of 14th July as one of the central themes of his music<sup>36</sup> but even extracts the passage and places it as a monologue of the poet in person at the beginning of the opera. It is no small achievement, bearing witness to great literary tact and command of language, that Čech was able to place without absurdity in the midst of a mock-heroic burlesque a passage of such sincere, unforced heroic intensity. We have even had previous

mock-heroic apostrophes — for example that to Beetle's pike. It is the unquestionable sincerity of the passage which prevents it from being incongruous. The way has been prepared by the deeper emotion of the Vítkov scenes in the preceding chapter, and the way back to the burlesque mood is prepared at the end of the invocation by the transitional sentence

"O thou setting sun of our strength, wilt thou ever rise again and wilt thou find a poet fit to greet thee with a burning fervour, and not with hollow-sounding words and mean caricature as do I?" (p. 214, 5),

and so back to Brother Matthew's dismal awakening on the fateful day of battle. In despair at his situation among the Taborites, he determines to desert them, make his way back to Prague, change into his own clothes, seek out the royal mansion, fill his pockets with treasure, and go back along the underground passage to the nineteenth century — or if that should prove impossible, at least to remain hidden underground in safety, "until the town should be taken . . ." It is a matter of complete indifference to him that the Hussites should be defeated. In fact his complete assumption of their defeat at the hands of the five times greater force of the Crusaders leads him into making the confused mistake which causes his final downfall.

In the stress of battle Beetle does manage to carry out his plan, to the point where, leaving the heroic Taborites, he flees once more through the vineyards — terrified by the swinging of his own flail behind him — and makes his way into the town as the messenger of Žižka to the besieged Praguers; he even finds Domšík's house, terrifies old Kedruta as she is sprinkling the chamber he had slept in with holy water, throws off his medieval garb, gets back with a sigh of relief into the decent clothes of modern times, puts on his newly-mended boots, covers his suit with the medieval cloak, and makes his way rapidly through the narrow alleys towards the royal mansion.

"But all at once he stopped short. All the way down Týn Street and the alley he had heard the church bells as before, but always more and more strongly, as if one bell after another throughout Prague were chiming in with the resonant chorale; now he could hear cries, and noise, and a jangling sound from Long Street, and could see the people hurrying from the square in that direction.

He intended to run across quickly to Goat Street, but it was too late. A few horsemen broke out of Long Street, waving long spears on which fluttered pennons with the Red Cross. The victorious Crusaders!

Mr. Beetle, realising that he could not hope to escape, in mortal terror fell on his knees and cried out in German: 'Mercy . . . I'm a German! I'm a Catholic!'

'Slay the German papist!' shouted the horsemen in Czech almost with one voice and one of them measured his lance at Mr. Beetle.

Beetle, however, leapt up and shouted, this time in Czech: 'Oh, for heaven's sake — but I'm not really a German, nor a Catholic! I'm a Czech and a Hussite!' (p. 226, 7)

A furious crowd immediately collects, demanding Beetle's death as a traitor, and he is revealed in his modern garments to the scorn of the people. All his protests are in vain, and the crowd decide to give him up to Žižka, who is now entering Prague in triumph. The extreme terror of

Beetle is contrasted with the heartfelt joy of the citizens. At this supreme moment of national fulfilment, the nineteenth-century petty bourgeois can only look on in deadly, trembling terror. Žižka appears in the procession of victory and halts by the miserable Beetle. He recognises him, and other members of the crowd come forward — Vacek Beard, Vojta of the Peacocks. But Domšík has been killed in the battle. Žižka condemns Beetle to death, and with his final appearance of the Hussite leader, Čech does rise to as adequate a characterisation as was perhaps possible at the time in which he wrote. Curiously enough, this opportunity was ignored by Janáček, in whose opera the Hussite leader does not speak at this point.<sup>37</sup>

“When I first cast eyes on thee I judged thou hadst served thy belly more than thou hadst served thy God, but now I perceive thou knowest no God, that naught is sacred to thee or dear, but the vain prosperity of thy miserable body, for which thou art prepared to deny to every man thy God, the truth, thy brethren, mother, kindred and thy native tongue.” (p. 237)

And in his final despair Beetle tries to explain that he is from another century. The crowd naturally conclude he is mad, and Žižka proclaims the final verdict:

“If indeed such an unheard-of wonder might even happen — then God forbid we should ever have such descendants!” (p. 238)

This is really the last point in the book which achieves real intensity of expression. Whether in some doubt as to how to resolve the situation without showing the Hussites in an unfavourable light as executioners, or from some compunction for Beetle, some lack of complete condemnation of him, Čech slips out of his dilemma with the well-worn device of pleading inadequacy.

“But my pen falls from my hand, hesitating to describe the terrible scene.” (p. 238)

Whatever the reason, there is no doubt that this is a weakness in the structure of the book as a whole and the reader is jerked out of his acceptance of the situation. Janáček felt the need to make the moment of Beetle's execution (he is nailed into a barrel and burned) one of the critical moments of his opera and enumerates it as one of the main points which he hopes to stress,<sup>38</sup> and yet the transition from the heights of Hussite enthusiasm to the grey level of nineteenth-century burgherdom — without any perspective for the future — is in any case bound to leave the effect of bathos. It is a tribute to the unity of Morris's thought, as well as to his optimistic view of the future, that he achieves his transition so successfully. Finally Čech manipulates his transition by setting his view point in the mind of the unhappy Beetle:

“Mr. Beetle made a last vain attempt to struggle with his executioners... then he knew nothing but darkness, the clubs hammered down the top of the barrel, and the barrel itself with him inside began to roll nearer to the crackling flames. A veil closed down over his senses, and the one remote star twinkling through the shadows was the still entrancing idea of Domšík's daughter; his darkling soul fixed itself upon

this vision madly as on the last ray of hope, and from his breast burst out a hoarse and hopeless voice: 'Kittok! Kitt-tok!'" (p. 240)

And at that moment he wakes up in the barrel in Würfel's backyard. The final chapter is a return to the mild irony of the early part of the book. Beetle has learnt nothing from his escapade.

"Mr. Beetle takes no exception to what is called patriotism, provided it is confined within reasonable limits; by all means let the Czechs speak Czech among themselves, let them go to the Czech Theatre, let them found Czech Societies, celebrate national holidays and even take up collection for patriotic aims, — as long as they leave Mr. Beetle out of it, since in these hard times he cannot permit himself such unnecessary expenditure. In any case, as has already been mentioned, Mr. Beetle has several times put a few ha'pennies into the collecting box for the National School Book Society, and no less than twice attended a National Day Celebration, on which occasions he quietly drank beer enough for five vociferous nationalists." (p. 244)

All that remains of his visit to the Middle Ages are the new soles on his boots — and even they are doubtful. And so the interlude comes to an end — "not with a bang but a whimper". There is no pointer to any further solution — and the final throbbing chord of Janáček's opera perhaps protests against this shelving of the problem.<sup>39</sup>

#### 4.

This concrete analysis of the two works has been necessary to illustrate the main points of contrast in method: the unity of Morris's work, its "keeping", the inevitability of the action, the consistency of its characters, the perfection and restraint of its detail, and the clarity of its purpose; and on the other hand the disproportions of *Mr. Beetle*, for example the large central section devoted to the comic exploitation of the accessories of medieval life; the shifting point-of-view, from the direct related experience of Beetle to the detached authorial commentary, the set pieces of description and narrative, such as the inserted narrative of the Battle of Vítkov in the middle of the denouement of the second last chapter; the shift from satire and the mock-heroic to the heroic and back again; the dual nature of the figure of Beetle — at once the foolish but likeable "little man" who holds something of ourselves, and the contemptible and despicable bourgeois coward who destroys himself in selfish panic; the alternation of artistically restrained and effective evocation of scene and personality with antiquarian, unselective accumulation of details (we may compare the selective presentation of Will Green, quoted on p. 118 with the exhaustive description of Domšík, quoted on p. 132); and finally the lessening of momentum and purpose which fails to drive the lesson home.

Morris's message is clear, and he never loses sight of it for a moment: to present the English working-class of the eighties with a clear-cut analysis, in artistic terms, of the decisive moment in the past when the revolutionary action of the people changed the course of events, to place the forces which brought about this action in correct perspective, and to produce a combined emotional and intellectual realisation of the power of the people which will lead to action on the part of his readers. This

was possible for Morris for two reasons: in the first place, capitalism in England had reached a stage where the organised proletariat was sufficiently strong to make a serious challenge to growing imperialism (mass strikes, close-knit working-class organisations all over the country, mass demonstrations) and to force imperialism to meet that challenge with repressive devices and action (the attempt to limit free speech, prosecutions, attacks by police and the military); in the second place, Morris was a Marxist, and could see the Peasants' Revolt dialectically. He knows precisely what effect he wants to produce, and so can use his very great artistic power to the greatest advantage. In addition, his knowledge of medieval life and art is so exact, detailed and expert that he can be highly selective and thus more effective in his use of detail.

It is no denigration of Svatopluk Čech to say that he was in a much less favourable position to see the past and the present clearly; on the contrary, it is a tribute to the sureness of his insight that he was able to reach conclusions about the Hussite past which are historically valid and fundamentally correct. The Czech working-class movement in the eighties had not yet advanced so far as the proletariat in England and the issue between capitalism and the proletariat was not yet so clearly defined; nor was it yet clear what was the function of the national revolutionary tradition in relation to the proletariat. Svatopluk Čech was a convinced democrat, opposed alike to capitalist exploitation and religious obscurantism, but he was still in two minds about the need for — or desirability of — revolution in his own day. Correctly, he saw that the most useful if unconscious weapon of reaction was the complacent cowardice and compromise of the Czech bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie of his day, mildly inclined towards nationalism, so far as it did not affect the dividends, but always ready to acknowledge the superiority of German civilisation; and against that he directed the sharpest barb of his satire. Unlike Morris (who never thought much of creature comforts and was willing even to contemplate the destruction of all the art he loved by revolutionary conflagration, should it seem necessary), he had not identified himself completely with the proletariat and was more inclined to identify the nation with the peasants of his own day; he still has something of Beetle in himself and can share his contemptuous amusement at the roughness of medieval ways. To this extent his satire is blunted. But if this detracts from the artistic unity of the work, from another point of view it is a gain, for it means that we can identify ourselves with Beetle and thus reach a comprehension of our own faults. This is the value of the satire for the present day, as Janáček well understood even at the period when he wrote his opera, between 1916 and 1918: "We can see as many Beetles in our nation as there are Oblomovs in the Russian nation. My purpose was to make us feel so disgusted with such a fellow, that we destroy and strangle him at sight — but above all, destroy him in ourselves; and to revive in utter purity the conception of our national martyrs."<sup>40</sup>

It was not however without considerable struggles that Janáček succeeded in having the contradictory elements of Čech's *Mr. Beetle* welded into an acceptable libretto which would bear the close-knit structure of his music with its clear motive of attack on the Beetle that lies in wait within ourselves. That Svatopluk Čech was a great artist in words, that

he could extricate himself by sheer force of literary power from the contradictory situations his limited viewpoint found him in, is shown by the analysis of *Beetle*; we cannot attribute its comparative inconclusiveness as a work of literature to failure or inadequacy of talent; it is above all the limitations of his historical situation which prevented Čech from achieving an absolute masterpiece of unassailable and consistent perfection.

Shortcomings of a similar nature are illustrated in Twain's comparable — but much weaker — “historical fantasy”, *A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur*, with its deliberate purpose of satirising as brutally as possible the “medieval” past or rather the reactionary romantic conception of the medieval past. Stuart Sherman, in his assessment of this work<sup>41</sup> as Twain's *Don Quixote*, as “a sincere book, full of life-long convictions earnestly held, a book charged with a rude iconoclastic humour, intended like the work of Cervantes to hasten the end of an obsolescent civilization”, has omitted to note that while Twain attacks both false “medievalism” and such British or European institutions as monarchy, aristocracy and an established church, his attitude to the hero is dubious, for all the boasted technical advances which nineteenth-century America could offer to the astonished eyes of Arthurian days end in destructive warfare and the annihilation by modern weapons of twenty-five thousand men. It is far from clear whether Twain regards this as desirable or deplorable. It need not necessarily be a condemnation of the *Yankee* that “the exhibition of the Arthurian realm is a brutal and libellous travesty, attributing to the legendary period of Arthur horrors which belong to medieval Spain and Italy” (Sherman, p. 259), and Sherman's defence that such “a comprehensive display of human ignorance, folly and iniquity” is necessary for Twain's wide-sweeping satirical purpose is quite arguable; but the whole point of the satire is blunted by the fact that against the old aristocratic civilisation which he attacks Twain can place nothing but the crassly ingenious mechanical destructiveness of expanding American imperialism. As in the case of Čech, this is a weakness arising not from artistic inadequacy — for who would allege that the author of *Huckleberry Finn* lacked artistic genius — but from the limitations of a particular nation, class, and moment in time.

It will thus be seen that apart from consideration of an author's artistic scope and craftsmanship, a decisive element in the formulation of the “historical utopian fiction” is the author's philosophical and historical outlook. His theory of history and politics influences directly his choice of artistic means, and this again affects the artistic integrity of his work and its final effect. But the mere fact that such a book reflects closely the life and outlook of its author's time and nation means that it has a specific value for that nation. While absolutely we may say that Morris's work offers a more fully conscious, more complete assessment of the national revolutionary tradition, that it urges a more concrete and more revolutionary solution of the problems facing his readers, nevertheless Svatopluk Čech's work has played an important role in mobilising national consciousness, in showing up the weakness and cowardice of bourgeois nationalism, in revealing the true stature of the Hussite movement. Even the long buildup of *Beetle*'s character and disgust at medieval conditions, although somewhat out of strict artistic proportion, has its value in

increasing the horror with which, having partly identified our modern selves with his distaste, we finally reject him in his self-seeking cowardice. At the same time, Čech's book, like Twain's, is rich in "iconoclastic humour", although the humour is directed not against the past but against the icons of present-day self-satisfaction. Although Morris's work is not without touches of humour — the nightmare at the beginning, Will Green's joking words to the dreamer, and a few other instances — these merely serve to give human depth to the scene. Neither humour nor satire is Morris's method here, for humour and satire are apt to become destructive of their own ends, and Morris's purpose here is serious and constructive.<sup>42</sup>

What is the position of these two works today? There can be no doubt that the figure of Beetle — aided doubtless by Janáček's opera — has become the personification of pettiness, of self-seeking respectability and time-serving, and that the book still lives in the hearts of the Czech nation "generously communicating its sincere fun and ominous warning".<sup>43</sup> *John Ball* too has played a historic role in English working-class and literary history; the phrase "Fellowship is life and the lack of Fellowship is death" was ever to the fore in the early I. L. P."<sup>44</sup> Other progressive artists have followed Morris in returning to this period of history, notably Alan Bush in his opera *Wat Tyler*. While the development of English Fabian and right-wing socialism in the first part of the twentieth century led to attempts to exploit Morris as a mere "dreamer" and impossibly medievalist and "utopian" socialist, recent Marxist work in the field of history and literary theory has shown the full revolutionary importance of Morris's life and work, and not least of his re-interpretation of the national past. We need merely confront *John Ball* with the pseudo-medievalism of, say, Chesterton's *Napoleon of Notting Hill* to appreciate the value of Morris's work.

The form of "historical utopian fiction" is a literary form depending for its effectiveness on the truth to reality of the author's historical point of view as much as on his artistic genius. No less than other literary kinds, it must bear a valid relation to historical truth and reality. We may say that both William Morris and Svatopluk Čech in the two books dealt with wrote works of lasting literary value and considerable national and political significance, although their artistic method and purpose were so divergent.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For example, on the level of serious creative work the children's books of E. Nesbit, a contemporary of Morris's in the English socialist movement. Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* is concerned rather to inform, than to point a contrast.

<sup>2</sup> cf. his sketch of his own life, *May Morris: William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist*, II, p. 9 seq., of himself at Marlborough School: "I set myself eagerly to studying [prehistoric monuments] and everything else that had any history in it." "I went to Oxford in 1853... I took very ill to the studies of the place; but fell to very vigorously on history and especially medieval history..." "I had about this time [1858] extended my historical reading by falling in with translations from the old Norse literature." "Both my historical studies and my practical conflict with the philistines of modern society have forced on me the conviction that art cannot have real life and growth under the present system of commercialism and profit-mongers." cf. also his list of best books given in *Works*, XXII, xiii seq.

<sup>3</sup> cf. *Works* XIV, *Intro.*, p. xxiv (May Morris): "The pure, musical prose that... is

partly the outcome of those years of speaking and lecturing in public... was at once welcomed by experienced critics as striking a new note in English poetic prose." May Morris also quotes Watts-Dunton in the *Athenaeum*.

<sup>4</sup> cf. note 2.

<sup>5</sup> cf. *Istoria anglijskoi literatury*. III. Moskva, 1958, p. 298–299. A. A. Elistratova: "The second period of Morris's creative work begins with his publicist activity connected with the struggle for peace and against the threat that England would go to war with Russia in 1877–1878... The most significant works of Morris as a socialist, written during this period, initiated a new epoch in the history of English democratic culture."

<sup>6</sup> Edward Thompson. *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*. London, 1955, p. 837.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Thompson, p. 499.

<sup>8</sup> May Morris. *William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist*. II, p. 143.

<sup>9</sup> cf. infra, 136 and n. 34.

<sup>10</sup> cf. Thompson, p. 804. "In both *News from Nowhere* and the *Dream of John Ball*, Morris breaks with his usual practice, and skilfully interweaves the dream and the conscious mind, counterposing realism and romance."

<sup>11</sup> The Morrises and their friends were rather given to dreams and in those pre-freudian unselfconscious days freely exchanged notes on them. cf. Oswald Doughty, *A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, Lond., 1949, p. 355, and *The Letters of William Morris to his family and friends*, ed. Philip Henderson, Lond., 1950, p. 254.

<sup>12</sup> All quotations from *John Ball* are from Vol. XVI of Morris's *Collected Works*, ed. by May Morris.

<sup>13</sup> cf. J. W. Mackail, *The life of W. Morris*, Lond., 1922, I, p. 295.

<sup>14</sup> Svatopluk Čech makes a similar apology for the language of his 15th-century characters. In my translation of Čech I have found Morris's use of language in *John Ball* a very great help in working out a suitable style for the rendering of Čech's "Old Czech".

<sup>15</sup> *Short History of English Literature*, London, 1929 (first published 1898), p. 784.

<sup>16</sup> The following passages may serve to support this assertion:

Bunyan: As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where there was a den, and laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold, I saw a man clothed with rags standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back. I looked, and saw him ope the book, and read therein; and as he read, he wept and trembled; and not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry, saying, What shall I do?

Malory: ... and so Sir Launcelot laid him down under an apple tree, and his helm he laid under his head. And Sir Lionel waked while he slept. So Sir Launcelot was asleep passing fast. And in the meanwhile there came three knights riding, as fast fleeing as ever they might ride. And there followed three but one knight... So within a while this strong knight had overtaken one of these knights, and there he smote him to the cold earth that he lay still... (quoted from Everyman Edition with modernised spelling).

The inconsequential and long-winded style of Malory is the very antithesis of Bunyan and Morris. It is this prolixity and confusion which Twain held up to ridicule in his *Yankee*.

<sup>17</sup> e. g. the bowl of white poppies in the window of Will Green's house, the single white poppy which the dreamer unwittingly carries in his hand as he enters the

- church for the final scene of the tale, the gradual fading of this poppy. cf. *Infra* p. 123.
- <sup>18</sup> cf. Svatopluk Čech, op. cit. 78, here quoted p. 132.
- <sup>19</sup> cf. Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, Globe edition, London, 1932, p. 89, "the murye wordes of the Hoost to Chaucer", l. 1886 seq., "Thou lookest as thou woldest fynde an hare; for ever upon the ground I se thee stare... He in the waast is shape as wel as I", and *John Ball*: "Thou art tall across thy belly and not otherwise," and "Look no more on the ground, as thou sawest a hare."
- <sup>20</sup> That Svatopluk Čech was conscious of not having attained as complete an expression of the heroic Hussite times as he considered worthy of them is shown above all in his apostrophe at the beginning of Chapter XII, with its final admission of his own failure, cf. op. cit. p. 214, and *infra*, p. 140.
- <sup>21</sup> In quoting this passage (p. 836) for comparison with a passage from *Ludwig Feuerbach* on the same theme of conscious aim and result in history, Thompson erroneously places the passage in the later scene between John Ball and the dreamer in the church. Even this trifling mistake illustrates the closely-woven nature of *John Ball*, since the theme of the conversation in the church is that of the reflection here made by the dreamer during John Ball's speech from the village cross at the very beginning of the dream.
- <sup>22</sup> Engels, *England in 1845 and in 1885*. Article published in *Commonweal*, March, 1885. See also *Preface to The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, English edition. Also quoted by Thompson.
- <sup>23</sup> cf. *Anthology of Chartist Literature*, Moscow, 1956, p. 347. Ernest Jones, *The Men of Kent and Essex. (The Labourer, 1848.)*
- <sup>24</sup> This is again in contrast to the method of Čech, who for the most part gives us panoramas of the culminating moments of the historical scene, making play with great masses of people and with the monumental and impressive background of medieval Prague.
- <sup>25</sup> *Art under Plutocracy. A Lecture delivered at University College, Oxford... with John Ruskin in the Chair. Works, XXIII*, p. 191.
- <sup>26</sup> In *Mr. Beetle*, the dreamer remains fully conscious of his position and of the contrast between the two periods, as is essential for the carrying out of the satire; in *John Ball* there are only occasional reminders of the present, and the reader is always brought back to the 14th century by a further appeal to the beauty of the scene.
- <sup>27</sup> cf. Morris, *Works, XXII, Hopes and Fears for Art. The Art of the People* (Lecture delivered in 1879), esp. p. 41.
- <sup>28</sup> Incidentally, John Ball, in excusing himself as a priest for asking such a heretical question, uses the only unexplained word in the whole book which could justify the statement that Morris's language is obscure or archaic. He says to the scholar: "I think thou art no delator," and here a similar caustic footnote to that supplied for the words "forestaller" and "regrater" has been omitted surely only through and oversight.
- <sup>29</sup> William Morris in all his socialist writings made use of what might seem to be a commonplace, outworn symbol, the dawn equalling the coming of socialism. The identification of the capitalist system with night, socialism with the dawn, was one of the simple, elemental ideas which Morris was never afraid of being thought naïf for stressing. In the same way the dark wood of Dante, a favourite mystic symbol with Rossetti and similarly used by Morris in his earlier lyrics (e. g. *Error and Loss*, first published 1871 as *The Dark Wood*, cf. *Works, IX, xxxiv*), comes later with Morris to signify the tangled contradictions of the capitalist world, cf. his socialist chant, *The Day of Days*.
- <sup>30</sup> Although the immediate occasion of this work was of course Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, which so disgusted Morris with its mechanical view of socialist society that he was impelled to write a book showing the quality of life under communism.
- <sup>31</sup> Václav Stejskal, *Introduction of The Journey of Mr. Beetle, etc.*, Prague, 1956 (*Světová četba* edition), p. 12.
- <sup>32</sup> This second adventure of Mr. Beetle was first published in serial numbers from the summer of 1888 to October of that year. The first adventure of *Mr. Beetle*, the *Journey to the Moon*, had been published in the periodical *Květy* in 1886. *Výlet* strictly means "excursion", but I have preferred the word "journey" as being in

the circumstances more appropriate as well as giving a more euphonious and less clumsy title. Page references are to the page in the original, in the edition quoted above, note 31. The translated passages are from my own unpublished translation, made in 1959.

- <sup>30</sup> It is instructive to note how many of the same motifs which occur in *John Bull* appear also in *Beetle*. We have already mentioned the new appearance of the buildings; here we have the innocent and charming maiden. The characterisation of Will Green's daughter and Domšík's daughter is remarkably similar, although of course the effect on Morris's dreamer and on *Beetle* are not comparable. Čech and Morris, when they "looked in their hearts and wrote" found the same answers to their questions about life in the Middle Ages.
- <sup>34</sup> cf. Karel Polák, *O Svatopluku Čechovi*, Prague, 1949, p. 85. "However this may be, the second journey of Mr. Beetle, in spite of its considerable breadth of treatment, merely offers a suggestion, so far as conception goes, while from the literary point of view as a satire in the grand style it goes no further than a mere hint and does not even exploit the full linguistic possibilities of this utopian confrontation." Janáček felt the need to underline and emphasise certain aspects and themes in *Mr. Beetle*, to "set *The Journeys of Mr. Beetle* more profoundly into real life". cf. Leoš Janáček, *Correspondence with the Librettists of Mr. Beetle's Journeys [Korespondence L. Janáčka s libretisty Výletů Broučkových]*, ed. Artuš Rektorys, Prague, 1950. *Preface* by Jan Racek and A. Rektorys, p. 7.
- <sup>35</sup> cf. Polák, loc. cit., in which Polák claims that Čech does satirise especially the minor figures of the Hussites. This writer however goes rather far when he says "The glorious past is indeed the mirror of the feeble present, but in no way the ideological model for the future". Most other contemporary critics pay tribute to Čech's service in depicting the greatness of the Hussite movement, e. g. Stejskal, op. cit., "The fervent admiration and love of the poet for the moral purity and greatness of the Hussite period and its people, which above all here, in a work of satire, glows all the more strikingly", p. 17.
- <sup>36</sup> cf. Racek and Rektorys, loc. cit.
- <sup>37</sup> cf. Jaroslav Vogl, *Leoš Janáček, dramatik*, Prague, 1948, p. 86.
- <sup>38</sup> cf. Racek and Rektorys, loc. cit.
- <sup>39</sup> Janáček felt the need to show *Beetle* "at least ashamed of himself". Racek and Rektorys, p. 7.
- <sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6-7.
- <sup>41</sup> *A Short History of American Literature*, Cambridge, 1924. *Mark Twain*, by Stuart P. Sherman, p. 259.
- <sup>42</sup> That Morris could use humour and satire as propaganda was shown in his topical playlet, *The Tables Turned, or Nupkins Awakened*, written for performance by the Socialist League, which won the praise of no less a dramatic critic than Bernard Shaw, cf. *Pen Portraits and Reviews*, London, 1931, p. 213.
- <sup>43</sup> Stejskal, op. cit., p. 18.
- <sup>44</sup> Thompson, op. cit., p. 739.

# KONFRONTACE PŘÍTOMNOSTI A NÁRODNÍ MINULOSTI PROSTŘEDNICTVÍM LITERÁRNÍ KONVENCE SNU U WILLIAMA MORRISE A SVATOPLUKA ČECHA

Autorka se ve své studii pokouší o srovnání Morrisova díla *Sen o Johnu Ballovi* s dílem českého spisovatele Svatopluka Čecha *Výlet pana Broučka do 15. století*. Obě díla užívají formy snu, aby konfrontovala autorovu současnost s vybraným úsekem národní minulosti. Obě díla vznikla v osmdesátých letech minulého století, obě staví do protikladu moderní svět se slavným okamžikem revoluční minulosti — se vzpourou anglických rolníků roku 1381 a s bitvou na hoře Vítkově roku 1420. Konfrontace současnosti s minulostí prostřednictvím člověka devatenáctého století, který se octne v minulosti, je v literatuře méně obvyklá než konfrontace současnosti s vymyšlenou utopií. Jedním z mála obdobných děl je Twainova kniha *Yankee u dvora Krále Artuše*, která také vznikla v osmdesátých letech devatenáctého století. Cílem článku je podat podrobný rozbor výše uvedených dvou prací, prozkoumat záměry autorů, jejich metody, silné a slabé stránky těchto metod a formulovat závěry o vztazích mezi uměleckým cílem a prostředky.

V krátkém úvodu autorka zařazuje *Johna Balla* do celkového literárního vývoje Williama Morrisa. Dílo je úzce spjato s postupným zvětšováním podílu prózy v Morrisově literární tvorbě od sedmdesátých let, což souvisí s jeho soudobou orientací na mnohem širší veřejnost, na proletariát. Morris vydal *Johna Balla* v socialistickém časopise *Commonweal* (který sám redigoval) jako součást své rozsáhlé socialistické propagační činnosti. Dílo je také výrazem jeho snahy zachovat vysokou literární úroveň v tomto časopise, určeném dělnickým čtenářům. Je to básnická interpretace polozapomenuté národní revoluční tradice. Stanovisko autorovo je marxistické.

Podrobný rozbor *Johna Balla* ukazuje, že básnické ladění jeho koncepce je důsledně zachováno v celém díle. Morris nepropracovává úvod tak složitě, jak to bývá běžné u utopistických nebo fantastických děl (včetně *Výletu pana Broučka*), nýbrž používá středověké básnické konvence snu, známé z Chaucera, kterého považoval za svého mistra. Přechod do země snů je snadný a rychlý. Jazyk *Johna Balla* úspěšně vytváří ovzduší čtrnáctého století v Anglii, ale současně zůstává přijatelný pro soudobého čtenáře. Je to jazyk národní tradice Johna Bunyana. Pohled na středověk nevychází z reakční lásky k mrtvé kultuře, nýbrž pramení z Morrisovy snahy tlumočit reálné hodnoty minulosti, zejména hodnoty lidské, a podat svým dělnickým čtenářům politické poučení. Zdůrazňuje soudružnost rolníků pod vedením Johna Balla. Morrisovy dosavadní organizační zkušenosti v zatím rozdrobeném socialistickém hnutí začátku osmdesátých let minulého století ho vedly k tomu, aby se omezil ve svém zobrazení na vzpuru rolníků v jedné vesnici. I když se nepokouší o syntetický obraz celého masového hnutí jako Svatopluk Čech, jeho marxistický pohled mu umožňuje, aby podal správné hodnocení rolnické vzpoury jako celku. Celý sen probíhá v ovzduší lyrické krásy. Závěrečné kapitoly, obsahující rozhovor Johna Balla s vyprávěčem, zabírají asi jednu třetinu knihy. I když jsou převážně teoretické, nejsou neúměrně dlouhé, protože mají pečlivě plánovanou strukturu a silné citové zabarvení. Morrisův materialistický světový názor se uplatňuje při řešení vztahu Johna Balla k náboženství. Jeho historický výklad vychází z marxistické teorie. Sen končí zase rychlou proměnou a jen letmým pohledem na soudobý všední život, jehož problémy zůstávají před spisovatelem a čtenářem nevyřešeny.

Protože se článek zabývá především anglickou literaturou, autorka podává jen krátký přehled o Svatopluku Čechovi jako pokrokovém demokratu a nepříteli buržoazního a maloburžoazního pseudovlastenectví. *Výlet pana Broučka do 15. století* konfrontuje Broučka, ctihodného majitele domu v Praze devatenáctého století, s hrdinskou husitskou minulostí v okamžiku, kdy Praha je obležena křižáckým vojskem a vysvobozena vítězstvím Jana Žižky na hoře Vítkově. Rozsáhlý úvod nám představuje Broučka jako požitkářského, pohodlného, úzkoprsého maloměšťáka, který po večeru stráveném u piva procitne v husitské Praze. Zpočátku pohrdá primitivním středověkým způsobem života. Když zjistí, že je Praha obležena, vyděsí se. Jeho jedinou starostí je zachovat vlastní kůži, což ho vede k zbabělým pokusům o útek,

až je nakonec odhalen jako zrádce. Když v marné snaze o sebezáchranu tvrdí, že přichází z jiného století, odsuzuje ho Žižka slovy: „Toho bohdá nikdy nebude, abychom takové měli potomky.“ Umělecká sourodnost *Výletu pana Broučka* je méně ucelená než je tomu u *Johna Balla*. Autor stíhá přímé vyprávění své hlavní postavy s autorským komentářem a s jinými mimosujetovými prvky. Ačkoliv popisuje pozadí pečlivě a procítěně, utápí se ve zbytečných podrobnostech, a pozadí je proto méně efektivní než u Morrisa. Svatopluk Čech původně zamýšlel spíše zaútočit satiricky na českého maloměšťáka než umělecky zobrazit historickou minulost. Přesto ve vyvrcholení příběhu jeho pohrdavý a odsuzující postoj k Broučkovi přesahuje rámec pseudo-heroična a dosahuje hrdinské hloubky. V závěru knihy se však Svatopluk Čech vrací k dřívější mírnější ironii, a proto závěr příběhu je méně výrazný. Vrcholné kapitoly jsou však prostoupeny hlubokým prožitím oživené revoluční minulosti. Autorka článku se zmiňuje i o Janáčkově snaze prohloubit některé motivy ve své opeře založené na Čechově *Výletu*. Autorka používá citátů z vlastního anglického překladu *Výletu pana Broučka*.

Příčinou umělecké jednotnosti Morrisova díla je spíše jeho jasnější ideologické stanovisko než jeho velké umělecké nadání. Svého uvědomělého stanoviska mohl dosáhnout ze dvou důvodů: za prvé proto, že v osmdesátých letech minulého století anglický proletariát jako třída byl na vyšším vývojovém stupni a lépe organizován než proletariát český, a za druhé proto, že Morris sám byl marxista. Ačkoliv Svatopluk Čech dobře vystihl hodnoty husitské revoluční minulosti, sám nezaujal marxistické stanovisko. Zaměřil svou satiru proti reakční maloburžoazii, ale ještě nedospěl k poznání nutnosti proletářské revoluce. Proto se vyskytují v jeho díle rozpory, přes které se přenáší jen díky svému literárnímu talentu. Přesto však *Výlet pana Broučka do 15. století* je a zůstává dílem trvalé hodnoty.

Úspěch tohoto literárního druhu je závislý na reálnosti historického pohledu autora, a to do stejné míry jako na jeho uměleckém nadání. *John Ball* i *Výlet pana Broučka do 15. století* jsou díla trvalého uměleckého a národně-politického významu, přestože jejich umělecká metoda a cíl jsou tak odlišné.

## РЕЗЮМЕ

# СОПОСТАВЛЕНИЕ СОВРЕМЕННОСТИ И НАЦИОНАЛЬНОГО ПРОШЛОГО ПОСРЕДСТВОМ ЛИТЕРАТУРНОЙ УСЛОВНОСТИ СНА (В. МОРРИС И С. ЧЕХ)

В своей работе автор ставит перед собой задачу сравнить произведение Морриса „Сон о Джоне Боле“ с повестью чешского писателя Сватоплука Чеха „Путешествие пана Броучка в 15 столетие“. Оба произведения пользуются формой сна, для сопоставления эпохи современной автору с избранным периодом национального прошлого. Оба произведения возникли в 80-х годах прошлого века, оба противопоставляют современный мир славному моменту революционного прошлого — восстанию английских крестьян в 1381 г. и битве на горе Витков в 1420 г. Сопоставление современности с прошлым, посредством человека нового времени, который очутился в прошлом, является менее обычным в литературе, чем сопоставление современности с вымышленной утопией. Одним из немногих подобных произведений является книга Твена „Янки при дворе короля Артура“, которая возникла также в 80-х годах 19 столетия. Цель статьи — представить подробный анализ этих двух литературных произведений, исследовать замысел автора, художественный метод, его сильные и слабые стороны и, насколько это возможно, формулировать заключение об отношениях между целью и средствами художественного изображения.

В кратком вступлении автор включает произведение о Джоне Боле в общее литературное творчество Морриса. „Сон о Джоне Боле“ тесно связан с постепенно возрастающим значением роли прозы в литературном творчестве Морриса начиная с 70-х годов, что находится в связи с его определившейся ориентацией на гораздо более широкий круг общественности, на пролетариат. „Сон о Джоне Боле“ был издан в социалистическом журнале *Commonweal* (который редактировал сам Моррис) и таким образом это произведение включается в круг его обширной социалистической пропагандной деятельности. Оно является выражением стремления Морриса сохранить высокий литературный уровень в этом журнале, предназначенном читателям из рабочего класса. Это поэтическая интерпретация полузабытой национальной революционной традиции. Его позиция является марксистской.

Подробный анализ „Сна о Джоне Боле“ показывает, что поэтическое настраивание его концепции в целом последовательно сохраняется на протяжении всего произведения. Вступительная часть не проработана так сложно, как это обычно бывает у фантастических и утопических произведений (включая „Путешествия пана Броучка“), а использует средневековую поэтическую условность сна, известную по Чосеру, которого Моррис считал своим учителем. Переход в страну снов является легким и быстрым. Язык Джона Боля удачно образует атмосферу 14 столетия в Англии и в то же время является приемлемым для современного читателя. Это язык национальной традиции Джона Бэньяна. Его представление о средних веках не возникает из реакционной любви к мертвой культуре, а берет свой исток из стремления Морриса передать реальные ценности прошлого, особенно человеческие, и подать своим читателям — рабочим политические советы. Этот взгляд подчеркивает солидарность, сплоченность крестьян под руководством Джона Боля. Организационный опыт приобретенный Моррисом в пока еще раздробленном социалистическом движении начала 80-х годов минувшего столетия привел его к тому, что он ограничился описанием крестьянского бунта в одной деревне.

Несмотря на то, что Моррис не пытается дать синтетическую картину всего массового движения, как это делает Сватоплук Чех, марксистские взгляды Морриса позволяют ему дать правильную оценку восстания в целом. Весь сон протекает в атмосфере лирической красоты. Заключительные главы, содержащие разговор Джона Боля с рассказчиком, занимают приблизительно треть книги. Однако, несмотря на то, что эти главы являются главным образом теоретическими, они не кажутся несоразмерно длинными, так как имеют тщательно планированную структуру и ярко выраженную эмоциональную окраску.

Материалистическое мировоззрение Морриса проявляется в решении религиозных взглядов Джона Боля. Его историческое толкование исходит из марксистской теории. Сон кончается опять быстрой переменой и ограничивается лишь беглым взглядом на современную повседневную жизнь.

Ввиду того, что в статье говорится в первую очередь об английской литературе, автор дает лишь краткий обзор литературной деятельности Сватоплука Чеха как прогрессивного

демократа и врага буржуазного и мелкобуржуазного псевдопатриотизма. В „Путешествии пана Броучка в 15 столетие“, Броучку, почтенному пражскому домовладельцу 19 века, противопоставляется героическое гуситское прошлое во время осады Праги войском крестоносцев и момент ее освобождения после победы Яна Жижки на горе Витков. В подробном вступлении Броучек представлен как рутинер, сибарит, ограниченный обыватель, который, после вечера проведенного за кружкой пива, просыпается в гуситской Праге. Сначала он пренебрегает примитивными средневековыми порядками, но узнав об осаде Праги, он пугается. Единственная забота Броучка — спасти собственную шкуру, что приводит его к целому ряду трусливых поступков, пока в конце концов его не разоблачают как изменника. „Бог даст, никогда не будет, чтобы у нас были такие потомки!“ — такими словами осуждает его Жижка, когда Броучек, в напрасных стараниях о собственном спасении, утверждает, что приходит из другого столетия. Художественная однородность „Путешествия Броучка в 15 столетие“ является менее полной, чем у „Сна Джона Боля“. Сватоплук Чех чередует прямое повествование с позиции своего главного героя с авторским комментарием и другими внесюжетными элементами. Несмотря на то, что фон выписан тщательно и прочувствованно, он утопает в излишних подробностях, и потому менее эффективен, чем у Морриса. Сватоплук Чех первоначально намеревался скорее сатирически атаковать чешского буржуа, чем художественно изобразить историческое прошлое. Однако несмотря на это, в завершении происшествия, его презрительное и осуждающее отношение к Броучку выходит за рамки псевдогероического и достигает соответствующей героической глубины.

В заключении книги Сватоплук Чех, однако, возвращается к прежней умеренной иронии, и конец истории поэтому менее выразителен. В лучших главах все же ощущается глубокое переживание ожившего революционного прошлого. Автор статьи упоминает и о стремлении Яначека разработать некоторые мотивы своей оперы написанной на основе „Путешествия“ Чеха. Автор пользуется цитатой из собственного английского перевода „Путешествия пана Броучка в 15 столетие“.

Автор статьи приходит к заключению, что причиной художественного единства произведения Морриса является скорее более ясная его идеологическая позиция, чем значительный художественный талант автора. То, что он занял сознательную позицию, стало для него возможным по двум причинам: во-первых, потому, что в 80-х годах прошлого столетия английский пролетариат, как класс, был на более высоком уровне развития и лучше организован, чем пролетариат чешский; во-вторых, потому, что Моррис был сам марксистом. Несмотря на то, что Сватоплук Чех хорошо постиг ценности гуситского революционного прошлого, сам он не стал на марксистскую точку зрения. Чех направил свою сатиру против реакционной малобуржуазии, но не пришел к признанию необходимости пролетарской революции. Поэтому в его произведениях возникают противоречия, через которые ему удается перешагнуть, только благодаря своему литературному дарованию. Тем не менее „Путешествие пана Броучка в 15 столетие“ представляет и будет представлять собой произведение, имеющее большое значение.

Успех этого литературного жанра зависит как от реальности исторических взглядов автора, так и от его художественного дарования. „Сон о Джоне Боле“, так же как и „Путешествие пана Броучка в 15 столетие“ являются произведениями, не теряющими своего художественного и национально-политического значения до сих пор, несмотря на то, что их художественный метод и цель так различны между собой.

Перевод: Е. Пухлякова.

