

*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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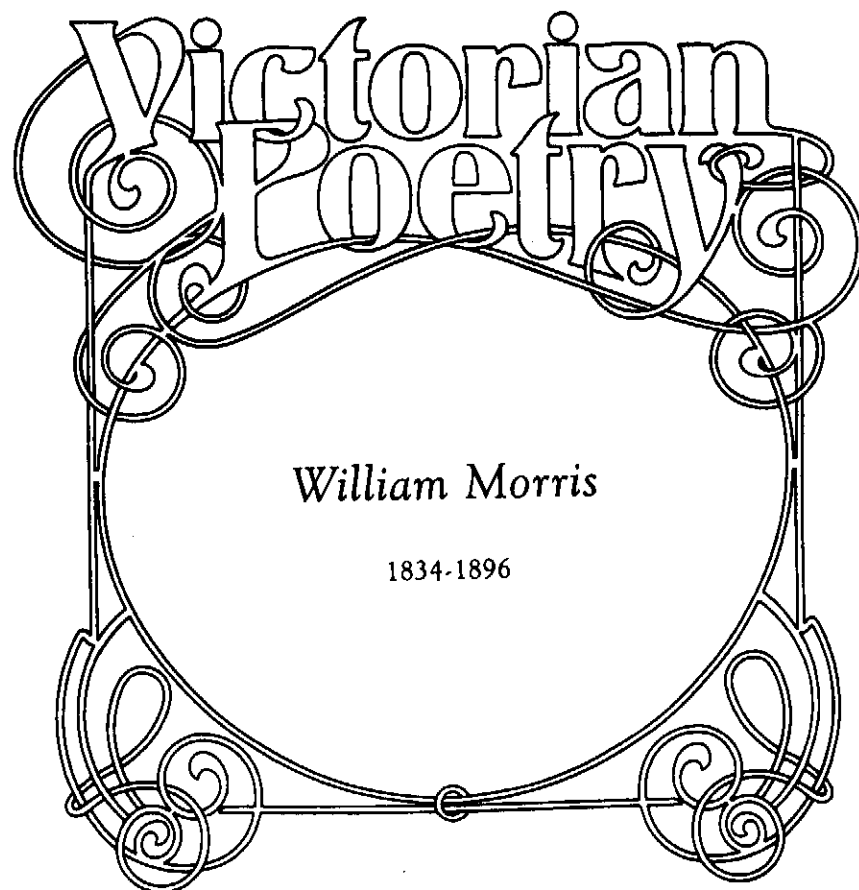
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Florence S. Boos  
Guest Editor

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## TO THE MUSE OF THE NORTH

**THOU** who sayest the sad northern song  
 Thy right hand full of smiting and of wrong  
 Thy left hand holding pity, and thy breast  
 Heaving with heave of that so certain rest,  
 Thou with the grey eyes hard and unafraid,  
 The soft lips trembling not that they have said  
 The doom of the World, and those that dwell therein,  
 The lips that smile not though thy children ween  
 The fated Love, that earns the fated Death,  
 Borne down the balmy freshness of thy breath,  
 Let some word reach my ears and touch my heart,  
 That, if it may be, I may have a part  
 In that sweet sorrow of thy children dead  
 That smote the soul, and bowed adown the head,  
 Whittened the hair, made Life an eager dream,  
 And Death the murmuring of a peaceful stream,  
 Without a blemish on those souls of thine  
 Whose fairness through the dim World yet doth shine,  
 Mother and Love and Sister all in one,  
 Come thou, for am I not enough alone  
 That thou thine arms about my heart shouldst throw  
 And wrap me in the griefs of Long Ago?

## The Summation of a Poetic Career: *Poems by the Way*

KEN GOODWIN

**BY THE WAY** MIGHT SEEM A RATHER OFF-HANDED TITLE, BUT IT REFERS TO A volume in which the contents are carefully selected and arranged. *Poems by the Way* might suggest also that the contents were peripheral to the main purpose of William Morris' journey through life, but Morris always protected himself against criticism of his verse by an expression of the relative insignificance of anything that came easily and an expression of diffidence at the value of the result. "By the Way" in this usage is, in fact, best understood as representing a continuous poetic commentary on Morris' personal and political development.

Morris' last volume of verse suggests, through its selection and to some extent its arrangement, a very careful attempt to present the author's view of the balance of his life's interests. It is a volume that indicates a review and revision of his career in all its aspects, including that of being a writer of short poems. The contents were drawn from some thirty years of endeavor: poems already published in journals, others preserved in unpublished manuscripts, and a few written in the year or so preceding publication. Charles Fairfax Murray, who had earlier helped illustrate some of Morris' calligraphic manuscripts and who had obtained Roman vellum for them, owned several holograph manuscripts of poems and had also kept a checklist of poems appearing in magazines. He was indispensable to the task of bringing the available poems together so that Morris could make the final selection.

*Poems by the Way* is not a collection of leftovers or previously rejected work. It is a first and final gathering of Morris' short poems from a few years after the date of his only other such collection, *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858). In a poetic life largely devoted to long narrative poems, he began and ended his career as a published poet with two collections of short works, lyrical, narrative, and meditative. *Guenevere* collects the first works that he considered publishable. His last volume of poetry, *Poems by the Way*, represents a retrospective view of almost his entire career in the short poem. While *The Defence of Guenevere* represents very well the matrix of his interests in the life, warfare, and love of the medieval period, *Poems by the Way* contains much material that goes beyond romantic yearning into a review of the actual romantic achievements and disappointments of his own life.

Morris took even more care with the selection and production of *Poems by the Way* than he had with *The Defence of Guenevere*. By this time, of course, he had almost total control over the processes of book production through the Kelmscott Press. His selection of his own hand-press as the medium of production indicates the value he placed on the collection. The volume was conceived as the second book to be issued (in 1891) from the Kelmscott Press. Collection and selection began in May 1891, printing (in red and black) began in July, and the volume, a small quarto with 196 pages of text set in the Golden type, was published by Reeves & Turner nominally on September 24, 1891 (according to the colophon) but actually on October 20. A trade edition, also published by Reeves & Turner, was issued in December.

The fifty-five poems in the volume extend in date of composition from 1861 to 1891. Chronologically they fall into two groups, the first beginning with "The God of the Poor" and finishing with "Echoes of Love's House" (written on March 10, 1873), the second beginning with the first of the "Chants for Socialists" (first published in March 1884) and ending with the one poem specifically written to fill out the Kelmscott Press edition of *Poems by the Way*, "Goldilocks and Goldilocks" (written in May 1891). Thirty poems fall into the first group, twenty-five into the second.

### 1 The earlier group

In the first group, most poems can be placed in one of three sets: a set associated with *The Earthly Paradise*, including some poems actually printed there; a set of love lyrics and narratives written at the end of *The Earthly Paradise* period and in the couple of years following; and a set drawn from Morris' study of the literature of the north, including a number of translations from Icelandic and Danish.

#### 1a *The Earthly Paradise* set

*The Earthly Paradise* set begins with "The God of the Poor." This ballad, because of its mood of foreboding and cruelty, forms a link to the style of the short poems in Morris' first volume, *The Defence of Guenevere*. Its connection with *The Earthly Paradise* is solely chronological: it was written about 1861, when the first Prologue was in hand. Morris revised it some years later, but without deleting its *Defence of Guenevere* qualities; it was published in the *Fortnightly Review* for August 1, 1868 (n.s. 4 [o.s. 10]: 139-145).

"A Garden by the Sea," the lyric beginning "I know a little garden-close, / Set thick with lily and red rose," is more closely related to the style of *The Earthly Paradise*. It is the beguiling song sung by the nymph to Hylas in

Book 4 of *The Life and Death of Jason*. Morris' affection for it is indicated by the fact that he later included it in the calligraphic volume, *A Book of Verse*, written and illuminated as a gesture of fondness—and probably love—for his friend and confidante, Georgiana Burne-Jones. The mood and some of the imagery resemble those of Yeats's "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," though Morris' poem avoids both the oddly energetic quality and the sentimentality of Yeats's.

Two poems in this group come from *The Story of Orpheus and Eurydice*, a tale excluded from the published version of *The Earthly Paradise*. One is "Meeting in Winter" which, like "A Garden by the Sea," expresses a yearning for reunion in love and for peace; it too was included in *A Book of Verse*. The other is "From the Upland to the Sea," which expresses a rare undeviating expectation of spring-filled bliss. Both are sung by Orpheus during his return from the underworld (CW, 24:269-270, 271-272). By placing the joyous, hopeful song, "From the Upland to the Sea," at the beginning of *Poems by the Way* Morris was, I believe, indicating that politically (and perhaps personally) a mood of hope and expectation now represented more accurately his own outlook on life. *The Earthly Paradise* had been permeated by a rather fatalistic expectation of constant change in the inexorable turning of the wheel of fortune. That outlook had now been replaced by a greater commitment to the more serene and joyous aspects fleetingly expressed in *The Earthly Paradise*.

The remaining song from *The Earthly Paradise* is "The Two Sides of the River," an expanded version of a song intended for *The Man Who Never Laughed Again*, but not used there.<sup>1</sup> It has additional significance in being the first of the poems in Georgiana Burne-Jones's *A Book of Verse*, where its expression of hopeful striving to be together, weariness with all that day or night bring when lovers are apart, and final reunion (in the last stanza: "How hard it was, O love, to be alone") may be thought to bear a biographical origin.

#### 1b Other love lyrics and narratives

This set of poems contains four more poems included in *A Book of Verse*: "Love Fulfilled," "Error and Loss," "Hope Dieth: Love Liveth," and "The End of May" (in *A Book of Verse* as "Birth of June"). All are poems of despair in love, sometimes bitter, sometimes muted; all may be derived from Morris' realization that his wife, Jane Morris, did not reciprocate his love and Georgiana could not fully respond to it. "Love Fulfilled," despite its apparently joyous title, is the most chilling of all, for it describes a love that has attained union but abandoned hope of any strengthening of the relationship beyond the stage where

Thou shalt wake and think it sweet  
That thy love is near and kind.  
Sweeter still for lips to meet;  
Sweetest that thine heart doth hide

Longing all unsatisfied  
 With all longing's answering  
 Howsoever close ye cling.

It is a state where, to use the summary with which the poem ends,

Now unrest, pain, bliss are one,  
 Love, unhidden and alone.

"Error and Loss" is an account of how those who truly love and seek each other fail to meet in the "dark wood" at night. Their love has been frustrated by the falseness of the world; they have been "Blinded by blindness of the world untrue, / That hideth love, and maketh wrong of right." It might well be an allegory of how Morris and Georgiana Burne-Jones had failed to find each other.

"Hope Dieth: Love Liveth" seems to be directly addressed to her. Its title, its tolling of "hope" and "dead" at the end of every quatrain, and its final line, "Love dieth not, though hope is dead!" may well sum up Morris' feelings about their relationship. The poem consists of two parts, an address of a separated lover to his beloved and his imagining of her reply. The opening comes close to exposing the domestic situation of Georgiana, married to a husband who was philandering and contemplating elopement with Mrs. Mary Zambaco.<sup>3</sup> Morris writes:

Strong are thine arms, O love, & strong  
 Thine heart to live, and love, and long;  
 But thou art wed to grief and wrong.

He has the lover advise the beloved to

Dream in the dawn I come to thee  
 Weeping for things that may not be!  
 Dream that thou layest lips on me!  
 Wake, wake to clasp hope's body dead!

And he imagines her reply as ending with the words

Behold with lack of happiness  
 The master, Love, our hearts did bless  
 Lest we should think of him the less:  
 Love dieth not, though hope is dead!

In lyrics such as this Morris organizes his material rhetorically rather than logically. Whatever the apparent dramatic form, he as speaker states his position at the beginning and reiterates it through the poem (generally in more than one voice), as if trying to convince himself of it emotionally. Somehow the process is successful: the material used for verification has a cumulative effect, so that whereas the initial statement may seem over-assertive, empty, or spuriously didactic, the final bold and dramatic re-statement seems justified and

convincing.

With these poems that appear in *A Book of Verse* a number of others from *Poems by the Way* can be associated. "On the Edge of the Wilderness" (published in *The Fortnightly Review* n.s. 5 [o.s. 11] April 1, 1869: 391-395) is another antiphonal poem like "The Two Sides of the River." It argues the case for suicide in order to secure life with the departed loved one, or at least a cessation of pain, but ultimately rejects it. The next poem in *Poems by the Way*, "A Garden by the Sea," arrives at the opposite conclusion.

Other poems in this set, "Pain and Time Strive Not," "Love's Gleaning-tide," "Spring's Bedfellow," and "Echoes of Love's House," reflect similar antiphonally expressed propositions about the joy and pain of love.

From the same period as these lyrics there are several narrative poems (from non-Icelandic and non-Danish sources): "The Burghers' Battle," "Love's Reward," "[Of the] Three Seekers," and "The Raven and the King's Daughter." "Love's Reward" is dated by Morris, on the copy marked for the printer, "Kelmescott April 21st 1871." It must have been written on Morris' first visit to view Kelmescott Manor, the house that he was to love so much during the next twenty-five years. The poem reverts to his early obsessional theme of two men in love with the same woman. As is quite usual in his handling of this theme, one lover behaves selflessly. He is "a knight of the southern land" who, although in love with the beautiful but sorrowful maiden he encounters, escorts her through many dangers to a reunion with her dead lover. He knows, and is quite content in the knowledge, that his only reward will be a kiss from lips that do not love him and a grave shared with his beloved.

"Of the Three Seekers," dated by Morris as August 5, 1872, was first published in *To-day* n.s. 1 (January 1884): 25-29. The published title is "The Three Seekers"; in a draft it is called "Three Houses." It tells the story of three knights meeting again after the customary year and a day to recount their exploits. One has found wealth and largesse, another strength and courage, the third "a love / That Time and the World shall never move." Subsequent events show that the trust of the first two knights in what they have found is misplaced; but the fearful, humble knight's love endures. Clothed in rags he casts down his head as his beloved, a richly dressed queen, rides by. Expecting not to be noticed, he is in fact embraced by his queen—another of Morris' masterful women—comforted, and taken home.

"The Raven and the King's Daughter," also written in August 1872, is a dramatic ballad in three scenes with tragedy obliquely hinted at but never directly stated. A princess has been locked by her father in a tower away from her lover, Olaf. A raven gives her reports of Olaf's setting out to win fame in battle and of his success. The raven, who is rewarded with two rings, tells of Olaf's sleeping beside the mast after the battle, but can report none of his words, for "nothing now he saith for long." He does, however, report the captain's

promise to Olaf that if they win the battle he will

bring thee in and lay thine hand  
About the neck of that lily-wand.  
And let the King be lief or loth  
One bed that night shall hold you both.

The princess dismisses the "fowl of death" and, amidst the moaning wind that will bring her lover back, prepares for his return. The captain's footsteps are heard, heavily, on the stair. He carries in Olaf and lays him alongside the now silent, rigid princess.

The death of the lovers is not explicitly stated, but the emblematic use of the raven, the singing swans, and the moaning wind, and the dramatic irony of the captain's promise have made its presence and impact far more immediate than any direct statement. As an example of narrative economy, mounting tension, and emblematic imagery this is one of Morris' finest ballads.

### 1c Poems with northern settings or origins

Although set in Scandinavia, "The Raven and the King's Daughter" does not emphasize its northern setting in the way that another set of poems does. That set may be further subdivided into original poems and translations. The earliest of the original poems may be "To the Muse of the North," written as an introduction to the Magnusson and Morris translation of *Grettis Saga: The Story of Grettir the Strong* (1869) but not used there. It was included in *A Book of Verse*. In it Morris weaves his usual double pattern of Love and Death, pity and destruction, sorrow and rest, ending with what appears to be a self-pitying personal reference:

O Mother, and Love and Sister all in one,  
Come thou; for sure I am enough alone  
That thou thine arms about my heart shouldst throw,  
And wrap me in the grief of long ago.

It was perhaps the "sure I am enough alone" that caused him to suppress the poem from *Grettis Saga*.

Some two years after the original composition of this poem, Morris visited Iceland for the first time. "Iceland First Seen" gives his first impressions, speculates on his reasons for the visit, and ends with an apocalyptic vision (reminiscent of Arnold's "Balder Dead" and even introduced with an Arnoldian "Ah!"): "Ah! when thy Balder comes back, and bears from the heart of the Sun/Peace and the healing of pain, and the wisdom that waiteth no more." The long six-beat lines look forward to the measure of *Sigurd the Volsung*, but unlike that measure they fall into two equal halves and are basically anapaestic.

Mackail, Henderson, and others have pointed out that some of the descriptive details in this poem resemble the prose account in Morris' journal of the visit to Iceland.<sup>5</sup> The same point can be made even more strongly about another poem of the same period also in the six-beat anapaestic measure, "Gunnar's Howe above the House at Lithend." Morris records in his journal for July 21, 1871 (CW, 8:48-49) that he and his companions were guided at Lithend to "the traditional site of Gunnar's hall, a little to the east of the present house," then "up the hillside into a hollow that runs at the back of the houses, which meets another little valley at an obtuse angle going up from the hollow, and that is Gunnar's Howe." This, then, is the "tomb in a tomb" of the poem. Both journal and poem refer to the passage in *Njals Saga* chapter 77 (Dasent translation) where the tomb opens and Gunnar sings; both describe the green grassy valley, the grey plain that meets the sea, the snow on the fells, the moon seen palely in the summer twilight, "For here day and night toileth the summer lest deedless his [Gunnar's] time pass away."

A month later, on August 20, 1871, Morris and his companions were at Borg, at the head of Burgfirth, near the entry of the Whitewater and its tributaries. In his journal he recorded that "of all the great historical steads I have seen this seemed to me the most striking after Lithend" (8:153). In the same entry he discussed the burgs further up the Whitewater, including "Deildar Tongue, where Odd of the Tongue lived."<sup>6</sup> This he made the setting for his ballad "Of the Wooing of Hallbiorn the Strong," a tale derived from Book 2 (chapter 26 or 30, according to the edition) of the *Landnámabók*, the account of the settlement in Iceland. The ballad, although placed second in *Poems by the Way*, is not one of Morris' best. It does, however, employ his typically indirect means of narration at the points of greatest action (Hallbiorn's stabbing of his wife, Hallgerd, because she loves her cousin, Snaebiorn, rather than her husband, and Snaebiorn's revenge on Hallbiorn), it makes use of premonitory refrain, and it offers several nods and becks to the reader to indicate the likely outcome of the story.

In *Poems by the Way* Morris included two translations from Icelandic poems, "The Lay of Christine" and "The Son's Sorrow." Both had been written out in *A Book of Verse*, the first as "The Ballad of Christine." Both are ballad-like complaints about the loss of a beloved husband or wife. In a similar melancholy mood and with much of the same complaint are "The King of Denmark's Sons" and four translations of Danish ballads, "Hildebrand and Hellelil," "Agnes and the Hill-man," "Knight Aagen and Maiden Else," and "Hafbur and Signy." The two copies of "Hafbur and Signy" are dated February 3 and 4, 1870, in Morris' own hand; "Hildebrand and Hellelil" was written on Wednesday, March 1, 1871;<sup>7</sup> the others are presumably of about the same date. Two of these ballads, "Hildebrand and Hellelil" and "Hafbur and Signy," share a plot motif with "The Lay of Christine": in all three, lovers are separated by

violence on or shortly after their first night of love. In "Knight Aagen and Maiden Else" death intervenes even before union, but there is a ghostly meeting after death. In "Agnes and the Hill-man" (which has similarities in plot to Arnold's "The Forsaken Mermaid") the separation is voluntary on Agnes' part, unwilling on the Hill-man's, and because of Agnes' refusal to relent she is conjured into sickness and death.

The last of the poems from the first group of *Poems by the Way* is "Verses for Pictures," a precursor of a type of verse that bulks largely in the second group. The verses for the seasons seem to have been first written to accompany a set of tile figures (by Burne-Jones and Morris) used in the decoration, by the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., of fireplaces in the Combination Room of Peterhouse, Cambridge. Then the verses were written out in *A Book of Verse* and published in *The Academy* 2 (February 1, 1871): 109. Numerous variants occur in each version, the most interesting being the reading introduced in *Poems by the Way* for the last two lines of "Winter." In the first three versions it had been similar to the Academy reading of "Beat the snow, tread down the frost! / All is gained when all is lost." This hearty and dramatic version is altered in *Poems by the Way* to the more solemn and hopeless reading of "Who shall say if I were dead / What shall be remembered?"

## 2 The later group

The later group of twenty-five poems contains six songs sung or recited at Socialist gatherings in Morris' life-time and (though less frequently) since; three sections of *The Pilgrims of Hope*; ten poems for paintings and tapestries; and six other lyrical or narrative poems. Each of these sets of poems represents a wider oeuvre which Morris did not choose to gather in full in *Poems by the Way*.

### 2a The Socialist songs

The six Socialist songs<sup>9</sup> included in the volume are, in order of composition, "The Day is Coming" (published in a wrapper for the Democratic Federation as "Chants for Socialists, No. 1" in March 1884); "The Voice of Toil" (published in *Justice* 5 [April 1884] as "Chants for Socialists, No. II"); "All for the Cause" (*Justice* 19 [April 1884]); "Drawing Near the Light" (*The Commonweal* [April 21, 1888]); "A Death Song" (written for the public funeral of Alfred Linnell, killed as a result of injuries inflicted by a mounted policeman); and "The Day of Days" (*Time* [1890]: 1178).

The imagery of these poems is drawn partly from Morris' own poetic stock (particularly as used in the late *Earthly Paradise* period and in *Love is Enough* and *Sigurd*), partly from the Socialist slogans of the day. As one might expect from Morris' habitual way of thinking and the topic in hand, the

imagery is attached to two opposed situations, the present "day of strife" and the future "days when the world grows fair." In these poems "day" recurs almost obsessively. With the present situation are associated "fear and sorrow," "grief and wrong," conditions that are "hell" and full of "pain," where man becomes the "slave of gold." By engaging in "the Cause," mankind may "right the earthly wrong," may see "the glimmering light" turn into "dawn" or "day" or "the rising of the morn," and may achieve the "joy" and "crown" that "the Cause hath for you."

What present conditions, the Cause, and its outcome have in common is work. But whereas it is now "never-ending toil," leaving the worker "too faint and weary to stand" and engaged in for the wealth and pleasure of "other hopes and other lives," then it will be, as Morris said so often in his lectures, pleasurable work: "a man shall work and bethink him, and rejoice in the deeds of his hand." The rewards, furthermore, will belong wholly to the workers, for "nor shall any lack a share / Of the toil and the gain of living." In the meantime, however, it is necessary that we give "All for the Cause." In words that might seem more appropriately addressed to himself and other middle-class Socialists than to those engaged in "toilsome earning," Morris adjures his hearers to "Come, then, let us cast off fooling, and put by ease and rest."

This hint (in "The Day is Coming") of a distinction between the author and his listeners is, however, something very rare in the "Chants for Socialists." While Morris often opens a poem in the role of a story-teller attracting an audience, the body of the poem is likely to be shaped in terms of solidarity for the Cause among all workers. Morris writes, for the most part, in the plural, making the workers the heroes, martyrs, and historians of the struggle and submerging his own personality in that of the group. He may be the teller of the tale of what is to happen, but the past, present, and future history belongs to the workers. Their "deeds," including the sacrifice of the lives of "the valiant dead," are an inheritance for the present generation of workers to be proud of.

All these songs—even the stately "Death Song," with its unforgettable refrain, "Not one, not one, nor thousands must they slay, / But one and all if they would dusk the day," are works of broad strokes and little subtlety. Yet the one Socialist poem of some depth that Morris wrote, *The Pilgrims of Hope*, he was unwilling to see reprinted.<sup>10</sup> In *Poems by the Way* he included only three of the thirteen parts: "The Message of the March Wind" (Part 1), "Mother and Son" (Part 4), and "The Half of Life Gone" (Part 8). He intended to revise and add to the poem in order to make it more coherent and suitable for separate publication, but he never found the time.

*The Pilgrims of Hope* is Morris' only extended attempt at a verse-novel set in contemporary times. Written in a makeshift fashion over a period of more than a year, it contains some parts that look like fillers, as if Morris was uncertain where to take the story next. The hero is not fully named until Part 10; the heroine is never named. The crucial dating needed for the political denouement

ment is not revealed until Part 9, and it may be doubted whether Morris had foreseen much before this the possibility of using the Paris Commune as a setting.

The characters in the poem are often devoid of individual life. So too, of course, are many of those in *The Earthly Paradise* and all but Giles and Joan in *Love is Enough*. In *The Pilgrims of Hope*, however, the flatness of the characters has the purpose not so much of allowing them to fit easily and unobtrusively into a broad pattern of human life, but of allowing them to speak on behalf of Morris' social doctrines and hopes. The reason for their lack of individuality is not an artistic one, dictating the pattern of the narrative, but a political one—a political one, moreover, that is not always integrated into the details of the narrative.

What has happened, in fact, at this late stage of Morris' poetry, is that the single-minded vision of life he had previously held no longer dictates the structure of his poetry. His political activities, his commitment to Communism, made it impossible for him to express any longer the notion that life oscillated inexorably from happiness to misery, from hope to fear. His social beliefs now found expression more aptly in the exhortations to improvement of his lectures or in the unmitigated joy, present or to come, represented so often in the prose romances.

## 2b Occasional poems

*Poems by the Way* represents not only a final philosophical position but also the process of thought and feeling by which it was arrived at. The volume contains one further group of non-political poems. Ten of them are occasional pieces for tapestries, embroidery, and paintings. They fall, chronologically, into two sets, one consisting of poems for tapestries designed and woven by Morris & Co. between 1885 and 1887 ("Pomona," "Flora," "The Woodpecker," "The Forest," and "The Lion"); the other being probably two or three years later and consisting of two pieces for tapestries ("The Orchard" and "Tapestry Trees"), one for an embroidery ("The Flowering Orchard"), and two for Burne-Jones's four paintings in *The Briar Rose* series at Buscot Park ("For the Briar Rose" and "Another for the Briar Rose"). For the most part they are straightforward verses. The mythological background of "Pomona" and "Flora" is well known, for instance, but there is one reference that is more obscure: the identity of the woodpecker who sings

I once a King and chief  
Now am the tree-bark's thief,  
Ever 'twixt trunk and leaf  
Chasing the prey.

The reference is to Ovid's description of Picus, King of Latium, who rejected the

love of Circe and was turned into a woodpecker.<sup>11</sup>

The most interesting poem is perhaps "Another for the Briar Rose," which was not in fact used on the picture frames of *The Briar Rose* series. Morris here goes beyond the descriptive quality of the four stanzas actually used for the frames in order to develop a spiritual interpretation of the legend that is merely hinted at in the painted stanzas. "The tangle of the rose" now becomes a "tangle of world's wrong and right." The members of the Council are no longer found merely sleeping; now they are "deep sunk from every gleam of hope," no longer men because incapable of being moved by Love. The maidens in the Garden Court are now accused of being part of "the world that would not love," needing, if they are to be awakened, to wait humbly on the God of Love. And in the last stanza the sleeping princess is not simply "the hoarded love, the key / To all the treasure that shall be" but "the voice of fate," the conqueror and possessor of light and life.

## 2c Miscellaneous lyrics and narratives

The remaining six poems in *Poems by the Way* begin with "Mine and Thine. From a Flemish Poem of the Fourteenth Century," written in 1887 or 1888 and published in *The Commonweal* 5 (March 2, 1889): 67. It is a simple exposition of the economic principle of a communist society, written, according to May Morris, during the question-time following Morris' delivery of the lecture "Art and Industry in the Fourteenth Century" for the Hammersmith Branch of the Socialist League.

"Thunder in the Garden" is a strange poem that may be based on a personal experience. The setting is a hot thundery June afternoon in the garden of a city or suburban house. The man who has been in love with his companion for some time is astonished to find that she now reciprocates his love. The rain falls and then ceases as "first brake out our love like the storm." They return to the rain-drenched garden, then, as the moon rises "o'er the minster-wall," go back inside, "And in the dark house was I loved." Philip Henderson (p. 142) suggested that the poem was written about Morris' relations with Georgiana Burne-Jones, but his theory was based on the false assumption that the poem appears in *A Book of Verse*. In fact it seems to have been written much later; May Morris (CW, 9:xxxvi) calls it "a late poem."

"The Folk-mote by the River" is an account of a successful medieval attempt to throw off the yoke of an oppressive landlord and master. "Earth the Healer, Earth the Keeper" is one of Morris' most abstract poems. It is almost impossible to interpret most of the details, which are expressed with both Pauline exhortation and Newmanesque gloom. "The Hall and the Wood" is a ballad written at the request of Morris' friend, Emery Walker, one of the editors of *The English Illustrated Magazine*, where it appeared in vol. 7 (February 1890): 351-

354. It bears some resemblance in plot to both "The Folk-mote by the River" and the Robin Hood legend. Sir Rafe is an outlaw who, with his band of green-coated bowmen, can defy the law of the king, but who is nevertheless considerate to "the ploughing carle," "the straying herd," and "the barefoot maiden."

The last poem in *Poems by the Way*, "Goldilocks and Goldilocks," is a ballad-like narrative, with more of magic and less of history than "The Hall and the Wood." In style and spirit it resembles the long prose romances, *The Roots of the Mountains* and *The Well at the World's End*; in theme it takes us back to one of Morris' earliest and most long-lasting literary favorites, de la Motte Fouqué's *Undine*. In that tale Undine the sylph has the opportunity of becoming human through the love of a mortal. In "Goldilocks and Goldilocks," an original tale by Morris, the heroine, Goldilocks the Maid, is a tree-nymph who is rescued from the wiles of evil forces and liberated into the world of humanity by the enduring love of Goldilocks the Swain. He has to resist the enervating beauty and finery assumed by the troll-queen; the terrors of "the snow-white ice-bear of the North," "the Dragon of the South," the whelming poison-pool (defeated by the forest in which Goldilocks the Maid has spent her life), and the wild-fire (defeated by invocation of the Christian saints); and the temptation of the false visions of pity. In the end, the dangers past, the two lovers return to the Swain's land of the Wheaten Shocks, where they look forward to a long life together in the open sunny country.

The ending of the poem, with its unrelieved brightness, almost deters any solemn interpretation. But one cannot avoid the impression that the poem is saying something about initiation into adult love life, both for the physical venturer, the Swain, and for the captive spirit, the Maid. In the end, after the separation enforced by the various dangers, "Goldilocks one flesh shall be," that is, body and spirit are united.

Morris was gruffly off-handed about most of his literary work. He wrote to Georgiana Burne-Jones while engaged on "Goldilocks and Goldilocks": "My wig! but it is garrulous: I can't help it, the short lines and my old recollections lead me on" (May 20, 1891; *Letters*, 3:306). Not long afterwards, with the paradoxical provocativeness that was also typical, he told Edward Burne-Jones that "poetry was tommy rot" (*Mackail*, 2:268). But he did not cease to write it, even after the publication of *Poems by the Way*.

His last poem of all, "The blossom's white upon the thorn," was written early in January 1896 and sent to Georgiana Burne-Jones with the comment on the manuscript: "This may be called a 'Poem by the way.' A stanza got into my head on Friday last, and so I thought I would go on with it."<sup>12</sup> Like so many of *Poems by the Way* it is about thwarted, unreciprocated, melancholy love. This is the mood that persists in Morris' poetry for over forty years, a deep-seated mood that incorporates particular personal experiences and particular human beings rather than being generated by them. Morris did not need experience or

human beings in order to be melancholy. As Burne-Jones once told France Horner: "I suppose he would miss me for a bit, but it wouldn't change one day of his life, nor alter a plan in it. He lives absolutely without the need of man or woman. He is really a sort of Viking, set down here, and making art because there is nothing else to do."<sup>13</sup>

### Conclusion

If Morris' first volume of verse, *The Defence of Guenevere*, presents a young man's romantic fascination for the vigor, the yearning, and the bitterness of medieval life, his last volume presents a philosophy characterized more by experience than by hopes and fears. Many features in the preparation of *Poems by the Way* suggest that Morris regarded it as a summative volume: the care with which he assembled its contents; its selective representation of all the types of short poem that he wrote following the appearance of *The Defence of Guenevere*; and his careful production of it through the Kelmscott Press.

The volume allows him to state in virtually final form his outlook on life, to refer (with some delicacy) to his relationships with his wife and with Georgiana Burne-Jones, and to restate his commitment to Socialism. The balance of mood is now both more engaged and more tranquil than in the languid and evanescent but ultimately doomed worlds of *The Earthly Paradise*. The selection and accumulation of love-lyrics makes his yearnings and disappointments in love more explicit than in the context of *The Earthly Paradise*. And his Socialist commitment is, as represented by the selection and balance of the works included, more inclined toward the philosophical than the politically and economically active.

*Poems by the Way* offers, if in a tangential way, Morris' own assessment of his life and achievements. It contains both a tracing of his poetic career and an assessment of what he considered valuable in his life. His philosophy, his experiential thoughts about love, his continuing attachment to the Middle Ages, and his contemporary political commitment are all present and carefully balanced.

### Notes

- 1 For its earlier form, see CW, 5:xxvii-xxviii.
- 2 This poem appears in *A Book of Verse* as "Missing"; it was published in *The Fortnightly Review* n.s. 9 (o.s. 15) (February 1, 1871): 219-220 as "The Dark Wood."
- 3 See, for example, Philip Henderson, *William Morris: His Life, Work and Friends* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), pp. 97-98; Martin Harrison and Bill Waters, *Burne-Jones* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1973), pp. 96-99; and Penelope Fitzgerald, *Edward Burne-Jones: A Biography* (London: Michael Joseph, 1975), pp. 112-115, 119-121.
- 4 The assembled manuscript of *Poems by the Way* is in the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, MS HM 6427. "Love's Reward" exists in a first draft (ff. 93-95), a fair copy of the second draft (ff. 96-101), and a second draft, marked for the

- printer (ff. 102-107).
- 5 J. W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, 2 vols. (London, 1899), 1:251-252; Henderson, p. 120.
  - 6 CW, 8:154. In a note (p. 140) to this passage Magnusson points out that Odd actually lived a few miles away from Deildar-Tongue.
  - 7 MS HM 6423: "Hafbur and Signy" ff. 151-164, 165-177; "Hildebrand and Hellelil" ff. 143-144, 145-146.
  - 8 For discussions of them, see Guy A. Aldred, "The Socialism of William Morris" [revised form of a lecture given in 1915], *The Commune*, second series 2, no. 2 (February 1927): 14-19; J. Bruce Glasier, *Socialism in Song: An Appreciation of William Morris's Chants for Socialists' Together with an Introductory Essay on Poetry and Politics* (Manchester: National Labour Press: [1919]); G.D.H. Cole, *William Morris as a Socialist: A Lecture given on 16th January to the William Morris Society at the Art Workers' Guild* (London: Transactions of the William Morris Society, 1960); Jessie Kocmanová, "The Socialist Poems of William Morris," *Marxism Today* (August 1966): 240-248.
  - 9 The funeral, at which Morris was a pallbearer and speaker, was held on December 18, 1887. "A Death Song," with a drawing by Walter Crane and music by Malcolm Lawson, was sold as a penny leaflet for the benefit of "Linnell's orphans." The poem was subsequently published in *The Commonweal*, November 23, 1889. For accounts of the Linnell incident and funeral, see CW, 20:xxxvi-xxxvii, xlv; and May Morris, ed. *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, 2 vols. (1936; New York: Russell and Russell, 1966).
  - 10 It appeared in *The Commonweal* in thirteen parts between March 1885 (Vol. 1, no. 2) and July 3, 1886 (Vol. 2, no. 25). It was reissued in CW, 24:369-408; G. D. H. Cole, ed., *Stories in Prose, Stories in Verse, Shorter Poems, Lectures, and Essays of William Morris* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1946), pp. 355-408; A. L. Morton, ed., *Three Works by William Morris: A Dream of John Ball, The Pilgrims of Hope, News from Nowhere* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), pp. 115-178. It is discussed in May Morris, 1:498-502; Kocmanová, "The Socialist Poems of William Morris"; and Tom Middlebro', "William Morris and the Paris Commune," *Communist Viewpoint* (Toronto) 1, no. 3 (May-June 1971): 45-50.
  - 11 See *Metamorphoses*, 14:320-434. I am indebted to Kristin Valentine for pointing out this source.
  - 12 See CW, 21:xxxv; and British Library Additional MS. 45298A, f. 135 (letter from S. C. Cokerell to May Morris, October 6, 1914).
  - 13 See Mackail, 2:349-350, and Lady Horner, *Time Remembered* (London: Heinemann, 1933), p. 15.