

*STUDIES IN
THE LATE ROMANCES
OF WILLIAM MORRIS*



BLUE CALHOUN JOHN HOLLOW
NORMAN KELVIN CHARLOTTE OBERG
and CAROLE SILVER

With an Introduction by
FREDERICK KIRCHHOFF

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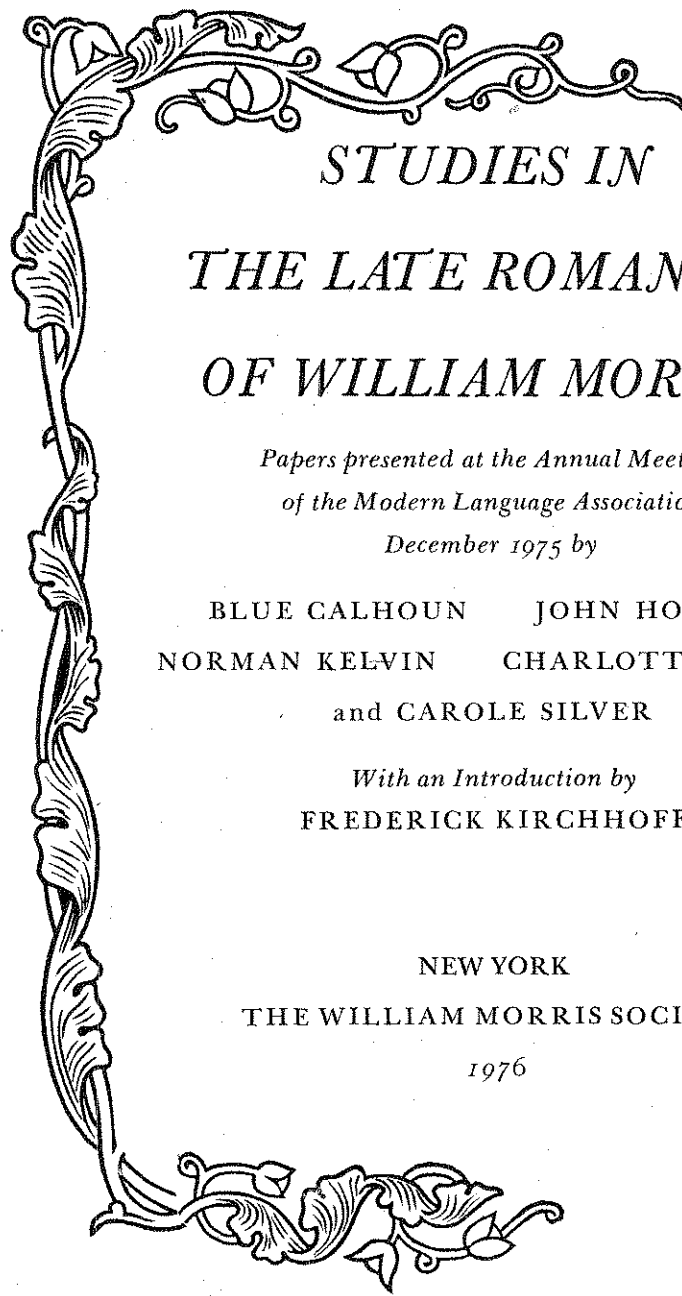
The essays contained in this volume are based on papers written for two seminars which were held at the convention of the Modern Language Association in San Francisco, December 1975. Frederick Kirchhoff organized the seminar entitled "William Morris: the Prose Romances" at which the papers by Blue Calhoun, John Hollow, Norman Kelvin and Carole Silver were presented. Charlotte Oberg's contribution was written for the seminar on "Fantasy Motifs." It is based on a chapter in her forthcoming book, A Pagan Prophet: William Morris, to be published by the University Press of Virginia.

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*Papers presented at the Annual Meeting
of the Modern Language Association
December 1975 by*

BLUE CALHOUN JOHN HOLLOW
NORMAN KELVIN CHARLOTTE OBERG
and CAROLE SILVER

With an Introduction by
FREDERICK KIRCHHOFF

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Introduction

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of William Morris

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Therefore day after day betimes in
the morning they bore the said book
to the altar and read therein,
till they had learned much wisdom.

ERRATA

Page 59, line 6: Read Mirkwood for Markwood.

" 119, lines 11 & 13: Read Pater for Peter.

" 124, lines 26 & 28/29: Read Sun-beam for Sun-Beam.

" 124, line 29: Read Folk-might for Folk-Might.

" 127, line 24: Read barbarians for bararians.

of Birth and Rebirth, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1965), p. 44; see also pp. 36-51 passim. See also Eliade's Myth and Reality, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York and Evanston, 1963), p. 80.

³ See Eliade, Images and Symbols, Studies in Religious Symbolism, trans. Philip Mairet (New York, 1969), pp. 155 ff.

⁴ See W. Jackson Knight, Cumaean Gates, Part II in Vergil: Epic and Anthropology (New York, 1967), for an extended treatment of this subject.

⁵ Eliade, Rites and Symbols, p. 59, suggests that the idea of the rebirth of the cosmos has always been closely associated with primitive initiation rites.

⁶ The Life of Alexander of Macedon (New York, 1955), p. 8.

⁷ See Eliade, Images and Symbols, pp. 165-67.

⁸ On the incorporation of the symbols of the Cosmic Tree and the center of the world into the symbolism of the cross, see Eliade, Rites and Symbols, pp. 119-20.

⁹ See Rose Jeffries Peebles, "The Dry Tree: Symbol of Death," pp. 59-79 in Vassar Mediaeval Studies (New Haven, 1923), ed. Christabel Forsyth Fiske.

¹⁰ May Morris discusses this matter in Works, 21:xi-xiv.

¹¹ See Eliade, Rites and Symbols, pp. 39-40.

¹² See Eliade, Myth and Reality, pp. 21-38.

"THE LITTLE LAND OF ABUNDANCE":
PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE LATE
ROMANCES OF WILLIAM MORRIS

Blue Calhoun

Few English writers are so acutely or pervasively natural as William Morris. The landscape of the prose romances is one of their memorable features, for within their fictional worlds even fantastic action has sure roots in an earth that is simply and sensuously perceived. Natural detail is vital, varied, and familiar; and it is contained in carefully delineated settings that convey a strong sense of place. May Morris recalled the double delight of reading these stories: experiencing the fictional adventures of the characters while mentally re-creating the Morris family outings in the English countryside that suggested the landscapes (18:xix-xxviii). Thus it is initially apparent that in these last works as in earlier ones Morris replaced the literary detail of traditional romance with the real detail of English landscape and thereby unified the romances with the rest of his work where the "winding reaches of the Thames" are setting and source of his utopian vision.

Yet the landscape of the romances is simultaneously artificial, a construction of the writer. While we may recognize the terrain of the Cotswolds in the recurrent "country of little hills and hollows and rising grounds" (18: 262), we are also aware that Morris uses the landscape to establish the aesthetic autonomy of the romance world. He accomplishes this in several ways. First, he repeats a descriptive pattern, a landscape configuration with variations of similar components:

mountains (snow-capped peaks, crags, rock walls, sheer cliffs, hills, ridges) or woods (forests, groves, thickets, copses), which encircle or provide background in the medial plain (various "flat bits," as Ruskin called them: meadows, grassy knolls, woodland clearings, pastures, tilled fields, valleys, dales, ghylls, closes, pleasancess, green-swards), which is in turn cut by a stream (occasionally a small lake or river). Frequently, Morris places a town within this enclosed landscape--a village, thorp, or stead, a human settlement of sufficiently small scale to draw its definition from the surrounding landscape rather than dominate it as a city does. Tangential elements of this total configuration are the road and the sea, associated with the wider world beyond. Second, Morris develops three distinct versions of this closed setting, which I will call the pleasance; two are paradisaical or supernatural, and one is pastoral or natural. The latter in turn provides the spatial and thematic focus of the narrative. Viewed in terms of these pleasancess, the romances suggest an evaluation of different views of nature and natural life by moving from the simple pastoral place through the supernatural complexity of the wilderness and the sophisticated complexity of the city and returning to "the well-loved nook of the pleasant places" (15: 396). Finally, in several of the romances Morris suggests an authorial consciousness, in a few cases a narrator who makes use of landscape motifs to imply the relationship between the pastoral pleasance and the contemporary world of author and reader.

The enchanted or paradisaical garden is known also as the sacred precinct.¹ Tenuously connected to the paradise topos of ancient literature, its landscape was first elaborated in the god's habitat of Greek lyric poets like Pindar. It was most accessible to Morris through medieval romance, where

it blends with the hortus conclusus, the walled garden discovered, usually unexpectedly, by a questing hero. Its enclosure promises rest from heroic activity, shelter from the dangers of the forest, and opportunity for meditation or love. These solitary pleasures are guided by the supernatural inhabitant of the tower, usually female, and her presence gives both the pleasance itself and the experience within it a demonic dimension. Walter Davis calls this place the heart of pastoral romance, the sacred inner circle of a movement through three concentric settings: "from the turbulent, heroic, and sometimes 'subnatural' world that includes the outer world's elements purified, to the supernatural center where the human and divine meet." After disintegration and education in the outer circles, the hero's rebirth occurs here where "under the aegis of a god or a magician, he adjusts his conflicts, composes his mind, and leaves for the outer world again."² This view of the supernatural pleasance informs one of Morris' enchanted gardens, the naturally secluded spot where the main character is initiated into secret lore, also of a natural sort, that is essential to the quest: the Chamber of Love in the Wilderness of the Lady of Abundance (The Well at the World's End), the trysting oak of Birdalone and Habundia (The Water of the Wondrous Isles), and to some degree, the woodland clearing where Thiodolf meets the Wood-Sun (The House of the Wolfings). Related to these instructive pleasancess are the House of Love under the Wood, where Birdalone and Arthur are reunited (The Water of the Wondrous Isles), the nuptial bower prepared for Ralph and Ursula by the Innocent Folk (Well), and the "thicket of small wood" where Walter is reunited with the Maid (The Wood Beyond the World). Common to all these settings is natural plenitude that is not cloying in its variety or abundance, a landscape configuration that seems discovered rather than created,

and simple provisions for bodily comfort. The enclosures contain caves, rough huts, rush beds, or soft grass; and their feasts offer simple fare--bread, cheese, honey, wood-strawberries, and fried trout. A particularly good example of this setting is the Chamber of Love in the Wilderness, where Ralph is led by the Lady of Abundance:

And therewith she pointed to a place where the stream ran in a chain of pools and stickles, and a sheer cliff rose up some fifty paces beyond it, but betwixt the stream and the cliff was a smooth table of greensward, with three fair thorn-bushes thereon, and it went down at each end to the level of the river's lip by a green slope, but amidmost, the little green plain was some ten feet above the stream, and was broken by a little undercliff, which went down sheer into the water. And Ralph saw in the face of the high cliff the mouth of a cave, however deep it might be. (18: 197)

Although Morris makes these pleasancess appealing and often vital to the protagonist's growth (in the sense of awakening new emotions, revealing new dimensions of experience), he seems to question the solitude which they encourage and on which they depend. He returns the hero to the wider world not only to deny the sustaining power of love in a cottage or to revitalize society with the hero's new insights, but more important, to express his suspicion of the isolating effects of demonic influence on the "sons of Adam." Ralph, bereft of the Lady of Abundance, is a victim of despair. He tells Richard simply, "I desire to die" (18: 212), and significantly, he is revived when Richard directs his vision outward toward the landscape of Swevenham, a human habitation: "The fair plain spreading wide, a river running through it, and little hills beyond the water,

and blue mountains beyond them" (18: 213). In certain ways, then, Morris makes the sacred precinct a place that does not compose the mind but paralyzes it instead.

Related to this instructive pleasance is the clearing in Markwood where Thiodolf "talketh with the Wood-Sun" (14: 14-15, 24). Although natural, it is distinctly separate from the tribal enclosure of Mid-mark. Deep within the wood, where "all the moonlight was quenched under the close roof of the beech-leaves," the trysting place is "a small wood-lawn whereon the turf grew again." Here Thiodolf meets the immortal woman who is wife, advisor, and savior, and here she gives the enchanted hauberk to protect him in battle. But the narrative clearly establishes the hauberk's threat to tribal unity. Its protection to Thiodolf isolates him from death, a part of natural process, and from the tribe and its natural activities. In sacrificing the hauberk, he breaks its spell of subjective isolation and literally reimmerses himself in human and natural process as "the friend of the Earth, the giver of life, the vanquisher of death" for the Wolfings (14: 170). Ironically, wearing the hauberk induces the heroic solipsism of many romantic heroes, an attitude repugnant to Morris. Thiodolf says, "I loved them not, and was not of them, and outside myself there was nothing: within me was the world and nought without me" (14: 169). The description of the pleasance itself mirrors its separating potential: Thiodolf must approach it secretly at night when nature sleeps "and there was no sound to be known as the sound of any creature, save that from the distant meadow came the lowing of a cow that had lost her calf, and that a white owl was flitting about near the eaves of the Roof with her wild cry that sounded like the mocking of merriment now silent." When

Thiodolf returns to the Mid-mark, he moves from darkness to light, from stasis to vitality, stepping "out of the beech-wood into the broad sunshine dappled with the shadows of the leaves of the hazels moving gently in the fresh morning air" (14: 24).

The potentially harmful isolation of these bowers is limited when the writer aesthetically collapses them as real centers of the narrative--by killing the Lady of Abundance, by having Thiodolf remove the hauberk, by returning Birdalone and Arthur to Utterhay, or even by introducing conversation about travel plans over a breakfast of fried fish after Walter had found the Maid, "like to an angel" in a "fair and lovely place amidst the shelving slopes of the mountains, a paradise of the wilderness" (17: 111-12).

The dangers, however, are allowed development in the second version of the supernatural pleasance, the type exemplified in the Wood Beyond the World and the Isle of Increase Unsought. In these places, Morris expands the false paradise of medieval and Renaissance narratives and gives artifice full play. An example is the trysting place of the Lady of the Wood Beyond the World. Like the cave of the Lady of Abundance, this "bower of pleasance" is near a stream. Walter and the Lady cross it, and

within a little they came upon a tall fence of flake-hurdles, and a simple gate therein. The Lady opened the same, and they entered thereby into a close all planted as a most fair garden, with hedges of rose and woodbine, and with linden-trees a-blossom, and long ways of green grass betwixt borders of lilies and clove-gilliflowers, and other

sweet garland-flowers. And a branch of the stream which they had crossed erewhile wandered through that garden; and in the midst was a little house built of post and pan, and thatched with yellow straw, as if it were new done. (17: 66)

Artifice is a striking element of the description, in the exotic excesses of the formal "close all planted as a most fair garden" and in the contrived rusticity of the new house, which magically vanishes after the encounter. The suggestions of artifice and illusion extend to the Lady herself, who seems ironically conscious of her time-honored role as enchantress: "Now, Squire, let us leave all these troubles and wiles and desires behind us, and flit through the merry greenwood like the Gentiles of old days" (17: 51). The motive of these descendants of Venus seems to be continuous titillation, the sort that "tickled the very soul" of Walter. The actual motive is captivity, an attempt to negate the hero's awareness of the outer world, to limit his perceptions, and finally to turn his consciousness inward in mindless bliss or despair. The effect of stasis, a kind of perverted repose, is foreshadowed in Thiodolf's hauberk and repeated when Birdalone is imprisoned in the Castle of the Isle of Increase, or when Hallblithe finds entrance and egress difficult matters in the Land of the Glittering Plain. The psychological paralysis of these places is suggested in their architecture, of both garden and palace, literal stasis contrived with "marvellous cunning." Although the Queen of Goldburg is neither witch nor fairy godmother, Ralph and the reader are put on their guard when he approaches the smiling lady through the "High House . . . which was like a piece of the Kingdom of Heaven for loveliness." Its very walls are "carven," and "all this was set amidst of gardens, the like of which they had never seen" (18: 267).

Created as imitations of nature, the decorative tableaux of palace walls and the formalized excesses of elaborate gardens are manifestations of the desire to possess and control natural process. They appear also in Cheaping-Knowe, a city dominated by rulers who torture their enemies and ignore the poverty of "the folk" while they create "great gardens within the town." These gardens were "exceedingly goodly, and had trees and flowers and fruits in them which Ralph had not seen hitherto, as lemons, and oranges, and pomegranates; and the waters were running through them in runnels of ashlar" (18:250).

The hero or heroine's instinctive caution in these places is activated by vivid memories of a natural past that immediately invalidate the claims of the false garden. In one sense this memory of a pastoral place located in a pastoral past functions for the romance hero as it does for the narrator himself: it sustains him in surroundings that are powerfully artificial. Thus Hallblithe finds his perceptions of the Glittering Plain constantly balanced by memories of Cleveland by the Sea. The sustaining strength of this vision is especially vivid when he approaches the king for a third time, asking for either assistance in his quest for the Hostage or safe passage to his homeland:

On the way it came into his mind what the kindred were doing that morning; and he had a vision of them as it were, and saw them yoking the oxen to the plough, and slowly going down the acres, as the shining iron drew the long furrow down the stubble-land, and the light haze hung about the elm-trees in the calm morning, and the smoke rose straight into the air from the roof of the

kindred. And he said, "What is this? am I death-doomed this morning that this sight cometh so clearly upon me amidst the falseness of this unchanging land?" (14:271-72)

The tale's thematic focus on the pastoral place returns Hallblithe and the Hostage to Cleveland by the Sea, a place which exists in opposition to the unchanging otherworld: the Glittering Plain, the Acre of the Undying, and the Land of Living Men are all expressions of the paradox so common in Morris' works: that the quest for immortality ends in living death and that true life is experienced only through acquiescence to natural process. Morris projects this notion early in the story when the three questers ask, "Is this the Land? Is this the Land?" and Hallblithe answers: "Wayfarers, look under the sun down the plain which lieth betwixt the mountains and the sea, and ye shall behold the meadows all gleaming with the spring lilies; yet do we not call this the Glittering Plain, but Cleveland by the Sea. Here men die when their hour comes" (14:212).

Finally, the paradisaical gardens, instructive and destructive, exist in dialectical opposition to the pastoral garden, the "plain which lieth betwixt the mountains and the sea." Whether its boundaries are narrow or wide, it becomes a world that contains simple folk, promises rest and work, and harmonizes man and nature in "the great drama of the seasons" (22:138). The pleasance most extensively and sympathetically developed by Morris, it reflects his life-long immersion in the "Bibles" that "have grown up from the very hearts of the people, "ancient imaginative works," and the "uncritical or traditional" histories that spurred his search for a Golden Age (22:xiii-iv).

Influenced by the groves of Theocritus and Virgil, Morris creates an enclosure where green meadows, grassy knolls, and fertile plains provide the varied delights of sunlight, warm breezes, birdsong, shady trees, and clear streams for bathing. In this version of the locus amoenus, nature provides sensuous pleasure and refreshment, as it does for Walter, who seeks "the peace of the green earth after all the tossing and unrest of the sea" (17:13); or for Birdalone, who is revived after visiting the static Isle of Queens by the vitality of nature: "Thence came she forth into the open meadow, and sweet and dear seemed its hot sunshine and noisy birds and rustling leaves" (20:94-95), or for Ralph, who "sighed for the very pleasure of life" when "the light wind bore into the chamber [of the Castle of Abundance] the sweet scents of the early summer, the chief of all of them being the savour of the new-cut grass, for about the wide meadows the carles and queans were awork at the beginning of hay harvest; and late as it was in the day, more than one blackbird was singing from the bushes of the castle pleasance" (18:97). In one important sense, then, the pastoral pleasance exists for aesthetic pleasure, and often it stimulates the narrator's own delight in discovering a fresh new world, as in News from Nowhere or A Dream of John Ball, where pastoral scale sharpens all the features of the landscape into "garden-like neatness and trimness" (16:217). Such a perception of nature's self-contained multiplicity moves Ellen in News from Nowhere to exclaim: "The earth and the growth of it and the life of it! If I could but say or show how I love it!" (16:202); likewise, Birdalone, upon discovering a great plain backed by mountains, says, "O earth, thou art beautiful!" (20:148).

Morris, however, also absorbs a less conventionally idyllic version of the pastoral place

from Hesiod, Icelandic literature, and Romantic pastoral descriptions. All encourage the realistic view of nature already deeply instilled in Morris. As one critic has suggested, the "Hesiodic strain," incorporated into mainstream pastoral tradition, ultimately conspired with nineteenth-century realism to give the modern pastoral, especially British, a recognition of rural hardship (Rosenmeyer, pp. 24-25). Rosenmeyer calls Works and Days the peasant manifesto, for it acknowledges the presence of labor and pain in country life and offers practical advice, like Virgil's Georgics, to country dwellers who resemble Morris' "Thames-side country bumpkins" (22:163). For instance, Hesiod urges man to harmonize his activities with natural process: "This is the law of the plains, and of those who live near the sea, and who inhabit rich country, the glens and dingles far from the tossing sea,--strip to sow and strip to plough and strip to reap, if you wish to get in all Demeter's fruits in due season, and that each kind may grow in its season."³ Rosenmeyer would likely interpret such advice as a design for regimentation: "The Hesiodic code of country living is one of discipline and foresight. The farmer does not live a random life of enjoyment and self-revelation. On the contrary, he plans and saves and reins himself in tightly for the sake of a future gain" (Rosenmeyer, p. 21). This seems a rather stern reading of Hesiod and certainly of Morris, who valued what Yeats called "Labour . . . blossoming or dancing where / The body is not bruised to pleasure soul." But Morris is very aware of seasonal cycle, natural vicissitude, and the importance of "rough occupations" (22:45). He makes it abundantly clear that spontaneous generation has no part in his ideal natural world. In a lecture he says, "Nature does not give us our livelihood gratis; we must win it by toil of some sort or degree" (23:98). And he says

of the site of Mid-mark, the House of the Wolfings: "You must know that this great clearing in the woodland was not a matter of haphazard; though the river had driven a road whereby men might fare on each side of its hurrying stream. It was men who had made that isle in the woodland" (14:1). Subsequently he reiterates, "In such wise that Folk had made an island amidst of the Mirkwood, and established a home there, and upheld it with manifold toil too long to tell of" (14:2).

The most compatible element of Hesiod's and Morris' natural worlds is the centrality of man and his works, and it is clearly a view fed by the Northern literature admired by Morris. In Iceland he found both a model for his terrible wastes and a model of tribal felicity that would be quite at home within the borders of even a southern pleasure. In a lecture delivered about the time of the composition of The House of the Wolfings and The Roots of the Mountains, Morris finds the life of the early Icelandic settlers "exceedingly simple, yet not lacking in dignity."⁴ It is a life wherein natural setting and tribal unity are dynamically interdependent, primarily because the northerly locations of these two romances in particular intensify the relationship of man and earth. Incidentally, The Water of the Wondrous Isles, The Well at the World's End, and The Sundering Flood all move their questers south and north again. Regardless of the tale's actual climate, the spirit of home is often associated with the sheltering pleasure of "the field-abiders of midwinter frost" (21:1). The harsh climate, rugged terrain, and remote location of Burgstead contribute to its microcosmic description at the beginning of the story: "Once upon a time amidst the mountains and hills and falling streams of a fair land there was a town or thorp in a certain valley" (15:1). As the detailed

panorama moves inward and down, we discover the several sorts of inhabitants who draw sustenance and pleasure from this place--Woodland-Carles, Shepherd-Folk, and finally the Dalesmen themselves. The diverse groups depend on one another's occupations and unite in battle to save Silverdale. The men of the Dale, whose economy is based also on trade with surrounding towns, are self-sustaining in crops and livestock, and both are catalogued in a Hesiodic manner to show their homeliness and variety (15:10). The most important quality of life in Burgstead, however, is its participation in seasonal cycle, the "eternal recurrence of lovely changes" (22:11). We see the Burgdalers feasting during the winter snows and experiencing the summer delights of sowing, reaping, and haymaking that are so typical of Morris' pastoral inhabitants. After their return from Silverdale, they celebrate not only the wedding of Gold-mane and the Sun-beam but the fruitful culmination of the year: "So wore the days toward Midsummer, when the wheat was getting past the blossoming, and the grass in the mown fields was growing deep green again after the shearing of the scythe; when the leaves were most and biggest; when the roses were beginning to fall, when the apples were reddening, and the skins of the grapeberries gathering bloom" (15:397-98). It is not surprising, finally, that this romance which pleased Morris so much and which contains some of the most sensuously rich description of the romances should evoke a vision of life in the pastoral place that seems a paraphrase of Hesiod's Golden Age (Works and Days, ll. 109-20):

Thus 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 could fain forget: life shamed them not, nor did death make them afraid.

As for the Dale wherein they dwelt, it was indeed most fair and lovely, and they deemed it the Blessing of the Earth, and they trod its flowery grass beside its rippled streams amidst its green tree-boughs proudly and joyfully with goodly bodies and merry hearts. (15:11)

A third influence in the creation of the pastoral pleasance is more southerly--the green meadows and downs of southwestern England. The model of the locus is of course Kelmscott Manor, Morris' "heaven on earth." Extensively described in News from Nowhere, its type appears throughout the romances, for example in the description of Upmeads or in the Shepherd-Folk's memories of "the garths where the last year's ricks shouldered up against the old stone gables, and where the daws were busy in the tall unfrequent ash-trees" (Roots, 15:395). Journeying toward the Well at the World's End, Ralph sees the old manor-house from a panoramic perspective that unifies its details into a pastoral tableau:

Thus they rode the down country, till at last, two hours before noon, coming over the brow of a long down, they had before them a shallow dale, pleasanter than aught they had yet seen. It was well-grassed, and a little river ran through it, from which went narrow leats held up by hatches, so that the more part of the valley bottom was a water-meadow, wherein as now were grazing many kine and sheep. There were willows about the banks of the river, and in an angle of it stood a grange or homestead, with many roofs half hidden by clumps of tall elm trees. (18:305)

The configuration of trees, meadow, stream, and dwelling is familiar. The tenor is peaceful, suggesting the stabilized harmony of human and natural elements. Man's ordering presence is felt even in the absence of human activity--through the channeled river, the grazing animals, the elm-framed homestead with "two or three cots" clustered around it. The most important detail, however, is the building itself, for its presence in the center of the scene suggests man's supreme achievement in humanizing nature, giving it "character" (22:427). As surely as man accommodates himself to nature, he orders it, not only by clearing the woods, planting and harvesting crops, and tending the animals that provide sustenance, but also by constructing his dwellings "amidst" the dales and meadows. This act of creation produces the hall, cot, stead, grange, hut, garth, and even the hedge-rows with their "unwonted trimness and handiness" (16:217). These buildings all share the distinction of being human habitations, and they are consequently simple and useful, with no pretense to being a "rare marvel of art . . . ; no palace either, not even a manor-house, but a yeoman's steading at grandest, or even his shepherd's cottage" (22:126). Speaking here in a lecture of the typical Cotswold cottage, Morris is anticipating the theme of "simplicity of life" best realized in "a sanded floor and white-washed walls, and the green trees and flowery meads and living waters outside" (22:149-150). In these celebrations of peasant art he unconsciously explicates the meaning of setting: random natural detail becomes landscape or setting--a perceptual configuration--only through the ordering vision of the writer, painter, or architect. Even a new Cotswold dwelling, Morris implies, would have merged with its natural surroundings because of the medieval craftsman's instinctive sense of the reciprocal harmony of natural and human space. Each defines the other in a

landscape: "the new house indeed would have taken away a little piece of the flowery green-sward, a few yards of the teeming hedge-row; but a new order, a new beauty would have taken the place of the old: the very flowers of the field would have but given place to flowers fashioned by man's hand and mind" (22:126).

Thus the elms frame the homestead, while the homestead gives centripetal definition to the meadows; Burgstead, ringed by rugged mountains, gives focus to its fair dale; and the "little hills" of Upmeads encompass not only "meadows and acres," "woods and fair streams," but simple architecture: "no mighty castle, or noble abbey of monks: nought but fair little halls of yeomen" (18:1). Mid-mark, Burgdale, Langton, Cleveland by the Sea, Utterhay, Upmeads, Wethermel: all these populated pleasancess of the romances suggest the creative conspiracy of man and nature to produce the "higher civilization" Morris wishes for. All celebrate a simple hero who is indifferent to material wealth, suspicious of power, and bound to earthly process. All show man's works "amidst the very nature they were wrought into, and of which they are so completely a part" (22:17). Summarily, their naturalness is a dialectical negation of the unnaturalness of the sacred precinct.

But what of the broader view of the writer, the creator of these little worlds? Two observations are in order to suggest the pastoral perspective of Morris as narrator. One is spatial, the other temporal. The settings examined here have been often separated from the world beyond by topographical barriers far more isolating than the "shelving bank" of Theocritus or the "spreading beech" of Virgil. Mid-mark is afforded protection by the seemingly impenetrable "tree-girdle" of

Mirkwood; Burgdale "was well-nigh encompassed by a wall of sheer cliffs"; and Wethermel is "a stead more lonely than most" in a dale isolated by mountains and the "perilous and awful" power of the Sundering Flood. One inevitable implication of these landscapes is that Morris, like Wordsworth, recognizes the pastoral place as an ideal vision; a deliberate inversion of the supernatural other-world and the chaotic world of contemporary experience. Its separation must be emphatic to stress the disparity of is and ought which surely seemed more apparent to nineteenth-century than to ancient writers. As if to explicate the destructive disorder of "modern civilization," these nineteenth-century artists thus separate their settings from the world without to reveal the unity within. In Wordsworth's landscapes it is the cliffs framing the "pastoral farms" of "Tintern Abbey" that give the scene aesthetic unity--its fertile seclusion and spatial connections. And in "Michael" Greenhead Ghyll is isolated from the "public way" by "pastoral mountains" which "have all opened out themselves, / And made a hidden valley of their own."

Yet Morris refuses to draw a map so small. Mirkwood is not inaccessible after all, and Upmeads is invaded. The pastoral world is not unassailable from without, and the dwellers within frequently yearn "to strive for life" and to "seek a wider land" (18:1,3). Osberne effects reunion with Elfhild by wandering "wide in the world" (21:133), and Gold-mane considers "wandering" since "Narrow is the Dale and the World is wide" (15:19). The motive of these forays is adventure; its medium is the road.⁵ And inevitably "travel on the roads" (18:2) brings hero and reader through supernatural wilderness to the city, viewed in all the romances as the site of corruption, greed, and turbulence. The City of the Sundering Flood is divided less by

the great river than by warring powers. Walter tells the Maid in Wood, "In every city shall foes grow up to us without rhyme or reason, and life therein shall be tangled unto us" (17:115). And Upmeads and Mid-mark are threatened by "the folk of the cities" who "dwell / Mid confusion of heaped houses, dim and black as the face of hell" (14:21).

The Romans who invade Mid-mark are for Morris the prototype of modern civilization, for in them "the worship of the city found its due expression at last" (Lectures, p. 98). Interestingly enough, the ancient green fosse that Ralph follows out of Upmeads is a historical symbol of the insurgence of Roman power into "the fair rich valley of the Thames." In a lecture on Early England Morris juxtaposes the "life of these earlier peoples dwelling on the high lands amidst their flocks and herds" with the urban civilization of the Roman invaders: "Into this population the Romans brought 'the blessings of civilization,' and destroyed the chances of the natural development of the British tribes, slowly hammering to pieces all resistance, till they had established the great taxgathering machine the Roman bureaucracy, the great curse of the ancient world, as our commercial market-hunting bureaucracy is the great curse of the modern world" (Lectures, p. 161).

The road, then, is a temporal as well as a spatial symbol. As an emblem of progressive change, it cannot return the narrator to the past as easily as it takes his characters home. Like all symbols of quest and conquest, it is open-ended. Thus in the introductory poems to The House of the Wolfings and The Roots of the Mountains, it is the element of setting with which the narrator associates himself. Suggestive of the self-destructive energy of modern civilization,

it is the "iron road" and the "dark road" that "drives us on." Its accelerated motion constantly increases the distance between the narrator and the pastoral enclosure--the "homestead" and the "garden bright amidst the hay." The only lasting accessibility to the place is aesthetic, through "wavering memories" which provide "rest." In this sense, the pastoral pleasance and its Golden Age are irrevocably lost, and the stories belong, as all romances must, "elsewhere and some other time."⁶

There is another important road in these romances, however. Also a "piece of Roman road," it is a country lane in Kent where the narrator of A Dream of John Ball awakes to discover a revolution under way. This road leads to London, and it resounds with "horse-hoofs" and the "clash of metal." The battle of the peasants to establish "the Day of the Earth" (16:286) resembles a recurrent situation in Morris' works where the only justification of battle is the preservation of the pastoral paradise from civilized threat. The Peasant's Revolt in John Ball, though, has a slightly different significance, and it is strikingly captured in one of the most important pastoral images of the late romances, the banner under which the peasants move down the dusty road toward war. It is "a picture of a man and woman half-clad in skins of beasts seen against a back-ground of green tress, the man holding a spade and the woman a distaff and spindle rudely done enough, but yet with certain spirit and much meaning; and underneath this symbol of the early world and man's first contest with nature were the written words: When Adam delved and Eve span, / Who was then the gentleman?" (16:227-28). In terms of temporal perspective, the banner looks backward toward a Golden Age, toward the archetypal inhabitants of a pastoral world; it exists within a narrative present that is both historically real

and fictionally ideal; and its makers (appropriately the "sons of Adam" in medieval England) look forward to a future time and place inhabited by the narrator. Furthermore, the narrator is able to see beyond the failure of his own day to a time when continued revolution will re-establish a Golden Age: "yet shall all bring about the end, till thy deeming of folly and ours shall be one, and thy hope and our hope; and then--the Day will have come" (16:286).

News from Nowhere, of course, is the vision of that projected Day, the final destination of the "dark road" that moves cultures toward a cyclical New Birth; and the realization of "fearless rest" and "hopeful work" (22:269) is so full in the land of Nowhere that even the recounting of the terrible birth throes of the new age has an air of Arcadian calm. What is so particularly appealing about the other romances--especially the quasi-historical ones--is their kinetic uncertainty. The narrator of John Ball, The House of the Wolfings, and The Roots of the Mountains is aware that these cultures, like his own, are in transition. The old is giving way to the new, and the known is threatened by the unknown. Even in the more tranquil romances, there is the suggestion that today's "well-loved nook of the pleasant places" may change tomorrow. Finally, it is the author's uncertainty about his own cultural landscape that gives these created ones their appeal. His energy informs the struggle on the road, and his hope looks forward to a new Land of Abundance.

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¹Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 188.

²Walter R. Davis, A Map of Arcadia: Sidney's Romance in Its Tradition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 38-39.

³Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns and Homeric, trans. H. G. Evelyn-White, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936), Works and Days, ll. 388-93.

⁴"The Early Literature of the North--Iceland," probably delivered at Kelmscott House, Hammer-smith, Oct. 9, 1887, in The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris, ed. Eugene D. LeMire (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), p. 184. Cited parenthetically as Lectures.

⁵The pastoral evaluation of "wandering" as unnatural is prefigured by Virgil in Eclogue I, where the dissolving empire dispossesses the shepherd of his pastures and forces Meliboeus, among others, to take to the road: "Yes, but meanwhile the rest of us are off; some to foregather with the Africans and share their thirst; others to Scythia, and out to where the Oxus rolls the chalk along; others to join the Britons, cut off as they are by the whole width of the world. Ah, will the day come, after many years, when I shall see a place that I can call my home, see turf piled high on my poor cottage roof, and in due time survey with pride the modest crop that is my little realm?" Virgil, The Pastoral Poems, trans. E. V. Rieu (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1954), I, 64-69.

⁶Mary Lascelles, "Shakespeare's Pastoral Comedy," in Pastoral and Romance: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. Eleanor Terry Lincoln (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 125.

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