

# Victorian Poetry



*William Morris*  
1834-1896

So now, amidst our day of strife,  
With many a matter glad we play,  
When once we see the light of life  
Gleam through the tangle of to-day.

VOLUME 34



NUMBER 3



AUTUMN 1996

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

# Victorian Poetry

## Editor

Hayden Ward

## Editorial Associate

Richard C. Tobias

## Assistant Editor

John Lamb

## Contributing Editor

Hilary Attfield

## Editorial Assistants

Christina Godlewski

Jill Schreiber

Founding Editor, 1962-1990 John F. Stasny

Send MANUSCRIPTS (and diskettes, if possible) to the Editorial Office of *Victorian Poetry*, Department of English, West Virginia University, PO Box 6296, Morgantown, WV 26506-6296. Manuscripts should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*; contributors who send a diskette should also send two manuscripts with a stamped return envelope.

Send SUBSCRIPTIONS to *Victorian Poetry*—Subscriptions, Department of English, West Virginia University, PO Box 6296, Morgantown, WV 26506-6296; make checks payable to *Victorian Poetry*. Subscriptions are entered on a volume basis beginning with the first issue of the current volume.

Rates: \$30.00—Institutions, U.S. and Canada (plus \$5.00 foreign)  
(U.S. \$18.00—Individuals, U.S. and Canada (plus \$5.00 foreign)  
funds \$6.00—Students (three-year maximum—faculty-signed statement only)  
of student status required)

\$6.00—Single current issue (\$12.00 double issue)

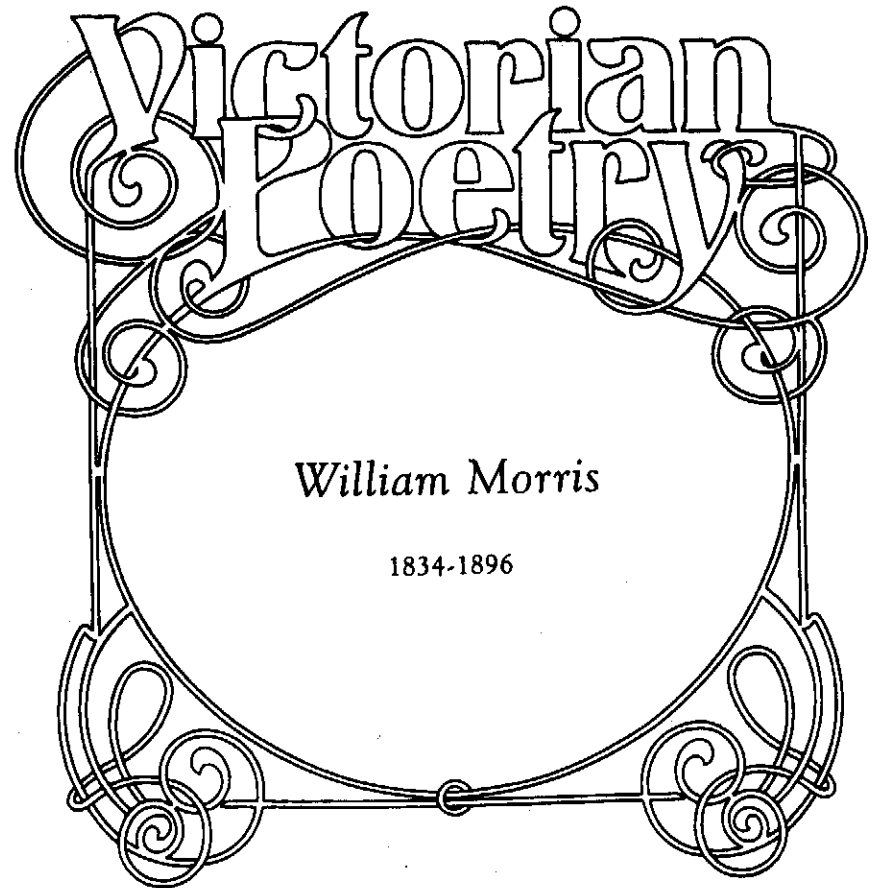
Back issues are available in microform from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Dept. PR., Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106. Back issues through Volume II are available from Kraus Reprint Company, Route 100, Millwood, NY 10546. Back issues from Volume 12 through the current volume are available from the *Victorian Poetry* office, 421 Stansbury Hall, West Virginia University, at \$4.00 per issue (\$7.50 double issue).

Permission to copy any article in whole or part according to the provisions of the United States Copyright Act of October 19, 1976, should be sought from the editor.

## VICTORIAN POETRY

Autumn 1996

*Victorian Poetry* (ISSN 0042-5206) is published four times a year in Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter by West Virginia University, Communications Building, 1 Fine Arts Drive, PO Box 6690, Morgantown, WV 26506-6690. Rates: \$30.00—Institutions, U.S. and Canada (plus \$5 foreign); \$18.00—Individuals, U.S. and Canada (plus \$5 foreign); \$6.00—Student; \$6.00 Single current issue (\$12.00 double issue). Second-class postage paid at Morgantown, WV 26505. POSTMASTER:



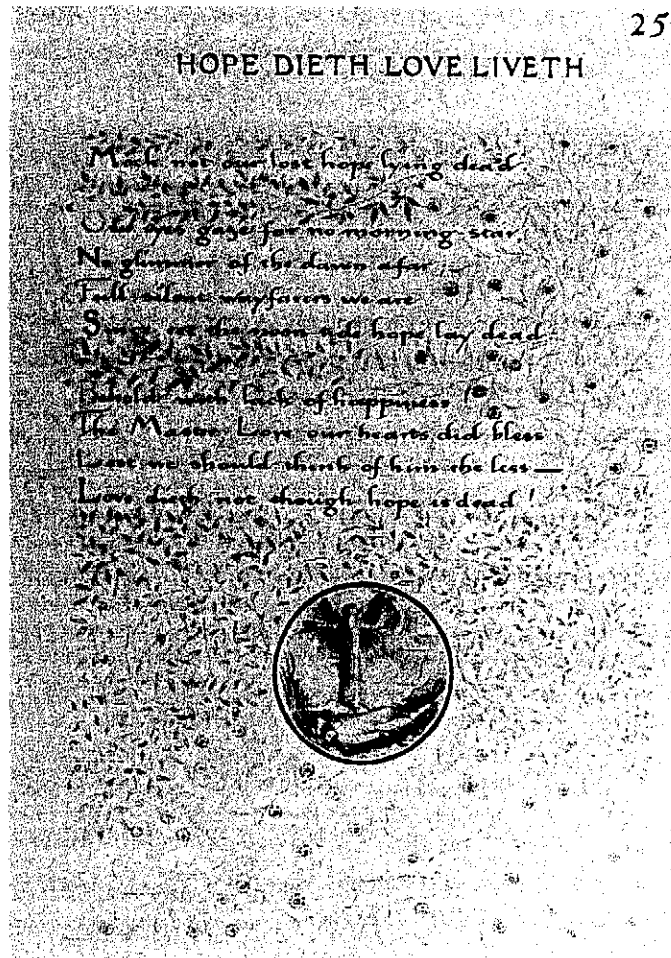
Florence S. Boos  
Guest Editor

VOLUME 34

NUMBER 3

AUTUMN 1996

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY



## Literal and Literary Texts: Morris' "Story of Dorothea"

DAVID LATHAM

WHAT YEARS AGO FIRST ATTRACTED ME TO WILLIAM MORRIS WAS his unusual development as a poet, turning as he did from a lyrical poetry of intense passion, full of unresolvable tensions and vividly jarring metaphors, to a narrative poetry, ostensibly dull, whose muse, according to his friend Swinburne, "drags her robes as she walks. . . . It looks as if he purposely avoided all strenuous emotion or strength of music in thought and word."<sup>1</sup> Northrop Frye once speculated that Gerard Manley Hopkins might have had Morris in mind when Hopkins distinguished two kinds of poetry: the "Parnassian" level of narrative continuity, which any poet can produce by practice and habit, and the deeper "abiding" energy of the contemplative "underthought" of metaphor.<sup>2</sup> Hopkins preferred the unpredictable flashes of the latter that sweep across the Parnassian level.

Morris progressed in the opposite direction, from dramatic flashes to narrative continuity. *The Defence of Guenevere* poems he began with were startling, haunting, metaphorically complex, and rhythmically awkward. These qualities Morris abandoned for the uniformity of his verse romances that emphasize continuity, a narrative surface of clear plotline, and a polished veneer of conventional rhythms. My initial justification of Morris' verse romances arose from my general understanding that the poet had turned to different interests. In *The Earthly Paradise*, Morris is writing about the fragmentation of nineteenth-century society and identity, of unity and paradise, of self-expression and tradition. The gathering of Nordic sailors and Greek settlers results in a mutual exchange of tales from Classical and Gothic mythology that provides a framework for Morris to explore the relation between personal vision and cultural tradition. With this noble premise providing a theoretical context for enjoying the poem, I would read it with an appreciation of its worthy aims. Though changes in taste from lyrical tension to narratological issues have restored interest in the romance, the rational consolation for the intense excitement of the flashes that ignite *The Defence of Guenevere* volume still leaves *The Earthly Paradise* problematic for some of us. It is the first poem I ever fell asleep reading. Even Georgiana Burne-Jones had to confess as well: "I remember, with shame, often falling asleep to the steady rhythm of the reading voice, or biting my fingers and stabbing myself with pins in order to keep awake."<sup>3</sup>

Seeking a better understanding of this transition between Morris' first two books, I recently returned to the earliest tales composed for *The Earthly Paradise*. Among the very first of the twenty-nine extant tales is "The Story of Dorothea." As a transitional poem composed between 1861 and 1865, Morris was eventually to reject it for publication in *The Earthly Paradise*. And yet it is precisely its transitional nature which makes "The Story of Dorothea" as important for an understanding of Morris' poetry as another transitional tale included in *The Earthly Paradise*: "The Lovers of Gudrun." "Dorothea" represses the earlier dramatics of *Guenevere*, just as "Gudrun" anticipates the later saga of *Sigurd*. It thereby offers a key to the unusual development in Morris' poetry. Its neglect by critics is thus perplexing.

Of all of Morris' unpublished manuscripts, "The Story of Dorothea" is the longest and least accessible. Until 1991 only two copies of the poem existed. The first is an autograph manuscript in the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge.<sup>4</sup> The second is a manuscript written by an amanuensis commissioned by Morris, held in the British Library.<sup>5</sup> Nearly a hundred years after Morris' death the poem at last has become more accessible with its publication by Florence Boos in an appendix to her *The Design of William Morris' The Earthly Paradise* (1991).<sup>6</sup>

Why was its publication delayed for so long? May Morris' decision to reject the poem from both *The Collected Works* (1910-15) and the two supplemental *Artist, Writer, Socialist* volumes (1936) remains a mystery when we consider that she included in volume 24 of *The Collected Works* the three other unpublished and less finished tales which her father had rejected from *The Earthly Paradise* ("The Story of Orpheus and Eurydice," "The Wooing of Swanhild," and "The Story of Aristomenes"). Her dismissal of the "Dorothea" manuscript as unpolished and cold in treatment went unchallenged until 1975 when K. L. Goodwin, in the only sustained criticism of the poem thus far, investigated its merit. Goodwin suggested that May Morris may have rejected "Dorothea" because of its cold treatment of the fleshly sisters and sadistic torture, adding perceptively that Morris himself more likely rejected his poem because of Dorothea's fearless acceptance of death, an acceptance incompatible with the fear of death that pervades *The Earthly Paradise* as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

With recollections of Rossetti's jokes about the cupboard full of Morris' manuscripts,<sup>8</sup> of Shaw's envy of Morris' ease in "never blotting a line" when composing,<sup>9</sup> and of Mackail's account of Morris' method of revision as simply discarding an unsatisfactory draft and then starting a new poem,<sup>10</sup> many readers may assume that any manuscript rejected by Morris could be little more than a routine exercise in what was alleged to be his factory-like production of poems. But the two extant manuscripts for "The Story of Dorothea" exemplify the care Morris devoted to his poetry. Evidence that still earlier drafts were composed for "Dorothea" is found in the revision of line 122 of the Fitzwilliam manuscript.

This revision suggests that Morris is transcribing from an earlier draft, since halfway through the line he jumps ahead to copy mistakenly the last half of the next line:

And when he saw her <scarce had power to move> \such a flame of love/  
Shot through him that he scarce had power to move.  
(Fitzwilliam: ll. 122-123)

Other revisions show further kinds of care. The revision of line 658, though similar in form to that of 122, has nothing to do with transcription. Rather it reveals Morris' discomfort with the visual arrangement and/or the emotional relationship of the three sisters:

And sank adown <while round Calliste's neck> \and nothing did she reckon/  
That Dorothea round Calliste's neck. (ll. 658-659)

Here he may be experimenting with a reversal in the order of his rhyming couplet, since "while" requires an alternative clause structure. Compare the revision of line 606, where he opts to break his pentameter in his effort to strike the correct shift from "ill at ease" confusion (l. 598) to sentimental emotion, as the three sisters transform into a round embrace:

<And to each other> \And round/ about they clung sorrowing. (l. 606)

Scrutiny of other such details will attest that there is nothing unpolished about this draft. Indeed, a reading of its subtle complexity reveals an excitement on the "Parnassian" plane equal to the flashes found in Morris' dramatic lyrics.

"The Story of Dorothea" is a subversive work from the very start of the curiously misleading *Argument* that precedes the tale:

The holy maiden Dorothea was slain because of her faith, and as she was passing to her death she was mocked by a certain man; which mock God rebuked in a wonderful way, so that the mocker died as she had done. (Boos, p. 404)

As a summary of the plot or a suggestion of the theme, this pre-text offers but a pretext for a poem that questions rather than ratifies divine retribution. By pitting the tale against the *Argument*, Morris skirts the issue of religious faith, and thereby demonstrably disengages himself still further from such literal discourse. The central focus of the tale is summarily dismissed in the first clause of the *Argument*: "Dorothea was slain because of her faith." The *Argument* instead proceeds to arouse our expectations that mockeries and miracles are the subject of the tale, promising evidence of divine retribution as the miraculous response to mockery: "as she was passing to her death she was mocked by a certain man; which mock God rebuked in a wonderful way, so that the mocker died as she had done." Yet this central focus of the *Argument* is in turn relegated in the tale to the last ninety

lines, culminating abruptly in the final five lines:

Now furthermore the ancient tale doth say  
That this Theophilus in no long time  
Met Dorothea in the happy clime  
For soon he bore the martyr's palm & crown  
Being slain by stoning mid most of the town. (p. 445; ll. 907-911)

The compression of this tail-end raises disturbing questions rather than settling us with answers. The brevity of both the Argument and the conclusion may momentarily suggest that the delivery of the heavenly basket and the subsequent stoning prove the power of Dorothea's faith and of God's vengeance. But the stoning is an elliptical allusion to the conversion of Theophilus. Though the poem dwells on the reality of physical torture and brutal execution, the parallel between Dorothea and Theophilus lies not in the brutality of their deaths, but in the fact that they were both slain for their faith. To be "rebuked in a wonderful way, so that the mocker died as she had done" is to die in the blessed condition of anticipating the eternal flowers of paradise. Are the two martyrs wedded in heaven? Having resisted the crown of the Roman prefect, does Dorothea accept the crown of the martyr, as Theophilus—having arisen from the mockeries feared by Fabricius—now assumes Christ's crown of martyrdom? To what extent does the tail-end wag the tale?

Morris' adaptation of his source further emphasizes the brevity of his conclusion. The life of St. Dorothea is told in Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Sanctorum*, the translation by William Caxton being one of Morris' favorite books. The account of her life was the most controversial of the tales of the saints; its inclusion was an issue debated by the editors of *Acta Sanctorum* who were skeptical of the details of her legend. Subjected to torture each day, Dorothea would emerge in the mornings fully recovered and with all wounds healed, professing her love for her spouse Jesus Christ. Morris leaves no evidence of these miraculous healings in his tale. His treatment instead suggests that the question of Dorothea's sainthood is the very reason he chose it as the subject for a tale. His interest is in the relation between the word and the world, the tale and the truth, turning the story of Dorothea into a poem on the power of art. The prose summary presented in the Argument is hence an intentionally inadequate introduction to the tale. As its inference of divine retribution is relegated to the periphery of the tale, the law of poetic justice is elevated to stand as the central convention:

Although of all the Gods thou fearest none,  
And though thou mockest both at heaven and hell,  
Remember somewhat that the poets tell  
Of right and justice and avenging fate. (pp. 426-427; ll. 497-500)

The opening and closure of the tale complete a full circle around the judicial convention, with the crown cast as its symbol. "In the old days when Rome was flourishing" (as she is no longer now), the crown was worn only by the will of the Emperor of Rome (p. 404; ll. 1-4). By the end of the poem, as the poet's "ancient tale doth say," the crown is worn by the will of the people of God (p. 445; ll. 907-911). The rest of the tale, however, shows this transition to be forced. The misappropriated crown leads to a profusion and confusion of crowns that are emblematic of a lordless world gone awry. The confusion derives from the floral crown of spiritual fulfillment being forsaken for the golden crown of earthly ambitions. While Morris makes appeals to the conventional restoration of the proper crown, he simultaneously undercuts the authority of such laws of poetic justice by relegating them to the forced conventions of art. "As my author in the old tale saith," Dorothea's father learned the truth of God (p. 405; ll. 20-21); "as the old tale saith," her sisters learned the lies of devils (p. 408; ll. 93-94); "the poets tell / Of right and justice" (ll. 499-500); and "furthermore the ancient tale doth say / That this Theophilus in no long time / Met Dorothea in the happy clime" (p. 445; ll. 907-909). Rather than authorizing these references to truth and justice, Morris reduces the credibility of his source as that of an old tale-teller whose claims remain unverified.

As Morris thus undermines the presumption of knowing the truth, he further undermines the abstraction by leaving it unarticulated: "little thing," "which thing," "strange thing" (p. 405; ll. 23, 27, 32). This most inarticulate word serves to describe the epiphany wherein Dorothea's father believes he can distinguish illusion from reality, the morbid metaphor from the uplifting word. Whereas in middle age Dorus had fallen prone to distorting metaphors ("the world began to seem like some vast cage" and "the great gift of life seemed small enow" [ll. 12, 15]), his perspective now changes to embrace more spiritual matters, as he joins the conversions that would leave the once flourishing Rome of "old days" behind for the "happy clime" of celestial eternity (ll. 1, 909). But his rejection of metaphor in favor of the "thing" itself is marked by a shift from the flight of fancy to the repetition of vagaries. As Dorus comes "to hear the truth . . . , through his mind the good thought passed / That, were it true, it were no little thing" [i.e., miracle] that he should thrive (ll. 21-25). "Which thing [i.e., truth] it was God[']s will he should believe . . . all the world can tell, / And from the font he passed with soul washed clean / And wondering at the strange thing [i.e., personality] he had been" (p. 405; ll. 27-32). The double image of the font (l. 31) is consistent with Dorus' rejection of metaphor, as he turns from his own projections to the font of God's word as his savior. In telling the story of Dorothea, then, Morris shows how the choice of one font over another or of one faith over another is really a conversion in taste from one kind of poetry to another. For among such conflicts as those between the word and the metaphor, the floral and the mineral, the spiritual and the physical, the only

conflict resolved in a distinctly hierarchical relationship is that between art and life: the power of art and the fragility of life. The foregrounding of these two truths makes the tale consistent with the mutability and creativity theme of *The Earthly Paradise* as a whole.

The power of art evolves from our need to project illusions that humanize the contradictory nature of the universe. The crown is emblematic of these unresolved contradictions. As the crown imagery progresses from the golden crown to the floral crown, it soars from the realm of earthly consequences to the realm of wishful dreams. With Juvenilian irony Morris describes this alien world gone awry wherein "such a crown" is borne from Dorothea's blossoming beauty (l. 115). Living in a brothel with her sisters, who have sold their virginity for gold, Dorothea tries to hide

her loveliness  
From lustful eyes: and yet did God ordain  
That her great beauty blossomed not in vain,  
Since in the end it bore her such a crown. (p. 409; ll. 113-116)

The crown "it bore her" is the crown offered to her by the Emperor's prefect, who has fallen in love after catching a glimpse of her in the brothel doorway. When the prefect's slave describes the riches that will be hers if she will but share the prefect's crown, she knows her life is doomed:

"Nay, in your gems," she said, "there lies the threat  
As in the olive wreath of old was set  
The grinded sword: leave me and let me be  
For I would weep alone and silently  
The remnant of my life." (p. 418; ll. 304-308)

As she acknowledges the presence of the sword within the wreath, she knows now that she cannot govern her own life by simply choosing the spiritual and rejecting the material. Rather, one cuts through to deny the other. With a prophetic foresight similar to that of another of Morris' entrapped heroines (Jehane of "The Haystack in the Floods" who "saw at once the wretched end, / And, stooping down, tried hard to rend / Her coil" [ll. 40-42] over her eyes as Robert is reassuring her that "Nay, love, 'tis scarcely two to one" [l. 44] for the enemy, and home "is so near"), Dorothea turns to the garden wall and cries as she foresees the end of the story of her life (pp. 416-418; ll. 277-308). When the emissary slave protests, she tells a story wherein she foresees her own execution (as the crown is depicted as a lie-detecting ring):

In a city once there dwelt a King  
Who would be wed, and had a certain ring  
So wrought, that whoso got it on her hand,  
Were she the fairest thing in all the land,  
And seeming perfect, body, soul and limb,  
Nevertheless it would be known to him

If she had sinned: now therefore many an one  
Fair as they were the wise Kings bed did shun:  
At last came one who in most secret wise  
Had wrought her sin, arrayed in royal guise  
But on her finger was there set the ring  
And she began to babble everything  
Spite of herself, and so was led away  
And ended all her life upon that day  
Being burnt with fire according to the law. (p. 419; ll. 327-342)

In response to the threats of torture and death, she contrasts the ephemerality of the earth with the eternity of the afterlife she anticipates. She reduces to dust the braveries of petty affairs conducted in these stone palaces of Roman settlements, as she envisions first the future when "midmost here some yellow lion lies / Unchid of any" on this very site wrung free of all Roman tongues (p. 428; ll. 529-531), and then a still yet more distant future when "no more use is found for moon or sun" (l. 533). The prefect counters Dorothea's vision of eternity with his own of intensity, as he warns her not to be deluded by a dream, but to reconsider her reality "while the next few hours flit."

When Dorothea is returned to her prison cell she does indeed dream, but what she learns from the distinction between appearance and substance is a reality unrecognized by the prefect. Her dream permits her to witness the power of faith: "it seemed / She was a child again, and on her head / Her father set a crown of roses red" (p. 430; ll. 577-579). As she awakens to the misery of the prison walls, she reaches toward her head "As if she thought to find the garland there, / That nothing met except her golden hair" (p. 430; ll. 588-589). She smiles with the faith that her golden hair needs no crown, for she "so soon should behold God[']s face / And all her troubles should have happy end" (p. 431; ll. 593-594).

Fortified by her dream, she conveys the power of her faith to her sisters, who then suffer torture and death for their choice to support rather than convert Dorothea. Faced next with her own torture, she arrives in the judgment hall with her gaze a "little raised," as if set beyond the earth to heaven's "shore / Where dwell the blessed" (pp. 437-438; ll. 749-750). Throughout the full day of torture, the focus of the tale turns to the prefect's internal self-torture over the tortures he has ordered to be inflicted, rather than on Dorothea's own external physical suffering. He is torn between his conscience and his fear of the mockery he would face from his subjects if he were to reveal compassion and mercy. At the end of the long day she stands before him trembling but still resolved with steady eyes and unchanged heart, while he sinks "back in his throne," haggard and pale, with swimming eyes, after ordering her to be slain outside the city gates (p. 439; ll. 777-781; pp. 440-441; ll. 811-815). His brief moment as the central focus of the tale ends abruptly, his

life dispatched summarily as if no longer relevant to the story:

Then mazed and grieved he sank back to his throne  
And soon he gat him back into his home,  
Nor dwelt there long, but journeyed unto Rome  
And there he lived and died in unbelief. (p. 441; ll. 816-818)

Instead the tale now turns tardily to the incident of mockery by the "certain man" who had been promised in the Argument to be the focus of the poem. Theophilus the Protonotary appears at last in—or, more precisely, appears as—line 823 ("Theophilus the Protonotary"). He asks Dorothea to deliver him flowers from her Lord whom he envies as her lover. When she turns her earnest eyes toward him and promises flowers and fruits by sunset, he regrets his mock and pities her madness. After Dorothea is led outside the city gates to be beheaded, Theophilus reaches home where he meets at sunset "a strange and fearful but most lovely sight" (p. 443): an angel dressed like the blue evening sky enfolded with golden stars, his bright rosy feet hovering at the horizon. The beautiful description reads like a set-piece for a Burne-Jones illustration:

There stood an angel clad in raiment bright  
Of lovely blue set thick with stars of gold  
Drawn round the girdle stead in many a fold;  
A green wreath had he on his golden hair  
And in the thickening frosty evening air  
From both his shoulders wondrous wings arose  
With feathers stranger and more fair than those  
The solitary bird is wont to bear  
Over Egyptian deserts, and these were  
Still moving gently, that his naked feet  
Rosy and bright scarce touched the wintry street  
And on his lips a gentle smile he had,  
But calm his face was though so sweet and glad.  
(pp. 443-444; ll. 875-887)

But this heavenly sunset is symbolically crowned by a green wreath on golden hair and extends to Theophilus a golden basket of apples and roses from Dorothea (ll. 888-891). As Theophilus takes the gift he experiences the same epiphany Dorothea had experienced after awakening from a dream in which her father placed a garland of roses upon her head. Theophilus "there-withal did wake / As if from sleep and saw things as they were" (p. 445; ll. 903-904). He is awakened to a spiritual reality by his visionary power to personify the natural order.

The brief conclusion is self-referential rather than dramatic. Its five lines are jarringly abrupt in their denial of the dramatic narrative of the divine rebuke promised in the Argument, making indeed that pre-text a pretext, reducing poetic justice (ll. 907-911) to a rumor that "an ancient

tale doth say" (l. 907) with redundant imprecision:

Theophilus in *no long time*  
Met Dorothea in the happy clime  
For soon he bore the martyr's palm & crown  
Being slain by stoning midmost of the town. (ll. 908-911; my italics)

When the parallels of this passage return us to the comparable dismissal of the prefect Fabricius (ll. 815-819), we find not only the same temporal imprecisions ("soon . . . no long time"), but must notice now that Fabricius "lived and died," that he may have indeed lived long, despite the tale-teller's efforts to compress his life for the sake of establishing the emotionally pleasing cause-and-effect narrative pattern of poetic justice. The example of Dorothea's faith and martyrdom inspires Theophilus to don the same martyr's crown, as the story of each of them is designed to inspire others to follow suit. Its success lies not through a proof of miracles but through the power of poetic vision. By uncovering the seams of the artfully constructed case for Dorothea's sainthood, Morris discovers the artistry of the tale and its power to subsume the truth.

The development of the crown image demonstrates how Morris has constructed his own poem by designing an intricate series of parallels and juxtapositions. Other such image patterns contributing to this design include the flame that beacons and burns, that inspires and distorts; the "walled garden" that encloses childish delights within the cage of life and the "city gates" that are a parodic entrance to the celestial city of "some great lord"; the spatial hill imagery of age, hierarchy, and territorial conquest (with Dorothea signifying the spoils of paradise) and the temporal organic imagery of decay, renewal, and resurrection to the eternal (where Dorothea, amidst the "ever-blooming trees . . . dwelleth evermore," ll. 899-901). All contribute to Morris' study of the relation between the literal faith in the word of God and the literary power of the artist's metaphor.

"The Story of Dorothea" thereby offers insight into Morris' curious progression in the direction opposite to Hopkins' prescription for poetry. Morris' shift to romance is typical of the shift of maturing artists like Shakespeare who are drawn to issues concerning the nature of art that arise from the purely imaginative realm of romance. The revisions of the manuscript itself reveal this shift away from the verisimilitude, physical violence, and psychological analysis that characterize *The Defence of Guenevere* volume, as Morris turns in *The Earthly Paradise* tales to a purer study of the power of the literary text.

The revision of line 338 provides a demonstration of the restraint Morris learned to exercise. The manuscript includes these two dramatic lines for Dorothea's parable of the magical ring which causes sinners to

"babble everything" about their sins:

<But while she stood before the watchful King  
Upon her finger did she set the ring>

The lines offer Morris' own psychological rationale for the mysterious phenomena, an inappropriate intrusion in a parable narrated by his young and spiritual heroine. He thus revised the passage to read:

\But on her finger was there set the ring./

Though passive and less dramatic and concrete in detail, the revised line is a necessary sacrifice. Morris realized that the reference to the watchful eyes of the King would undermine the mysterious power of the ring by suggesting instead that fear of the King's close scrutiny had prompted the sinner's confession. Morris knew when not to attribute his own insight to a character whose personality was so different from his own.

Such examples of subtle restraint may enable us to understand better what Swinburne and Hopkins considered to be a turn from an inspiring to a slackening muse. The same restraint required for sacrificing sophisticated lines for the integrity of the tale must have been applied to sacrifice the sophisticated "Story of Dorothea" for the integrity of the entire *Earthly Paradise*. Morris may have questioned the compatibility of "Dorothea" with the melancholy mood of the other tales. He may have questioned its compatibility with the tale-tellers' demonstrations of how individual mutability is transcended through the communal effort toward creative renewal by rooting personal vision within one's own cultural tradition. That his final revision was the decision to sacrifice the whole of one of his most powerful tales may be the ultimate proof that the poet remained true to his art.

### Notes

- 1 A. C. Swinburne, Letter to D. G. Rossetti, December 10, 1869, *The Swinburne Letters*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1959), 2:68. Rossetti responded with a defense of Morris (December 12, 1869): "So excellent a poet must be allowed his own style in forms of poetry where deliberateness and delay are not absolutely inadmissible" (*Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965], 2:773).
- 2 Northrop Frye, "The Meeting of Past and Future in William Morris," *Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays, 1974-1988*, ed. Robert Denham (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1990), pp. 325-326.
- 3 Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones* (London: Macmillan, 1904), 1:297.

George Eliot's and G. H. Lewes' enthusiasm for *The Earthly Paradise* typified its popular appeal to many Victorians: "We take Morris's poem into the woods with us and read it aloud, greedily looking to see how much *more* there is in store for us. *If ever* you

have an idle afternoon, bestow it on *The Earthly Paradise*" (*The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1955], 4:451, June 27, 1868). Douglas Bush marked its post-Victorian nadir with a return to Swinburne's metaphors, from "a river of romance"—"a broad, clear stream of narrative . . . is hardly ever ruffled . . . by a dramatic moment. . . . Character, incident, description . . . all melt into the even uniformity of tapestry" (p. 306)—to the bedraggled robes: "Morris's poetic conventions and poetic diction may on first acquaintance give real pleasure, especially if one is young and has some fear of intellectual and stylistic subtleties, but they are not for daily wear and in the long run become rather frayed. All eyes are gray, all hair is golden, all bosoms are hidden or half bare, all legs are limbs, all feet are dainty" (*Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry* [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1937], p. 320).

- 4 "The Story of Dorothea," Manuscript: Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, 25F.
- 5 "The Story of Dorothea," Manuscript: British Library, London, BL Add. Ms. 45309.
- 6 Appendix B: "The Story of Dorothea," in Florence Saunders Boos, *The Design of William Morris' The Earthly Paradise* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), pp. 400-445. Page citations are to this edition; line citations are to the Fitzwilliam manuscript.
- 7 K. L. Goodwin, "An Unpublished Tale from *The Earthly Paradise*," *VP* 13 (Fall-Winter 1975): 102.
- 8 *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, ed. May Morris (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936), 1:396.
- 9 *Communism: A Lecture*, Fabian Tract No. 113, ed. G. B. Shaw (London: Fabian Society, 1903), p. 3.
- 10 J. W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris* (London, 1899), 1:52.