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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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

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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### CHRONOLOGY OF THE LATE ROMANCES

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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.


MYTH AND RITUAL IN THE LAST ROMANCES OF WILLIAM MORRIS

Carole Silver
William Morris was born into the era which had discovered the Rosetta Stone (1821) and had begun to unlock the mysteries of ancient Egypt. The world of his adolescence and young manhood thrilled to Layard's excavations of the cultures of Nineveh and Babylon (1847-65) and to the revelations of the still earlier history of mankind imbedded in the skeletal remains of Neanderthal (1856) and Cro-Magnon Man (1860-65). From Morris' youth to his death, his contemporaries were fascinated by new discoveries of the historical sources of mythology and moved by events such as Schliemann's locations of the sites of Troy and Mycenae (1872-1885). Equally important, they were exposed to and excited by those who sought to explain the origin and transmission of mythology in ways other than the archaeological--by scholars who developed linguistic, aesthetic, and anthropological theories.

Morris' fascination with myth, legend, and folklore led him to an interest in the new disciplines of scientific mythology and cultural anthropology which sought to explain them. He had always loved what he called the "Bibles...of the people" (22: xiii), their ancient epics, myths, and legends, and he owned and revered even such relatively unknown ancient works as the Avesta, Kalevala, Mahabharata, and Shah Nameh. His library included more than twenty-five books on archaeology and antiquarian history and more than thirty-five works on or about folklore. He was acquainted with the tales and legends of cultures as remote as India, Persia, Russian Georgia, Australia, and Alaska.
Morris' interest in books which attempted to explain the origins, transmission, and significance of mythologies, though less well documented, was also strong. Of some works he spoke directly, listing Grimm's Teutonic Mythology as one of his "Bibles" (22:xiv). Other important works were known to him through reviews or through books he owned which discussed and outlined their arguments. Still others were used as "tools" (22:xii); though he did not mention them directly, he utilized their premises and details in his own writings. From these materials he derived three important concepts which shape the prose romances he wrote between 1888 and 1896: the myth of barbarism, the myth of the hero, and the myth of the fertile earth-mother. His use of these archetypal patterns can be clarified by examining the mythological and anthropological works he read and by tracing his use of the mythic constructs derived from them.

Among the works with which Morris was best acquainted were those of the brothers Grimm and those of Max Müller. The Grimms had examined folklore and fairy tales as survivals of a great Indo-European mythological system. They had tried to reconstruct, from these remains, the core of the mythology as well as to explain its migrations and transformations and its relationship to such genres as romance and fairy tale. Max Müller, utilizing a philological and etymological method, had tried to make of mythology a scientific study. Popular in England, he had written and lectured on the prehistoric Indo-European peoples and their common culture and language. He treated mythology as a variety of linguistic decay, for he believed that myths were the products of poetic fantasy from prehistoric times, that they were stories told to explain figures of speech no longer understood by those who spoke them. Moreover, he believed that all myth stemmed from prehistoric explanations and descriptions of the behavior of the sun; all myth was solar and all heroes were versions of a primeval sun-god.

In addition to the historical and linguistic approaches to the study of mythology, Morris was cognizant of the aesthetic and humanistic method of analysis applied by such figures as John Ruskin and Walter Pater. Although Ruskin occasionally saw myth as euhemeristic, he and Pater stressed its origins in early attempts to explain natural phenomena. In their view, the phenomena of nature were embodied in the figures of gods and goddesses who bore moral and allegorical significance. To them, the study of myth involved the explication of its eternal truths and beauties; not only an important source of poetry, myth was poetry itself.

Perhaps most importantly, Morris was influenced by the anthropological view of mythology. This approach, flowering in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and triumphing in the twentieth, was represented in its early stages by such books as Lewis H. Morgan's Ancient Society (1877) and E. B. Tylor's Primitive Culture (1871). Morgan's ideas shaped one of the works Morris valued most highly, Frederick Engels' Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (1884). Tylor's comparative method--his thesis that cultures pass through the same stages of development, so that one may study modern primitive societies to understand ancient civilizations--greatly influenced Morris' friend and admirer, Andrew Lang. Not only did Lang explain various occurrences in ancient myths by
comparing them to practices still utilized in primitive societies, but he also challenged Max Müller's view of the sun as the source of all nature myths. Instead, Lang found the roots of myth in vegetative and fertility cults, in early religion and magic. To him, mythology was a primitive form of science, an effort to explain and control the natural world.

The works of Tylor and Lang, as well as those of the Grimms and Müller, were utilized by James George Frazer, whose books marked the culmination of the Victorian study of mythology. Frazer's volume on totemism was published in 1887, and his monumental *Golden Bough* first appeared in 1890. Though briefer than the later editions, the 1890 *Golden Bough* contained all of Frazer's major constructs: the drama of Nemi, the motif of royal succession by murder, and the significance of vegetative rituals. Moreover, his crucial discussions of vegetative deities, of dying gods and mother-goddesses, and of the connections between human sexuality and the fertility of the earth were already present.

As William Morris assimilated these sources, he fused his new knowledge of the study of mythology with his own private visions, creating new myths for himself and his audience. Always interested in the same interlocking mythic patterns, Morris depicted imaginary worlds composed of groups living in various stages of social evolution—or moving from savagery through barbarism to civilization—as described by the anthropologists of his era. For the structure of his plots he utilized the ancient motif of the quest; for his major characters he drew upon concepts of the hero and speculations about the nature of the *Magna Mater*. Morris' awareness of his contemporaries' approaches to mythology and his utilization of many of their major works becomes evident through a careful reading of the late prose romances.

The settings of Morris' late romances are shaped by his strong preference for the stage of social development known as "upper barbarism." This state was described in detail by Lewis H. Morgan in *Ancient Society* and recapitulated at length in Frederick Engels' *Origin of the Family*. Both Morgan and Engels saw the history of man as an evolution through three stages of savagery to the crucial periods of lower, middle, and upper barbarism, and finally to civilization. They envisioned "upper barbarism" as the era of the heroic peoples: the Greeks, the Vikings, and the German and Celtic tribes of the Roman period. They characterized "upper barbarism" as the age of iron tools and weapons and as the source of a rich oral tradition of mythology and epic. Both saw the people and the life they led as superior to the world of civilized man; to them the upper barbarian was a noble, vigorous, and naturally moral human being, living in the heroic community of the gens or clan and dwelling in political, social, and economic cooperation with his fellows. To Morris, who described the leading passion of his life as the "hatred of modern civilization" and who looked forward to "barbarism once more flooding the world," Morgan's and Engels' praise of heroic primitivism came as inspiration.

Morris saw in a revival of "upper barbarism" an escape from the ravages of the Industrial Revolution and from Victorian mechanism. Renewed barbarism would provide a cure for the cold, meaningless world-view proposed by modern scientific law and capitalist economic law; it would revivify human feeling and restore emotions tainted by civilization. Like Morgan and
Engels, Morris hoped for "a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes." Equating "upper barbarism" with ideal communism, seeing in the collective ownership and cultivation of the land by the gens the true spirit of the commune, Morris found, in barbarian society, a culture in which human rights were not separated from human duties, a world without class exploitation.

The world of "upper barbarism" is both the background to and a vital theme of Morris' The House of the Wolfings. The subject of the romance is "the melting of the individual into the society of the tribes" and its setting is a group of gentes or clans living within a Mark--the tract of land held in common by the community. Each gens, which Morris calls a House, is designated by an animal name, for its members believe themselves descended from a semi-animal, semi-human ancestor. All members of a gens are related by blood, and descent is matrilineal. They must take wives from outside their clan and wed the women of other friendly Houses. Members of a House owe each other aid, protection, and the avenging of injury. All work communally in the central dwelling (or Roof), and all own and work their land in common. The people of a gens are led, when necessary, by those among them whom they consider most worthy and whom they choose in free elections.

Morris' House of the Wolfings begins with a barely fictionalized summary of Engels' description of life in the gentes of "upper barbarism." Morris speaks of the Mark, and of how "the folk that now dwell there had learned the craft of iron-founding, so that they had no lack of wares of iron and steel" (14:3). Speaking of the Houses who inhabit the Mark, Morris praises their way of life and their egalitarian spirit: "the men of one branch of kindred dwelt under one roof together, and had therein their place and dignity; nor were there many degrees amongst them...but all they of one blood were brethren and of equal dignity" (14:5). Completing his description, Morris speaks of marriage customs in the gentes, of how men "might not wed the women of their own House" but must wed with "such Houses of the Mark as were not so close akin... and this was a law that none dreamed of breaking" (14:5). As the romance progresses, he writes of the barbarians' reverence for their mythical ancestors, of the adoption into the gentes of aliens and strangers, and of the democratic election of war-leaders. He lets us hear the folk-poetry and myths of the Men of the Wolf, demonstrates the way they wield their iron weapons, and shows us their pure communism in action.

The conflict in The House of the Wolfings is a conflict of loyalties, for Thiodolf, the Folk-Wolf, must choose between his love for his consort and his duty to his people. The enemy facing the Germanic clans is Rome, a power which to Morris and Engels represented "the rottenness of a decaying civilization."9 When Thiodolf renounces love and life for the sake of his duty to his people, he aids in the rebirth of Europe. Morris suggests that the barbarians' triumph over Rome was because of just such deeds. He agrees with Engels that the gentes were victorious because of their values and way of life, that their barbarism gave them "their individual ability and courage, their sense of freedom, their democratic instinct...all the qualities which had been lost to the Romans and were alone capable of forming new states and making new nationalities grow out of the slime of the Roman world."9 Like Engels, he believes that "only barbarians are able to
rejuvenate a world in the throes of collapsing civilization. And precisely the highest stage of barbarism, to which and in which the Germans worked their way upward before the migrations, was the most favorable for this process. Thus, Morris finds his subject in the times and traits that enabled the Germanic Houses to win their battle “for the life... [they] have made in the land... [they] have made” (14:161), and makes heroic myth from Engels’ reading of history.

In the sequel to The House of the Wolfings, The Roots of the Mountains, Morris further develops his historical myth of “upper barbarism.” As he traces the gradual change from “upper barbarism” to civilization and the transition from the end of the heroic age to the beginning of the chivalric, he depicts the struggle of the Germanic tribes against the threat posed by the Huns. The romance describes how the separate Kindreds become one fellowship, how the tribes melt into a race and nation which will “increase and multiply, till... valiant men and clean maidens make the bitter sweet and purify the earth” (15:235). The fusion of Houses and tribes is accomplished through love and friendship. The hero of the romance, Face-of-god, unites with Sun-beam, a woman of an alien people, while his rejected love, the Bride, enters a union of friendship with Sun-beam’s brother, Folk-Might. Amid the rituals of bride-capture and the maiden-ward, a new people is created.

The Roots of the Mountains marks the end of Morris’ literalistic adherence to descriptions gleaned from Morgan and Engels. In the romances which follow, Morris’ treatment of “upper barbarism” becomes increasingly mythical and psychological. The barbarians of The Story of the Glittering Plain, for example, no longer stem from a historically identifiable time or place. Although they resemble the Norse and dwell in lands faintly reminiscent of Iceland, the romance in which they participate is as much influenced by Celtic myth as by Icelandic saga. Hallblithe, the hero, is again a member of a gens, the House of the Raven; his betrothed, the Hostage, is a member of the House of the Rose “wherein it was right and due that the men of the Raven should wed” (14:211). When she is kidnapped by a band of Vikings, he embarks on a quest to find and free her. Seeking her first on the Isle of Ransom, a land described as an underworld, he must next journey to an earthly paradise. This terrestrial Eden is modeled upon Tír-na-nóg, “The Land of Living Men,” visited by Oisin and Connla in the Celtic myths that Morris loved. Like the island to which Connla voyages, Morris’ Glittering Plain is a land far in the west, where even the old become young, where decay and death are unknown, and where the earth is naturally abundant.

Yet Hallblithe is shown as repudiating both the land and the concept of an earthly paradise. He condemns the desire for eternal youth and life as unnatural, despises the exclusivity and subtle tyranny of the realm, and rejects the love it offers, choosing, instead, the heroic values of his own world. The Land of Living Men is found lacking, in part because its people have forgotten the old customs and structures of the gens. They no longer remember their kinsmen, their deeds, and their duties to the clan. There are no Houses, and, with their passing, the old laws of marriage are no longer honored. Thus, Hallblithe chooses to reject the love of the women of the island and to keep faith with his mortal bride. When, returning to the Isle of Ransom, he regains the Hostage, his rewards are those fit for a heroic barbarian. Adopted into one of the Houses of the
Ransomers, he may return to his own House. To it, he brings both a friend from the Isle of Ransom and his own rightful bride.

The romances which follow The Glittering Plain show Morris further abandoning the historical treatment of "upper barbarism" and becoming increasingly mythological in his use of its materials. He extends his settings to include the representation of savage, barbaric, and civilized societies—all coexisting within the same area and era. Instead of depicting unilateral social evolution, he turns to demonstrating how cultures at various levels of development aid or oppose each other. He retains his faith in the values of "upper barbarism," however, further idealizing its representatives and magnifying its power.

In The Wood Beyond the World, Morris juxtaposes two realms, one of middle savagery and one of medieval Christian civilization. The hero, Golden Walter, and his beloved, the Maid, escape from the sinister wood to encounter the People of the Bear. The Men of the Bear are enormous figures, larger and stronger than civilized men, an attribute symbolic of their incorruptibility. Both they and their women are dressed in the skins of beasts and are ignorant of iron weapons and of the use of bows and arrows. With their primitive bone and flint tools they have built an impressive Doom-ring and an altar to their Magna Mater. These tribal folk have evolved to Morgan's and Engels' "middle savagery," worshipping an Ancient Mother of tribes who they believe predated all male leaders, and offering human sacrifices.

When the Maid, using her magic powers of fertility, persuades the People of the Bear that she is "the new body of...[their] God" (17:106), she issues new edicts which will raise them from savagery to ideal barbarism. No longer are the Bear people to practice the savage customs of slaying aliens or of offering human victims. Instead, they are to adopt into their clan the strong and worthy among their captives and to enslave only the weak or degenerate. When the Maid returns to visit the Bears, she makes no attempt to bring with her the customs or the tools of her civilized Christian kingdom. Instead, she carries with her what the savages will need to become barbarians: gifts of iron tools and seed corn, men to educate them in the art of tillage.

Idealized barbarism plays an equally important role in The Well at the World's End, for it is the force that helps reclaim a group of decadent societies. Morris fills the vast canvas of this romance with reminders of past and glorious barbaric cultures: ancient earth-works, grave mounds and carvings; broken Doom-rings and shattered altars. But he is more interested in the living barbarians, represented by the healthy, vigorous Kindred of the Bull. It is they who help Ralph, the civilized prince of Upleads, to redeem corrupt societies. The Bulls are pagans who dwell in the hidden places of the Fell, worshipping their ancestral animal-god and the forefathers of their tribe. They are raiders who, in the tradition of barbarism, enslave their captives, and Ralph must wean them from this vice. Their other customs, however, suggest the nobler aspects of their barbarism. When one member of the gens is murdered by the corrupt Lord of Utterbol, his clan-brother, Bull Shockhead, is sworn to avenge his death. Killing the Lord and wedding the Queen, Bull purges Utterbol of its corruptions and restores a land described as Hell
to normal earthly virtue. When he adopts Ralph as a clan-brother, he cheerfully assumes the duties of aiding and protecting him. Thus, when Ralph must battle the survivors of Utterbol and the forces of the tyrannous Burg-of-the-Four-Friths, Bull and his tribe become his army. The tribe joins with the Shepherds—a semi-barbaric people who have retained their ancient customs—to help Ralph regain his peaceable kingdom. The values and powers of barbarism again prove superior to those of decadent civilization—even to those of the Christian Middle Ages.

Interestingly, idealized barbarism is one of the hallmarks of Morris' heroes, even when, like Ralph, they are nominally Christian. The heroes of the last romances retain the simplicity, vitality, and sense of duty to kin and group which Morris associates with the men of the gens. Traditional heroes, Morris' protagonists are given the conventional traits of the protagonists of heroic legend and chivalric romance. They are not derived from any specific source, but they are less divine heroes than "culture heroes," figures who represent the highest ideals of their given societies. John Rhys had described "culture heroes" in his Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by Celtic Heathendom and, though Morris did not need to read of them to recognize their traits, his heroes meet all of Rhys' criteria. Like Rhys' heroes, the protagonists of Morris' last romances are of anonymous parentage or somewhat obscure background. The lineages of Thiodolf and Halblithe are unknown; Osborne in The Sundering Flood is the child of a dead freeholder, and Golden Walter in The Wood Beyond the World may be "golden" in token of his kinship to the sun, but his major resemblance to a solar deity lies in his travels. Like the sun whom Müller and Rhys had visualized as a great traveller crossing perilous mountains or dismal plains and encountering the death represented by night, Morris' last heroes encounter trials and confrontations on their journeys. Their adventures follow the same basic stages, whether they are land journeys or imram—the sea voyages of Celtic legend. Their experiences constitute what Joseph Campbell calls "the monomyth..."
of the hero."17 All of Morris' heroes are called to adventure, either by a vision, as in The Wood Beyond the World, by a rumor, as in The Well at the World's End, or by a direct challenge to them or to their loved ones. Leaving the world of common day, they enter a realm in which the laws of nature are partially suspended; here they undergo their initiations and their trials.

Separated from others, Morris' heroes must undergo the experience of evil and the confrontation with death. Hallblithe, for example, must voyage to the Isle of Ransom, a sort of underworld; Birdalone, the female protagonist of The Water of the Wondrous Isles, must encounter two different kingdoms of the dead and the ordeal of an Isle of Nothing; Golden Walter must traverse the pitfalls of a wood beyond the world. All their quests are for the same goal—the bride (or in the case of Birdalone, the groom). The woman they seek is the image of their destiny, the promise of perfection and the life-force itself. Even in The Well at the World's End where the quest is ostensibly twofold, its two objects are really one and the same. The Well, a secular grail, an Irish Well of Wisdom, and the Celtic Cauldron of Regeneration is sought because it is the source of the water of life. As such, it is another manifestation of the gifts of valuable being, mysterious energy, and renewal of life which are implicit in the figure of the bride.

In all of Morris' last romances the quests culminate in success. But when the hero and the bride are united, they do not choose to live in solitude, secluded from the world. Instead, the hero returns from his adventures filled with the desire and blessed with the power to aid his fellow men. He may discover and rule a new society, as does Walter, or he may rebuild and rejuvenate his own realm, as does Ralph, but his ultimate role is social. Through bravery in action and loyalty in love, he is to make of the ordinary earth the only earthly paradise that human beings can know. He is to "succour the oppressed" (19: 33), and to serve his fellows and "deliver them from the thralldom of those that be strong and unwise and unkind" (19:66), thus regenerating both his world and his own life.

This process of personal and social rebirth lies at the heart of the last romances. Envisioned in images of fertility, vegetative force, and human sexuality, regeneration often involves the hero's confrontation with the powerful, ambiguous figure of the Earth-Goddess; it may necessitate his dying to be born again. The terms of the process are drawn from Grimm, Lang, and Frazer, for Morris' preoccupation with the earth as creative power and destructive force was nurtured by their studies.

In the last romances, Morris celebrates "the Green Tree and the goddess Habundia, and wells and enchanted Waters."18 Fascinated by the cults and rituals of fertility, and by the Great Mother and her consorts, he creates female characters who represent "the abundance of the earth."19 The women in The Wood Beyond the World, The Well at the World's End, and The Water of the Wondrous Isles are always seen as symbols of the fecundity of the natural world. As William Butler Yeats observes, even when they are depicted as evil, they create "a disordered abundance like that of weedy places."20 Morris' third mythic construct is a vision of the forces of nature, either integrated into one female figure who represents both creative and destructive aspects, or separated into two opposing figures who represent dichotomies.
The Wood Beyond the World centers on the dual aspects of the Mother Goddess as seen in two complementary figures. The most Frazerian of Morris' romances, it is a quest in search of the explanations of a mystery. Like The Golden Bough, it reenacts an eternal ritual of love and pain and death. Golden Walter is caught between two women, the destructive Lady and the vegetative Maid; each is an aspect of the Great Mother. At the beginning of the romance he finds himself involved in a ritual of fertility and death, for his first meeting is with an old man of the woods, a Frazerian priest of Nemi. The man tells Walter of his participation in bloody rites, of how he has slain his predecessor and supplanted him in order to possess the Lady. His warnings: that evil has come of his act, and that he too would have been killed (were it not for the intervention of the Maid) are to discourage Walter from entering the forbidden precincts of the valley. Drawn by a vision of the Lady, however, Walter feels compelled to explore the mystery. He is almost lured to his death, for the Lady wishes him to kill and replace her present consort, the King's Son. Even if he survives this first test, he too is to be slain and replaced when the Lady tires of him.

The mysterious Lady is clearly not mortal; she is passionate and cruel, a Diana of Nemi who represents all the fearful aspects of the Great Mother. As a figure for Frazer's Diana, Morris' Lady appears with sandals and a bow and arrows, garbed like "the hunting-goddess of the Gentiles" (17:50). She is depicted as the carnal Venus as well, tempting and seductive when Walter glimpses her arising from her bed of love, clothed only in her golden hair. Hunting or loving, men are her prey and her wantonness is seen as fertility run wild. Walter's response to her is an appropriate mixture of passion and terror.

Walter is nearly destroyed, but he is saved from death by the Maid; it is she who represents the creative, life-giving aspects of the Great Mother. Her name indicates her functions, for she is the magical virgin, the enslaved or captive power of fertility, and the Maiden Kore. Not wholly mortal, she has magic power which depends on her remaining chaste. Through her power, she rescues Walter from "the wilderness fruitful of evil" (17:33), and destroys the King's Son and the Lady. She supplants the Lady, becoming the new body of the Mother Goddess and softening her savage edicts. She appears to the People of the Bear as a Demeter or Kore. Clothed like Frazer's May Spirit or May Queen,21 in a flower bedecked gown, she is "The Mother of Summer" (17:97). She is a vegetative spirit who can restore the bloom to faded flowers and send the rain from the mountains to make the dry earth bear fruit; her very footsteps on the meadows will make them thrive. In all her attributes she is the bringer of fecundity and plenty, "the very heart of the year's increase" (17:108). Even when she becomes a mortal, she retains her role as a Lady of Abundance, becoming like Frazer's Isis, the "mistress of bread."22 For, in her final visit to the People of the Bear, she carries with her the gifts that will insure renewal and abundance, a knowledge of the art of agriculture, the seed for planting grain, and the tools with which it may be reaped.

The creative and destructive forces of the Great Mother are incorporated into one figure in The Well at the World's End, a mysterious woman simply called the Lady of Abundance. She is the inspiration for and the force behind a quest whose pattern is influenced by Frazer and his sources. The quest, though set in a Christian era, is far from Christian in meaning and symbolism. It is condemned by a priest who describes it as inspired
by the devil, "a memory of the customs of the ancient gentiles and heathens" (18:214). Though the talisman that marks its initiates derives from Sarra, the holy city of the grail, it too is essentially pagan and may not be blessed or exchanged for a rosary. The rituals of the quest are heathen; they involve the wearing of toga-like garments, the study of pagan books in the groves and forests of pre-Christian worship, and the ritual purifications of the ancient past. The sign of the quest, carved on rocks and trees, in the forbidding Wasteland, and on the sacred Well is a priestly sword crossed by a three-leaved bough. A symbol known only to the initiates, it is the Golden Bough itself.

The Lady of Abundance, connected by her title to Frazer's corn goddess as well as to Grimm's domina Abundia, rules both the realm of the Dry Tree and the fertile Land of Abundance, whose people believe that "when she came...increase became more plenteous" (19:152). The Lady's paradoxical qualities are manifested by more than the differing nature of her provinces. She is seen as harlot and mother, creator and destroyer, enemy and guide. Although she destroys other men, she brings life to Ralph, and their sexual union initiates him and enables him to undertake the further stages of his quest.

The Lady herself must die; like the Corn Goddess and the fertile grain, she must be killed and reborn in a new form. Her new body and her "sending" is the mortal Ursula, named after the saint who is "the Friend of Maidens" (19:14), and Ursula is the purely benevolent aspect of the Goddess. Frank, free, courageous, and truly natural, she is the child of the earth and the woodlands which bore her. It is she who saves and rejuvenates Ralph, leading him through dangers to the sacred Well. When they drink of the waters together, they become a second Adam and Eve, able to make the tree of death become the tree of life, ready to bring the life-giving stream "from the waste to the home" (19:196).

The figure of the fertile, animating woman who represents all aspects of the earth undergoes yet another transformation in the last of the romances completed by Morris, The Water of the Wondrous Isles. Here Morris' heroine, Birdalone, is tutored by a female figure who is the domina Abundia. Habundia serves as both the good mother and the wise teacher to Birdalone. Tutoring her beneath the branches of the oak tree of Wisdom, she gives Birdalone the gift of a ring, shaped and carved in the form of Ouroboros, the great World-Serpent. Yet Habundia is limited in function, representing only the benevolent aspects of the Great Goddess. The malevolent aspects are symbolized by Birdalone's mistress, a witch, and by the witch's sister who rules an "Isle of Increase Unsought," a realm of false fertility.

Both figures, however, are ultimately subsumed in the figure of Birdalone herself. Capable of both good and evil, courageous but fallible in her quest for a fulfilling husband, Birdalone becomes the last, most human, and most believable manifestation of the Lady of Abundance. When, strengthened and matured by suffering, she makes a second journey through the Wondrous Isles, she discovers that each of them has changed. The Isle of Nothing, once a Wasteland, has evolved into a land inhabited by simple, idyllic people. These new children of the earth worship her as a goddess, promising to keep her memory alive in the minds of their offspring. As the small group grows into a tribe, builds ships, and leaves the island to disseminate its culture, it bears the myth of
Birdalone with it. To the people of the Isle of Nothing she becomes a founding mother and a civilizing power, an Isis or Athena who has come from another land to bless them in their infancy and has then mysteriously departed. She is their Lady of Abundance.

Thus, in The Water of the Wondrous Isles, Morris presents his readers with an imaginative vision of how myth itself may originate and be transmitted. The heroine of this last complete romance replicates Morris' own role in the history of mythology: a mortal becomes a maker and giver of myth and thereby is made immortal.

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1 For a partial indication of the contents of Morris' library see the Catalogue of a Portion of the valuable collection of Manuscripts, Early Printed Books, & etc. of the late William Morris, of Kelmscott House Hammersmith (London: Sotheby, 1898).

2 See Walter Pater, Greek Studies, [1875-1889] Vol. 7 of Collected Works (London: Macmillan, 1901) and John Ruskin, The Queen of the Air, [1869] Vol. 19 of The Works of John Ruskin, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: Allen, 1905). Ruskin's approach to myth is well exemplified by his praise of Morris' Life and Death of Jason: "You may obtain a more truthful idea of the nature of Greek religion and legend from the poems of Keats, and the nearly as beautiful, and, in general grasp of subject, far more powerful, recent work of Morris, than from frigid scholarship, however extensive." (p. 309)

3 See, for example, Custom and Myth (London: Longmans, 1884).


7 Letters, p. 302.

8 Engels, p. 215. Morris is also influenced by Engels' praise of the Germanic tribes of the heroic age—a praise which Engels adds to Morgan's book. Like Engels, Morris sees the Goths as adding to the general virtues of the gens system a high evaluation of women, morality, and clean living.

9 Engels, pp. 215-16.

10 Engels, p. 216.

Engels, p. 88.

The term "last romances" is used to refer to those written or published after 1890.

(London: Williams and Norgate, 1888), pp. 284-287. Rhys lists anonymous parentage, courage in war, creative power, wisdom, and wanderings as the characteristics of culture heroes.

Rhys, p. 305.

Rhys, p. 345ff.


Yeats, p. 76.

Yeats, p. 80.

Frazer, I, 87.

Frazer, I, 310. Several of the names Morris uses for female characters are the names Frazer identifies as those given to manifestations of the female vegetative force. Isis as Corn Goddess is a Lady of Abundance, and the young corn is the Maid(en) II, 344, or the Bride, II, 346.

Teutonic Mythology, trans. James Stallybrass, 4 vols. (London: Bell, 1882-88), I, 286-287. Grimm identifies the Lady of Abundance as dame Habonde (Habundia), as Diana, and as the Germanic goddess Frulla. All are alternate titles for a goddess of plenty who bestows prosperity and blessing upon mortals. Grimm makes clear that all goddesses are forms of the One, different names for a primal Earth and Mother Goddess, III, xxi. He sees her as granting the human race "the occupations and arts of housekeeping and husbandry," I, 250.

Grimm, I, 286-287. Like Grimm's goddess, Morris' Habundia is a wood-mother or wood-wife. She is a tree-spirit whose domain is a forest and who rules over lesser deities. She may enter man-made houses only at her own peril. In Morris' romance, she shrinks in size when she does so.