

*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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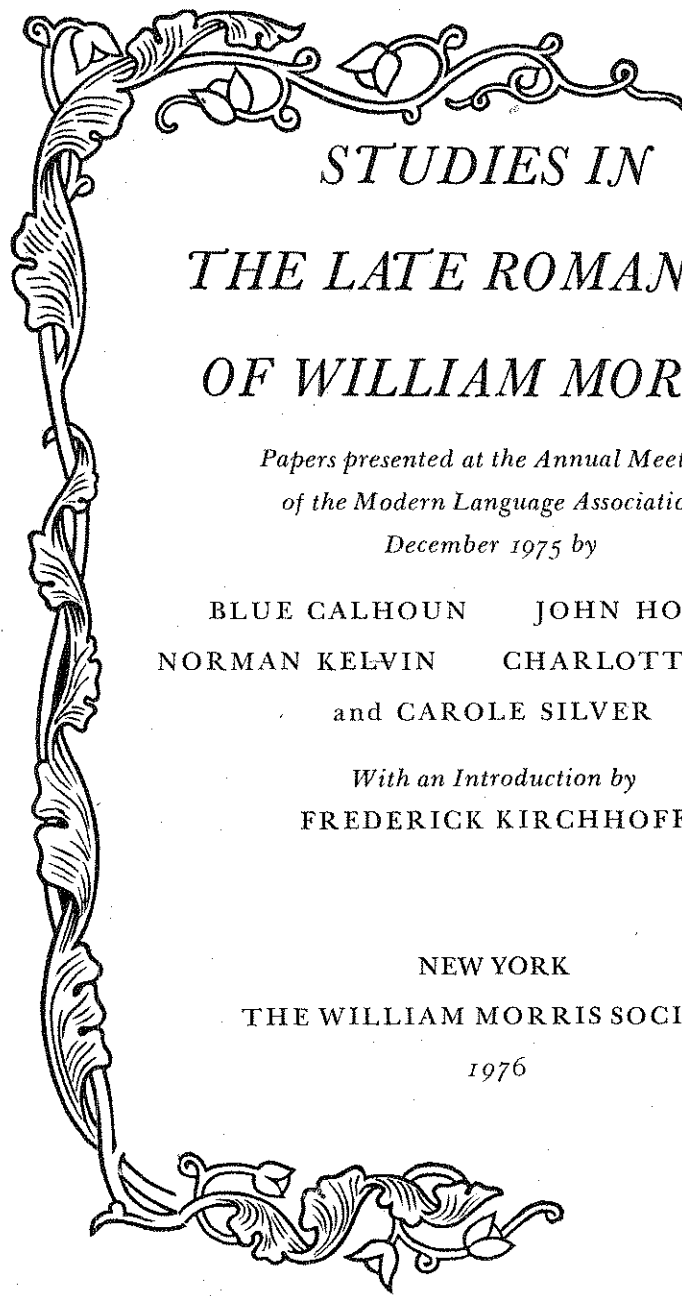
The essays contained in this volume are based on papers written for two seminars which were held at the convention of the Modern Language Association in San Francisco, December 1975. Frederick Kirchhoff organized the seminar entitled "William Morris: the Prose Romances" at which the papers by Blue Calhoun, 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.

Carole Silver and Joseph Dunlap prepared the papers for publication. Mr. S. A. Russell, president of Oriole Editions, kindly took charge of design and production. Scholastic and Manuscript Typing Service made the text camera ready.

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The decoration on the title page appears in the Kelmscott Press edition of The Sundering Flood at the beginning of Chapter XXIII.

The cut on the cover and on page [7] was designed by A. J. Gaskin as an illustration for Chapter XVI, Book III, of the Kelmscott Press edition of The Well at the World's End, but it was not used. (Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library.)



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THE LATE ROMANCES  
OF WILLIAM MORRIS

*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*  
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Introduction

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of William Morris

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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.

awareness of contrasts, of change from one state to another, as the defining characteristic of both the life of mankind and the way of the world. The change and the contrasts may be subject to pattern, as in the seasons of the year, but for Morris contrast is the most real part of the pattern.

Tennyson has something of the same sense that the desire for immortality is not innocent, as in, for example, "The Lotus-Eaters." And Swinburne has something of the same sense of contrasts, especially between pleasure and pain. But one has to turn to Keats for the real sense of the tension between joy's grape and the palate fine. Like Keats, Morris seems to love the earth and the life of man, but, also like Keats, the affirmation of life follows from a contemplation of the earthly paradise on the side of an urn. Human life, even with its changes, is preferable to that cold pastoral. If such a contrast is not all we would like to know on earth, it is all we know and (perforce) all we need to know.

Ohio University

<sup>1</sup> William Morris: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 415-417. Yeats' review originally appeared in Bookman (November, 1896). "The Happiest of the Poets" is in Ideas of Good and Evil (London: Bullen, 1903). It originally appeared in the Fortnightly Review (March, 1903).

<sup>2</sup> William Morris: The Critical Heritage, p. 411. Wells' review appeared originally in the Saturday Review (October, 1896).

<sup>3</sup> Yeats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 296.

<sup>4</sup> "William Morris," Rehabilitations and Other Essays (London: Oxford University Press, 1939).

THE EROTIC IN NEWS FROM NOWHERE AND  
THE WELL AT THE WORLD'S END

Norman Kelvin

William Morris had an extraordinarily retentive mind. It was a mind also that continuously adapted and reshaped to new purposes both the central themes and bits and pieces of imagery that his abundant reading in medieval romance, saga literature, and oriental epic provided him. In the works short and long of his first period--from The Defence of Guenevere (1858) to Sigurd the Volsung (1876)--he made rich use of this talent. He had a mind's eye, also, that remembered in precise detail the parts of England he knew and loved best. As a consequence, News from Nowhere and The Well at the World's End could be mined indefinitely for evidence of his vast reading, for themes and images he had already used in earlier works, and for imaginary scenes that result in part from his faithful rendering of familiar places. The erotic imagery in Well could be traced back to The Earthly Paradise. The journey by boat from London to Kelmscott, in Nowhere, could be shown to be, in visual detail, a report of what Morris saw when he made the voyage with family and friends in 1880. And similarly, proof and illustration could be supplied for May Morris' comment that the quest in Well takes place in a setting created by "loving observation of familiar country mingled with marvels beyond sea" (18:xix).

Of interest here, however, will not be a search for sources, however fruitful one might be, but rather a quest for understanding of the meaning and uses of the erotic in the two romances. Because relatively few years separate Nowhere from



Well in time of composition,<sup>1</sup> a view of them together will reveal that the erotic meant something very different to Morris when he wrote his socialist romance for the readers of Commonweal and when, it can be said, he indulged himself more freely, permitting his imagination to be governed only by the conventions of traditional romance and treating these, moreover, only as low hedges and boundaries to be vaulted at will.

The prevalence of the erotic in Morris' prose romances was noticed early. A. C. Rickett wrote that "there is [in them] a frank animalism, an outspoken earthiness, which is wholly beautiful, because of its frankness and simplicity. The people of Morris-land are naked and unashamed."<sup>2</sup> And C. S. Lewis, one of the most perceptive readers in the next generation of Morris as imaginative writer, said: "The eroticism [in his work in general] is . . . patent, ubiquitous, and unabashed." As for its connection with love, "Havelock Ellis's definition . . . ('lust plus friendship') . . . is a perfectly good definition of love in Morris's stories--unless, indeed, 'lust' is too heavy . . . a name for anything so bright and youthful and functional as his kind of sensuality." As for the permanence of erotic relationships, "Morris does not deal much in world-without-end fidelities, and his heroes are seldom so enamoured of one damsel that they are quite indifferent to the beauties of others. When infidelities occur they are, of course, regrettable, as any other breach of faith, because they wound the social health and harmony of the tribe; they are not felt as apostasies from the god of love."<sup>3</sup>

These comments tell us that the presence of the erotic in Morris' writing is indeed a strong one, and examples of critical notice of the fact could be multiplied. More interesting than continuing

to adduce them, however, is to see what is disclosed when the presence is taken as established and questions are asked about particular works, in this case, Nowhere and Well. The questions I raise are these: how is the erotic managed socially in the worlds of the two romances, and how does the experience of the central figures in one compare with that of the protagonists in the other?

In Nowhere, the goal of society is to extinguish the power of the erotic. Society does this by promoting physical health and attractiveness, so that they become widespread; and by removing many of the legal and social restraints to love making known in the nineteenth century. But society does not make the pleasure of the erotic more available: nature does this.

On the issue of pleasure, the attitude of Nowhere is ambivalent. Since erotic pleasure is natural, it is morally neutral. On the other hand, the consequences of this pleasure are potentially dangerous: people are apt to give too much importance to it and thereby lay the ground for trouble. To counteract the tendency, society teaches that sexual pleasure can lead to pain and that there is a need to anticipate and stoically endure the change. Old Hammond says: "Calf love . . . early waning into disappointment; the inexplicable desire . . . [of] a man of riper years to be the all-in-all to some one woman . . . ; or lastly the reasonable longing of a strong and thoughtful man to become the intimate friend of some beautiful and wise woman . . . as we exult in all the pleasure . . . that goes with these things, so we set ourselves to bear the sorrow which not unseldom goes with them also" (16:57).

To minimize the consequences of opening oneself to erotic pleasure, society can do even more

than encourage stoicism. It can insist that the relationships springing from this pleasure are from the beginning illusions (thereby, incidentally, contradicting its own view that nature is benign). By calling the end of such relationships an "awakening from illusion," society defines its own responsibility as a need to minimize the consequences of the awakening. More positively, it can and does refuse "to pile up degradation on that unhappiness by engaging in sordid squabbles about livelihood and position, and the power of tyrannizing over children who have been the results of love or lust" (16:57).

As for infidelity, it is but the other side of the coin. If it is an illusion to mistake natural passion for a desire for lasting friendship, it is self-deception, too, to see infidelity as other than natural. Thus, as C. S. Lewis noted, the only business of society when faced with infidelity is to avoid wounding its own health. Old Hammond says: "At least if we suffer from the tyranny and fickleness of nature or our own want of experience, we neither grimace about it or lie. If there must be sundering . . . so must it be . . . we [do not] drive those who well know that they are incapable of it to profess an undying sentiment which they cannot really feel" (16:58).

What this means is that society remains passive when two people sunder: it approves their parting by ignoring it. And this response parallels nature's, for fickleness (a manifestation of nature) begins not as a new activity but as the ceasing of an old one, as the ending of a relationship and of the power of the erotic to influence it.

Another problem in Nowhere is jealousy. It is a distinct problem, no longer linked with infidelity, as it often was in the past. Most of the

causes of jealousy in the past were bad social conditions, and with the elimination of these, jealousy itself has dramatically diminished. Again it is Old Hammond who explains: "Many violent acts came from the artificial perversion of the sexual passions which caused over-weening jealousy and like miseries. Now when you look carefully into these, you will find that what lay at the bottom of them was mostly the idea (a law-made idea) of the woman being the property of the man, whether he were husband, father, brother, or what not. That idea has of course vanished with private property" (16:81).

Although it is not his main purpose to do so, Hammond in these words has told us that in contrast to infidelity, whose first cause is that erotic power has ceased to function, jealousy in the past signified that erotic power was not only active but, because jealousy generated strong and exacerbated feeling, greater in intensity than in many relationships free from jealousy. Thus in dealing with it, society needed to use means the very opposite from the passivity with which it manages infidelity in the present. Determined and decisive action was required to deal with this historical problem, the kind of action inherent in so large a social change as the abolition of private property. This is not to say that the main reason for abolishing private property was to eliminate sexual jealousy but only that a change of this magnitude was necessary before it would disappear.

But there is evidence in Nowhere that jealousy still occurs. What can account for it, since the social causes have been removed? The only cause left is nature itself. One could argue that Morris implies that it is nature unbalanced. However, there are no social factors left that might

cause the unbalance, and this condition must therefore have a "natural" cause: "unbalance" is merely "balanced" nature in a different guise.

Because jealousy-as-unbalance is natural, it is, interestingly, treated as is that other natural phenomenon--infidelity--rather than as the socially caused jealousy of the past. In his journey up the Thames, Guest hears discussed a case in which a man whose love for a woman was unrequited became deranged and was killed in self-defense by the man she preferred. The only problem that falls to society as a result is that the homicide must be prevented from becoming a suicide.

The first approach is to put the problem into perspective. Clara discounts the worry about suicide. To Walter Allen, who has been relating the incident, she says: "From all you tell me, he is really very much in love with the woman; and to speak plainly, until his love is satisfied, he will not only stick to his life as tightly as he can, but will also make the most of every event in his life--will, so to say, hug himself up in it; and I think that this is the real explanation of his taking the whole matter with such an excess of tragedy" (16:168).

To this, Walter Allen replies: "Well you may be right; and perhaps we should have treated it all the more lightly." He then adds: "We are all inclined to excuse our poor friend for making us so unhappy, on the ground that he does so out of an exaggerated respect for human life and its happiness" (16:168).

There is a hint of bitterness here, a hint that the best way to prevent the erotic from exercising its power in such a way as to cause unhappiness is to denigrate erotic pleasure altogether. Certainly that is part of what is meant by alleging that a respect for human life and its happiness can ever be exaggerated.

But the ominous consequences of such pessimism are not pursued. Rather, Morris seems next to shake off the incipient despair, for the discussion of what to do about the homicide focuses on a socially positive solution. The man will take up residence in a house not too far away. He will thus have begun his self-cure, in compliance with the general rule for cases like his. In addition, as Clara observes, continuing her own diagnosis and prognosis, "He will not be so far from his beloved that they cannot easily meet if they have a mind to--as they certainly will" (16:169).

Thus does society in Nowhere manage the erotic: by seeing to it first that people are so healthy and handsome that "every Jack may have his Jill," as Dick says earlier, the abundance of beautiful women making fights over them as scarce prizes unnecessary (16:35); by condoning infidelity and eliminating the material causes of jealousy; and, finally, by recognizing that unrequited love, the only source of pain in "the general felicity of Nowhere," as Lionel Trilling observes,<sup>4</sup> can lead to violence but that society can limit the effects of such a wound to itself by refusing to inflict punitive violence in return. It is against this background of social rules and goals and their shaping effect on the lives of the inhabitants of Nowhere that Guest's own experience must be seen.

Not surprisingly, Guest is potentially the prey of nineteenth-century passions; but, as in any dream--Morris' technique of characterization is marvelously effective here--the limits are set by internalized inhibitions not quite overcome rather than by any explicit restraint imposed upon Guest by his hosts. It may be accurate to say that Morris manages the problem of what to do about the erotic desires of Guest, who will have to leave Nowhere, by denying him the power to acknowledge and gratify them properly, the power to mix dream and reality. To grant him this power would be to change the larger theme of the romance, a vision

of happiness achieved by creating a social order that knows the nature of human desire, permits its gratification, but controls its consequences. It would be, ultimately, to set loose a power that would subvert the form and purpose of the romance, and this, also, Morris is not prepared to do. Within these strictures, Guest is permitted cautiously to yearn: to have his feelings aroused and immediately transmuted into an unearthly tenderness, the precise nature of which, it will be seen, is of social importance.

The woman with whom Guest falls in love is Ellen, an idealized farm laborer, rescued from the stunting and deforming conditions of nineteenth-century agricultural life. Guest first sees her as the "chief ornament [of the cottage in which she lives] . . . light-haired and grey-eyed, but with her face and hands and bare feet tanned quite brown with the sun." He observes: "Though she was lightly clad, that was clearly from choice, not . . . poverty . . . for her gown was of silk" (16:148).

Signs of good health, the promise of physical vigor, light clothing, and bare feet are staples in Morris' descriptions of attractive women, and it is these that arouse Guest. But Morris' descriptive language--and its psychological function is equivalent to the social action of the general rules governing sexuality in Nowhere--must either divert the power of the erotic into tranquil outlets or convert the object of that power--gratification of desire--into one that is social and not overtly sexual. A second reference some pages later (p. 185) to Ellen's "sunburnt cheeks . . . grey eyes, amidst the tan of her face" signals that where erotic pleasure is concerned the limits of what is permitted to language were reached in Guest's very first description of Ellen. The circularity, which characterizes subsequent descriptions as well,

not only circumscribes sexual possibility but tells us that it is not to be explored. Throughout the pages dealing with Guest and Ellen, we are given a series of cameos. Viewing them, we are to understand that the words we read testify to a middle-aged man's appreciation of a beautiful young woman (as was Morris in 1890, Guest is fifty-six), but we are to understand also--and it is a triumph of Morris' art that we do--that age is not so much a physical barrier as a rationalization enlisted in the cause of keeping dream and reality apart.

Ultimately, the chaste and tender feeling aroused in Guest by Ellen's beauty shades into a desire for friendship. As he continues to praise Ellen, we become more aware of his loneliness, and of the possibility of its relief, and less aware of the effect upon him of Ellen's physical beauty. Shortly before the dream ends, he says: "I felt even this happy world were made the happier for my being so near this strange girl. . . . [She] was not only beautiful with a beauty quite different from that of 'a young lady,' but was in all ways so strangely interesting . . . that I kept wondering what she would say or do next to surprise and please me" (18:182).

They grow intimate in thought, "her beauty and kindness and eagerness combined" forcing Guest "to think as she did, when she was not earnestly laying herself open to receive [his] thoughts" (16:194). Since friendship in Nowhere is both a precondition for sexual intimacy and more important than it is, one could argue that the relationship has been consummated, according to the highest values of Nowhere, were it not that friendship itself must end with the dream, leaving Guest the consolation only of the advice there seemed to be in Ellen's last glance at him: to be the happier for having seen the inhabitants of Nowhere (16:211). As for the latent desire aroused by Ellen's beauty,

the desire that cannot be gratified even while the dream lasts, it is taught to be satisfied by her beauty as an end in itself. Through repetition of the descriptive details that render it, the beauty of Ellen becomes a distinct motif, accompanying and paralleling Guest's characterization of her as a woman but acquiring a function that is separate from its ability to arouse desire in a man. What occurs, in effect, is that Ellen's beauty is converted from an erotic power into a decorative one. As such, its threat as a force that will cause passion to overcome the limits of a dream is effectively diminished, and Guest learns to connect her beauty with the general felicity of the society--to see its decorative power as a social good. This conversion of the erotic and personal into the decorative and general is a very good way to control the power of the erotic, and a good way also to conclude a work in which the social management of the consequences of desire has been at least as important as desire itself.

The conversion of the erotic into the decorative occurs again in Well and provides a thread of continuity between the two romances, which are otherwise very different in their attitudes toward the sexual. And it is the differences, rather than the one similarity, that first become apparent in Well.

In Nowhere, the power of the erotic is neutralized by society, but in Well it is the shaping force of society itself. What is meant here by "society" in Well should be made clear. It consists of Upmeads and those other imaginary lands through which Ralph travels in his quest for adventure and the Well. Although the story is told by an omniscient, third-person narrator (in contrast to Nowhere, which is a first-person account by Guest), it is not the unhampered and unlimited view of the narrator which permits us

to speak of a single "society" in the romance. It is the centrality of Ralph's observations and responses that does. Despite the distances he travels, his adventures seem to generate a single social ambiance as he moves through them in time.

In Nowhere, women were seen as friends and equal partners of men in all enterprises. Although they continue to have these roles in Well, they are seen at times--and often--as slaves. Indeed, woman-as-thrall is an important source of erotic imagery in Well. The matter of minimal dress, bare limbs, and bare feet provides a point of contrast between the two romances. Whereas in Nowhere scanty dress is a common-sense response to the fact that life is lived in the open, and bare limbs and feet signify happy labor in harmony with earth, in Well they are often associated with whips and chains and encourage fantasies of sadistic male power. A number of Ralph's encounters with the Lady of Abundance, for example, seem designed to stir such fantasies, and the first sets the tone for the rest.

In this initial encounter, Ralph sees two men on horseback who have a woman captive. Morris writes: "[The spearman] was leading a woman by a rope tied around her neck (though her hands were loose). . . . Ralph could see that though she was not to say naked, her raiment was but scanty, for she had nought to cover her save one short and strait little coat of linen" (18:49).

Later, when Ralph enters the Burg of the Four Friths, he observes that although most of the women are, like the men, ill-favored, some are very attractive. Unknown to Ralph, these are slaves, and the details of their appearance are further enticements to erotic power fantasies: "Their gowns [were] yellow like wheat-straw, but gaily embroidered; sleeveless withal and short,

scarce reaching to the ankles, and whiles so thin that they were rather clad with the embroidery than the cloth. . . . Sandals [were] bound on their naked feet with white thongs, and each bore an iron ring about her right arm" (18:71).

A chivalric hero ought at least to be curious to know what the iron ring signifies, but Ralph is extraordinarily slow to make an association, though he watches as fresh war-taken thralls, all of them "women and women-children," are brought into the Burg (18:72-73). As he wonders who these women are, "one of those fair yellow-gowned damsels" first noticed by Ralph, sees him, slackens her walk, and lowers her gaze. And: "It was pleasant to Ralph to behold her. . . . Her . . . gown was dainty and thin; and but for its silver embroidery had hidden her limbs but little; the rosiness of her ankles showed amidst her white sandle-thongs, and there were silver rings and gold on her arms along with the iron ring" (18:74). She looks up at Ralph and takes his smile of greeting very well; it is clear that she, as well as Ralph, is deriving erotic pleasure from her condition as thrall. This self-indulgence is not cancelled but merely stopped when Ralph, still apparently oblivious to the iron ring on her own arm, asks her who the newcomers are and succeeds in making her leave "her dainty tricks," draw "herself up straight and stiff," and pass by him "as one both angry and ashamed" (18:75).

Later, Ralph and his companion, Roger, converse with some aging men of the town who are engaged in pseudo-practical talk about the thralls. Roger pretends to join in and says: "[These] women . . . are brought hither and sold at the market-cross to the highest bidder. . . . Yet they make but evil servants, being proud, and not abiding stripes lightly, or toiling the harder for

them; and they are somewhat too handy with the knife when they deem themselves put upon" (18:78).

Had the discussion finished with reference to self-defense with a knife, an end would have been put to erotic fantasies. But the next comment, which is made by a young man and is the concluding one, keeps them very much alive. He says: "Fair sirs, ye are speaking like hypocrites, and as if your lawful wives were here to hearken to you. . . . Which of you will go to the Cross next Saturday and there buy him a fairer wife than he can wed out of our lineages? and a wife withal of whose humours he need take no more account than the dullness of his hound or the skittish temper of his mare, so long as the thong smarts, and the twigs sting" (18:79).

It could be argued that persistent reference to sex for sale and freely applied whips and thongs is meant as a moral brake on fantasy, but the argument would have more force had Morris ever left off insisting on the beauty of the slaves. Since he does not, there is no brake. There is, rather, a question as to whether Morris is fully aware of the effects he achieves. In some scenes, there is a suggestion of those old Hollywood epics in which heavy moral themes were lightened for the eye at least by crowds of slave girls casually dispersed about the set. It is the suggestion of pornography-as-extravaganza, as theatrical elaboration that is incidental to the main theme but related to it.

Clearly, the nature of the erotic experience will have to change when the hero becomes participant rather than observer. Ralph and the women he loves will, of course, be equals, and their eroticism will contrast with that of the men and women of the Burg (and of Utterbol), where women

are thralls. For my larger purpose here, to view together the eroticism of Nowhere and that of Well, the sexual desire of Ralph and his partners will be seen to contrast also with that of Guest and Ellen. It will contrast with the latter simply by existing as a vigorous active power, bent on full gratification and permitted by Morris to achieve it.

Ralph's first love is the Lady of Abundance. She is the first woman whom Ralph sees as a thrall. She has also a complicated history of past loves, and her present plight is such that she has to be rescued by Ralph from the tyranny of a husband. She is not to be the ultimate heroine, but she initiates Ralph into an erotic and chivalrous manhood. She urges him on to kill her captors; then, in the woods, they make love.

The description of the lovemaking is startlingly Lawrentian: "He drew her down to him as he knelt there, and took his arms about her, and though she yet shrunk from him a little and the eager flame of his love, he might not be gainsayed, and she gave herself to him and let her body glide into his arms, and loved him no less than he loved her. And there between them in the wilderness was all the joy of love that might be" (18:145).

The evocation here of love between equals is possibly the most fully achieved instance of it in the entire romance; the degree is hardly matched in those later scenes that depict Ralph with Ursula, his final and lasting love. Certainly it is not matched in the description of the meeting between Ralph and Ursula that leads to their marriage. Although equality as an idea looms large in the scene, it is introduced in an oddly difficult manner, as if the need to develop companionship as a theme (a need apparently more easily met

in the case of the transient Lady of Abundance) required Morris to be especially ingenious when portraying the start of a lasting union.

In the scene, Ralph sees what he takes to be a young knight in armor. Ralph "went up to him hastily, and merrily put his hand on his shoulder, and kissed him, saying: 'The kiss of peace in the wilderness to thee!' And he found him smooth-faced and sweet-breathed" (19:12). It is of course Ursula whom he has kissed; and though the vision is comic, it also reflects the frequent depiction, in Victorian literature, of women in men's clothing as having a special appeal for men. Moreover, because the clothes are armor and suggest a warrior virgin, this view of Ursula recalls Joan of Arc and Morris' own characterizations of women who are companions to men in battle. The effect is almost to deflect the thought that a man and a woman are beginning as equals in love; and it is not until the story moves on, putting into perspective for us the picture of Ursula in war gear being kissed by Ralph, that the theme takes hold and develops.

Ralph and Ursula consummate their love only after they marry. However, there is one more scene before they wed in which play is given to the voyeurism and sadism that marked the beginning of Ralph's quest, were present during his sojourn in the Burg of the Four Friths, and figured again in Utterbol. Ursula, who has been bathing naked in a river, is attacked by a "huge bear as big as a bullock." After killing the bear, Ralph looks for her. She has run off to dress. "When they met he cast himself upon her without a word, and kissed her greedily; and she forebore not at all, but kissed and caressed him as if she could never be satisfied" (19:53). No doubt the succession of danger, rescue, and relief is in

itself erotically stimulating. But how much more so after the hero has seen his virginal love naked, in the embrace of a "bear as big as a bullock."

In contrast both to this scene and to the love-making of Ralph and the Lady of Abundance is Ralph and Ursula's marriage ceremony. By the light of the moon, "Ralph rose up, and took Ursula's hand." Then, they "stood before the Elder [of the Innocent Folk], and bade him bear witness that they were wedded: then those twain kissed the new-comers and departed to their bridal bower hand in hand through the freshness of the night" (19:59). The ceremony and the narration of it--both so brief and chaste--put an end to erotic fantasy in The Well at the World's End. There will be brief celebrations of joy in bodily health. When Ralph and Ursula reach the Well there will be glimpses of nakedness and tenderness, lyrically described. But the erotic will never again have the power to confuse, encourage fantasies of ownership, enlighten, or transform.

Ralph and Ursula become king and queen of Upmeads, and they retain for the rest of their lives the physical glory they gained at the Well. In the concluding paragraph, Morris writes of Ursula: "Never was she less goodly of body, nay rather, but fairer than when she first came to Upmeads; and the day whereon any man saw her was a day of joyful feast to him, a day to be remembered for ever" (19:245). Thus has the erotic potential of a woman's body been converted, as it was at the end of News from Nowhere, to its proper social function: to serve as a decorative entity and thus to give visual joy to the moral inhabitant of the land. The unmediated power of the erotic is presumably experienced only in the privacy of the royal bed chamber, though even the existence of this power can only be inferred from Ursula's

producing goodly heirs. There will be no Lawrentian embraces under trees, nor tender touching and gazing upon each other's nakedness, as occurred in the Waters of the Well. As Ralph and Ursula are transformed from young lovers to king and queen, the reader is obliged to see Upmeads as a society rather than as another magical setting for love. The reader sees, moreover, that as a society Upmeads is even less concerned with the erotic than is Nowhere.

What conclusions can we draw? In Nowhere the power of the erotic is so diminished that it provides only a tame experience for most of society and none at all for Guest and Ellen. In the Well, it is only in the world of the quest, where magic is a given, that the erotic is directly experienced and is profound enough to be transforming. To this extent, to say that Morris in writing the Well indulged himself in erotic fantasies is to say that he acknowledged the truth he excluded from Nowhere. It is that without the magic of fantasy--even at the risk of temptations to lust and sadism--the erotic is indeed socially manageable. It is controllable because, without magic, it becomes so attenuated in power that it can be converted into passionless emblems of itself: socially decorative ones. Without magic, that is to say, it is nonexistent.

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<sup>1</sup> News from Nowhere was written and published serially in Commonweal in 1890 (in book form, it was issued at the end of 1890 in America and in 1891 in England). The Well at the World's End, though not published until 1896, was begun early in 1892.



<sup>2</sup>William Morris: A Study in Personality (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1913), p. 174.

<sup>3</sup>"William Morris," Rehabilitations and Other Essays (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 41-42.

<sup>4</sup>"Aggression and Utopia: A Note on William Morris's News from Nowhere," The Psychoanalytic Quarterly, XLII, No. 2 (April 1973), 214-225.

MYTH AND RITUAL IN THE LAST ROMANCES  
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