

MORRIS'S TREATMENT OF GREEK LEGEND IN *THE EARTHLY PARADISE*

By OSCAR MAURER

"I BY NATURE TURN TO ROMANCE rather than classicalism, and naturally, without effort, shrink from rhetoric."¹ Thus William Morris wrote of his own literary preferences, in answer to the inquiry of a German student about the traditions which had influenced him most. Again, at the end of his life, Morris commented significantly upon a fifteenth-century edition of Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*:

The subject-matter of the book also makes it one of the most interesting, giving it opportunity for setting forth the mediaeval reverence for the classical period, without any of the loss of romance on the one hand, and epical sincerity and directness on the other, which the flood-tide of renaissance rhetoric presently inflicted on the world.²

These statements are both particularly important in considering Morris's treatment of Greek legends in *The Earthly Paradise*.³ The mediaevalism in which he was steeped and which colored all his work was not the mediaevalism of Geoffrey de Vinsauf or Alan de Lille; it was confined chiefly to the imaginative art of the Middle Ages, above all to romance. "Classicalism" and rhetoric were by no means unknown in the centuries that preceded the Renaissance: the two writers just mentioned composed works which are striking examples of both these conventions. But Morris ignored these aspects of mediaeval culture, as literary influences, quite as successfully as he ignored mediaeval theology after his break with the Anglo-Catholics. In the light of this identification of mediaeval literature with romance, this assumption that classic tradition had survived in the Middle Ages only through the modifications which we associate, for example, with Benoit's treatment of the tale of Troy, Morris was consistent in believing that rhetoric came in with the Renaissance. In his versions of Greek legends he acted consistently in emphasizing direct simplicity of narrative, unclassical pictorial elabora-

¹ J. W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris* (London, 1922), I, 203.

² William Morris, "On the Artistic Qualities of the Woodcut Books of Ulm and Augsburg in the 15th Century," *Bibliographica*, I (1895), 445.

³ For an account of the original legends (not the immediate sources) used by Morris, see J. Riegel, *Die Quellen von William Morris' Dichtung "The Earthly Paradise"*, Erlangen, 1890. For criticism of Morris's treatments, see Elisabeth Kuester, *Mittelalter und Antike bei William Morris*, Berlin, 1928; and Douglas Bush, *Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry*, Cambridge, Mass., 1937.

tion of detail, and mediaeval unconcern with accurate local and historical color. For he wanted to use the great wealth of fiction which we have inherited from Greece, without allowing himself to be influenced by the Greek *Weltanschauung* and literary tradition.

I

With the exception of the fragmentary "Scenes from the Fall of Troy" (not published by Morris) which belongs to the same period in his career as *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*, all the work which he based on Greek material was composed for *The Earthly Paradise*.⁴ Besides the twelve Greek tales which appeared in the collection as published, Morris wrote six others which he rejected from the completed work: "The Story of Aristomenes" and "The Story of Orpheus and Eurydice" were printed by May Morris in Volume XXIV of the *Collected Works*; "The King's Treasure House,"⁵ "The Story of Theseus," "The Dolphins and the Lovers,"⁶ and "The Fortunes of Gyges" remain unpublished. *The Life and Death of Jason*, longest and best of Morris's Greek tales, was also originally intended for inclusion in *The Earthly Paradise*; its length, however, made it unsuitable for the design of the *Paradise*, and it was published separately in 1867. Allowing for minor variations of atmosphere which clearly result from differences in the stories themselves, we can see a remarkable consistency of tone and treatment in this considerable body of poetry based on Greek legend. Mackail, it is true, thought he saw "the epic manner rising beside and partially overmastering the romantic" in Morris's version of the Bellerophon story, which was the subject of the last two Greek tales in *The Earthly Paradise*.⁷ The first of these, "Bellerophon at Argos," has in its treatment of a "triangle" situation some of the characteristics of tragedy; but, though Bellerophon is unmistakably heroic in both tales, neither gives the effect of epic breadth.

The consistency of treatment running through all the Greek tales is the result of a combination of *mood* and *narrative manner* that constitute Morris's unique virtue as poet and story-teller. To describe *The Earthly Paradise*, as Professor Bush does, as "forty-two thousand lines

⁴ Morris's translations of the *Aeneid* (1875) and the *Odyssey* (1887), though not "classical" in tone, are exact renderings.

⁵ A version of the tale of Rhampsinitus; see Herodotus, *History*, Bk. II, c. 121.

⁶ From Plutarch, "The Banquet of the Seven Sages," in *Moralia*, Book III. It is the tale of Enalus and the daughter of Smintheus; see the Loeb edition of *Moralia* (London, 1927), II, 440-43.

⁷ Mackail, I, 207; cf. Bush, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

with hardly a character or an idea,"⁸ is to miss the point that the mood—the sense of beauty quickened by the sense of “quick-coming death”—is the informing idea, and that the characters are subordinated to it. In the earlier *Scenes from the Fall of Troy* Morris had dealt with the relations, military and amatory, of Greeks and Trojans in the hard grim spirit which characterizes the poems based on Froissart in the *Guenevere* volume. It was a world of brutal passions; it was above all a world of clear outlines, where pleasure and pain had a sharp immediacy. But when *Jason* was published, the melancholy tone which was to be preserved during the whole of Morris's “central period” was indicated at once.⁹ The Argonauts, at their banquet after the Harpies have been destroyed, are not quite happy. The brooding sense of mortality in beauty is upon them:

So, set 'twixt pleasure and some soft regret,
All cares of mortal men did they forget,
Except the vague desire not to die,
The hopeless wish to flee from certainty,
That sights and sounds we love will bring on us
In this sweet fleeting world and piteous.¹⁰

Arrived at Aea, the voyagers are kindly received by the father of Medea. But the strange sadness of mood remains:

Long sat the Minyae there, and for their parts
Few words they said, because, indeed, their hearts,
O'er-burdened with delight, still dreaded death;
Nor did they think that they might long draw breath
In such an earthly Paradise as this,
But looked to find sharp ending to their bliss.¹¹

The tone of these passages recurs in all the Greek tales. The subjects are chosen or modified to suit the mood. For this reason the tale of Perseus (“The Doom of King Acrisius”) is set in the framework of Acrisius' unavoidable fate:

Now of the King Acrisius shall ye hear,
Who, thinking he could free his life from fear,
Did that which brought but death on him at last.¹²

⁸ Bush, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

⁹ This is the period (1865–75) of *Jason*, *The Earthly Paradise*, and *Love is Enough*. See Dixon Scott, “The First Morris,” in *Men of Letters* (London, 1916), pp. 257 ff.

¹⁰ *The Collected Works of William Morris, with Introductions by May Morris* (London, 1910–15), II, 84.

¹¹ *Works*, II, 99.

¹² *Works*, III, 171.

Even when a tale ends happily, the sense of death is still present. Acontius and Cydippe meet and embrace at last :

Yea, though amid the world's great wrong,
Their space of life should not be long;
O bitter-sweet if they must die!¹³

Rhodope goes to meet her destined husband with little of the joy of a bride, but rather with the feeling of one who is fey :

I strive with change,
I strive with death the Gods' toy, but in vain.¹⁴

Three tales, "The Love of Alcestis," "The Son of Croesus," and "The Death of Paris," are based on legends which have death as the central motif. "The Golden Apples" deals with the contrast (also frequently to be noted in the mediaeval tales) between the unearthly beauty—impersonal, lonely, inhuman—of the Hesperides, and the transitory concerns of mankind. As one of the maidens tells Hercules,

When the world foredone
Has moaned its last, still shall we dwell alone
Beneath this bough, and have no tales to tell
Of things deemed great that on the earth befell.¹⁵

The conclusion of "Atalanta's Race" is one of positive joy in the success of Milanion and the awakening of love in Atalanta's heart. But the brief epilogue to the tale shifts the mood at once back to the disillusionment of the listeners :

Yea, on their hearts a weight had seemed to fall,
As unto the scarce-hoped felicity
The tale grew round—the end of life so nigh,
The aim so little, and the joy so vain.¹⁶

Of the two tales devoted to Bellerophon, the first, "Bellerophon at Argos," ends with the death of Sthenoboea and the passing of her fame :

There where she once had dwelt mid hate and praise,
No smile, no shudder now her name could raise.¹⁷

The narrator of the second tale, which describes Bellerophon's adventures at the court of Jobates, closes his story with a moving personal prayer for deliverance from mutability :

¹³ *Works*, V, 155.

¹⁶ *Works*, III, 105.

¹⁴ *Works*, V, 248.

¹⁷ *Works*, VI, 134.

¹⁵ *Works*, VI, 12.

My heart faints now, my lips that tell the tale
 Falter to think that such a life should fail. . . .
 O Death-in-life, O sure pursuer, Change,
 Be kind, be kind, and touch me not, till strange,
 Changed too, thy face shows, when thy fellow Death
 Delays no more to freeze my faltering breath!¹⁸

From *Jason* to “Bellerophon,” by choice of incident or by relevant comment, this mood is preserved. It is the more striking in the Greek tales because in these Morris followed his sources, on the whole, more exactly than in his versions of mediaeval legend. Using plots familiar in outline, he altered little or nothing in the events of the tales, but produced his characteristic effect of subdued beauty and melancholy by the devices we have indicated.¹⁹

Another striking feature of Morris’s treatment of Greek legend is his deliberate avoidance of “classicalism” and the literary conventions it involves, in working out to his own satisfaction the tales so frequently and so variously told and retold before they reached his hand. The principles which he opposed and eschewed under the broad terms “classicalism” or “classicism” may well be summed up in the common definition, formal elegance and correctness of style; in this sense he rejected classicism in all the numerous forms of art which occupied his busy life. Thus he wrote, in the journal which he kept for a time in 1887, of some tapestries from the tombs of Upper Egypt:

Very curious as showing in an unusual material the transition to the pure Byzantine style from the Classical . . . the contrast between the bald ugliness of the Classical pieces and the great beauty of the Byzantine was a pleasing thing to me, who loathe so all Classical art and literature.²⁰

In a more specifically literary sense, the Greek tales of *The Earthly Paradise* are conspicuous for the absence of that type of classicism which aims at the reproduction, or re-creation, of a scene and spirit specifically Greek—the classicism of Landor’s *Crysaor*, of Browning’s “Artemis Prologizes,” of Arnold’s “Antigone” and “Dejaneira” fragments, or of his *tour de force*, *Merope*. Morris was undoubtedly well read in the

¹⁸ *Works*, VI, 277.

¹⁹ The same mood may be noted in “Orpheus and Eurydice,” written for but not included in *The Earthly Paradise*; see *Works*, XXIV, 239 ff. Biographers, beginning with Violet Hunt—see *The Wife of Rossetti* (London, 1932), pp. 215 ff.—have attributed this dominant mood, especially as it concerns the love of women, to Morris’s disillusionment over his wife’s affair with Rossetti. Compare the central situation in “Bellerophon at Argos,” discussed below.

²⁰ Mackail, II, 181.

classics. After leaving Marlborough he prepared for Oxford by reading with a tutor for nearly a year; according to Mackail (surely a competent judge), "under his tuition Morris developed into a very fair classical scholar."²¹ But his reading at Oxford, outside the regular curriculum, was chiefly in the literature of the Middle Ages, and he was never stirred by any such keen archeological interest in Greek antiquities as that which led to his close acquaintance with the romances and chronicles of mediaeval France, England, and Scandinavia. When he learned Icelandic, Morris was impatient of grammatical detail: "I must have the story," he remarked to his instructor. In the same way, classical legend was valuable to him for its wealth of narrative material. With Hellenism as an end in itself he was not much concerned.

II

This preoccupation with the stories and indifference to the historical backgrounds and ethical overtones usually associated with them simplifies the problem of sources for the Greek tales in *The Earthly Paradise*. The bare outlines of the legends or portions of legends treated by Morris were sufficient for his purpose. With two exceptions, the plots for all the Greek tales published in the final form of *The Earthly Paradise* may be found in the *Classical Dictionary* of John Lempriere, the standard popular work of reference in its field for the greater part of the nineteenth century.²² Lempriere's dictionary, which is more distinguished for its liveliness of style and for a sort of mischievous delight in the salacious aspects of Graeco-Roman literature than for scrupulous accuracy of scholarship, gives concise accounts of the legends under the names of the principal characters involved; it also includes in each article a list of references to the chief literary sources of the tale in question. If there are variant versions of a legend, Lempriere usually includes them. May Morris has recorded the fact that her father used Lempriere, and has pointed out one instance in which it led him into error: Herodotus (*History*, Book II, c. 133) and Aelian (*Varia Historia*, Book XIII, c. 33) give the name of one of Morris' heroines as *Rhodopis*; Lempriere gives preference to the form *Rhódope* in his summary of the legend. When Morris discovered his mistake the poem had been published, and metrical use of the name made correction impossible.²³

²¹ Mackail, I, 27.

²² The *Bibliotheca Classica* of John Lempriere (1765–1824) was first published in 1788; 2d ed., 1792; 8th ed., 1812.

²³ *Works*, V, xxii.

In two tales Morris used material not found in Lempriere. The tales of Cupid and Psyche is summed up in the *Dictionary* with brevity and vagueness:

Psyche, a nymph whom Cupid married and carried into a place of bliss, where he long enjoyed her company. Venus put her to death because she had robbed the world of her son; but Jupiter, at the request of Cupid, granted immortality to Psyche.²⁴

Lempriere seems not to have been familiar with Apuleius, whose *Golden Ass* contains the earliest written form of the myth; the *Dictionary* speaks of the *Golden Ass* as “an allegorical piece replete with morality.” The action of Morris’s “Cupid and Psyche” is taken directly from the *Golden Ass*, Books IV, V, and VI; it is the tale overheard by the hero in his asinine form, told by a wicked old woman, servant to a band of robbers, to amuse a maiden whom the robbers are holding for ransom. Apuleius wrote in the second century of the Christian era, but he repeated the story as an old wives’ tale, and it had circulated orally before being worked into literary form with studied art and included by Apuleius in his Milesian novel.²⁵ Thus the Elder who tells the tale in *The Earthly Paradise*, whose ancestors had left Greece long before the time of Apuleius, remarks in his introductory lines that he has the story from oral tradition:

Since the learned say
No written record was there of the tale,
Ere we from our fair land of Greece set sail.²⁶

“The Death of Paris” is also taken from a source independent of Lempriere. His account omits the interview between Paris and Oenone which is the principal theme of Morris’s poem:

He [Paris] ordered himself to be carried to the feet of Oenone, whom he had basely abandoned, and who, in the years of his obscurity, had foretold him that he would solicit her assistance in his dying moments. He expired before he came into the presence of Oenone, and the nymph, still mindful of their former loves, threw herself upon his body, and stabbed herself to the heart, after she had plentifully bathed it with her tears.²⁷

Morris has made a particular study of the Trojan story in its classical

²⁴ J. Lempriere, *A Classical Dictionary* (8th ed., 1812), *s.v.* Psyche.

²⁵ See W. R. Halliday, *Indo-European Folk-Tales and Greek Legend* (Cambridge, 1933), p. 42: “The only example in classical literature of a fairy story told as such is the tale of Cupid and Psyche.”

²⁶ *Works*, IV, 2.

²⁷ Lempriere, *s.v.* Paris.

form and in mediaeval versions.²⁸ For this short and poignant tale he used the account given in Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca*, one of the great epitomes of Greek mythology, dating from about 100 A.D. Apollodorus gives the following account of Paris's death:

Alexander [i.e. Paris] married Oenone, daughter of the River Crebren . . . She told him to come to her if he were wounded, for she alone could heal him. When he had carried off Helen from Sparta and Troy was besieged, he was shot by Philoctetes with the bow of Hercules, and went back to Oenone on Ida. But she, nursing her grievance, refused to heal him.²⁹

With these exceptions the direct sources of the Greek tales in *The Earthly Paradise* are all indicated in Lempriere. "Atalanta's Race" is based upon two forms of the legend. Ovid, in Book X of the *Metamorphoses*, makes the heroine daughter of Schoeneus and describes her device to avoid marriage, in which she is finally overcome by Hippomenes.³⁰ Apollodorus gives an account of Atalanta's childhood, during which she had been exposed by her father (who wanted a son) and had been brought up by bears; in his version the successful suitor is called Melanion.³¹ Morris combined the two accounts, which are both given in Lempriere. He adopted the romantic childhood of the heroine and the suitor's name, Milanion, from Apollodorus; the parentage of Atalanta and the elaboration of the race are from Ovid.³²

"The Doom of King Acrisius" also follows Apollodorus and Ovid as summarized by Lempriere.³³ The brief "Argument" prefixed by Morris to this tale of Perseus is so similar in phrasing to Lempriere's account as to be worth comparing:

MORRIS

Acrisius, king of Argos, being warned by an oracle that the son of his daughter Danae should slay him, shut her up in a brazen tower built for that end beside the sea; there, though no man could come nigh her, she nevertheless bore a son to Jove, and she and her new-

LEMPRIERE

Acrisius had Danae by Eurydice daughter of Lacedaemon; and being told by an oracle, that his daughter's son would put him to death, he confined Danae in a brazen tower, to prevent her becoming a mother. She however became pregnant, by Jupiter changed

²⁸ See Mackail, I, 172 ff.

²⁹ Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, Bk. III, c. xii, sec. 6; translation by J. G. Frazer (London, 1921), II, 51.

³⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, X, 560-680.

³¹ Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, III, lx, 2 (Frazer, I, 399 ff.).

³² Apollodorus, II, iv, 1 (Frazer, I, 153 ff.); Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 604-803.

³³ The spelling "Milanion" is from Lempriere, not Apollodorus.

MORRIS

born son, set adrift on the sea,
came to the island of Seriphos.³⁴

LEMPRIERE

into a golden shower; and tho'
Acrisius ordered her, and her in-
fant called Perseus, to be exposed
on the sea, yet they were saved.³⁵

The poem, though long and much elaborated in detail, follows the outline without important changes in the action.

In "The Love of Alcestis" Morris also added an incident from Apollodorus to the outline of the story given by Lempriere. In the *Bibliotheca* we find the following:

In offering a sacrifice at his marriage, he [Admetus] forgot to sacrifice to Artemis; therefore when he opened the marriage chamber he found it full of coiled snakes. Apollo bade him appease the goddess.³⁶

This incident, which is similar in its strange effect of terror and frustrated passion to the central episode of "The Ring Given to Venus" (one of the mediaeval tales in *The Earthly Paradise*) is introduced with pictorial and thematic emphasis into "The Love of Alcestis." Admetus complains to his divine herdsman:

Risen betwixt my waiting love and me,
As soundless as the dread eternity,
Sprung up from nothing, could mine eyes behold
A huge dull-gleaming dreadful coil that rolled
In changing circles on the pavement fair.³⁷

Apollo replies:

Go back again; for fair-limbed Artemis
Now bars the sweet attainment of thy bliss;
So taking heart, yet make no more delay
But worship her upon this very day,
Nor spare for aught.³⁸

With the exception of this single episode, Morris's poem coincides exactly with Lempriere's summary in the wooing of Admetus and the final sacrifice of his wife.

"Pygmalion and the Image" contains a further indication of Morris's use of Lempriere. The *locus classicus* of this legend is Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book X, where the sculptor's work is thus described:

³⁴ *Works*, III, 171.

³⁵ Lempriere, *s.v.* Acrisius.

³⁶ Apollodorus, I, ix, 15 (Frazer, I, 91).

³⁷ *Works*, IV, 109.

³⁸ *Works*, IV, 110.

Vivebat, thalamique diu consorte carebat.
 Interea niveum mira feliciter arte
 Sculpsit ebur, formamque dedit, qua femina nasci
 Nulla potest: operisque sui concepit amorem. . . .
 Saepe manus operi temptantes admovet, an sit
 Corpus, an illud ebur; nec adhuc ebur esse fatetur.³⁹

Lempriere, frequently careless in detail, mistakes the material of which the statue is made, and changes it from ivory to marble:

The affection which he had denied to the other sex, he liberally bestowed upon the work of his own hands. He became enamoured of a beautiful statue of marble which he had made.⁴⁰

Morris preserves the error, in his ornate version of the tale:

The lessening marble that he worked upon,
 A woman's form now imaged doubtfully.⁴¹

In "Pygmalion" too Morris borrowed some circumstances direct from Ovid. The sculptor's desire is granted after he has prayed to Venus and has received miraculous signs of her favor from the sacred fire at her temple:

Amici numinis omen,
 Flamma ter accensa est apicemque per aera duxit.⁴²

Pygmalion's prayer is similarly answered in Morris's poem:

But suddenly
 Like a live thing, the thin flame 'gan to throb
 And gather force, and then shot up on high
 A steady spike of light.⁴³

In the conclusion Morris makes an original imaginative addition to the story, with the statue-maiden's account of the visit of Venus and the sensations which accompany the change from marble to living flesh and blood.

"Acontius and Cydippe" is a free enlargement of the summary in Lempriere:

Acontius, a youth of Cea, who, when he went to Delos to see the sacrifice of Diana, fell in love with Cydippe, a beautiful virgin, and being unable

³⁹ *Metamorphoses*, X, 246-49; 254-55.

⁴⁰ Lempriere, *s.v.* Pygmalion.

⁴¹ *Works*, IV, 190.

⁴² *Metamorphoses*, X, 278-79.

⁴³ *Works* IV, 200. The symbolism here is not Ovid's.

to obtain her, on account of the obscurity of his origin, wrote these verses on an apple, which he threw into her bosom:

Juro tibi sanctae per mystica sacra Dianae,
Me tibi venturam comitem, sponsamque futuram.

Cydippe read the verses, and being compelled by the oath she had inadvertently made, married Acontius.⁴⁴

The tale of the lover's stratagem is given only by Ovid in classical literature. In Epistle XIX of the *Heroides* Acontius writes to Cydippe after she has made the inadvertent oath and has refused to abide by it. This offense against Diana, the youth threatens, will be punished by illness:

Dicendum tamen est. Hoc est, mihi crede, quod aegra
Ipso nubendi tempore saepe iaces:
Consultit ipsa tibi, neu sis periura laborat;
Et salvam salva te cupit esse fide.⁴⁵

Cydippe, moved rather by the fear of Diana's resentment than by affection, after experiencing sudden illnesses when she attempts to marry another, finally consents to wed Acontius. Morris follows Lempriere rather than Ovid: he omits the heroine's reluctance to fulfill her oath and the punishment which forces her to submit. Two alterations in the plot are Morris's own. The obstacle that Acontius must overcome is not disparity in birth, as in Ovid and Lempriere, but religion. Cydippe is to be made a priestess:

Her folk, to win Diana's thanks,
Shall make her hers, and she shall be
Honoured of all folk certainly,
But unwed, shrunk as time goes on
Into a sour-hearted crone.⁴⁶

Again, in Morris's version Cydippe has actually conceived some love for her suitor before unintentionally swearing to marry him.⁴⁷ The central significance of the tale is thus shifted from the clever stratagem of the lover to the conflict between earthly love and the *tabu* that surrounds the sacrosanct virgin. It is significant that the ancient priest who decides to permit the marriage speaks bitterly: there is no need to fear that the lovers will be so happy as to provoke the resentment of the goddess. Mortal love is cruel, and brings frustration in its very pleasures; its fiercest pain comes from its intensification of human loneliness:

⁴⁴ Lempriere, *s.v.* Acontius.

⁴⁵ Ovid, *Heroides*, XIX, 109–12.

⁴⁶ *Works*, V, 141.

⁴⁷ See *Works*, V, 130.

A light thing and a little thing
 Ye deem it, that two hearts should cling
 Each unto each, till two are one,
 And neither now can be alone?
 O fools, who know not all has sworn
 That those shall ever be forlorn
 Who strive to bring this thing to pass.⁴⁸

Morris thus injects a characteristic modulation of mood into the simple direct problem of his original.

"The Son of Croesus" is a brief poetic version of Herodotus' *History*, Book I, Chapters 34–45. Morris was intimately acquainted with Herodotus, whose *History* he included in his list for Stead of the *Pall Mall Gazette* as one of five books of the first rank, or "bibles."⁴⁹ In this tale the dramatic concentration of events requires no revision, and the style of Herodotus, simple and vivid in narrative, is free from all the characteristics of the "classicalism" which Morris rejected. Hence in "The Son of Croesus" he followed the historian closely, in plot and in dialogue.⁵⁰ Of all the tales in *The Earthly Paradise* it is copied most exactly from its source.

"The Golden Apples" gives an account of the eleventh labor of Hercules, his expedition in search of the precious fruit in the Garden of the Hesperides. Here Morris used the familiar material of the legend, including the aid which Hercules receives from Nereus and his slaying of the guardian dragon, as summarized in Lempriere; he omitted the trick played upon Atlas, preferring the simpler version of the adventure: "According to other accounts, Hercules gathered the apples himself, without the assistance of Atlas, and he previously killed the watchful dragon which kept the tree."⁵¹ The only departure in Morris's poem from the classical form of the tale is made in having Nereus accompany the hero

⁴⁸ *Works*, V, 154. Here again one is tempted to speculate on the extent to which Morris's own personal tragedy influenced his view of the futility of romantic love. In "The Story of Rhodope," also derived from Lempriere, the heroine's character is similarly modified, provoking a contemporary reviewer to remark that "Rhodope must have been brought into this world somewhere in the eighteenth-thirties, we should say, at the very earliest, and questions herself about herself as much as one of Miss Brontë's young ladies, or any of their free-spoken successors. She is more modest a great deal, but she is not more contented." See *Blackwood's Magazine*, May, 1870, p. 646.

⁴⁹ *Pall Mall Budget*, February 4, 1886, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Compare the request of Atys for permission to hunt the Mysian boar: Herodotus, *History*, I, 37–38; Morris, *Works*, IV, 151 ff.

⁵¹ Lempriere, *s.v.* Hesperides.

on his voyage.⁵² But the striking feature of "The Golden Apples" is the indirect method which Morris uses to focus his narrative. The whole tale is told from the point of view of the Tyrian sailors on whose ship Hercules and Nereus sail to the Western land. The two come aboard as mortals and engage for passage; the elder tells strange stories of Arion and the dolphins, of Bacchus and the pirates, and of Deucalion's flood.⁵³ When the ship reaches the land of the Hesperides, two adventurous sailors follow Hercules to the garden, overhear his conversation with the nymphs, and see him slay the serpent. During the homeward voyage Nereus gives the crew an account of how Hercules came to him for aid and mastered him through all his changes of shape. Thus the sailors are not aware until the end of the tale that they have carried a god and one of the greatest of the heroes on their voyage. The story had often been told directly, with Hercules as the central and sole important figure of the adventure. Morris's version, with its shift of narrative focus, emphasizes the mystery of Alcmena's son and the romantic quality of his exploit by regarding the episode through the eyes of the Tyrian seamen.

The last and largest of the Greek tales, divided into two parts, is an elaboration of the tale of Bellerophon. The classic source of this legend is in the *Iliad*, in the account of his lineage given by the Lycian Glaucus to Diomedes on the battlefield:

Glaucus [i.e. the speaker's great-grandfather] was father to Bellerophon, whom heaven endowed with the most surpassing comeliness and beauty. But Proetus devised his ruin, and being stronger than he, drove him from the land of the Argives, over which Jove had made him ruler. For Antea, wife of Proetus, lusted after him, and would have had him lie with her in secret; but Bellerophon was an honourable man and would not, so she told lies about him to Proetus. "Proetus," said she, "kill Bellerophon or die, for he would have had converse with me against my will." The king was angered, but shrank from killing Bellerophon, so he sent him to Lycia with lying letters of introduction, written on a folded tablet, and containing much ill against the bearer. He bade Bellerophon show these letters to Antea's father, to the end that he might thus perish.⁵⁴

This compressed summary is repeated by Apollodorus (and by Lempriere) with slight alterations and additions. Proetus' wife is called Sthenoboea; Bellerophon's earlier history (he had originally been called

⁵² *Works*, VI, 6.

⁵³ In Apollodorus (*Bibliotheca*, II, v, 11) and Lempriere (*s.v.* Hesperides) Hercules obtains information from Prometheus as well as from Nereus.

⁵⁴ *Iliad*, VI, 156 ff.; translation by Samuel Butler (London, 1921), p. 94.

Hippinous, but the inadvertent murder of his brother Beller had given him the name Bellerophon, or Beller's slayer) is briefly indicated.⁵⁵ "Bellerophon at Argos," the first section of Morris's poem, is based upon this part of the legend. Morris follows the plot of the tale with strict accuracy, and his elaboration is directed chiefly toward the development and the motivation of the three principal characters—Bellerophon, Proetus, and Sthenoboea. The queen is presented as a cold and scornful woman whose love for Bellerophon is the first positive passion of her life. When he rejects it, she tells her lying tale to Proetus in a burst of hatred, and kills herself when Bellerophon has departed, as she believes, to certain death.⁵⁶ Proetus' problem is modified from the original. The feeling which keeps him from killing Bellerophon outright is not shame, as in Homer, but friendship and affection:

And must I slay him then,
Him whom I loved above all earthly men?
Behold, if now I slept here, and next morn,
Ere the day's memory should be fully born
From out of sleep, men came and said to me,
"Sire, the Corinthian draweth nigh to thee,"
My first thought would be joy that he had come.
And yet I am a king, nor shall my home
Become a brothel before all men's eyes.⁵⁷

Bellerophon himself is of heroic stature, with the hero's brave independence of circumstance. He accepts his unexplained dismissal with fortitude:

Now go I forth alone
To do what in my life must needs be done,
And in my own hands lies my fate, I think,
And I shall mix the cup that I must drink:
So be it.⁵⁸

In giving depth and dimension to the persons of the legend, Morris approaches the dramatic form. This poem breaks into sharply defined scenes: Bellerophon's first appearance before the king, his two interviews with Sthenoboea, her skillful acting in the false accusation of Bellerophon, and her suicide. The focus is on Sthenoboea. In this poem

⁵⁵ Apollodorus, II, iii, 1; Lempriere, *s.v.* Bellerophon. The derivation of Bellerophon's name is not given in Apollodorus.

⁵⁶ Sthenoboea's suicide is not mentioned in Homer or in Apollodorus; but see Lempriere, *s.v.* Sthenoboea.

⁵⁷ *Works*, VI, 117.

⁵⁸ *Works*, VI, 122.

Morris has modified the romance narrative technique of *The Earthly Paradise*, not toward epic, as we have said, but toward tragedy.

"Bellerophon in Lycia," the second and longer poem of the two, returns to the style of romance. It is based on the exploits of Bellerophon at the court of Jobates, to whom the hero delivered the *Todesbrief*. Homer's summary, from the same speech of Glaucus, is as follows:

When the king had received Proetus' wicked letter he first commanded Bellerophon to kill that savage monster, the Chimaera, who was not a human being, but a goddess, for she had the head of a lion and the tail of a serpent, while her body was that of a goat, and she breathed forth flames of fire; but Bellerophon slew her, for he was guided by signs from heaven. He next fought the far-famed Solymi, and this, he said, was the hardest of his battles. Thirdly, he killed the Amazons, women who were the peers of men, and as he was returning thence the king devised yet another plan for his destruction; he picked the bravest warriors in all Lycia, and placed them in ambuscade, but not a man ever came back, for Bellerophon killed every one of them. Then the king knew that he must be the valiant offspring of a god, so he kept him in Lycia, gave him his daughter in marriage, and made him of equal honour in the kingdom with himself.⁵⁹

This is essentially the outline of Morris's second poem on Bellerophon. The name of Jobates and Philonoë his daughter appear in Apollodorus and Lempriere; but Morris follows Homer in omitting all reference to Pegasus, with whose aid, according to Apollodorus, Bellerophon overcame the Chimaera.⁶⁰ Although he used nearly all the material in his classical sources, Morris made two significant changes in the plot. The role of Philonoë, who comes into the original legend at the very end and plays no part in the action, is greatly extended. She and Bellerophon fall in love soon after his arrival in Lycia; she encourages and protects him through all his dangerous adventures, and finally saves him, by a timely warning, from the ambush of the Lycians.⁶¹ Secondly, the order of Bellerophon's exploits is altered in Morris's version: the battle with the Chimaera is reserved as a climax in the series of the hero's successful feats of arms, and comes after his overthrow of the Solymi and the Amazons.

The Greek tales in *The Earthly Paradise*—to conclude with a brief

⁵⁹ *Iliad*, VI, 171 ff. (Butler, pp. 94–95).

⁶⁰ Professor Bush (*op. cit.*, p. 319) suggests that Pegasus is omitted in the interests of realism. The Chimaera, however, can hardly be brought within such bounds.

⁶¹ *Works*, VI, 266 ff.

summary—are thus based upon sources chiefly indicated in Lempriere which give the bare outlines of the legends used by Morris. His method in retelling the stories is mediaeval in one sense: it emphasizes the value of Greek myth as material for romances, and involves no attempt to preserve the Hellenic background or spirit. There is, on the other hand, little conscious anachronism of feeling or of detail in these poems. The *Scenes from the Fall of Troy*⁶² present the Greek and Trojan warriors as mediaeval knights in armor; the siege of Troy is treated in the manner of Froissart. This kind of mediaevalism does not appear in the Greek tales of *The Earthly Paradise*. The narrative of incident and the subduing of character largely approximates the romances. But the landscape, the decoration, and the consistent emotional tone—

The hopeless wish to flee from certainty—

belong neither to classical nor to mediaeval literature. They are Morris's own, products of the ambivalence which resulted from the poet-craftsman's awareness both of an urgent need for escape and of its impossibility.

⁶² First published by May Morris in *Works*, XXIV, 4 ff.