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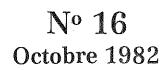
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MONTPELLIER

Nᵒ 16
Octobre 1982

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(16) Robert Roberts, *The Classic Sum : Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973), p. 90. The title of this excellent monograph – a blend of personal reminiscence- and sociological analysis – belies a more comprehensive concern with « the plight of the undermass in pre-1914 industrial Britain » as a whole (p. 9). Virtually a sourcebook for Tressell's novel, it should be complemented by David Kynaston's *King Labour : The British Working Class 1850-1914* (London, George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1976), esp. pp. 89-119.

(17) *An Economic History of England 1870-1930* (London, Methuen and Co. Ltd. ; New York, Barnes & Noble, 1960), p. 252.

(18) 'Author's Preface', p. 12.

(19) 'Dialectical Materialism and Literary History', *New Left Review*, No. 92, July-August, 1975, p. 51.

(20) 'The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists – Corner-Stone of a Proletarian Literary Culture and of Socialist Realism in English Literature', *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* X, 1 (1962), 33-55 (p. 42).

(21) 'Author's Introduction', p. 7.

(22) See my essay, dealing at some length with this problematic, 'Protest and Prepossession : the case of proletarian fiction in England in the 1930s', *Modernist Studies : Literature and Culture 1920-1940* [University of Alberta], Vol. 3, 1980.

(23) 'Author's Preface', *loc. cit.*

WILLIAM MORRIS'S *ROOTS* : HISTORY INTO METAPHOR

Suddenly near the end of the twentieth century « roots » has become a commonplace word for the cultural history and traditions which inform our individual identities. With a best-selling novel and an acclaimed television series, Alex Haley pointed out that a meaningful knowledge of the past is particularly important in recovering minority experience. In our day, awareness of roots has helped define positive self-images for an American Black community nearly uprooted and destroyed by overwhelming, dominant cultural forces.

Nearly a century ago, William Morris, like Haley, perceived a deadening rootlessness threatening the basic human dignity of the hard-pressed working class in England. At the century's end, industrialization and an expansive colonial empire meant extravagant wealth and power, with all the identity money could buy, for the ruling upper classes ; but with neither rank, title, nor wealth, the lower class common folk had little to inform their vision of the past and no great expectations for improvement in the future. After years of tireless effort as a lecturer and organizer for political and social change, Morris turned from action to fiction to present the compelling roots he saw clearly in the early history of the common folk of Britain. He wrote of hopeful precedents which might recover and preserve a nearly lost minority identity in English experience.

The period he chose to write about stretches through the first few centuries A.D., that « uncivilized » early period of English history when Britain was inhabited by tribes. In fact, this period had always held great interest for Morris, but it received special attention in the fiction he wrote during the last years of his life. *The House of the Wolfings*[1], published in 1888, is the first modern fantasy novel written in English, and marks the beginning of Morris' cultivation of roots in the history of his island country which offer a system of value and identity markedly different from the expectations of industrial England. *The Roots of the Mountains*, written and published the following year, is a thematic and historical partner, clarifying and elaborating Morris' social revisionism. *Wolfings* depicts imaginary tribal life standing up to the threat of Roman conquest, before indigenous customs

and beliefs were replaced by Roman technological and legal systems. The communal, democratic style of folk in *Wolfings* showed that at this early Iron Age period an alternative social system offered precedents quite different from the empire-building, road-making Roman model. Morris discerned fresh strength and significance in a tribal past which he followed into a later period in *Roots*[2]. Concerned to stretch the imagination of his readers, as well as to expand their historical awareness, he depicted gothic tribal life as it might have been[3], but more importantly as he developed his fantasy-writing facility in his second fantasy novel, he led the reader into a realm of inexplicable powers and intuitions. His characters, action, and setting are subject to non-rational occurrences and become figurative rather than literal. He manages an astounding leap from history into metaphor.

Morris signals the reader to prepare for a metaphorical orientation in the title he has given his book. To speak of a mountain's roots is to talk of one thing in terms of another ; rootedness is normally more characteristic of a tree than of a mountain. Yet Morris describes rock and earth as though they were organic and alive. The title phrase is, of course, an old colloquial way of speaking about foothills – and, significantly, a commonplace rather than an upper-class phrase. In the opening pages of the book Morris describes the mountains and the geographical setting in great metaphoric detail. His metaphors expand from the organic rootedness of inanimate growth, to increasingly anthropomorphic images : « the faces of the hills, » « great shoulders of land, » « a knowll nigh the brow, » and « feet of the Southern crags. »[4] The hard-working men of Burgdale would easily use such expressions, for they have shaped their lives to the land. They take the natural contours and resources of landscape to define their village, build their towers and homes of stone, and testify to their close bonds with the earth in their dwellings of rock and wood. Their most important tribal meetings and their religious worship occur within a simple circle of stones –a widespread practice for early tribes in Britain, preserved notably in Avesbury and Stonehenge, as well as other sites.

The metaphorical connections between the earth and its human inhabitants in the opening pages are cast in elemental realities : rock, wood, earth, and water. The Burgdalers live beside the Weltering Waters, and Morris makes a point of saying that the stream is clear and fresh. It is not a recycled product of melting snow or polluted rain, but bubbles from the rock in crystal springs. Metaphorically Morris established through this description that the tribal settlement is itself a fresh source, a root of native English experience unpolluted, as it were, by run-off culture from Greece and Rome.[5] The solid earth, the rooted mountains, are in other works often used as opposing images to changeable waters ; symbolically they usually represent a static and fixed solidity contrasting to the flowing stream. But in Morris'

descriptions these diverse elements are shown to be harmoniously blending with one another, and the land is metaphorically described in terms of water : « rugged and broken by rocks and ridges of water-borne stones, it smoothed itself ... at last into a fair and fertile plain swelling up into a green wave. »[6]

Having linked the solid earth and rock, the flowing waters, and the human inhabitants in a coalescing landscape, Morris represents social harmony upon the face of the earth. The story focuses on the House of the Face, with its elders (the past) dramatically personified in Stone-face and Iron-face, and its present and future potential in the Youthful Face-of-God. The Stone and Iron Ages hold out the promise of a Golden Age – and Face-of-God is also called Gold-mane. Yet the promising young man is disturbed whenever he enters the dark forest. Stone-face and Iron-face, whose names connote the stages which gave designations to whole periods of human culture[7], are inclined toward increased interaction with the merchants of the plain. At the time of Morris' story, the tribe itself has coined no money, but the lure of material goods and the stories of wars, murders, and excitement in the marketplace beyond are compelling to the older generations. Stone-face and Iron-face seem bent in that direction. When Face-of-God expresses uneasiness, his father immediately suggests the boy should go visit with the merchants, but this course seems instinctively wrong to him.

Morris himself felt that the path to capitalistic materialism represented a decline in real human value. He did not disapprove of the great human creative inventions in the Stone and Iron Ages which had led man into a period of relative security and made possible craft and nurture as practiced by the Burgdalers. Yet, he was outspokenly critical of the path to industrialization and materialism which men have unthinkingly pursued since then, a lifestyle which places the very harmony of the face of the earth in jeopardy. In this inscription verse for *Wolfings* he wrote of the materialistic legacy of the road-building Romans with sorrow as he recognized that « still the dark road drives us on. » The title page verse for *Roots* resumes this road motif as it depicts man as a passive passenger through hectic modern life, swept past scenes of natural beauty (« the garden bright amidst the hay ») but « carried o'er the iron road, » on rails of technology beyond his control, swept past the very vision of loveliness he yearns to inhabit.[8]

Technology is at the opposite pole from metaphor. Technical advance which has rushed us rootless across the earth depends upon a literal, specific, materialistic language with little ambiguity. The emphasis on metaphor in Morris' novel clearly affirms an ancient, poetic linguistic tradition. Moreover, the very vocabulary of the book, largely short, active, colloquial words with Germanic or Nordic roots, is a repudiation of the Frenchified and Latinate language which prevails in upper-class and

technical usage, in the language of the conquerors. Face-of-God is pivotal in this regard, returning to the social and linguistic roots of his ancestors, he has not personally found the world to be capable of precise expression. The older folk have carved their place in life by coming precisely to know their needs, analyzing them, and then solving their problems through inventive thought and ardent labor. They are puzzled and perplexed by a young man who feels himself on the brink of « something » but who can't say what. Face-of-God senses that the life of his people is good, but that within the dark wood danger looms, a threat to his marriage and his future. His foreboding and later his very movements are directed by non-rational impulse, rich sensitivity, and he consistently moves away from the impoverished precision of technology.

The dark wood which metaphorically contains his uneasiness is an archetypal place for spiritual confusion. Dante finds himself alone in such a place as he begins his journey in *The Inferno*. And Dante's persona must descend into hell to learn the true condition of his society and of his soul. Face-of-God's route lies another way. Neglecting the promptings of his father to visit the plain – always in Morris' fiction a symbol of flat, materialistic values – he follows a difficult and unknown path upward, true to his aspirations and to his name. The mountains of this novel recall man not only to his roots, but to his kinship with the earth. It is a social vision informed by a sacred theory of the earth, a vision in which man's ability to commune with nature leads organically to a communal social fabric, and ultimately to transcendent communion. God is often said to have come closest to man on mountain tops and is thus portrayed in parables from Zeus to Moses. The metaphorical harmonies between the House of the Face and the face of the mountain which culminate in Face-of-God promise a type of divinity fulfilled through human aspiration.

The magic, intuitive force which leads Face-of-God through the woods to the Shadowy Vale is an instinctive power for unity which can preserve and strengthen harmonious and simple life. As a born chieftain, Face-of-God would normally have followed the inclinations of his elders, the predictable path to marriage within his clan to his betrothed, « The Bride. » He might even have carried out the leanings of those elders to explore the riches of the plain and to abandon the roots and wellsprings of their self-reliant culture. But this is fantasy, and a force intervenes. The pattern of narrow, predictable behavior is broken. The Sunbeam, a daughter of the Kindred of the Wolf, is a light beyond the confusion of the dark forest. The Dusky Men (perhaps Mongols or Huns) who represent a state of savagery as threatening as sterile technology, are overcome through union with her illuminating new presence. The liberated women led by Bow-may help turn the tide of battle, and form only one of many images of strength in unexpected forms. Even

The Bride is included in the final unities of the novel, but most of nineteenth century reality is carefully excluded.

J.M. Mackail, the major biographer of Morris, praised *Roots of the Mountains* for « its union of the gravity of the Saga with the delicate and profuse ornament of romance. » He counted it very high in the ranking of his fiction, finding that « for balance of his qualities » it ranked in first place « as a work of art. »[10] The critic and medievalist Robert Steele praised the book as « perhaps the finest story of primitive Northern life ever written. »[11] And Morris himself said late in life that of all his books, this was the one which had given him the greatest pleasure in writing. Both the pleasure and the praise are to be found in what Morris called the « literary matter, »[12] primarily in the successful realization of a consistent metaphorical reality.

For Morris, roots represented more than the knowledge of one's history and ancestors – though certainly he wished to remind his English-speaking readers of a nearly lost primitive Northern lifestyle in their cultural roots. He could conceive no better metaphor for one's personal connection with the earth. He dreamed in *News from Nowhere* of a utopian time when men would feel the « overweening love of the very skin and surface of the earth on which man dwells, such as a lover has in the fair flesh of the woman he loves. »[13] Perhaps Face-of-God foresees first in the dark woods the impending uprooting which historically destroyed the tribal culture of which he was a part. His own close kinship with the earth is keenly felt, as well as his repugnance for the urban merchant class. Urban roads do not follow the natural curves of riverbeds; they run straight and clean. Morris was particularly struck by the iron railroads he refers to in his inscription; rails cut straight through virgin woodlands and through mountainsides[14]. In his book Morris has shown something beautiful and good forsaken in building roads and railroads, something at the very root and source of human aspiration, and perhaps the thing which could have brought man closest to his god-like potential: harmoniously embracing the world rather than merely asserting power and dominance over it.

Roots is a book which cultivates metaphor and imaginative sensitivity as a means of gaining perspective on what has been lost and showing how things might be otherwise. Though Face-of-God triumphs in these pages, the fruit of his triumph, a fulfilling life of unhurried simplicity, has eluded us. Until the energy supply runs out we keep our dark roads lit all night. Morris challenges our awareness with metaphorical modes which cause us to consider one thing in terms of another unlike thing – roots and mountains, rocks and faces. It must be our challenge to apply the living roots of metaphor and history to strengthen our ideals and support our growth toward this metaphorical life with its new Edenic ending which is so unlike what seems to be our own :

Then lived this folk in much plenty and ease of life, though not delicately nor desiring things out of measure. They wrought with their hands and wearied themselves ; and they rested from their toil and feasted and were merry : tomorrow was not a burden to them, nor yesterday a thing which they would fain forget : life shamed them not, nor did death make them afraid[15].

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NOTES

(1) Unless otherwise noted, all references to William Morris's writings are to *The Collected Works of William Morris*, 24 vols., ed. by May Morris (London : Longmans Green and Company, 1910-1915). This collection includes *The House of the Wolfings*, Vol. XIV ; *The Roots of the Mountains*, Vol. XV ; and *News from Nowhere*, Vol. XVI, mentioned in this essay.

(2) In *William Morris : Artist Writer Socialist* (Oxford : B. Blackwell, 1936), Vol. I, pp. 508-509, May Morris identifies the « Dusky Men » as « Huns, » which would locate the tale in Northern Italy or the alps of middle-Europe. It seems likely that the story is set within the area the Romans called Gaul, which had been settled by Celtic invaders (the Romans called the Celts Gauls). *The House of the Wolfings* specifically identifies its tribal people as « Goths » who are fighting the Romans or « Huns, » and Morris said in a letter to his daughter Jenny that the folk in *Roots* reflected a later condition (*Collected Works*, XV, p. xi). Britain had been settled by Celtic tribes from Gaul in the 5th Century B.C. and was therefore directly linked to the Celtic tribal culture of this area of middle-Europe. It wasn't until 55 B.C. when Julius Caesar's armies crossed the Chanel that Romanization and literacy were brought to Britain, and even to 43 A.D., when the Emperor Claudius brought the island firmly under Roman control, the Celtic roots of culture in Britain represented an indigenous, « anti-Roman » model. Later, during the period of *Roots*, the germanic-celtic tribes of middle-Europe still preserved in isolated pockets this early and vigorous pre-literate culture. These cultural roots which pre-date and repudiate Roman values offer an alternative cultural legacy for Britain, even though the action of the story is not specifically set in Britain. In a lecture on « The Gothic Revival » in 1884 (and elsewhere) Morris praised these roots, which he pointed out had survived in Britain in « the fragmentary literature of Ireland and Wales, the oral tradition and ballads of Scotland and the northern border, and the fragments of songs of the early Germanic invaders among which towers majestic the noble poem of Beowulf, unsurpassed for simplicity and strength by any poem of our later tongue, » [*The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*, ed. by Eugene D. LeMire (Detroit : Wayne State Unviersity Press, 1969), p. 57].

(3) Most of the details of tribal life were probably taken from Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which Morris had read more than once [*Collected Works*, XXII, pp. xxvi-xvii].

(4) *Collected Works*, XV, pp. 1-3.

(5) In response to an 1895 review in *The Spectator* which interpreted *The Wood Beyond the World* as a socialist allegory of Capital and Labor, Morris disclaimed allegorical intentions, saying that his book was « a tale pure and simple, with nothing didactic about it, » [*The Letters of William Morris to his Family and Friends*, ed. by Philip Henderson (London : Longmans, Green and Company, 1950), p. 371]. The disclaimer was made at some distance from *Roots* and probably would not apply to it in any case. In fact, Morris expresses an impulse toward didacticism in his early version of the title-page poem for *Roots* which May Morris published in her introduction to Volume XV of the *Collected Works*. There Morris avows he yearns to provide a glimpse of a good vision that has been lost :

> I saw a thing and deemed it fair
> And longed that it might tarry there
> And therewithal with words I wrought
> To make it something more than nought.
>   [*Collected Works*, XV, p. xxxii]

His poem directly states his aim to recover and make significant a valuable and beautiful part of his past.

The *Spectator* critic who read *Wood* as a socialist allegory was underrating and trivializing the level and complexity of the didactic message. Morris's response that the book should be taken as a « tale pure and simple » is not an easy request if one realizes that « simplicity and strength » were the qualities Morris singled out for praise in *Beowulf*, (see Note 1). J.R.R. Tolkien, who was inspired and influenced by Morris, shared and enthusiasm for *Beowulf*, and in his famous essay « Beowulf : the Monsters an the Critics » [*Proceedings of the British Academy*, 22 (London : Oxford University Press, 1937) pp. 245-95, Tolkien explains many of the strengths of the work which would have appealed to Morris. For readers disturbed by Morris's disclaimer, a reading of Tolkien's essay will elucidate what is meant by a « pure and simple » tale. Morris was, I believe, involved in an act of « sub-creation, » a term for describing the pure invention of the fantasy writer which Tolkien explains in his later essay « On Fairy Stories » [a 1939 lecture published in *Tree and Leaf* (London : George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1964]. Tolkien's essay outlines three primary functions for fantasy – Recovery, Escape, and Consolation – all of which afford a sound basis for appreciating Morris's aims and attainments in his novels.

(6) *Collected Works*, XV, p. 1.

(7) It is worth noting that the Celtic tribes attained their greatest strength in the Alps and Danube Valley, areas which their forefathers had inhabited since the Stone Age, in the period 500 B.C. to A.D. 1. A significant measure of their success has been ascribed to their great skill in metallurgy, especially in regard to the working of the native iron resources.

(8) The title-page poems of both *Wolfings* and *Roots* associate poetry with the stories from the very start. *Wolfings* makes extensive use of verse throughout the narrative, and in *Roots* Morris includes songs and verse within the body of the text. One function of this verse is to show the people themselves in the process of preserving history in literature, and thereby beginning the transformation of history into metaphor. It also conveys the centrality and nobility of language in this period before it had been degraded for commercial use. Poetry is shown to be part of life, not reserved for an elite.

(9) *Collected Works,* XV, p. 19.

(10) J.W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris* (London : Longmans Green and Company, 1901), p. 227.

(11) Quoted in Aymer Vallance, *William Morris : His Art His Writings and His Public Life*(London : George Bell and Sons, 1909), p. 369.

(12) Mackail, p. 227.

(13) *Collected works,* XVI, p. 132.

(14) Reference to the railroad is found in the early version of the title-page poem cited above (note 4). In her introduction to Volume XV of the *Collected Works,* May Morris explains the origins of this extension of « iron » technology : « One day, going down in the train to Kelmscott, he called Emery Walker's attention to a pretty hay-making scene beyond the 'iron road' they were on, the high wind lifting hay from the waggon [sic]. » [p. xxxi].

(15) *Collected Works,* XV, p. 11.

FROM WHISPER TO VOICE :

MARLOW'S « ACCURSED INHERITANCE » IN *HEART OF DARKNESS*

> « I listened, I listened on the watch for the sentence, for the word, that would give me the clue to the faint uneasiness inspired by the narrative that *seemed* to shape itself without human lips... »[1].

A multilevelled literary text, *Heart of Darkness* has been, and should remain, open to several, not mutually exclusive, readings. The following notes will try to unravel in a Freudian (half) light a neglected network of echoes and whispers.

In the Name of Kurtz :

In the quotation used for an epigraph, the first narrator (as attentive listener-reader) is described « on the watch for the sentence, for the word that would give... the clue... » While « the sentence » cannot be spotted yet, a close reading of the African tale shows that *two* words are in fact emphasized as *such,* given an autonomous life as resonant « signifiers » : one is « the word ivory » that « rang in the air » (p. 23) or « would ring in the air » (p. 35) ; the other is the name of « Kurtz, » whose enigmatic sound long precedes the character's appearance : « He was just a word for me » (p. 27). This foretokens a symbolic link, beyond the literal business association of Kurtz and his ivory. But one step at a time : the word « Kurtz » is offered for auscultation.

The manuscript reveals that the first choice was « Klein », the name of a French agent in the company, who had died of dysentery on Conrad's steamer[2]. But why did the author, while clinging to the initial letter, replace