

Victorian Poetry



William Morris
1834-1896

So now, amidst our day of strife,
With many a matter glad we play,
When once we see the light of life
Gleam through the tangle of to-day.

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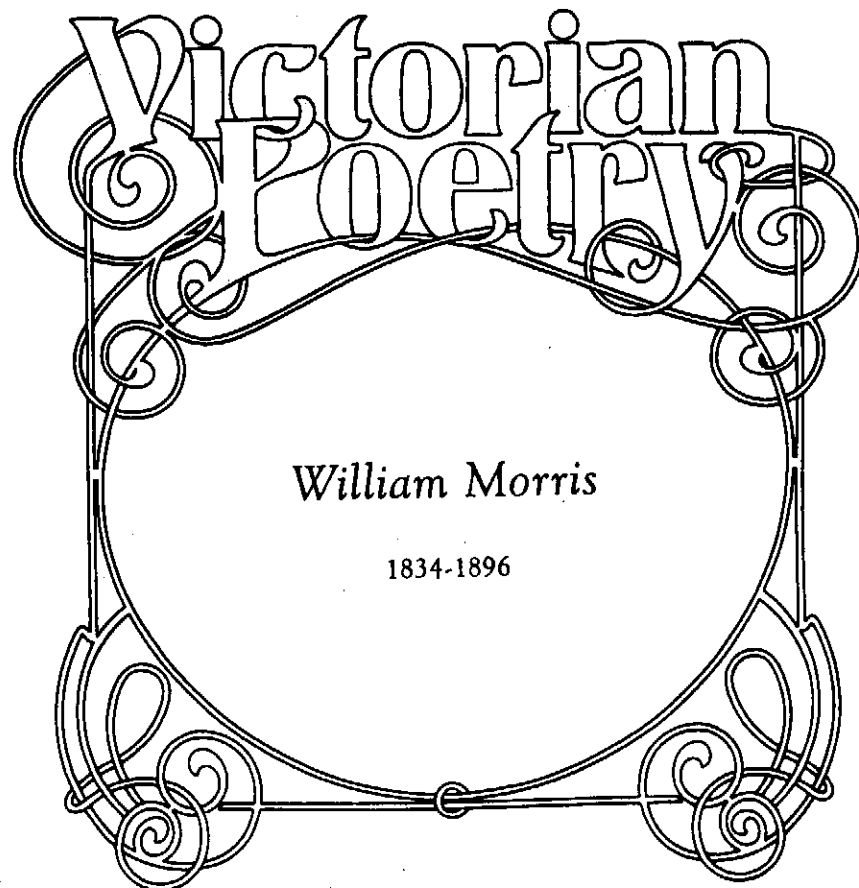
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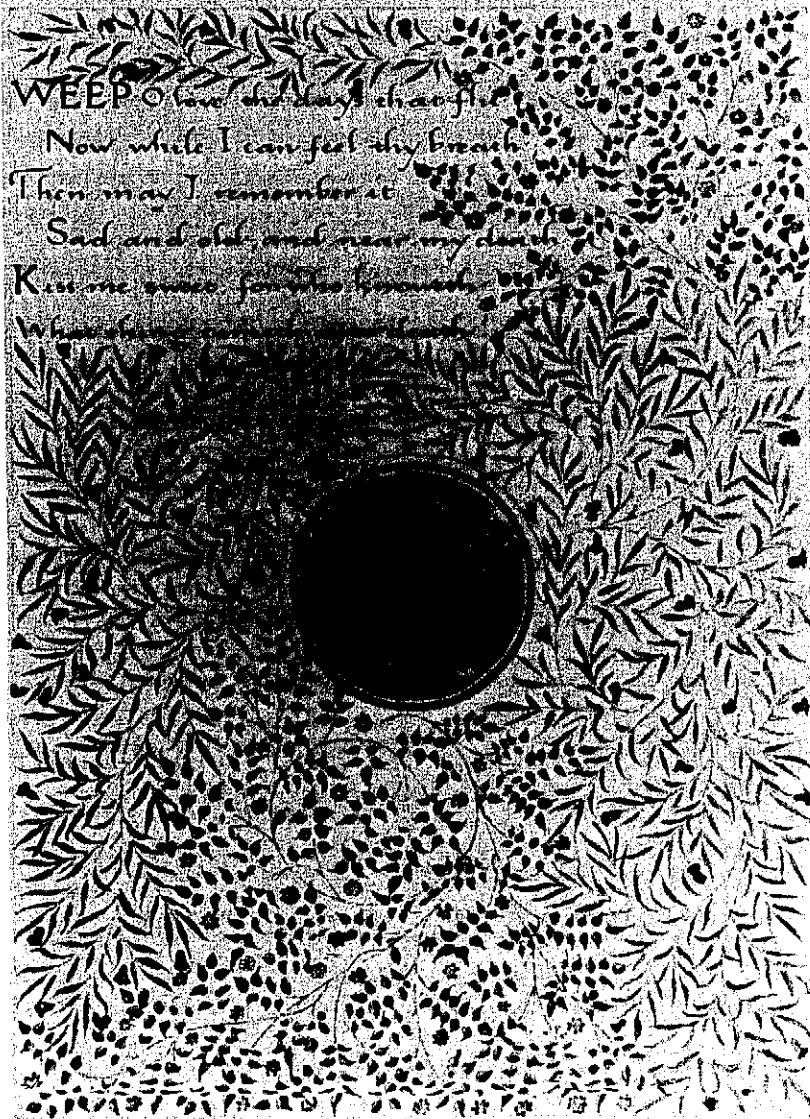
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LOVE AND DEATH



The Male as Lover, Fool, and Hero : "Goldilocks" and the Late Prose Romances

PETER FAULKNER

MORRIS' LAST VOLUME OF POETRY, *POEMS BY THE WAY*, HAS ATTRACTED FAR less critical attention than his earlier poems. David Latham's recent edition for the Thoemmes Press may, I hope, encourage further attention to this eclectic volume which represents so many aspects of Morris: the late Romantic, the Northern enthusiast, the supplier of verses for tapestries, the Socialist, and the romancer. "Goldilocks and Goldilocks" was the only poem written explicitly for the volume, and in circumstances that have made for what Latham calls "trifling and misleading commentary."¹ May Morris reproduced Emery Walker's story that the poem merely "dropped off the end of his pen" to fill up a volume that would otherwise have been too short to offer for sale from his recently established press (*CW*, 9:xxxvi). Latham has convincingly shown that this account is greatly exaggerated. On May 20, 1891, Morris wrote to Georgiana Burne-Jones: "I am writing a short narrative poem to top up my new book with. My wig! but it is garrulous: I can't help it, the short lines and my old recollections lead me on."² But printing of the volume did not begin until July, and two long drafts of the poem survive, so that, as Latham argues, "the myth of the scribbled poem should be put to rest."³

The poem was referred to favorably by Richard Garnett in his 1892 review as "a lovely picture of the innocence of the young world when all the iniquity was concentrated among witches and dragons."⁴ But most subsequent commentators have ignored it—perhaps put off by what may seem its whimsical title. It is paradoxical that Roderick Marshall, who considered it "a rather silly little poem,"⁵ should nevertheless have written perceptively about it. He notes its relation to the prose romances on which Morris had just embarked, finding in the poem the "first adumbration of what became a favourite romance pattern . . . a tug-of-war between a tall witch and a small enchantress" (p. 284). I will discuss later the accuracy of these descriptions, but for the present note Marshall's suggestion that *The Wood Beyond the World* (which was to be published in 1894) is "a mature 'Goldilocks and Goldilocks' in prose" (p. 283). What is certain is that the most useful descriptions of the general atmosphere and mode of the poem are to be found in critical characterizations of the prose romances which Morris was going on to write for the rest of his life. The

relation between these romances and Morris' socialism has generated a good deal of controversy, but it seems to me that Amanda Hodgson has described the relation accurately: for the later Morris, she wrote, "romance [was] a sustaining force, a necessary adjunct to his political commitment, because only romance could adequately capture the quality of hope."⁶

This emphasis on "the quality of hope" provides the best introduction to the spirit of the poem. The short lines—which Morris suggested in his letter "led him on"—are brisk four-foot couplets, basically iambic but speeded up with anapaests to give a free-flowing narrative energy. Their simplicity—associating itself readily with the Old English-based diction familiar throughout the later writings—is part of the relaxed mood of the poem, which takes us rapidly into its own world in the way that Fiona MacCarthy has recently remarked to be characteristic of the prose romances: they "remove the reader from reality into the curiously convincing detail of their imagined worlds. These are essays in a new country, out of place and out of time, pervaded by an extreme eroticism. They are stories that end in the fulfilment of desire."⁷ But like all such stories, if they are to have any force, that fulfilment must be delayed; and it is the pattern of promise, delay, and fulfilment characteristic of the quest romance that we find in "Goldilocks." Discussion will therefore fall into three sections, with the male character taking on a different role in each.

In the first, the Goldilocks leaves his pastoral home at harvest time in his "scarlet gear" and with a "sharp sword" by his side; he will seek adventure—and self-knowledge—in "the wide world," called upon by his sisters to return with "a tale for men to tell." We are already taken into the pattern of the quest-romance, and are not surprised when the hero, having left the productive "land of the wheaten shocks" [i.e., sheaves of wheat], comes to a "wild-wood dark and drear." After six dismal days which leave him hungry and comfortless, he meets "a maiden face to face":

Face to face, and so close was she
That their lips met soft and lovingly.

Sweet-mouthed she was, and fair he wist;
And again in the darksome wood they kissed.

The immediate sensuous response suggesting that the two are, as it were, made for each other (like characters in any comedic structure) is confirmed by the coincidence of their names:

"O thou fair man with the golden head,
What is the name of thee?" she said.

"My name is Goldilocks," said he;
"O sweet-breathed, what is the name of thee?"

"O Goldilocks the Swain," she said,
"My name is Goldilocks the Maid."

He spake, "Love me as I love thee,
And Goldilocks one flesh shall be."

At this point life seem disconcertingly simple. The shared name of the couple, and their aura of Aryan glamor, promises a unity and happiness which the Swain has done little to earn. We know less about the Maid, but discover her to be in poorer straits:

In all the world was never maid
So fair, so evilly arrayed.

Nevertheless, she has apples and "cakes of woodland bread" with which she feeds the Swain, and she gives him "water from the well"—all symbolic of simple pastoral life. As they embrace, the Swain "felt her body dear and kind": the mood is erotic and confident. But of course there are to be difficulties: fulfilment must be deferred and earned. The Swain asks to be led further into the wood, which he deems "dear and good." The Maid, however, lives in it in the demanding service of "a hard-handed cruel crone." Reassured by the arrival of the Swain, she takes him toward her mistress' dwelling, confident in her new-found love and keen to confront the crone:

"this hour the crone shall know
That thou art come, her very foe."

Here the first, comedic, section of the poem closes. Goldilocks has become a lover; the future seems assured. But the crone is not to be easily defeated.

The second section begins with the pair lying beneath a bush and looking out towards the mistress' domain. Then occurs a strange proleptic passage. The Maid asks the Swain what he can see, but it is she who actually names a series of sights: "a white bear of the North," "a worm of the South," "a whelming poison-pool," "a wild-fire flash." It is not clear whether the Swain also sees these sights (it is more likely that the Maid has a capacity for second sight denied to the more limited Swain), but he confidently announces methods of dealing with each problem that we are to see enacted later in the poem. Maybe he is over-confident, for he is about to face—and fail—an immediate challenge. When the Maid now asks him what he can see descending the "stone-wrought stair / That leadeth up to the castle fair," it is not, apparently a crone, but a beautiful woman:

"Is she not foul beneath her weed?"

"O nay, nay! But most wondrous fair
Of all the women earth doth bear."

The Maid realizes at these words that she and the Swain are drifting apart. But worse is to come, and with dramatic rapidity:

But up he sprang from the bramble-side,
And "O thou fairest one!" he cried.

And forth he ran that Queen to meet,
And fell before her gold-clad feet.

About his neck her arms she cast,
And into the fair-built house they passed.

And under the bramble-bushes lay
Unholpen, Goldilocks the may.

Unholpen indeed! The male has betrayed her without a backward glance, overcome by the magical glamor that has transformed the ugly crone into a beautiful Queen. (Just before, it was the Maid who had led him "from the sun-lit green" toward the castle, "Going sweet-stately as a queen.") He is totally enraptured by the artificial beauty symbolized by her "gold-clad feet" and perhaps even her "fair-built house," in which he finds himself a privileged guest, but also a kind of prisoner:

Cold was his heart, and all afraid
To think on Goldilocks the Maid.

He is evidently paying for his betrayal of "natural" love (the reader may well think this only reasonable). Nevertheless, he remains with the "gay and gallant company" of the castle, a fool unable to distance himself from his infatuation. The poem becomes increasingly dramatic as we find him about to marry the "Queen."

As the company sit "at the board" in the morning awaiting the wedding, darkness mysteriously falls and leads to confusion and anger among those present. The Queen manages to enforce her authority, but in so doing speaks in a voice "like an unoiled wheel at work" and denounces her guests, proleptically as it turns out, as "routing swine," thus revealing an unpleasant aspect of herself so far concealed from the Swain (and the reader). Suddenly a woman's voice is heard offering to bring back the light, on condition that she shall be allowed to sit between the Queen and the bridegroom, to "eat of his dish and drink of his cup / Until for the bride-bed ye rise up." The Queen has to accept these conditions from a being whom she recognizes as the Maid, and whom she addresses as "thou Angel's child": presumably she knows about the Maid's origins, which are not otherwise disclosed. The Queen is also forced to swear on oath to let the Maid go free, and has to do so in grotesquely self-revealing terms:

"Thou shalt swear by the one eye left in thine head,
And the throng of the ghosts of the evil dead."

By contrast with this symbolic ugliness, the Maid is asserting the rival values of natural goodness. Now the light is returned, the Queen recovers her equanimity, and the guests become courteous again. But Goldilocks the Swain experiences a dream, of "a grassy place" and the Maid dressed in "a gown of green" and wreathed in "blossoms of summer-tide," representative of the world that he is foolishly on the point of renouncing for worldly glamor and sexual allure.

However, the Maid has her magical resources too. As she sits by him, she speaks to the Swain of their past love, reminding him also of his home-land of "the wheaten shocks" and of his mother and sisters who are awaiting his return. As the Swain remains unmoved, she produces from a basket a pair of doves, which enact a symbolic drama: the female bird feeds the male with the spice-loaf the Maid offers her, but when the female bird wants the same, the male drives her away. The Swain at last sees the significance of this (he would have to be obtuse not to do so) and is delivered from his own foolishness. The two Goldilocks embrace, and everything around them suddenly changes: the poetry conveys this with a good deal of vigor:

The fair Queen into a troll was grown,
A one-eyed, bow-backed, haggard crone,

And though the hall was yet full fair,
And bright the sunshine streamed in there,

On evil shapes it fell forsooth:
Swine-heads; small red eyes void of ruth;

And bare-boned bodies of vile things,
And evil-feathered bat-felled wings.

And all these mopped and mowed and grinned,
And sent strange noises down the wind.

Morris has retained the power to render the grotesquely threatening so obvious in an early work like "Lindenberg Pool." This is the crisis of the story. The Queen/crone approaches the two with a cup seething with "some dreadful drink," but the Swain draws his sword:

Then Goldilocks cried out and smote
And the sharp blade sheared the evil throat.

The head fell noseling to the floor.

This has some of the quality of early poems, like "The Haystack in the Floods," the disturbing power here focused in the vivid word "noseling." The liquor pours from the cup and runs toward the Goldilocks in "a sparkling flame," but

does not quite reach them, and they flee together "down the stony stairway" and out into the natural world.

Now the Swain has found his heroic qualities. In the last section of the poem he continues to exhibit them as the lovers are confronted by a number of challenges, which had been foreshadowed in the Maid's visions as the pair had looked toward the castle. First they meet the "snow-white ice-bear of the North" whose "grisly head" Goldilocks the Swain soon "reaps" with his sword. Next, the "Dragon of the South" appears, and another powerfully rendered fight ends in the creature's death:

And the hot blood ran from the hairy throat,
And set the summer grass afloat.

Morris' temperament had nothing in it of the passive or pacific, and these heroic feats are narrated with force and conviction. But the succeeding challenges to the lovers are more complex and demanding. They reach what the Maid recognizes as a "whelming poison-pool," and she exclaims:

"And now availeth nought the blade:
O if my cherished trees might aid!"

This challenge is not to be met with simple male heroism. Although the Maid at first feels overwhelmed, she recovers to play her part in their survival. As the flood approaches, she embraces "a great oak," and invokes its natural/supernatural power to help her:

She crouched beside the upheaved root,
The bubbling venom touched her foot;

Then with a sucking gasping sound
It ebbed back o'er the blighted ground.

The Maid is rewarded for having previously saved the "lovely tree" from "axe and saw"; the nature which she respects can help the lovers to survive in a scene which, for the modern reader, can hardly fail to be emblematic of our environmental concerns.⁸ Still there remain challenges to be met. A "flickering fire-flaught" (flash of fire) gleams on the boughs of the trees. The sword, once again, cannot help; but on this occasion, prayer can. The Swain invokes "Hallows All," "Mother," and "true St. Nicholas," and the "wild-fire waned and paled": here, unusually in Morris, Christianity proves a positive force—although it is evoked in rather vague terms which tend to ally it rather with nature-worship than with orthodoxy.

Now night has really fallen, and the Swain thinks that "won is all our fight." But the Maid is more perceptive. She is very tired now, and must sleep. She tells the Swain that he must carry her the rest of the way, and on no account put her sleeping body on the ground, whatever pitiful sights he may see. This is evidently

to be the final trial and it is directed to the Swain's ability to withstand approaches to his own good nature: the suggestion is that the psychological weakness that led him to submit himself to the Queen may still be at work in him. Can he act on the Maid's advice, or will his human sympathies betray him? The positive movement of the narrative at this point suggest the former, and he survives these last two challenges. First he hears a woman's voice claiming that she has been "bound and left / To perish; of all help bereft"; he ignores her. Finally, as the wood grows lighter, he hears shrieks and cries, and sees a "woman bare of breast and limb" whom he is tempted to help. A little later she reappears, pursued by a man brandishing a sword, sobbing and beseeching Goldilocks' aid. Again the scene is vividly described as the Swain struggles with his impulse to help:

Doubted the swain, and a while did stand
As she took his coat-lap in her hand
.....
Sleek was her arm on his scarlet coat,
The sobbing passion rose in his throat.

But e'en therewith he looked aside
And saw the face of the sleeping bride.

Then he tore his coat from the woman's hand,
And never a moment there did stand.

But swiftly thence away he strode
Along the dusky forest road.

He hears "laughter shrill" from what the reader may assume to be the female figure whose appeal to his sympathies was emblematic of his attraction to false ideals. This is the last challenge. Although the lovers are still in the darkness of "the tangled wood," they can be confident. The Maid states:

"For overcome is every foe
And home tomorrow shall we go."

The home she has in mind is necessarily that of the Swain, since she has none of her own. As the Swain looks at her, he realizes that the fine clothes she had worn at the wedding feast have disappeared, and she is dressed in the tattered fashion in which he first met her. She explains that the "garments gay" had been connected with "the false Queen" and that she had had to wear them until the Swain's "truth and troth was proved," as now it is:

"And this tattered coat is now for a sign
That thou hast won me to be thine."

(It also enables the Swain to see the "shining shoulder," the "sleek sweet arms," and the "naked feet" that recall their first meeting, with such erotic force as to lead the Maid to blush.) The lovers are perfectly united, and it is the Maid

who announces their next move:

"Now wilt thou lead along thy maid
To meet thy kindred unafraid."

There is indeed no need for fear, because the two are so evidently well matched, even if the image of falcon and dove, used to describe their kissing, may seem to introduce an inappropriately violent note. At all events, they move on together:

Then hand in hand they went their way
Till the wood grew light with the outer day.

If we recall Adam and Eve leaving Paradise here, the effect is one of reassuring contrast, and of equality (as it arguably is in Milton too at that point).

Now the lovers head for "the Upland Acres good." The Swain makes sandals for the Maid, then dresses her in "wreaths" of beech and woodbine and gives her a crown of poppies. She happily accepts this treatment as transforming her into "the Woodland Child," and is led to recall her origins, so far shrouded in mystery:

"Most meet and right meseems it now
That I am clad with the woodland bough.

For betwixt the oak-tree and the thorn
Meseemeth erewhile was I born.

And if my mother aught I knew,
It was of the woodland folk she grew.

And O that thou art well at ease
To wed the daughter of the trees!"

(The reader may well be reminded here of other poems in the volume celebrating female nature spirits, especially in the charming lyrics for tapestries, "Pomona" and "Flora.") The male is still the figure of action and worldliness, but he can be redeemed by association with the (super)natural values embodied here in the female. So now the couple pass through the "wheaten shocks" of another harvest and approach the town. Goldilocks the Swain is recognized and welcomed as they approach "the Fathers' House." If we see no actual fathers in the poem, they are present as having created the social order to which the couple are now returning. The couple approach the farm appropriately riding on a wagon laden with wheat.

The end has elements of surprise. Goldilocks' mother is now "old and hoar," and his sisters, no longer children, are now "meet for a young man's may." The mother asks Goldilocks about his deeds—symbols of heroism—and does not seem impressed by his claim that he has "wooed me a wife in the

forest wild" whom he is now bringing home, which she describes as a "little deed" to have accomplished in the long period of his absence. Goldilocks insists that it is still summer, and talks of his killing of "an Evil Thing"—presumably the Queen (and his own foolishness)—which impresses her more. Still, she insists that he has been away for a long time—her hair has grown from grey to white in the interval and his sisters have grown tall. Several years have obviously passed. This is actually consistent with Goldilocks' statement at the beginning of the poem that many seasons would pass before his return. References to "autumn drought," "winter rain," "The forest and the snow, and St. David's wind" recur, giving a sense of pattern and inevitability to the narrative. There is a suggestion that Goldilocks and Goldilocks have been living in a world of mythical time and are now returning to real time.

Goldilocks now comes down from the wagon:

And there beside his love he stood
And he saw her body sweet and good.

The sensuousness is direct and attractive, presented as natural. The poem concludes with the Swain's words, referring briefly to the past and mainly to the future, and so on a positive note:

"The years are gone as a tale gone past.

But many the years that yet shall be
Of the merry tale of thee and me.

Come, love, and look on the Fathers' Hall,
And the folk of the kindred one and all!

For now the Fathers' House is kind,
And all the ill is left behind.

And Goldilocks and Goldilocks
Shall dwell in the land of the Wheaten Shocks."

Here we have the fulfilment of desire for individuals, indeed, but placed in a social context which promises the healthful continuation of the lives of the community.

When he left home, his sister had told Goldilocks to "Come back with a tale for men to tell!" The tale that can now be told is, of course, the one he has lived, not one he has made up. Similarly, the life that Goldilocks and Goldilocks will live together will be a "merry tale of thee and me." Stories, for Morris, are humanly valuable because they are part of the fabric of our lives; in and through them, we make ourselves. Goldilocks has made something of his life in a way that justifies his original departure. But it is notable that, although he has passed through a foolish passion to a true love through heroic deeds, he strikes the

reader still as lacking the force of the two female characters who dominate his life. Between the artifices of the femme fatale and the natural power of the Maid, Goldilocks the Swain remains, for all his good looks and confidence, a curiously subdued figure, saved from thralldom to the Queen to become the happily obedient servant of the dove-like but authoritative Maid. In this, the relationship in the poem differs from those in the prose romances, which share the same pastoral eroticism and regard for environmental and human sanity, but reach in different ways toward the rendering of a relationship of more convincing equality between hero and heroine.

Morris, we noted earlier, found the poem lengthening under his pen because "my old recollections led me on." What can these recollections have been, in a poem which seems a long way from autobiography? We have already glanced at Roderick Marshall's view that the poem and the romances should be read as Morris' "therapeutic dreaming," in which we can see the "reordering of his life brought about by a tug-of-war between a tall witch and a small enchantress," representing, for Marshall, Jane and Georgiana respectively (pp. 284, 281). But the mode of the narrative is so far away from literary realism that such a reading seems forced. Moreover, the poem lays little stress on the appearance of the characters, and to see the Maid as an enchantress would undermine the whole significance of the contrast with the Queen/witch. Rather than being autobiographical, the "old recollections" surely have more to do with Morris' extensive readings in all forms of romance. His extraordinary wide-ranging knowledge of stories from numerous cultures, particularly but by no means exclusively medieval—we might look anywhere between Homer and Bunyan—is what enables him effortlessly to create convincing varieties of character within the clearly defined limits of a genre that does not involve psychological complexity. It is pointless for the critic to seek specific precedents for the characters and situations described, for they are not, as Carole Silver has argued of the prose romances, "derived from any specific source."⁹ They are Morris' distillation of the mood and spirit of the quest romance itself.

Even Goldilocks himself (herself) refuses easy identification. The name is known to English readers through the fairy story, in which Goldilocks is a girl associated with three anthropomorphic bears. The story is known only in the early nineteenth century, and in the first version the human protagonist is not a little girl but an interfering old woman. Later she became a little girl called Silver-hair, then Silver Locks; in "1889 she became Little Golden-Hair, and very shortly after that, if not before, she took final shape as Goldilocks," according to K. M. Briggs.¹⁰ It seems unlikely that this is the origin of Morris' name. His characters belong to a very different world. In their case the golden locks link them to Max Müller's solar heroes, and to such figures as the Wood-Sun in *The House of the Wolfings*, the Sunbeam in *The Roots of the Mountains*, and Golden Walter in *The Wood Beyond the World* (two female and one male, it may be noted).

Morris draws on the myth that associates heroic power with the sun, but denies it the exclusively male identification that it has in Müller. His aim is to raise the reader's sense of human potential, both male and female, and to emphasize mutuality. The identity of names serves the same function as the symbol of the intertwined sword and bough in *The Well at the World's End*, to indicate essential reciprocity, not to cancel individuality. For the success of the poem—for it is a success, and deserves to be better known as we move away from the restrictive norms of poetic excellence asserted by Modernism—lies in a humanistic vision. For the Morris of the poem as well as of the romances, as Barbara Bono has well said, "the source of all this abundant life is at heart not some transcendent force, but a natural, albeit wondrous, one: the paradigmatic wedding of man and woman, creating a unity out of doubleness and thus the central metaphor for societal and cosmic harmony."¹¹ In so far as "Goldilocks and Goldilocks" moves the reader toward such an experience of harmony, it shows how, in a mature imagination like that of Morris in 1891, what "drops off the end of a pen" can be informed with energy and wisdom.

Notes

- 1 William Morris, *Poems by the Way*, ed. David Latham (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994), introduction, p. xxxi. Quotations in this essay are taken from this edition, pp. 225-248.
- 2 J. W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris* (1899; London: Longmans, 1922), 2:270.
- 3 Latham, p. xxxiii. His suggestion (p. xxxiv) that what "the prose romances most resemble . . . is his fairy tale of 'Goldilocks and Goldilocks'" is developed in this essay.
- 4 Peter Faulkner, ed., *William Morris: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 358.
- 5 Roderick Marshall, *William Morris and His Earthly Paradise* (Tisbury: Compton Press, 1979), p. 283.
- 6 Amanda Hodgson, *The Romances of William Morris* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), p. 156.
- 7 Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Times* (New York: Knopf, 1995), p. 634.
- 8 A similar point was made as early as 1903 by W. B. Yeats in his fine essay "The Happiest of the Poets" where he writes of Morris that "it was his work to make us, who had been taught to sympathise with the unhappy till we had grown morbid, to sympathise with men and women who turned everything into happiness because they had in them something of the abundance of the beechen boughs or of the bursting wheat-ear" (*Essays* [London: Macmillan, 1924], pp. 67-68).
- 9 Carole Silver, "Myth and Ritual in the Last Romances of William Morris," in Frederick Kirchoff, ed., *Studies in the Late Romances of William Morris* (New York: William Morris Society, 1976), p. 128.
- 10 K. M. Briggs, ed., *British Folk Tales* (London: Routledge, 1970), Part A, vol. 2, p. 566.

- 11 Barbara J. Bono, "The Prose Fictions of William Morris: A Study in the Literary Aesthetic of a Victorian Social Reformer," VP 13, nos. 3-4 (1975): 51-52.

Morris, the 1890s, and the Problematic Autonomy of Art

NORMAN KELVIN

I RECENTLY LOOKED AGAIN AT HOLBROOK JACKSON'S *THE EIGHTEEN NINETIES*, published in 1913. What I found particularly interesting was the index. It contains about a thousand names of people, movements, journals; and the number of citations for any one name ranges from just one enough to require seven lines. In first place—with indeed seven lines—not surprisingly, Oscar Wilde. In second, again no surprise, is Aubrey Beardsley. But after that, there is surprise. Tied for third place—with approximately the same number of citations each—are *The Yellow Book*, Max Beerbohm, and William Morris. After them come such also-rans, as important figures of the 1890s, as Whistler, W. B. Yeats, Bernard Shaw, and Walter Pater. All the other names that might occur to you dwindle out of the competition altogether.

I cite these statistics with the obvious inference that a major interpretative historian in 1913 clearly regarded Morris as a man and maker of the 1890s (Jackson's text fulfills the promise of the index); and though in our own fin de siècle Morris-and-the-1890s is beginning to get some attention again, the books about Morris published in the 1960s through 1980s (and constructing a post-1945 Morris) do not emphasize his role in the formation of the 1890s, do not give the subject anything like the treatment Jackson's overview of the decade suggests it deserves. Though critics and scholars have shown a great deal of interest in Morris' lifelong career as poet, socialist, designer, writer of prose romances, and (for the 1890s) founder of the Kelmscott Press and fine studies have resulted, they have shown less interest in locating Morris' activities in the larger but specific cultural context of the fin de siècle; and have made less effort to see Morris synchronously with other figures who shaped the decade.

I do not quarrel with the books about Morris that have been written. They have made available important discoveries, have emphasized needed approaches and have demonstrated great scholarship, from E. P. Thompson's *Romantic to Revolutionary* to Carole Silver's *The Romance of William Morris* and Florence Boos's *The Design of the Earthly Paradise* to William S. Peterson's *History of the Kelmscott Press* (which does indeed enlarge our sense of the 1890s in its later pages) and, finally, Fiona MacCarthy's splendid *William Morris: A Life for Our Times*, which though it contributes strongly to our awareness of Morris in the