

William Morris's Love Is Enough:  
A Parabolic Morality

Some critics have made claims for Morris's merits as a poet,<sup>1</sup> and The Earthly Paradise and The Defence of Guinevere have received some attention, but the bulk of Morris's poetry has been largely passed over. Love Is Enough, a poetic drama emerging from the period during which Morris was shifting away from Pre-Raphaelitism, has been especially neglected. Of those studies now directed towards Morris's poetry, the fullest suffers from its special pleading: Jessie Kocmanova in The Poetic Maturing of William Morris<sup>2</sup> applies the perspective of Marxism to his poetry--even to Love Is Enough, a poem May Morris finds transcendental, even mystical. Actually, neither Jessie Kocmanova nor May Morris have dealt very fully with the poem, nor indeed have any other critics of Morris; but the failure to probe into Love Is Enough begets a distorted image of the Morris canon. The poem is not a minor piece. May Morris, for example, refers to the poem's experimental metrical scheme, describing it as the "most elaborate scheme the poet ever worked on, and [one which] shows his most sensitive touch."<sup>3</sup> And Rossetti considered it "at a higher point of execution than anything he has done."<sup>4</sup> Morris himself maintained an oddly detached attitude towards the poem, as though he were not quite sure what to make of it. In Love Is Enough Morris apparently portrays a conversion experience. In presenting a pattern of spiritual conversion similar to many other nineteenth-century experiences--such as Teufelsdröckh's--Morris would seem to align himself with those Victorians who transfigured both the materialistic and the mystical worlds by adopting a world view perhaps best described by Tennyson's term "parabolic." Tennyson uses the term in speaking of his Idylls, rejecting a narrowly allegorical interpretation and implying a difference between Idylls and In Memoriam, which, unlike Idylls, presents a clear conception of an ideal or supernal world. Similarly, one finds it necessary to underscore the "descendentalism" Carlyle couples to his "transcendentalism" as reflective of the this-worldly realism he advances in Sartor Resartus, denoted in the chapter title "Natural-Supernaturalism." The world view Morris presents in Love Is Enough integrates the mystical and the materialistic, fusing them into a

realism which may best be approached parabolically; the action intends different levels of meaning. This integration enables us to view the poem not as romantic escapism but as myth, myth which attempts to present a view of the world grounded concurrently in naturalistic actuality and in supernal actuality. To read the poem successfully we must read it as we do Idylls or Sartor, in terms of its moral and metaphysical structure, and to understand it we must view it with reference both to the world most of us choose to call the real world and to the supernal world. That Morris wishes us to approach his poem parabolically is suggested not only by the obvious use of the medieval morality<sup>5</sup> structure, including the alliterative verse, but by the lack of dramatic action, suggesting that it is not to be viewed as stage drama but as drama of the inner life--as closet drama. Paul Thompson, for instance, describes it as a "symbolic verse play with a medieval dramatic structure of receding planes of action representing different levels of consciousness."<sup>6</sup> Few would argue that Love Is Enough would succeed on the stage, and though one might also argue that its complexity causes it to fail even as interior drama, an understanding of its "symbolic" or parabolic meaning must precede such a conclusion.

Perhaps it would be most fruitful first to examine the speeches of "Music," lyric interludes which comment on the meaning of the morality for the benefit of those watching it, specifically for the newly wedded Empress and Emperor but also for the peasant couple, Giles and Joan. Kocmanova implies that May Morris misreads the Music sections, locating in them a non-existent mysticism, but by arguing instead for an "allegorical" reading Kocmanova limits the term severely. "Allegorical," for her, means "philosophical." The poem, she implies, has a philosophy, and from her point of view, a materialistic one. Admittedly, Morris may not be arguing for the orthodox Christian ontology, but unless the language of Music is deliberately ironic--and no one has read the poem in that way--it embodies a spiritual message. The major statement by Music occurs at the end of the play within the play, after Pharamond has succeeded in withstanding the lure of his former way of life, the way of the world. The Music lyric is pointedly religious in language and tone. Love is enough, Music says, in the first stanza of this last speech,<sup>7</sup> for those "who seek saving" from the "World's Wound," a wound the previous action of the play

indicates is caused by man's egocentric desire for fame and glory. Love becomes the "House of Fulfilment of Craving": no longer does Pharamond, having finally found his love, suffer the need to plunge into the world of appetitive action confronting him upon his father's death. At the end of the play he is content to leave his former kingdom to King Theobald and depart for the peaceful land of the Shepherds. Music further defines love as that which speaks with a "voice of compassion," as that which bids the world-weary, "Come cling round about me, ye faithful who sicken/Of the weary unrest and the world's passing fashion"--believing that surely some will feel the "Godhead" quicken within them. The world honors men with a crown, but love replaces the world's "crown"--given as a reward for the "pain," the "thirst," the "fasting" and all the suffering of the world--with a "fair life everlasting." The last stanza of this lyric repeats the counsel that the "World's Wound" will be healed with the "balm" of love; man need only "cry out" his need. The notion of spiritual love leading one away from the world's egoistic lures and healing the wound of the soul's immersion in matter and its resulting separation from God, this notion, coupled with the compassion Love offers and the statement that you need only ask and you shall receive, is reinforced not only in the action of the morality but in the statements of Love himself.

Immediately after the Music lyric, holding a "crown and palm-branch," Love appears before the curtain, placing a capstone on the preceding dramatic action, and in the process reinforcing the spiritual meaning of the poem. Love begins by asking that if what he offers "Be aught but glittering wings and gown of gold,/Be aught but singing of an ancient song," how could Pharamond endure the loss of his worldly possessions and follow him? The reward Love offers is not that of another world, for the kingdom of God is within man. Love's "heaven" is a state of being. Love emphasizes this notion by his use of an analogy suggesting that so full of life is earth that heaven is but modeled after it, and by stating that the bark girding the winter tree is unable to "babble about the sap that sleeps beneath,/And tell the fashion of its life and death." This image of nature containing the future spring within the barrenness of winter is similar to the images informing The Earthly Paradise, and it offers man hope for his own resurrection--which will be

a change in a state of being, an inner change, launched in mystery but recognizable in operation. Admitting the difficulty of describing in discursive terms the nature of this resurrection, Love says that it can talk only in paradoxes, telling of love, for example, but calling it hate. Faith then becomes the desideratum. This faith entails sufferings, but those enduring them will see "The many mansions of my house" once they have cast away their "pride," and have moved away from the corruptions of time and the things of the world. Love then likens the resurrected state to a wedding, in which the stains of the world have been removed from the wedding dress--the heavenly bridegroom purifying the earthly. The preparation for the wedding, however, demands that man cast off all worldly acquirements, for "Across my threshold naked all must pass." Love then advises his adherents to avoid the temptation of those who distort or misrepresent God, for "on the great day when the hosts are met/On Armageddon's plain" the faithful will be called to prove their faith, and after the last great battle will dwell in the "House of Love." Love strengthens his plea by developing further the analogy of the house, suggesting that the sorrow and pain man suffers are but part of God's building of a house, which until completed will demand man's continual aid in present time. Love's closing lines reflect the theme threading the whole of his final speech, the Christian idea of the paradoxical nature of time and eternity. They suggest that only when man is exclusively caught up in the sorrows of the world--separated from God--does he experience life as something merely temporal, with a past full of suffering and a future presaging it. A change is needed not by earth but by those who perceive the earth from the point of view of time only. In implying that man may gain a paradise on earth, Love, far from positing a merely materialistic, naturalistic, or romantic paradise, is suggesting the idea of the kingdom of God emerging from a resurrection in the soul of man. The new earth, or the paradise on earth, becomes a new state of mind. This final statement by Love caps the action, for immediately the play ends and we encounter the reactions of the spectators. These comments by Music and Love, however, far from being an attempt to impose a meaning on the dramatic action, find support in both the outer and in the other interior action.

The subtitle of the poem is "Pharamond the Freed," the title of the morality proper. And the question, of course, is, freed of what? Of the two major characters of the morality, Oliver functions both as a commentator on Pharamond's actions and as a foil--a representative of the world Pharamond is attempting to free himself from. Significantly, Oliver is Pharamond's "foster-father," for if we interpret Pharamond's actions parabolically, as suggested by the meaning of those final speeches of Music and Love, Pharamond has given up one father--the old King who ruled a world of retributive justice--and is searching for another source of guidance. This pattern resembles not only the usual reading of the transition from the Old Testament God of retribution to the New Testament God of love but also the pattern of Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh, who, also having foster parents, celebrates in the "Everlasting Yea" the discovery of a father so long absent. Throughout, Oliver is usually attempting to dissuade Pharamond from his "folly." The play opens with Oliver informing the "councillors" that Pharamond has "drifted from us." The "leeches," the doctors of the physical, cannot aid Pharamond in his despair, for their advice that Pharamond pursue the life of action--hunting, sailing, tilting--only exacerbates the disorder in Pharamond's soul. For Pharamond the natural world has lost its flavor, for it is no longer harmonizing with the needs of his soul. Only by "escaping" to the dream world of the "great valley" is Pharamond able to endure. Though obviously intending this "paradise" to be in some way analogous to a spiritual state, Morris sketches it in very earthbound, natural imagery. Weary of five years of fighting, Pharamond has journeyed to his paradise by means, Morris wants us to believe, of a dream-like but very real method, suggesting a night journey of the soul. Unlike Pharamond, Oliver is both in the world and of it. In response to Pharamond's revelation of his night journeys, Oliver advises Pharamond to reflect on glory as the way of the world and to relinquish his foolish dreams. But of the two, fame or love, Pharamond decides for the latter, living "for the last gain and the greatest." Upon first encountering his love, Pharamond easily remembers her voice, but "Too much of strife is about us this morning," he says, referring to the strife of the world and implying that in a paradisiacal state the memory is unclouded--a notion not alien to most visions of the Christian paradise. The

love Pharamond encounters in his dream visits, later to be identified as Azalais, is unable to leave the valley with him, finding the chaos in the world divisive.

Thus described, this paradise corresponds to the world but lacks the world's impurities; the love Pharamond finds there resembles very much a soul mate, she being described as a twin, a sister. But being pure, this mate cannot accompany Pharamond to the impure--at least while Pharamond is still in such a blurred spiritual state. Pharamond will get, Morris implies, the vision his state of being deserves: "Then waved my sweet vision midst glory's fulfillment, / And still with its waving, hot waxed by desire." When seduced by the world and lusting after its glory, Pharamond finds his vision corrupt. Only when Pharamond has purged himself of the world will his soul mate be able to leave the valley with him and live in the world.

At this point Pharamond finds himself in a state analogous to Teufelsdröckh's centre of indifference: finally leaving the world of "glory," and taking a reluctant Oliver with him, Pharamond travels to "foreign lands," subjecting to questions both his dreams and the supposed reality he has fled from. Oliver interprets Pharamond's sickness as death, and even Pharamond describes it as a dying, but gradually in questioning his old way of life Pharamond approaches the paradoxical state of dying only to the flesh and of being reborn. At this midpoint in the play, Pharamond now remembers the songs, metaphysical in content, which his love sang to him, and not the misery of his past struggles, whereas Oliver can think only of the action and the misery they have endured. Perhaps at this point Pharamond has reached the nadir of his centre of indifference, for Oliver describes Pharamond as "naked a king" whose "crown's glitter" and glories have flown. The fact that Pharamond's dream of his love immediately succeeds Oliver's observation also suggests the wavering state of Pharamond's soul, for though the first part of the dream brings him the desired vision, the latter part is troubled. After this, however, Pharamond's spiritual growth is for the most part upward. He is ready to be "freed."

This freeing takes place upon the entry of Azalais, who kisses Pharamond, and thereupon transfigures him, awakening him to deliverance. Pharamond's deliverance is reflected in the natural imagery: Love, for example, upon viewing Pharamond

sleeping, says, "Look, look! how sun and morn at last do win/Upon the shifting waves of mist!" The idea of spiritual deliverance is also suggested by Music, who notes that "Eve shall kiss night," bringing about its shift to a new day. Moreover, the dialogue between Pharamond and Love just preceding Azalais's entry reveals to Pharamond that what he thought of as death was but another name for God, and that Love has transfigured death and paradoxically turned it into love. Pharamond's central realization is that God is love.

With the apex of Pharamond's spiritual ascent occurring with that kiss, we find Pharamond afterwards truly reborn, unwilling, in spite of Oliver's promptings, to return to the old ways of glory. Pharamond catalogues the advantages of the kingship, but once having tasted of love he will never succumb again to such lures. At the end Pharamond has freed himself of the world's appetitive allurements, and whereas at the beginning Oliver as foster father led Pharamond, now Pharamond has reversed the roles and will be a spiritual guide to Oliver as they go to the poor land of the shepherding people.

The Music and Love commentaries parallel Pharamond's spiritual ascent. Music's first speech establishes the motives and images that predominate throughout the poem; it implies that the drama is to be an interior drama, a drama of the soul, and it introduces the nature imagery: the "dim-eyes" cannot see the "gold-cups and daisies fair blooming." Once the eyes have been cleansed the spring will return to Pharamond's soul. Music continues to make exegetical comments on the interior drama, its second statement, again in language infused with religious overtones, reinforcing the major theme of the poem that love will change the world from a place of sorrow to one of joy. That this alteration in the state of the world will issue as a revelation of the soul Music underscores in its use of an extended metaphor--echoing the sap image--describing love as a seed which though apparently unplanted emerges in the spring: the unseen mysterious forces in nature mirror those at work in man. If one views the poem as romance, and interprets "romance" to mean escapism into some unreal world, certainly a frequent enough equation, this interpretation is seemingly reinforced by Music's counsel to avoid the lures of the world. But from the point of view of myth.

Music's injunction to give up the world leads not to escapism but to spiritual fulfillment. In rejecting passion and appetite, Music emphasizes love as a spiritual force. In its succeeding commentaries, culminating in the final one obviously religious in intent, Music glosses Pharamond's struggles to overcome these worldly lures and free himself; in one of its later comments for example, the language resembles a combination Good Friday and Easter hymn in its assertion that once having cast off "dead fruitless desire" Pharamond will "pluck out a new world from the fire." In the short lyric immediately preceding Pharamond's meeting with Azalais, Music's song does become an Easter hymn, exulting in the triumph of love over the world.

Music's role is limited to describing Pharamond's spiritual progression; Love is, of course, more active. In addition to commenting upon Pharamond's actions, Love also directs Pharamond to his end, guiding as well as counseling him. Moreover, during the movement of the spiritual drama, Love takes on different forms which parallel Pharamond's spiritual state of mind. Clad as a king in his first appearance, for instance, Love appears very much an Old Testament God, a Yahweh cataloguing all the many types of bad love and extolling those who remain faithful. Later, however, clad as an "image-maker," Love casts off his Old Testament garb and, by advising Pharamond to reject such traditional gods as Apollo, Mars, and Jove, implicitly advises him to reject the state of mind associated with the worship of such gods so that "he at last may save his soul alive." Love describes himself as "the Life of all that dieth not/ Through me alone is sorrow unforgot." As a bestower of gifts upon man, Love only asks that in return man give up those aspects of the self that are false gifts from false gods; or, to put it into more specifically Christian terms, to give up oneself to save oneself. In his appearances after this--as we noted in the discussion of his last speech--Love describes the process Pharamond is going through in terms more and more appropriate to Christianity. Finally, just before Pharamond's union with Azalais, Love enters clad as a pilgrim, obviously a state reflective of Pharamond's, and notes that he has taken away the sword and crown, anger and pride, from Pharamond and replaced them with a different crown, one purged of the sin of pride.

The impact of Love's efforts on Pharamond is obvious enough, but it has been just as strong on the characters of the exterior drama.



Two sets of characters dominate the exterior drama: Giles and Joan, the peasants, and an Emperor and Empress, whose marriage is being celebrated by the inner drama. Significantly, the play opens and closes not with the Emperor and Empress but with the peasants, suggesting that the drama is very much intended for them, as a means of celebrating all marriages. Giles and Joan reflect on their own marriage as the Emperor and Empress do; but the reflection extends beyond the merely practical or physical, for Joan's awe at one "Whose raiment flashes down the sun"--the King in the play--causes the two peasants to speculate on the nature of marriage. Similarly, the Empress reflects on the paradoxical "terribleness" of love. This interpretation of the two sets of characters and their thoughts is intended to imply the interpenetration and communion of all men, and this is underscored by the fact that the "player-King" once stumbled across Giles' "hamlet-home." That this communion is not merely happenstance Morris emphasizes by mirroring the relationships and actions of this introductory portion in his conclusion, where Giles and Joan comment on the action of the morality. Joan bemoans that the "fair shapes" have passed away, but Giles reassures her that "they" live within their hearts, and that even though the morality was ancient, the message is not. Likewise, the Emperor and Empress express the same notion, seeing the morality as embodying an "ancient dream." Giles and Joan attempt to give this dream immediate reality by inviting Pharamond and Azalais to their pastoral home, hoping that a new dawn will presently emerge: "And there we four awhile shall dwell/As though the world were nought but well." Not merely dreaming of a return to paradise, Giles and Joan are now attempting to establish it on earth. Rather than a metaphysics of escape, they wish to embrace a metaphysics of love, the ancient love that is now and ever has been. That love is eternal, and human relationships--under its impetus--break through social barriers.

Love Is Enough portrays a world neither exclusively materialistic and natural nor mystical and transcendental. It portrays the natural world transfigured by spirit. Obviously Love Is Enough is in debt to the climate of romanticism surrounding it, and probably it could not withstand rigorous questioning by orthodox Christianity. Nevertheless, its reliance on the language and metaphysics of Christianity argues for its spiritual intentions. In fleeing from a world governed by appetitive action to one of love, Pharamond,

by means of love, is able to endure the earth's conflicts. Man and paradise have conjoined. Paradise is earthly but not naturalistic; it becomes an analogue for the interior state of man on earth. Admittedly Morris later repudiated the thought expressed in the title, declaring, "There's a lie for you, though 'twas I that told it! Love isn't enough in itself; love and<sup>8</sup> work, yes! work and love, that's the life of a man!" One might seek the reasons for this attitude in the evolution of Morris's developing involvement in the arts and crafts movement and in his socialism--love requiring expression in action<sup>9</sup>--but whatever his later attitude, in this poem Morris testifies to the sufficiency of love.

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#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>See for example Barbara Fass in "William Morris and the Tannhäuser Legend: A Gloss on the Earthly Paradise Motif," The Victorian Newsletter, 40 (1971).

<sup>2</sup>Brno Studies in English, 5 (1964), 118-135.

<sup>3</sup>The Collected Works of William Morris (London: Longmans Green, 1911), IX, xxxi.

<sup>4</sup>J. W. Mackail, The Life of William Morris (London: Longmans Green, 1899), I, 281.

<sup>5</sup>Oliver Elton (A Survey of English Literature [New York: MacMillan, 1920], IV, 39) refers to the poem as a masque; but even though Love Is Enough contains lyrics of great beauty, some spectacle, and a certain number of costume changes, it lacks the lavish theatrical display usually associated with the masque. The development of the morality play out of the medieval religious drama and allegories such as Roman de la Rose argues for placing Love Is Enough closer to this tradition than to that of the masque. Mackail refers to the poem as a "sort of masque" (280). Morris, however, chose the term "morality."

<sup>6</sup>The Work of William Morris (New York: Viking Press, 1967), p. 178.

<sup>7</sup>All references to Love Is Enough are from The Collected Works of William Morris (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1910), IX.

<sup>8</sup>Thompson, The Work of William Morris, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup>Elton, for example, suggests that in Love's reference to "Armageddon's plain" we find evidence that "Morris is moving towards a vision of a world-war which shall overwhelm the present evil order" (Survey, IV, 40). Morris, of course, describes such a war in News From Nowhere.