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 LATE ROMANCES
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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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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.)
Introduction
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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 barrarians.
NOTE


INTRODUCTION

Frederick Kirchhoff
Paradise, and groves
Elysian, Fortunate Fields--like those of old
Sought in the Atlantic Main--why should they be
A history only of departed things,
Or a mere fiction of what never was?
For the discerning intellect of Man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.

--Wordsworth, Preface to
The Excursion (1814), ll. 47-55

With the exception of the explicitly Marxist,
Dream of John Ball (1886) and News from Nowhere
(1890), the prose romances of William Morris' final decade remain the least understood body of major Victorian fiction. Despite their claim of place--the culmination of Morris' literary development--they have received a fraction of the critical attention given his earliest work. In fact, during the past fifteen years there has been more published criticism on the title poem of The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems (1858) than on all the romances put together. In this respect, of course, they share their neglect with Love is Enough (1873) and The Story of Sigurd the Volsung (1876). But even within the context of the purely literary work of Morris' last quarter century, the romances are something of a special case. Never lacking a small but respectable following, they have presented an enigma or an embarrassment for otherwise staunch admirers of Morris' social vision,
design, and even poetry. Shaw dismissed them as "a startling relapse into literary pre-Raphaelitism," symptomatic of Morris' need for "a refuge from reality."¹ E. P. Thompson, who rejects the "startling relapse" theory, treats them as mere "fairy-stories, legends, for which the belief of the active mind is not invited."² Philip Henderson, in a life-and-works biography his publisher had the temerity to call "definitive," does not even seem to have read the romances with sufficient attention to get their plots straight. On the other hand, John Goode's perceptive reading of The House of the Wolfings cavalierly misspells the name of its central figure.³ And even Norman Talbot, among the most sophisticated of their recent critics, feels constrained to justify himself for writing on what is, but he knows should not be, "an esoteric subject."⁴ But the romances are far from esoteric. Indeed, in this country they are the one portion of Morris' literary output popular with a non-academic audience. And judging from the availability of paperback reprints, they may well have begun to be accepted--as Morris hoped--as something akin to an art of the people.

There are a number of reasons for the neglect of the romances by academic critics. The most significant have doubtless been their "escapist" genre and archaic language. In response to the question of genre, it is sufficient to reiterate Northrop Frye's injunction that "William Morris should not be left on the side lines of prose fiction merely because the critic has not learned to take the romance form seriously."⁵ Certainly the papers in this collection more than adequately document the "seriousness" of the romances and, confirming Frye's notion of the "revolutionary nature of the romance," their relevance to the social and political concerns of Morris' last years. Far from being "a refuge from reality," Morris refines the genre into a uniquely syncretic model of human experience--a model which, among its other functions, at once confirms and re-examines his commitment to Marxism. In the recurrent characters and narrative structures of the romances Morris establishes a set of psychological archetypes by means of which he can explore the processes of individuation, sexual relationship, and social interaction that must be accounted for in any version of the Earthly Paradise. Moreover, this fascination with form in itself leads Morris to an imaginative and intellectual freedom that I feel brash enough to compare with that of Beethoven's late quartets and Shakespeare's final romances. Here, as nowhere else, Morris' imagination is fully liberated. Here, as Norman Kelvin persuasively argues, Morris gives fullest rein to his own erotic fantasies. And as a result, it is difficult to escape a sense that it was in writing the prose romances--and returning full-circle to the genre he had laid aside at the beginning of his manhood--that Morris became most fully himself.

Early reviewers of the romances, who dismissed their diction as "Wardour Street English," failed to grasp the genuinely radical nature of Morris' experimentation with language. Admittedly a stumbling block in The House of the Wolfings (1888), and perhaps never entirely successful, although much refined, in the subsequent romances, his extensive use of archaic terminology is not so much an attempt to evoke the past as it is to revitalize the language through a return to its Germanic roots. Just as the romances themselves oppose the "healthy" world of the Germanic gens to the decadence of Rome, their diction deliberately substitutes a Germanic for a Latin vocabulary. No quaint self-indulgence, this vocabulary, coupled
with the controlled simplicity of Morris' syntax, is inseparable from the ethos of the romances. For he is as much concerned with setting forth a way of thinking—or story-telling—as he is with the story line of the narration.

This link with an earlier stage in the evolution of the language is one aspect of an overall pattern of reintegration functioning in the prose romance. As Charlotte Oberg and Carole Silver from separate viewpoints observe, the romances reassert the values of the past—whether an heroic code or the social structure of the gens—in order to restructure or revitalize the present. They present a series of idealized societies—family, tribe or nation—happy in their accommodation to the natural world. But these accommodations tend to be static (insofar as the cyclic pattern of Nature is itself static). Hence, their vulnerability to external forces and consequent dependence on the hero, who alone is capable of revitalizing his society. But the romances do not merely celebrate the fortunate presence of these "lucky" men. The hero faces two closely related liabilities: his very stature threatens his ability to participate in his own society, and his traffic with the sources of power in Nature and history threatens to transform his personality. Since John Hollow deals with the social role of "special men" in the romances, and Charlotte Oberg with the quest of the hero in history, I shall take the opportunity of this Introduction to explore what seems to me the most ticklish issue in Morris' later writing: the problems inherent in the hero's relationship with the natural world.

The revitalizing dialectic, in which the past is re-created against the present in order to be negated in a new present, functions through the thematic oppositions of town and country, village and wilderness, "civilization" and the natural world. Extending the argument of her important study of The Earthly Paradise, Blue Calhoun discusses this structure in terms of the pastoral. It strikes me that the dialectic of the romances can with equal fruitfulness be related to Romantic concerns with the relationship between Imagination and Nature. Specifically, the romances are an epoch in the long series of attempts to resolve the ambivalent role of Nature in the development of the individual Imagination.

From the start, Morris has misgivings. In The House of the Wolfings, the Valkyrie Wood-Sun stands for a superhuman potency at cross-purposes with Thiodolf's participation in the life of the Wolf gens. As her name implies, their daughter Hall-Sun is able to unite the strengths of her two parents, yet only at the cost of Thiodolf's life. Rejecting Wood-Sun's protection in battle, Thiodolf accepts his necessary doom. Thus, to revitalize his gens through intercourse with the alien power of the natural world—an act necessary if the gens is to withstand the threat of Roman invasion—and at the same time remain true to the heroic code of his human society, the hero must take upon himself the role of sacrificial victim. And it is precisely this tragic dilemma that the later romances attempt to circumvent. In The Roots of the Mountains (1889), Morris allows Face-of-god's infatuation with the Sun-beam—who of all his heroines most clearly links Nature with the historical past of the hero's tribe—to resolve itself with the best interests of his tribe. Yet this is only possible by means of a remarkably ineffectual scene in which the Sun-beam, hitherto a figure of stark courage, gives way to an unconving show of maiden fear (15: 144-146), and by the timely discovery that the "aliens" to whose cause Face-of-god has found
himself committed are really long-lost kinsmen. The most optimistic of the romances, *The Roots of the Mountains* leaves us with a sense that the hero's victory has come altogether too effortlessly.

*News from Nowhere*, that work that brings together so many strands of Morris' thinking, sets forth the problem in a Marxist context. Life in Morris' communist utopia is a "reasonable strife with nature" founded on the carefully balanced integration of urban and rural values. The renewed countryside is "vivified by the thought and briskness of town-bred folk." City-dwellers regularly journey down to participate in the seasonal tasks of agriculture. But the relationship between man and his environment is more than a simple synthesis of town and country. "The spirit of the new days... was to be delight in the life of the world; intense and overweening love of the very skin and surface of the earth on which man dwells, such as the lover has in the fair flesh of the woman he loves" (16: 132). The metaphor is no accident. Morris has in mind a wedding of man and Nature very like that anticipated by Wordsworth--whose poetry he ostentatiously disliked--in the lines quoted as my epigraph.

Certainly Wordsworth's promise of "Paradise... a simple produce of the common day" is an accurate description of *News from Nowhere*. And it is also more than coincidence that Wordsworth deliberately opposes this goal to that of an earlier quest--"like those of Old/Sought in the Atlantic Main"--like that of the Wanderers in *The Earthly Paradise*. One looks in vain in *The Excursion* for an Earthly Paradise comparable to Morris' utopia. But the vision of Nature in Wordsworth's fragmentary *Home at Grasmere* is comparable. That Wordsworth (in effect) suppressed "Home at Grasmere" suggests, of course, the very aspect of his personality Morris found congenial. (It is hard to imagine Wordsworth ever allowing himself to write poetry as defiantly unrepressed as the prose romances.) What the parallel argues is not literary influence, but common concern. And it is precisely this bond of common concern that urges we read the prose romances as a significant stage in the evolution of British Romanticism.

Yet despite the talk about Nature as a sexual object, the childlike qualities of life in *News from Nowhere* suggest that the relationship between man and his natural environment may be closer to son and mother than husband and wife or mistress. What, for example, are we to make of the haymaking festival that climaxes the utopia? Is the ritual, like the apocalyptic harvest of *The Four Zoas*, an ultimate symbol for Nature re-created as an expression of the Imagination? Or does it set a natural limit to the claims of the Imagination? (Is communal agriculture--determined by the cycles of the natural year--the highest achievement we should look forward to in an ideal society?) Put another way, is the idealization of Nature we encounter in *News from Nowhere* a metaphor for the perfection of man under communism? Or does Morris' need to idealize Nature give the lie to whatever realism might underpin his vision? (Without so hospitable a setting, would the utopia he envisions be nearly so appealing?) Whether one chooses to term Morris' strategy a synthesis or a self-contradiction, these conflicting possibilities lie at the heart of *News from Nowhere*.

Seen in terms of its place in Romantic literature, this ambiguity is the price Morris pays for attempting a short solution to a long problem. In order to revise the pattern of loss Wordsworth
expresses in "Tintern Abbey" or the Intimations Ode, Morris must assume the wholesale benignity of Nature. In the communist society he envisions, man is born again as an infant "best philosopher" whose untainted good sense rejects the validity of that other kind of "philosophic mind" founded on "the soothing thoughts that spring out of human suffering." But this is only possible because the childlike adults of his utopia are--very literally --"nurtured" by an accommodating Mother Nature. Thus, the significant act of faith we make in accepting News from Nowhere as the picture of an ideal society does not stem from Morris' disregard for the equation of work to productivity, but from his assumption that a lifestyle largely subservient to the cycles of Nature can answer to the claims of the Imagination.

Reacting to this assumption, the sequence of romances Morris completed in the six years following the publication of News from Nowhere qualifies the optimism of his utopia and continues his trial-and-error search for alternative possibilities. News from Nowhere, of course, is both an expression of Morris' visionary ideal and the record of his inability, as a man of the late nineteenth century, to achieve it. His quest is in part success, in part failure. He has his vision, and hopefully his journey into a future significantly akin to the Middle Ages will in some sense revitalize his own society. But this revitalization is a slow process, and the immediate effect of his return to the present is a sense of profound loss. Within the romance, this conflicting pattern of gain and loss is reflected in the narrator's hopeless passion for Ellen. Like the earlier heroines, she accompanies the hero--seductively--into the heart of the natural world--in this case, from London to the center of rural England. But unlike her predecessors, she must finally dismiss him from her world. She is at once the woman who beckons and the woman who forbids--her promise of an intense, sexually liberated existence awakens the narrator to the sharp awareness of his erotic unfulfillment.

If Ellen is an intriguing character, this is because she represents so much that is problematic in News from Nowhere. The history and economics of Morris' utopia are interesting in their way, but Ellen's natural supernaturalism is the crux of his vision. Thus, it is only understandable that the later romances tend to shift intellectual focus from the relatively straightforward events of the hero's quest to the more complex business of the heroine's upbringing.

The first evidence of this shift is the presence of alternative heroines in The Story of the Glittering Plain (1891). However the King's Daughter, whom Hallblithe rejects, and the Hostage, who has the advantage of belonging to the gens "wherein it was right and due" he wed, are so strikingly unrelated that the strategy proves ineffective. The figure of the Hostage seems an attempt to emphasize the "common day" aspect of Ellen. Conversely, the Kings' Daughter, whose desire for Hallblithe rises out of seeing his picture in an illuminated book--like Guest in News from Nowhere, he is a kind of living history lesson--is meant to clarify what Ellen ought not to be. As a result of these exaggerations, Hallblithe's ultimate union with the Hostage is anticlimactic; the King's Daughter is a tragic figure for whom we can feel a surprising sympathy. For the King's Daughter is more profoundly in bondage than the Hostage (who has been kidnapped by Vikings). The Daughter is psychologically trapped in a state of perpetual innocence. Despite its self-indulgence, her infatuation with
Halblithe equates to the desire to be freed from the enforced childhood of her father's kingdom. Had the romance been written from a different perspective, liberating the King's Daughter and leading her from the pseudo-paradise of the Glittering Plain to the real world of Cleveland-by-the-Sea would have been an entirely satisfactory denouement to Halblithe's quest.

Significantly, the next group of romances—The Wood Beyond the World (1894), The Well at the World's End (1896), and the posthumously published Water of the Wondrous Isles (1897)—emphasize the pattern of psychological dependence and rescue latent but ignored in The Story of the Glittering Plain. But rescue is no longer a simple matter of freeing the maiden from a dominant father-figure. The King of the Glittering Plain is replaced by a series of older women—witches or sorceresses—through whom Morris is able to examine both the essentially alien power of the natural world and the liabilities inherent in attempts to dominate this alien power for human purposes. At the same time, the virgin herself is at once a bride to be won from bondage to the witch-wife and a permanent bond to the sources of natural potency.

The King of the Glittering Plain succeeds in exercising dominance over the natural processes of growth and decay. But the price of this dominance is sterility and dehumanization. Similarly, the witch-wife in The Water of the Wondrous Isles enjoys power over the natural world at the cost of her full humanity. Symbolically, she is given to fits of uncontrollable and debilitating anger, while her sister, also a sorceress, cannot remember anything for longer than twenty-four hours. Her dwelling, a farmhouse isolated between forest and inland sea, is the geographical antithesis of the world of socio-economic cooperation from which the hero initiates his quest and to which he will ultimately return. (This pattern is also true for The Wood Beyond the World and The Well at the World's End.) To function in the outside world—even to pass through the forest she has violated—in her search for power—she must forgo her natural shape. Moreover, she relies on the captive virgin (Birdalone) to accomplish acts of which her incomplete humanity is incapable.

The witch-wife's Sending Boat is perhaps the best illustration of the form and limitations of her power. Its stem and stern smeared with her blood and appropriate verses spoken, the boat carries the witch to whatever destination she wills. Discovering the ritual, Birdalone is able to use the boat to escape, but her course is programmed by the witch's previous journeys and the boat's power is contingent upon the witch's life. At her death the boat breaks up and a "big serpent, moulty and hairy, grey and brown-flecked, came forth from under the stem and went into the water and up the bank and so into the dusk of the alder-wood" (20: 320). To make use of the boat, anyone but the witch must submit to its maker's itinerary. The price of commanding natural forces to perform a given act is human blood. The spell dissolved, the natural force itself, sinister and ancient, returns to the symbolic repository of all natural power, the forest. (That Morris refrained from explaining the mechanism of the "force barges" in News from Nowhere turns out to have been more than a matter of literary decorum. As we have discovered in our own century, apparently "clean" energy belies its appearance, and what seems an effortless power over the natural world can commit its user to forces all too easily beyond his control. While I do not mean to credit Morris with prophesying thermonuclear energy, the parallel of the force barges to the witch-wife's Sending Boat suggests the ambivalence of their power.)
By resolving the Nature figure into two components, Morris clarifies the distinction between the threatening and benevolent aspects of the natural world. But the virgin is not merely the innocent victim of the witch's machinations destined for rescue by the hero: she represents a significant alternative to the witch's attempt to find power through dominating Nature. Instead of dominance, she is able to gain at least some of her ends by participation with the forces of the natural world. Strictly speaking, then, the witch is not a Nature figure at all, but an archetypal representation of man dehumanized by his--or, in this case, her--attempt to bend Nature to her own purposes. That she can function as an agent of whatever forces threaten to bind the Imagination to the natural world--by reducing the hero to the instrument of her own sexual gratification--is thus the fundamental irony of her situation. (Blake would recognize the figure immediately as a priestess of natural religion--even without the druid altars and rumors of human sacrifice with which Morris links her.)

But despite her dissociation with the witchwife, the virgin is not an entirely "safe" figure. Her participation in the potency of the natural world does not entirely suit her for entering into human civilization--Birdaline literally reduces her lover to a "wild man"--and there is a period in her relationship with the hero in which she assumes a dominant, protective role from which the hero must emerge if he is to attain full manhood. Moreover, this dominant role is based, in part, on the natural magic she has learned or stolen from her mistress. And this use of the sorceress' power seems to have posed a problem of possible contamination Morris found it difficult to resolve.

His chief tactic in explaining the virgin's special skills is to attribute the large part of her power to an aspect of her education directly opposed to whatever learning she undergoes with the sorceress. The Maid in The Wood Beyond the World, explaining the hardships of her past life, describes "an old woman, who telleth me sweet tales of other life, wherein all is high and goodly, or at least valiant and doughty, and she setteth hope in my heart and learneth me, and maketh me to know much . . . O much . . . so that at last I am grown wise, and wise to be mighty if I durst" (17: 86). This inversion of the witch-captor figure is given fuller treatment in subsequent romances. Also, it is related explicitly to the virgin's coming-of-age through participation in the processes of the natural world.

In The Well at the World's End, the episode in which the future Lady of Abundance is encouraged to revolt from her mistress establishes the essential elements of this aspect of the virgin's education. Morris' symbolism is largely self-explanatory:

On a day of May-tide I fared abroad with my goats, and went far with them, further from the house than I had been as yet . . . I went till I came to a little flowery dell, beset with blossoming whitethorns and with a fair stream running through it . . . And the sun was hot about noontide, so I did off my raiment, which was rough and poor, and more meet for winter than May-tide, and I entered a pool of the clear water, and bathed me and sported therein, smelling the sweet scent of the whitethorns and hearkening to the song of the many birds; and when I came
forth from the water, the air was so soft and sweet to me, and the flowery grass so kind to my feet, and the May-blooms fell upon my shoulders, that I was loth to do on my rough raiment hastily, and withal I looked to see no child of man in that wilderness: so I sported myself there a long while, and milked a goat and drank of the milk, and crowned myself with whitethorn and hare-bells; and held the blossoms in my hand, and felt that I also had some might in me, and that I should not be a thrall of that sorceress for ever. (18: 156)

It is at this point, when the virgin has actively participated in the natural cycle of death (removing her old clothes) and renewal, that just as she begins to take up her task of spinning (symbolic of her thralldom and sexual latency) she looks up and sees "a child of man coming down the side of the little dale towards me... an old woman grey-haired, uncomely of raiment, but with shining bright eyes in her wrinkled face" (18: 157). The natural order can lead her to the verge of sexual maturity, but the actual transition requires the presence of a human figure against whom the virgin can measure her own identity. This old woman (the Wise Woman of Sarras) teaches the virgin "much of the world which she had not yet seen, of its fairness and its foulness; of life and death, and desire and disappointment, and despair," and anticipates her longing for escape by telling her the direction of the compass in which escape can be made. Their conversations are repeated day after day through the late spring until Midsummer Day, when the virgin encounters a knight in "gay surcoat of green embroidered with flowers." He is in search of the Well at the World's End, but even his quest cannot carry him past the girl without a kiss, which turns into an embrace until "there in that place, and in a little while, we loved each other sorely." He goes his way, but gives her a necklace of beads, the token of searchers for the Well and, as defined by this instance, recompense for her lost innocence. Proceeding to her meeting with the Wise Woman, she is given a gift to go along with the necklace--a sharp knife. When she returns to the House of the Sorceress, her mistress announces that "now at last the time has come when thou art of no more use to me," then screams and rushes at the girl, who stabs her with the knife and thus effects her escape.

The day of the knight's coming and the sorceress' murder is Midsummer Day, the longest day of the year and the climax of the process of natural fecundity celebrated on the day the girl crowned herself with whitethorn. If she elects to stay in the cycle of the natural year, she now begins the stage of decline as days shorten to winter. It is fitting, then, that this is both the day of the virgin's escape from her enslaver and of her transfer of affection from Nature--her Pre-Raphaelite absorption in the natural sensuousness of the May-tide--to a living human being. Moreover, the knight's gift of the bead necklace is itself a token of power over and through the natural world unavailable to the sorceress figure. (The sorceress owns a similar necklace--taken from the body of a dead woman--but it is useless to her, since it was not acquired as a gift of love.)

The episode in the forest in which Birdalune meets Habundia parallels the meeting between the Lady of Abundance and the Wise Woman of Sarras. Sitting alone by an oak, she takes off her clothes "that she might feel all the pleasure of the cool shadow and what air was stirring, and the kindness of the greensward upon her very body" (20: 15). Her only covering is the green gown in her lap on which she is at work embroidering "roses and lilies,
and a tall tree springing up from amidst the hem of the skirt, and a hart on either side thereof, face to face of each other." (The imagery suggests a moment of stasis, in which Birlalone is poised at the transition between the "roses and lilies" of experience and innocence, the two "harts" at once joined and separated by the tree of natural potency.) Suddenly "she saw standing before her the shape of a young woman as naked as herself, save that she had an oak-wreath around her loins." But Habundia's nakedness is not the only thing she has in common with Birlalone. She appears here and elsewhere in the romance as Birlalone's identical twin. "Hast thou ever seen thyself in a mirror?" she asks the girl. "Now I am to be thy mirror." From the passage that follows it is clear that the appearance of Habundia corresponds to Birlalone's awakening self-awareness. Significantly, when she returns to the witch's house, she is able to tell her first thoroughly lie. Moreover, in parting, Habundia translates Birlalone's vague dissatisfaction into the explicit desire to escape and tells her that escape itself must be by water. Confrontation with her own identity is thus the first stage in Birlalone's escape both from the dominance of the witch and also from the state of innocence represented by her life in the forest. And insofar as this confrontation involves an awareness of her own sexuality--Habundia's description of Birlalone's physical attractiveness is among the more unabashedly erotic passages in the romances--it is the first stage in her preparation for union with the hero.

This double pattern of slavery and education suggests a further refinement in Morris' notion of the ambivalence of the natural world and establishes unexpected affinities between Birlalone's education and the dialectic of imaginative pro-

jection and response to Nature described in the first books of The Prelude. Just as Wordsworth's Nature is at once protective mother and an expression of the poet's own developing individuality, the forest in The Water of the Wondrous Isles is at once that which enslaves--the barrier that separates her from the civilized world--and that which frees the virgin from the innocence (or intellectual passivity) of childhood. Insofar as Habundia is the natural world--seen either as the source of all things (that abundance implicit in her name) or as the "Woo-wife," a natural spirit "not of the children of Adam"--Birlalone first becomes aware of her own identity through encountering its projection in the mirror of Nature. (This notion of a mirror may be the significance of the two harts in Birlalone's embroidery.) In this respect, Habundia's gesture directly counters the witch's threat of sacrifice (loss of identity) for the appeasement of the natural power she seeks to enlist to her private ends.

The virgin must choose a middle course between two equally destructive alternatives: complete absorption in the world of natural process and alienation from Nature through the attempt to dominate it. (Choosing the former, she is not only trapped in undifferentiated innocence, but an easy mark for the witch-wife's natural magic.) Morris seems to have felt this could be possible through projection of the personality onto Nature itself, a humanizing process stimulated by the benevolent aspects of natural potency expressed in the figure of Habundia or perhaps the "natural" lore of the Wise Woman of Sarras. (Although I tend to think of Habundia as a revision of the earlier figure.) Undergoing this dialectic of self-discovery, she becomes in turn the medium for the hero's encounter with the sources of power in the natural world. But while the elaborate coming-of-age strategies
of the last romances qualify the destructive potency of a figure like Wood-Sun in *The House of the Wolfings*, even her limited participation in the alien power of Nature remains a threat to the hero's individuality.

To elucidate Morris' attempts to solve this problem exceeds the scope of an Introduction. In *The Wood Beyond the World*, he limits the Maid's natural magic to a geographical locus and the condition of virginity itself. In *The Well at the World's End* he subdivides the virgin figure into the Lady of Abundance and Ursula. In *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*--the most satisfying of the romances--he refocuses on the heroine's personal quest to control her own devastating power. No strategy proves a final solution. (*The Sundering Flood*, drafted but incomplete at Morris' death in 1896, introduces a male fertility figure and returns the focus of the romance to the childhood of the hero.) Generally speaking, however, Morris' thinking moves in the direction of a complex set of compromises and accommodations between the worlds of forest and town, Nature and Imagination, of which the final chapters of *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* are the fullest expression. In the process, the "intense and overweening love of the very skin and surface of the earth" he hopes for in *News from Nowhere* is relegated from adult to adolescent experience. Specifically, to the transitory experience of coming of age. Its closest equivalent in the later romances is Ralph's brief sexual union with the Lady of Abundance in the heart of the wilderness. But she is murdered a few hours later and becomes a Wordsworthian memory of lost intensity never entirely forgotten in his subsequent love for Ursula. His personal triumph, of course, is finding what John Hollow aptly terms "deliberate happiness" in spite of--but also founded on--his failure to sustain this "intense" union with the "Abundance" of the natural world.

There is nothing comparable to this pattern of loss and consequent spiritual growth in *News from Nowhere*. Its presence in *The Well at the World's End* and *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* is a development and not a digression--much less, a "relapse"--in Morris' thought. The prose romances lead Morris--perhaps against his considered wishes--to accept the problematic nature of man's relationship with the means of his own power. Here, as nowhere in his earlier imaginative writing, we encounter the real obstacles to an Earthly Paradise. As the essays in this collection ably demonstrate, the prose romances turn out to be the most deadly "serious" of Morris' literary undertakings.

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The definitive study of Morris' language remains unwritten. C. S. Lewis has some perceptive things to say about the diction of the romances in his essay "William Morris" (Rehabilitations [London: Oxford University Press, 1939], pp. 37-41). E. P. Thompson, who agrees "it is pointless to criticize Morris for using archaic ... English" and recognizes "that his vocabulary ... is an essential part of his purpose," does not see it as a means of reinstating the past, but rather of emphasizing "the difference between the values of the folk and those of today" (p. 785).


When Bruce Glasier admitted to having "fallen in love with Ellen," Morris "said he had fallen in love with her himself! 'Oh, and I shan't give her up to you—not without a tussle for her anyway,' he said, with a smile, but almost jealously, I thought" (Glasier, William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement [London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1921], p. 140).

MOTIF AND THEME IN THE LATE PROSE ROMANCES OF WILLIAM MORRIS

Charlotte Oberg
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way,' he said, with a smile, but almost jealously, I thought" (Glasier, William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement [London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1921], p. 140).
Morris' prose romances are varied in type if not in style or basic theme. Following his historical romances and immediately after writing the Utopian dream-vision *News from Nowhere*, Morris began to evolve yet another genre, one which his daughter, May Morris, has called "fairy romances," a term appropriate in that it connotes elements of magic supernaturalism, which, in fact, figure prominently in *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, *The Wood Beyond the World*, *The Well at the World's End*, *The Water of the Wondrous Isle*, and *The Sundering Flood*. But a common feature more significant than the fairy-tale provenance is the quest pattern which is basic to all these romances. With the exception of *The Glittering Plain*, set in a northern tribal culture reminiscent of that in *The House of the Wolfings*, all these later romances take place in a vaguely medieval setting recalling the romance cycles of the middle ages (and the world of the early Pre-Raphaelite poets). But whereas *Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountains* are firmly grounded in the actual history and struggles of the Northern races, *The Glittering Plain* (1890) is clearly a fantasy. For the land in which Hallblithe stays for a year, the Land of the Glittering Plain, is the Other World of myth and folklore, a realm of eternal youth like that sought unsuccessfully by the wanderers of *The Earthly Paradise*. The implicit authorial viewpoint, moreover, is the same as that in *The Earthly Paradise*—that is to say, the regressive searching for escape from the demands of life is at length condemned, in *The Earthly Paradise* by its own failure, in *The Glittering Plain* by the example of Hallblithe's rejection. But, unlike the quest of the
wanderers, Hallblithe's is not an elixir quest, for he journeys to the Acre of the Undying only to ransom his betrothed, the Hostage, and the testing which he successfully undergoes requires him to reject the temptations of this erotic paradise. Hallblithe, almost puritanical in his devotion to the ideals and traditions of his austere and moralistic tribal life, is never really tempted by the sensual pleasures available to him in the Land of the Glittering Plain, and is not even momentarily attracted by the beautiful princess whose love has set in motion the abduction of the Hostage and his own begging. He expresses his dedication to the world of deeds and death (which is, paradoxically, the arena of life) in a stirring rebuke to his companion Sea-eagle, and this speech expresses forcefully the joy in the life of this earth which Morris himself obviously felt. It begins: "O Eagle of the Sea, thou hast thy youth again: what then wilt thou do with it? Wilt thou not weary for the moonlit main, and the washing of waves and the dashing of spray, and thy fellows all glistering with the brine?" (14:256). With these images of motion, of flux, Hallblithe conveys the joy which life's very transience confers on mortals.

The testing which Hallblithe undergoes is not for the purpose of chastening and purifying the quester which purpose has come to be associated with the quest pattern since the medieval grail legends took that form. Hallblithe's character (and, in so far as we may infer it, his spiritual state) is just the same at the end as at the beginning. For him as an individual, there is no real temptation, no consequent fall, and, thus, no redemption. In other words, Morris is not concerned here with allegories of the human soul and its search for God—there is no Christian accommodation of the quest pattern such as we see in the grail legends or in The Faerie Queene.

This generalization also holds up for the other romances of this group. In each of these tales we meet heroes and heroines who are entirely blameless from the beginning, whose adventures prove and confirm their congenital worthiness. Walter, for example, in The Wood Beyond the World, though he consorts with the malevolent Queen of the Wood, does so at the direction of the wise and virtuous Maid, so that their planned escape may not be suspected and forestalled; he is not in any sense tainted by his amorous night in the arms of the Queen, and does not have to suffer, do penance, or be purified in any way. (Arthur of The Water of the Wondrous Isles similarly is forced to succumb to a witch's lust; his subsequent suffering is occasioned not by this episode but by the necessity of forsaking his sworn lady, Atra, because of his love for Birdalome.) Ralph, Birdalone, and the other central figures of the romances are pre-eminently spotless in their characters (and persons as well for, as always in Morris, outward beauty signifies inward worth).

But what is the meaning of these last romances? Many critics would suggest, and no doubt many readers would protest, that there need be no meaning, that these are entertainments which at most represent the repressed longings of incipient old age. Morris's own continual protestations against proffered interpretations add weight to this view. And yet, there is more to be said about the recurrent themes and motifs of these romances and their implications.

First, it is quite plain that, in these romances as in earlier writings, Morris is concerned with liberation from tyranny. This is basic to The Wood Beyond the World. On the most superficial level of plot, the Maid is liberated from her bondage to the Queen; Walter, who had undertaken his wanderings as an escape from the torment of marriage to
an unfaithful wife, is liberated from the more subtle slavery of an unfair social bond. It is poetically just that these two former victims should become rulers of a new kingdom—a new society—upon their escape from the Wood. Further, there is a symbolic progression in the social orders they encounter in their adventures. Upon leaving the Wood, presided over by a cruel and tyrannical queen, where both are humiliated and threatened because of their positions in this corrupt order, they pass through the land of the Bears, a primitive tribe of herdsmen who as yet are ignorant of agriculture. On leaving the superstitious Bears, who have accepted the Maid as their goddess, they are escorted to the beautiful city of Stark-wall by the elders who, according to tradition, are awaiting their appointed rulers to come down through the same mountain pass through which their forebears traveled to found the city. Thus the experience of Walter and the Maid is a paradigm of the history of civilization—from oppression to a new beginning, represented by the primitive Bears, to an advanced and harmonious civilization governed in an enlightened and beneficent fashion. As king, Walter continues and refines this just government: "... first he bade open the prison-doors, and feed the needy and clothe them, and make cheer to all men, high and low, rich and unrich..." (17:128). Thus a millennium period of peace and harmony is instituted. It is important to note that Walter's reign of prosperity is gained through a rededication to the ancient values of courage and of devotion to duty. This is made clear in the emblematic choice made by Walter immediately before the elders hail him as king. As one of the tests to be undergone, he is asked to choose between two kinds of raiment: "... one was all of robes of peace, glorious and be-gemmed, unmeet for any save a great king; while the other was war-weed, seemly, well-fashioned, but little adorned; nay rather, worn and bestained with weather, and the pelting of the spear-storm" (17:119). Walter rightly chooses the battledress, symbolic of action, of deeds, rather than the peace robes, associated here with weakness, cowardice, and pride of place. This militancy of attitude is always presented as admirable in Morris' writings. Just as Walter, together with the Maid, comes to the city through the same mountain pass as their leaders of old, thus standing in their place, so his values and ideals are those of past times—and, the success of the future results from an affirmation of the past.

In The Well at the World's End (1896), unquestionably the most complex (and lengthy) of all Morris' romances, the same issues are of paramount importance. Here the hero Ralph dedicates himself at the beginning to a life of deeds when he rejects his parents' desire that he remain at home and leaves to seek the greater world. The plot of this romance is intricate, but one of its main threads is the overthrowing of threatening tyrannical forces, culminating in the apocalyptic defense of Ralph's homeland, Upmeads, at the end. The psychological and spiritual significance of these imaginary events to Morris himself is underscored by the revealing remarks of May Morris to the effect that Ralph's home, the High House of Upmeads, was an extrapolation from Morris' beloved home, Kelmscott Manor itself: ... the King's sons start on their adventures from the very door of Kelmscott Manor transformed into the palace of a simple-living kinglet, and the second page describes closely the placing of our home between river and upland, with the ford at the corner where the harvesters in News from Nowhere landed at their journey's end" (18:xix). Of Kelmscott Manor, Morris once wrote: "It has come to be the type of the pleasant places of earth, and of the homes of..."
harmless, simple people not overburdened with
the intricacies of life; and, as others love
the race of man through their lovers or their
children, so I love the Earth through that
small space of it." Kelmscott had come
to be the center of Morris' world—a home in every
sense of the word, inextricably bound up with
his own life and, thus, a personally symbolic
focus for the earth, home of mankind.

Now the quest pattern is inextricably asso-
ciated with the concept of initiation, that is,
a ritual transformation of the quester into a
new state of being or, in short, rebirth. Ini-
tiation patterns proliferate in all Morris' ro-
mances; for instance, the Land of the Glitter-
ing Plain is reached twice by Hallblithe after
experiences in caves, suggesting symbolic en-
tries into the womb of Nature prior to rebirth.
Caves figure importantly in Well--Ralph buries
the Lady in a cave and lives with Ursula in a
cave during the winter prior to completing their
journey to the Well of Life. The Lady and Ursu-
la of Well and Birdalone of Water dress like
men—here is the motif of "temporary androgy-
nization and asexuality of novices" discussed by
Mircea Eliade in Rites and Symbols; 2 Ursula re-
fuses to wear men's clothing after drinking from
the Well, that is, after her initiation is com-
plete. Birdalone escapes from and returns to
the witch's hut naked, and Walter in Wood is made
to present his naked body for inspection by the
elders of Stark-wall; we see in these episodes
the ritual nakedness common to initiation rites. 3
Such symbolic initiatory episodes are common to
the heroic literature with which Morris was in-
timately familiar, e.g., Jason's passage through
the Symplegades, or Aeneas' experiences in caves, 4
and, of course, their counterparts occur often in
the medieval romances he knew so well. Morris

seems to have grasped intuitively not only the
great symbolic significance of the initiation pat-
ttern (without guidance from writers on cultural
anthropology), but also the tremendous imaginative
appeal of such strange episodes. They lend an air
of mystery to the romances lifting them above the
banality of mere adventure. Ralph's initiation is
quite complex, progressing through several levels,
beginning with the gift from his "gossip" Katherine
of the mysterious necklace of blue and green beads,
and climaxing in the drinking of the water of the
Well (of Life, although Morris does not so name it).
Through the intervening experiences, including his
wanderings in a labyrinthine wood (like the entrails
of the earth), Ralph is not really transformed, but,
rather, develops naturally from a beautiful young
man into a semi-divine culture hero who is thereupon
enabled to redeem his society—that is, to effect,
in part, the rebirth of the world into new life. The
real significance of the initiation symbolism is that
the world is reborn as man regains his primeval per-
fection. 5 This is no Christian quest for a heavenly
vision which is granted only to those who have risen
above and renounced the world (cf. the equivocal ex-
erience of Galahad in Morris' early poem, "Sir
Galahad: A Christmas Mystery").

Whereas the wanderers of The Earthly Paradise had
sought the land of eternal youth in the West, asso-
ciated of old with death, Ralph finds the Well in
the heathen East, where the dawning sun symbolizes
the beginning of new life. As he starts out, at
first heading south toward the warmth of life and
love, he greets and blesses the world: "Now, wel-
come world, and be thou blessed from one end to the
other, from the ocean sea to the uttermost mountains!"
(18:20). This dedication to the earth is reiterated
throughout the two volumes of Well—when, for in-
stance, Ralph speaks to the people of the Land of
Abundance as their dead Lady would have done: "Live
in peace, and love ye the works of the earth" (19:151), or when, even more dramatically, he drinks of the water of the Well and cries out: "To the Earth, and the World of Manfolk!" (19:83).

Ralph's words are borne out by his deeds as, on his return, he gathers to him a conquering host, annihilates the would-be oppressors of his homeland, and institutes a preternaturally long reign of prosperity and peace (but a peace won and maintained by the might of the sword). For Ralph is a great military leader, whose very aspect terrifies and paralyzes his foes, as he confronts them unarmored and unhelmeted like the humblest of the shepherd warriors in his company. Like Alexander the Great, whose footsteps Ralph retraces to the Dry Tree and the Well, Ralph is invincible. His luck is noted and remarked upon by all who meet him in the course of his adventures and we find, in the last chapters, that his quest, prophesied and prepared for by those who are "somewhat foreseeing," is a fulfillment of the ancient prophecies of the people of the Bear, the Shepherds. In short, Ralph is the one looked-for, the renewer of the age of gold. Thus Ralph does not merely resemble Alexander in being a great leader and warrior, but, because he, like Alexander, is born to greatness, he is likewise an incarnation of the recurring heroic ideal. The Alexander romance cycle, which is obviously the major inspiration for Morris' romances, is of considerable importance in interpreting it. Alexander's life is an instance of the confluence of myth and history-the ideal and the actual. Further, for the Middle Ages as well as for later antiquity, Alexander was, in the words of Elizabeth Hazleton Haight, "the prototype of all aspirants to the dominion of the world." Morris means that his readers should be aware of these matters, and so insistently mentions Alexander again and again throughout Well.

Ralph's great destiny is from the beginning apparent in his great beauty of form and character, for Ralph in truth has no spot nor blemish. He need not be chastened or purified; he is the type of the new man, that is, he embodies the endemic perfection of mankind, which must become apparent when the unlovely fruits of selfish ambition--tyranny, cruelty, poverty, etc.--are purged and eradicated and a prelapsarian state of innocence, i.e., nobility, is regained. As the Innocent People beyond the mountains called the Wall of the World (which they call the Wall of Strife) explain it: "Now our folk live well and hale, and without the sickness and pestilence, such as I have heard oft befall folk in other lands... Of strife and of war also we know nought: nor do we desire aught which we may not easily attain. Therefore we live long, and we fear the Gods if we should strive to live longer, lest they should bring upon us war and sickness, and overweening desire, and weariness of life" (19:65-66). The Innocent People need not to seek the Well, for they have not fallen into corruption. In short, they represent an ideal and unfallen state of society, where unnatural greed and ambition have not changed man from his primeval state of earthly happiness. Here death is welcomed as a friend, lest men grow weary of life.

The other societies Ralph encounters on his symbolic eastward journey to the Well or source of life likewise suggest stages of civilization, growing successively more primitive as he, travelling eastward back through time, approaches the origins of life: starting out from a Christianized feudal system, he meets with despotic tyrannies in eastern
cities situated among terrible mountains and desert wastes (inspired by the topography of Iceland) before reaching the Innocent People beyond the Wall of the World, and finally travels unpeopled volcanic wastes before reaching the Well. The bird which lights unafraid on Ursula’s shoulder in a forest region near the Well signifies that Ralph and Ursula have reached symbolically a stage of harmony with nature—in short, this is a paradisical interlude expressing itself in images traditional throughout the literature and religions of the world.  

On another level, which we might call psychological or spiritual in another author’s work, Ralph must experience death before he finds new life. The Dry Tree, surrounded by the corpses of those who sought the Well in vain, symbolizes this death, foreshadowed by the death of the Lady, which plunges Ralph into despair and marks the end of his boyish naïveté. (But what the Lady represents lives on in Ursula, who takes her place in the Quest and in Ralph’s affections.) The Dry Tree irresistibly suggests another level of interpretation—it was a pre-Christian symbol of death, associated paradoxically with the Tree of Life, and is certainly used in that sense by Morris. Trees have long had symbolic associations with the cross and are used interchangeably as symbols of the crucifixion and, hence, of Christianity. A dead tree suggests that Christianity is dead—or a source of death, as is Morris’ tree standing in a poisonous pool. The Dry Tree is a waymark on the road to the Well of Life—it must be passed beyond and is not the goal of the journey. The Fellowship of the Tree exemplifies medieval ideals of chivalry based on Christianity, but, like Christianity, they are limited. Further, Christianity is an other-worldly religion and the cosmic tree is a traditional focal point for crossing into the other world, but the tree is dead, there is no other world, and thus, no getting beyond this world. (The legend of the Dry Tree, like the legend-laden life of Alexander in its entirety, is a further instance of the confluence, or, in this case, confusion, of myth and actuality: it was extraordinarily popular in the thirteenth century when it figured importantly in numerous romances, and the tree itself even appeared on maps. Supposed to have “marked the eastern extremity of the known world,” it was placed in the vicinity of the Terrestrial Paradise on the thirteenth-century Hereford map by Richard de Haldingham, and many travelers claimed to have visited it.)

Ralph and Ursula note that the dead seekers do not wear the talismanic beads of questers after the Well; that is to say, not being among those chosen by destiny for the Fellowship of the Well, they must needs fail. One may wonder at this point whether the exclusivity of this fellowship is not more than a little undemocratic, and whether it is not inconsistent for the egalitarian Morris to have posited such a situation in an idealistic work of fiction. But the hierophantic elements of Well suggest the same kind of millennial thinking evident in the earlier poetry and romances. The mystical Fellowship of the Well is a chosen group, much as are the barbarian Goths, or Aryans, if you will, of Wolfsong and Roots, who are to lead the world into a glorious millennial age. These, the chosen, represent all mankind. In the story of Ralph of Upmeads, destined to become a great leader of men, Morris makes explicit what he implies elsewhere: Destiny chooses its agents; all has been arranged since the beginning of time; man’s role is to recognize and rise to his own destiny, no more, no less. Further, any man is chosen if he only realize that destiny. Morris spoke as follows about those fallen
in the American Civil War: "... many thousand
men of our own kindred gave their lives on the
battle-field to bring to a happy ending a mere
episode in the struggle for the abolition of
slavery: they are blessed and happy, for the op-
opportunity came to them, and they seized it and
did their best, and the world is the wealthier
for it: and if such an opportunity is offered to
us shall we thrust it from us that we may sit
still in ease of body, in doubt, in disease of
soul?" (23:212). This speech expresses clearly
the meaning of Ralph's quest and explains why the
gold cup at the Well is inscribed: "THE STRONG
OF HEART SHALL DRINK FROM ME" (19:82), and not
"THOSE WHO DRINK FROM ME SHALL BE STRONG OF HEART."
That is, all those who are strong in heart shall
accept their destined mission, and, in the ful-
ilment of the quest shall find what they have al-
ways been. (If this sounds disconcertingly like
a comment on The Wizard of Oz, let us remember
that Baum also drew on the tradition of the quest.)
Ralph's greatness is confirmed and brought to fru-
tion by the struggles and hardships of the jour-
ney, but it is his own intrinsic worth which makes
him into a hero-king. By contrast, we are told
that the foolish King of Coldburg wasted the gifts
of the Well on pomp and luxury; his portion was
death.

The deeper signification, then, of the Fellow-
ship of the Well is not of an elite body of the
elect. In fact, Well bristles throughout with
some rather pointed egalitarian preachments by
example: Ralph gives up his horse and fights un-
protected so as not to have an advantage over the
lowliest of his shepherd followers; though a king's
son, he weds a yeoman's daughter, Ursula, whose
"heart is greater than a king's or a leader of
folk" (19:215). Throughout the romances, as a
matter of fact, Morris democratically takes his
heroes and heroines from all strata of society:
Walter, in Wood, is a merchant's son; Birdalone
is a child of the poor; Osberne in The Sundering
Flood refuses knighthood because it would not be
consistent with his yeoman heritage.

But Ursula's parentage is of minor importance;
her true relations are the other beautiful, yet
doughty and militant women who figure in Morris'
rewritings from Sigurd the Volsung on, just as Ralph
is cast in the mold of other Morrisian heroes.
These warrior-maidens abound in Wolfings and in
Roots: in Wood, it is the Maid who plans and di-
rects the escape from the evil wood. In Well,
Ursula, by virtue of her courage and stamina, be-
comes an equal partner in the quest and, rather
than being conventionally rescued by the hero of
romance, herself saves Ralph at the Dry Tree. In
fact Morris' egalitarianism is nowhere more evi-
dent than in his depiction of women as the equals
of men both in spirit and in body. Far from the
ethereal creatures of the courtly love tradition
and the Victorian stereotype (and far too, we
might note, from Janey Morris' enjoyment of ill
health), they were born in the pages of Germanic
saga. If they are not completely liberated sexu-
ally (their maidenly virtue always being preserved
until union with the hero), neither are most of
their prototypes of heroic literature.

Morris indulged his fascination with these self-
sufficient women by making one of them the central
figure of the posthumously published The Water of
the Wondrous Isles, the last romance he was able to
put into finished form. In this tale, Birdalone's
adventures subsume a number of the various roles
and situations experienced by other Morrisian hero-
ines, most notably the Lady in Well. Like the Lady,
Birdalone grows to womanhood in an isolated wood-
land cottage as the thrall of a witch and is tutored
in secret by a fairy godmother figure, who prepares her for escape to the world and the life of mankind. (A similar situation occurs in Wood.) In *The Sundering Flood*, Elfhild's unsympathetic aunts take the place of the witch figure; Dame Anna, wise in spell-making, is her tutor and helper. (The fragment Desiderius contains the germ of the same situation.) Morris' repetition of this motif underlines its importance: symbolically, the interlude with the witch in an almost inaccessible forest suggests a kind of enforced separation or isolation from life itself, which isolation must be ended by the slave herself, as it is in these cases when she is reborn through the initiatory instruction by those wise in the lore of the earth, i.e., an elder, or even the spirit of an ancestor. When the Lady in *Well* and Birdalone in *Water* return to these forest huts, their solitary sojourns suggest initiatory ordeals--symbolic returns to the womb (the hut) surrounded by chaos (the forest). The witch, who embodies in each case an unnatural and perverted force, must be overcome or annihilated so that her victim may not only be liberated but united with the greater life of the earth. It is symbolically fitting, therefore, that Birdalone's tutor should be an earth spirit, a faerie queen of the wood, whose name, Habundia, suggests the abundance and fertility of the earth, the antithesis of the perverted and barren sexuality of the witch, and Birdalone's true heritage. So Birdalone and Arthur are at last blessed by Habundia as very children of the earth (20:360).

The pattern of separation and isolation ended by union and generation is centrally important in the romances and is the deeper significance of the emphasis on sexual love so noticeable in all of them. Morris' heroes and heroines are all devastatingly attractive to the opposite sex, though occasionally this may be unconvincing to the reader. (It is difficult, for example, to reconcile Birdalone's fatally potent sex appeal with some of her Girl Scout speeches and actions.) But this sexual attraction is an outward sign of the inner generative force working through the lives of these characters, overcoming unnatural restraints and privations in order to bless the earth and bring forth the abundant fruit of love and brotherhood. Even the luxuriance of their hair suggests their kinship with the burgeoning life force of the earth.

A striking pattern in the tales of *The Earthly Paradise* is the opposition of Diana, associated with celibacy and death, and Venus, associated with sexuality and life. In the romances, Diana's associations with death and sterility are attributed to the witch figures while the hunt-maiden heroines blossom into love goddesses. (Morris frequently compares their beauty to that of goddesses of old.) In their mixed militancy and nubility, the heroines of Morris' prose romances suggest a blending of the archetypal female roles of Aphrodite and Artemis--an emblem of this reconciliation is the reiterated description of Birdalone in her huntress garb, armed with bow and arrow.

Numerous episodes in the romances are emblematic in function. As a matter of fact, Morris remarked in an 1892 biographical talk that his poems "are rather of the nature of a series of pictures" (22: xxxii), and he might have included the romances in this observation. In *Well*, for example, the rock carving called "The Fighting Man," which is an important waysign for seekers after the Well, suggests the militancy and commitment to action essential for the Strong of Heart who are to renew their lives at the Well, and, further, is a natural
association with the great military leader, Alexander the Great, an early traveler to the ends of the world, and Ralph, who follows in Alexander’s path to become a Fellow of the Well and a warleader. Earlier in the plot, an arras in the Castle of Abundance, where Ralph awaits the Lady prior to setting out for the Well, depicts the story of Alexander, foreshadowing Ralph’s subsequent adventures. Similarly, in an earlier episode, Ralph sees the play of St. George killing the dragon and is shortly after, in his first encounter with the Lady, able to effect his own rescue of a lady in distress.

In Water, the magic boat in which Birdalune escapes the witch stops at several islands which have no real plot function other than to suggest emblematically the basic theme, isolation followed by union, which is the pattern of the plot. Upon leaving the enchanted Isle of Increase Un- sought where the three damsels are held captive by the sister-witch, Birdalune comes to the Isle of the Young and the Old, inhabited only by children and an old man who has no memory. Next are the Isle of the Queens, where an enchanted company of women mourn a dead king, and the complementary Isle of the Kings, where a dead woman lies in state among an enchanted throng of armed men. The last island lying between Birdalune and the Castle of the Quest toward which she is bound is the Isle of Nothing, a barren desert where she is trapped in an obscuring mist. The first three of these islands are emblematic representations of perverted states of society in which parts of family units exist in unnatural isolation and consequent paralysis. The last, the Isle of Nothing, suggests the sterility resulting from such perversions and frustrations of nature. Long afterward, on Birdalune’s return voyage to the witch’s house by the water-side, she finds these islands somewhat returned to normality: the Isle of Nothing become populated and fruitful; the women and men of the Isle of the Queens and the Isle of the Kings aroused from their enchantment (their unsatisfied lust emphasizing their incompleteness); the old man gone from the Isle of the Young and the Old. We might infer that these changes are the result of the destruction of the Isle of Increase Un- sought together with its witch-mistress. At any rate, there is evident a liberation from a debilitating or atrophic enchantment which would isolate, separate, wither, and annihilate humanity; what Birdalune sees on her way back to the forest of Evilshaw is a renewal of life not yet complete, but promising that her journey will end in lovers’ meeting, as indeed it does, ending her long separation from Arthur. Renewal is foreshadowed in the magical serpent ring given Birdalune by Habundia before she escapes the witch, and in the serpent shape assumed by the escaping spirit of the sending boat after her return to the witch’s cottage, the serpent, who sheds his skin and renews his life, long having been a symbol of regeneration.

The pattern of separation followed by union and restoration is graphically developed in Morris’ last romance, The Sundering Flood, which tells the story of two lovers who grow up separated by an impassable river and of their individual quests to find one another and be united. Morris did not have time to develop The Sundering Flood as he seems to have planned, but, despite the relative lack of development toward the end, this last tale shows clearly its affinity with its predecessors. Osberne, like Ralph and Face-of-god, is created in the mold of the archetypal hero of saga and myth, singled out from childhood to become a glorious leader by a destiny manifesting itself in supernatural helpers. Like Ralph, Osberne has luck, plain for all to see in his face, and the elfin
sword Boardcleaver, "fashioned by the fathers of long ago" (21:73) is in fact an attribute of his innate prowess rather than a source of it. The mysterious Steelhead, who initiates Osberne into manhood by the Imposition of Hands, and who gives him the magical sword, is a spirit of the earth, one of the "warriors of while ago" (21:76), and may not come into builted towns. (Anthropologically, Osberne's initiation is a classic example of tutelage by the spirit of a dead ancestor.)

Osberne is, in fact, an incarnation of ancient heroic values reasserting themselves in a new age in order to revitalize and restore a nation. His significance as the agent of rebirth and renewal is emblematized in his boyhood victory over the would-be tyrant, Hardcastle, an experienced warrior. The analogy between Osberne's challenge of the champion and David going out to fight Goliath (perceived by the women of the household) is significantly appropriate. The wonderful child Osberne brings together the past and future: his youth is a promise of the future as his manly deeds vindicate and reaffirm the values of the past.

Osberne's glorious career as the Red Lad, the bane of tyrants, does not lead him into kingship; this, the most democratic of all Morris' heroes, returns to his home to live out his life among his own, the free goodmen of the uplands. Like Ralph and Birdalone, he does not forsake his heritage, but returns to his origins, healing and protecting the land which cradled him. This is the noblest end to which heroism may be put, and Morris' homecoming heroes and heroines complete and make whole their lives in the circular pattern of their quests, separation overcome and union achieved. The idea of returning to origins is allied to the millennial eschatological themes recurrent in Morris' writings. Man has been separated from his origins (earth, life, the unfallen state) and must achieve reunification. Morris' heroes come from the earth and return to it in death, forever a part of the unending cycle of life. Like Morris, they accept the human condition, its limitations as well as its glories.

The implicit message of the "fairy romances," then, is plain: heroism is not dead; the earth calls to each man and woman in her hour of need; she will be saved and revitalized by those of strong heart who heed the call; and those are blessed indeed who give their all to destiny. Morris once described himself as "careless of metaphysics and religion, as well as of scientif- analysis, but with a deep love of the earth and the life on it, and a passion for the history of the past of mankind" (23:280). On another occasion, he remarked, "In religion I am a pagan" (22:xxxii). That is to say, Morris' concern first and foremost was for the life of this earth, and the romances would be anomalous indeed if they did not evidence the same abiding concern for our earthly life which is so abundantly plain in everything else Morris undertook during the years of his maturity. Because the romances emphasize and mythicize the dimensions of human life, they constitute an important part of Morris' work, complementing his personal struggles in the realms of architecture and crafts, as well as politics. And this in addition to their being in themselves delightfully unique works of art.

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2Rites and Symbols of Initiation, The Mysteries


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.


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.


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.
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-xviii). 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, pleasures, 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, thorpe, or stand, 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 pleasure; two are paradisal 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 pleasures, 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 pleasure and the contemporary world of author and reader.

The enchanted or paradisal garden is known also as the sacred precinct. 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 solitaire pleasures are guided by the supernaturally inherent in the tower, usually female, and her presence gives both the pleasure 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." This view of the supernatural pleasure 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 pleasures 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 pleasures 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 Mirkwood 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试着 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 narra-
tive—by killing the Lady of Abundance, by hav-
ing Thiodolf remove the hauberk, by returning
Birdalone and Arthur to Utherhay, 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 develop-
ment in the second version of the supernatural
pleasance, the type exemplified in the Wood Be-
yond the World and the Isle of Increase Unsought.
In these places, Morris expands the false para-
dise 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 Abun-
dance, 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 wood-
bine, 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 van-
ishes after the encounter. The suggestions of arti-
fice 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 de-
sendants of Venus seems to be continuous titilla-
tion, 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 Halliblith 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 paradisal 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 a-wor on 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 pleasure 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" (15:217). 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’s "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 sov 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." 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 pleasance. 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." 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 Burgdaler 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, 11. 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 weared 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 pleasanct 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, pleasant sa 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 ingle 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 hedges 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 steadying 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-ward, 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 yeo-men" (18:1). Mid-mark, Burgdale, Langton, Cleveland by the Sea, Utterhay, Upmeads, Wethermel: all these populated plenties 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 otherworld 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 Chyll 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). Osborne 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 insurrection 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 midst 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 tax-gathering 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 "waving 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."5

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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5. The 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 (Hamondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1954), I, 64-69.

\[ \text{DELIBERATE HAPPINESS: THE LATE PROSE ROMANCES OF WILLIAM MORRIS} \]

John Hollow

76
Yeats' essay on Morris ("The Happiest of Poets") has two fine images, the one which calls him a poet of the time when the Cross shall blossom with roses, and the other which is a recollection of Morris holding a glass of claret to the light and asking, "Why do people say it is prosaic to get inspiration out of wine? Is it not the sunlight and the sap in the leaves? Are not grapes made by sunlight and the sap?"

Both pictures enliven Yeats' conclusion that "the early Christians were of the kin of the Wilderness and the Dry Tree, and they saw an unearthly paradise, but he [Morris] was of the kin of the Well and of the Green Tree and he saw an Earthly Paradise." But Yeats' essay is so governed by his contrast of Rossetti and Morris, of those who pray in "the shadow of the Green Tree," of those who yearn for another world and those who love this, that he ignores the important difference between an unchanging earthly paradise and this changing earth, a distinction which makes Morris something other than "the happiest of the poets." It is as true of Morris as it is of Keats, that this "love of the world" is a chosen attitude, a "deliberate happiness" ("Ego Dominus Tuus").

In The Well at the World's End, for example, the Dry Tree does not in fact blossom into the Green Tree. Or to put it another way, if Yeats is correct and the contrast is between desiring unearthly or earthly paradises, then it is difficult to see how the Queen of the Dry Tree can also
be the Lady of Abundance. Or to put it yet a third way, it is not easy to understand why the Lady of Abundance fails and Ursula succeeds. The Lady certainly does not seem to prefer the idea of heaven to the reality of this earth.

There is such a contrast in the book (and Yeats makes much of this scene in his review of this romance[1]). A monk says to Ralph:

"Now Lord, I can see by thy face that thou art set on beholding the fashion of this world, and most like it will give thee rue."

Then came a word into Ralph's mouth, and he said [punning nicely on the word "fashion"]: "Wilt thou tell me, father, whose work was the world's fashion?"

The monk reddened, but answered nought, and Ralph spake again: "Forsworn, did the craftsman of it fumble over his work?"

(18:35-36)

But the contrast here is between the priests and Ralph, not between the Lady and Ralph or Ursula.

Late in the story, when the Champion of the Dry Tree becomes a wild-man, and Roger the Rope-walker a hermit, because neither of them can enjoy life without the Lady of Abundance, then the contrast is between those who reject the world and Ralph who still loves it, "even though (as the monk warned) it has given him rue. But that is not a contrast between those who seek an unearthly paradise and those who seek an earthly one.

As H. G. Wells lamented, "Ever and again the tale is certainly shot and enriched with allegory. But as we try to follow these glittering strands, they spread, twist, vanish, one after the other, in the texture of some purely decorative incident."[2]

Without denying Wells' point, which is a good one, and always remembering Morris' outraged denial of allegorical purpose, still it does seem that Ralph has two very similar sets of adventures. He leaves home to seek his fortune, loves one lady whom he is unable to protect from death, loves another lady whom he is able to protect, drinks of the Well and returns home to inherit his father's kingdom. He is that fortunate favorite son of folklore, that Joseph who will thrive even if sold into Egypt. And that does seem to be the point: Ralph and Ursula are lucky; the Lady of Abundance is not.

Part of the difficulty in interpreting The Well at the World's End is that there are so many clues. The Lady of Abundance is said to be a witch, a fairy, a goddess, something other than a child of Adam. She is called, in a speech Harold Bloom takes to be the center of the romance, the kind of women who distracts men from great deeds.[3] And her origins are obscure, her life is simply a history of one aroused lust after another, and she does not seem to move men to any great deeds. But to Ralph, who learns to judge her for herself, she is not the belle dame sans merci that pale kings, princes too, say she is. She says and means "I love thee true," and Ralph awakes on the cold hill's side only after she dies. She becomes for Ralph, in his life with Ursula, the opposite possibility, the tragic potential, the unhappy end of love and beauty. His love for Ursula and his appreciation of their good fortune is intensified by the constant reminders of the Lady's ill fortunes. He almost loses Ursula to the bear just as he did lose the Lady in a similar scene; and at the end of the story his parents welcome Ursula in a way that the Lady's in-laws did not welcome her.
This awareness of the dual possibilities of life, happy and unhappy, is what the book is about. As Ralph returns from the Well he finds that everything has changed in the towns and among the peoples he visited before. He helps to bring about some of the change, but most of it happens without his assistance; the tyrants of Utterbodl and the Burg of the Four Friths, for example, have already fallen before he arrives. The one sure and certain thing about human life is that it changes, and that is what the inscription at the Well says: "Drink of me, if ye deem that ye be strong enough in desire to bear length of days" (19:81). If, in other words, ye can stand up under the heavy load of a life which may be more full of sorrow than of joy, Ralph reaches the Well because after the death of the Lady Abundance he does not loiter on the cold hill's side; his love of the world, of deeds, other maidens, and the life of man, is such that he is strong enough to drink from the fountain of youth.

The Dry Tree, then, does not blossom into the Green because dead trees like dead hopes, dead loves, and dead men are as much a part of this life as is the renewal of spring, love, and life. The sign of the road to the Well of longer life is a sword crossed with a green bough, the symbols of war and peace, man and the earth, death as well as life.

II

On the other hand, Yeats is certainly correct when he insists that Morris never sought an earthly paradise. In A Dream of John Ball, for example, the medieval priest thinks he believes in heaven; but, as the dreamer tries to tell him, his hope of immortality is really based upon the continuing life of mankind on this earth.

"What sayest thou, scholar?" John Ball asks, lifting the corner of a sheet from the face of a dead man, "feelest thou sorrow of heart when thou lookest on this, either for the man himself, or for thyself and the time when thou shalt be as he is?"

"How can I sorrow for that which I cannot so much as think of?" replies the dreamer; "while I am alive I cannot think that I shall die, or believe in death at all, although I know well that I shall die--I can but think of myself as living in some new way."

"Yea, forsooth," says John Ball, "that is what the Church meaneth by death, and even that I look for." But the new life in the world-to-come promised by the Church is not what the dreamer has in mind. "Though I die and end," he explains, "yet mankind yet liveth, [and] there I end not, since I am a man."

Moreover, the dreamer goes on to claim, John Ball himself must share some such belief, for "with a few pennies paid, and a few masses sung, thou mightst have had a good place on this earth and in that heaven; whereas John Ball is "ready to die in grief and torment rather than be unfaithful to the Fellowship, yea rather than fail to work thine utmost for it" (16:264-266). Which is to say, not only is John Ball no Bishop Blougram, but he is more ready to work for the good of his fellow men in this world than to save his soul in the next.

The medieval priest is unable to see the distinction between the ends of fellowship and of salvation, but if willingness to be martyred is
a test of true belief, then what John Ball most truly believes is in the universal brotherhood of men on this earth, "the sons of one man and one mother, begotten of the earth" (16:235). Thus his banner pictures, not the fellowship of angels and of men, but "a man and a woman half-clad in skins of beasts seen against a background of green trees" (16:227).

And so, although John Ball does not realize it, the point of his sermon is that men act for the future of mankind, not so that they may earn heaven. "Forsooth, brothers, fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell: fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death: and the deeds that ye do upon the earth, it is for fellowship's sake that ye do them, and the life that is in it, that shall live on and on for ever, and each one of you part of it, while many a man's life upon the earth from the earth shall wane" (16:230).

In the future, the dreamer promises the priest, John Ball will be remembered as one who dreamed of equality (16:285), just as Ball's followers remember our first parents as proof of our brotherhood and equality. John Ball will be, as he promised that his men would be, "though men call you dead, a part and parcel of the living wisdom of all things, very stones of the pillars that uphold the joyful earth" (16:230).

Similarly, in that amalgamation of Caesar's Commentaries, Tacitus, Icelandic saga, and Beowulf called The House of the Wolfings (who may be, in fact, those "Sons of the Wolf" with whom Beowulf's father had a feud), although Thiodolf seems to expect to wend his way to Godhome when he dies, the immortality most real to him is the continued life of his tribe.

I am Thiodolf the Mighty: but as wise as I may be
No story of that grave-night mine eyes can ever see,
But rather the tale of the Wolfings through the coming days of earth,
And the young men in their triumph and the maidens in their mirth;
And morn's promise every evening, and each day the promised morn,
And I amidst it ever reborn and yet reborn.

"This tale I know," he continues:

who have seen it, who have felt the joy and pain,
Each fleeing, each pursuing, like the links of the draw-well's chain:
But that deedless tide of the grave-mound,
And dayless nightless day,
E'en as I strive to see it, its image wanes away.

"What say'st thou of the grave-mound?" he concludes:

shall I be there at all
When they lift the Horn of Remembrance, and the shout goes down the hall,
And they drink the Mighty War-duke and Thiodolf the Old?
Nay rather; there where the youngling that longeth to be bold
Sits gazing through the hall-reek and sees across the board
A vision of the reaping of the harvest of the sword,
There shall Thiodolf be sitting . . .

(14:109)
So, although the old man sings of Thiodolf's arrival at Godhome, *The House of the Wolfings* concludes with the body of Thiodolf enthroned at the feast of his tribe: "There then they fell to feasting, hallowing the high-tide of their return with victory in their hands: and the dead corpses of Thiodolf and Otter, clad in precious glistening raiment, looked down on them from the High-seat, and the kindreds worshipped them and were glad; and they drank the Cup to them before any others, were they Gods or men" (14:206). The spirit of Thiodolf may be wending the way to the God's feast, but the book ends (as does *Beowulf*) with the raising of the hero's grave-mound, the place "called Thiodolf's Howe for many generations of men." A legend grows up, in fact, that Thiodolf is not dead but only sleeping, and that he will wake at the hour of the Goths' greatest need (14:207). In other words, the Wolfings are no more able to picture Thiodolf in Godhome than he was able to imagine himself there.

Thiodolf may be in Valhalla, as John Ball may be in heaven, but in this life neither of them could act to win such unearthly paradises. Thiodolf's only choice is whether to live for himself or to die for his people. It is not the choice of Achilles (long life or fame), nor is his need that of *Beowulf* (who of all the *Beats* was the "most yearning of fame"): when Thiodolf refuses to wear the dwarf-wrought hauberk, he chooses not so much the immortality of fame as the immortality of fellowship. If Thiodolf lives on, it is as a part of the life of his people.

In *The Roots of the Mountains*, when the Warriors of the Wolf recapture their tribal hall, they find several of their heroes, including "he who bore a name great from of old, Folkwolf" (which is what the Wolfings call Thiodolf), hanging from the roof-beam, "dusty, befouled, with sightless eyes and grinning mouths, in the dimmed sunlight of the Hall" (15:356). Or so much for the immortality of fame.

Face-of-god certainly seeks no such fame; his single aim is the present and future good of his people. In fact, his lady only accepts him after he demonstrates that he is capable of putting the welfare of the tribe ahead of the welfare of any individual. He has to acknowledge, as befits the ruler of an agricultural rather than a warrior society, that he prefers the quiet of peace to the fame of war. He is willing to fight, and knows that he will often have to, but his role is to establish a society less cruel than the tyranny of the Dusky Men. He and his lady plight troth on the ring of the Earth-god (as opposed, one assumes, to any God in the sky), but the tribe is the real God in the book, and that is why the hero is called Face-of-god.

It is as Old Hammond says in *News from Nowhere*, when the "assured belief in heaven and hell... has gone," men turn to the "religion of humanity," by which he means that men should "love their kind" and "believe in the continuous life of the world of men, and as it were, add every day of that common life to the little stock of days which our own mere individual experience wins for us" (16:132). Judging from *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountains*, in both of which the individuals learn to lose themselves in the future of the tribe, men had a similar religion of humanity in the days before heaven or hell seemed assured. Christianity desires an unearthly paradise, but Morris' heroes possess the future through anticipation.
III

The future they anticipate is not, however, an earthly paradise. In *The Earthly Paradise* itself, the Wanderers of the frame tale discover that an earthly paradise would lack change and that human life without the intensifying threat of death would no longer be human life. In *The Glittering Plain*, when the hero, whose name is Hallblithe because he is only blithe in the hall of his ancestors, visits the earthly paradise known as the Glittering Plain, he finds neither life nor love there sufficiently in earnest—all that glitters is not gold.

The maidens are lovely, but somewhat light-headed; the king smiles and smiles, but is a villain; the place is called "the Land of Living Men," but it is really only "the Acre of the Undying."

Then stirred Hallblithe's heart within him and he said: "O Eagle of the Sea, thou hast thy youth again: what then wilt thou do with it? Wilt thou not weary for the moonlit main, and the washing of waves and the dashing of spray, and thy fellows all glistening with the brine? Where now shall be the alien shores before thee, and the landing for fame, and departure for the gain of goods? Wilt thou forget the ship's black side, and the dripping of the windward oars, as the squall felleth on—when the sun hath arisen, and the sail tuggeth hard on the sheet, and the ship lieth over and the lads shout against the whistle of the wind? Has the spear fallen from thy hand, and hast thou buried the sword of thy fathers in the grave from which thy body has escaped? . . . Whose thrall art thou now, thou lifter of the spoil, thou scarer of the freeborn? The bidding of what lord or King wilt thou do, O Chieftain, that thou mayst eat thy meat in the morning and lie soft in thy bed in the evening?" . . .

But the Sea-eagle laughed from a countenance kind with joy, and said: "... And as to what thou sayest concerning the days gone past and our joys upon the tumbling sea, true it is that those days were good and lovely; but they are dead and gone like the lads who sat on the thwart beside us, and the maidens who took our hands in the hall to lead us to the chamber. Other days have come in their stead, and other friends shall cherish us. What then? Shall we wound the living to please the dead, who cannot heed it? Shall we curse the Yuletide, and cast foul water on the Holy Hearth of the winter feast, because the summer once was fair and the days fit and the times change? Now let us be glad! For life liveth."

Therewith he turned about to his damsel and kissed her on the mouth. But Hallblithe's face was grown sad and stern, and he spake slowly and heavily: "So is it, shipmate, that whereas thou sayest that the days fit, for thee they shall fit no more; and the day may come for thee when thou shalt be weary, and know it, and long for the lost which thou hast forgotten." (14:256-258)

As Hallblithe says, he seeks no dream, "but rather the end of dreams" (14:273). He leaves the Glittering Plain for the hall of his ancestors, and on the way home he not only rescues his lady, but walks under a raised strip of turf called the "earth-yoke" with his former enemies, now become his brothers, with whom he shares this life, its changes, and death.

So extreme, in fact, are the differences between earthly paradises and this earth that the
Guest cannot remain in the improved model of this earth which is the world of *News from Nowhere*. "One thing seems strange to me," says Dick, late in that story, "that I must needs trouble myself about the winter and its scantiness, in the midst of the summer abundance. If it hadn't happened to me before, I should have thought it was your doing, Guest; that you had thrown a kind of evil charm over me" (16:207). Dick hastens to assure Guest that he is only joking, but that restlessness in the improved future is, according to Ellen, the reason Guest cannot remain: "No, it will not do; you cannot be of us; you belong so entirely to the unhappiness of the past that our happiness even would weary you" (16:210). He must return to the present, to do what he can to bring about that day, and to take what comfort he may in the possibility that Old Hammond may be his grandson.

Lack of change, however, is also something of a problem for the people of the future. Clara, for example, is always a little restless, though it is to be hoped that she is settling down. The more serious temptation, as Ellen realizes, is the attractiveness of change itself. "Who knows? happy as we are, times may alter; we may be bitten with some impulse towards change, and many things may seem too wonderful for us to resist, too exciting not to catch at, if we do not know that they are but phases of what has been before; and withal ruinous, deceitful, and sordid" (16:194). In fact, Ellen is so tolerant of the Praise of Past Times because he keeps alive the contrast of the present with the past, which contrast is necessary lest the present, for all of its changing seasons and changing jobs, seem to lack change enough.

The most important thing the people of the future know about the past is that it was a "life which was always looking upon everything, except mankind, animate and inanimate--'nature,' as people used to call it--as one thing, and mankind as another" (16:179). In the future, Ellen leads Guest to the old house and, laying "her shapely sun-browned hand and arm on the lichen-walled wall as if to embrace it," cries out: "0 me! 0 me! How I love the earth, and the seasons, and weather, and all things that deal with it, and all that grows out of it--as this has done" (16:201-202). The people of the future are so aware of being part of the earth that they have no need of paradies either unearthly or earthly; such dreams make men and women seem separate from the earth.

IV

As Face-of-god plights troth on the ring of the Earth-god, as Hallblithe walks under the earth-yoke, and as Ellen thinks Kelmscott Manor as natural a growth of the earth as any tree, so the three romances of the alliterated Ws celebrate the interconnection of men, women, and this changing earth. In *The Well at the World's End*, as I have said, the Lovers learn to live even though life is as changeable as the seasons. In *The Wood Beyond the World* the lovers help a city to bloom at the edge of the wilderness, and in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* Birdaline embodies no less than the life urge itself.

Golden Walter has to decide whether to believe the Dwarf, who says the Mistress is a god, or the Maid, who says the Mistress only holds them captive. Walter's wife has been unfaithful, and so he has reason enough to believe that
the beautiful but wanton Mistress does rule all. Fortunately, he is neither so cynical nor so blind as to be unable to see the truth of the Maid.

The lovers' restraint in allowing the Maid to remain a maid proves the power of the lascivious Mistress more apparent than real; she is a fit goddess for Dwarfs and Bears, but not for civilized men and women. Walter's similar foresight in choosing the garments of war necessary to protect peace proves him a fit king for the world beyond the wilderness. His city, the medieval city, is not a blot on the landscape, but a well-organized natural growth. And as Walter's ancestors were medieval traders, not nineteenth-century businessmen, so he has the virtues of foresight and restraint necessary to help his corner of the world blossom as did the Maid's faded garlands.

In The Water of the Wondrous Isles, Birdalone, who wanders naked through the world, seeming like Venus almost to make the grass grow and the flowers bloom, visits the islands of Increase Unsought, the Young and the Old, the Queens, the Kings, and of Nothing. Upon her return, she finds that the Isle of Nothing has become a pastoral scene (of Increase Sought), the Isle of Kings a place of maidens yearning for men, the Isle of Queens a place of men yearning for maidens, the Isle of the Young and Old a place where the old do die and the young grow older, and the Isle of Increase Unsought a wasteland. All of these changes are the result of Birdalone's passage across the water between the wondrous isles in the sense that her fine and naked body arouses the lust for life in all who behold her. She is change itself moving through a stagnant world.

At the same time, however, she also causes as much pain as pleasure. She moves several men to hopeless passion, and most of them are not better for it; she brings about the rescue of three maidens, but she causes the death of one's knight and steals the affection of another's; in fact, she flees from her friends because she can no longer endure being the cause of as much pain as joy. It is only at the end of the book that she is reconciled to the double possibilities of her beauty, which duality is also the earth's and is well represented by the Green and the Rocky Eyots which do not change.

Morris seems to have borrowed the captive maiden and the witch from folk tales to embody a vision of a beauty as irresistible as change, of the hounds of spring straining at winter's traces. The effects of Birdalone's passage through the world are perhaps not as disastrous as those of Swinburne's Atalanta, but they very nearly are. And no one has ever called Swinburne the happiest of the poets.

C. S. Lewis said the center of Morris was not the contrast between an unearthly and an earthly paradise, but a "tension" between "the passion for immortality" and "the feeling that such desire is not wholly innocent, that the world of mortality is more than enough for our allegiance." Perhaps even closer to the truth is the suggestion that this tension is just one of the tensions, albeit an important one, in a poet whose lines are full of pairs such as "joy and sorrow," "pleasure and pain," "hopes and fears," and "life and death." If Morris' prose romances have anything in common, it is this overwhelming
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.

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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, 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." 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."

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 at 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 unyielding 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, 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 "sun-burnt 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. Shorty 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, ac-
companying and paralleling Guest's characteri-
ization 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 so-
cial good. This conversion of the erotic and per-
sonal 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 so-
cial management of the consequences of desire has
been at least as important as desire itself.

The conversion of the erotic into the deco-
rative 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 be-
come apparent in Well.

In Nowhere, the power of the erotic is neu-
tralized by society, but in Well it is the shap-
ing 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. Al-
though 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 sadis-
tic male power. A number of Ralph's encounters
with the Lady of Abundance, for example, seem de-
signed 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, sets 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 hersel
up straight and stiff," and pass by him "as
one both angry and ashamed" (18:75).

Later, Ralph and his companion, Roger, con-
verse with some aging men of the town who are en-
gaged 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 civil servants, being proud, and not abid-
ing stripes lightly, or toiling the harder for

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 conclud-
ing 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 elabo-
ration 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 partici-
pant 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 Utterboi), 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 shrank 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 godly 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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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.


MYTH AND RITUAL IN THE LAST ROMANCES OF WILLIAM MORRIS

Carole Silver


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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.¹ 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 Grims 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.²

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.³ 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 dwelt 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." 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." 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 sagas.

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 "where-in 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 Tir-na-nòg, "The Land of Living Men," visited by Oisin and Conna in the Celtic myths that Morris loved. Like the island to which Conna 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,”12 worshipping an Ancient Mother of tribes who they believe predated all male leaders, and offering her 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 enthrall 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 Upmeads, 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 earn 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 Hallblithe are unknown; Osberne 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 interag—the sea voyages of Celtic legend. Their experiences constitute what Joseph Campbell calls "the monomyth.
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, 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." 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,23 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, &c. of the late William Morris, of Kelmscott House Hammersmith (London: Sotheby, 1898).


"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.

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

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 Folha. 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, xxxi. 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.