

Michael Holzman

Propaganda, Passion, and Literary Art

in William Morris's *The Pilgrims of Hope*

The three headings of the title of this essay describe vectors, as it were, of the analysis that follows. That long poem of William Morris's maturity, *The Pilgrims of Hope*, serialized in a Socialist newspaper in 1885-86 and never reprinted by Morris, can be read as "mere" propaganda, or as Pre-Raphaelite love poetry, or as a formal exercise. It has seemed to me best to read it along each of these lines, with the hope that their resolution will add to our understanding of Morris's art and thought. Beyond these technical matters, I have also tried to place the poem in the wider contexts of a theory of Morris's utopian thought, his biography, and the political situation in which he found himself in the mid-1880s.

One aspect of Morris's thinking about the conditions of nineteenth-century life can be expressed as a series of conceptual oppositions which differ in their terms at various stages of his life, but which transcending, encompassing, summing up one another, progress even while maintaining a constant ratio. Morris tended to write as if the rural condition were normal for human life, that of the city corrupt and degraded. This was partially because he had been brought up on a large country estate and educated at Oxford, then virtually a part of the countryside itself ". . . one still approached it as travellers had done for hundreds of years, and saw its towers rise among masses of foliage straight out of the girdle of meadow or orchard."¹ And, of course, it was partially an aspect of the classical pastoral tradition (a connection thoroughly explored by Blue Calhoun in *The Pastoral Vision of William Morris* [Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975]). This polarity of city and country could be subsumed in other, more sophisticated or elaborate oppositions, but was always present for Morris, down to and including the period of *The Pilgrims of Hope*, where for most of the poem the opposition between country and city life is practical-

ly the equivalent of that between capitalist oppression and revolutionary freedom, between a dismal reality and the utopian negation of that reality. Throughout the poem it seems almost as if the escape from the city is the same as an escape from capitalism itself, so that the return to the countryside at the end of the poem is, in spite of all its sorrow, a triumph. If capitalism has not been smashed, if his love is dead, and the Commune has been drowned in blood, the protagonist, Richard, and his son, at least, have escaped from the center of that hatefulness to an area where its power was relatively weak. That the condition of the rural poor was at least as bad as that of their relatives in London is a matter not so much ignored in the poem as deemphasized. Although Morris knew about rural poverty (and was to write about it in *A Dream of John Ball*), it was somehow less pressingly visible for him than its urban twin, masked, perhaps, by his own experience of rural life. His father's estate had been more a pleasure garden than a working farm, and his own view of country life was primarily suburban. Thus in *News from Nowhere*, his ideal England was portrayed not so much as a rural community as a spacious suburb, thinning out here and there into parkland.

But if Morris's first measure was the division between town and country, it was quickly succeeded by that between beauty and ugliness. This, also, was enduring, appearing in *News from Nowhere*, for instance, in the often noted emphasis on the sheer beauty of postrevolutionary England. If he had not felt this earlier, he would have found the doctrine of the supremacy of beauty in that second phase of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, the high priest of which was his friend Edward Burne-Jones, a phase which centered on, or at least originated from, Rossetti and Ruskin. This viewpoint reached Morris at Oxford and formed part of his ideal to his last days at the Kelmscott Press. The cult of beauty, the aesthetic movement, was part of Morris's public image before he became a Communist, and after. Walter Pater, whose work formed the other center of the aesthetic movement, wrote his first major essay on Morris's early poetry, concluding with lines made famous in another context:

For our one chance is in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time. High passions give one this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, political and religious enthusiasm, or the "enthusiasm of humanity."²

Strangely prophetic words! This division of all things into the

beautiful and the ugly was, for Morris, imposed upon, or absorbed by, the earlier division between country and city life, so that in *The Pilgrims of Hope* they are equated, as elsewhere in his work. But if one can express Morris's thought as moving along an axis between the beautiful countryside and the ugly city, it was, nonetheless, in the city that he spent most of his life (Kelmscott being reserved for his family and holiday visits) and almost as a matter of course a great deal of that life was spent in attempting to eradicate the original sin of ugliness that he found there. To do this, he (and his friends) went back before the Fall, as it were, into an idealized precapitalist medieval period, when even the city, or town, was beautiful. This making concrete of what had begun as a stylistic ideal for the first generation of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood was aided by, even as it was directed against, the nineteenth-century fad for imitating the fashions of previous eras. Thus when the time came, the merchandise of Morris and Company was able to find markets in an England already given to the habit of living in stage sets of the Florentine fourteenth century or the French twelfth.

There we have nearly complete the system of oppositions that Morris used as viewing frames with which to look at the world: country and city, beautiful and ugly, past and present. When he came, in the 1870s, to look at the ugly city world of his nineteenth-century present, it was first of all the ugliness of the products of capitalism that attracted his attention to that system, an ugliness that seemed to him to be a mark of Cain that his times wore, proclaiming their murder of humane values. At first he simply attempted to build for himself, or design to have built, those intimate items of home furnishing impossible to find in a world gone shoddy. Later, in his work with the Eastern Question Association, he attempted to bring decent standards into politics, and with the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, he attempted to prevent the destruction of those remaining monuments of medieval beauty. Both these public efforts demonstrated to Morris that particular "questions" were mere surface manifestations of a systematic ill. By the early 1880s, he saw the root of that disease in the maldistribution of wealth:

In looking into matters social and political I have but one rule, that in thinking of the condition of any body of men I should ask myself, "How could you bear it yourself? What would you feel if you were poor against the system under which you live?" I have always been uneasy when I had to ask myself that question, and of late years I have had to ask

it so often, that I have seldom had it out of my mind: and the answer to it has more and more made me feel that if I had not been born rich or well-to-do I should have found my position unendurable, and should have been a mere rebel against what would have seemed to me a system of robbery and injustice.³

Two years before he became an active Socialist (or Communist—he used both terms), Morris had already ascertained a plan of action:

Just think of the mixture of tyranny and hypocrisy with which the world is governed! These are the sort of things that make thinking people so sick at heart that they are driven from all interest in politics save revolutionary politics: which I must say seems like to be my case. Indeed I have long known, or felt, that society in spite of its modern smoothness was founded on injustice and kept together by cowardice and tyranny: but the hope in me has been that matters would mend gradually, till the last struggle, which must needs be mingled with violence and madness, would be so short as scarcely to count. But I must say a matter like this [the Most trial] and people's apathy about them shake one's faith in gradual progress.⁴

Although the fundamental oppositions in Morris's social thought are at one level city/country, ugliness/beauty, present/past, these categories are not static. Eventually, experience taught him the power of refusal of the given, so that in his later thought these categories are dynamic and open: London/not London, shoddy/not shoddy, now/not now. The ideal which seemed firmly planted in a northern medieval past could shift, with the occasion, becoming a future England in *News from Nowhere*, or yesterday's Paris Commune in *The Pilgrims of Hope*. The opposition now/not now, which has sometimes been seen in criticism of Morris's work to be a simple escapist philosophy, is not such a simple matter at all; it is not independent of the other factors in his thought, but is comprehensible only when perceived as part of a totalizing system where the negation of the given is the representation of human freedom.

Another vector of the forces that resolved themselves into *The Pilgrims of Hope* was that of the novel life of the political agitator. It forms the substance of the most realistic parts of the poem and bridges what might otherwise be too wide a gap between the poem as mourning for Morris's lost love and the poem as celebration of

the Commune. Representing to us Morris's actual work in the 1880s, these scenes demonstrate a partial solution to his problems of the 1870s. The organization of the poem, its lack of unity, was an attempt at bridging the chasm in nineteenth-century thought between the realms of the intimate and the social, a chasm made deeper for Morris and his associates by their aesthetic ideology. Morris took that aestheticism so far as to marry a woman for her ideal beauty alone, but eventually discovering that the intimate life could not be isolated from the social, nor the social from the political, he sought in work (both aesthetic and political) the satisfaction that he had lost in love. The form of *The Pilgrims of Hope*—from "The Message of the March Wind" and the other early sections evocative of love, across the descriptions of political life, to the culminating scenes at the Commune and the final awakening in rural semiretirement—is in one way a representation of Morris's own life's story, rather strangely taken beyond the year in which he wrote the poem to that period nearly ten years later when, still waiting for the revolution, he spent his time in the quiet practice of making more than mediocrally beautiful books at the Kelmscott Press.

But there is more to the poem than simple autobiography. It was published as a monthly, then weekly, feature of a political newspaper and had a manifestly agitational purpose. It represented to the readers of *Commonweal* the realities, and at times the events, of their own lives, as it represented to them the ideal (in the Commune) toward which they were working, while at the same time demonstrating the possibility of a literary work of art of real merit which had as its subject the life of the working class.

The Pilgrims of Hope begins as a description of the coming to political consciousness of a young man from rural England. On this level it represented to its original audience and its author an aspect of their own lives. The plot then traces a love triangle which is resolved by a journey to the New Jerusalem of the Paris Commune and the deaths of two of the three participants. Wishing to write about his life as a political organizer, Morris chose the Commune as the proper dramatic culmination for such a poem, a validation in the past of his hopes for the future. Having begun to write about that period, Morris found that he had much personal material to deal with in terms of the development of the plot of the poem, material which combined with the overt subject of the poem to produce a work of art at once powerful and deeply flawed. By placing the poem in its political, biographical, and literary context, we can begin to understand it as part of Morris's lifelong effort to express simultaneously his yearning for utopia and

death, the golden age and love, through art. We can also account for its failure as a work of art, a failure of the form to contain the conflict between the topical subject matter of the poem and the personal emotions that flowed into it when Morris began to write about the period around 1870. The period was that of the Commune, to be sure, but also that of a decisive trauma of his adult life, the destruction of his relationships with his wife and his mentor which occurred when Jane Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti began their love affair.

The first section of *The Pilgrims of Hope* is entitled "The Message of the March Wind," a title reminiscent of the seasonal verses from *The Earthly Paradise*. In the latter extraordinarily gloomy poem which first made him famous, Morris had written under the heading "April":

Ah! life of all the year, why yet do I
Amid thy snowy blossoms' fragrant drift,
Still long for that which never draweth nigh,
Striving my pleasure from pain to sift,
Some weight from off my fluttering mirth to lift?
—Now, when far bells are ringing, "Come again,
Come back, past years! why will ye pass in vain?"

And under the heading "September":

Look long, O longing eyes, and look in vain!
Strain idly, aching heart, and yet be wise
And hope no more for things to come again
That thou beheldest once with careless eyes!
Like a new-wakened man thou art, who tries
To dream again the dream that made him glad
When in his arms his loving love he had.⁵

Philip Henderson, on the authority of Mackail's statement that "in the verses that frame the stories of *The Earthly Paradise* there is an autobiography so delicate and so outspoken that it must be left to speak for itself," concludes that "about this time, in 1867-8, Morris awoke to a very unpleasant reality in his personal life."⁶ As the final version of the Prologue to *The Earthly Paradise*, "The Wanderers" was not finished until the summer of 1867 and the first part of *The Earthly Paradise* itself was not published until 1868, it is probable that the verses to April, which stand midway in the first volume, were written in the fall of 1867, or at the latest that winter.⁷ The verses to September which appeared in the third part

of *The Earthly Paradise* were published in December 1869 and were probably written at Bad Ems the previous summer.⁸ William and Jane Morris were in Germany at that time, partially because Mrs. Morris, who had begun to suffer from ill-defined health problems as early as 1865, had been ordered to that fashionable spa for the sake of the waters.⁹ (She was to remain in bad health, off and on, until her death in 1914.) May Morris wrote concerning this period:

I have often pictured father and mother in those uncongenial surroundings—amidst the usual banal racket of a foreign watering-place, with the added sense of unrest in the air that the presence of the King of Prussia gave (for I think the French Ambassador was there during their visit, and rumours of war were about.)¹⁰

Bad Ems had to wait for the following summer in order to see those rumors confirmed. The theme of lost love, the stories of the king of Prussia and rumors of war between France and Germany, the unpleasantness in Morris's personal life—these, along with so much else, reverberate between the verses of *The Earthly Paradise* period and those of *The Pilgrims of Hope*.

"The Message of the March Wind" was first published, fittingly, in the March 1885 issue of *Commonweal*, along with "Gordon and the Soudan" by E. Belfort Bax, "The Actual Position of Russia" by Stepniak, "The Political Game of the Police in France" by Paul Lafargue, "England in 1845 and in 1885" by Frederich Engels, and other articles on imperialism and English working conditions by Morris, Shaw, Eleanor Marx-Aveling, Edward Aveling, and others.¹¹ This was the second number of the newspaper, the propaganda organ of the Socialist League. Morris was editor of *Commonweal*, having emerged as one of the leaders of the league after the Social Democratic Federation had split a few months earlier. Paul Lafargue, one of the other contributors to *Commonweal*, was a son-in-law of Karl Marx and a close associate of Engels. He had been a member of the Paris Commune of 1871 and was one of the founders of the French Communist Party.¹² Eleanor Marx-Aveling and her common-law husband Edward Aveling were also close to Engels. Eleanor Marx had practically been adopted by Engels after her father's death, and Aveling was to be Engels's instrument whenever he took an interest in English Socialist affairs. It appears that at this point the Socialist League and its newspaper were Marxist and heavily under the influence of Engels. Given this, the occasional efforts of Morris's critics to separate "The Message of

the March Wind" from the rest of *The Pilgrims of Hope* and read it solely as a personal lyric must be quixotic, to say the least. The political thrust of the poem as a whole became obvious as succeeding numbers of *Commonweal* were issued.

"The Message of the March Wind" begins as an evocation of spring, firmly in the Chaucerian tradition: "Fair now is the spring-tide, now earth lies beholding / With the eyes of a lover the face of the sun."¹³ This is followed by an invocation of the Thames, which, to late twentieth-century ears, must bring to mind both the beginning and what is virtually the end of a lyric tradition:

Down there dips the highway, toward the bridge crossing
over
The brook that runs on to the Thames and the sea.
Draw closer, my sweet, we are lover and lover;
This eave art thou given to gladness and me.

(p. 369)

"Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song."¹⁴ But even without the echoes of Spenser and the fore-echoes of Eliot, the March wind is not entirely untroubled, as in this case it blows from London:

Hark! the March wind again of a people is telling;
Of the life that they live there, so haggard and grim,
That if we and our love amidst them had been dwelling
My fondness had faltered, thy beauty grown dim.

(p. 370)

For the poet listening to the March wind, the message is that love and the beauty of a rural spring are not for the poor:

This land we have loved in our love and our leisure
For them hangs in heaven, high out of their reach;
The wide hills o'er the sea-plain for them have no pleasure,
The grey homes of their fathers no story to teach.

(p. 370)

This theme is too bitter for lovers, and the poet takes his beloved back into the country inn: "For there in a while shall be rest and desire, / And there shall the morrow's uprising be sweet" (p. 370). In spite of the verbal parallels with *The Earthly Paradise*, in 1885 Morris was no longer "the singer of an empty day." It is not simply escape from the unpleasantness of industrialization but ad-

vocacy of social change which now seems to him to be the proper role of the poet. Therefore, Morris has his narrator emerge from the cocoon of intimate pleasures to listen to the message that the wind brings from London:

"Rise up on the morrow
And go on your ways toward the doubt and the strife;
Join hope to our hope and blend sorrow with sorrow,
And seek for men's love in the short days of life."

(p. 371)

The first series of verses ends with the slightly altered burden: "And to-morrow's uprising to deeds shall be sweet" (p. 371). The connotations of the crucial word "uprising," in the context of the poem's thematic concerns, are transformed here from the sexual to the political.

The second part of *The Pilgrims of Hope* appeared in the April 1885 issue of *Commonweal* under the title "*The Pilgrims of Hope*. II.—The Bridge and the Street (Being a continuation of 'The Message of the March Wind')" with a note: "It is the intention of the author to follow the fortunes of the lovers who in 'The Message of the March Wind' were already touched by sympathy with the cause of the people." The title and note testify that within a month, at the latest, of the initial publication of "The Message of the March Wind" Morris was thinking of those verses as part of a larger whole already entitled *The Pilgrims of Hope*, possibly in indirect reference to "The Wanderers," but with an emphasis on the purposive nature of the journey to be undertaken by the protagonists. "The Wanderers" carries in its very title the frustration of the efforts of its characters to reach their goal, while the word "pilgrims" has strong connotations of searching for a new land, especially for the New Jerusalem, that is, a place ethically superior to that left behind. The lovers from "The Message of the March Wind," we discover, have left the countryside for London, where they stop on London Bridge:

On each side lay the City, and the Thames ran between it
Dark, struggling, unheard 'neath the wheels and the feet.
A strange dream it was that we ever had seen it,
And strange was the hope we had wandered to meet.

(p. 371)

Morris's narrator is looking for hope in the City, not despair. At first he and the woman with him find, though, just that despair,

the effect of a grim city that has destroyed the humanity of its inhabitants. These lines help establish London as the antithesis of the New Jerusalem. During their first night in lodgings, the narrator dreams of a future in which his companion is "worn and changed," a nightmare of the physical degradation of the urban poor. He awakens to that other nightmare, the immense industrialized city, resolving from that moment his grief and fear will not be felt in isolation.

Let us grieve then—and help every soul in our sorrow;
Let us fear—and press forward where few dare go;
Let us falter in hope—and plan deeds for the morrow,
The world crowned with freedom, the fall of the foe.

(p. 373)

Once again the verses lead from the individual emotions of the lover to collective, political goals. In addition to this poem, the April issue of *Commonweal* included articles on the Paris Commune, the conflict of Russia and England in Afghanistan, and the condition of workers in the East End of London. The coincidence of the article on the condition of the workers in the East End and that on the Paris Commune is just that nexus from which the political aspects of the poem itself arose.

"*The Pilgrims of Hope*. III.—Sending to the War" appeared in May. We are given a picture of the London streets during a mobilization for some distant colonial war. Although the time of the poem is supposed to be the late 1860s, the continual references to contemporary events make it seem to be taking place in the 1880s. "Sending to the War" was accompanied in *Commonweal* by articles on the French invasion of Tonkin (Vietnam) and the British invasion of the Sudan. This juxtaposition is one of many indications that Morris's verse of this period was often firmly embedded in the day-to-day political context as it appeared to him in his capacity as editor of *Commonweal*. In "*The Pilgrims of Hope*. III" the verse form changes to couplets as the appearance of the rural and urban poor are contrasted.

The hurrying feet of labour, the faces worn and grey,
Were a sore and grievous sight, and enough and enough to
 spare had I seen
Of hard and pinching want midst our quiet fields and green;
But all was nothing to this, the London holiday throng.
Dull and with hang-dog gait they stood or shuffled along,

(p. 375)

This holiday crowd in London, unspeakably wretched, has been drawn out into the streets to see a military parade. The narrator watches the soldiers pass in the street, "And my clenched hands wandered about as though a weapon they sought" (p. 376). He has a brief vision of soldiers maneuvering in London for more reason than a parade, a vision of the people having risen against the government: "Hope is awake in the faces angerless now no more, / Till the new peace dawn on the world, the fruit of the people's war" (p. 376). The vision of revolution fades. The narrator returns to his unhappy present day: "Peace at home!—what peace, while the rich man's mill is strife, / And the poor is the grist that he grindeth, and life devoureth life?" (p. 377). Morris has stripped his verse of most of his usual anachronisms, the occasional "devoureth" hardly interrupting the flow of angry lines. Read in the pages of *Commonweal*, "*The Pilgrims of Hope. III*" can be seen functioning as a model for its readers of how a Socialist militant is expected to react to jingoist sentiments and demonstrations; it illustrates and extends the anti-imperialist articles and editorials which filled the rest of the newspaper.

In "*The Pilgrims of Hope. IV.—Mother and Son*," the narrative voice changes to that of the young woman of the couple. She is crooning to her newborn son about the early days of her relationship with the child's father, about their hopes and fears and their love for one another. (The traditional linkage of the words "hope" and "fear" continues throughout the poem as a leitmotif, as it does in Morris's work in general.) The function of this seemingly otherwise arbitrarily interpolated section may be to establish a baseline of shared ideals and love against which the estrangement of the later sections might be measured, to establish, as it were, the notion of the Earthly Paradise as the original condition of individual consciousness, and so to legitimize the quest for its social analogue in utopian political action.

The July 1885 issue of *Commonweal* contained a seventy-four line "Prologue spoken at the Entertainment of the Socialist League at South Place Institute, June 11, 1885," by Morris. "*The Pilgrims of Hope. V.—New Birth*," was printed in the August issue. It is once again in the voice of the young man (now firmly established as separate from that of the poet), addressing the newly born child and reviewing his own lonely childhood (both man and woman are presented as orphans), his meeting with a refugee French revolutionist while at school and (then rapidly shifting to the "present" of the poem), his new life in London, and his observations of rich men there. (The time sequences are complicated. In the logic of the poem, the French refugee must have been a man

of 1848 and the "present" that of the 1860s, but in another sense that refugee would have been one of a number known to Morris, of the emigration of 1871, and the "present," therefore, that of the 1880s.) These lines are as crushing a dismissal of private charity as one might find. It was a common observation by his friends that Morris never gave money to beggars. As early as the mid-1870s, these reflections on his own class had been brewing in Morris. He was said to be "growing inscrutable," and behind those heavily lidded eyes these unpleasant thoughts about his peers culminated about 1879.

Morris was growing more and more restless and disturbed in mind by the conditions of modern life, and his conscience was dragging him towards some definite work for its amendment, while Edward [Burne-Jones] held that it was always a mistake, if not a wrong thing, for a man to swerve from his own special gift, or seek another way of helping the world.¹⁵

It has been the peculiar trick of Morris's fate, until fairly recently, that most of his admirers, let alone his critics, have agreed with Burne-Jones in this matter, expressing that agreement in judgments of the transitory nature of Morris's political commitment and altogether overlooking such evidence as Georgiana Burne-Jones's testimony to the contrary or the manifestly deep-seated rage of such lines as those just quoted from *The Pilgrims of Hope*.

To return to the poem, which is now firmly on course, we find that the young man has gone to work in London as a joiner, working at cabinetry even though his father had left him enough money for his needs. A fellow worker, hearing his complaints about the structure of society invites him to a meeting where a "Communist" is to speak. The ugliness of the meeting hall and the worn-out quality of the men at the meeting depress the narrator. The "Communist" speaker turns out to be a familiar figure: "He rose, thickset and short, and dressed in shabby blue." It is William Morris, speaking, as he so frequently did, of his utopian hopes: "Of man without a master, and earth without a strife." When he has finished, the men applaud him, but only the narrator offers to join him. Readers of Morris's letters from this period will recognize the scene. Morris spoke night after night in such places, to such audiences, with such meager results. In this (fictional) case, the narrator finds that shaking the agitator's hand after the meeting has changed his life. "I was born once long ago: I am born again tonight" (p. 384). There is, once more, an interesting double focus in this part of the poem. From one angle we are shown a pro-

paganda session with Morris as the agitator, but from another, surely, we are being shown the feelings that Morris himself felt when he first went to a meeting of the Democratic Federation, coming away having joined "the band" of revolutionists, as so they seemed.

"*The Pilgrims of Hope*. VI" is "The New Proletarian," and just the use of that technical word marks a turn in English poetry, introducing a note not to be taken up until fifty years later by John Cornford and his friends. This is seemingly a long way from *The Earthly Paradise*, and although the subject of the verses is not yet professedly modern love, it was as unconventional as that, being another aspect of those "facts of life" so carefully avoided in the official poetry of Morris's day. Shortly after being converted to communism, the narrator finds that he has been swindled out of his money by a dishonest lawyer, and now "I who have worked for my pleasure now work for utter need" (p. 385). The narrator finds that under such conditions his relationship to the work itself is changed:

there's something gone, I find;
The work goes, cleared is the job, but there's something left
behind;
I take up fear with my chisel, fear liest 'twixt me and my
plane,
And I wake up in the merry morning to a new unwonted
pain.
That's fear: I shall live it down—and many a thing besides
Till I win the poor dulled heart which the workman's jacket
hides.

(p. 385)

In these passages concerning the economic dread of the laborer, Morris breaks the conventions of "artistic" poetry, reaching back to certain of Blake's *Songs of Experience*, perhaps, to forge an aesthetic of the poetic dignity of everyday life as lived by those who have little time for the contemplation of landscapes. Richard (the narrator) studies communism ("I read day after day / Whatever books I could handle") and begins to propagandize on street corners. But his employer hears about his monetary losses and seizes the opportunity first to forbid him to talk of revolution in the shop and then to fire him for doing so after hours.

Between the September appearance of "The New Proletarian" and the November publication of "*The Pilgrims of Hope*. VII.—In Prison—and at Home," Morris was involved in a political court

case. The police had broken up one of the Socialist League's outdoor meetings, arresting eight men, one of whom was sentenced the next day to two months of hard labor. In the October number of *Commonweal*, Edward Aveling gave a lively account of the incident and of Morris's arrest for disorderly conduct in the Thames police courtroom. (The magistrate dismissed the charges against Morris as soon as he discovered Morris's status.) This was all woven into "In Prison—and at Home," which is narrated by Richard's wife. Richard has been sentenced to two months imprisonment by a "white-haired fool on the bench" for hitting a rich man who had insulted Richard's wife at a street corner meeting. The section contains the poem's third description of the daily round of propaganda to which Richard (like Morris) had set himself. In this instance the meeting is given as being held in the West End of London for an audience of the rich and the degraded poor of the section, in sharp contrast to the earlier descriptions of East End working-class meetings. (In the actual case the arrested persons were accused of striking the police, not members of the audience. Perhaps the transformation was useful to Morris as a means of introducing the theme of jealousy which is of importance later in the poem.) "In Prison—and at Home" reads much like a poetic retelling of Aveling's article in the previous issue of *Commonweal*. We see that *The Pilgrims of Hope*, like Morris's other serialized work in *Commonweal*, was firmly bound up with the news of the day, both literally—as it appeared in the columns of the newspaper—and in content, the literary work constantly referring to current events of agitational interest.

"*The Pilgrims of Hope*. VIII.—The Half of Life Gone," which did not appear until January 1886 presents a sharp break in the poem. We are suddenly at the end of the story: Richard is an old man, his wife is dead, and their son is now a half-grown young man working in the fields with his stepmother. Some not yet identified catastrophe has accomplished this, changing Richard from an unemployed urban militant to a broken man retired in the countryside. This relatively short section concludes with a promise of more to come, telling of how this change had come about. The transition here is rough, and this part is probably one of those Morris had in mind when he refused to republish the poem at the Kelmescott Press because of its unfinished state.¹⁶

Commonweal for February 1886 carried a note stating that *The Pilgrims of Hope* was not being printed that month for lack of space but would continue in the following issue. In the March number, "*The Pilgrims of Hope*. IX.—A New Friend" picks up the story with Richard newly released from prison, apparently black-

listed from his craft, trying to supplement money his wife earns with his own newspaper writing, and still carrying on propaganda for the cause. It is difficult:

When the poor man thinks—and rebels, the whip lies ready
anear;
But he who is rebel and rich may live for many a year,
While he warms his heart with pictures of all the glory to
come.
There's the storm of the press and the critics maybe, but
sweet is his home,
There is the meat in the morn and the even, and rest when
the day is done,
All is fair and orderly there as the rising and setting sun—
And I know both the rich and the poor.

(p. 395)

The many passages like this one in the poem, which seem to be mere versified musings by its author about his own position in the movement, add much to the poem's effect through their honesty and novelty, if not through their choice phrasing. In this case these reflections preview the appearance of "a new friend." A wealthy young man hears one of Richard's speeches on the subject of the Franco-Prussian War: "It was late in the terrible war, and France to the end grew nigh." He is taken with both the cause and with Richard himself and begins to give Richard work ("It was writing, you understand") and otherwise help him financially and with companionship. Richard is able to move from a "den to a dwelling" and allows his new friend to visit him and his wife there. After a while the friend (Arthur) becomes moody and his visits unpredictable. During a conversation about the French situation, Richard speaks of "betrayers":

As I spoke the word "betrayed," my eyes met his in a glance,
And swiftly he turned away; then back with a steady gaze
He turned on me; and it seemed as when a swordpoint plays
Round the sword in a battle's beginning and the coming on
of strife.
For I knew though he looked on me, he saw not me, but my
wife.

(p. 398)

Arthur leaves, and there is a difficult scene between Richard and his wife as they both realize that she is in love with Arthur:

We were gentle and kind together, and if any had seen us so,
They had said, "These two are one in the face of all trouble
and woe."
But indeed as a wedded couple we shrank from the eyes of
men,
As we dwelt together and pondered on the days that come
not again.

(p. 399)

We have heard that note before: "'Come again, / Come back, past years! why will ye pass in vain?'"

Some days go by with no more visits from Arthur. We are told that it is February (1871). He suddenly reappears with the news that Paris has fallen to the Prussians:

"And who knows what next shall happen after all that has
happened and passed?
There now may we all be wanted." I took up the word: "Well
then
Let us go, we three together, and there to die like men."
"Nay," he said, "to live and be happy like men." Then he
flushed up red,
And she no less as she hearkened, as one thought through
their bodies had sped.

(p. 399)

Richard lets this go by without comment. The three of them make their plans to go to Paris. The boy is taken to the country and left with a friend of Richard's mother, along with some money from Arthur in case they do not return. Richard excuses this "blot" on his honor to the reader by saying that he did not intend to return alive from the fight and the boy needed to be cared for. A strong mood of melancholy informs this entire section ("Ready to Depart," published in April 1886) composed of mingled feelings (attributed to the narrator) of friendship for Arthur, love for his wife and child, jealousy of Arthur's and his wife's love for one another, regret at the end of his own relationship with his wife, political hope and knowledge of the catastrophe toward which they are all moving.

Among all the information about personalities in the vast surviving documentation of the Rossetti/Morris/Burne-Jones set from the early 1870s, one must look in vain for any sympathetic comment on the Paris Commune, the great news event of the time.

There are one or two references to the Prussian siege of Paris, references occasioned by the arrival of French refugee celebrities in London, but none of these references are in Morris's letters. The whole group was sufficiently preoccupied with their own complicated private affairs. It seems, then, a modest thesis that when Morris came to write in *The Pilgrims of Hope* in 1885-86 about the events of 1871, his memories of that earlier year were those of the dramas of domestic life, memories that forced their way into the construction of the poem, so much so that it at times threatens to be not about the Commune or politics at all but just one more variation on that ancient troubadour theme that Meredith had so mistakenly attempted to characterize as "modern" love. In weighing the factors that were combined in *The Pilgrims of Hope*, the peculiar tension between the literary tradition of jealousy and the actual events of Morris's life must be carefully measured. This conclusion agrees with Paul Zumthor's observation that "in all ages, the relationship between author and tradition has been dialectical, with the author reproducing, deforming, or refusing a certain given that has been transmitted to him."¹⁷ Matters are more complicated yet when the text is one produced by an author nearing the end of a long career, a career in which he had, as Thompson noted, formed a literary tradition of his own.

We can trace this theme in Morris's literary work almost from its beginning, notably in *The Earthly Paradise* (where the seasonal verses quoted above sound like less daring versions of some of the sonnets in *Modern Love*) and in his unfinished novel of contemporary life (written about 1870). *The Pilgrims of Hope* is practically its last appearance. In the later prose works, the male protagonists are free to love their gray-eyed maidens without interference from dark wives or jealous male friends. It is notorious that this triangular motif, well enough rooted in the traditions of Western Romanticism, was especially poignant for Morris because of its enactment in his own life and its mirror image in the life of his friend Burne-Jones. The crucial events are those relating to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Jane Morris, and William Morris in the late 1860s and early 1870s.

William Fredeman has published various extracts from the Penkill and Angeli Papers at the University of British Columbia, which reveal some details of Morris's intimate life during this period. His quotations from William Bell Scott's letters to Alice Boyd trace the development of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's relationship with Jane Morris.¹⁸ The triangle described in *The Pilgrims of Hope* as taking place in a fictional 1870 is the literary equivalent of the Rossetti-Morris triangle that actually occurred at that time.

Although biographical criticism can be pressed too far, one can at least attribute some of the power of the emotions depicted in the poem to the return of the repressed emotions associated with its setting. It is not necessary to draw some crude equation of Morris with Richard or Rossetti with Arthur; the effort would break down in a dozen places. It is, however, important to note that the period in which the poem is set was important to Morris for two completely different types of reasons: it marked the definite end of his domestic happiness, and it was the moment of the emergence of utopian communism. The evidence that he could not think of the one without the other following is to be found in the form of *The Pilgrims of Hope*. The personal emotions, erupting into the agitational and propagandistic plot of the poem, disrupted it, leaving it fragmented, without surface unity, disturbing.

But the Commune is, ultimately, the great event toward which the poem is overtly moving, its living center and just end. The Commune itself was for Morris, as for Marx, the great "negative" event of the nineteenth century. The utopian negation of that inferno of commonsense, it was indeed his New Jerusalem. In his last years, Morris made it a practice to deliver speeches on the anniversary of the Commune; it became a model of the future for him, supplementing the model of the idealized past. If the Commune was, in one way, a contemporary phenomenon for Morris and his readers, it was, in another, out of time entirely, a utopian moment unregulated by factory hours and contract limits, particularities of time and space. Utopia as festival, as saturnalia, is one of the oldest forms of the representation of human life as joy. Thus the Commune is a festival and represents the resolution of the conflicts of all that is in opposition to it, including the emotional conflicts of the protagonists of the poem, conflicts which are suspended during the Commune and end with it. The idea or ideal (if not the strict historical record) of those days in the spring of 1871 became for Morris the token of the summary of the possibility of human life in the world that is not enchained by the tyranny of the here and now and so acted as an antidote to the memory of other, personal, events of that season and year, events that he was able to place in a larger context of social relations corrupted, as he often put it, by a system that valued things above people.

Beginning with the issue of May 1, 1886, *Commonweal* became a weekly. "*The Pilgrims of Hope*. XI.—A Glimpse of the Coming Day" was printed in the May 8 number. The three protagonists of the piece travel to Paris, at first depressed by the war-ravaged countryside and (except for Arthur) by their own emotional

situation. Their mood changes when they arrive in Paris and find that the people there are not thinking of their own desperate straits, trapped between the Prussians and the French (counter-revolutionary) army:

Yet here we beheld all joyous the folk they had made
forlorn!
So at last from a grey stone building we saw a great flag fly,
One colour, red and solemn 'gainst the blue of the spring-tide
sky,
.....
In Paris the day of days had betid; for the vile dwarf's stroke,
To madden Paris and crush her, had been struck and the dull
sword broke;
There was no foe and no fool in the city, and Paris was free;
And e'en as she is this morning, to-morrow all France will be.
(p. 402)

The three English Communists had arrived in Paris on February 19, the Day after Thiers (the "vile dwarf") had attempted to seize the cannon of the National Guard, failed, and fled the city. Richard comments that here at last he saw the joy of the people after the Revolution, a joy that until then he had not been sure of when he had "preached" it: "If it was but despair of the present or the hope of the day that was due— / I say that I saw it now, real, solid, and at hand" (p. 402). (This phrase recalls the last lines of *News from Nowhere*.) The two men enlist in the National Guard as Richard briefly dreams of an English countryside as free and joyous as revolutionary Paris, thus forging a link between Morris's personal myth of a rural golden age and his political utopianism. Richard's wife joins the ambulance-women: "And gently and bravely would serve us; and to all as a sister to be— / A sister amidst of the strangers—and, alas! a sister to me" (p. 403). Here we see the two main themes of the poem, the Commune and the love triangle between Richard, his wife, and Arthur, interpenetrating.

The *Grande sortie* of April 3 is depicted in "*The Pilgrims of Hope*. XII.—Meeting the War-Machine," published on June 5, 1886. This section is especially notable for its perception of modern war as an industrial process: "By the bourgeois world it was made, for the bourgeois world; and we, / We were e'en as the village weaver 'gainst the power-loom, maybe" (p. 406). Side by side with these installments of the poem, *Commonweal* was printing during these months memorial histories of the Commune.

Morris's verses acted as artistic iterations of those historical accounts and so are particularly easy to associate with exact sequences of events.

With that the poem moved quite suddenly to a conclusion in "*The Pilgrims of Hope*. XIII.—The Story's Ending," published July 3, 1886. Arthur and the narrator's wife are killed on one of the last barricades (perhaps May 28, 1871), and Richard is severely wounded. Recovering in a friend's house, he learns that his wife and Arthur had been placed on the same litter after their deaths, so that some "Took them for husband and wife who were fated there to die / Or it may be lover and lover indeed—but what know I?" (p. 408). The phrase "lover and lover" ironically echoes a line in "*The Message of the March Wind*"; in the earlier verses, it had applied to Richard and his wife. Richard escapes from France with faked papers and returns to the English countryside to "look to my son, and myself to get stout and strong, / That two men there might be hereafter to battle against the wrong" (p. 408). This represents a return to the maternal Earthly Paradise of rural childhood upon the occasion of the defeat of adult utopian hopes.

The positive epilogue to *The Pilgrims of Hope* chimes with Morris's own rising hopes at this early point in his career as a political organizer. Richard had found an initial refuge from the problems of the world in the intimate satisfactions of married life; losing these he seeks death or a new social order. The utopian moment which in Morris's earlier work was a place outside of time, or simply art itself, becomes in *The Pilgrims of Hope* the possibility of community within, or at the end of, history. That is a public meaning of the poem. On a more intimate level, the destruction of the form of the poem as it was apparently originally intended, the establishment of that political New Jerusalem, the Commune, as a goal for life, causes it, perhaps, to serve the satisfactory personal purpose for Morris of allowing him to describe in art what he dare not have stated in any other way: that the unfaithful wife and the "betrayers," the best friend who takes her, are to be punished with death. It is not surprising that he did not allow the republication of the poem; its lessons were at once too ambivalent and too clear, too ambivalent in that the political life does not actually resolve the problems of intimate unhappiness, too clear in revealing the murderous unconscious impulses of the betrayed husband.

Notes

1. J. W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), I, 30.
2. Walter Pater, "Poems by William Morris," *Westminster Review*, 15 Oct. 1868, 300-12.
3. William Morris, *The Letters of William Morris to His Family and Friends*, ed. Philip Henderson (London: Longmans, Green, 1950), p. 176.
4. Morris, *Letters*, p. 149.
5. William Morris, *The Earthly Paradise*, in *The Collected Works of William Morris* (London: Longmans, Green, 1912), III, 169; V, 1.
6. Morris, *Letters*, p. xxix.
7. Morris, *Works*, III, xv.
8. *Ibid.*, V, xj.
9. *Ibid.*, V, xij.
10. *Ibid.*, V, xv.
11. May Morris, *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), II, 171.
12. Chushichi Tszuzuki, *The Life of Eleanor Marx* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 27.
13. William Morris, *The Pilgrims of Hope*, in *Works*, XXIV, 369. Page numbers in the text refer to this volume.
14. T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," in *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1934), p. 31.
15. Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones* (1904; reprint ed. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), II, 97.
16. E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), p. 671. Elsewhere the 1955 edition of this work has been cited whenever changes in the text have made that necessary.
17. Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poetique medievale* (Paris, 1972), p. 82.
18. William E. Fredeman, "Prelude to the Last Decade: Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the Summer of 1872," *John Rylands Library Bulletin* (Manchester), 53 (Autumn 1970). Scott's first reference to Jane Morris is in a letter of November 9, 1868. "Even Mrs. Street had spoken to Letitia about Gabriel being so fond of Mrs. Top" (p. 101). (William Morris's nickname was Top or Topsy, due to his "unnaturally curly hair.") On the twenty-sixth of the same month Scott reports of a dinner party that:

Gabriel sat by Jeanie, and I must say acts like a perfect fool if he wants to conceal his attachment, doing nothing but attend to her, sitting sideways towards her [and] that sort of thing. Mrs. Linton sat opposite and I shall be surprized if she did not see anything interesting. Also Mrs. Morris' sister. However, I have concluded that they (G. & J.) will not go further than they have gone. She is certainly the most remarkable looking woman in the world, and in expression lovely. Of course a woman under such circumstances, before people, is a sealed book, still I think she is cool. As to Gabriel he forgets everyone else. When we went down, although it was my part to take Jeanie, G. got her arm in his in a moment, then abandoned her as hurriedly for the nearest other lady, Morris looking at him all the time. (p. 102)

Morris was beginning his Icelandic studies. He had "plunged," according to

Mackail, into these in the autumn of 1868. All that winter and the following spring he worked both at those studies and at *The Earthly Paradise* while Jane Morris modeled for Rossetti. Then, Mackail writes, "In the autumn, Mrs. Morris's delicate health led to their spending two months at Bad-Ems" (Mackail, I, 207). As early as July 21, 1869, Rossetti was writing to his "Dear Good Janey" in Germany (John Bryson and Janet Camp Troxell, eds., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris, Their Correspondence* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976], p. 5). In July 1871 Rossetti and the Morrises jointly took a lease on Kelmscott House, and Rossetti immediately moved in. Mackail gives his usual cautious account of this:

He was there through the summer and autumn of 1871. In 1872 the dangerous illness of which details are given in his biography was followed by a long visit to Scotland, but he was at Kelmscott again from September all through the winter of 1872-3, and for the greater part of the following twelve months. In the summer of 1874 he finally left it; not a little to Morris's relief for many reasons. (Mackail, I, 243)

Morris had left for Iceland directly after settling Jane Morris, their children, and Rossetti at Kelmscott (1871). He did not return until September (Mackail, I, 280). In addition to this circumstantial information, we now have the following letter from Scott, dated October 23, 1871:

In my last I told you of the second dinner party when D.G. & Huffer came unexpectedly in the evening. Well next evening (Friday evening) I went to Morris to dinner at 6. I asked Gabriel the evening before if he was to be there, and on his answering no, I said "Why, then?" His reply was "Oh I have another engagement." This engagement was actually, Janey at his own house for the night! At Top's there were Jones, Poynter, Brown, Huffer, Ellis and Green. Of course not Janey. Is it not too daring, and altogether inexplicable? Of course I did not ask Morris after his wife, having been warned before that she was at Chelsea. (Fredeman, p. 104)