

WILLIAM MORRIS

THE COMPLETE BOOK: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE
DEVELOPMENT OF WILLIAM MORRIS'S
AESTHETIC THEORY AND
LITERARY PRACTICE

By

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

William Morris has for many years now been considered a minor figure in Victorian literature. His poetry, which enjoyed immense popularity in the nineteenth century, has become unfashionable, and his prose writings, which have never been popular except with a few poets, seem very widely underestimated in academic circles, even where they are read at all. On the other hand, his fabrics and wall-paper designs have never been more popular, and he is still quite well-known as a political figure, with the result that these aspects have dominated most writing on him since the Second World War, while his literary work has been largely ignored, or only treated by critics in other fields who have not felt themselves qualified to appraise his work in this area on any scale.

This lack of concern for Morris's literary work, and particularly for his prose romances, which have been most unjustly neglected, has come about chiefly through two factors: the changes in taste which have caused twentieth century critics to be chiefly interested in lyric poetry and in the novel, instead of in narrative poetry and in the prose romance; and the resulting ignorance about the conventions of these genres which have led them

to judge Morris's work by inappropriate norms. That Morris's work is relevant to the twentieth century is shown by the new non-academic revival of interest in his prose romances, and it seemed that the time had come when a serious attempt should be made to understand just what Morris was trying to do in his poetry and prose, and how far he succeeded.

This thesis attempts therefore to distinguish a line of development in Morris's aesthetic theory, working from his writings on art and on literature, to analyse that development, and to apply it to his literary work. The thesis thus falls into five parts: a section which deals with critical attitudes to Morris and the break-down of suitable critical terminology for judging his work which has brought about his present low status; two sections setting out Morris's aesthetic theory in design-work and literature; and two sections in which this theory is related to his literary achievements in the earlier and the later work. This means that the thesis considers at least briefly most of Morris's literary production, but main areas of concentration are on the early prose tales, The Earthly Paradise, and the late prose romances. The resulting picture of Morris's theory and practice shows how his thought and art, modified by the needs of his political ideals, developed from his early naïve work in

design and literature towards a much more sophisticated art, which can be read on a number of levels, in which his wide knowledge of myth and legend and his own symbol-system taken from the world of nature blend in equal parts.

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FOREWORD
THE COMPLETE BOOK

William Morris has for many years now been considered a minor figure in Victorian literature. His poetry, which enjoyed immense popularity in the nineteenth century, has become unfashionable, and his prose writings, which have never been very popular except with a few poets, seem very widely underestimated in academic circles, even where they are read at all. On the other hand, his fabrics and wall-paper designs have never been more popular, and he is still well-known as a political figure, with the result that these aspects have dominated most writing on him since the Second World War, while his literary work has been largely ignored, or only treated by critics in other fields who have not, on the whole, dealt with his work in this area on any scale.

This lack of concern for Morris's literary work, and particularly for his prose romances, has come about through two main factors: the changes in taste which have caused twentieth century critics to be chiefly interested in lyric poetry and the novel instead of narrative poetry and the prose romance; and the resulting ignorance about the conventions of these genres which have led them to

judge Morris's work by inappropriate norms. That Morris's work is relevant to the twentieth century is shown by the new non-academic revival of interest in his prose romances, and it therefore seemed that the time had come when a serious attempt should be made to see what Morris was trying to do in his poetry and prose, and how far he succeeded.

This thesis will attempt to distinguish a line of development in Morris's aesthetic theory, working from his writings on art and on literature, to analyse that development, and to apply it to his literary work. It will be divided into five parts: a section which deals with critical attitudes to Morris and the break-down of suitable critical terminology for judging his work which has brought about his present low status; two sections setting out Morris's aesthetic as derived chiefly from his design theory and his literary criticism; and two sections in which his theory is related to his literary achievements. This means that the thesis will be dealing briefly with most of Morris's literary production, but the main areas of concentration will be the early prose tales, The Earthly Paradise, and the late prose romances. The resulting picture of Morris's theory and practice is intended to show how his thought and art, modified by the needs of his political ideals, developed from his early naïve work in

design and literature towards a much more sophisticated art, which can be read on various levels, in which his wide knowledge of myth and legend and his own symbol-system taken from the world of nature blend in equal parts.

In order to understand this development, it is necessary first to place Morris's literary work in the artistic¹ context in which it was written. In a sense, literature was only a secondary activity for him; his main work was in the pattern-design which provided his livelihood throughout his life and which was always his first love. Moreover, it was out of this pattern-design that his aesthetic, which came to comprehend both social and literary theory as well as design theory, grew. As we shall be concentrating in this thesis to a considerable extent on tracing the origins of this aesthetic, it is important to start out with some definition of the three basic concepts which underlie all Morris's work, in whatever field, and which make it difficult for purely literary criticism to cope with it adequately. These basic concepts are the two intermedial artifacts with which almost all his aesthetic

¹In a thesis which deals with art and the arts, there is bound to be some tendency towards confusion of terminology, as there is in Morris's own work. I have tried to use "the arts" as a general term for all creative activity, and to distinguish painting, costume-designing, etc. by the term "the visual arts". "Art" will usually be synonymous with "the visual arts", but "a work of art" may refer to a piece of music as well as to a painting, and "artist" may signify anyone who works in the creative arts, not just a painter.

theory is concerned, the "complete building" and the "complete book", and the term which Morris uses to embrace both these complex artifacts, "Architecture".

The building and the book, then, are Morris's two main concerns, both in his theory and his practice, and they are closely linked together. He once said that "the only work of art which surpasses a complete Mediaeval book is a complete Mediaeval building".² The proposition sounds simple enough, though many of us, accustomed as we are to the post-Renaissance reverence for the "fine arts", sculpture and painting, might quarrel with its apparent significance. But Morris was not just making a plain statement of the supremacy, for him, of the Mediaeval period. He was also propounding an artistic theory which, although it has its roots in Ruskinian mediaevalism, is really quite different from it, and different also from our own narrow concepts of the building and the book. Take away the word "Mediaeval" from the above statement and you will see what I mean: "the only work of art which surpasses a complete book is a complete building". This is a much more complicated proposition, and one which demands further investigation, for it embodies in little much of Morris's teaching on art. For, and this is at the core of what may be called his purely artistic theory, as distinct from his theories about the re-

²"Woodcuts of Gothic Books", May Morris, William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist (Oxford, 1936), I,

relationship between art and labour which he called the moral side of art, Morris claimed that from architecture, from the desire to build and adorn the house, all the other arts may be derived.³

Architecture, for Morris, was not only the source of all the visual arts, but embraced under its roof-tree, so to speak, all the non-visual arts also, and was therefore in some sense the over-lord of these too. Thus the art of building, far from being inferior to the "fine arts" in its capability of artistic expression, as has sometimes been suggested, is in fact inclusive of them, and of all the other modes of art:

A true architectural work rather is a building duly provided with all necessary furniture, decorated with all due ornament, according to the use, quality, and dignity of the building, from mere mouldings or abstract lines, to the great epical works of sculpture and painting, which, except as decorations of the nobler forms of such buildings, cannot be produced at all. So looked on, a work of architecture is a harmonious co-operative work of art, inclusive

321. These volumes will in future be referred to as May Morris I and II.

³As in "The Beauty of Life", Collected Works of William Morris (London, 1910-15), XXII, 73: "I have spoken of the popular arts, but they might all be summed up in that one word Architecture; they are all parts of that great whole, and the art of house-building begins it all: if we did not know how to dye or to weave; if we had neither gold, nor silver, nor silk: and no pigments to paint with, but half-a-dozen ochres and umbers, we might yet frame a worthy art that would lead to everything, if we had but timber, stone, and lime, and a few cutting tools to make these common things not only shelter us from wind and weather, but also express the thoughts and aspirations that stir in us". These volumes will henceforward be referred to as

of all the serious arts, all those which are not engaged in the production of mere toys, or of ephemeral prettinesses.⁴

When Morris used the term "a complete building", therefore, he meant not only the architecture in the sense in which we use the term, but the whole range of man's activity in the arts as it is brought together under the roof of the house. In other words, architecture in his own wider sense of the term is the interpretation of the whole building as a single unit, including the complete contents as well as the outer shell, in "this union of the arts, mutually helpful and harmoniously subordinate one to another which I have learned to think of as Architecture".⁵

In the Middle Ages, this complete building or unit of architecture would usually have been represented by the church: in the first place because the church in those days was likely to contain the greatest variety of arts as well

Works I-XXIV.

⁴"Gothic Architecture", May Morris I, 266.

Morris includes sculpture and painting, usually taken to be separable works of art, under architecture and asserts that they cannot, properly speaking, be produced at all except under these conditions. Out of this springs Morris's theoretical dislike of painting and sculpture taken or indeed created as isolated works of art -- though in practice of course there were many individual works that he did like -- when divorced from its natural context in architecture. See below Part II, Chapter 2 for a full discussion of the relationship between fine and applied art and the architectural whole.

⁵"The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization", Works XXII, 119.

as the the best examples of them;⁶ and in the second place because the church expressed the highest thoughts and aspiration of mediaeval man, a factor which was very important for Morris, for whom art was never "for art's sake", but always the expression of thought.⁷ But though the church was the usual example, it was not necessarily the only one. The Guild-Hall is also a possible mediaeval alternative, though it would be unlikely to be quite so richly furnished, and this at its best would be closer to

⁶ With reference to the plain interiors of churches as we have them now see "Gothic Architecture", May Morris I, 278-9: "And let me note in passing that the necessarily ordinary conception of a Gothic interior as being a colourless whitey-grey place dependent on nothing but the architectural forms, is about as far from the fact as the corresponding idea of a Greek temple standing in all the chastity of white marble. We must remember, on the contrary, that both buildings were clad, and that the noblest part of their raiment was their share of a great epic, a story appealing to the hearts and minds of men. And in the Gothic building especially in the half century we now have before us, every part of it, walls, windows, floor, was all looked on as space for the representation of incidents of the great story of mankind, as it had presented itself to the minds of men then living; and this space was used with the greatest frankness of prodigality, and one may fairly say that wherever a picture could be painted there it was painted".

Thus the story had its place in the whole building, though admittedly the story as painted and not as written.

⁷ See above footnote 9 and also "The Lesser Arts", Works XXII and passim in his lectures. It was the meaninglessness, thoughtlessness, of most modern art, especially applied art, that disturbed Morris most about it, next to its ugliness.

Morris's own secular ideal of the appropriately adorned communal hall in the co-operative society of the future:⁸ "that other kind of building, which I think, under some name or other, whether you call it Church or Hall of Reason, or what not, will always be needed, the building in which people meet to forget their own transient personal and family troubles in aspirations for their fellows and the days to come, and which to a certain extent make up to town-dwellers for their loss of field, and river, and mountain".⁹ Nor, moreover, must the ordinary mediaeval house be omitted, for though it might not display the same variety of costly goods as the church, yet, in its own way, it formed a unit of art equally complete and appropriate.¹⁰

⁸ See the description of the hall in News from Nowhere, Works XVI, 100-1.

⁹ "The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization", Works XXII, 114.

¹⁰ Morris recognized that the mediaeval peasant had less comfortable furniture, less luxury and quantity of possessions in general than the Victorian working-man, but maintained that he was really better off because all that he had was "properly made and properly ornamented, that is . . . beautiful". From "The Gothic Revival I" in The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris, henceforward simply to be referred to as Unpublished Lectures, edited and compiled by Eugene C. Lemire (Detroit, 1969), p. 65. Speaking of the beautiful things in the Victoria and Albert Museum, he says, "The Art of the People", Works XXII, 40: "Now, consider, I pray you, what these wonderful works are, and how they were made; and indeed, it is neither in extravagance or without due meaning that I use the word 'wonderful' in speaking of them. Well, these things are just the common household

There was, however, one exception to Morris's inclusion of all the arts under one art, and that is literature proper; for though the art of story-telling is, as we have seen, present in the house beautiful, the written word is not, save in the separable form of the book.¹¹ Thus there is a second category of intermedial art distinguishable here, which, like architecture itself, also includes many different kinds of art in the same harmonious subordination. This category is called by Morris the "complete Mediaeval book". This complete book is not regarded by him as quite so vital to man's overall health as are architecture and the music-drama. Indeed, in the future state of society envisaged in Socialism Morris says that "in our belief, Music

goods of those past days, and that is one reason why they are so few and so carefully treasured. They were common things in their own day, used without fear of breaking or spoling -- no rarities then -- and yet we have called them 'wonderful'".

¹¹Morris, as we saw, did not consider painting and sculpture to be valid outside the context of the building, though these are usually considered separable arts. The book, however, is really separable, since although it adorns a room its proportions are not designed with the room in view, as is the case with all the other contents of the house.

and Architecture, each in its widest sense, will form the most serious occupation of the greatest number of people";¹² literature there presumably being included under Music, and the complete book not appearing at all as an individual art unit. A similar opinion about man's future occupations is given in "The Ideal Book", a year earlier than Socialism. In this case, however, Morris does explain the place of the complete book in his hierarchy, claiming that, if not quite of first importance, nevertheless the "picture book . . . gives us such endless pleasure, and is so intimately connected beside with the other absolutely necessary art of imaginative literature that it must remain one of the very worthiest things towards the production of which reasonable men should strive".¹³

"So intimately connected beside with the other absolutely necessary art of imaginative literature": this is the crux of the matter. For the complete book, in its truest and fullest form, includes not only the physical characteristics of the book: the paper, calligraphy or typography, illuminations, whether of patterns of grotesques or pictures in the painted manuscript or woodcuts and other forms of illustration in the printed book, and the colouring of these, all interpenetrating, each a fit setting for each

¹²William Morris and Belfort Bax, Socialism; Its Growth and Outcome (London, 1893), p. 310.

¹³May Morris I, 318.

in the whole complex art unit;¹⁴ but also the story itself as revealed and reflected in these things. As Morris says of the mutual subordination of story and ornament in mediaeval art:

All organic art, all art that is genuinely growing, opposed to rhetorical, retrospective or academical art, art which has no real growth in it, has two qualities in common: the epical and the ornamental; its two functions are the telling of a story and the adornment of a space or tangible object . . . Mediaeval art, the result of a long unbroken series of tradition, is pre-eminent for its grasp of these two functions, which, indeed, interpenetrate then more than in any other period. Not only is all its special art obviously and simply beautiful as ornament, but its ornament also is vivified with forcible meaning, so that neither in one or the other does the life ever flag, or the sensuous pleasure of the eye ever lack. You have not got to say, Now you have your story, how are you going to embellish it? Nor, Now you have made your beauty, what are you going to do with it? For here are the two together, inseparably a part of each other.¹⁵

And in the same way ornament and story in the complete book

¹⁴In "The Ideal Book" and "Woodcuts of Gothic Books", May Morris I, Morris goes through a complete list of these physical characteristics of the book one by one, in each case insisting on the best available product to complement the whole, and beginning the list in "Woodcuts", p. 331, with the magic formula he so often used: "Well, how is this beauty to be obtained? It must be by the harmonious co-operation of the craftsmen and artists who produce the book". Thus in all senses the book is to be "architectural" in the same way as the complete building is.

¹⁵"Woodcuts of Gothic Books", ibid., p. 320.

are to be "inseparably a part of each other".

At the time when Morris began to formulate this vision, he had only the mediaeval and early modern work to look to as exemplars, for in his view no modern work was worthy of being considered on this level as a work of art.¹⁶ Thus his earliest attempt at a "big picture-book", the projected edition of The Earthly Paradise illustrated with woodcuts by Burne-Jones, was never carried out, not so much because of the cost as because there was no suitable modern type-face. Even though it was designed in the early eighteen-seventies, before Morris came to have any specialized knowledge of or interest in the art of printing, he already knew enough to realize that "in the experimental sheets the woodcuts looked all wrong with the best type then available".¹⁷ The same was true also of the projected

¹⁶ Morris expresses his disgust at modern type and printing in "The Ideal Book", *May Morris I*, 313 and 315.

¹⁷ *May Morris* gives an account of this edition in Works III. The "best type available" was that later used, unadorned by woodcuts, for The Roots of the Mountains (1889). The first editions of both The Earthly Paradise (1868-70) and Love is Enough (1872) were, in the event, printed in ordinary spindly modern type on unpleasantly shiny paper, and, despite attempts at variation through the use of italic type in Love is Enough, they are not especially pleasing books. Indeed, in the opinion of Paul Thompson, The Work of William Morris (London, 1967), p. 139, they may be considered inferior in some respects to the editions of The Defence of Guenevere (1858) and The Life and Death of Jason (1867) published by Bell and Daldy before Morris ever became interested in printing at all: "His lack of interest

Love is Enough, or, the Freeing of Pharamond: A Modern
Morality, a trial sheet of which, reproduced in Paul
Thompson's The Work of William Morris, reveals the dis-
crepancy between the depth of tone in type and woodcuts,
which gives a glaring effect to the illustrations, and
certainly does not produce harmony on the page.¹⁸

in typography and undecorated printing at this time is in-
dicated by the fact that, although his early publications,
The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, Guenevere and Jason had
all been well printed by the Chiswick Press, his books
published by F. S. Ellis after 1868 were printed in an
inferior style with inferior presswork by John Stangeways.
There is no sign that Morris resisted this change". I am
inclined to disagree with Thompson, however, as to the
inferiority of the later editions of Morris's works, despite
the immense prestige that the name Chiswick Press carries.
The dark green binding of Love is Enough, with its delicate
gold blocking round the title, makes the first edition of
this work handsome and unusual outwardly at least, while
the type used in the printing of The Earthly Paradise
certainly conforms more closely to the square shapes later
favoured by Morris than did that of Jason.

¹⁸ Illustration facing p. 144. The same woodcuts
from Love is Enough side by side with the text in Works IX,
xxxii-xxxv, show how much modern type has improved in
strength of effect. The blackness of page which Morris
really admired can, of course, only be produced by the use
of the hand-press, since mechanical methods do not allow
enough time for the thickness and greater area of ink pro-
duced by heavy types to dry properly. Thus machine type
will always appear what Morris called "spindly" in relation
to hand-press type. The Kelmscott Press Love is Enough
(1897) uses one of the illustrations, a full-page picture
of the union of the lovers, designed by Burne-Jones for the
projected early edition, and the thin lines of this,
especially when compared with the new woodcut at the front
of the book designed especially for the Kelmscott Press
edition, show how Burne-Jones was attempting to match the
"light" page which even the best nineteenth century type
produced, though it was too heavy to match it even so. The

Because of this inadequacy in modern type and printing methods, these early attempts at book-making had to be abandoned, and this meant that Morris tended to turn back to the manuscript as the only way in which he could get his complete effect. In this field at least, he could produce the whole work himself, unhindered by the vagaries of those outside his control. Thus in the eighties¹⁹ he produced a whole series of manuscripts, some illuminated, some written almost without ornament. May Morris describes them in her introductions to Works IX and XI, claiming for the Virgil a place "even in its unfinished condition, among the notable manuscripts of the world".²⁰ Despite this excursion into mediaevalizing, however, Morris did not intend his ideal of the complete book to stop

illustration looks, of course, pale and ineffective against the richness of the Gothic Troy type, though a comparison with the frontispiece of the Kelmscott Press News from Nowhere (1892) suggest that it would be just about the right weight to match up with Golden type, Morris's Roman fount.

¹⁹ He also seems to have done a little decorating in the eighties-fifties, but none of this has survived. Ibid., p. xix.

²⁰ Ibid., p. xxi. This manuscript is also described in A Pre-Raphaelite Aeneid of Virgil . . . by A. C. Brinton (privately printed, Los Angeles, 1934).

at an analysis of a past style, whether of manuscripts or incunabula, which he also collected. As with his concept of a complete building, architecture in its widest sense, the mediaeval book was also to be translated into modern terms, to become "a book which is a visible work of art",²¹ but of the art of the present day, even though in both cases Morris used somewhat old-fashioned methods by which to achieve the ideal. Indeed, much of the lecture "The Ideal Book" is devoted to explaining how modern printers could improve their technique and performance without going to the expensive and generally impractical lengths of hand-printing. As he said, "whatever the subject matter of the book may be, and however bare it may be of decoration, it can still be a work of art, if the type be good and attention be paid to its general arrangement".²²

Thus when Morris took the concept of the "complete Mediaeval book" and attempted to realize it in the nineteenth century, he was not mediaevalizing or trying to forge sham-antique work, but trying to reproduce a

²¹ Ibid., p. 330.

²² "The Ideal Book", May Morris I, 310. This was what Morris was aiming at in The House of the Wolfings and The Roots of the Mountains, which were commercially printed under Morris's supervision before the formation of the Kelmscott Press, and, within the limits of commercial printing, designed by him.

bibliographical aesthetic of the book as a union of many arts, an aesthetic which had long fallen into disuse but which was not therefore necessarily obsolete. He had a genuine vision before him of what books could and should be, of "books which are beautiful as books; books in which type, paper, wood-cuts, and the due arrangement of all these are to be considered, and which are so treated as to produce a harmonious whole, something which will give a person with a sense of beauty real pleasure whenever and wherever the book is opened, even before he begins to look closely at the illustrations. . . ." ²³ And as Morris saw it, there was no reason, save perhaps cost, why such an ideal should not be realized in modern times also. So the Kelmscott Press was founded, and the prose romances were written for it, and whether or not Morris actually succeeded in producing that complete nineteenth century book, he certainly bequeathed his vision of it to the twentieth century. ²⁴

²³ "Woodcuts of Gothic Books", ibid., p. 330.

²⁴ As Ruari McLean notes in Modern Book Design (British Council Pamphlet, London, 1951), p. 8: "The Kelmscott Press Chaucer made possible the Penguin Shakespeare: the world needs both".

PART I

A MYTH AND ITS MAKERS, OR, HOW A LITERARY CRITIC
SHOULD APPROACH A JACK OF ALL TRADES

CHAPTER 1

THE SOURCES OF MORRIS'S POPULAR REPUTATION, PAST AND PRESENT

The first problem that confronts the would-be student of William Morris is the mass of writing that has already been done on the subject, far more than Morris's present literary critical position as a somewhat secondary Victorian poet would alone justify -- would justify, that is, if Morris had indeed been nothing but a poet, whereas actually he was both more and less than that: more, because he worked successfully in so many other media besides poetry, and less because with all those other activities he could scarcely be expected to be a major poet too.¹ However,

¹Morris himself realized that such diversity could be damaging, but could not prevent himself from using all the modes of expression open to him. As he explained in a letter to William Allingham in 1854, quoted in The Life of William Morris by J. W. Mackail (London, 1899, reprinted in World's Classics, 1950, which is the edition used here), I, 113, when he was trying, under Rossetti's influence to become a painter: "I believe my poetry and painting prevented each other from doing much good for a long while, and now I think I could do better in either, but I can't write, for then I shan't paint". The further inference that the two might be expected to continue to injure each other is obvious, but so also is the inference, from the later development of his career, that Morris could not do otherwise than attempt to both write and paint. Even if Morris had just stuck to poetry, however, it is questionable whether he would have been a better poet, for he would have had to force himself into the role of specialist, the "nothing-but" as he contemptuously called it (see

besides being a poet, Morris was, as we have already seen, an artist and designer in a number of fields, and a theorist of the arts also. As well as this, he was an innovative prose writer, a prolific translator from Greek, Latin, Icelandic, Old English and Mediaeval French, a lecturer on art and social theory, and a political writer and journalist too. It is no wonder that his doctor said, when Morris was dying at the comparatively early age of sixty-three: "I consider the case is this: the disease is simply being William Morris, and having done more work than most ten men".²

All this activity in so many fields means that not only is there a great deal of writing on Morris, but also that its scope is very varied indeed. Each of the fields in which he worked is studied by specialists, so that books on Morris might be being written in four or five university departments simultaneously, and all of these specialists

H. H. Sparling, The Kelmscott Press and William Morris, Master Craftsman [London, 1924], p. 42), and thereby have cut himself off not only from the full range of artistic expression open to him, but also have become more limited in his poetry because a part of the source of his inspiration, the visual arts, would have been denied to him. In fact to have limited himself in this way would probably have led to his producing nothing at all, instead of to his grand and unique attempt to re-integrate all the crafts of which he was master under one intermedial architectural whole.

²Quoted in Mackail II, 352.

have their own terminologies and points of view. In addition, there has also been a less scholarly interest in Morris, for he was a "personality", the sort of man around whom legends tend to collect, and this is a factor, over and above serious critical interest in his work, which has ensured his continued popularity as biographical subject-matter.

Apart from the usual quota of contemporary reviews, and the then unusual distinction of becoming the subject of a Ph.D. thesis in his own life-time,³ most of the writing on Morris, in whatever field, falls into the twenty or so years following his death, the normal period of maximum critical interest in a contemporary author. However, unlike most of his fellows, Morris never really suffered the eclipse of fame, temporary or otherwise, which is to be expected after this first interest has died down and before the critical revaluation of a generation or so later. Thus while the major concentration of books on Morris dates from

³Die Quellen der neun ersten Erzählungen von William Morris' Dichtung The Earthly Paradise (Erlangen, 1890), by Julius Riegel. Morris was pleased by this tribute, but did not take it very seriously, and indeed seems in fact not to have ever read some of the tales there claimed as his sources. He said it "taught him 'a great deal about his stories he had not known before'", Works III, xviii n.

about 1896 to 1926,⁴ there has continued to be a steady trickle of books, articles and theses up till the present time, when re-examination of the later Victorians is again causing that flow to increase. All this adds up to a considerable quantity of secondary material, though fortunately not all of it is valuable for the literary critic.

In addition to the writing on Morris, there has been since 1950 a William Morris museum in the house where he spent part of his childhood,⁵ and since 1953 the William Morris Society with a regular journal and programme of lectures.⁶ His last house, Kelmscott Manor in Oxfordshire, has also been partially preserved as a museum, though extensive restoration has been necessary, and non-movable

⁴For example, in the "Appendix" to the works of Morris in the British Museum Catalogue (1963), forty-eight books and pamphlets on Morris are from the thirty years following his death, most from the first ten years of this period, and thirty-three are post-1926, many of them from 1934, the centenary of his birth.

⁵The William Morris Gallery, Water House, Walthamstow, London. Efforts had been made since the foundation of the Walthamstow Antiquarian Society in 1914 to purchase Water House for a Morris Museum, and it was actually acquired in 1934 together with a considerable collection of Morris material though it was not officially opened until 1950. The museum publishes a Quarterly Bulletin.

⁶The William Morris Society was privately constituted in 1953, and made public in 1955. It organizes visits, exhibitions and lectures, and publishes The Journal of the William Morris Society.

decoration such as wallpaper and paint-work is now no longer original.⁷ It seems that Kelmscott House, too, will shortly be opened to the public, and it can already be visited by private arrangement with the William Morris Society and the present tenant. This house will be of particular interest, both as Morris's last London house and the home of the Kelmscott Press, and as the former house of George MacDonald.

There are a number of reasons for the continued interest in Morris which all this shows. Initially of course, his work as a designer and craftsman ensured that he would not be forgotten. Quite apart from its artistic merit, it had and has a considerable popular appeal, and his firm of decorators, Morris and Company, in fact only closed down in 1940, when the general shortage of raw materials in the war made this sort of art workmanship no longer viable. For some years after this, his designs were

⁷Morris lived at Kelmscott Manor from 1871 until his death, when his family bought the property, his daughter May remaining there until her own death in 1939. After some legal confusion, it eventually then passed into the hands of the Society of Antiquaries, who have converted part of it into a private house so that it can be let at an economic rent. The remaining older part, the part most closely associated with Morris who had his own rooms on that side, has been restored as a museum and is open once a month in the summer, or by private appointment. See "Kelmscott Manor Restored" by Edgard Penning-Rowell, Country Life CXLII (1967). The Red House also still contains some of its original furniture, and may be visited by appointment with the owners.

unavailable, but thirty-two of his own wallpapers and fabrics,⁸ as well as others from his workshop are at present in production in the "Morris Collection" put out by Sanderson's, an English firm famous for classic fabric and wallpaper designs, who own the original wallpaper blocks.⁹ John Lewis, the English department-store chain, have also begun to re-issue some more fabrics since they recently acquired some blocks. Neither of these firms is appealing primarily to the popular fad which is re-discovering Victoriana: they have kept Morris papers and fabrics

⁸This figure is from Paul Thompson, The Work of William Morris (London, 1967), p. 93, but the number is now greatly increased, though some of the so-called Morris fabrics at present available are travesties of his work. However most of these designs have not been in continuous production. In 1960, Peter Floud found only two designs regularly available though he wrote that: "It is just this timeless quality (of Morris's best papers) which makes one confident that sooner or later some enterprising manufacturer will decide to put a selection of Morris designs back into regular production", from "The Wallpaper Designs of William Morris", The Penrose Annual: A Review of the Graphic Arts, LIV (1960), 41 and 45.

⁹Morris and Co. continued to sell Morris designs until their voluntary liquidation in 1940. Sanderson's had taken over the blocks when they bought out the original owners and hand-printers, Jeffrey and Co. of Islington, in 1930. John Lewis's fabric blocks were acquired in a recent take-over of a Carlisle firm of fabric printers and dyers.

available because they have never become dated. As a recent critic, Paul Thompson, has said of the Morris designs:

Yet his patterns, because they are never responses to fashion, could sometimes hold their appeal for far longer than the work of his contemporaries. . . . His designs have proved adaptable to an extraordinary variety of furnishing fashions. The explanation is not that they in any way anticipate the modern style but on the contrary, unlike the historically more significant and sometimes very striking designs of his contemporaries, the best Morris papers have a classic, timeless independence.¹⁰

And Morris's name also became a household word through the term "Morris chair", which is still in popular use in Canada though it seems to have be relegated to a technical term in England.¹¹

¹⁰Paul Thompson, p. 93. One might add that Morris papers were always very expensive, and might therefore be expected to be adaptable. "The proper course, he [Morris] argued, was to choose a fine design, spend the extra money required for hand block-printing with good colours on a stout paper, and then retain it for a life-time -- a logic which is certainly supported by such examples as the papers he put up in a Norman Shaw house in Queen's Gate in 1882, which are still in excellent condition 78 years later", Peter Floud, "The Wallpaper Designs of William Morris", p. 42.

¹¹This was a type of arm-chair with an adjustable back designed for Morris and Co. in 1866, though probably not by Morris himself. Paul Thompson, p. 73, claims that the prototype for it was discovered by Warrington Taylor, the firm's manager at that time.

The classic quality of his design-work, then, kept Morris's name from being forgotten by a public which by now had ceased to read his poetry, while at the same time art critics continued to be interested in the whys and wherefores of that popularity. Writers like Nikolaus Pevsner described his influence on modernism through the Bauhaus, whose originators took Morris's writings on art, if not his actual art-work, as their starting-point.¹² Morris was, of course, also an inspiration to the Arts and Crafts movement, which still survives in the modern provision of craft evening-classes at a nominal fee in England,¹³ and in the general

¹²Pioneers of Modern Design from William Morris to Walter Gropius (London, 1960). This was originally published under a slightly different title in 1936, but since 1960 in Penguin, which testifies to its continued popularity. "Gropius regards himself as a follower of Ruskin and Morris . . . Morris laid the foundation of the modern style; with Gropius its character was ultimately determined", p. 39. Morris's own designs do not look as if they had the germ of modernism in them, but the following little prophecy of the future shows that he knew what was ahead: "As to ornamental art (so called), I can, under our present conditions, looking forward from out of the farrago of rubbish with which we are now surrounded, chiefly see possible negative virtues in the externals of our household goods; can see them never shabby, pretentious, or ungenerous, natural and reasonable always; beautiful also, but more because they are natural and reasonable than because we have set about to make them beautiful . . . it may be in rather a Spartan way at first; from that time onward we shall have art enough, and shall have become so decent and reasonable, that every household will have become a quiet, daily, unadvertised Health Exhibition", "Textile Fabrics", Works XXII, 294-5.

¹³The most recent book on Morris at the present time, William Morris: Wallpapers and Designs, edited by Andrew Melvin (London: Academy Art Editions, 1971), is

esteem for hand-made objects there. Ruari McLean has shown his influence on modern book design -- for instance, Stanley Morison, former designer for the Cambridge University Press and later for the Monotype Corporation, whose types are now used for most machine-printing, got his original inspiration from his study of the work of Morris at the Kelmscott Press.¹⁴ Others have treated him not so much from the point of view of influence and tradition, but as an artist in his own right, and their colourfully illustrated magazine articles, often in non-specialist periodicals, and "coffee-table books" have helped to keep non-academic interest in his work alive.¹⁵

billed as "A collection of wallpapers, chintzes and graphics by the influential founder of the Arts and Crafts movement". Morris was also one of those who gave evidence at the hearings of the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction in 1882, which became the instrument of setting up art schools in all major towns in England and Wales. See May Morris I, 205-25.

¹⁴ See Modern Book Design, and also Modern Book Design from William Morris to the Present Day (London, 1958).

¹⁵ See for example J. S. Gibson, "Artistic Houses", Studio, I (September 1893); G. H. Crow, "William Morris, Designer", The Studio Special Winter No. (1934); and A. R. Dufty, "William Morris's Holiday Home", The Connoisseur (December 1968). Illustrated editions which were vehicles for the illustrations rather than for Morris, but which indicate his continued popularity as a poet to some extent, were also produced, e.g. The Life and Death of Jason: A Metrical Romance, decorated by Maxwell Armfield (London, 1916), valuable now because Armfield is undergoing a revival, or Guenevere: Two Poems, The Defence of Guenevere and King Arthur's Tomb (1858) with eight decorations by D. G. Rossetti, and a foreword by Gordon Bottomley (London, 1930).

Another factor in the continued interest in Morris has been his political commitment. He played an important part in the beginnings of English socialism, and News from Nowhere and A Dream of John Ball have continued to be read as socialist textbooks,¹⁶ quite apart from their literary merit. Moreover, as with the art critics, interest at a popular level has not prevented politicians and political theorists from arguing over Morris's body, so to speak, each group wishing to claim him as the grand old man of their own particular set of theories.¹⁷ The best recent

¹⁶ A recent paperback, Three Works by William Morris, edited by A. L. Morton (London, 1968), contains these two prose works and also Morris's socialist epic poem, The Pilgrims of Hope. The book is deliberately aimed at a political audience, and the introduction speaks of Morris's "three socialist masterpieces" and of Morris himself as a "propagandist for scientific socialism", and examines the socialist content of the works rather than their literary merit. See also Speeches in Commemoration of William Morris (Walthamstow, 1934) by John Drinkwater, Holbrook Jackson and J. H. Laski. Laski in 1934 saw News from Nowhere and John Ball alongside the Bible in the cottages of unemployed miners in S. Wales and Cumberland, the only books they owned, p. 21. Similarly G. D. H. Cole in "William Morris" in Revaluations: Studies in Biography, ed. Lascelles Ambercrombie et al. (Oxford, 1931) relates: "News from Nowhere made me a socialist, and I have never had cause to regret either the fact or the manner of my conversion", p. 133.

¹⁷ All the left, including Fabians, Distributists, Guild Socialists and the Labour Party, I.L.P., etc., as well as the Fascists on the extreme right, have claimed Morris as their forerunner at one time or another, unjustifiably. Only the Marxists, to whom he really belongs, have been reluctant to accept Morris, ever since Engels condemned him as an unpractical dreamer not worth taking seriously. See

book on Morris, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary by E. P. Thompson (London, 1955)¹⁸ is concerned chiefly with untangling the errors about Morris which these groups have perpetrated, and explaining what his political theories really were.

These other activities, while adding considerably to the volume of Morris-scholarship, have also helped to keep Morris more in the public eye than would have been likely had he been a poet only, and have even increased his readership. People interested in art or politics, the ordinary reader of Country Life, anyone furnishing a house, have been aware of his name, and probably of the fact that he was a poet, even if they have never read any of his

R. P. Arnot, William Morris: A Vindication (London, 1934), for further discussion about this. The resulting myths about Morris's political activities will be examined below.

¹⁸This otherwise fine book is vitiated by its rather uninformed attempt to discuss the Romantics and Pre-Raphaelites as background to Morris's thought, and its sometimes naïvely expressed political outlook is likely to alienate the unconvinced, e.g. by such dangerously non-critical statements as: "This impoverished sentimentalising [by Rossetti, etc.] was based, in the last analysis, upon a refusal (or inability) really to look the facts of capitalist exploitation and class conflict in the face", p. 83. True, perhaps, but at that period, how many did or could be expected to do that? And, true or not, is such a statement relevant to the value of Rossetti's work as art?

poetry. In these areas, Morris has retained popular appeal as well as critical esteem. With his writing, however, apart from his political works, it is a different matter. It has, of course, had its share of critical comment, and indeed its critical reputation probably stands very nearly as high as ever it did, but it is for different reasons now, and among a different section of readers.

To the Victorian reading-public, Morris was pre-eminently the poet of The Life and Death of Jason and The Earthly Paradise. They ignored or disliked his more difficult work, but these two works became popular not just with the sort of people who usually read poetry, but also with those who might not normally be expected to care for such things. A contemporary critic notes with some surprise that even scientists and business men enjoyed reading The Earthly Paradise.¹⁹ Later, when Morris became a political agitator and street-speaker, his authorship of these poems seems several times to have saved him from arrest, the police having orders to leave him alone, when his working-class companions were imprisoned and his middle-

¹⁹"He is, we have noticed, appreciated by those, who as a rule, do not care to read any poetry. To our personal knowledge, political economists and scientific men to whom Shelley is a mystery and Tennyson a vexation of spirit, read 'The Earthly Paradise' with admiration," Westminster Review, XCV (1871), 581.

class companions fined for the same offences.²⁰ No-one could quite believe that the author of The Earthly Paradise had really meant to break the law.²¹

Just as his readers ignored the unpleasant fact of Morris's political activities, so they were able on the

²⁰Cf. E. P. Thompson, p. 472: "Morris knew that his presence embarrassed the police and made them a little hesitant in their attentions. Consequently he made a point of taking the platform in the danger spots himself". In one famous case in socialist history, Morris was fined 1/- by the Magistrates Court, while his two working-class companions were sent up to the Middlesex Quarter Sessions as being more serious cases. "But Morris, the magistrate said, 'as a gentleman would at once see, when it was pointed out to him, that such meetings were a nuisance, and . . . would desist from taking part in them.' He thought a fine would meet the case -- 1s! In the event both Williams and Mainwaring were fined £20, plus a surety for good behaviour of £50; and Williams, as in his previous case, refused to pay and was imprisoned for two months. The difference in treatment of the 'gentleman' and the workers was as plain as a pikestaff", ibid., p. 474.

²¹In one instance the judge actually asked, "I suppose you did not intend to do this?" Quoted in Mackail II, 155. Even Queen Victoria and her ministers were unable to believe in Morris's seditious acts, for when Tennyson died and Morris was deep in revolutionary socialism, he was still "sounded" as to whether he would accept the laureateship if offered -- and this despite the fact that Victoria had rejected the obvious choice, the by now quite unrevolutionary Swinburne, meekly subject to Watts-Dunton, and almost certain to have accepted, on the grounds that his early poems were immoral and he had wanted to assassinate the Russian Emperor, My Diaries by Wilfred Scawen Blunt (London, 1919-20), pp. 140-3.

whole to avoid noticing the uncomfortable undertones which are present in much of his poetry, especially in The Earthly Paradise, his most popular work, which is patently obsessed with the despair of love and the fear of death, though some element of comfort has crept in by the end of the poem. The reviewer of The Earthly Paradise in the Athenaeum pointed out this obsession with death in no uncertain terms, but he was apparently the only contemporary critic to be disturbed by it:

Still his narrative power is really extraordinary; and for those who love to sit rapt in fair dreams of the by-gone, his book would be a treasure-house, a palace of delights, but for one thing which spoils all -- an ominous sound which is continually breaking in like the toll of a knell -- death! death! death!

The dread of death hanging over all the author's thoughts, a dark and inevitable horror appears everywhere throughout the book, in season and out of season. . . .²²

²²Athenaeum (December 17, 1870), p. 796. The closest any other critics came to perceiving this was in the New Monthly Magazine, CXLIX (1871), 282-3, whose reviewer sensed a vague unease: "No poet can altogether escape from his own age; and Mr. Morris has not escaped the sorrowful perplexities of this time by leaving out all consideration of, or allusion to, those problems that produce them; for their result remains, in an irrepressible note of sadness, through his entire writings. Even in his very verse there is a tune of gentle complaining".

Most were content with that extraordinary narrative power and looked no further, and the book's popularity, moreover, whatever it says about the minds of its readers, proves that they did not hear that knell either, but continued to think that they had found a real "palace of delights".²³

These same delights are now no longer valid, for the qualities which made Jason and The Earthly Paradise popular with the Victorians, the presentation of classical and other myths in forms suitable for family reading,²⁴ the

²³One might add here what Arthur Symons says of Balzac in Studies in Prose and Verse (London, 1904), p. 5: "A hundred years is a long time in which to be misunderstood with admiration". It is a little over a hundred years since The Earthly Paradise first appeared. Morris is still admired to-day, but he is no better understood.

²⁴Philip Henderson, William Morris, His Life, Work and Friends (London, 1967), p. 88: "For the Victorian paterfamilias, The Earthly Paradise was ideal for family reading, being 'adapted', according to The Saturday Review of 30 May, 1969, 'for conveying to our wives and daughters a refined, although not diluted version of those wonderful creations of Greek fancy, which the rougher sex alone is permitted to imbibe at first hand'". (The reference to The Saturday Review, however, appears to be incorrect.) The Pall Mall Gazette, VI (1867), 348, also throws an interesting light on poetic propriety in its review of The Life and Death of Jason, where Morris is roundly scolded for putting too much emphasis on "soft limbs and white" ("Mr. Morris can never look at a lady without mentally undressing her"), and Medea is considered "immodest" for knocking unannounced at Jason's chamber door in the middle of the night. Other reviewers seem not to have objected to this.

comfortable expansiveness of Morris's story-telling methods, which contemporary reviewers compared with Chaucer and Spenser,²⁵ even the very concept of the long story-poem, are not virtues that recommend themselves to the poetry-reader of to-day. Nor have most modern critics taken up the strictures of The Earthly Paradise made by the reviewer in The Athenaeum, which, it might seem, would make the poem more interesting to a modern reader than a real "palace of delights" would be.²⁶ Indeed Paul Thompson in The Work of William Morris comments that probably many wives listening to The Earthly Paradise read aloud by complacent husbands must have been in the same position as Lady Burne-Jones, who on one occasion had secretly to stab herself with pins in order to keep awake when Morris was

²⁵Edinburgh Review, CXXXIII (January 1871), 266: "Chaucer himself might regard with complacency the work of his disciple throughout this poem. . . ." Contemporary Review, VI (1868), 632: "There has hardly been such another story-teller since old Dan Chaucer, at whose well our poet has, of course, deeply drunk". Pall Mall Gazette, VII (1868), 2204: "Mr. Morris's work is remarkable for 'This same invention' [a quotation from Keats on narrative verse], the especial gift of the story-teller, in virtue of which he lives with the persons of his fable, and leads them through a labyrinth of circumstances conceived with unforced ingenuity and realized with pictorial distinctness. For vividness and luxuriance in this kind Mr. Morris may be compared with Spenser rather than with any other English poet. . . ." Morris, it may be noted, did not think Chaucer had influenced his style much at all: "It (the apparent likeness) only comes of our both using the narrative method", Mackail I, 203-4. The Defence of Guenevere, Morris thought derived most from Browning and Keats.

²⁶An exception is E. P. Thompson, p. 154: "In

reading it to her,²⁷ and he then ironically suggests this poem as suitable reading for a long train journey, though he adds that the reader is unlikely to remember what any of the stories were about when he gets off at the other end.

The Earthly Paradise, in fact, has lost its appeal for reader and critic alike, but Morris's other poems, once ignored by the public and disliked by most reviewers, have now come into some favour, at least critically. Morris, while popular in his own time for some poems, never had the critical prestige which their contemporaries awarded to Tennyson and Browning,²⁸ and when he tried, as in Love Is Enough, or The Freeing of Pharamond: A Modern Morality

truth, the underlying note of The Earthly Paradise is neither sweet nor careless: it is a note of despair".

²⁷Paul Thompson, p. 171. Philip Henderson also quotes this story as evidence of the boring nature of the poem, p. 78. Quite a contrast is the contemporary comment in The Edinburgh Review, CXXXII (January 1871), 264: "We are carried away with the art of the bard whose strains drive away all sleep from the eyes of his hearers". However, to judge by the cartoon of Morris reading aloud to a sleeping Edward Burne-Jones, reprinted in May Morris I, 372, this was something of a family joke.

²⁸Cf. The New Monthly Magazine CXLIX (1871), 286: "To some of our contemporaries we owe larger debts than to Mr. Morris, and we must yet prefer the authors of 'The Ring and the Book' and 'In Memoriam' for our constant companions and teachers. Most of us will still value more highly stronger meat than this, which is comparatively simple food. Nevertheless, we can heartily thank Mr. Morris that he has in such abundance provided an elevated enjoyment, a

(1872), to write serious experimental poetry, it tended to be either dismissed as a falling-off from the standards of The Earthly Paradise or actually attacked by the reviewers,²⁹ and it was certainly not read by his popular audience. Even now, few take it seriously, though its formal affinities to the plays of Yeats and Fiona MacLeod, among others, suggest that this masque should be considered at least as

recreation fitted for the leisure hours of men of taste". I do not, of course, quarrel with the estimate of Browning and Tennyson, but with the contrast that is made between them as teachers and Morris as a mere entertainer. Morris himself, in a late letter, comments that Browning's popularity with the Middle Class was not entirely due to his poetic abilities, and suggests that Browning could only be regarded as a "teacher" by those of rather limited intelligence: "'The versified prose' of the latter part of the article & Wordsworth there anent raised a grin in me: also the hint about the Browning Society. You know, though Browning was a poet, he had not a non- but an anti- poetical side to him: and this is why he has achieved a popularity among the 'educated middle-classes', who though they are badly educated are probably over-educated for their intellect", Letter to Theodore Watts-Dunton (1892), in Philip Henderson, The Letters of William Morris to his Family and Friends (London, 1950), pp. 349-50. I do not think this is entirely a case of sour grapes.

²⁹ Again, however, we must except the perceptive reviewer, or reviewers, of The Athenaeum, who had high praise for Morris's revival of the alliterative mode, with "improvements", though he did not think the story of Love Is Enough worthy of the verse. He adds, rather interestingly in view of Morris's later work: "In this metre we may repeat Homer would, for the first time, become truly naturalized on English soil. In this metre some of the grand but fragmentary Norse tales might, for the first time, unfold their eagle plumage to the full, or the Arthurian legends at last attain to complete development", Athenaeum (November 1872), p. 658.

having historical importance.³⁰ However, Morris's earliest volume, The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems, which was so neglected at the time of its publication that a reviewer of Jason nine years later was able to comment, "No-one . . . acquainted with Mr. Morris's previous volume will be surprised to find that he has again chosen a classical subject",³¹ is now very highly regarded, and even Sigurd the Volsung is showing signs of increased popularity. In 1967, Paul Thompson, who is, after all, an architectural rather than a literary critic, seemed to feel rather isolated in his admiration for Sigurd,³² but the recent Faber paperback, Selected Poems of William Morris, supports Thompson's judgment by giving a number of selections from this poem, though it has little praise for it in the introduction.³³

³⁰For example, Morris's influence on Yeats, which was briefly discussed in the Foreword. That Yeats and Morris had discussed the drama is clear from Yeats's essay "The Theatre", Essays and Introductions (London, 1961), p. 168.

³¹Quoted in Mackail I, 190.

³²Paul Thompson, p. xv: "I found my principal difference from the many able criticisms to be a special sympathy for Sigurd the Volsung" Thompson's brief examination of Sigurd is the best part of his otherwise undistinguished chapter on Morris's poetry.

³³Selected Poems of William Morris, edited by Geoffrey Grigson (London, 1969). Sigurd is dismissed in a line or two in the introduction: "His lines elongate across the page into a tom-tom rhythm which deadens the readers attention (true notably of the epic Story of Sigurd the Volsung, in spite of its intermittent power", p. 17.

The fact of there being a paperback of Morris's poetry available at all is, of course, an indication of increased interest in his work.³⁴

Strangest of all the turns of literary prestige, however, is the new place Morris has gained recently as a popular fantasy writer. His prose romances, which have never been much admired except by W. B. Yeats,³⁵ which were attacked, sometimes viciously, by critics in their own day,³⁶ and which have certainly never had any popular readership, since they were mostly only printed in a form too expensive for all but the comparatively wealthy, are now being reprinted for the first time in fifty years in the

³⁴An interesting example of continued blindness to Morris's work is evident in the Penguin Book of Socialist Verse (Harmondsworth, 1968), in which Morris is only represented by two of his not very interesting "Chants for Socialists", while his fine poem, The Pilgrims of Hope (1885-6), which attempts an epic treatment of the Paris Commune of 1870, and includes some of the best of his later writing, goes unmentioned; and this despite the fact that it must be the only Socialist epic poem in existence in English, which has any pretensions to literary merit.

³⁵Yeats in "The Trembling of the Veil", Autobiographies (London, 1926), p. 141, writes of "those prose romances that became after his death so great a joy that they were the only books I was ever to read slowly that I might not come too quickly to the end". Although Yeats is inaccurate in some details his essay, "The Happiest of the Poets", Essays and Introductions, remains one of the best studies of the prose romances ever written. F. A. C. Wilson in Yeats's Iconography (London, 1960) has a valuable chapter on the influence of these stories on Yeats's own vision.

³⁶A fair example of mixed reaction is the review of

Ballantyne Adult Fantasy paperback series.³⁷ Undoubtedly the thanks for the new popular readership that this promises must go to J. R. R. Tolkien, whose own fantasy books, The Hobbit (1937) and The Lord of the Rings (1954-5), in many ways so close to Morris's own in their use of Old Norse and Celtic material as their starting-point, have opened the way to an appreciation of earlier fantasy literature, like that of George MacDonald and Lord Dunsany, whose books are also available in the Ballantyne series, as well as ^{those} of Morris. But Tolkien is only the final outward manifestation of an undercurrent of popular feeling, which has long been turning away from the outworn tradition of so-called realism in the modern novel towards detective and science fiction,³⁸ and now at last is re-discovering

The Water of the Wondrous Isles (1897) in The Academy (October 1897), especially pp. 341-2.

³⁷The Wood Beyond the World (New York, 1969; London, 1971), The Well at the World's End (New York, 1970) and The Water of the Wondrous Isles (London, 1972) all with introductions by Lin Carter, who is the overall editor of the series, are already available, and Ballantyne are intending to publish a further collection of the short early prose romances which Morris wrote for the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine in 1856.

³⁸Yeats explains this phenomenon in "The Body of the Father Christian Rosencrux", Essays and Introductions, pp. 196-7, but he was premature in assuming that "the age of criticism" and of social realism would give up without a fight. Many artists followed him, but criticism and the popular imagination did not. Perhaps now that the latter has

the other "great tradition" of romance.³⁹

Unfortunately few "modernist" critics have as yet realised this change in taste, or the change in critical standards which it implies. As long ago as 1939, in Rehabilitations and Other Essays, C. S. Lewis attempted to initiate the rehabilitation of Morris by pointing out that he was only being undervalued because he did not happen to fit the critical preconceptions of "what we may now, perhaps, begin to call Georgian anti-romanticism":

It has been said that if you tell ten people you are reading Thomas Aquinas, nine will reply with something about angels dancing on the point of a needle. The saw is already out of date and Thomism in the ascendant; but it is worth remembering as a reminder of the misleading labels which great writers bear during the periods of their obscurity, and also of the sudden changes of fashion which strip those labels off. In spite of some excellent critics, William Morris is still commonly among the labelled. A mention of him in many literary circles still produces a torrent of objections which have been learned by heart -- he wrote Wardour Street, he was a victim to false medievalism, his poetry is the poetry of escape, his stories are mere tapestries... . Yet as the

been awakened, we may hope that criticism will follow, though indeed there are some critics who are already of the elect.

³⁹ Oliver Elton, in his lecture "Poetic Romancers after 1850", (Wharton Lecture on English Poetry), Proceedings of the British Academy, V (London, 1914), points out that before the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century the romance had flourished in England, but that the obsession with realism of subsequent periods had tended to obscure the fact that much of the best prose work of the nineteenth century was also in the romance genre. My use, therefore, of the term the "other 'great tradition' of romance" is a deliberate attempt to re-assert the importance of an alternative tradition of prose fiction side by side with the novel.

lovers of Morris now are, the lovers of Donne once were, and not so very long ago. It is possible that a critical revolution may yet embarrass these scattered and inoffensive readers with the discovery that what they regard as a private, perhaps a shame-faced, indulgence has all along been a gratifying proof of their penetration and 'contemporaneity'. The thing is feasible because even the sternest theories of literature cannot permanently suppress an author who is so obstinately pleasurable. It is certain that the common cries against Morris, where they are not mere ignorance, are based on a priori dogmatisms that will go down at a touch. . . .⁴⁰

Unfortunately, as far as Morris-criticism to-day goes at any rate, anti-romanticism is still in the ascendant, and even the most recent books on Morris are still judging his prose romances by a standard of realism which is simply not applicable to them, and by which they are, of course, found wanting.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Rehabilitations and Other Essays (London, 1939), pp. 37-8.

⁴¹ E.g. Paul Thompson, pp. 158-9: "To Yeats the prose romances had more meaning than they are likely to have for most modern readers . . . the shallowness of character, the frequent use of magic, and the general feeling of purposelessness makes the longer stories almost unreadable. The House of the Wolfings, in which the vacuous narrative and silly rambling speeches are alternated with unsettling sections in verse is the worst of all . . . mere regrettable eccentricities. . . ." Philip Henderson is more circumspect, perhaps because he was more aware of changes in taste, and, though he mentions the names of a number of romances in passing in the text, he manages to avoid saying anything at all about them. His footnotes give him away, however: "Indeed the late prose romances recall Sir Walter Raleigh's description of their author: 'a hale old party, with a skipper's beard and a loud voice, but I cannot get rid of the impression that there was a strain of the schoolgirl

in his soul. A little, just a little, silly, I think'". And to prove the silliness, Henderson quotes the first sentence of The Water of the Wondrous Isles. On the other hand, Lin Carter, an enthusiast for fantasy writing, in his introduction to the Ballantyne edition, calls this work one of Morris's "three major fantastic novels". See Henderson, p. 378, note 1 to Chapter 14, and Carter, p. xiv.

CHAPTER 2

THE PRESENT STATE OF MORRIS CRITICISM

It is scarcely surprising that Morris critics do not know how to handle the prose romances, for, despite the continued interest in his work, Morris criticism in general is still in a rather confused and rudimentary state. Most of the early writing on him was essentially biographical, and much of it uncritically so. Indeed Paul Thompson describes it as "little better than aesthetic hagiography, assuming his pre-eminence as a pioneer of design and embellishing the assumption with anecdotes".¹ Apart, therefore, from a few exceptions, reading most early criticism involves more pain than profit. Pre-eminent among these exceptions is, of course, The Life of William Morris (London, 1899) by J. W. Mackail, the son-in-law of Morris's closest friends, Sir Edward and Lady Burne-Jones, who commissioned the book. This weighty and valuable, if sometimes misleading, work is still the major biography of Morris. Other exceptions are Aymer Vallance's William Morris: His Art, His Writings and His Public Life (London, 1897), and The Art of William Morris (London, 1897), which is

¹Paul Thompson, p. 83.

particularly valuable for Morris's designs, and Arthur Compton Rickett's William Morris, Poet, Craftsman, Social Reformer: A Study in Personality (London, 1913), which is interesting in that it has a whole section on the prose romances.

This state of affairs meant that modern criticism has had to begin by criticising the older criticism in order to reach even a preliminary understanding of Morris's work. Modern writers have therefore often been concerned more with clearing away the debris of misconceptions about Morris's theories, and even about his life and character, than with any constructive analysis of his achievements. Of the five major books published on Morris in the last twenty years, not one is a critical work in the constructive sense, though all are interesting and valuable in other respects. Paul Thompson's The Work of William Morris (London, 1967) is self-avowedly a general introduction to Morris,² "a very adequate survey" as Philip Henderson calls it,³ but by no

²". . . While two notable biographies exist by J. W. Mackail and (more recently) by E. P. Thompson, both are very long, and none of the shorter biographies is satisfactory. There is no brief introduction to his work and ideas which takes account of all the important research of the last few years -- research which has greatly altered the evaluation of Morris made by Mackail. This book is an attempt to meet that need", p. xv.

³Preface (unpaginated). Henderson's is rather faint praise, and I would put Thompson's achievement higher. Though

means the sort of in-depth study Morris deserves. Ray Watkinson's William Morris as Designer (London, 1967) is chiefly a picture-book, though with some interesting things to say about the designs. The remaining three are also deliberate attempts to correct largely biographical, but also theoretical, errors on the part of earlier writers. Of these, E. P. Thompson in William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary (London, 1955) and R. Page Arnot in William Morris: the Man and the Myth (London, 1964) are concerned chiefly with political errors, defending Morris from the white-washing of his Marxism which earlier anti-socialist biographical writers had indulged in,⁴ Thompson's fine work being in part inspired by a fiery little pamphlet of

most of what he says is summarised from other books and articles, he is the first person to have made any attempt to collect all of Morris together in one place. He is least successful in his literary criticism, though when he thinks for himself even here, as in his pages on Sigurd, he can be interesting.

⁴Arnot is quite blunt about the inaccuracy of earlier writing: "For, more than any other socialist leader of the nineteenth century, Morris has been subjected to that 'canonisation' of which Lenin set forth the stigmata:

During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes have invariably meted out to them relentless persecution and received their teaching with the most savage hostility, most furious hatred and ruthless campaign of slanders. After their death, however, attempts are usually made to turn them into harmless saints, canonising them, as it were, and investing their name with a

Arnot's, William Morris: A Vindication (London, 1934), the request for reprinting of which also led to Arnot's book. The remaining work, Philip Henderson's William Morris: His Life, Work and Friends (London, 1967), is biography pure and simple, but again with the object of supplementing and correcting the "demonstrably untrue" impression of Morris give by Mackail's Life.⁵

certain halo, by way of 'consolation' to the oppressed classes, and with the object of duping them, while at the same time emasculating and vulgarising the real essence of their revolutionary theories and blunting their revolutionary edge.

This halo-casting process set in early with William Morris, grew with each year after his death, until it reached a climax in the hundredth year after his birth. Then, in March, 1934, these words of Lenin were proved to apply faithfully. For this Englishman's centenary celebrations were turned into an orgy of 'canonisation'; books poured forth 'in his honour'; newspaper articles were written in dozens; and this 'great Victorian' (did they ever read what Morris wrote of Queen Victoria?) was hoisted up to his niche as a 'harmless saint'. Thereafter this false effigy was set up as an object of worship", pp. 9-10. Thompson is quieter, but his drift is the same: "J. W. Mackail's Life of William Morris, published over fifty years ago, is likely to remain the standard year by year narrative of the main events in Morris's life. But many new sources have become available since Mackail wrote his book, and, moreover, his account has serious defects. First, his close connection with the family and intimate friends of Morris inhibited frankness in certain matters. Second, Mackail's dislike of Morris's revolutionary convictions resulted in a totally inadequate treatment of the political activities which absorbed Morris's whole energy in the years of his full maturity", p. 7. (My italics.)

⁵ Preface (unpaginated). Henderson chiefly supplements Mackail on the intimate details of Morris's life, which Thompson also mentions, but adds also "But it still remains to see the man himself, and the men and women who surround him, in a modern perspective". I would myself

All of these books have followed, while criticising, the pattern of earlier work on Morris: biography, albeit in this case supposedly corrected biography, plus a brief run-down of the best-known aspects of his work.⁶ Not one even attempts to make a detailed critical examination of his writing. Why is this? -- Mere error on the part of earlier writers, while needing to be cleared away, would not demand all their critical energies. The title of W. P. Arnot's book gives us part of the answer, "the man and the myth". It is not just an accumulation of inaccuracies, but an active myth which modern critics are still trying to correct, and because the myth represents what people want to believe about Morris, it is harder to combat, for people are often reluctant to give up their myths even when they are shown to be false.⁷ The reason for so much biographical emphasis in

however consider it a misleading sensationalist introduction to Morris's life and work, and am not all that happy about its recent re-issue as a Penguin Biography.

⁶In some cases briefer than others. Philip Henderson barely distinguishes Sigurd the Volsung from the translation of The Volsunga Saga, and does not even mention some of the prose romances by name, let alone commenting on them. Arnot is only interested in the political side of Morris.

⁷A case of myth-obstinacy over Morris occurred early in 1972, when Morris was described in a BBC Television fiction series as the father of modern parliamentary socialism. A viewer wrote to The Radio Times to point out that this was incorrect, as Morris, as a revolutionary Marxist, was very much against "gas-and-water socialism" (general

modern books now also becomes clearer, when we realise that most older biographies of Morris are about the "false effigy" rather than about the man.

This false picture of Morris is not, however, entirely due to the "halo-casting process" described by Arnot. Some of the cause lay in Morris's own character, for he was not only a versatile artist, but also a great personality, the sort of man whose personal magnetism inspired passionate admiration in his friends and followers, so that when they came to write about him they tended to idealise him further both as man and artist. In this idealising process also, they usually under-emphasised as much as possible whatever views or actions of their hero they themselves did not like in the total picture of the man -- as Mackail, for instance, plays down Morris's socialist activities.⁸ Where these omissions or alterations

name for all palliative measures to relieve the lot of the working-class so that they will remain content with their subordinate position, which is what parliamentary socialism boils down to). The programme-writer replied that he preferred to believe the book his programme researcher had read on Morris, rather than an obviously biased viewer.

⁸ An anonymous review published in The Observer (November 6, 1949), says this of Mackail: "Mackail, according to Shaw, regarded Morris's Socialism 'as a deplorable aberration and even in my presence was unable to quite conceal his opinion of me as Morris's most undesirable associate. From his point of view Morris took to Socialism as Poe took to drink'", quoted in E. P. Thompson, p. 886. Mrs. Morris and Sir Edward and Lady Burne-Jones were also hostile to socialism, and therefore very unlikely to have

are obvious, this does not matter,⁹ but if, like Mackail, the idealiser's method of presentation is sufficiently sophisticated, then his Morris is likely to become the Morris people believe in, and later biographers using him as a primary source, as is often done with Mackail's Life,¹⁰ may develop a portrait of Morris which is still further from the actual man.¹¹ The result of this idealisation has

wished to correct Mackail on this point.

⁹There is an amusing instance in J. Bruce Glasier's curious chapter "Socialism and Religion" in his William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement (London, 1921), a very misleading book in general. Morris was quite indifferent to religion, but Glasier, "himself deep in the swamp of religiosity" (Arnot, p. 14), when faced with Morris's plain statement, "But so far as I can discover from logical thinking, I am what is called bluntly an Atheist", flounders about trying to find some atom of doubt or uncertainty which might leave him a hope of his hero's ultimate salvation, and almost manages to leave us with a picture of Morris as a deeply pious man: "The fact that he did not choose to speak about these themes, that he did not feel he was likely to derive any satisfaction from the discussion of them, may as reasonably be interpreted as an indication of the deep regard in which he held them, as of mere indifference towards them", p. 169.

¹⁰For instance, Philip Henderson quotes almost verbatim from Mackail in places, particularly in dealing with Morris's early life, e.g. paragraph two on page 9 compared with Mackail I, 27. Often he does not credit his borrowings, as shown in note 53 below.

¹¹Of course one must not discount also the simple effect of man's own character affecting what he sees in others, even without the addition of an element of idealisation. George Bernard Shaw's Morris -- "as he has drawn further and further away from the hurlyburly of our personal contacts into the impersonal perspective of history he

been a Morris-myth, which still clouds critical reaction even now, and which has led various people or groups of people, often political, but also sometimes, as in the case of W. B. Yeats, literary, to claim Morris as their particular forerunner and prophet, even when his ideas really have only the most tenuous connection with theirs.

This Morris-myth has three aspects, which roughly correspond to his three main activities, art, politics and literature. Firstly, there is the exaggerated estimate of his work in the visual arts, created initially by relatives and friends, such as May Morris, his daughter,¹² and

towers greater and greater above the horizon beneath which his best-advertised contemporaries have disappeared" -- is as different as possible from Sir Walter Raleigh's silly old man with "a strain of the schoolgirl in his soul"; and both are different again from William Allingham's down-to-earth picture: "I like Morris much. He is plain-spoken and emphatic, often boisterously, without an atom of irritating matter". See Shaw's "Morris As I Knew Him", which forms the introduction to May Morris II, xl; Philip Henderson, p. 378 for Raleigh's remark; and H. Allingham and D. Radford, eds., William Allingham: A Diary (London, 1907), p. 139.

¹²May Morris adored her father, though her sister was his favourite. She worked under him as head of the Firm's embroidery department, and accompanied him to his Socialist meetings where she was often the only woman present, and finally, after his death, she devoted the rest of her life to his memory. She edited the twenty-four volume Collected Works of William Morris (London, 1910-15), each volume containing a critical and biographical introduction, and also two supplementary volumes, William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist (Oxford, 1936), also with critical introductions. Her admiration for her father tended to be filial rather than critical, and her assignments of dates and even of the designs themselves are not always

J. W. Mackail, who, it will be recalled, was the son-in-law of Sir Edward and Lady Burne-Jones.¹³ Their naturally somewhat partisan judgments were taken up later by critics who did not know enough about Victorian design to distinguish Morris's particular contribution, and so again over-estimated his importance as an originator. Such sweeping statements as Nikolaus Pevsner's analysis of Morris's position:

accurate. Paul Thompson, p. 83, describes her introductions as "the rather unreliable contribution of May Morris".

¹³Burne-Jones was Morris's closest friend from University days onwards, and Lady Burne-Jones was probably his most intimate female friend. In fact it is possible that at one time she and Morris were lovers. She gave Mackail access to private letters which they afterwards destroyed (which lends credence to this interpretation), but she also supervised his work rather closely. In the Preface to the first edition, Mackail wrote: "This biography was undertaken by me at the special request of Sir Edward Burne-Jones To Lady Burne-Jones, whose share in the help given me has not been less than that of anyone I have named, this is not the place where I can fully express my gratitude", I, xxi-xxii. However, he also wrote somewhat ruefully to Aglaia Coronio, another friend of Morris, "Of course my difficulties over the work itself were great, especially in the constant need for what is called 'tact', which is a quality unpleasantly near untruthfulness often; and especially I feel that my account of all those stormy years of The Earthly Paradise time and the time following it must be excessively flat owing to the amount of tact that had to be exercised right and left", from an unpublished letter of J. W. Mackail to Mrs. Coronio, 12th May, 1899, partially quoted in Philip Henderson, p. 22. Apart from the above-mentioned supervision of his work, it must always be remembered that Mackail was a classicist and not an art or even literary critic, so that his judgments on Morris's work are not always very expert.

When his impressionable nature began to react on buildings, fine art, and industrial art, almost all contemporary buildings which surrounded him, as a youth in London and as a student at Oxford, and practically all industrial art was crude, vulgar, and overloaded with ornament. . . . But, when, in 1857, he had to furnish his first studio in London, the thought struck him that before one can settle down to paint elevating pictures, one must be able to live in congenial surroundings, must have a decent house, and decent chairs and tables. Nothing was obtainable that could possibly satisfy him.¹⁴

could still be made as late as 1960.¹⁵ In earlier writing on Morris it is a commonplace, for his pre-eminence in the field of Victorian design was automatically and uncritically assumed. It is only very recently that experts in the

¹⁴Pioneers of Modern Design, pp. 20 and 22. The idea that Morris could not even get suitable chairs and tables made for him is taken directly from Mackail I, 116, as is the estimate of contemporary decorative art: "Ugliness and vulgarity reigned in them unchecked". This view is shown to be unjustified in "A Calendar of English Furnishing Textiles 1775-1905", Architectural Review (August 1956) by Peter Floud. The sort of superbly ugly Victorian furniture with which we are familiar from catalogues of the Great Exhibition was never really used by anyone. They were mostly tours-de-force especially produced by firms to show the maximum versatility of their processes, what they could do if given the opportunity.

¹⁵Pevsner actually first made this statement in the first edition of this work in 1936, but he specifically states in the 1960 edition: "I have corrected a few errors. . . . This is all that seemed to me to be necessary", p. 18.

decorative arts, such as Peter Floud,¹⁶ and, to a lesser extent, though more accessibly, Paul Thompson and Ray Watkinson, have been able to correct the balance. They show that, far from being innovative in the sense that they anticipate modern designs, Morris's patterns are in fact often very close in spirit to those of his contemporaries, and tended to be admired for their conservatism and classic qualities,¹⁷ rather than as an avant garde taste.

¹⁶ Floud has a number of valuable articles on Morris and related topics. See note 14 above and also "Dating Morris Patterns", Architectural Review (July, 1959), and "English Chintz: The Influence of William Morris", CIBA Review (1961), among others.

¹⁷ As Peter Floud points out in "The Wallpaper Designs of William Morris", Penrose Annual: A Review of the Graphic Arts, LIV (1960), 43, the first appreciative comment on a Morris paper is to be found in a sentimental American novel of 1872. Floud explains the confusion between conservatism and innovation among Morris critics thus: "The Morris firm as originally founded in 1861 is known to have represented a conscious protest against Victorian philistinism and vulgarity. Writers on wallpaper design have therefore normally depicted Morris as rebelling against those typical papers covered with cascades of naturalistic flowers in the colours of a seedsman's catalogue, which were so acclaimed at the Great Exhibition of 1851. The Patent Office records now show this to be a complete misconception. . . . Far from representing a revolutionary protest against a prevailing philistine naturalism, they could well have been hailed as a welcome return to the cosy naturalism of earlier days from the frigid formalism of the current taste".

That aspect of the Morris-as-artist myth has to some extent been dispelled by recent criticism, and, likewise, important and much-needed work has been done by R. Page Arnot¹⁸ and E. P. Thompson¹⁹ in clarifying Morris's political theories and activities. Critical attitudes to Morris as political activist have been particularly confused, because, as has already been mentioned, Mackail, the chief source for Morris's life, disapproved of Morris's political beliefs, and tended to suppress mention of them as far as he could without actually falsifying the facts. His description of the main years of Morris's activity in the Democratic Federation, 1883-4, is accurate enough, for it would have been hard to avoid documenting a period when, to use

¹⁸R. Page Arnot's early pamphlet, William Morris: A Vindication (London, 1934) was virtually ignored by critics, who preferred their own innocuous Morris to Arnot's Marxist revolutionary. His second book, William Morris, the Man and the Myth (London, 1964) is a rewriting of this pamphlet, backing up his argument with some hitherto unpublished socialist correspondence of Morris's, and is a direct attack on the idea of Morris as a "gas-and-water" socialist as he is depicted in such books as William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement (London, 1921) by J. Bruce Glasier.

¹⁹For a detailed discussion of the political Morris-myth, see E. P. Thompson, Part IV, "Necessity and Desire". Thompson is particularly good on Glasier's contribution to the myth, which he deals with in Appendix IV, "William Morris, Bruce Glasier, and Marxism", where he shows that most of the conclusions Glasier draws about Morris's politics are distortions owing their origin to the changes which Glasier's own political convictions had undergone since the time of his association with Morris. More-

Mackail's own words:

For the two years during which Morris was a member of the Democratic Federation, there is little in his life to chronicle which is not directly connected with that organization, and with his own development under its influence into a more logical and uncompromising type of Socialist.²⁰

However, Mackail then allows the reader to infer that Morris was only a socialist of this "uncompromising type" for those two years, and that afterwards, when he left the Democratic Federation, he grew out of his idealism, partly because he realised that it could not lead anywhere, and partly because the other members of the Federation were no longer influencing him, or, as Mackail might have liked to put it, leading him astray.²¹ Though this implication is

over, the fact that Glasier was actually writing these reminiscences on his own death-bed has caused an intrusive pre-occupation with religion, which was not a subject that Morris was at all interested in himself.

²⁰Mackail II, 91.

²¹"His principles had changed little when he became a declared Socialist: they changed even less now: but the movement of things was lifting him slowly away from the path that had coincided with or deflected his own, and insensibly he began to swing back into his own orbit", Mackail II, 165-6. (My italics.)

Again, to be fair to Mackail, Mrs. Morris and the supervisors of his work, Sir Edward and Lady Burne-Jones, were no more sympathetic to Marxism than he was, and he may not have found it possible to be more emphatic about its importance. Indeed Georgiana Burne-Jones's Memorials, though full of valuable information about Morris, contains scarcely a mention of it, except to say that, while they admired his ideals, they did not care for his means to an end. The comparison of Morris to a cheap-jack, however unintentional,

demonstrably false,²² it is nevertheless the view which subsequent writers have tended to take of Morris's politics.²³

It is in the inaccuracies caused by the over-dependence of later critics on what is, after all, a secondary source, that the importance, for this thesis, of

in the following passage, is a fair indication of Lady Burne-Jones's fundamental lack of sympathy for his political activities, though her admiration for his bravery in defying social convention and risking antagonizing his friends is also evident: ". . . during the time of Morris's active work as a Socialist he often had to leave in the middle of the morning for his street-preaching. The simplicity with which he did this was fine to see. Consider what it must have meant for him to leave the Grange unsped by sympathy, and to speak, as he frequently did, either at a street corner near his own house -- where he was but a prophet in his own country -- or perhaps miles away at Ball's Pond, where he was not of as much importance in the neighbourhood as a cheap-jack", Memorials II, 193.

²²To see that this is untrue one has only to read Morris's statement of his Marxist position in Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome (London, 1893), a work which, incidentally, Mackail does not even mention, as its late date would destroy his theory of insensible deflection. And Morris's last words on Socialism, which appeared posthumously in Justice (a Socialist paper), May Day Special, 1898, are concerned with the differences between revolutionary and reformist (i.e. parliamentary state-socialism) socialism. His fear there is still that reformism can only delay the inevitable, and still desirable, revolution. See E. P. Thompson, pp. 716-7. Even Mackail felt compelled to quote Morris's last letter on socialism (9th January, 1896) not long before he died, where he states firmly, "I have not changed my mind on Socialism", Mackail II, 307.

²³E.g. the extraordinary statement by Alfred Noyes, William Morris (London, 1908), "Morris's socialism, in brief, was the gospel of the joy of life. A few mistakes he made

this aspect of the Morris-myth lies. For examination of the misconceptions about his political activities shows up very clearly, albeit in a simplified form, the genuine problems in writing about Morris, and also the way in which some Morris critics have manipulated the Morris myth for their own purposes, without making any attempt to authenticate their bogus claims by an reference to Morris's actual writings. In this lack of authentication, the political myth is closely related to much ^{of the literary criticism on Morris, except indeed for some} of the excellent work on The Defence of Guenevere volume, which it is outside the scope of this thesis to discuss. It throws particular light on the way in which the prose romances have been treated, the writing on these also being almost entirely a matter of emotional bias rather than of properly documented scholarship.²⁴

In these two areas, then, art and politics, recent criticism has done much to dispel the confusions of earlier

in details, chiefly with regard to the best kinds of joy. But with the elements of Morris's socialism it is hardly possible for anyone of intelligence to disagree at the present day", p. 127. How deep a misunderstanding of the "elements of Morris's socialism" must this imply!

²⁴This matter of emotional bias works both ways, Morris's admirers often being as uncritical as his detractors. C. S. Lewis fondly describes the inadequacies of these admirers, who are too inarticulate to explain to others the delights they find in the prose romances. See Rehabilitations, p. 37.

writers and myth-makers. However, there is still a third and in some ways more important aspect of the mythology associated with Morris, an aspect which, despite its importance for the biographical treatment of Morris and therefore ultimately for our understanding of all his work, has not been diminished but even perhaps exaggerated in recent years. This is the myth which separates us from the Morris of the writings and designs and substitutes instead the Morris of his friends' numerous anecdotes, a curiously contradictory being, on the one hand liable to strange fits of temper and anti-artistic statements like "there is more art in a well-cooked and well-served dinner than in a dozen oratorios".²⁵ but on the other hand also very gentle and patient, and so absorbed in the art that was his daily life that he thought he would die if he were ever forced to give it up,²⁶ and, above all, even when concerned with only the most commonplace subjects, extra-

²⁵Sparling, p. 40.

²⁶"The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization", Hopes and Fears for Art (1882): "For I tried to think what would happen to me if I were forbidden my ordinary daily work: and I knew that I should die of despair and weariness, unless I could straightway take to something else which I could make my daily work . . .", Works XXII, 142.

ordinarily impressive as a man.²⁷ These are the elements out of which the myth of Morris-the-man has grown.

This aspect of the Morris-myth is again, like the myth of Morris-as-artist, largely dependent in origin on the early works of Morris, but this time with an important difference. In the case of Morris-as-artist, it was chiefly ignorance of nineteenth century artistic conditions which caused the myth, and revived knowledge of the period has therefore more-or-less dispelled it. In this case, however, though the admiration of Morris's friends for him was the source of the Morris-as-man myth, they did not actually create it. That was left to the critics, mainly the literary critics, since writers on art have rarely been interested in biography. They elaborated the anecdotes and reminiscences into a theory about Morris's life, and ultimately

²⁷ Mackail illustrates this last paradox with the comments of some of Morris's friends: "'At my first visit,' Mr. William De Morgan notes -- this was at Red Lion Square in 1864 -- 'I chiefly recollect his dressing himself in vestments and playing on a regal, to illustrate points in connection with stained glass. As I went home it suddenly crossed my mind as a strange thing that he should, while doing what was so trivial and almost grotesque, continue to leave on my memory so strong an impression of his power -- he certainly did, somehow.' And this was true of all his diversions. Another friend of his who had been staying a few days with him was asked, after he came away, what they had talked about. He confessed that he could not remember that they had talked of anything but eating: 'and yet,' he added, 'I came away feeling myself enlarged and liberalized'", I, 229-30.

into a theory by which to judge his writing. What happened then, of course, was that if a critic admired his construct of Morris-the-man then he was likely to admire Morris's work, or at least attempt to take seriously anything that he did not admire, and to judge it as a work of art. If on the other hand he did not like his Morris, then he was equally likely to attribute the faults of Morris-the-man to the poems and designs which he happened to be examining. This sort of treatment has been prejudicial to Morris's work in general, but once again it is his prose romances which have suffered most, because in them critics have discovered, or think they have discovered, that "like a child turning home, he comes back completely and wholeheartedly to the dreamland of his youth".²⁸ Such a return to childhood is then to be admired or reviled according as the critic admires fairy-tales or dislikes escapism, and the question of artistic validity is entirely ignored.

Let us look in greater detail for a moment at the sources of this biographical myth. Firstly, there are the works already mentioned in connection with the other myths, though indeed they have much information that is valuable

²⁸ Alfred Noyes, p. 138. See also Paul Bloomfield, William Morris (London, 1934), p. 296, for whom the romances are: "drolly and charmingly conventional, the wish-fulfilment of good children everywhere".

too and must not be disregarded by any means. These are: May Morris's Introductions to The Collected Works and to William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist, and Mackail's Life and his William Morris and his Circle (London, 1907). Then there are also the diaries, letters and biographies of Morris's friends. These are too numerous to list, but some notable ones are the Memorials of Sir Edward Burne-Jones, by G[eorgiana] B[urne]-J[ones] (London, 1904),²⁹ My Diaries by Wilfred Scawen Blunt,³⁰ "William Morris as I

²⁹Of this book, Philip Henderson, p. 143, writes: "it has long been recognized that Morris is virtually the hero of Lady Burne-Jones's Memorials of her husband. . . ." This is something of an over-statement, but there is enough truth in it to lend credence to his suggestion that Georgie and Morris were more than friends.

³⁰My Diaries: Being a Personal Narrative of Events 1888-1914 (London, 1919). Morris stayed with Blunt at his house in Sussex a number of times in his last years, but Blunt's account of Morris is rather unreliable, having on occasion too much of the personal and too little of the factual. For instance he says: "Politically he is in much the same position as I am. He has found his Socialism impossible and uncongenial, and has thrown it up wholly for art and poetry, his earlier loves. I fancy I may have influenced him in this", p. 70. Apart from its egotism, this statement seems to be mere wishful thinking on Blunt's part, for as we have seen, Morris had not changed his mind on socialism, and indeed in this same year, 1892, his own Hammersmith Socialist Society was still flourishing.

knew him" by George Bernard Shaw,³¹ the letters of Sir Sidney Carlyle Cockerell,³² and the diary of William Allingham, the Irish poet, who was a friend of Tennyson as well as of Morris and Yeats and their circles. Some of these writers were younger than Morris, and wrote from the point of view of pupils and followers. Sidney Carlyle Cockerell may speak for these:

Acknowledgement is made in the preface to some other close friends on whom Mackail drew for first-hand information. With one exception, all these became at one time or another friends of my own. When we met we exchanged stories of Morris and sang his praises together. We thought him flawless and it would never have occurred to any of us to criticize him.³³

Others, like William Allingham, were contemporaries and therefore more critical, especially towards Morris's

³¹This essay has been published in a number of places, but is probably most readily available in *May Morris II*. Like Blunt's contribution to Morris criticism, it suffers from egotism, and is far more concerned with Shaw than with Morris.

³²Friends of a Lifetime: Letters to Sidney Carlyle Cockerell (London, 1940) and The Best of Friends: Further Letters to Sidney Carlyle Cockerell (London, 1956), both edited by Viola Meynell. Cockerell, who later became the director of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, was secretary to the Kelmscott Press from 1894. He and Morris became great friends despite the difference in their ages, and it was to him that the dying Morris dictated the last pages of his last book, The Sundering Flood.

³³Cockerell's Introduction to the 1950 World's Classics edition of Mackail's Life, p. vi.

socialism.³⁴ All, however, were ready to relate their reminiscences of one whom Ruskin called "the ablest man of his time".³⁵

The aspect of Morris's character which his friends describe most unanimously is the power of his personality. Cockerell compares him to Tolstoy in this:

Gorky has told how on some occasion Tolstoy entered a gathering of his friends, and though (as I can testify) actually a man of middle stature, he immediately took on the aspect of a giant. So also did Morris seem to dominate any company in which he found himself -- not consciously, still less aggressively, but by sheer force of personality.³⁶

Other friends assert that his greatness lay in what he was, not in what he did, great though that was also, and that any understanding of his work must be incomplete without know-

³⁴William Allingham: A Diary, p. 326: "T.[ennyson] was shocked to hear of William Morris's Democratic Socialism, and asked to see a copy of Justice. (Morris's Justice I partly agree with and partly detest. It is incendiary and atheistic, and would upset everything . . . I want reforms and thorough-going ones, but not by the hands of atheists and anarchists.)"

³⁵Ruskin in 1892, quoted in Cockerell's Introduction to Mackail's Life, p. vi. Ruskin knew the Pre-Raphaelites well and also became the friend and benefactor of the Burne-Joneses, but he was never very close to Morris despite their mutual admiration.

³⁶Ibid., p. vii.

ledge of the man, statements which, of course, inevitably lead to biographical criticism:

Poets there have been who, when one has read their works, all that we have to do with them is done; but to read Morris and never to have known the man is to lose half of him. Something there was so simple and direct, so faith-inspiring and whole-souled about him, that all his verse and all his many-sided life seem to me incomplete unless one knew him and had felt his charm.³⁷

The highest praise of all, exaggerated though it may sound to-day, came from a man he met very briefly on a Socialist lecture tour in Scotland: "If one can speak of a God amongst men, we can speak of William Morris as he has been with us this day in Glasgow".³⁸ And there are many other comments of this kind from fellow-Socialists who had only met him a few times, and who were often men of little

³⁷ R. B. Cunninghame Graham's Preface to Arthur Compton Rickett's William Morris, Poet, Craftsman, Social Reformer: A Study in Personality (London, 1913), p. xii. Curiously enough, although this sounds like praise it can also be read as an indictment of Morris's poetic method, which intentionally aimed at a bardic elimination of the personality of the poet from the poem. Many other testimonies of this kind could be quoted, including W. B. Yeats's somewhat mysterious commendation, which also exalts the man at the expense of the poet, in "The Happiest of the Poets", Essays and Introductions: "He may not have been, indeed he was not, among the very greatest of the poets, but he was among the greatest of those who prepare the last reconciliation when the Cross shall blossom with roses", p. 64.

A modern version of Cunninghame Graham's whole-souledness may be found in E. P. Thompson, p. 827, ". . . in the integration of his life, the splendid unity of aspiration and action of his later years, there is the simplicity of greatness".

³⁸ Quoted in J. Bruce Glasier, p. 71.

education, ignorant of or despising poetry and art, yet who nevertheless succumbed to the charm of Morris-the-man just as his more sophisticated friends had done.³⁹

All this is apparently to Morris's credit, especially the comparison with Tolstoy, but it is in this very paragraph that the change in attitudes to which the Morris-myth is susceptible, and which is its real danger, shows most clearly. For, because the cult of Morris-worship has led to an over-estimation of his value, the modern myth of Morris-the-man has tended to swing to the other extreme and become an anti-myth, turning even appreciative references to his character upside down. A slight alteration of emphasis turns Cockerell's "dominate any company . . . not consciously, still less aggressively, but by sheer force of personality", into a modern critic's condolences to poor Jane Morris, "dominated by the loud and boisterous manners

³⁹The most moving testimonial to the force and charm of his personality came after his death from a Lancashire branch of the Social Democratic Federation, an organization which he had left after a quarrel some years before: "Comrade Morris is not dead there is not a Socialist living whould belive him dead for he Lives in the heart of all true men and women still and will do so to the end of time [sic]", quoted in Mackail II, 364. These words are very close to, at the other end of the social scale, those of Sir Edward Burne-Jones: "You cannot lose a man like that by his death, but only by your own", quoted in Philip Henderson, p. 365.

of her overwhelming husband",⁴⁰ "overwhelming", of course, giving a pejorative slant to a trait which had formerly seemed evidence of greatness.

To add to this trend of criticism which turns even positive stories to negative effect, there are further anecdotes of Morris-the-man and his behaviour which have not worn so well, though his friends still seem to relate them with pleasure. In this category are anecdotes about his dress, manners and general behaviour,⁴¹ the undergraduate

⁴⁰ Philip Henderson, p. 81.

⁴¹ For example, there is the story of Morris being mistaken for a labourer in A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London, 1949) by Oswald Doughty, p. 236, or the time when Burne-Jones's servant would not let him into the house because he thought he looked like a burglar in Mackail I, 132, and another where his coarse blue serge suit and rolling gait led him to be mistaken by an old sailor for his former sea-captain, Mackail I, 223. G. B. Shaw quotes the sea-captain story in praise of Morris's taste in dress: "The origin of the 'nautical cut' legend", he wrote to Sidney Carlyle Cockerell, The Best of Friends, pp. 191-2, "was a remark by Andrew Lang on the shock it gave you when you met your favourite poet in the flesh and found him looking like a ship's purser. This could apply to Morris only, because he wore not only a blue suit like yours, but a blue shirt and collar without tie or cravat instead of the white starched collar, tie, tall hat and frock coat then de rigueur. When he went into a shop to buy a manuscript for hundreds of pounds they could not at first sight believe that he was good for more than five shillings.

"His favourite colour was blue; and he dyed his own shirts, which were not commercial blue". One can just hear Shaw stressing the "not commercial", with some pleasure, but Andrew Lang was obviously only telling the story to get at Cockerell and Morris. R. D. MacLeod in Morris without Mackail -- as seen by his contemporaries (Glasgow, 1954) uses these stories as evidence of Morris's general uncouthness and inability to behave like a gentleman.

pranks of his friends,⁴² his own trenchant and sometimes perverse sayings, and, above all, his fits of temper. These last have received particular attention in recent years, and, from being a comparatively rare phenomenon,⁴³ often associated with incipient gout, an illness with a notorious reputation for trying the tempers of those who suffer from it,⁴⁴ they have become in 1967, in Philip Henderson's version of Morris-the-man, "fairly frequent fits of uncontrollable rage, epileptic in origin".⁴⁵

Now the idea of epilepsy almost certainly comes from G. B. Shaw, who was fascinated by it and refers to it several times, including in a letter of 10th April, 1950,

⁴²E.g. the stories of "bear fights", of "ostracising" Morris, and of Rossetti's practical jokes at the Red House in Memorials of Sir Edward Burne-Jones, pp. 209-212.

⁴³Henry Halliday Sparling, who was closely associated with Morris for some years at the Kelmscott Press, and who married Morris's daughter May, thought that reports of Morris's "rages" were grossly exaggerated. See Sparling, The Kelmscott Press and William Morris, Master-Craftsman (London, 1924), pp. 6-7.

⁴⁴Cf. Mackail II, 30, and A. Compton Rickett, p. 36: "Much, however may be forgiven a gouty man, and that he suffered most of his life from gout, seems clear. Just before an attack, even his most intimate friends found it desirable to go slowly. When once the toe had begun to shoot, amiability returned, or, at any rate, comparative amiability. And he had the saving grace of being able to make fun of himself".

⁴⁵Philip Henderson, p. 81. The reason for his belief is not, of course, footnoted.

to Cockerell where he comments on Peter Quennell's life of Ruskin and Oswald Doughty's of Rossetti: "Morris comes into both books as the biggest man of the lot, in spite of his epileptic rages, his gout, and his final tuberculosis".⁴⁶ From this it may be seen that Shaw, who was by then a very old man, was somewhat confused about the medical facts of Morris's case, for though one lung was affected, it was actually the diabetes as much as tuberculosis which caused the deterioration of Morris's health and the "general organic degeneration"⁴⁷ that led to his death. Besides, Shaw's exaggerated regard for bodily health leads him to the curious position of regarding health as necessary to greatness -- witness the function of "despite" in the sentence quoted above. Mackail does not see Morris's rages as epileptic, nor does Henderson cite any additional medical evidence, nor any reference at all, in fact, to justify his opinion. It is mere sensationalism, the deliberate creation of a more exciting picture of his subject than can be justified by a balanced picture of the known facts. It is balance indeed that such portraits of Morris most clearly lack. In Mackail's Life, for all its inaequacies in other respects, these fits of temper are set against the real

⁴⁶The Best of Friends, p. 202.

⁴⁷Mackail II, 339 and 350.

sweetness and patience of Morris's nature under stresses which would have roused far less quick-tempered men than he.⁴⁸ Moreover, Mackail takes care to show that Morris gained more control over his temper as he grew older:

His own temper was naturally passionate, and his gouty habit, with all which that involves when the subject is gathering up for an illness, did not, of course, tend to make him less irritable. That in spite of this his temper sweetened with years was due to an amount of self-control which it is very easy for natures more phlegmatic or of more perfect physical balance to underestimate.⁴⁹

All this is omitted from Henderson's picture.

Apart from this extract about epilepsy, Henderson's

⁴⁸Mackail II, 354-6. See also Shaw's "William Morris as I knew him", *May Morris II*, xxxix: "I must add that though Morris was rich in the enormous patience of the greatest artists, he went unprovided with the small change of that virtue which enables cooler men to suffer fools gladly. The provocations and interruptions of debate, which give experts such effective opportunities for retort that they are courted rather than resented, infuriated Morris, especially when they were trivial and offensive (he could bear with any serious and honest utterance like an angel)" Likewise, Morris tended to behave badly if he thought he was being "shown off" (*Mackail II*, 360) or if anyone criticised Burne-Jones's painting in his presence (*II*, 353), but was quite indifferent to any personal criticism, or to the teasing of which he received more than his fair share.

⁴⁹Mackail II, 30. Cf. also: "But in these latter years his whole personality ripened and softened. The outbursts of temper so familiar to his earlier friends ceased", *Mackail II*, 267.

description of Morris in general is a good example of the sort of effect compression of a few of Mackail's and other stories gives:

Jane probably found it fatiguing to live in a work-shop ["in" is misleading -- actually the work-shops were on the ground-floor and in the outhouses behind their house, and besides Jane was brought up in a livery stables and should have been used to noise and dirt], dominated by the loud and boisterous manners of her over-whelming husband [already commented on]. For Morris's manners also were medieval. He would fling his dinner out of the window, if it was badly cooked, or, if a door did not open at once, he was liable to wrench its handle off or kick out one of its panels. He could never sit still a moment, even at table, continually getting up and pacing the room. Friends speak of his tempestuous and exacting company, or describe him pacing the room like a caged lion. He was liable to get up and begin work at five o'clock in the morning [there was no reason for this to have disturbed Jane, as they had separate rooms], or continue, if he felt like it, most of the night. This sort of behaviour, combined as it was by fairly frequent fits of uncontrollable rage, epileptic in origin, could not have been easy to live with.⁵⁰

It is a hair-raising account, but when the paragraph is

⁵⁰ Philip Henderson, p. 81. Curiously enough even Mackail was criticised for introducing material which distorted the effect of his biography by over-compression, or over-expansion, depending on which way round it is looked at: "A minor instance of the same tendency to blur the picture is the citation of Miss Charlotte M. Yonge, by the same writer, as a potent influence upon Morris at the time when he was evolving his passionate early Arthurian dreams. No matter what authority there may be for such a suggestion, it would be out of proportion except in a biography large enough to estimate also the exact influence upon him of Bradshaw's Railway Guide", Alfred Noyes, pp. v-vi.

looked at in detail, much of its effect collapses. Even when we except the quite normal artistic behaviour of staying up all night when there is poetry, or indeed literary criticism, to be written at the call of inspiration, we find that the remaining stories give quite a false picture of Morris. To begin with, these stories, whether told in Mackail's Life or in Georgie Burne-Jones's Memorials, or from some other source, are spread over a number of volumes, not concentrated all in one place as Henderson puts them, and they only make up a small part of the whole picture. Then, the Morrises did not actually live "in" the workshop as Henderson says,⁵¹ and if the incident of the dinner occurred as frequently as Henderson suggests, it is rather surprising that I have not been able to find sources for it. Similarly the incident of the door was not a regular occurrence, and Compton-Rickett, the source here, specifically states it as being "on one occasion"⁵² Nor did Morris, nor

⁵¹ Letters of Henry James, selected and edited by P. Lubbock (London, 1920), I, 17: "Morris lives on the same premises as his shop. . . . Of course his business is small and may be carried on in his house: the things he makes are so handsome, rich and expensive (besides being articles of the very last luxury) that his fabrique can't be on a very large scale". Not much dirt and noise in this description!

⁵² p. 36: "On one occasion, when he was painting an Italian model, in Red Lion Street, someone called at the door. Morris left his painting, and presently his model heard him furiously anathematising. When he returned he was

could any man, though of course a myth of this kind has a tendency to confer almost superhuman powers, live continually at the peak of tension described here, and which was, in any case, mainly in the company of his men friends. One has only to read his letters to his wife, with whom he had as good cause to be disappointed as she with him, though to read Henderson one would think that the blame was all on his side, and to his children and women friends,⁵³ and to think of his

in a tremendous rage, rushing about the room like a madman. In a moment he took a flying kick at the door and smashed in a panel. The model in fright, started to flee, but Morris turned towards him his rage suddenly evaporating, and said genially: 'It's all right -- it's all right -- something had to give way!' The painting was then resumed". There is also an apparently facetious reference to kicking out door panels in Arthur Clutton-Brock, William Morris: His Work and Influence (London, 1914), where Faulkner, commenting humourously on Morris's new-found tranquility after his marriage, writes: "I grieve to say he has only kicked one panel out of a door for this twelvemonth past", p. 75.

⁵³ Henderson had the less cause for misrepresentation of his behaviour to Janey in that he is the editor of the Morris letters, and must have known perfectly well that Morris's letters to his wife are always tender and chivalrous in the extreme, and especially during the times when she was actually staying with Rossetti, which Morris cannot have liked very much.

There is also a further small charge to bring against this passage, that part of the latter half of the paragraph is an unacknowledged but direct quotation from Mackail I, 221-2: "Friends speak of his tempestuous and exacting company, or describe him pacing the room like a caged lion" is condensed from: "His 'tempestuous and exacting company,' in the phrase of one of his most intimate friends, [note that Mackail acknowledges his source with quotation marks!] had something of the quality of an overwhelming natural force; like the north wind, it braced

favourite relaxation, fishing, surely the quietest and least tempestuous of activities,⁵⁴ to see the other side of the picture.

Distorted as Henderson's version of Morris-the-man may seem, it was probably not an intentional misrepresenta-

and buffeted in almost equal measure. One of his friends describes him, on the occasion of their first meeting in 1871, as pacing up and down the room like a caged lion."

Mackail's passage is pretty strong meat, but it does not diminish Morris, as Henderson's does, into a petty tyrant over his wife and home.

⁵⁴" . . . his devotion to angling beyond all other pastimes, and his delight in all the simplest rural pleasures . . .", Mackail I, 220. It might be noted also that there is some suggestion that the wildest of these stories were invented, perhaps by Rossetti, though enough people refer to Morris's tempers to assure us that they did exist, if not perhaps quite in the form related by Mackail: "From the time when, sarcastically commenting on the profusion of sunflowers with which Morris had covered the foreground of his Union picture, Rossetti suggested that he should help the other painters out of difficulties by filling up their foregrounds with scarlet runners -- from that time to the publication of Sigurd the Volsung, when Rossetti, with a flash of his old humour, deliberately goaded Morris into fury by declaring he could really take no interest in a man whose grandfather was a dragon, Morris was continually 'having his leg pulled,' and in many cases we fear his biographer's leg has also been given a surreptitious tug. At any rate we have it on the authority of one of Morris's most intimate friends that Rossetti coined many of the wild myths that are circulated about 'Topsy's' behaviour in moments of emotion", Alfred Noyes, p. 21.

tion. So much the worse, therefore, is a book which deliberately collects together all the worst things it can find about Morris in order, ostensibly, "to find the real Morris by going beyond Mackail by presenting the views and opinions of other writers and artists, who, unlike Mackail, were not writing to commission but merely reminiscing on Morris as they themselves had found him".⁵⁵ This is R. D. McLeod's pamphlet Morris Without Mackail -- as seen by his contemporaries. There is neither room for, nor value in, demolishing this work systematically, though it would not be difficult to do, but it may be stated here that McLeod's evidence consists entirely of partial quotations, and, like Henderson, but in a more spiteful spirit, he omits the balancing facts.⁵⁶ However, since one cannot take

⁵⁵R. D. McLeod, Morris Without Mackail -- As Seen by His Contemporaries (Glasgow, 1954), p. 4.

⁵⁶For instance, McLeod quotes Mackail's "Many years before, Rossetti, in one of those flashes of hard insight that made him so terrible a friend, had said of [Morris], 'Did you ever notice that Top never gives a penny to a beggar,'" Mackail II, 100. Now Mackail goes on to add that while Rossetti was always ready to aid the individual in distress, Morris was also "liberal up to and even beyond his means in the support of an object which had gained his sympathy . . ." though perhaps he did not feel towards the individual case of distress quite as Rossetti did. McLeod omits this, and then goes on to quote Arthur Compton Rickett, p. 43, again with a half-quotation, and to ridicule him: "'How far Rossetti meant it seriously one cannot say. It is quite possible that Morris, engrossed in conversation as he often was when out walking, might have

McLeod's portrait of Morris as public exhibitionist, political opportunist and general buffoon very seriously, especially when it is combined with complete and non-critical, indeed ignorant, condemnation of Morris's work

neglected a casual importunity for alms. But the number of "beggars" who called at his house and went away rewarded were legion.' It may be said that Morris was no fool in money-matters. Compton-Rickett's observation is based on guess-work . . .", McLeod, p. 10. Now Rickett's observation is not, in fact, based on guess-work at all, but on information from Belfort Bax, a close associate of Morris in work for Socialism -- they collaborated on Socialism, Its Growth and Outcome it will be recalled -- and Rickett actually continues, though McLeod does not care to mention it:

"Mr. Belfort Bax declares that he kept a drawerful of half-crowns for foreign anarchists, because, as he explained apologetically [apologetically because as a good socialist he should have been against anarchists]: 'They always wanted half-a-crown, and it saved time to have a stock ready.' Indeed, on many occasions it was not a matter of half-a-crown, but of pounds to anyone in need." Mackail also modifies his picture of Morris's lack of "that touch of lavishness that gives a human warmth to generosity. . . ." Thus, later in Morris's life: "When his activity in the Socialist movement brought round him a mass of more or less disreputable professing adherents, whose application of the principles of Socialism did not go much beyond the idea that Morris should share his money with them, he carried his indulgence to an extreme pitch. He told a friend of his once that a young man and woman, quite unknown, had called on him and asked him to give them a start, as they were going to be married. 'Were they Socialists?' his friend asked. 'I don't know,' Morris answered; 'I suppose so. I gave them five pounds to get rid of them, as I was busy'", Mackail II, 100-1 and 335. H. H. Sparling, p. 7, contradicts even Mackail's rendering, declaring that when Rossetti said that Morris "never gives a penny to a beggar" he "intended to imply the very opposite failing", and that it was always a question of pounds, not pennies, with him.

McLeod likewise invents a "jealous streak" in Morris which no-one else has ever observed, apparently on the grounds that he did not like Tennyson's later work, and thought an obscure Scots professor, a compatriot of McLeod's, second-rate, pp. 11 and 15. His comments on Morris's

in toto, his book turns out to be actually less misleading than the sort of partial truth which is found in other exponents of the myth. For what is dangerous and misleading in any case is not so much the myth itself as the effect it has on literary criticism, so that where, as with McLeod, criticism is minimal and obviously silly,⁵⁷ then the myth

"quarrelsome career as a Socialist", p. 16 ff., may be seen to be thoroughly discredited in E. P. Thompson's book on Morris's socialism, where Morris is shown to have been, to a large extent, a propitiatory figure in the various socialist organizations to which he belonged.

⁵⁷It is hard to find a sample of actual criticism in McLeod, but the following, which criticizes both Morris and his books, is a fine passage of non-sequiturs: "Some reviewers criticised what one of them called Morris's 'Wardour-Street English'. One of these was Richard Le Gallienne who said:

No doubt the archaic English in which these books are written has repelled many readers, and the archaic type in which Mr. Morris has chosen to print some of them has been a stumbling block for others. For this reason of type alone it is a real physical trial to read right through The House of the Wolfings. The English of that none the less beautiful book is also somewhat wilfully archaic.

But the fact that Morris was steeped in Chaucer would no doubt have its influence. Much of his poetry and its style are not of his times. And yet there is the interesting fact that he himself preached the gospel of simplicity to Cunninghame Graham who reported that Morris had once confessed to him:

I have spent, I know, a vast amount of time designing furniture and wallpapers, carpets and curtains; but after all I am inclined to think that that sort of thing is mostly rubbish, and I would prefer for my part to live with the plainest white-washed walls

is ineffective also.

Indeed the whole myth of Morris's character would deserve little mention here, if simple misrepresentation of character were all there was to it. Fascinating as exercises in biographical accuracy may be, they are not the object of this thesis. It is in the influence that the biographical misjudgements of the myth of Morris-the-man have had on literary criticism that their importance lies, for a number of critics have seized upon the apparent character of Morris to explain the weaknesses, real and imaginary, of his poetry and prose, not realizing that the character they have got

and wooden chairs and tables.

It is not unlikely that Morris was to talking in order to impress Cunninghame Graham with the idea that as a socialist he believed in white-washed walls and plain living and high thinking. But it was a case of deep calling unto deep. Both Morris and Cunninghame Graham were exceedingly well-placed in life and left big fortunes behind them in death", p. 19. Interestingly enough, Le Gallienne's review is actually a panegyric on The Wood Beyond the World, and he did not at all accuse Morris of "Wardour Street" as McLeod says he does. McLeod therefore gives an entirely false impression by this quotation out of context. See Retro-spective Reviews (London, 1896), II, 254-8. Moreover, the "gospel of simplicity" is a crucial part of Morris's theory of art, and not a pose, and anyone who had bothered to read Hopes and Fears for Art or Lectures on Art and Industry would soon have realized this. Besides, Morris did not make a habit of talking to impress, and it is on record that he always behaved particularly badly if he suspected that "he was there to be shown off", see Mackail II, 360.

hold of is not Morris at all but a mythical version of Morris. A great deal of the resultant misreading has been expended on the prose romances, but Morris's poetry, which has faults of course, but not faults which either can be extenuated or should be exaggerated by reference to his character, has also suffered in some ways from the Morris-myth.

To begin with the poetry: firstly, there is the type of critic who takes the apparently casual attitude towards poetry and art of the bluff sea-captain of the Morris-myth, and then applies this to Morris's poetry. Thus, the reasoning then proceeds, the fact that Morris thought that one should be able to compose an epic while weaving tapestry, and declared that "That talk of inspiration is sheer nonsense, I may tell you that flat . . . there is no such thing: it is a mere matter of craftsmanship",⁵⁸

⁵⁸Mackail I, 291-2. What Morris meant by craftsmanship will be discussed later in the thesis. Suffice it to say here that it was a very high ideal to him, and bore no relation whatever to Paul Thompson's facetious interpretation (quoted in the text below), for craftsmanship would necessarily preclude any shoddiness of execution that Morris could have remedied. Mackail sums it up thus: "But it was a matter of simple duty with him, in a poem as in a design for decoration, to do everything he did as well as he could", I, 191.

means either that Morris is, according to the friendly critic, an untutored genius who needed to take no care since "the verse flowed off his pen" without any need for correction or revision,⁵⁹ or else, according to the hostile critic, a careless fool who spoiled his poetry by taking too

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This extreme view is rare, but Mackail comes close to it in such comments as: "The verse flowed off his pen. Seven hundred lines were once composed in a single day", I, 192, and "Summer ended, and still the flow of rhyme continued as powerful and as sweet", I, 194, which makes it sound as if Morris had really found Lewis Carroll's treacle well! Mackail, quoted Richard Watson Dixon, a great admirer of Morris's early poetry, is also the source of the idea that Morris was incapable of correcting his poems, I, 55. And A. M. W. Stirling, a relative of William de Morgan, another close friend of Morris, quotes De Morgan in The Merry Wives of Battersea (London, 1956), p. 133, as saying: "He produced poetry as readily as a bird sings".

Contemporary critics, too, often emphasized the ease and spontaneity of Morris's verse, as in The Athenaeum review of the first volume of The Earthly Paradise: "Productiveness of this sort [i.e. The Earthly Paradise following so soon after Jason] may in itself seem somewhat suspicious; for very abundant growths are seldom those of the greatest worth; but in the present case it may truly be said that the fertility exhibited denotes not the inferiority of the crop, but the richness of the soil. The care, the patience, the wealth of knowledge which the poems before us reveal, thoroughly shut out the notion of haste in their composition, though these merits may not be appreciated at their true value, quoting because the ease and spontaneousness of the poet in a great measure veil the arduousness of his labour. Perhaps, indeed, that should hardly be called labour which has been produced with such evident pleasure", (30th May, 1868), p. 753.

little heed of his own errors and being too impatient to bother to correct them. This last is the view taken by Paul Thompson, who actually uses the phrase about craftsmanship, most incorrectly interpreted, as a rod with which to beat Morris's back:

His method was to think out a poem in his head while he was busy at some other work. He would sit at an easel, charcoal or brush in hand, working away at a design while he muttered to himself, 'bumble-beeing' as his family called it; then, when he thought he had got the lines, he would get up from the easel, prowl round the room still muttering, returning occasionally to add a touch to the design; then suddenly he would dash to the table and write out twenty or so lines. As his pen slowed down, he would be looking around, and in a moment would be at work on another design. Later, Morris would look at what he had written, and if he did not like it he would put it aside and try again. But this way of working meant that he never submitted a draft to the painful evaluation which poetry requires. He did not even possess a dictionary until the year before his death. So far from seeing the danger of this method, Morris seems to have been oblivious of his own linguistic slackness, and was convinced that poetry could be written in no other way. He strongly opposed any exclusive concentration on poetry, argued that all poets should be part-timers, and declared that 'if a chap can't compose an epic poem while he's weaving tapestry he'd better shut up.' Poetry was 'a mere matter of craftsmanship': by which Morris meant that it should be pleasant work, which would be spoiled by intellectual perfectionism.⁶⁰

⁶⁰Paul Thompson, pp. 177-8.

This passage could be attacked at any number of points. Apart from the gross misinterpretation of what Morris meant by craftsmanship, the peculiar idea that a poet is linguistically slack if he does not use a dictionary, and the misunderstanding of Morris's idea about poets being "part-timers", which arises out of his remark to Halliday Sparling that when a poet's inspiration is temporarily in abeyance then "he'd be better off if he had something else to go on with",⁶¹ one might also accuse it of plagiarism. The first part of the paragraph is borrowed almost word for word from Henry Halliday Sparling's The Kelmscott Press and William Morris, Master-Craftsman,⁶² but with one very important difference. Sparling is here referring not to the composition of poetry in general by Morris -- he did not know Morris at the time when he was composing most of his original verse -- but to the specific instance of the translation of The Odyssey. Morris, who apparently knew

⁶¹"And, of course, nobody's always at his best; and, especially if he sticks at one thing -- say poetry -- the inspiration -- and that, after all, is only to say the impulse -- will halt at times, to say the least of it. When that happens, he'd be better off if he had something else to go on with. If you have to screw yourself up to writing a poem when the poem isn't there to be written, or flog yourself into chair-making for the sake of your wages, the poem or the chair is pretty well bound to suffer . . .", Sparling, p. 9.

⁶²pp. 73-8. Thompson's version is somewhat abbreviated, but a number of phrases are actually identical in the two books. No debt is, of course, acknowledged.

the poem by heart, would mumble the Greek to himself while working on a design, and then, "as the English began to come", would get up and pace about the room until he had it worked out. His method with his original poetry was rather different,⁶³ as a number of people testify, so that Thompson was unjustified in extrapolating from translation to composition, however much he would like to explain the undoubtedly rather monotonous tone of some poems in this way.

Neither the friendly nor the hostile critic is right in the assumption of Morris's poems being totally spontaneous and uncorrected, whether that is considered admirable or not. Morris has faults of style indeed -- what poet does not? -- and they are probably partly due to his hasty methods of composition, but that does not mean that he was not serious about his work, or that he never corrected it. In his narrative poems he did not, of course, revise as much as a lyric poet might, for the sheer size of Jason and The Earthly Paradise preclude that, and in any case the art of narrative poetry does not demand the high finish and

⁶³It is true that some of his literary work was done on the train to and from work in the morning and evening, A. Compton-Rickett, p. 20, but this is not quite the same as composing in several artistic media at once. He also, like Wordsworth and Yeats among others, composed while out walking, Mackail I, 208, and a friend describes another occasion: "I came down and found Morris in the parlour. He was nibbling a pen, and he said after a few words of chat,

compression of the lyric, but there are plenty of excised passages to show that he worked over his poems before publication.⁶⁴ The work done by J. R. Wahl⁶⁵ on the manuscripts of Sigurd the Volsung, which has as many as seven versions for some of the key scenes, also proves effectively that the talk of Morris's not revising or inability to revise is nonsense.

In the case of The Defence of Guenevere, the approach is a little different, for most critics nowadays admire the volume, and besides there is no slackness of

'Now you see, I'm going to write poetry, so you'll have to cut. I'm sorry, but it can't be helped.' So I cut", Mackail I, 228-9.

⁶⁴See especially the cancelled passages of Sigurd given by May Morris in her introduction to Works XII. The moving dialogue between Sigurd and Brynhild was excised because Morris thought it hampered the movement of the poem. At the other extreme, there is a humorous scene from the playlet, "Sir Peter Harpdon's End", where the old soldier relates his past life to Sir Peter in the last few hours before the castle falls to the enemy, Works I, xxvi-xxxi. Swinburne "considered it so good that he tried to persuade him to leave it in", but Morris thought that it made the poem unbalanced structurally; showing a concern for style and structure, which he is not usually thought to have had, Works I, xxvi.

⁶⁵See Philip Henderson, p. 168: "As the result of his examination of all the existing MSS of Sigurd, Dr. Wahl has revealed the immense amount of work put into his huge poem, completely exploding the notion that Morris habitually wrote hurriedly and carelessly and was incapable of revision". As Yeats quotes Morris as saying of Sigurd: "It cost me a lot of damned hard work to get that thing into verse", "Modern Poetry", Essays and Introductions, p. 508.

verse or monotony as in the narrative poetry. The question here, therefore, is whether a poet who wrote the kind of relaxed narrative verse used in The Earthly Paradise could also intentionally produce the strange and jerky but very effective lyric poetry of The Defence. Did Morris achieve his startling effects, particularly in the title poem, by accident, as Paul Thompson asserts,⁶⁶ or are they the result of a mastery of prosody extraordinary in one so young? Alfred Noyes takes the latter view:

Morris's art in these poems consisted not in the maintenance of the normal iambic pentameter, but in his subtle variation from it. If we compare a line like:

The ploughman homeward plods his weary way, or
the way in which Gray maintains the regularity of the
metrical beats throughout his elegy, with the way in
which Morris departs from it in

"Clench teeth, dames, yea, clasp hands, for
Gareth's spear

Throws Kays," etc.,
it is obvious that Morris does not err from mere lack
of craftsmanship. We shall have more to say on this
subject in another chapter; it is enough here to
point out that, while indicating the "norm" of his
verses, he obtains his effects by subtle variations
from it, only possible to a master of technique.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ See Paul Thompson, pp. 167-70: "The plain truth is that The Defence of Guenevere was something of an accident".

⁶⁷ Alfred Noyes, pp. 28-9.

In view of Morris's later prosodic achievements, particularly in the virtuoso performance of Love is Enough, where he recreates the Old English alliterative metre as a modern poetic form,⁶⁸ one might be inclined to think the latter view more plausible. Moreover, whatever the individual critic may think of the content of the narrative poems or of their style, within their own terms they are undoubtedly metrically excellent, and even contemporary reviewers of Jason and The Earthly Paradise, who actually seem to have gone through the poems searching for bad rhymes and metrical slackness, had few faults to cavil at,⁶⁹ while the variety which Morris succeeds in imparting to the very difficult metre of Sigurd, which could so easily have turned the poem into a self-parody as Swinburne's rather similar sing-

⁶⁸ See The Athenaeum (23rd November 1972), p. 657: "Mr. Morris may be said to have, in point of form, enlarged the limits of English verse in his new poem. Its metrical construction, although fundamentally, perhaps, the only purely national one, had fallen into such total disuse, that its reviver might fairly be entitled to the claim of invention. . . . It is manifest that Mr. Morris has greatly improved on this measure. Under his hands it has assumed statelier proportions. . . ." The rest is too long to quote, but consists of a detailed description of the metre and its use by Morris.

⁶⁹ The Athenaeum (30th May, 1868), pp. 753-4: "One of the merits of the book indeed is that even and sustained excellence which makes it difficult to give a very decided preference to any of its contents in particular. . . . That a diffuse page may now and then be pointed out, has already been said; it may be added, that on occasions the rhymes employed are too obviously suggested by each other, and

song verse can sometimes do, is quite astonishing.⁷⁰

The other way in which pseudo-biography has been misapplied to criticism may be seen in embryo in Cunninghame Graham's remark that "to read Morris and never to have known the man is to lose half of him". Here the work is only being under-valued because Cunninghame Graham admires the man so much, but as Morris-the-man came to seem a less attractive figure a sort of inside-out approach to his poetry developed, with the faults of the poetry being attributed to the man and the faults of the man to his poetry. There are several stages in this process, including Yeats's appreciative, but none-the-less derogatory: "He may not have been, indeed he was not, among the very greatest of the poets, but he was among the greatest of those who prepare the last reconciliation when the Cross shall blossom with roses",⁷¹ and Paul Bloomfield's "Still,

indicate difficulties avoided rather than difficulties overcome. But the wonder is, after all, that these faults occur so rarely in a work of such extent".

⁷⁰For an appreciation of the metrics of Sigurd see Arthur Clutton-Brock, pp. 129-30. For a study of all Morris's Prosody, see George Saintsbury, A History of English Prosody (London, 1910), III, 316-334. Saintsbury is probably unique in admiring virtually all Morris's poetry.

⁷¹"The Happiest of the Poets" in Essays and Introductions, p. 64. Yeats is of course right that Morris is not "among the greatest of poets" -- I am not criticising him for the judgement -- but both he and Bloomfield show this tendency to exalt the man at the expense of his work.

charming and important though they (the designs, etc.) are, they have distracted attention from the fact that Morris was above all a prophet; a sage".⁷² Both of these are full of admiration for the man, but inclined to discount the work. The next stage is where neither man nor work is particularly esteemed, as in many literary histories,⁷³ and the culmination of the process may be seen in Dorothy M. Hoare's The Works of Morris and Yeats in Relation to Early Saga Literature (Cambridge, 1930). In the following passage, a by no means isolated example, she manages to criticize Morris and his poetry alternately and both at once, without ever separating the artist from the work:

Something of the fundamental weakness of Morris' poetry is seen here. He is unable to face distasteful facts. This weakness is very evident in Pygmalion and the Image, which approaches maudlin sentimentality. . . . The weak anguish, the restless fever of love, is emphasised. Love for Morris was not a thing fiery, dangerous,

⁷²Paul Bloomfield, p. v.

⁷³Recent literary histories, I should say, for the classics of the genre, like A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller's Cambridge History of English Literature, XIII (Cambridge, 1916), or E. Legouis and L. Cazamian's History of English Literature (originally Paris, 1924, but repeatedly reprinted in translation), are full of enthusiasm for Morris. A relatively modern view may be seen in the Pelican Guide to English Literature, VI (1958, but revised since), 368-70, edited by Boris Ford, where Morris is considered to be of little interest.

capable of producing tragedy, Morris' nature avoids tragedy.⁷⁴

One may agree with her judgment on The Earthly Paradise, particularly on the two poems which are probably the weakest in the whole work,⁷⁵ but that does not alter the

⁷⁴p. 41. This is in general a rather curious book, for Miss Hoare seems to assume that Morris and Yeats were attempting to reproduce Saga values literally in their poems, and, of course, failing to do so. She then proceeds to criticize them for what they were not trying to do. It must be self-evident that Yeats was only using the characters and life of the Sagas, in so far as he did use them, as literary metaphors, as Tennyson, for instance, did with the Arthurian material. Morris is a more doubtful case, and it could be argued the Sigurd was an attempt to reproduce rather than to recreate the Saga. However, if that had been the case, then surely Morris would not have used the material from the Nibelungenlied, the medieval German version of the story, but would have retained the Icelandic Volsunga Saga completely. In fact, however, the medieval poem gives more plausible motives for the tragedy in nineteenth century terms than does the more primitive Saga, as Wagner also found, and more openings too for social satire on the nineteenth century, which some critics have suggested is present in Sigurd (e.g. E. P. Thompson, p. 228) -- an obvious reason for the alteration. In this context see also Paul Thompson, p. 182: "Morris wisely avoided writing a pseudo-primitive tragedy, which would have been little better than a parody . . ." and E. P. Thompson, op. cit., p. 783: "He knew perfectly well that he could not reconstruct with accurate detail the lives of the Germanic peoples at the dawn of the Middle Ages. . . ."

⁷⁵Interestingly enough, Morris never cared for "Acontius and Cydippe" either. Acontius, he wrote in a letter to a friend, "is a spoony, nothing less", an estimate quite in agreement with Dorothy Hoare. His general opinion of the whole collection appears in the same letter to Swinburne given on p. 642 of May Morris I: "For the rest I am rather painfully conscious myself that the book would have done me more credit if there had been nothing in it but the Gundrun, though I don't think the others quite the worst things I have done. Yet they are all too long and flabby, damn it!"

basic fact that the artist is not the same thing as his poem, and that it is bad critical practice to confuse the two. Besides, the weak sentimental Morris she has created bears little resemblance to Morris the manufacturer and Morris the political activist, in both of which rôles he had plenty of unpleasant facts to face.⁷⁶

As usual, however, it is the prose romances which have suffered most from misrepresentation of Morris-the-man, for they were taken by many critics to represent some kind

⁷⁶The testimony of A. Compton Rickett, p. 173, supports quite the opposite view from Miss Hoare's about Morris's attitude to love: "With Browning, he believe whole-heartedly in the sacramental value of Passion. Coldness, indifference, timidity, superficiality; these were the deadly sins in Morris's view: given Passion, he would forgive a man almost any breach of the Decalogue". And one might also add that while superficially his poetry may look escapist, an understanding reading shows that it is not; e.g. The Cambridge History of English Literature, p. 128: "On 3 October 1896, the greatest master of romantic story-telling among modern Englishmen died at his London residence, Kelmscott House, Hammersmith, worn out by a life of unceasing work, in which he had endeavoured, with remarkable consistence and success, to realise and translate into practice for his countrymen the beauty of the visionary world of his prose and poetry. His love of the beautiful work of the past, material and imaginative, stood for him in the place of religious fervour, and his whole strength of purpose was dedicated to the reconstitution of modern life upon conditions similar to those under which such work, impossible in an age of mere competition for money, was produced. Read in this light, his writings are no mere pictures of an irrecoverable past painted with a dilettante regretfulness: they are a coherent revelation of his sources of inspiration in his combat with the torpor from which, like Ruskin and Carlyle, he, not the least of the three, strove to deliver the life of his day".

of direct transcript of Morris's own psychological state.⁷⁷
 There is an element of that of course in almost all writing, but the prose romances, being art, are just as separate from their author as other forms of art are. The result of these preconceptions about his character was, at one extreme, extravagant sentimentalizing of Morris, who was, after all, the head of a thriving business concern just as much as he was an impractical dreamer:

In this far other-world, full of magic and faery, he lived in the last years of his life, when the fourteenth century, and the Greek life in its medieval dress, and the early Teutonic communities such as he painted in the House of the Wolfings and the Roots of the Mountains, and even the Norse Saga-land and life, and the future world of a regenerated humanity -- having been long

⁷⁷ Even Northrop Frye, who has the principles of the matter correct when he writes: "The reason is that a great romancer should be examined in terms of the conventions he chose. 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", Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, 1957), p. 305, yet falls into this error when he suggests "The tendency to allegory in the romance may be . . . unconscious, as in the very obvious sexual mythopoeia of William Morris", ibid., p. 306. Actually it is so very obvious that it is obviously intentional and not unconscious at all, as C. S. Lewis, p. 41, explains: ". . . it is no use invoking modern psychology to reveal the concealed eroticism in his imagination, because the eroticism is not concealed: it is patent, ubiquitous, and unabashed". Nonetheless, Philip Henderson is yet more grossly literal with his psychological reading: "In fact, one is struck in all Morris's late prose romances by the prevalence of these compliant, white-armed maidens, who make up to him in imagination for what, one suspects, he had been too shy to claim in his own life", p. 327.

dwelt in, were finally left behind by this spiritual wanderer through many times and nations; this Ulysses of the soul, who, working and walking among us, yet never truly lived save far away from us, in a hundred roving of imagination.⁷⁸

If that analysis were true, then Morris might really resemble Sir Walter Raleigh's schoolgirl! At the other extreme, come the sort of comments by modern critics already quoted above, who seem to regard the prose romances as a form of maudlin escapism, or even senility.⁷⁹

The most curious thing about all this, however, is that none of these people, whether friends or foes, seem really to have read the romances.⁸⁰ Paul Thompson of course

⁷⁸Rev. Stopford A. Brooke, Four Poets: Clough, Arnold, Rossetti and Morris (London, 1908), p. 243. Brooke, however, does admire Morris's work to some extent.

⁷⁹Paul Thompson, p. 159: "They were Gothic fancies of his old age, created for his own pleasure. . . ." See also Chapter 1, note 41 above. It may be noted that Morris was only fifty-four when the first of the romances was written.

⁸⁰An outstanding instance of misunderstanding, not even misinterpretation but sheer ignorance of plot, may be found in Philip Henderson, pp. 143 and 327, where he describes The Story of the Glittering Plain, the only one of the romances of which he mentions more than the name: "whose Story of the Glittering Plain is of a land of eternal youth spent in the delights of free love . . ." and again; "a story of the search for the land of eternal youth, though characteristically, Hallblithe, like Pharamond before him in Love is Enough, is only bent upon his quest for a lost maiden whose image he is shown in a painted book. . . ." The Story of the Glittering Plain, however, is actually the story of Hallblithe's rejection of this land of eternal youth in favour of work in the world, a northern counterpart

naïfly says they are "almost unreadable", so presumably he has not read them at all, but, in general, as with the intimations of mortality which disturbed The Athenaeum's reviewer of The Earthly Paradise, but which few others perceived, it is a case of failure of understanding, a blind spot at some point, often in what is otherwise perceptive criticism. For the prose romances, read seriously, are every bit as disturbing as The Earthly Paradise can be. Like fairy-tales, they invariably have the evil principle lurking somewhere, whether in the shape of a witch as in The Water of the Wondrous Isles or The Wood beyond the World, or, more tangibly, as war and death and destruction of civilizations as in almost all the other stories. And the evil is no less real, as some critics suggest,⁸¹ because

to the romance world of George MacDonald's Phantastes (London, 1858), where fairy-land is rejected to follow Goethe's maxim of "the duty that lies nearest thee", Wilhelm Meister, Book 7, Ch. 1. The woman Hallblithe follows is no painted image as Pharamond's was, but his flesh and blood betrothed, who was stolen from him, and for whose sake he rejects the daughter of the king of the Glittering Plain; the two women, of course, standing for the half-life of eternal youth and the brief but fully living life of this world. It is fairly obvious how Henderson's error came about, however, for the passage where Hallblithe sees the book of his life is quoted in Mackail II, 255-6, and anyone who has not read the whole story would be led into just the same error as Henderson. In fact, it becomes clear that he never read the story at all, and is simply deducing it incorrectly from Mackail's quotation!

⁸¹E.g. Dorothy M. Hoare: "When Morris settles down to the prose tales, he is free to express, in a more dis-

the good people always win, for, again, as in the folk-tale, and more particularly in Old Germanic literature, like Beowulf, or the Icelandic Sagas, the influence of which is so strong in his later writings, the evil is never really vanquished. It is only a question of a strong man keeping back the tide of darkness for a while, as Sigurd does, or Thiodulf in The House of the Wolfings, bringing a brief golden age of righteous judgements and noble deeds to their people, but vanquished at last by fate:

Ye have heard of Sigurd aforetime, how the foes of
 God he slew;
 How forth from the darksome desert the Gold of the
 Waters he drew;
 How he wakened Love on the Mountain, and wakened
 Brynhild the Bright,
 And dwelt upon Earth for a season, and shone in all
 men's sight.
 Ye have heard of the Cloudy People, and the dimming
 of the day,

cursive and leisurely form than verse, his own favourite dream of the world as a pleasant, sunny place, where, if the excursions of war and the bitterness of disappointment entered, it was only for a time, and where finally one passed to the abundant waters of lasting happiness, and to the green fragrance of a blossoming country-side", p. 44, and E. P. Thompson: "Suffering, pain or death are passed over in a paragraph, while sensuous beauty or physical love are embroidered for whole chapters. Hero and heroine bear charmed lives, and the evil witch and baron are always worsted. If there are battles and blood, the scarlet threads look pleasant in the tapestry", p. 787.

And the latter world's confusion, and Sigurd gone
 away;
 Now ye know of the Need of the Niblungs and the end
 of broken troth,
 All the death of kings and of kindreds and the
 Sorrow of Odin the Goth.⁸²

The quest has been achieved, the evil vanquished, but with the death of the hero comes renewed confusion, and all must be done over again.

Not to have perceived the dark side of Morris's artistic vision is a blind spot in Yeats's fine essay on the prose romances,⁸³ though it does not invalidate the essay

⁸²Sigurd the Volsung (London, 1877), p. 392. Cf. also the end of Beowulf, where the line of kings comes to an end and the kingdom is absorbed into another, despite all the hero had personally achieved, and The House of the Wolfings (London, 1888), Chapter 26, where Wood-Sun explains that she had tried to save Thiodulf at the expense of his people, because "They are doomed to departure; in a little while must they wane", so that his personal heroism which will save them now will ultimately all be wasted. Like all Morris heroes, however, Thiodulf prefers death for his people to immortal life and the shame of having deserted them, even if his sacrifice will only stave off the inevitable destruction for a brief while.

⁸³Actually, Yeats was criticised for his estimate of Morris as "the happiest of the poets", but the evidence for the criticism was drawn from the poetry, not the prose: "The greatest of living poets has called him 'the one perfectly happy and fortunate poet of modern times.' But Mr. Yeats disregards the tortured emotion, the stark horror, and stangled cries that surge up from many of the early poems in The Defence; add to them obsession with death, a thread wound through The Earthly Paradise or some of the ghastly visions of Sigurd, and the other Morris is revealed". Montague Weekley, William Morris (London, 1934), pp. 52-3.

completely as it does the criticism of writers less perceptive in other ways than he was, and it raises the question why, in any case, it has been so difficult to see the prose romances properly, even for such a man as Yeats. I suggest that yet again it is the Morris-myth that is intruding between the critic and the work of art. For Yeats, the factor seems to have been his desire to believe in the perfectibility of human nature, to believe in perfect happiness, somewhere, somehow, whatever the evidence to the contrary, and Morris, the child-like Morris of his friends' stories, was the best candidate for the job. This is obvious from the interpretation Yeats gives to The Well at the World's End of the two ways, and Morris's perfection in the way of nature:

Indeed all he writes seems to me like the make-believe of a child who is remaking the world, not always in the same way, but always after its own heart; and so, unlike all other modern writers, he makes his poetry out of unending pictures of a happiness that sets mind and body at ease. . . . He has but one story to tell us, how some man or woman lost and found again the happiness that is always half of the body; and even when they are wandering from it, leaves must fall over them, and flowers make fragrances about them, and birds sing to them, for being of Habundia's kin they must not forget the shadow of her Green Tree even for a moment, and the waters of her Well must be always wet upon their sandals. His poetry often wearies us as the unbroken green of July wearies us, for there is something in us, some bitterness because of the Fall it may be, that takes a little from the sweetness of Eve's apple after the first mouthful; but he who did all things gladly and easily, who never knew the

curse of labour, found it always as sweet as it was in Eve's mouth.⁸⁴

Other critics have different reasons, conscious or unconscious, for their mythologising, whether political, religious, or something else, and this is borne out by two modern critics, both of whom perceived the dark aspects in the prose romances, but both of whom, for different reasons, denied its validity. The first is Dorothy M. Hoare, who indeed seems to understand that all is not well in the world of romance, but she has become so convinced by her picture of Morris-the-escapist that she denies the meaning of the wars and deaths and loss of loved ones:

When Morris settled down to the prose tales, he is free to express, in a more discursive and leisurely form than verse, his own favourite dream of the world as a pleasant sunny place, where, if the excursions of war and the bitterness of disappointment entered, it was only for a time, and where finally one passed to the abundant waters of lasting happiness and to the green fragrance of a blossoming countryside.⁸⁵

The other critic is E. P. Thompson, who, deceived by his own ideological beliefs and by the picture of Morris-the-Socialist which he created to counter the earlier and more erroneous myth of Morris's political beliefs, has convinced

⁸⁴"The Happiest of the Poets", Essays and Introductions, pp. 60-1.

⁸⁵A. D. M. Hoare, p. 44.

himself that Yeats's phrase "the happiest of the poets" really does apply to Morris, not because he achieved the way of the Green Tree, as Yeats thought,⁸⁶ but because his socialist beliefs gave his life complete fulfillment:

The middle years of Morris's life were years of conflict: and only when 'hope' was reborn within him in the 1880s do the 'poet' and the 'designer' become one, with integrated aim and outlook. Only when Morris became a Communist did he become (as W. B. Yeats was to describe him) the 'Happiest of the Poets'.⁸⁷

⁸⁶F. A. C. Wilson, p. 57, explains this concept of the two ways: "Yeats felt that Morris was an artist like himself, content with the 'middle way', and the antithesis of such part sympathisers with the visionary world as Verhaeren, Mallarmé and Maeterlinck, and even more so of such romantic subjectives as Shelley and Rossetti. They rejected material happiness and sought, by spiritual struggle, to encompass the full mystical vision, but Morris was satisfied with the celebration of life, or more precisely to be a master of the mystery of the Self in the lower two of its three aspects, the level of the integrated personality and the sexual plane. . . . One cannot stress too strongly how exalted and noble even his discipline, as Yeats saw it, made Morris: he had achieved union with the transcendental virgin and drunk the miraculous water; he had fulfilled his own personality and learned present immortality, pure contemplation, all gifts that life can offer save that of total mystical union".

⁸⁷E. P. Thompson, p. 141. I would agree with Thompson that Morris to a very high degree found peace and fulfillment in the idea of a world renewed through socialism, but the point is that no man is happy in the way that Yeats and Thompson suggest, without conflict or suffering, and if Morris did achieve a tranquility in his old age after the troubled middle years, it was hard won, not at all the tranquility of suffering rejected, as Dorothy Hoare suggests, but of suffering understood and accepted, as his own heroes understood and accepted their fate.

Thompson also sees the evil in the prose romances, and puts a yet baser interpretation on it than does Miss Hoare, that "If there are battles and blood, the scarlet threads look pleasant in the tapestry".⁸⁸

These two saw without seeing, and it was their own self-created Morrises that blinded them, but by far the commonest tendency is not to see at all, to follow implicitly the myth of the innocent child-like Morris, and its counterpart in the interpretation which Arthur Compton Rickett gave to the prose romances when he wrote that "Morris's concern was entirely with Adam, but Adam in a Paradise regained".⁸⁹ Whatever the view taken, however, the result is ultimately the same, for, apart from the very few, critics almost always end by waving aside the prose romances as Morris's own daughter did, as "frankly holiday work",⁹⁰ or some other

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 787.

⁸⁹ Compton Rickett, p. 173. At least, however, Rickett regards the paradise as having been regained. The primal innocence of the Morris described by Yeats has not even the doubtful advantage of having known evil.

⁹⁰ Works XVII, xvi. One must except C. S. Lewis in his essay on Morris in Rehabilitations from both categories, for he really does understand the dialectic of the romances, probably because he was himself influenced by Morris in his science fiction and children's stories, all of which portray the conflict between good and evil so persistently as to be almost obsessive: "The left agrees with Morris that it is an absolute duty to labour for human happiness in this world. But the Left is deceiving itself if it thinks that any zeal for this object can

such dismissive phrase. And this is not because of the Morris-myth entirely, nor because their own preoccupations confuse them, but because the romance as an art form is simply not yet taken seriously, as Northrop Frye, whose section on the mythos of summer in The Anatomy of Criticism has begun the rehabilitation of the romance form, and C. S. Lewis have shown.⁹¹

permanently silence the reflection that every moment of this happiness must be lost as soon as gained, that all who enjoy it will die, that the race and the planet themselves must one day follow the individual into a state of being which has no significance -- a universe of inorganic homogeneous matter moving at uniform speed in a low temperature . . . Morris will show them how to acknowledge what they are tempted to camouflage and yet not to draw from it the conclusion they rightly fear. Nay he will show them how his thirst for immortality, tinglingly alive in the perpetual motion of its dialectic, will but add a more urgent motive to their endeavours, an honourable firmness in defeat, and a keener edge to victory.

"For Morris has 'faced the facts'. This is the paradox of him. He seems to retire far from the real world and to build a world out of his wishes; but when he has finished the result stands out as a picture of experience ineluctably true. No full-grown mind wants optimism or pessimism -- philosophies of the nursery where they are not philosophies of the clinic; but to have presented in one vision the ravishing sweetness and the heart-breaking melancholy of our experience, to have shown how the one continually passes over into the other, and to have combined all this with a stirring practical creed, this is to have presented the datum which all our adventures, worldly and other-worldly alike, must take into account", pp. 54-5.

⁹¹See note 77 above.

Lewis does not categorize Morris's work as romance as Frye does, because he has not reached the stage of constructing an entire terminology for his theory of literature as Frye has, so he defines Morris's romances by the fact that they are not novels, but his conclusion is the same, that it is the rigidity of critical classifications that has excluded Morris from proper attention:

Nineteenth-century criticism was unconsciously dominated by the novel, and could praise only with reservations work which does not present analysed characters ('living men and women' as they called them) in a naturalistic setting. Modern Shakespearian criticism dates from the abandonment of the attempt to treat Shakespeare's plays as if they were novels. . . . We are free to recognize that in the Winter's Tale the Pygmalion myth or resurrection myth in the last act is the substance and the characters, motives, and half-hearted attempts at explanation which surround it are the shadow. We may even regret that the convention in which Shakespeare worked did not allow him to make Paulina frankly a fairy or an angel and thus be rid of his 'improbable possibilities'. It will soon, we may hope, be impossible to relegate Morris to the shades because his whole world is an invention.⁹²

Thirty years earlier, Yeats, too, had prophesied that "this age of criticism is about to pass, and an age of imagination, of emotion, of moods of revelation, about to come in its place . . ."⁹³ but to judge by Morris criticism, at any rate,

⁹²C. S. Lewis, pp. 43-4.

⁹³"The Body of Father Christian Rosencrux", Essays and Introductions, p. 197, and he continues: ". . . and when the external world is no more the standard of reality,

we are no nearer the goal, and prose-criticism as well as prose writing has, with a few exceptions, continued to be novel-based.

This suggests that there is more to the problem than mere critical resistance to the non-novel, and again it is Yeats who has the answer. For to Yeats, and, incidentally to Arthur Symons, who was very close to Yeats, both as a friend and in his critical judgments,⁹⁴ Morris was not just a romance-writer, but a symbolist in the sense in which Rossetti and Burne-Jones, as well as the French writers usually associated with the term, were symbolists, and not an entirely unconscious one, as Frye suggests he is, either.⁹⁵ And as Yeats explains also, "In England, which

we will learn again that the great Passions are angels of God, and that to embody them 'uncurbed in their eternal glory,' even in their labour for the ending of man's peace and prosperity, is more than to comment, however wisely, upon the tendencies of our time, or even 'to sum up' our time, as the phrase is; for Art is a revelation, and not a criticism, and the life of the artist is in the old saying, 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is everyone that is born of the spirit.'"

⁹⁴See "The Prose of William Morris" in Studies in Prose and Verse (London, 1904).

⁹⁵See note 77 above, for Frye's view. Yeats wrote in "The Happiest of the Poets", Essays and Introductions: "He knew clearly what he was doing towards the end, for he lived at a time when poets and artists have begun again to carry the burdens that priests and theologians took from them angrily some few hundred years ago", p. 64. Even had he not stumbled upon the symbolism of ancient art through

has made great Symbolic Art, most people dislike an art if they are told it is symbolic, for they confuse symbolism with allegory".⁹⁶ The whole question of symbolism and allegory will be discussed in Part III, Chapter 3 below. Suffice it to say here that an understanding of this explains much of our difficulty with Morris's prose: the lack of analysed character, the magic, the conventionality of the images, which Paul Thompson objected to in the romances, are all part of the necessary self-limitation of the symbolist. As Yeats wrote of W. T. Horton, a symbolist painter, in *A Book of Images* by W. T. Horton and W. B. Yeats:

He tried at first to copy his models in colour, and with little mastery over colour when even greater mastery would not have helped him, and very literally: but soon found that you could only represent a world where nothing is still

his study of patterns and fabrics, as he obviously did (see for example "The History of Pattern Designing", Works XXII, 213-4), his interest in Maeterlinck, the last of the great French symbolists, which May Morris records in the introduction to Works XXII, xxii, would have taught him about it.

⁹⁶"Symbolism in Painting", Essays and Introductions, p. 146. As Arthur Symons explains, this is why Morris rejected the allegorical interpretations of his prose romances put forward by various reviewers in his own lifetime: "Morris was a poet, never more truly a poet than when he wrote in prose; and it was because he was a poet that he resented the imputation of writing allegories. Allegory is the prose writer's substitute for symbol . . .", Studies in Prose and Verse, pp. 91-2.

for a moment, and where colours have odours and odours musical notes, by formal and conventional images, midway between the scenery and persons of common life, and the geometrical emblems on mediaeval talismans. His images are still few, though they are becoming more plentiful, and will probably be always but few; for he who is content to copy common life need never repeat an image, because his eyes show him always changing scenes, and none that cannot be copied; but there must always be a certain monotony in the work of the Symbolist, who can only make symbols out of the things that he loves.⁹⁷

It was intended to apply to Horton, but is true of symbolism in general, and defines the conventions within which Morris works in the prose romances as no other mode of criticism has been able to do.

⁹⁷(Unicorn Press, London), 1898, p. 15.

CHAPTER 3

PROLEGOMENA TO ANY FUTURE MORRIS CRITICISM

The final problem in writing about Morris is connected with the narrowness of outlook of those critics who condemn prose writers whose "whole world is an invention" (though in poetry they are perfectly happy for the writer to invent his own world), because they do not understand the conventions within which writers like Morris are working, and cannot be bothered to find them out. This sort of narrowness has led to a narrowness and rigidity in critical classifications generally, not only with regard to those classifications that exclude the romance genre from serious recognition, but also in those which separate the arts one from another, so that each aspect must be treated by different specialists, even when the subject of inquiry is an artist in many different media. We are back, in fact, to the problem, already mentioned in the Foreword, of how to cope critically with the novelist who also happens to write string quartets.

This problem obviously applies particularly to someone like Morris, the variety and scope of whose interests has already been discussed, since although it is possible to group certain parts of his work under wider headings, such as the "complete building" and the "complete book", and thus

treat a number of his artistic activities simultaneously, it is not possible to group all his work into one whole in this way. Indeed, to read most criticism, one would scarcely be aware that Morris the designer, Morris the poet, and Morris the political activist were the same man at all, despite the fact that for Morris all these activities were very closely linked. The visual arts were not his relaxation from poetry, nor prose from the visual arts. Poetry was not his "sub-trade" as Henry James called it.¹ Each activity was co-equal with each, and each serves to reinforce the others. Some of his earliest designs pair with Rossetti's pictures.² Later, some of his best designs are for manuscripts of poems or for the printed books themselves, and some of his tapestries and hangings have poems woven into them.³ As Holbrook Jackson wrote of the Kelmscott

¹"Morris's poetry, you see, is only his sub-trade", Letter of Henry James, I, 17.

²For example, "The Blue Closet". In his case Rossetti's picture came first: "To one of my water colours, called The Blue Closet, he has written a stunning poem", letter from Rossetti to William Allingham, quoted in Philip Henderson, p. 51. Rossetti also returned the compliment by painting subjects from Morris's poems on the heavy chairs which were among the first furniture Morris ever designed, for the rooms he shared with Burne-Jones in Red Lion Square. See Mackail I, 117.

³For example, Pomona and Flora, two tapestries in the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, and the hangings for his four-poster bed in Kelmscott Manor. The poems woven

Press:

The first book to be printed on the new press was Morris's own romance, The Story of the Glittering Plain. The press work was completed in April of that year, and Poems by the Way, again his own work, was set up and printed. There was consistency in this preferential treatment of his own compositions, a consistency in key with the logical procedure of his progress from decorative artist to complete craftsman. It was not that he set his own works higher than those of others, but that a poem or a story by William Morris was not complete until it had been set forth in the best materials and workmanship which he could command.⁴

into the first two of these were also published separately in Poems by the Way (1891), in the section, "Verses for Pictures", along with some of Morris's other tapestry verses, in the last of which, "The Flowering Orchard", the speaker is actually called "Silk Embroidery".

⁴William Morris (London, 1926, revised and enlarged from 1908 edition), p. 90. Another testimonial to the unity of Morris's work comes from Henry Halliday Sparling, pp. 1-2, who was Morris's assistant at the Kelmscott Press: "It has not been given to many men of any time to be masters of more than one art, and those that have been true masters of one only are none too numerous. But Morris was master of many, practising them all at the same time and together; and those whose knowledge and understanding are confined within the limits of any one art, or any one craft, are not only incapable of comprehending the Master-Craftsman who 'set his triumphant hand to everything from the sampler up the epic', but, in proportion to the narrowing of their interests and experience, are puzzled and worried by his output in the one field of activity with which they are acquainted. His poetry is not as that of others, nor his prose, nor his designs, nor anything else that is his, because he recognized and felt the underlying unity of all creative work, and could utilize the skill and experience gained in the pursuit of any one art in the pursuit of any other.

"A few years later on, when the men and things of the immediate past have taken their due place in historical perspective, when the passions of yesterday have cooled and the prejudices of to-day have diminished, Morris will begin to loom up into something like his real size. The

Moreover, as we have already seen in the Foreword, Morris's whole art theory was directed towards uniting, not dividing, the arts.

This in itself would be sufficient to show that it is dangerous to attempt to treat the literary work separately from the whole œuvre, but there is also a further and, as some think, more important link between Morris's different activities. That link is the socialism which he adopted in his late forties. He was led into it through art, because he believed that modern conditions of life were not suitable for the production of beautiful things, and that only a Marxist revolution could infuse new life and vigour into the decadent arts of Western Europe.⁵

Almost all his lectures on art therefore preach socialism also, and his socialist theory is bound up with his preference for craftsmanship and folk art over the products

tyrannous reign of the specialist -- the 'nothing but', as Morris called him -- will then, it is to be hoped, be over; and the work that Morris did may be more correctly estimated, each and every one of his achievements being reckoned as part of an organic whole, the work of Rossetti's 'one vast Morris'. He will no longer be regarded as a poet who strayed into the making of wallpapers, an artist who wasted himself upon the dyeing of silks and the weaving of carpets, or as a genius who lost grip upon reality and wandered off into a wilderness of Utopian dreams". When due allowance is made for the idealization of the portrait, there remains much truth in the criticism of the 'nothing-but'.

⁵"Poetry goes with the hand-arts I think, and like them has now become unreal: the arts have got to die, what is left of them, before they can be born again", Morris

of an upper class artistic élite.⁶ It was in the cause of socialism that he became a journalist, a profession which he hated, and for several years edited the Commonweal, the weekly paper of the Socialist League, often writing many of the contributions himself. A Dream of John Ball and News from Nowhere, usually considered his two greatest prose works and sometimes the greatest of his literary work as a whole, were both first written for the Commonweal, and appeared in it as serials.⁷

quoted in Mackail II, 116.

⁶"I specially wished to point out that the question of popular art was a social question, involving the happiness or misery of the greater part of the community. The absence of popular art from modern times is more disquieting and grievous to bear for this reason than for any other, that it betokens that fatal division of men into the cultivated and the degraded classes which competitive commerce has bred and fosters; popular art has no chance of a healthy life, or, indeed, of a life at all, till we are on the way to fill up this terrible gulf between riches and poverty. . . . What business have we with art at all unless all can share it?", Morris quoted by Mackail II, 105. Note also that Morris did not care for "arts-and-crafts"-iness, which was an artificial attempt to reintroduce local crafts, patronized by the middle classes, and not the natural outgrowth of popular feeling, which, to be of any value, it must be. See "The Aims of Art", Works XXIII, 93.

⁷A curious attitude both to Morris's socialism and to his journalism is shown by Philip Henderson, pp. 32-3: "[John Ball and News from Nowhere] were both written for the pages of The Commonweal, the journal of Morris's Socialist League, but into them he put his deepest thoughts on life and human destiny". The question is, why does Henderson say "but" here?

This unity in multiplicity, while making Morris's life a fascinating study, causes problems for the pure critic of literature and art, and even for the political theorist. How much is the critic justified in excluding of the other aspects of Morris's activity? How much can he afford to include, when he is not familiar with the disciplines of the other categories into which Morris's work may fall? In fact, except in dealing minutely with limited areas as art critics tend to do and as some practical critics have done with individual poems of The Defence of Guenevere volume (Morris's other poems are generally too long and diffuse to be treated effectively by this method) to divide is almost always to deny the validity of the artistic whole. At the same time, however, no one critic can hope to be competent in all the areas in which Morris expressed his art. Thus inevitably all the critical writing on his work is either partial, or, where some survey is attempted, inadequate in some parts.

One way of solving the problem of an adequate book on Morris might be to follow the prescription of E. P. Thompson in his political biography of Morris, "William Morris's genius was so versatile that any overall judgement on his life must be the collaboration of many specialist opinions".⁸ It sounds plausible, but what would

⁸E. P. Thompson, p. 7.

be the result? Yet another book in which Morris is divided up into sections, prose, poetry, politics, patterns, printed books. But this time there would not even be the unity that comes from the same author dealing with all these different sections. What would emerge would be as many different artists as there are authors and chapters, and all these artists coincidentally sharing the name William Morris. Worse still, each would be only a partial artist, because in considering his work, the work of all those other Morris'es will have been ignored. Who would write a book on Yeats without reading A Vision? It is the key to his symbolism. Likewise, no-one can write on Morris's prose without understanding also the art, poetry, socialism, which are equally the keys to his symbolism, especially as it is only in relation to applied art that Morris ever becomes really articulate about his aims and ideals. Critical collaboration of Thompson's sort could not solve the problem of the adequate book on Morris, because it would only serve to reinforce the old tradition of putting different aspects of the same artist into different compartments, and denying the links between the media.

Such compartmentalizing has perhaps not mattered so much where the activity of the artist is less varied than Morris's, or where the standard of achievement in the secondary or tertiary areas is less high. Who remembers, for instance, that Victor Hugo and George Moore were artists

when criticizing their novels, though some of Hugo's paintings are very fine? Yeats, too, was trained as a painter, and that is one of the secrets of his affinity with Morris, and an aspect of his work that has not, I think, been adequately assessed yet. But for these literature was the overriding art, and we can understand much or most without reference to their other modes of expression. Where, however, as with Morris or Blake or Edward Lear, art is the main activity of a lifetime, as mathematics was for Lewis Carroll, or law for Wallace Stevens, the connections between the various media in which they expressed themselves cannot be ignored without a grave misunderstanding of the work.

Blake, of course, is the most important figure among this group, and also the closest to Morris in the way in which art and writing are connected in his work, for his copper-plate engravings resemble in essence if not in actual execution the concept which Morris was trying to realise at the Kelmscott Press. Morris himself understood this resemblance, and wrote of "the almost miraculous phenomenon of a painter of that period who had a real and strange genius for the decorative and beautiful side of the art, Blake to wit, who visionary as he was understood not only the power of words in verse but also the power of form and

colour to delight the eye at the same time that it exalts the mind".⁹ Indeed, in Blake's poetry more than in Morris's, for it was not until his late prose that Morris began to understand how to use the inter-relationship of the arts in a symbolist manner, the visual arts are as vital a factor as poetry is in his creative work as a whole. For Blake, philosophical abstractions became in vision giant human figures. They sprawl across the sky in America, A Prophecy or in The Book of Urizen, and are portrayed literally thus in some of his pictures. But their dominion over his artistic vision is ultimately more subtle, for even in landscape and natural features the curves of hill and tree and cloud are those of the human body, and a half-perceived physical presence broods over the earth. The description of the giant Albion in Milton, Book the Second:

his left foot near London
Covers the shades of Tyburn: his instep from Windsor
To Primrose Hill stretching to Highgate & Holloway
London is between his knees: its basements fourfold
His right foot stretches to the sea on Dover Cliffs, his
heel
On Canterburys ruins; his right hand covers lofty Wales
His left Scotland; his bosom girt with gold involves
York, Edinburgh, Durham & Carlisle & on the front
Bath, Oxford, Cambridge Norwich; his right elbow
Leans on the Rocks of Erins Land, Ireland ancient
nation[.]¹⁰

⁹The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris, p. 75.

¹⁰The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, edited by David V. Erdman, commentary by Harold Bloom (New York, 1965), pp. 139-40.

has its true visual counterpart not in the literal giant portrayed in "Albion Worshipping Christ", Jerusalem (1804-20), plate 76,¹¹ but in the way in which the line of the mountains in "The Wise and Foolish Virgins" (c. 1826)¹² reflects the shape of arm, torso and thigh of the angelic trumpeter above, or the tree in "The Little Girl Found", Songs of Experience (1789-94)¹³ uses the same technique of twisted sinews as the body, particularly the arms, of the figure and its background in "Nebuchadnezzar" (1795)¹⁴ or as the whole central figure-group of "Daughters of Job", The Book of Job (1825), plate 20.¹⁵ And this omnipresence of the human form is not a separable part of Blake's art

¹¹Kathleen Raine, William Blake (London, 1970), p. 166, plate 120. While primarily an art book, this never forgets that Blake's painting and poetry are closely interrelated, and therefore has some valuable intermedial insights.

¹²Ibid., p. 120, plate 87.

¹³Ibid., p. 140, plate 102.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 85, plate 62.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 195, plate 142.

or of his poetry. It is the very shape of his thought, which cannot be expressed in any more explicit way.

Just so in Morris's prose romances in their final form at the Kemplscott Press, the artistic and poetic visions are unified, less perfectly perhaps than Blake's, for Morris came to it late and was less consumed by his vision than was Blake, but united none-the-less. Yeats has described this unity beautifully as "as musical relation": "and when sound, and colour, and form are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation to one another, they become as it were one sound, one colour, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion".¹⁶ It is this intermedial area, where prose and poetry and design meet and mingle, the poetic vision clarifying the artistic, and the artistic interpenetrating the poetic, that in Morris's work has scarcely been touched, and which this thesis hopes, however feebly, to illuminate.

¹⁶"The Symbolism of Poetry", Essays and Introductions, p. 157.

PART II

LINE INTO PATTERN, A THEORY OF TOTAL DESIGN

CHAPTER 1

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF "ADJECTIVE" ART

Up till now, the direction of this thesis has been towards surveying the fragmentation that has occurred in treatments of Morris's work, and in attempting to suggest a way in which a new critical synthesis could take place. Now, however, it is necessary ourselves to fragment, for the propositions which this thesis makes about the nature of Morris's aesthetic purpose and his achievement at the Kelmscott Press depend on a close examination of his theoretical and critical writings, and this cannot be carried out without a certain amount of fragmentation, even if only to the extent of separating the theory from the practice. In order to make this examination, therefore, the next two sections of the thesis, Part II: Line Into Pattern, A Theory of Total Design, and Part III: "The Applied Arts of Literature", will be devoted to a treatment of Morris's theories of literature and of the visual arts, and to some extent also to his practice in applied art.

The reason for this emphasis on theory is that, as we saw in Part I, it has been only too easy for Morris's prose work to be dismissed because it derives from a literary tradition unfamiliar to present day critics of continuous prose fiction, who have therefore tended to treat Morris's

romances as if they were bad novels rather than as part of an alternative prose tradition. Because of this failure of understanding, and also because of the complexity of Morris's intentions, it is important to begin by establishing just what Morris was trying to do, so that we can meet him on his own terms when we come to read the prose romances. Thus in addition to the concept of intermedial structures in the arts, and, more specifically, the complete building and the complete book, which have already been introduced in the Foreword, further analysis is still needed, for we do not yet know how Morris came to develop these concepts, nor how he worked towards realizing them. There is a long step from his first attempts at painting, as Rossetti's pupil, when he found that his painting and poetry interfered with one another, before he had acquired the technique of handling his talents and passing smoothly from one piece of artistic production to another as he later could, to his culminating ideal of producing a work of art which would be an integrated whole. The object of these theoretical sections, therefore, is to explore that long step in greater detail before advancing to an examination of the complete book itself and all that it entails, and to show in the process that not only did Morris's ideals of art ultimately find their goal in the complex intermedial structures of the music-drama, the complete building and the complete book, but that his whole theory and practice of the arts is in-

extricably linked together and interdependent, from his earliest efforts onwards, so that no one aspect of his art, whether literature or design, can be thoroughly studied without taking into consideration his theory and practice in the other arts.

In order to emphasize the intermedial nature of this discussion of Morris's theories of art, the titles of Parts II and III both deliberately involve puns, which mingle terminology from the visual arts and literature. In the case of "Line Into Pattern" especially, the analogy implied is between the uses of the terms "line" and "pattern" in all the arts.¹ These arts include painting of course, particularly in its modern non-representational phase, which, like pattern design in paper and fabrics, cannot readily be talked about as the older pictorial art was in terms of story portrayed or realistic subject; but they also include literature, in the pattern and structure of the lines of the

¹Morris does no more than hint at such an analogy in his theory of patterns, but his concept of the relationship between form and meaning in the complete book seems to justify such an approach. See also, for example, his "Address at the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings", May Morris I, 154, where he says: "Such an ordinary thing as a wall, ashlar or rubble, cannot at the present day be built in the same way as a medieval wall was. Any architect who has tried it will tell you that what I say is correct. I say the unconscious habit of working the stone in a certain way cannot be supplied artificially, and in such habits lies the very life of the buildings; it was the language in which the story was told when stories were told in buildings. If you have

poem, in the construction of prose out of its component shapes: paragraphs, sentences, even down to phonemes, and the construction of the story itself out of certain recurrent patterns, and out of mythemes;² and they include printing, in which visual and literary lines and patterns come together; and all those other arts, like music, drama, mime, ballet, costume, stage-design, scenery, which we have included in the category music-drama. The title "The Applied Arts of Literature"³ also plays on this interaction between the visual arts and literature in Morris's work, for it seems to me that to push the structural analogy between these two disciplines as far as it will go will ultimately throw light on the form and purpose of the prose romances as complete books, as works in which the pattern

destroyed the language, can you restore the style of the story? [my italics]. You can have but a diagram of it, a caput mortuum. The language gone, the literature is also departed. In short, the art of that time was the outcome of the life of that time".

²A mytheme may be defined as the smallest meaningful unit of a mythos (for the explanation of which, see Northrop Frye, the section "Theory of Mythos" in Anatomy of Criticism, Four Essays [New York, 1966]), on the analogy of phoneme, which is the smallest meaningful sound element in the word. It was coined by Claude Lévi-Strauss. See Structural Anthropology (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), p. 207. The whole chapter, "The Structural Study of Myth", is relevant here.

³This title comes from a piece by W. B. Yeats quoted (without a reference to its source) by John Unterecker, A Reader's Guide to W. B. Yeats (London, 1973), p. 17: "We

of language and myth is of paramount importance.

I have chosen to treat the visual arts first in this analysis, chiefly because it is there that Morris was most explicit about his theories, his concept of art generally, and his principles of composition, but also because applied art was the day to day business of his life, and therefore the context in which all his other creative work must be interpreted. As we shall see, Morris was not nearly as forthcoming in what little theoretical and critical writing he did on literature. Thus, since his theories of the visual arts are so much more thoroughly worked out and clearly expressed than are his theories in other fields, it will sometimes be necessary to extrapolate from the visual arts to literature.⁴ It must, however, be stressed, that "clearly expressed" is in this case only a relative term, since Morris's theoretical work is almost all in the form of lectures and is never rigorously worked out, so that his

had in Ireland imaginative stories, which the uneducated classes knew and even sang, and might we not make those stories current among the educated classes, rediscovering for the work's sake what I have called 'the applied arts of literature', the association of literature, that is, with music, speech, and dance. . . ."

⁴This extrapolation occurs most notably on the question of symbolism, which Morris discussed at some length with regard to pattern design, but scarcely at all for literature, even though it is obviously rather important for his prose romances. Such extrapolation will not be made, however, unless there is some indication in his writing on literature to justify it.

ideas are often inconsistent and his terminology varies from lecture to lecture.

The sources of Morris's theories of the visual arts are mostly collected in Volumes XXII and XXIII of the Collected Works, but additional lectures also appear in William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist, chiefly in Volume I, though Volume II, William Morris, Socialist, where many of the papers originally published by Morris in his political journal, The Commonweal, are collected, contains much useful material for anyone concerned with Morris's ideas on the social implications of art. Other sources are The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris, edited and compiled by Eugene D. Lemire (Detroit, 1969), and Socialism; Its Growth and Outcome, which shows a concern with the arts which would be rather surprising in a textbook on socialism written by anyone but Morris. There are also various comments of interest in Morris's letters, and in the records of his sayings by May Morris, J. W. Mackail, and Henry Halliday Sparling, though these are of course rather less reliable than Morris's written word.

All this adds up to a very large body of work, none of which could be ignored by anyone attempting to form a complete picture of Morris's aesthetic, and yet to deal fully with it would provide material enough for a whole thesis. For obvious reasons, therefore, the treatment of his theories here has had to be limited to one small area

of his work in the field: that part of his aesthetic which is most relevant to his practice in the interrelationships between literature and the visual arts. This limitation is the greater pity in that there is as yet no comprehensive appreciation of Morris as theorist of the arts that one may point to as providing an adequate general approach to the subject before embarking on an analysis of one section in detail. The best treatment is Jessie Kocmanová's essay "The Aesthetic Opinions of William Morris",⁵ but, like most writers on Morris, she tends to ignore the theory of design in the applied arts in which Morris, as a practising designer, was something of an expert, and to concentrate on those of his theories which have a general social application.⁶ In

⁵Comparative Literature Studies, IV (1967), 409-24.

⁶The same may be said of all full length works on Morris as social theorist, like Margaret Grennan's useful study, William Morris, Medievalist and Revolutionary (Columbia, 1945), though her chapter "History, Medievalism, and Propaganda" is worth reading in this context; and also of general studies of nineteenth century social thought, such as Alice Chandler's A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth Century English Literature (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1970). Both of these discuss Morris's art theory in its mediaeval aspects, but have placed even less emphasis than Jessie Kocmanová on his distinctly artistic contribution, being chiefly interested again in his ideas on art in so far as they affect his politics. Even Paul Thompson, who, as an art and architecture expert himself, might be expected to be interested in Morris's theories of how to design for the applied arts in their place in the architectural whole, is almost entirely concerned with Morris's practice in the arts and does not include a chapter on his art theories as such in

fact the only work which really gets to grips with the subject of Morris's design theory is Alf Bøe's fascinating book, From Gothic Revival to Functional Form, A Study in Victorian Theories of Design (Oslo Studies in English 6, Oslo, 1957), though this, as its title indicates, covers such a wide area that the section specifically devoted to Morris is rather brief. In this book, more emphasis is placed on Morris's actual analyses of patterns and on his practical advice on how to design for the applied arts than has been the case in any other treatment of Morris as theorist so far,⁷ but even here Morris's concept of applied art in its relationship to the architectural whole is scarcely mentioned.

From the foregoing comments on the inadequacies of art criticism in dealing with that part of Morris's art

his survey of Morris's work. It is true that Chapter 4 is an attempt to examine "the relationship between theory and practice in work and style", p. 94, in Morris's art, but it only deals with a very fragmentary area of the design theory, and there is no actual treatment of Morris's development as a theorist, or any summary of his work as a theorist, anywhere in the book.

⁷It may seem odd that at one moment I have criticized Paul Thompson for too much emphasis on practical advice, and at the next I have praised Bøe for apparently the same thing. In fact what is inadequate about Thompson's treatment is that while he does indeed deal with Morris's actual practical advice to some extent, this is only in relation to his practice, and never in the context of his whole art theory. And as the different aspects of Morris's art production are divided up into separate chapters, so the practical aspects of his art theory are divided up to accompany the individual sections to which they specifically relate, and so we never get any overall view of the theory at all.

theory which is most relevant to his practice of design, it has probably become clear to the reader that, as we have seen to be the case with his creative output, Morris's theory is not easily dealt with under any one category or by any one type of critic. However, unlike his creative work, Morris's theories of art have not, generally speaking, been broken down into individual compartments each for a separate critic to examine. Rather, what has happened is that a large part of his theory has more or less been ignored by most critics in order to fit the remainder into the single neat category of his ideas on what Jessie Kocmanová has called "the collective and social nature of art".⁸ In some ways, though, this presents less of a problem than did the tangled web of complications in which political and biographical work on Morris has become involved, for Morris's writing on art does break down fairly readily into three main areas of thought, each of which can be treated separately from the others without losing too much (always provided that both critic and reader are aware that omissions are being made), so that it is reasonably easy to remedy omissions in the areas that have been ignored.

Of these three areas, the first, Morris's socio-aesthetic of which we have already spoken, can be dismissed

⁸Comparative Literature Studies, IV (1967), 420.

fairly quickly because, as we have seen, it has already been treated at length by others, and quite adequately enough for our purposes. All that needs to be said here is that this is the part of Morris's art theory which is concerned with the relationship between art and labour, the basic tenets of which may be neatly summed up in Morris's definition of true art in "The Beauty of Life", as "art made by the people and for the people, a joy to the maker and the user".⁹ This is the part of his aesthetic which is most important for his social theory,¹⁰ which is why it has already been treated

⁹Works XXII, 80.

¹⁰Statements of his socio-aesthetic position are frequent in Morris's lectures, particularly those after 1883, the date of his first overtly socialist lecture, "Art Under Plutocracy", Works XXIII, which was given at Oxford with an approving Ruskin in the chair. His clearest statement, however, may be found in his preface to the Kelmscott Press edition of Ruskin's "The Nature of Gothic" (1892), a chapter from The Stones of Venice, where he seems in fact to justify the treatment his own art theory was to receive by treating Ruskin's in the same way: "Some readers will perhaps wonder that in this important chapter of Ruskin I have found it necessary to consider the ethical and political, rather than what would ordinarily be thought, the artistic side of it. I must answer, that, delightful as is that portion of Ruskin's work which describes, analyses, and criticizes art, old and new, yet this is not after all the most characteristic side of his writings. Indeed from the time at which he wrote this chapter here reprinted, those ethical and political considerations have never been absent from his criticism of art; and, in my opinion, it is just this part of his work, fairly begun in 'The Nature of Gothic' and brought to its culmination in the great book Unto This Last, which has had the most enduring and beneficent effect on his contemporaries, and will have through them on succeeding generations," May Morris I, 249. But while this may be true possibly for Ruskin, though I for one do not

fairly adequately by social critics, but in this thesis it is only relevant as being one of the reasons for Morris's preference for applied or popular art over fine art. There are various other reasons for this preference, some of which we shall go into detail about shortly, but from the social point of view it was the élitist nature of fine art which he did not care for, considering it of less value than applied art, at least in some respects, because it is made by a privileged category of people called artists chiefly for the amusement of another privileged category, the very rich.

Of this art he says:

Unless something or other is done to give all men some pleasure for the eyes and rest for the mind in the aspect of their own and their neighbours' houses, until the contrast is less disgraceful between the fields where beasts live and the streets where men live, I suppose that the practice of the arts must be mainly kept in the hands of a few highly cultivated men, who can go often to beautiful palces, whose education enables them, in the contemplation of the past glories of the world, to shut out from their view the everyday squalors that the most of men move in. Sirs, I believe that art has such sympathy with cheerful freedom, open-heartedness and reality, so much she sickens under selfishness and luxury, that she will not live thus isolated and exclusive. I will go further than this and say that on such terms I do not wish her to live. I protest that it would be a shame to an honest artist to enjoy what he had huddled up to himself of such art, as it would be for a rich man to sit and eat dainty food amongst

think it is, it is far less true for Morris, who was more of a practising artist, and does not justify neglect at least of that part of his art theory which bears upon his practice.

starving soldiers in a beleaguered fort.

I do not want art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few.¹¹

The last part of the quotation should be especially noted because it emphasizes the way in which Morris's socialism was bound up with his aesthetics, just as much as his art was involved with socialism, for, even apart from the moral aspect of élitist art, Morris, like Yeats after him, felt that any art which was divorced from its proper contact with the people must sooner or later become degraded and meaningless, and eventually die.¹² It was partly the desire to prevent this decay from going any further than it had already (which was quite a long way, in Morris's opinion) that turned Morris into a socialist, just as it turned Yeats into a folklorist and mystic, in the attempt to recapture contact with the springs of art.

It is the remaining part of Morris's aesthetic -- what may be called his art theory proper, as distinct from his socio-aesthetic -- which has been least well treated by critics, and which is the special concern of this section of the thesis, though again nothing like a full analysis of its implications is contemplated. This art theory can be

¹¹"The Lesser Arts", Works XXII, 25-6.

¹²See Works XXI, 3-4. We shall be hearing more about Morris's concept of an art of and for the people in the next chapter.

loosely divided into two sections. The first of these is concerned with the theoretical background to the visual arts generally, including some things which are not generally regarded as coming within the sphere of aesthetics, such as road-building and crop rotation.¹³ The development of this part of Morris's thought culminates in the theory of inter-medial artistic structures, which has already been discussed, and these intermedial structures then provide the background for the second part of Morris's art theory proper, that which encompasses his actual professional concern: the history, theory, and practice of the applied arts, and, most specifically, the history and theory of pattern design, which is as much a practical guide for workers in the applied arts as it is abstract theory. It is in this last area that Morris's theory and practice come together, so that by studying his analyses of the historical background, together with his advice to other practitioners of pattern design, we are able more clearly to discover what his own intentions were in his designs, and how far he succeeded in carrying them out.

¹³See Works XXIII, 164-5, for example: "And first I must ask you to extend the word art beyond those matters which are consciously works of art, to take in not only painting and sculpture, and architecture, but the shapes and colours of all household goods, nay, even the arrangements of the fields for tillage and pasture, the management of towns and of our highways of all kinds; in a word, to extend it to all the externals of our life".

Before we can go on to discuss the theory and practice of pattern design, however, it is first necessary to understand a key concept which is vital for any interpretation of Morris's aesthetic as a whole, the concept of "adjective art". This art bears a close relationship to what we would usually call "applied art", but an applied art exalted into a social, moral and aesthetic ideal differing considerably from our usual understanding of it. According to the normal usage of the term, "applied art" is loosely taken to signify all those lesser arts from weaving and pottery to wood- and stone-carving which are the province of the handicraftsman rather than the artist, while "fine art" signifies painting and sculpture, which are usually considered the more important and interesting visual arts. For Morris, on the contrary, it was applied art which was the more important and interesting, not only because it was what he himself practised, but also because it had a very important place in relation to his concept of Architecture,¹⁴ as we shall see. In order, therefore, to do away with the value judgement

¹⁴Following Morris's occasional practice, I have used a capital A to distinguish Morris's overall architectural structure from the usual significance of the term "architecture". See, for example, his usage in "The Beauty of Life", Works XXII, 73, or "The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization", ibid., 119.

implicit in the contrast between "fine" and "applied" (or less fine?) art, and to distinguish his different attitude, Morris coined the terms "adjective" and "substantive" (or noun) art,¹⁵ terms borrowed from grammar which reinforce the suggestion of an intimate relationship in Morris's mind between the visual and the literary arts. The significance of these terms in Morris's usage is closely related to the function of the corresponding parts of speech in a sentence, where a noun can stand alone, whereas an adjective is a descriptive word which must be dependent on something else. Similarly, the term "substantive" is used by Morris to designate those works of art which, like easel-painting, are conceived of as separate and independent works, which can stand alone because their meaning is independent of any context in which they may be placed. "Adjective" art, on the other hand, cannot stand alone, but must be dependent upon some larger whole, in some definite context.

At first sight, this terminology still seems to indicate a somewhat negative attitude to adjective art, for

¹⁵Morris himself does not use these terms with any consistency. In a number of places he calls the applied arts "the lesser arts", as in the titles of lectures in Works XXII, 3 and 240, and he also uses "the decorative arts", p. 3, and "the popular arts", p. 73. When he actually uses the term "applied art", p. 356, it is in a rather different sense. For fine art he has no fixed terminology because by and large it was not his province, and he tends to use a circumlocution, such as "the great arts commonly called Sculpture and Painting", p. 3. In [Art: A Serious Thing], Unpublished Lectures, p. 14, he says with some

we are accustomed to thinking of independent works of art as the highest development of the visual arts. However, when it is understood that the larger whole which is the context for adjective art is none other than Morris's ideal of the complete building, then the position becomes clearer. For the complete building, according to Morris's ideal, was intended to embrace all the arts, not only those that obviously belong to architecture, such as mason's work, carving, stained glass, but also the individualist arts, painting and sculpture, which in their modern development had come to consider themselves too grand to submit to the discipline of the complete building. Thus, properly speaking, in Morris's terms sculpture and painting also ought to be adjective arts, and can only be overgrown and imperfect when separated from their proper place in relation to Architecture.¹⁶ It is when they are thus overgrown and detached from their appropriate interdependence within the architectural whole that they become substantive arts, individually perhaps attaining greater heights of expressiveness, but lacking the power that the visual arts in cooperation have to achieve the transcendence of Architecture.

scorn: "fine art as 'tis called".

¹⁶See "The Arts and Crafts of To-day", Works XXII, 359-60.

Morris's definition of adjective and substantive art and his preference for adjective art both depend upon his theory of history, and are best expressed in conjunction with that theory in one of his last statements of his artistic position, in Socialism; Its Growth and Outcome (1893). In this book, which was intended as a simplified Marxist analysis of history as tending towards socialism,¹⁷ Morris and Bax interpret the history of Europe as a sort of spiral, with a recurring movement of the structure of society from barbarism through to decadence and then to a renewal of barbarism. According to this spiral, the "Golden Age" of Rome was a high point of civilization, but one which held the seeds of decay in itself, for Rome passed into decadence under the emperors and was consequently overcome by a barbarian invasion. This new barbarism then itself developed until it too reached a high point at the Renaissance, and the inference of course is that nineteenth century Europe

¹⁷In essence, the book is an expansion of the historical elements (as distinct from the economics) of Marx's Capital, using his "historical method", but Morris and Bax also add their own introductions to earlier socialist and semi-socialist thinkers, such as Fourier, Saint-Simon, and Marx himself. Their object is stated in the introduction, pp. 16-17: "In order that our readers may get a correct view of this, it is necessary to use the historic method -- that is to say, to trace the development of society from its early times up to the full expression of the commercial period, which has created and is now creating such a vast mass of discontent. . . . We propose to finish the book by giving our own impression both of the immediate issue of the

was in a similar state of decay to that of imperial Rome. The orthodox Marxist conclusion to this theory of history was therefore that a socialist revolution was needed to fulfil the function of a return to barbarism, to cleanse and purify decadent Western society, though, as the cycles on the spiral tend to produce an improvement in the quality of life each time they recur, it would be an improved and controlled barbarism.¹⁸ As Morris wrote to Georgiana Burne-Jones: "What a joy it is to think of! and how often it consoles me to think of barbarism once more flooding the world, and real feelings and passions, however rudimentary,

present stir and commotion in socio-political life, and also of what may be reasonably expected of the new society when it has at last supplanted the ever-increasing confusion of the present day

¹⁸This "new barbarism" is nowhere explicitly stated, but the analogies made, for instance, between the Middle Ages and pre-Classical antiquity, Socialism, pp. 48-9, or the implied comparison between late Roman times and nineteenth century Europe, pp. 41 and 49, obviously suggest a further analogy between "this interpenetration of progressive barbarism and decaying Roman civilization" and what was likely to happen in a socialist revolution, as indeed does his cyclical theory of art quoted in the text below. Cf. also Works XXII, 370-1: "the spiral, which is . . . the true line of progress". That the idea of a recurrence of barbarism was a very well-established concept in this period may be seen from Jaques Rivière's important essay of 1913, "Le Roman d'Aventure", Nouvelles Etudes (8th edition, 1947), p. 326, where he points out that the expected recurrence of barbarism has not in fact occurred: "Le symbolisme n'est pas -- comme lui-même d'abord eut la naïveté de le donner à croire -- un art de décadence, un fruit paradoxal et pourri, produit par une sève presque

taking the place of our wretched hypocrisies".¹⁹

The last chapter of Socialism, "Socialism Triumphant", deals with various matters of life under socialism, including the position of the arts, though not as a dogmatic assertion of future developments but merely as a suggestion of what might happen, combined of course with a little wishful thinking.²⁰ In this chapter, Morris defines adjective and substantive art and gives a brief picture of their progress from their birth to their decadence, linking them, as follows, with the spiral of history outlined in the last paragraph:

When we emerge from vague primitive into early historic barbarism, we find that this expression of some degree of pleasure in labour receives a fresh impetus, and is everywhere present in needful occupations. It was from this turning of a necessary work into an amusement that definite art was finally born.

As barbarism began to give place to early civilization, this solace of labour fell asunder into duality like everything else, and art became incidental and accessory on the one side and independent and primary on the other. We shall take the liberty here of coining words, and calling the first adjective, and the second substantive art: meaning by adjective art that which grew up un-

épuisée. La preuve en est que nous lui avons survécu, et sans qu'il y ait eu besoin de révolution, ni d'invasion barbare". We shall be talking about Morris as a symbolist later, and this suggests an initial link between the two.

¹⁹Letters, p. 236.

²⁰See below, Part III, Chapter 1, note 41.

consciously as an amusement blended with the production of ordinary wares more or less permanent, from a house to a garment-pin; and by substantive, a piece of craftsmanship whose raison d'être was to be a work of art, and which conveyed a definite meaning or story of some kind.

In the civilization of Greece, which was so vigorous in throwing off barbarism, substantive art progressed very speedily, more or less to the prejudice of adjective art. As Roman despotism dragged the ancient world into staleness the triumphant substantive art withered into lifeless academicism, till it was met by the break-up of classical society. Under the new access of barbarism, art, acted on and reacting by, the remains of the classical life, changed completely. Substantive art almost disappeared and gave place to a fresh development of adjective art, so rich and copious as to throw into the shade entirely the adjective art of the past, and to fill up the void caused by the waning of substantive art. Architecture, complete and elastic to adapt itself to our necessities, was the birth of this period; the blossoming time of which is dated by the name of the Emperor Justinian (c. 520 A.D.). This great adjective art developed into perfection in the early Middle Ages, its zenith being reached at the middle of the thirteenth century. But its progress was marked by the birth and gradual growth of a new substantive art; which, as the architecture of the Middle Ages began to decline, became, if not more expressive, yet at least more complex and more completely substantive till the Middle Ages were on the verge of dissolution. At last came the great change in society marked by the Renaissance enthusiasm and the Reformation; and as the excitement of that period began to pass away, we find adjective art almost gone, and substantive unconscious of any purpose but the display of intellect and dexterity of hand, the old long enduring duality dying out into mere nullity.

The upshot of this, so far as it concerns the solace of necessary occupation, was, that while substantive art went on with many vicissitudes, amusing the upper classes, commercialism killed all art for the workman, depriving him necessarily of the power of appreciating its higher, and the opportunity of producing its subsidiary form.²¹

²¹Socialism, pp. 302-4.

As we can see from this analysis, Morris thought of adjective art as a pleasure and solace for all men which characterized the art of the periods of barbarism and early civilization, whereas substantive art, on the other hand, was primarily the art of the rich, and characterized periods of high civilization and of decadence. Thus, for example, the Middle Ages were a time when adjective art flourished, when, in Morris's view, all artists were craftsmen and all craftsmen artists in some degree, and their artistic endeavours went chiefly towards making and embellishing objects for use.²² This period, for him, was the high point of previous civilizations, both in its social structure and in its art,²³ so that like Ruskin and Carlyle he reverses the

²² Morris's maxim: "Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful", Works XXII, 76, is relevant here, for the order in which these two points are listed indicates their relative priority in Morris's aesthetic, in which attractive useful objects are far more important than beautiful useless ones. See also "The Lesser Arts", Works XXII, 23.

²³ Morris was not however looking at the Middle Ages with rose-coloured glasses as Ruskin, to some extent, did, and he goes to the trouble in Socialism to include a chapter entitled "The Rough Side of the Middle Ages" to counteract any idea that he might be. Nevertheless, in relation to modern times, as he says, they have considerable virtue, and of course, given the theory of history as a spiral, with modern Europe placed above late Rome, the socialist revolution above the barbarian invasion, and the socialist future above the mediaeval period, it is clear that Morris envisaged the future socialist state as being closer in type to mediaeval life than to the nineteenth century, to which it was closer in time. As he says in Socialism, pp. 83-4: "We have thought it necessary to meet objections as to over-valuing the importance of the Middle Ages, but it

more usual view of the "Dark Ages" as a period of decline and poverty in the quality of life and in artistic production. However, the period of the Renaissance in Europe, which is usually taken to be the time of the noblest development of the arts generally, was associated by Morris as it was by Ruskin with the beginnings of decadence; for while in this period substantive art was much prized, and indeed reached very high standards, at the same time adjective art was declining, shortly to become degraded and finally to perish altogether as an artistic possibility, as Morris thought it

must be understood that we do not stand forward as apologists for them except in relation to modern times. The part which they played in the course of history was not only necessary to the development of the life of the world, but was so special and characteristic that it will leave its mark on future ages in spite of the ignorant contemplation of them from which we are slowly emerging. They had their own faults and miseries, their own uses and advantages, and they left behind them works to show that at least happiness and cheerful intelligence were possible sometimes and somewhere in them, even amongst that working class, which now has to bear the whole burden of our follies and mistakes". Of the art of this period compared with that of Modern times, he adds, pp. 82-3: "In short it is clear that such misery as existed in the Middle Ages, was different in essence from that of our times; one piece of evidence alone forces this conclusion upon us: the Middle Ages were essentially the epoch of Popular Art, the art of the people; whatever were the conditions of the life of this time, they produced an enormous volume of visible and tangible beauty, even taken per se, and still more extraordinary when considered beside the sparse population of those ages. The 'misery' from amidst of which this came, whatever it was, must have been something totally unlike, and surely far less degrading than the misery of modern Whitechapel, from which not even the faintest scintilla of art can be struck, in spite of the idealising of slum life by the modern philanthropic sentimentalist and his allies, the impressionist novelist and painter".

had in modern Europe.²⁴ And as the applied arts died, so fine art, divorced from its contact with its roots in the

²⁴Morris describes this process of degradation from the Renaissance onwards thus: "Then came a change at a period of the greatest life and hope in many ways that Europe had known till then: a time of so much and such varied hope that people call it the time of the New Birth: as far as the arts are concerned I deny it that title; rather it seems to me that the great men who loved and glorified the practice of art in those days, were the fruit of the old, not the seed of the new order of things: but a stirring and hopeful time it was, and many things were newborn then which have since brought forth fruit enough: and it is strange and perplexing that from those days forward the lapse of time, which, through plenteous confusion and failure, has on the whole been steadily destroying privilege and exclusiveness in other matters, has delivered up art to be the exclusive privilege of a few, and has taken from the people their birthright; while both wronged and wrongers have been wholly unconscious of what they were doing.

Wholly unconscious -- yes, but we are no longer so: there lies the sting of it, and there also the hope.

When the brightness of the so-called Renaissance faded, and it faded very suddenly, a deathly chill fell upon the arts: that New-birth mostly meant looking back to past times, wherein the men of those days thought they saw a perfection of art, which to their minds was different in kind and not in degree only, from the ruder suggestive art of their own fathers: this perfection they were ambitious to imitate, this alone seemed to be art to them, the rest was childishness: so wonderful was their energy, their success so great, that no doubt to commonplace minds among them, though surely not to the great masters, that perfection seemed to be gained: and, perfection being gained, what are you to do? -- you can go no further, you must aim at standing still -- which you cannot do.

Art by no means stood still in those latter days of the Renaissance, but took the downward road with terrible swiftness, and tumbled down at the bottom of the hill, where as if bewitched it lay long in great content, believing itself to be the art of Michael Angelo, while it was the art of men whom nobody remembers but those who want to sell their pictures.

Thus it fared with the more individual forms of art. As to the art of the people; in countries and places where

useful arts, declined also into mere lifeless academicism, unable to survive as "an air-plant independent of the ordinary sources of nourishment".²⁵ As with the conclusion of the theory of history, therefore, the inevitable conclusion that Morris comes to here is also that a revolution is necessary to restore the arts to a healthy adjectivity. This would come about through the destruction of the present economic superstructure which supports élitist art (known as fine art) and mass-produced rubbish (known as applied art), and the restoration of the arts to the hands of the people to be used for their own pleasure, and not for commercial purposes which can only debase it and them.

It is clear from this Marxist theory of art history²⁶

the greater art had flourished most, it went step by step on the downward path with that: in more out-of-the-way places, England for instance, it still felt the influence of the life of its earlier and happy days, and in a way lived on a while; but its life was so feeble, and, so to say, illogical, that it could not resist any change in external circumstances, still less could it give birth to anything new; and before this century began, its last flicker had died out", "The Beauty of Life", Works XXII, 56-8.

²⁵ A comment made by Mrs. Mark Pattison in a review of Walter Pater's The Renaissance (1873), quoted by Thomas Wright, Life of Walter Pater (London, 1907), I, 253. Mrs. Pattison objected to Pater making Renaissance art sound as if it had no roots. It is interesting to see two such different aestheticians as Pater and Morris, concurring in their judgement of the art of the Renaissance, though Pater of course admired this "air-plant" aspect, while Morris hated it for the same reason.

²⁶ Morris's art theory is endorsed as orthodox

that an art which is merely there for the purpose of "amusing the upper classes" must obviously in Morris's opinion be morally inferior to an art which is able to give pleasure to all, so that too much substantive art, unless redeemed by close contact with adjective art, is per se undesirable. On the other hand, an art which gives pleasure to the workman is equally desirable per se, because it not only makes the workman happier with his job, which will probably help him to produce better work, but also adds beauty to the world around us generally, so that we all receive pleasure from it. Moreover, in Morris's opinion, a healthy artistic tradition in the small everyday things of life, like pottery and fabrics, helps to form an appropriate environment for great works of art to come to fruition: cathedrals, guild-halls, painted books, such as were produced in the Middle Ages, when adjective art was predominant, and have never been equalled since; whereas a lack of artistic tradition in small things inevitably foreshadows a decline into "lifeless academicism" for a substantive art

Marxism by Jessie Kocmanová as follows: "Not only did he [Morris] develop in greater detail and with greater technical knowledge of art processes than had Marx or Engels, a scientific theory of art history, but he sketched at least the main lines of an aesthetic theory of the function and significance of art in a communist society", Comparative Literature Studies, IV, 413-4.

deprived of its proper roots in the life of the people.²⁷

By these criteria, adjective art is obviously of benefit to us all.

What is less easy to understand is why Morris thought that an independent substantive art would necessarily be inferior to a rich and copious adjective art in aesthetic value. For the answer to this question, we must return to the concept of the complete building, for what Morris wanted was not that we should abandon painting and sculpture, but that they should once again become proper subordinate parts of Architecture; that, in fact, the substantive arts should merge with the adjective arts again as they had in the Middle Ages, and return to their proper rôles as part of the decorative scheme of the complete building, instead of being

²⁷Cf. "The Lesser Arts", Works XXII, 3-4: "Now as to the scope and nature of these Arts I have to say, that though when I come more into the details of my subject I shall not meddle much with the great art of Architecture, and less still with the great arts commonly called Sculpture and Painting, yet I cannot in my own mind quite sever them from those lesser so-called Decorative Arts, which I have to speak about: it is only in latter times, and under the most intricate conditions of life, that they have fallen apart from one another; and I hold that, when they are so parted, it is ill for the Arts altogether: the lesser ones become trivial, mechanical, unintelligent, incapable of resisting the changes pressed upon them by fashion or dishonesty; while the greater, however they may be practised for a while by men of great minds and wonder-working hands, unhelped by the lesser, unhelped by each other, are sure to lose their dignity of popular arts, and become nothing but dull adjuncts to unmeaning pomp, or ingenious toys for a few rich and idle men".

independent objects with no proper artistic context.²⁸ Thus the result of a socialist revolution in the new situation of controlled barbarism would, Morris hoped, be that the individualistic arts of sculpture and painting would give

²⁸ Morris does not in fact condemn fine art outright, but only in so far as it is divorced from the applied arts and improperly used, and this brings us back again to his concept of architecture and to the place of painting in the architectural whole (see Socialism, p. 308). According to his analysis, what happened at the Renaissance was that painting and sculpture became detached from their former roles as part of the decorative scheme of the building, and became objects which were made in isolation, independent of the place for which they were intended. They could then be collected and brought together in galleries, or by private persons in rooms where they were inappropriate or even ugly, whereas before they had been inseparable, often literally inseparable being painted on walls, parts of the greater transcendent whole. This process of individuation is described without Morris's accompanying value judgements by Shuichi Kato, Form, Style, Tradition, translated by John Bester (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1971), pp. 51-8. The separation had the two-fold effect, that art and artists became more and more introspective and less comprehensible to the ordinary man (See Works XXIII, 167), while the decorative arts which had accompanied and, as it were, led up to painting and sculpture, divorced from their contact with the greater arts, became debased and meaningless and finally died out altogether. From this it follows that all the arts lose by this separation, and though painting and sculpture may become greater for a while, as they did at the Renaissance, because more nervous energy is going into them, ultimately these too will fail. In the revival of art after the revolution, the substantive arts will remain, but will take on more of the adjective quality as decoration such as they had in the Middle Ages but have lost (see Socialism, pp. 307-8), and they will not normally be in private hands either: "For as to the higher art there never can be very much of it going on, since but few people can be found to do it; also few can find money enough to possess themselves of any portion of it, and, if they could, it would be a piece of preposterous selfishness to shut it up from other people's eyes . . .", Works XXII, 177. For a discussion of the ornamental, as differentiated from

place to the co-operative and all-inclusive art of Architecture to which everyone could contribute something, however small:

Architecture, which is above all an art of association, we believe must necessarily be the art of a society of co-operation, in which there will certainly be a tendency towards the absorption of small buildings into big; and it must be remembered that of all the arts it gives most scope to the solace of labour by due ornament. Sculpture, as in past times, will be considered almost entirely a part of fine building, the highest expression of the beauty which turns a utilitarian building into a great artistic production.

Pictures again will surely be mostly used for the decoration of buildings which are specially public; the circumstances of a society free from chronic war, public, corporate, and private, cannot fail to affect this art largely, at least in its subjects, and probably will reduce its independent importance.²⁹

In such a society, there will obviously no longer be a distinction between "fine" and "not-fine" art. The applied arts will be understood not as different in kind from fine art, but as shading gradually upwards, the lesser arts supporting and contributing to the well-being of the greater in an appropriately adjectival relationship, and all

the pictorial, qualities of fine art, or how the fine arts might again fit into the decorative whole, see "Address on the Collection of Paintings of the English Pre-Raphaelite School in the City of Birmingham Art Gallery", May Morris I, 302.

²⁹Socialism, pp. 307-8.

united in the transcendent art of Architecture. What this ideal meant for Morris's theory and practice of design, we shall see in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER 2
THE CASE FOR APPLIED ART IN THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY

Having established a definition of adjective art and of its place in the context of the complete building, it is now time to ask how this concept worked in Morris's theory and practice of pattern design. It was obviously a problem to him, for adjective art as defined in the last chapter was essentially either a product of the past which the nineteenth century had proved itself unable to duplicate, despite gallant attempts by Pugin, Ruskin and others, or else a desired but distant objective for the future of society under socialism when all the arts would, Morris hoped, again be grouped in the communally created inter-medial structures of Architecture and the music-drama. Morris was doing his best to hurry on this future art by involving himself deeply in the socialist movement, despite the fact that many of his colleagues thought the arts as a whole to be a mere product of decadence and privilege,¹ but it was

¹Cf. Morris's answer to critics who sneered at what they called his "aesthetic socialism": "Some people will perhaps not be prepared to hear that Socialism has any ideal of art, for in the first place it is so obviously founded on the necessity for dealing with the bare economy of life that many, and even some Socialists, can see nothing save that economic basis; and moreover, many who might be dis-

obvious to him that he was not going to live long enough to see the new art grow to adulthood, however quickly the immediate objective of revolution was achieved. As he wrote to the Daily Chronicle, offering what is almost an apology for continuing to produce art-work in the usual way at a time when the destruction of work like his was imminent:

I do not believe in the possibility of keeping art vigorously alive by the action, however energetic, of a few groups of specially gifted men and their small circle of admirers amidst a general public incapable of understanding and enjoying their work. I hold firmly to the opinion that all worthy schools of art must be in the future, as they have been in the past, the outcome of the aspirations of the people towards the beauty and true pleasure of life. . . . This, I say, is the art which I look forward to, not as a vague dream, but as a practical certainty, founded on the general well-being of the people. It is true that the blossom of it I shall not see; therefore I may be excused if in common with other artists, I try to express myself through the art of to-day, which seems to us to be only a survival of the organic art of the past, in which the people shared, whatever the other drawbacks of their condition might have been. For the feeling for art in us artists is genuine, though we have to work in the midst of the ignorance of those whose whole life ought to be spent in the production of works of art (the makers of wares to wit) and of

posed to admit the necessity of an economic change in the direction of Socialism believe quite sincerely that art is fostered by the inequalities of condition which it is the first business of Socialism to do away with, and indeed that it cannot exist without them. Nevertheless, in the teeth of these opinions I assert first that Socialism is an all-embracing theory of life, and that as it has an ethic and religion of its own, so also it has an aesthetic: so that to everyone who wishes to study Socialism duly it is necessary to look on it from the aesthetic point of view", Works XXIII, 255.

the fatuous pretence of those who, making no utilities, are driven to 'make-believe'.²

However, expressing himself through the art of the day was not enough for Morris, for although he defended the actions of those artists who continued to produce work, he was very well aware that according to his Marxist interpretation of the rôle of art as "the outcome of the aspirations of the people towards the beauty and true pleasure of life" the art of the nineteenth century was very sick. Anything that was any good in it was completely substantive and survived only through the nervous energy of a small group of people, who were forced to feed on and encourage their own emotions in an introspective fashion,³

²Quoted in Mackail II, 311-2.

³We shall be learning more about Morris's attitude to introspection on the part of the artist in Part III of this thesis. Suffice it to say here that he thought that too much inward-looking produced an unhealthy self-centredness in the artist, exacerbated by the separation between the arts, and leading to emotional instability: "Time was when the mystery and wonder of handicrafts were well acknowledged by the world, when imagination and fancy mingled with all things made by man; and in those days all handicraftsmen were artists, as we should now call them. But the thought of man became more intricate, more difficult to express; art grew a heavier thing to deal with, and its labour was more divided among great men, lesser men, and little men; till that art, which was once scarce more than a rest of body and soul, as the hand cast the shuttle or swung the hammer, became to some men so serious a labour, that their working lives have been one long tragedy of hope and fear, joy and trouble", "The Lesser Arts", Works XXII, 9. This "long tragedy" of the artist could only, in Morris's

now that their art could no longer draw on the collective aspirations of the race, while applied art was very nearly dead altogether.⁴ Thus although he thought that the sub-

view, give rise to unhealthy art, and this of course would eventually have a bad effect on the viewer. Jessie Kocmanová, quoting and commenting on a passage from William Gaunt, The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy (which has recently been reissued, now that the Pre-Raphaelites are becoming popular, as The Pre-Raphaelite Dream!), suggests that Morris's attitude to the modern substantive artist was much coloured by his association with Rossetti: "A further perception has been well-made by William Gaunt, the historian of the Preraphaelite movement. Writing of the conclusions drawn by Morris from his experience of the joint tenancy of Kelmscott Manor, which he held with Rossetti from 1872 to 1874 (a period in Rossetti's life of alternating frustration, despair and exaltation), Gaunt says: 'The individual life of what was called "the artist" Morris had now had the opportunity of examining at close quarters without any of the false glamour round in [sic] which was imparted by youth and innocence. That hooded glance of his had taken in every detail, one may be sure, had weighed its feebleness, its tawdriness, its egotism, its self-indulgence, its sordid and furtive complications which rose like mud in a stagnant pool on some slight stir of the waters. What was to be set on the other side of the balance? -- that after much fret and fuss, some expression of this emotional chaos was transferred to canvas or paper for the idle entertainment of a rich man who did not know what on earth to do with the superfluity of his wealth.' We can scarcely doubt that Rossetti's tragedy, so closely bound up with Morris' personal life, played a considerable part in Morris' growing inclination towards a social, collective and non-individualistic conception of art", Comparative Literature Studies, IV (1967), 410-11.

⁴In "The Art of the People", Works XXII, 3, Morris says that the Art Schools were founded because some intelligent people realized that craft was dying in nineteenth century England, and had thought that they could revive it by teaching art formally as an academic subject. But although this had produced a temporary improvement, it could not cure the disease of the separation of the arts from each other and from life.

stantive art of the nineteenth century was an improvement on that of the eighteenth, this was only a superficial gain, for "obvious as is that surface improvement of the arts within the last few years, I fear too much that there is something wrong about the root of the plant to exult over the bursting of its February buds".⁵ Nor did Morris think that the Arts and Crafts Movement had any answer to the problems of design in the nineteenth century. No movement such as that, made up as it was, in his opinion of "dilettanti fine gentlemen and ladies",⁶ could hope to do anything really constructive to help bring about a living art, even though it was apparently trying to work towards adjectivity, for the practice of handicrafts by the rich, like the Radical section of the Liberal Party in politics, was really no more than a middle class palliative measure which could never get to the grass-roots of the problem of

⁵"The Art of the People", Works XXII, 38. The metaphor taken from plant-life is characteristic of Morris, especially when he is talking about the necessity for natural rather than artificial growth in the arts.

⁶"The Aims of Art", Works XXIII, 93. Morris was aware that he had very nearly fallen into the trap of becoming a mere middle class trifler himself, trying to turn back the clock as many of the Arts and Crafts people seemed to be attempting to do, but he, unlike them, had been saved by his conversion to socialism: "the consciousness of revolution stirring, prevented me, luckier than many others of artistic perceptions, from crystallizing into a mere railer against progress on the one hand, and on the other from wasting time and energy in any of the numerous schemes

the relationship of art to the people who really mattered, the working classes.⁷

Besides these obvious deficiencies in the art of his day, Morris was also rather uncomfortably conscious of his own somewhat equivocal position as a designer and manufacturer appealing primarily to the rich, which made him appear something of a dilettante in his socialism, as if he could not really have any deep commitment to revolution.⁸ This

by which the quasi-artistic of the middle classes hope to make art grow when it no longer has any root", statement quoted in Mackail II, 86.

⁷The real remedy, of course, was a social one, involving measures more stringent than either the Radical-Liberals or the Arts and Crafts Movement could accept: violent revolution and the death of art. As Morris said in a letter to the Manchester Examiner, after he had been attacked for mixing revolutionary ardour with his lecture on art: "I specially wished to point out that the question of popular art was a social question, involving the happiness or misery of the greater part of the community. The absence of popular art from modern times is more disquieting and grievous to bear for this reason than for any other, that it betokens that fatal division of men into the cultivated and the degraded classes which competitive commerce has bred and fosters; popular art has no chance of a healthy life, or, indeed, of a life at all, till we are on the way to fill up this terrible gulf between riches and poverty. Doubtless many things will go to filling it up, and if art must be one of those things, let it go. What business have we with art unless all can share it?", quoted in Mackail II, 105.

⁸There is a long discussion of the difficulties of Morris's position in Mackail II, 139-47. The attacks made on Morris for his "capitalism" eventually caused him to draw up an elaborate memorandum listing the possibilities open to him: of keeping his business as it was and using the profits for "the cause"; of giving up his profits and sharing them among his workmen; or, the most attractive to him personally, of simply giving up the business entirely

consciousness led him to examine his position seriously, but it did not seem to him ultimately that his renouncing the profit motive in his business could do any real good, save to a few of his own workman, whereas to keep it going as a capitalist concern did at least produce a surplus profit which he could then devote to the general good. Thus he was very generous to the socialist movement, largely supporting first Justice and then the Commonweal out of his own pocket, as well as editing and writing a great many of the contributions for the latter. Later, Morris also introduced a system of profit-sharing among his employees at Merton Abbey, despite his doubts as to whether the raising of wages could ever do more than raising a few skilled artisans into the lower middle class, without tackling the real problems of nineteenth century society.⁹

and retiring to a life of asceticism. His conclusion was that he could best serve the cause of socialism by maintaining the status quo in his work, even though he would have to put up with "suffering some pangs of conscience" in the process. For his later profit-sharing, see Mackail II, 65.

⁹For this reason, Morris was never really very happy even with Trades Unionism, which, in his view, simply aimed to make as many people as possible middle class, without actually changing the root of society. As he wrote in a letter to C. E. Maurice, the "Christian Socialist": "For my part I used to think that one might further real Socialistic progress by doing what one could on the lines of ordinary middle-class Radicalism: I have been driven of late into the conclusion that I was mistaken; that Radicalism is on the wrong line, so to say, and will never develop into anything more than Radicalism: in fact that it is made

All this went some way to palliating his social conscience, but Morris's malaise went deeper than a mere discomfort at having too much money. At one time he doubted whether he ought to be producing any art-work at all when there seemed to be so many more important things to do.¹⁰

for and by the middle classes and will always be under control of rich capitalists: they will have no objection to its political development, if they think they can stop it there: but as to real social changes, they will not allow them if they can help it . . .", quoted in Mackail II, 109-10. Morris's prediction was certainly correct as far as the situation in England went, for Fabianism conquered, the middle class increased in size and prosperity, and we are now further than ever from the sort of complete change in the basis of society that Morris desired.

¹⁰As he wrote to Georgiana Burne-Jones when she urged him to go back to writing poetry: "I am touched by your kind anxiety about my poetry; but you see, my dear, there is first of all my anxiety [presumably about the health of his daughter, Jenny], which I am bound to confess has made a sad coward of me; and then, though I admit that I am a conceited man, yet I really don't think anything I have done (when I consider it as I should another man's work) of any value except to myself: except as showing my sympathy with history and the like. Poetry goes with the hand-arts I think, and like them has now become unreal: the arts have got to die, what is left of them, before they can be born again. You know my views on the matter; I apply them to myself as well as to others. This would not, I admit, prevent my writing poetry any more than it prevents my doing my pattern work, because the mere personal pleasure of it urges one to the work; but it prevents my looking at it as a sacred duty, and the grief aforesaid is too strong and disquieting to be overcome by a mere inclination to do what I know is unimportant work. Meantime the propaganda gives me work to do, which, unimportant as it seems, is part of a great whole which cannot be lost, and that ought to be enough for me", quoted in Mackail II, 116-7. Note the stress here on the unimportance of personal expression in poetry, and the corresponding importance of the impersonal work for the cause.

In fact he did for a time virtually give up writing poetry or doing any but the most essential design-work to keep his firm going at the time when his lecturing and journalism commitments to socialism were at their height.¹¹ Moreover, believing as he did that the desired revolution would shortly be coming to sweep away everything, including, as we saw in the last chapter, the decadent remains of the art of the nineteenth century, it was difficult for him to do any creative work, especially in a medium which he considered moribund, and close to being immoral. As he wrote sadly to Georgiana Burne-Jones: "I don't know if I explain what I'm driving at, but it does sometimes seem to me a strange thing indeed that a man should be driven to work with energy and even with pleasure and enthusiasm at work which he knows will serve no end but amusing himself; am I doing nothing but make-believe then, something like Louis XVI's lock-making?".¹² However, as Morris shows here, whatever his scruples, he was a designer by inclination as well as by trade, and he could not bear the thought of giving up his work.¹³ He therefore had to find something to design,

¹¹See Mackail II, 97-8.

¹²Letters, p. 157.

¹³There are a number of places where Morris states this; among others, Mackail quotes from a letter to the Manchester Examiner: "I could never forget that in spite of all drawbacks my work is little else than pleasure to me;

and some reason for designing it, and, as with all his later work, the design as well as the reason for it had to have a social as well as an aesthetic justification, for Morris was never able to design or write poetry just "for art's sake" as many of his contemporaries chose or were forced to do, because they had no guiding ideal for the future such as Morris had.¹⁴

What then was the answer to the problem of how to be a creative artist in the nineteenth century for someone who thought that the art of that period ought to be swept away and soon would be? For Morris, although he was well aware that no-one can really predict the future and escape from the social and aesthetic conditioning of his own day,¹⁵ the only answer was to attempt as closely as possible to

that under no conceivable circumstances would I give it up even if I could", Mackail II, 106.

¹⁴In "The Art of the People", Works XXII, 38-9, Morris follows up an attack on "art for art's sake", with an assertion of his own creed of involvement: "However, I cannot forget that, in my mind, it is not possible to dissociate art from morality, politics, and religion", p. 47. This lecture was written before Morris's involvement with the socialist movement began, and indicates the attitude of mind that led him to seek a cause to follow. He must have realized, however, that for those who did not instinctively seek out some sort of cause "aestheticism" was the only possible alternative reaction to the problem of creativity at that period, unless, like Oscar Wilde who tried both those solutions first, they were able to turn to the third alternative, religion.

¹⁵See below Part III, Chapter 1, note 41, for a comment on Morris's "predictions" of the future of the arts.

envisage what the future of the arts under the new order might be, and then to try to make some advance contribution, or, at least, to produce some foreshadowing of that new art. Morris attempted to do this in two ways. Firstly, as we saw, he created a theoretical structure within which he thought the new arts might work, and then proceeded to preach that theory, and to try to make his own art-work conform to it as far as he could under the circumstances. This applied both in his poetry, which changed markedly as he moved towards socialism and finally almost disappeared; in his prose fiction, which, as we shall see, was entirely the outcome of his new aesthetic theory; and in his work in the visual arts, which did not show as marked a change because it was out of his practice of applied art that his theory of adjective art and of intermedial artistic structures had developed. Secondly, on the analogy of past occasions when the "civilized" world had been overwhelmed by barbarism, Morris assumed that those of the visual arts which were most likely to survive a revolution would be the useful handicrafts, such as weaving, which would always be indispensable to man, and this, too, fitted in with his practice of applied art.

Both of these lines of thought led Morris to feel justified in continuing to develop his use of handicrafts, instead of turning more towards designing for machine

processes,¹⁶ for although he did not, as some critics have thought, believe in "machine-breaking",¹⁷ he did think that there would be far more hand-work in the future than there was in the nineteenth century. This belief was partly the outcome of his historical theory, which showed how progress and sophistication in manufacturing, among other things, were put back a considerable way by incursions of barbarism. Thus Morris automatically assumed that a certain initial primitivism would result from the revolution, if for no other reason than that the cities would be the centres of violent action, and would probably be largely destroyed

¹⁶ Morris's early machine designs, such as the Kidderminster three-ply Lily carpet (1870), show what he could have done in this field, and of course to his modern followers in the Bauhaus movement the use of mechanical means seemed an obvious logical extension of Morris's teachings on art, if not of his own practice. For a picture of Lily and a discussion of Morris's designing for machine-made carpets, see Paul Thompson, plate 14b and p. 103.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Tillotson, for instance, has an essay, "William Morris and Machines", which claims that Morris was completely, if inconsistently, anti-machine. See Essays in Criticism and Research (London, 1942), pp. 144-52. Even Pevsner, who ought to have known better, says: "Looking forward to barbarism, he certainly hoped for machine-breaking . . .", Pioneers, p. 25. It must be admitted that the silent clean electrical machinery in News from Nowhere is not very heavily emphasized, and it is easy to overlook it, but it must be remembered that News was written partly in reaction to Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward, and the use that Bellamy made of the telephone in that book now makes very quaint reading. Morris's circumspection in not trying to invent the machinery of the future when at best he could only have predicted something a little in advance

along with their factories and machinery.¹⁸ In addition, Morris thought that in any case there would not be over-much need for machine processes in manufacturing in a society which was not based on capitalism. Since there would be no incentive to produce more goods more quickly in order to make more money, the only things for which machines would be useful would be for unpleasant tasks which no-one would want to do by hand, while pleasant necessary processes, like weaving and pottery, could go back to being done by hand.¹⁹

of his own day has enabled that aspect of News to stand up well to technological advances: indeed, clean, silent factories still remain a valid ideal for the future! For his more formal opinion see also "Art and the Beauty of the Earth", Works XXII, 166: "Machines then. Truly we shall have a good stock to start with, but not near enough. Some men must press on to martyrdom, and toil to invent new ones, till at last pretty nearly everything that is necessary to men will be made by machines. I don't see why it should not be done. I myself have boundless faith in their capacity. I believe machines can do everything -- except make works of art".

¹⁸This seems to have been the situation in News from Nowhere, where there is very little remaining of the old urban areas, and the new factories, or, rather, banded-workshops, are set among the fields.

¹⁹See Socialism, pp. 306-7: "We should say that machinery will be used in a way almost the reverse of the present one. Whereas we now abstain from using it in the roughest and most repulsive work, because it does not pay, in a socialist community its use will be relegated almost entirely to such work, because in a society of equality everything will be thought to pay which dispenses the citizen from drudgery. For the rest it must be admitted that the tendency of modern industrialism is towards the entire extinction of handiwork by machinery; but there is no doubt that in the long run this will work out its own contra-

Moreover, in the new society, men would have more leisure time, again because there would be no drive to produce excess goods for profit, and that leisure, Morris thought, would be chiefly taken up with the production of beautiful things, not for sale, but for home use.²⁰ In other words, the visual arts would be restored to their proper place as a pleasurable activity instead of a commercial operation. This was where Morris came in, for his firm was training apprentices in hand-processes, which had died out among the working-class because they had neither time nor leisure to produce art-work by slow hand methods when they could earn more money working in factories. Similarly the Arts and Crafts movement had a function here as a sort of "holding operation" to keep techniques of craftsmanship alive,²¹ even if, as Morris thought, their work was unlikely

diction. Machinery having been perfected, mankind will turn its attention to something else. We shall then begin to free ourselves from the terrible tyranny of machinery, and the results of the great commercial epoch which it has perfected. . . ."

²⁰ Beautiful things not just in the visual arts, that is, but in literature and music as well. Cf. Socialism, p. 310: "And in our belief Music and Architecture, each in its widest sense, will form the most serious occupation of the greatest number of people".

²¹ Cf. "The Lesser Arts", Works XXII, 11-12: "Meantime it is the plain duty of all who look seriously on the arts to do their best to save the world from what at the best will be a loss, the result of ignorance and unwisdom; to prevent, in fact, that most discouraging of all changes, the supplying the place of an extinct brutality by a new

to have any permanent aesthetic value.

Having thus provided a social justification for continuing to practise applied art, because at least some of its techniques might survive into a future society and there provide the basis for a new adjective art, it was next necessary for Morris to ask himself what sort of art was appropriate to his own day, and to see if he could combine the two. He did not immediately rush into the assumption that applied art was best, but examined the situation carefully, albeit in his own rather idiosyncratic way. Thus he begins his lecture "The Lesser Arts", one of his earliest lectures, by asking what is the "best art", and answering:

For I suppose the best art to be the pictured representation of men's imaginings: what they have thought has happened to the world before their time, or what they deem they have seen with the eyes of the body or the soul: and the imaginings thus represented are always beautiful indeed, but oftenest stirring to men's passions and aspirations, and not seldom sorrowful or even terrible.

Stories that tell of men's aspirations for more than material life can give them, their struggles for the future welfare of their race, their unselfish love, their unrequited service: things like this are the subjects of the best art; in

one; nay, even if those who really care for the arts are so weak and few that they can do nothing else, it may be their business to keep alive some tradition, some memory of the past, so that the new life when it comes may not waste itself more than enough in fashioning wholly new forms for its new spirit".

such subjects there is hope surely, yet the aspect of them is like to be sorrowful enough: defeat the seed of victory, and death the seed of life, will be shown on the face of most of them.

Take note, too, that in the best art all these solemn and awful things are expressed clearly and without any vagueness, with such life and power that they impress the beholder so deeply that he is brought face to face with the very scenes, and lives among them for a time; so raising his life above the daily tangle of small things that wearies him, to the level of the heroism which they represent.²²

In other words, this "best art" is something very powerful and moving, that sharpens man's senses and emotions and raises him above the level of everyday life into the realms of the ideal.

This beautiful and terrible sensation that the "best art" gives does not sound very much like the effect of applied art, and indeed it is not, but this does not mean that Morris has abandoned his championship of applied art all of a sudden, as we shall see. In fact the very strength of the effect of the "best art" turned Morris away from it towards something less emotional, for he

²²"Some Hints on Pattern-Designing", Works XXII, 176. What is this statement of the effect of the "best art" but a rendering of Socrates's praise of beauty as leading ultimately to a vision of eternal reality in Symposium 210a-212a, though Morris speaks in terms of heroism and Plato of love? Morris often leans towards a sort of Sidneyan Neo-Platonism, though he couches his analyses of the effect of art in terms more reminiscent of Carlyle than of Sidney. Cf. the function of the hero as role-model in Carlyle, On Heroes and Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History, edited by Edmund Gosse (London, 1896), p. 4.

assumed an extraordinary sensitivity to beauty on the part of the viewer, which he thought needed guarding against abuse. Thus he was afraid that too much exposure to a powerful stimulus like the "best art" would deaden the sensitivity of the viewer until he became indifferent to the stimulus: every organism needs rest, and if our senses and emotions are constantly bombarded with impressions of pity and terror such as the "best art" ought to produce, then our organisms obviously will adapt so that we can ignore those impressions. It is possible to argue that this potential indifference serves an adaptational function,²³ but since for Morris the value of such art lay in its continued ability to stimulate, indifference was something to guard against. He therefore followed up his analysis of the qualities of the "best art" by a warning against over-exposure to it:

²³ Morse Peckham, for instance, in Man's Rage For Chaos: Biology, Behavior, and the Arts (Philadelphia, 1965) suggests that the arts have a problem-solving function, helping man to adapt to his environment by presenting him with the "stylistic disorientation" of unfamiliar stimuli (in Morris's terms the great aspirations and emotions which most men are too feeble to conceive for themselves), but in a controlled situation (the concert-hall, the art gallery), so that the recipient of the stimuli is able to absorb them and adapt to them without going into a state of shock, and can then learn by them. See Part III, Chapter 1. But the logical outcome of this adaptational function is that eventually man becomes indifferent to each successive stimulus, and must then seek something new, though it is possible to argue that the very greatest art-works never cease to have something new to offer, and Peckham actually

This is the best art; and who can deny that it is good for us all that it should be at hand to stir our emotions: yet its very greatness makes it a thing to be handled carefully, for we cannot always be having our emotions deeply stirred: that wearies us body and soul; and man, an animal that longs for rest like other animals, defends himself against the weariness by hardening his heart, and refusing to be moved every hour of the day by tragic emotions; nay, even by beauty that claims his attention over-much.

Such callousness is bad, both for the arts and our own selves; and therefore it is not so good to have the best art for ever under our eyes, though it is abundantly good that we should be able to get at it from time to time.²⁴

What exactly does Morris mean by the sensitivity of response to fine art which he posits? Do we really respond in such an intense way to pictures that we are

welcomes the idea of arriving at complete indifference to art: "Art is rehearsal for the orientation which makes innovation possible. Because it is fraudulent, deceiving, and enticing, it is a Circe; it can turn men to beasts. The only moral justification for the study of the highest level of art of the present and of the past, and for the years of difficult self-discipline and training necessary to make one capable of responding adequately to it, is to take what it can give so seriously, so passionately, with such conviction that one can learn to do without it. Of all man's burdens, art is one of the most terrible and certainly the most necessary. Without it he would not, he could not be human. But of that burden, with effort, with skill, with intelligence, and above all with luck, it is perhaps possible -- at least for the very old -- to be free", pp. 314-5. Morris would have agreed that the "highest art" is terrible and powerful and necessary in this way, but he does not desire an ultimate indifference to its effects. He prefers that substantive art, at any rate, should be used very sparingly in order to avoid that indifference.

²⁴Works XXII, 176-7. That it may be emotionally harmful to the owner is of course another reason why no-one should actually own paintings, besides the reason already

continually wrought up to the highest pitch of emotion by them? Are pictures really able to present us with the problem situations that Morse Peckham suggests which force us into potentially frightening emotional and psychological states?²⁵ Perhaps this concern with stimulus and callousness may be said to argue an extraordinary over-sensitiveness on the part of Morris, and indeed of Peckham, which is not borne out by the experience of most picture-viewers, but in fact this is just the point, that the post-Renaissance fascination with fine art has dulled our responses in general through over-stimulation.²⁶ A modern analogy might be the argument that too much violence on the

cited that private ownership of anything so wonderful is grossly immoral. See above Chapter 1, note 28.

²⁵See above, note 23.

²⁶This emphasis on fine art over the applied arts has been particularly noticeable in our modern anti-ornament functionalism, though this does seem to be showing signs at last of giving way to a revival of handicraft somewhat wider than the nineteenth century Arts and Crafts Movement could boast. However, it may well be possible to argue that it was this very opposition to ornament that has given rise to minimal painting and sculpture, to art works which give out considerably fewer and less complex stimuli than works of earlier periods have tended to do, though they may well be individually more intense -- a painting which depicts only one or two colours unrelated to any realistic subject, for example, obviously gives out much stronger and simpler colour stimuli than the same one or two colours when they form part of a painting which not only represents a subject but probably also includes a dozen or so other colours and tints. But because they

television and in the cinema leads to callousness towards violence in children. The case is not really susceptible of proof, but certainly in the nineteenth century Morris's was not an isolated sensitivity. Take for example the case of William Holman Hunt's painting, The Awakening Conscience,²⁷ which depicts the moment at which a young woman who has left home and family to live with her lover suddenly realises just what she has lost, and what future of degradation and shame lies before her when her lover casts her off, as he inevitably will. It sounds distressingly sentimental put into words, though as Morse Peckham points out in Victorian Revolutionaries, Speculations on Some Heroes of a Culture Crisis (New York, 1970) it is not "particularly sentimental to realize that one's life is

give out less stimuli, such paintings can be lived with in the way that the applied arts can without disturbing us excessively. Thus in effect we have approximated to the increase in adjective quality in fine art which Morris thought would come after the revolution (see footnote 27), and, moreover, because of the allusive rather than representational nature of modern art more people have been able to practice it successfully, and therefore more people have been able to afford to own it, at least in print form, than formerly, just as Morris said was to be the case with the lesser arts: "But this kind of art must be suggestive rather than imitative; because, in order to have plenty of it, it must be a kind of work that is not too difficult for ordinary men with imaginations capable of development; men from whom you cannot expect miracles of skill . . .", Works XXII, 177-8.

²⁷Commissioned by Thomas Fairbairn of Manchester and painted 1853-4. Now in the possession of Sir Colin and Lady Anderson.

ruined".²⁸ In fact, however, it is a very powerful picture even now, despite the fact that it was altered to lessen its impact on the viewer, the purchaser of the painting having "persuaded Hunt to repaint the girl's face, for in its original form it expressed such anguish that he found he could not live with it".²⁹

That sort of effect was what Morris expected from "the best art", though it is unlikely that he would have taken The Awakening Conscience as his ideal in this matter, and that sort of response also. Thus it is scarcely surprising that for everyday use he turned away from the "best art" towards the less intense stimulation of applied art. Our answer has been different from his, though our response similar, in that to a very considerable extent the artistic styles of the twentieth century have tended to scale down fine art to a level at which it can be made and owned by the many, as against the former restriction of ownership of paintings to the few rich enough to buy the very highly finished and time-consuming pictures of earlier

²⁸ p. 160.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 161, and see also William Holman Hunt, An Exhibition arranged by the Walker Art Gallery: Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, March-April 1969, with an introduction by M. Bennet (Liverpool, 1969), pp. 35-7, for an account of contemporary reaction to the painting, and also the alteration of the face. There is also a rather inadequate reproduction of the painting, inadequate because it is really too small to see the details, which of course

ages.³⁰ Morris would no doubt have approved this in one way, but it has meant the loss of the grand large-scale painting even in circumstances where he would have thought it appropriate, in public buildings or places of communal worship and coming-together. Thus his answer, which is to rely to a greater extent on the applied arts, but not to the exclusion of the fine arts, is more versatile, for it allows us to see and respond fully to great art in its proper place, and yet not to be deprived of art in our everyday surroundings.

What then is this art that is appropriate to our everyday use? There must be some, of course, for obviously the complete absence of art from our lives, even if it could be achieved, would make us as callous towards beauty

are extremely important for the iconography of the painting.

³⁰ See above, note 26. It is interesting to note that when I attended art classes at Sheffield College of Art, we were actually taught to 'manufacture' abstract paintings by taking an object, say half a tomato, making a ten or twenty times larger than life-size sketch and then a painting of it, depicting every vein and nuance of colour. A small square was then to be marked off from the large picture, say an area about the size of the original tomato, and this again blown up to ten or twenty times its original size, thus forming an unidentifiable abstract picture on an organic basis which probably did not involve more time or labour than the depiction of that amount of tomato life-size in a conventional still life. Thus a course of plagiarism could make one conventional picture yield a hundred or so abstract pictures, if one cared to apply the principle thoroughly!

as too much does,³¹ especially as most of the things that surround us in our daily lives have pretensions to being ornamental and may easily give us false ideas of beauty -- as indeed Morris thought had happened in Victorian England.³² We know already that what Morris predicted for the future socialist society was adjective art, and that the closest contemporary equivalent to that was what we call applied art, "which grew up unconsciously as an amusement blended with the production of ordinary wares more or less permanent, from a house to a garment-

³¹Cf. Works XXII, 138: "Until our streets are decent and orderly, and our town gardens break the bricks and mortar every here and there, and are open to all people; until our meadows even near our towns become fair and sweet, and are unspoiled by patches of hideousness; until we have clear sky above our heads and green grass beneath our feet; until the great drama of the seasons can touch our workmen with other feelings than the misery of winter and the weariness of summer -- till all this happens our museums and art schools will be but amusements of the rich . . .", or p. 16: "Yet I am almost brought to a stand-still when bidding you to study nature and the history of art, by remembering that this is London, and what it is like: how can I ask working-men passing up and down these hideous streets day by day to care about beauty?"

³²As he pointed out in his article "The English Pre-Raphaelites", May Morris I, 299, the public initially did not like pre-Raphaelite paintings not because they were not realistic, because they often were, but because they did not follow the conventions of art to which the viewers were accustomed, and therefore did not look like pictures. He goes on to explain that, far from these viewers looking with untrained eyes, in fact they were quite sophisticated, but in a false tradition: "People sometimes talk, as though the ordinary man in the street (of all classes, I mean) is the proper person to apply to for a judgment on Works of Art. They say he is unsophisticated, and so on. Now,

pin".³³ We know also that the specific part of applied art that Morris was most interested in, both as a designer and as a theorist, was pattern-designing, the use of which "subordinate but by no means unimportant art is to enliven with beauty and incident what would otherwise be a blank space, wheresoever or whatsoever it may be",³⁴ and lastly we know that while an art that is excessively stimulating is inappropriate to the home, one that does nothing but lull our senses to sleep will also be inappropriate, except of course in the bedroom. What then shall we do with this data?

When a Victorian designer like Christopher Dresser,

just let us look the facts in the face. It would be very agreeable if he were; it would be delightful if he were. But if he were, you would not need all these efforts for Art Education that you do need now. As a matter of fact he is not unsophisticated. On the contrary he is steeped in the mere dregs of all the Arts that are current at the time he lives . . . I perhaps haven't got much right to talk about another and kindred Art, because I don't know much about it, but I am perfectly certain that in the Art of Music what the 'unsophisticated' person takes to is not the fine works of Art, but the ordinary, commonplace, banal tunes which are drummed into his ears at every street corner. That is natural. In other words, there is a tendency for all people to fall under the domination of tradition of some sort; the fine tradition, the higher tradition, having disappeared, men will certainly fall into the power of the lower and inferior tradition".

³³Socialism, p. 303.

³⁴Works XXII, 209.

whose influence on Morris is in some respects very marked, takes up a problem of this sort, he comes up with to us rather curious answers, for example, his suggestion of an appropriate dado-rail for the dining-room made up of pseudo-Gothic grotesques in the form of emaciated hares,³⁵ or the need for dark colours on the dining-room walls in order to focus interest on the colourful display of food.³⁶ Morris is not concerned with appropriateness of this sort, but he does agree with Dresser on the need for the quality

³⁵ Appropriate because they are game! Dresser seemed to think anything edible, provided it was properly conventionalised, would be suitable to a room where eating takes place. See Studies in Design (London, 1876), plate VII.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 31-2: "A dining-room we generally make rather dark. The table, when set for a repast, certainly looks better if the surroundings are of a receding character. Citrine, or blue of medium depth, and with greyish hue, looks well for the wall of a dining-room, and a maroon dado is very suitable. It is desirable that the spread table and the viands have prominence given them by the shade of the walls. But our tablecloths are too strong in effect. Instead of being white, they should be of cream-tint, for the general repose would not then be disturbed by them, and yet the table would have sufficient prominence given to it".

of repose in interior design,³⁷ and on the fact that such repose cannot be achieved by the simple absence of art:³⁸

Repose cannot be found if forms are apparent which betoken ignorance, vulgarity, or coarseness. The eye will rest on a surface which reveals beauties of form, harmonies of colour, knowledge on the part of the decorator, and which has an absence of crude and garish qualities, and it will there

³⁷Though again, characteristically, Dresser goes to the extreme of claiming that "The attainment of repose is the highest aim of art". Ibid., p. 10. Morris, of course, as we have seen, tended to prefer the lesser and more reposeful arts, but also, as we have seen, recognised the position and value of fine art as stimulating man to higher things. Nevertheless, there are considerable traces of an attitude like Dresser's in his social approach to art. Probably every reader of News from Nowhere has noticed with dismay that all the characters in it seem half asleep, that nothing of any moment ever happens in the future, and one of the characters, Clara, even complains that the uneventfulness of their life is such that it cannot furnish images for their art, which is entirely concerned with historical and mythical subjects, Works VII, 101-2. Her complaint is, however, invalidated, in that she has just returned to her mate after creating a little artificial excitement for herself by spending some time with another man (behaviour which is not considered immoral, merely immature), and it is notable that all the 'good' characters in the book remain perfectly contented with their quietude.

³⁸Morris admired the "dwellers in the tub of Diogenes", Works XXII, 237, but only in so far as they were "the real thing", real ascetics: "If we are to be excused for rejecting the arts, it must be not because we are contented to be less than men, but because we long to be more than men". These would not be choosing absence of art for the sake of repose, but as a further hardship in the strenuous spiritual life of the would-be ascetic, but anyone else who claims to reject art altogether is, in Morris's view, something less than human.

find repose. . . . But how are we to achieve the necessary amount of repose in our rooms? We need not paint the walls of our apartments grey, nor of mud-colour, neither need we make them black; indeed the highest sense of repose -- i.e. dreamy, soothing repose, may be realised where the brightest colours are employed. Repose is attained by the absence of any want. A plain wall of dingy colour reveals a want; it does not then supply all that is necessary to the production of a sense of quiet and rest. A wall may be covered with the richest decoration, and yet be of such a character that the eye will rest upon it and be satisfied.³⁹

Compare this with what Morris has to say about the cynical

³⁹ Studies in Design, pp. 10-11. Cf. Morris, Works XXII, 101 and 109-10. One could go on at length detecting similarities between Morris and Dresser, for instance, their insistence that plain white-wash is better than bad design, Morris, Works XXII, 260 and elsewhere, and Dresser, Studies in Design, p. 10, or in their concern for appropriateness in pattern, as in Dresser's fascinating plant studies in The Art of Decorative Design, Chapters VI and VII, where he explains the different structures of plants depending on whether they are to be looked at from above, as in radiating forms like the daisy, or from the side as in asymmetrical forms like the violet, and deduces from this principles as to the appropriate use of plant forms in decoration, depending upon whether they are to be used for wall, floor, or in some other position. Morris has no such rules as Dresser, but is very insistent on the "means of treatment which is called, as one may say technically, the conventionalizing of nature", Works XXII, 181. That he does not elaborate those means is understandable in that he was not actually an art teacher as Dresser was.

As far as actual practical work goes, the two men are quite different, for not only are their tastes in colour antagonistic, Dresser relying heavily in his decorative schemes on olive, citrine, which Morris loathed and of which he says "On the other hand, do not fall into the trap of a dingy bilious-looking yellow-green, a colour to which I have a special and personal hatred, because . . . I have been supposed to have somewhat brought it into vogue", Works XXII, 100, and that hot red of which Morris says, "Till someone invents a better name for it, let us call it

vulgarity of "the tub of Diogenes lined with padded drab velvet, lighted by gas, polished and cleaned by vicarious labour, and expecting every morning due visits from the milkman, the baker, the butcher and the fishmonger",⁴⁰ or with his remarks on colour in decoration, whether on the need to avoid crude and garish tints,⁴¹ or in his desire that "all right-minded craftsmen who work in colour will strive to make their work as bright as possible, as full of colour as the nature of the work will allow it to be".⁴²

cockroach colour, and have nought to do with it", ibid., p. 91, but also Dresser's own designs lack what Morris regarded as most vital in design, the principle of growth, Works XXII, 222. In fact in many ways they are anticipatory of the curiously spiky and, one would have thought, unrestful designs of art-deco. -- an interesting parallel this to the influence Morris had on the designers of the Bauhaus, who took over many of his theories, but whose actual productions could scarcely be further in appearance from his work. See Pevsner, Pioneers of Modern Design, pp. 38-9.

⁴⁰ See above, note 38 and Works XXII, 237-8.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 99-101. The point is that as the colours become stronger, so they must also become very slightly greyer in order not to produce an overwhelming effect, which would be very wearisome. On the other hand, there must not be so much grey added as to make the colours muddy.

⁴² Ibid., p. 101.

Where Morris comes closest to Dresser, is the proposition that "Repose is obtained by the absence of any want". A similar statement may be found in one of Owen Jones's "General Precepts in the Arrangement of Form and Colour in Architecture and the Decorative Arts . . ." in The Grammar of Ornament, where he says that "True beauty results from that repose which the mind feels when the eye, the intellect, and the affections, are satisfied from the absence of any want".⁴³ From Jones and Dresser, however, it is not clear what this "want" may be. Dresser says that it is revealed by "a plain wall of dingy colour". From Owen Jones, we infer that want occurs when eye and intellect and affections are not satisfied, but when is that? Neither puts forward any coherent suggestions as to what it is that the mind requires, though both deal with the needs of the eye. This is where Morris comes to the fore, for he understands that what is wanted in design are not only the formal qualities of "fitness, proportion, harmony, the result of all which is repose",⁴⁴ but also the conjunction with them of "the moral qualities of art",⁴⁵ of interest

⁴³Proposition 4, p. 4.

⁴⁴The Grammar of Ornament, Proposition 3, p. 4.

⁴⁵Works XXII, 110.

and stimulus "to sharpen our dulled senses",⁴⁶ by making us aware of the life about us, as fine art does, but without the over-wearying effect of the excessive stimulus of fine art. There must be something there for us to see and ponder over if we wish it, in other words but not something which will force itself upon our attention unless we wish to be made aware of it.

What form of art then will best serve this double adaptational function? Clearly, in Morris's view, it must be some form of applied art, since nothing else fits his criterion of restfulness, and it must also be beautiful and soothing, but at the same time full of meaning, for what but meaning can provide the necessary stimulus for our periods of alertness? Yet it will not be meaningful in the direct sense in which representational paintings

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 4-5: "For, and this is at the root of the whole matter, everything made by man's hands has a form, which must be either beautiful or ugly; beautiful if it is in accord with Nature, and helps her; ugly if it is discordant with Nature, and thwarts her; it cannot be indifferent: we, for our parts, are busy or sluggish, eager or unhappy, and our eyes are apt to get dulled to this eventfulness of form in those things which we are always looking at. Now it is one of the chief uses of decoration, the chief part of its alliance with nature, that it has to sharpen our dulled senses in this matter: for this end are those wonders of intricate patterns interwoven, those strange forms invented, which men have so long delighted in. . . ." This is, at a lower level, the same sort of effect of stimulus which was discussed on pp. 109-10 above. The difference is that adjective art does not force itself upon us to any greater depth than this unless we wish it to do so.

have meaning, since that, again, would be too stimulating and ultimately therefore too deadening for everyday use.⁴⁷ No, the meaning will be allusive, symbolic, reminding us of natural events, great stories, or heroic myths, but in a distanced and undemanding form, as it was in the art of earlier, less aggressively individualistic ages, when the myths and religious rituals of the people were only shown in art in a highly stylized form, a form so stylized in fact that it often appears to the untrained eye to be no more than pattern-work.

To think that there is such a thing as mere pattern-work as we know it in ancient art is a misapprehension, however, for, as Morris explains, no archaic art ever uses pattern except in a symbolic sense:

⁴⁷Works XXII, 177: "Meantime, I cannot allow that it is good for any hour of the day to be wholly stripped of life and beauty; therefore we must provide ourselves with lesser (I will not say worse) art with which to surround our common workaday or restful times; and for those times, I think, it will be enough for us to clothe our daily and domestic walls with ornament that reminds us of the outward face of the earth, of the innocent love of animals, or of man passing his days between work and rest as he does. I say, with ornament that reminds us of these things, and sets our minds and memories at work easily creating them; because scientific representation of them would again involve us in the problems of hard fact and the troubles of life, and so once more destroy our rest for us".

Doubtless these flowers here look as if they might have been the prototypes of many that were drawn in the fourteenth century of our era; but you must remember that, though they are conventional and stiffly drawn, they are parts of a picture, and stand for the assertion that flowers grew in such and such a place. They are not used in mere fancy and sportiveness; which condition of art indeed, as I said before, will be found to be common to all these primitive archaic styles. Scarce anything is drawn which is not meant to tell a definite story; so that many of the members of the elaborate Egyptian diapers are symbols of the mysteries of nature and religion; as, for example, the lotus, the scarab, the winged orb, the hooded and winged serpent.⁴⁸

But Morris did not require that modern patterns should be quite so deeply symbolic as this. Indeed, he preferred that they should not have the kind of particular religious significance with which the ancient peoples invested them, since that meant that they could not be used and understood by the uninitiated. However, many religious motifs have had at the same time a wider application which many other cultures have been able to take and adapt to their own uses. An example of this is the Egyptian lotus and bud motif, one of Morris's examples in the quotation above of "symbols of the mysteries of nature and religion". This was among the most important of the Egyptian religious symbols, but it also, by virtue of its wider symbolism of nature, became one of the furthest travelling of all

⁴⁸Works XXII, 213.

decorative motifs, passing via Assyria and Persia to Greece, where it developed as the so-called honeysuckle, and ultimately to India and even China in the east, and to Renaissance Europe in the west,⁴⁹ and always as it went retaining its suggestion of the new springing life of

⁴⁹See W. G. Collingwood, The Philosophy of Ornament: Eight Lectures on the History of Decorative Art (Orpington, 1883), pp. 31-2 and 37-8 for an account of the movement of this motif: "The Egyptians are remarkable for their want of strictly ornamental motives of pattern. They have abundance of decoration, but it consists chiefly in figures of deities, and in hieroglyphic writing, itself consummately ornamental, full of beauty and variety, -- fuller of meaning. . . . In painting and textile work, spare spaces are filled with squares, the squares with suggested flowers, or monotonous lines of simple zigzag, varied by the merest hints at a leaf pattern. This sometimes rises to recurring lotus blossoms, arranged in the zig-zag; alternate blossom and bud; basis of the knop and flower, bell and pomegranate, Greek honeysuckle, and infinite variations of this simple theme which the Assyrians developed and handed on to Persia and Greece. . . . This pattern travelled further eastward: in Persia and India it reappears, sometimes in a highly conventional, sometimes in a naturalistic form, and is found even on Chinese pottery. It travelled westward: we see it on fragments dug up at Cyprus, and it develops in Greece into the well-known palmette and honeysuckle. Thence to Rome, recurring continually in mediaeval textiles, Renaissance shell mouldings, and recognized most unexpectedly in rustic traditions of popular design, as the silver bells and cockle or pilgrim's shells of the nursery myth". And in his plate III facing p. 35, Collingwood shows, beside the Egyptian lotus and bud, the Assyrian, Cyprian, Greek, Indian, and Renaissance variants of the same pattern.

plants after their winter rest.⁵⁰

This was the sort of meaning that Morris wanted in his pattern design, the sort that could lead the viewer deep into the mysteries of the birth and rebirth of man and nature, though without a specifically religious content, but which never lost its decorative aspect, or forced itself upon you if you were not ready for it. Here he contrasts the two modes of artistic expression, ancient symbolism and modern realism, and it is interesting to see how he uses a literary metaphor to convey an idea about the visual arts:

In more modern and less forbearing art the pictured wall is apt to become a window through which a man quietly at work or resting looks on some great tragedy, some sad memory of the past, or terrible threat for the future. The constant companionship of such deeply emotional representations are too apt to trouble us at first, and at last to make us callous, because they are always claiming our attention, whether we are in a mood to be stirred by them or not. But in the older and more suggestive art, the great subjects, symbolized rather than represented by its pictures, only reached the mind through the eye when the mind was awake

⁵⁰ Morris says of it, Works XXII, 215: ". . . the ornament called the honeysuckle, which I rather suppose to be a suggestion of a tuft of flowers and leaves breaking through the earth. . . ." This, of course, in a sense it is, in so far as the lotus was the first blossom to rise above the water as the Nile floods receded, and therefore symbolically similar to the first flowers and leaves in Spring, rather than to the later blooming, perennial vine-like honeysuckle.

and ready to receive them. The wall was a wall still, and not a window; nay, a book rather, where, if you would, you might read the stories of the gods and heroes, and whose characters, whether you read them or not, delighted you always with the beauty of their form and colour.⁵¹

Only pattern-work, in Morris's view, fulfils these criteria of suggestiveness and meaning without direct representation-ism, as the symbolic art of Egypt did, and, as the literary metaphor suggests, this was the kind of work he wished to achieve not only in his designs, but also in the prose romances; that while their colour and pattern and life should delight us on a superficial level, as patterns do, when we desire to rest and be refreshed, so too should lie hidden there, to be revealed when we wish it, the greatest themes with which man has to deal, life and death and the forces of nature, and, above all, love, the varied manifestations of which are Morris's constant theme.

This belief in the need for symbolic rather than directly representational art, both in literature and in

⁵¹Works XXII, 210-11. He is referring, latterly, to Egyptian art, but it is almost equally true of much Christian mediaeval work.

the visual arts, is the source of all the rest of Morris's teaching on pattern design, whether in the more purely visual qualities, in the masking of the structures of the pattern and the development of the motifs so that we do not try to trace out the component parts of the design but accept its richness as analogous to the richness of natural growth,⁵² or in what may be called the intellectual qualities of pattern, those elements of form or motif which are meaningful in a more cerebral sense, and of which Morris says that "you may be sure that any decoration is futile, and has fallen into at least the first stage of degradation, when it does not remind you of something beyond itself, of something of which it is but a visible symbol".⁵³ From this follows his insistence on the need for the qualities of mystery and repose in patterns, repose, so that the eye can rest comfortably upon them without seeking to go

⁵²Cf. ibid., p. 5: ". . . forms and intricacies that do not necessarily imitate nature, but in which the hand of the craftsman is guided to work in the way that she does, till the web, the cup, or the knife, look as natural, nay as lovely, as the green field, the river bank, or the mountain flint". This principle of analogous creation is obviously particularly important for Morris's own work in pattern design. One has only to look at the richness of, for example, the Honeysuckle (1876), Snakehead (1876), or Tulip and Willow (1889) chintzes, or the working drawing for the Jasmine wallpaper (1872), illustrated in Ray Watkinson, William Morris as Designer, plate 73, to recognize his genius for the presentation of that sort of controlled profusion of natural growths.

⁵³Works XXII, 179.

beneath the surface if the mind is not ready for it, and mystery, so that there is always something beyond the surface beauty which closer examination will reveal to the seeker. These two qualities are combined in the maxim, which is equally applicable to his work in literature as in applied art, that "we should not be able to read the whole thing at once, nor desire to do so, nor be impelled by that desire to go on tracing line after line to find out how the pattern is made".⁵⁴

What the symbols were which were to express this depth of meaning, we will leave for our study of Morris's practice of pattern design in the next chapter, but perhaps before we close this chapter we might look for a moment at Morris's ideal in the matter of pattern designing, and of applied art as a whole. This is not, as we might have expected from his interest in "that older and more suggestive art", the art of ancient Egypt: that, he felt, was too distant from the western sensibility both in time and in style, for though their art used picture-work as if the pictures were patterns in a way which Morris admired, they did not make patterns as we know them.⁵⁵ Besides, the

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 109.

⁵⁵Works XXII, 210-11: ". . . and we must admit that in each of these systems the art of mere pattern designing takes but an unimportant place. In Egyptian art, and the

art of Egypt was an hieratic art, rigid and unchanging, which allowed no freedom for individual expression, since to alter the traditional shapes in which the gods were depicted would amount to at least blasphemy, if not heresy.⁵⁶ Strict rules were therefore laid down within which alone the artist could work, and while Morris was always eager for tradition and for the guide-lines for designing which the nature of

school which it represents, the picture-work itself was so limited by rule, so entirely suggestive only, that a certain canon of proportion having been once invented and established, it was easy and effortless work for a people who were full of feeling for quiet beauty, and, moreover, suggestion, not imitation, being the end aimed at, the picture-work easily, and without straining, fulfilled any office of decoration it was put to; so that the story which was necessary to be told on religious or public grounds became the very ornament which, merely as a matter of pleasant colour and line, the eye would most desire. . . . For all these reasons there is in the archaic or suggestive art of the ancients scarce any place for the elaborate pattern-designing which in later times men were driven more or less to put in the place of picture-work, now become more liable to ridiculous and ignoble failure, more exciting to the emotions, less restful, and therefore less beautiful than it had been".

⁵⁶ See Owen Jones, The Grammar of Ornament, p. 4: "These forms [e.g. the lotus and papyrus], once sacred, their religious laws forbade a change . . ." and W. G. Collingwood, The Philosophy of Decorative Design, p. 43: "the hieratic nature of their art itself, regulated by rules, whose breach was not merely an error, but a sin".

the material gives,⁵⁷ yet he could not wholly admire an art which had no place for fancy and imagination, or for the creating of new forms and motifs.⁵⁸ Likewise his admiration for Middle Eastern carpet-work, though he admired it

⁵⁷Cf. Works XXII, 181: ". . . every material in which household goods are fashioned imposes certain special limitations within which the craftsman must work. Here again, is the wall of order against vagueness, and the door of order for imagination. For you must understand from the first that these limitations are as far as possible from being hindrances to beauty in the several crafts. On the contrary they are incitements and helps to its attainment; those who find them irksome are not born craftsmen, and the periods of art that try to get rid of them are declining periods".

⁵⁸This is what Morris objected to also in Greek art, which reached heights of perfection perhaps never equalled since, but yet condemned the majority of the people to be without art because it had no room for the lesser arts. Cf. Works XXII, 211: "On the other hand, in the perfect art of Greece the tendency was so decidedly towards fact of all kinds, that it could only give a very low place to ornament that had not a quite definite meaning; and its demand for perfection in quality of workmanship deprived effort of all hope of reward in this lower region of art, and crushed all experiment, all invention and imagination. In short, this perfect art preferred blankness to the richness that might be given by the work of an unrefined or imperfectly taught hand, whatever suggestions of beauty or thought might be in it: therefore, as in the art of Egypt picture-work was not thought too good to fill the place of the elaborate pattern-work we are thinking of, so in that of Greece mere emptiness was good enough for the purpose . . ." and Unpublished Lectures, pp. 144-5: "Nevertheless you must understand that perfect as their art was it was barbourously and oppressively limited in scope, going step by step indeed with their social conditions the foundation of which was mere chattel slavery: when all is said what a mass of expression of human thought, what a world of beauty that exclusiveness shut out from the light of day. Absolute perfection in art is a vain hope; the day will never come when the hand of man can thoroughly express the best of the thoughts of man. Why then should we deprive

greatly, was a little impaired by the weight of traditional and religious taboos which condemned the designer to avoid certain motifs, the human figure especially, and, to a large extent, the animal world as well. Again, as with the Egyptian art, such conservatism could eventually only lead to degraded copying and to inferior versions of earlier work,⁵⁹ and eventually to what Morris calls "nonsense-work",

ourselves therefore of all the fancy and imagination that lies in the aim of so many men of lesser capacity than that of great masters? Is it not better to say to all who have any genuine gifts however small, 'courage! it is enough for a work of art if it show real skill of hand, genuine instinct for beauty, and some touch of originality; co-operation will show you how your smaller gifts may be used along with the greater ones'". This is, I think a rather unfair view of the decorative arts in Greece, of which so much was lost in the loss of the painted decoration from their architecture, but it must be remembered that one of their crafts which we tend to admire so much, that of pottery painting, was in many cases not really a craft at all as Morris would have seen it, for much of the decoration was put on with moulds or stamps and merely to be filled in, as nineteenth century "hand-painted" pottery was, by the untrained labourer, thus of course still leaving no room for the free play of fancy and imagination.

⁵⁹Works XXII, 288-9: "Of these latter flowered carpets I do not pretend to fix the dates with any accuracy, but among the specimens I have seen, I will undertake to say that there are representatives of at least three different styles before the degradation of the art. . . . After that the degradation began, but it took a very different form, as always is the case with eastern art, from what it would have done in Europe, where all degradation of art veils itself in the semblance of an intellectual advance; in the East, on the contrary, haste, clumsiness, rudeness, and the destruction of any intellectual qualities are the signs of degradation; a tendency in fact to mere disintegration. . . . As to this special degradation of the carpet-making art, the thing to note about it is that it has as

the copy of a copy of a copy that carpet-makers were still producing but without understanding the motifs or meaning of what they imitated, and therefore distorting the details and cutting corners until at last they had rendered the original meanings almost indecipherable.⁶⁰

The ideal which he chose for himself was more fugitive than these, for it was not kept alive by the conservatism which preserved the art of Egypt for two thousand years, but was killed, as so many other arts have been, by the passing of artistic initiative to another style and mode of thought, and so its becoming unfashionable and finally uneconomic. This art was that of the Sicilian and Luccan silk-weavers of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, in whose work, for a brief while, the arts of East and West mingled, until the Gothic style, of which they were a part,

its subject-matter all the different styles I have mentioned; the Byzantine or floor-mosaic style, the flowing fourteenth-century, the scroll and beasts style, and the floral style. From the disjecta membra of these four are knocked up, so to say, the traditional designs which in spite of all degradation are generally very beautiful things. . . ."

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 111: "No pattern should be without some sort of meaning. True it is that that meaning may have come down to us traditionally, and not be our own invention, yet we must at heart understand it, or we can neither receive it, nor hand it down to our successors". In other words, if the artist does not understand the meaning of the outward semblance that he copies, then he cannot copy it correctly, nor give it life that it may please and inspire others.

was destroyed in Italy by the coming of the Renaissance.⁶¹ As Morris describes it, the weaving designs of this period are at the end of a long tradition of symbolic patterns, stretching back through Byzantine and Persian art to Assyria and Babylon and perhaps even to Egypt,⁶² and this united with the traditions of Mohammedan Art which the Arabs brought when they introduced silk-weaving into Sicily in the twelfth century,⁶³ to form a style which is un-

⁶¹Works XXII, 283: "The sixteenth century saw the change in woven work which fell upon all the architectural arts. I have said that weaving is conservative of patterns and methods, and this is very obvious in this great period of change; one may say that the oriental-gothic feeling, which was the very well-spring of fine designs in this art, lasted side by side with divers new fashions, some of which were merely the outcome of the general pseudo-classical feeling, and shown in detail rather than general arrangement of pattern, and in some pieces of fantastic ugliness which indicated only too surely the coming degradation of the weaving art".

⁶²See "The History of Pattern Designing" in Works XXII, especially 215-7, where Morris traces the development of various symbolic motifs up to fifteenth century Italian silk-weaving. He does not take the sacred tree motif back further than Assyria and Babylon, but it is probable, as W. G. Collingwood showed in The Philosophy of Decorative Design, pp. 37-8, that it relates back still further to some of the Egyptian depictions of the sacred lotus and papyrus plants. This will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

⁶³At least, according to legend. Roger the Norman, King of Sicily, is supposed, in a raid on the Eastern Empire in the twelfth century, to have captured as part of his booty "the silk-weavers themselves and their families, whom he took back with him to Palermo and established in a royal factory attached to his palace, bidding them teach

paralleled for its combination of the fantastic and the beautiful:

For I must tell you that these stuffs, designed in the heyday of mediaeval art, uniting the wild fancy and luxurious intricacy of the East with the straight-forward story-telling imagination and clear definite drawing of mediaeval Europe, are the very crown of design as applied to weaving . . . for the rest, the resources and the ingenuity of structure, the richness of imagination in these stuffs is amazing. Beasts, birds, and compound monsters are frequent, often arranged in opposition on each side of the holy tree or holy fire as aforesaid; but often simply passing their lives in the scenes of nature, and generally admirably drawn as to their characteristics, though of course generalized to suit the somewhat intractable material. Then we have castles, fountains, islands, ships, ship-sails, and other such inanimate objects. Finally the weaver uses the human form often enough, though seldom complete: half-women lean down from palm-trees, emerge from shell-like forms amongst the woods with nets in their hands, spread their floating hair over the whole pattern, water their hounds at the woodland fountains, and so forth. Now and again definite winged angels are introduced. In one whole class of designs a prominent feature is the sun-dog, as it used to be called in the older English tongue, a cloud barely hiding the sun, which sends its straight rays across the

their mystery to his own people". Ibid., p. 277. This story accounts for the continued use, a century later, of imitations Arabic script in the webs, which may have been intended to indicate originally that they were of Eastern manufacture, and therefore, by implication, fine work.

design with admirable effect.

And all these things are drawn at once with the utmost delicacy and complete firmness; there is no attempt to involve or obscure anything, yet the beauty of the drawing and the ingenuity of the pattern combined give us that satisfying sense of ease and mystery which does not force us to keep following for ever the repetition, of the pattern; in short, in most of the designs of this place and period there is nothing left to desire either for beauty, fitness, or imagination.⁶⁴

All Morris's ideals meet here: the clarity of the drawing (like Blake, he hated a scribbler),⁶⁵ the beauty and mystery and repose, the fancy and imagination, and, above all, the free use of symbolic motifs to reinforce the otherwise limited story-telling capacity of the woven pattern. For the stories on these cloths may still be read,

⁶⁴Works XXII, 278-9. Many of the motifs described by Morris can be found illustrated in Friedrich Fischbach, Ornamente der Gewebe (Hanau, n.d. [189-?]) which remains one of the best series of illustrations even by to-day's standards; and Otto von Falke, Decorative Silks (translated from Kunstgeschichte der Seiden-weberei, 3rd edn. London, 1936).

⁶⁵In his "Annotations to the Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds", Blake makes it clear that "precision of pencil", outline, and finish, as opposed to the "Blots & Blurs" which he considered the work of most post-Raphael artists to be, are the desirable qualities of drawing, and painting too, for that matter. Similarly, Morris throughout his volumes of art theory continually emphasises the value of firm clear drawing. See especially "Some Hints on Pattern Designing", Works XXII, 199: "Above all things, avoid vagueness; run any risk of failure rather than involve yourselves in a tangle of poor weak lines that people can't make out. Definite form bounded by a firm outline is a necessity for all ornament. If you have any inclination towards that shorthand of picture-painters, which they use when they are in a hurry, and which people call sketching,

some of them, as Morris does when he finds thereon the sacred tree and its guardians of Assyrian mythology, or the Zoroastrian fire, or the fountains of the water of life,⁶⁶ such as that spring which features so largely in his romance, The Well at the World's End. The huntress who waters her hounds at the woodland fountain, too, is not just any woman, but at once Artemis and Atalanta and Holda or Holle of the Wild Hunt,⁶⁷ and his own Habundia from The Water of the Wondrous Isles, and her followers are the dryads and naiads and oreads and strange beasts of the woods, which people these fabrics as they do myths and fairy-tales. Such images are the source-material from which Morris worked, not so much in his fabric patterns, which scarcely go further into the animal world than the

give up pattern-designing, for you have no turn for it".

⁶⁶See "The History of Pattern Designing", Works XXII, especially 216-228, and also my next chapter.

⁶⁷See the section on Holda, Holle in Jacob Grimm's Teutonic Mythology, translated from the 4th edition with notes and appendix by James Steven Stallybrass (London, 1883 and 1888), I, 265-272.

depiction of birds, or at most rabbits,⁶⁸ but in his prose romances, which have the same qualities of clarity of drawing, of beauty and mystery and imagination, that these Sicilian silks have. They, too, can be read in a reposeful mood without jarring, but also have the capacity for stimulating the mind and eye to a wider perception and understanding of human life.

⁶⁸E.g. in the "Woodpecker" tapestry, "Brer Rabbit" and "Strawberry Thief" chintzes, "Bird", "Dove and Rose", and "Peacock" hangings, and all the birds in his hand-made carpets. The figures in his tapestries were chiefly designed by Burne-Jones, and some by Walter Crane, and Philip Webb did the larger animals, notably in the "Forest" tapestry now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and some of the smaller ones. These figures and animals, however, never appear in his pattern-work.

CHAPTER 3

THE MEANING OF PATTERN

Now that we have established a definition of an adjective art of the future in the context of the architectural whole, and seen what this means for Morris's theory of applied art in the nineteenth century, it is time to move on to an examination of his theory and practice of pattern design. To recapitulate: Morris wanted to find out what sort of visual art would be appropriate both for his own day and also to act as a sort of "holding operation" and preparation for the future, and he decided that for him the applied arts best fulfilled both these functions, because they could keep alive knowledge of techniques which might be useful in a future socialist society, and also because they were able to combine the qualities of repose and stimulus which he saw in the adjective art of the past, and which he hoped would be restored in the future. The combination of restfulness and stimulus in the one work of art Morris thought could only come about through the use of symbol and allusion rather than direct representationalism; through the use of motifs which would remind us of natural events, great stories and heroic myths, but in a distanced and undemanding form, just as "in the older and more suggestive art the great subjects, symbolized rather than

represented by its pictures, only reached the mind through the eye when the mind was awake and ready to receive them", and we saw that his ideal in this respect was the pattern-work of the Sicilian and Italian silk-weavers of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries.

This ideal of an adjective and symbolic art brings us to another aspect of the survival of the visual arts into the socialist society of the future, for it is clear that, as with the symbolic art of the past, in order for symbol and allusion to be effective in the way Morris wanted, everyone must know and understand the objective referent. This was certainly not the case at the time when Morris was writing, for the only symbol-systems in use then were based either on Christianity or on an artificially developed symbolism taken chiefly from classical mythology and only comprehensible to an educated minority. Morris could not accept either of these bases as valid, because he regarded Christianity as, if not quite dead, at least something which would be quickly discarded after a socialist revolution, and, as we saw, he was not interested in élitist art of any sort. In order therefore to find some valid significance for the visual arts both in the present and in the future, Morris had to look for some form of symbolism which would be accessible to everyone, and the answer he found was to 'return to the same material as that with which the visual arts had originally begun: the natural world

around us. As he wrote in "The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization":

And in all I have been saying, what I have been really urging on you is this -- Reverence for the Life of Man upon the Earth: let the past be past, every whit of it that is not still living in us: let the dead bury their dead, but let us turn to the living, and with boundless courage and what hope we may, refuse to let the Earth be joyless in the days to come.

What lies before us of hope and fear for this? Well, let us remember that those past days whose art was so worthy, did nevertheless forget much of what was due to the Life of Man upon the Earth; and so belike it was to revenge this neglect that art was delivered to our hands for maiming: to us, who were blinded by our eager chase of those things which our forefathers had neglected, and by the chase of other things which seemed revealed to us on our hurried way, not seldom, it may be for our beguiling.

And of that to which we were blinded, not all was unworthy: nay the most of it was deep-rooted in men's souls, and was a necessary part of their Life upon the Earth, and claims our reverence still: let us add this knowledge to our other knowledge: and there will still be a future for the arts. Let us remember this, and amid simplicity of life turn our eyes to real beauty that can be shared by all: and then though the days worsen, and no rag of the elder art be left for our teaching, yet the new art may yet arise among us, and even if it have the hands of a child together with the heart of a troubled man, still it may bear on for us to better times the tokens of our reverence for the Life of Man upon the Earth. For we indeed freed from the bondage of foolish habit and dulling luxury might at last have eyes wherewith to see: and should have to babble to one another many things of our joy in the life around us: the faces of people in the streets bearing the tokens of mirth and sorrow and hope, and all the tale of their lives: the scraps of nature the busiest of us come across; birds and beasts and the little worlds they live in; and even in the very town the sky above us and the drift of the clouds across it; the wind's hand on the slim trees, and its voice amid their branches, and all the ever-recurring deeds of nature; nor would the road or the river winding past our homes fail

to tell us stories of the country-side, and men's doings in field and fell. And whiles we should fall to muse on the times when all the ways of nature were mere wonders to men, yet so well beloved of them that they called them by men's names and gave them deeds of men to do; and many a time there would come before us memories of the deeds of past times, and of the aspirations of those mighty peoples whose deaths have made our lives, and their sorrows our joys.

How could we keep silence of all this? and what voice could tell it but the voice of Art: and what audience for such a tale would content us but all men living on the Earth?

This is what Architecture hopes to be: it will have this life, or else death; and it is for us now living between the past and the future to say whether it shall live or die.¹

This chapter will develop the theme of the need for a new symbol-system, which Morris was by no means alone in feeling, and it will deal with meaning and symbol in patterns as it was understood by Morris's contemporaries, with Morris's interpretation of it in relation to the designs of earlier periods, and with the implications which this interpretation has for the student of Morris's own designs, and ultimately of his stories also. I say of his stories also, because the passage quoted in the first paragraph of this chapter continues: "The wall was a wall still, and not a window; nay, a book rather, where, if you would, you might read the stories of the gods and heroes, and whose characters, whether you read them or not, delighted

¹Works XXII, 111.

you always with the beauty of their form and colour". When this passage was first quoted, all the emphasis was on the phrase "if you would", on the adjective quality which enabled such allusive work to retain a restfulness unless the viewer wished to look for meaning in it. In this and the succeeding chapters, the emphasis will be on the idea that a pattern may be read, that characters, meaning letters as well as significant motifs generally, may be beautiful in themselves without being read, and on what this analogy between design and literature means for the understanding of Morris's artistic and literary symbolism, of the "complete book", and of its culmination in the late prose romances.

Since Morris placed so much weight and value on pattern design, it is scarcely surprising that he found its manifestations in his own day disappointing, for it is self-evident that with most patterns as we see them and conceive of them in Western Europe in the twentieth century this richness and depth of symbolism are not present. Nor were they present in the nineteenth century, except to some extent in the work of historicizing design theorists like Owen Jones, Christopher Dresser, and Morris himself; nor in the eighteenth century, especially in France, the most advanced European country at that date, whose productions in applied art Morris described as "that bundle of degraded whims falsely called a style, that so fitly expresses the

corruption of the days of Louis XV";² nor, except as fragmentary survivals, in the seventeenth century even.³ And the more civilized the country, the less meaning of any value, it seemed to Morris, there was in its patterns in the modern period. As he says of post-Renaissance applied art generally: "as to the arts of the people", by which he means especially handicrafts like weaving, pottery, etc., "they had become in countries where art had flourished most, as in Italy, a kind of necessarily tolerated appendage to intellectual art, in short to make my meaning plain in a few words the flunky of intellectual, or rather I should say of academical art: they had become

²"Some Hints on Pattern-Designing", Works XXII, 201.

³"The Gothic Revival [I]", Unpublished Lectures, 67: "Meantime in less artistic, and cultivated countries all pretence even of intellectual art had disappeared, but though popular art had fallen very low, it did not altogether fall into upholstery though [in] the last half of the 16th and the first half of the 17th [century] social and economic causes had indeed deprived it of its dignity and thoughtfulness, but tradition still clung to it, and even mere ignorance and clumsiness aided it to shake off to a certain extent the fetters which academical art imported from Italy would have laid upon it . . . it will not bear criticism but it forces us to love it in spite of all defects. But you must always keep in mind that it is not its super-imposed defects that make it lovable but the tradition still lingering in it which has remained from the times of art which produced work at once logical and beautiful: it is not the Renaissance form which we love in it, but the Gothic spirit".

upholstery".⁴

What then does Morris intend us to think of when he writes of pattern design? As we have already seen, he considered that the separation of adjective and substantive art at the Renaissance had led to the degradation of applied art, in its simple visual effect initially, but also, and at a depth more important, in the loss of the sort of meaning which we have been talking about, of the allusive qualities of pattern-work by which, if we let it, it speaks to us of something beyond its simple surface meaning. This almost mystical significance was what Morris wished to recover to give back meaning to the applied arts; for it was the loss of that meaning that seemed to him to be the cause of all that was wrong with nineteenth century design: that it had, in point of fact, no meaning for the greater part of the population, because both it and they had become severed from the traditions of art.⁵ Pattern design

⁴Ibid.

⁵"Art and the Beauty of the Earth", Works XXIII, 167: "For, first, they are cut off from tradition, that wonderful, almost miraculous accumulation of the skill of ages, which men find themselves partakers in without effort of their part. The knowledge of the past and the sympathy with it which the artists of to-day have, they have acquired, on the contrary, by their own most strenuous individual effort; and as that tradition no longer exists to help them in their practice of the art, and they are heavily weighted in the race by having to learn everything from the beginning, each man for himself, so also, and that is worse, the lack of it deprived them of a sympathetic and appreciative

was existing, in so far as it had any meaning at all, on a borrowed system of symbols, partly gleaned from Gothic architecture and its corresponding religion, and partly from scavenging in the art of classical and pre-classical periods, but in this case without the religious referent that their designs had for the periods in which they were current, or without indeed a referent of any kind.

Look, for example, at what Morris says about Gothic revival architecture in his two lectures on "The Gothic Revival": that some of its best churches are really very like the real thing until you begin to look at their details, which reveal them as counterfeit at bottom, partly, even mainly, because the spirit behind the work is not the same as that which animated the work of the mediaeval builder, but also partly because the ornament of statuary and carving is not "genuine imagery".⁶ It did not mean anything to its

audience. Apart from the artists themselves and a few persons who would be also artists but for want of opportunity and for insufficient gifts of hand and eye, there is in the public of to-day no real knowledge of art, and little love for it. Nothing, save at the best certain vague prepossessions, which are but the phantom of that tradition which once bound artist and public together. Therefore the artists are obliged to express themselves, as it were, in a language not understood of the people".

⁶"The Gothic Revival [II]", The Unpublished Lectures, p. 84. Of course for Morris, the real and only answer to this problem of the loss of a symbol system was to be the restoration of the autonomy of the individual workman through a socialist revolution, and until that occurred he did not "expect to see a living school of art amongst us" again, ibid., p. 92.

makers, and therefore cannot say anything to us. In one case that he cites, the architect's enthusiasm for the past was real enough, but his workmen were indifferent to it, so that the sculptured figures which should have been the glory of the church were mere carvings, not real sculpture, "that is they were done by men who really had nothing to do with the design of them who cut them unfeelingly and mechanically without troubling their heads as to whom they represented, with no trace in them of my friend the architect's enthusiasm for the Middle Ages, by men who would just as soon have cut 18th century grave-stone cherubs, or apples and amorette in a new club house; in short they were just mechanical dolls nothing more".⁷ And that they are "just mechanical dolls" is all that can be said about any imported symbol system, whatever its provenance.

Morris of course was not alone in his perception of the loss of meaning in nineteenth century applied art, and the related problem of lack of a distinctive style in architecture. A. W. N. Pugin, who was equally disturbed by it, was probably one of the earliest nineteenth century designers to look at artistic structures in terms of their symbolism and to attempt to explain the loss of a coherent

⁷Ibid., pp. 83-4.

style by loss of that symbolism. In The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture (London, 1841), he discusses Gothic architecture in terms of its religious significance, for example, in his analysis of the importance of pinnacles:

In the third place, we will proceed to the use and intention of pinnacles and spiral terminations. I have little doubt that pinnacles are considered by the majority of persons as mere ornamental excrescences, introduced solely for picturesque effect. The very reverse of this is the case; and I shall be able to shew you that their introduction is warranted by the soundest principles of construction and design. They should be regarded as answering a double intention, both mystical and natural: their mystical intention is like other vertical lines and terminations of Christian architecture, to represent an emblem of the Resurrection. . . .⁸

Pugin's work as a whole is a plea for meaning in art, and most major nineteenth century art theorists, like Ruskin,⁹ Owen Jones, Christopher Dresser, followed him in this, but

⁸ p. 8.

⁹ Compare, for example, Pugin's remarks on the four-centred arch in The True Principles, p. 7, footnote: "The moment the flat or four-centred arch was introduced, the spirit of Christian architecture was on the wane. Height or the vertical principle, emblematical of the resurrection, is the very essence of Christian architecture", with Ruskin's The Stones of Venice, Book I, Chapter VII, where he calls it "a barbarous pointed arch, called four-centred, and composed of bits of circles", which "is at the bottom or top of sundry other blunders all over the world". Ruskin, like Pugin, is antagonistic partly for religious reasons towards classical revival architecture: "The whole mass of the architecture, founded on Greek and Roman models, which we have been in the habit of building for the last

except for Ruskin to some extent, or a "conservative Christian anarchist"¹⁰ like Henry Brooks Adams, they could not follow him in his demand for a revival of the old beliefs in order to validate the architectural

three centuries is utterly devoid of all life, virtue, honourableness, or power of doing good. It is base, unnatural, unfruitful, unenjoyable, and impious. Pagan in its origin, proud and unholy in its revival. . . . Exactly in the degree in which Greek and Roman architecture is lifeless, unprofitable, and unchristian, in that same degree our own ancient Gothic is animated, serviceable, and faithful . . . and in all its form is symbolical of the faith, of Christianity", Book II, Chapter IX.

¹⁰The Education of Henry Adams, An Autobiography (Cambridge, Mass., 1918), pp. 406-8. See also his Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres (Cambridge, Mass., 1919), a book which is a striking instance of the continuing power of the mediaeval religious vision as embodied in its architecture. Adams's imaginative reconstruction of the cult of the Virgin as revealed in the construction of Chartres can, as he says himself, only fail to appeal to those who have no imagination. The last paragraph of the book demands to be quoted: "Perhaps the best proof of it is their apparent instability. Of all the elaborate symbolism which has been suggested for the Gothic Cathedral, the most vital and most perfect may be that the slender nervure, the springing motion of the broken arch, the leap downwards of the flying buttress -- the visible effort to throw off a visible strain -- never let us forget that Faith alone supports it, and that, if Faith fails, Heaven is lost. The equilibrium is visibly delicate beyond the line of safety; danger lurks in every stone. The peril of the heavy tower, of the restless vault, of the vagrant buttress; the uncertainty of logic, the inequalities of the syllogism, the irregularities of the mental mirror -- all these haunting nightmares of the Church are expressed as strongly by the Gothic cathedral as though it had been the cry of human suffering, and as no emotion had ever been expressed before or is likely to find expression again. The delight of its aspirations is flung up to the sky. The pathos of its self-distrust and anguish of doubt is buried in the earth as its last secret. You can read out whatever else pleases your youth and confidence; to me, this is all", p. 383.

revival.¹¹ They therefore tended to fall into the error of believing that the ornamental structures of the past could be imitated without a revival of the spirit that animated them. Hence, whatever its historical accuracy of form, which was sometimes, as Morris saw, most convincing at first sight, the basic aridity of much Victorian Gothic, though, predictably enough, the greater the element of fantasy and the less the historicism the more alive the buildings become. The designs of the architect William Butterfield, for instance, which are very different from the Italian Gothic churches from which he was nominally deriving his style, have a very considerable degree of vitality, whether or not one actually likes them.¹²

One of the worst offenders in his matter of imitation in ornament is Christopher Dresser, who is, paradoxically, also one of the most unusual and original designers of the period, when, that is, he chooses to work, as he puts it, in that style which "is peculiarly that of

¹¹Pugin of course fulfilled the logic of his own beliefs by becoming a Catholic.

¹²The Times Literary Supplement, No. 3,683, 6th October, 1972, in its recent review of Paul Thompson's new book, William Butterfield (London, 1972), calls Butterfield the "most challenging architect of the Victorian style", though the reviewer also makes it clear that he is not to be persuaded into a liking for Butterfield's work, despite the evident enthusiasm of Paul Thompson, which, I may add, I share.

the author".¹³ Dresser not only himself designed, without any perception of incongruity, "Ornament in the Arabian style, intended to be painted in the centre of a ceiling", "Greek ornaments suitable for dadoes", "frieze ornaments, in free Gothic style", and "Grotesque 'powderings' suitable for the wall-ornaments of a smoking-room",¹⁴ but also actually recommended his students to study Egyptian and Greek design at second hand by looking at the Egyptian and Greek courts which Owen Jones had constructed when the Crystal Palace was re-opened in 1854 on its new site at Sydenham,¹⁵ though, to be fair, he also recommends the

¹³Studies in Design, plate XXII. This book consists for the most part in a series of plates of Dresser's own designs in various styles, of which by far the greater part is derivative, but there are also half-a-dozen or so in the author's own style, as he calls it, odd, spiky designs in tertiary colours. He seems to have been, if not the actual originator, at least the populariser to a considerable degree, of that style of Victorian design which we tend to regard as most peculiarly Victorian, with liberal use of dark and tertiary colours, brown, olive, plum and maroon, what Morris, who hated it, called, Works XXII, 91, the "blood-red and chocolate with white facings" style. For examples of Dresser's colour schemes see Principles of Decorative Design (London, 1873), especially plate facing p. 84.

¹⁴Studies in Design, plates I and XIII, plate XXIII, XXXII, and VI.

¹⁵Principles in Decorative Design, pp. 8 and 11. For descriptions of the work of Owen Jones in these courts, see the Crystal Palace Handbooks of 1854. Several of these are either by Jones or descriptive of his work, for example, The Alhambra Court in the Crystal Palace and An Apology for

study of actual Egyptian mummy-cases as well. His only strictures on imitation are that a designer who is simulating the style of a previous age take great care to be internally consistent, to understand the symbolic system he is using, and not to mix motifs from different periods:

I am never at a loss for an idea; but when in ordinary mood, I appeal to scholarship -- to knowledge of what has been done, rather than to any faculty by which distinct originality is evolved; and from my knowledge I arrange or produce a pattern. I may settle that the pattern is to be Arabian, Chinese, Indian, or Moresque ornament. Knowing what the Arabians, Chinese, Indians, and Moors have for centuries produced when they have ornamented a fabric, or surface, such as I desire to decorate, I commence to produce forms similar to those employed by the particular people that I elect to follow, and thus I produce an Arabian, or Chinese, or Indian, or Moresque pattern. But my success in the production of such a pattern depends largely upon the extent to which I become, in feeling, for the time a Chinaman, or Arabian, or such as the case requires. But I must not only become, in spirit, a citizen of the country whose ornament I wish to simulate, but I must be-

the Colouring of the Greek Court . . . both by Owen Jones, and George Scharf's The Roman Court erected in the Crystal Palace by Owen Jones.

Owen Jones, however, did not himself intend plagiarism, and was in fact one of the most important teachers of the need for the development of a distinctively Victorian style. One of his "Propositions" in The Grammar, No. 36, p. 6, says: "The principles discoverable in the works of the past belong to us; not so the results. It is taking the end for the means". Like Morris, what he intended us to imitate from the past were the principles, the "grammar", not the actual artifacts, and like Morris also, his ultimate precept is "that the future progress of Ornamental Art may be best secured by engrafting on the experience of the past the knowledge we may obtain by a return to Nature for fresh inspiration", ibid., p. 2.

come, in a sense, a scholar of that country. He who is ignorant cannot express in his works a knowledge which he does not possess. The learned alone can express by their works learning. In order that I enter into the spirit of the Oriental, I often find it necessary to inform myself of the religion, mode of government, climate, and habits of a people; for it is only by understanding their faith and usages that I can comprehend the spirit of their ornament, and become for a time one of them in feeling. Being familiar with the ornamental forms employed by a particular people, and being acquainted with their religious faith, mode of government, social arrangements, the nature of their food, and the character of their climate, I can, by allowing the mind to absorb foreign feelings till it is pervaded by them, so far become for the time a foreigner in spirit that I can produce ornament having much of the spirit of that which I have decided to simulate, and which may even be indistinguishable from native work.¹⁶

Even Owen Jones, despite the fact that his Grammar of Ornament was itself intended to "aid in arresting that unfortunate tendency of our time to be content with copying, whilst the fashion lasts, the forms peculiar to any bygone age, without attempting to ascertain, generally completely ignoring, the peculiar circumstances which rendered an

¹⁶Studies in Design, pp. 3-4. At an earlier period, Dresser had resembled Owen Jones and Morris more closely, however, for in his first book, The Art of Decorative Design, p. 14, he repudiates the idea of copying from past styles also, for "as our creed differs from theirs, and as we are not prepared to endorse all their sentiments, we cannot fitly appropriate to ourselves these ornaments with which we do not sympathize, as they are an expression of sentiments in which we cannot concur". Of course the ability to "sympathize" is the escape clause which allows eventually the development of the sort of position Dresser took later in the passage quoted in the text above!

ornament beautiful, because it was appropriate, and which as expressive of other wants, when thus transplanted, as entirely fails",¹⁷ did not entirely avoid the habit of copying, as Dresser's description of the decorations of St. James's Hall show.¹⁸

The result of this sort of historicising design theory is to leave Morris in some ways closer to Pugin than to his immediate predecessors in the field of design,

¹⁷p. 1.

¹⁸The Art of Decorative Design, p. 16: "It has features which are Egyptian, yet it is not Egyptian; it has parts which are somewhat Greek, yet it is not Greek; and few styles have appeared which are not suggested by some ornamental character, and yet the decoration is neither in any one style, nor in all jumbled together". The result of this in Dresser's opinion is a new style, but to us it sounds like a typical product of Victorian eclecticism, reminiscent of G. H. Stokes's design for the Sheffield Court of the 1854 Crystal Palace Exhibition of "plate glass and iron, an appropriate and happy selection for a court intended to receive the productions of Sheffield" but in a "composite Moresque-Gothic style, and elaborately ornamental in design", General Guide-Book to the Crystal Palace and Park by Samuel Philips (London, 1854), p. 97. The Birmingham court was pseudo-seventeenth century French or English iron-work, while in the "Printed Fabrics Court the architects have suited their fancy by appropriating what they found picturesque in several styles; and the character of the court may be called decorative Italian, combined with Elizabethan, and even Byzantine features", with, notably enough, "an allegorical figure of Manchester placed in the centre", ibid., pp. 96 and 116. One thing that can never be said of Morris is that his pattern designs are anything but fairly and squarely Victorian, though admittedly his stained glass has sometimes (though heaven knows why) been interpreted as pseudo-mediaeval, and some of his late fabrics actually were influenced by fifteenth century Italian designs, though this

for while he thought that it was vital to study the practice of applied art such as it was in its best periods, since if you do not "you will be nose-led by the first bad copyist of it that you come across",¹⁹ he did not suppose that one could reconstruct the ornament of past ages, or even imitate it to any purpose, without an actual belief in the systems that gave rise to it.²⁰ Morris's remedy for the loss of a coherent style of ornament and architecture resembled Pugin's too, the restoration of an age of faith, except that while Pugin looked at the past Morris was con-

is not discernible except to the expert.

¹⁹"Some Hints on Pattern-Designing", Works XXII, 200.

²⁰Cf. "Of the Origins of Ornamental Art", The Unpublished Lectures, p. 149: ". . . the pedant of today, self-sufficient, the slave of money, ignorant he also of that real history which is no dead thing, but the living bond of the hopes of the past, and the future, believes that from his study or his office he can re-create past times, and without a word of sympathy or a day of education can get from the machine-driven work-man of today work like that of the free craftsman of the Middle Ages. . . ." Of course, Christopher Dresser really thought that he was not ignorant, and had "entered into the soul of the dead artist", but clearly this is not possible, for however learned we are, and Dresser expects his designer to be very learned, as we saw, he will not produce with the spontaneity of the original craftsman -- indeed the more learned we are, the less likely we are to be spontaneous, but we will come to that question in a moment.

cerned with the future.²¹ However we are concerned here not with the remedies that a social revolution would bring, but with what Morris tried to do himself with the materials at his command, for though he was often pessimistic about the future of the arts as a whole that did not prevent him from designing, and doing what he could at least to keep the possibility of design open for the future.²²

How then did Morris set about his designing? Not by imitating the work of the past, not even by attempting to enter into the soul of the dead periods of art and going on from there, but simply by taking the only thing in the world which he felt everyone could understand and working from there, and that, of course, was nature. His earliest designs are naïve in the extreme: Daisy and Trellis and Fruit (all 1864) are scarcely even conventionalised from

²¹As is of course made plain in such articles as "The Aims of Art", "Art under Plutocracy", or "Art and Socialism", all in Works XXIII.

²²Sometimes Morris felt that there was no future for the arts at all, as e.g. "The Lesser Arts", Works XXII, 10: ". . . but in the meantime the present state of the arts and their dealings with modern life and progress seem to me to point, in appearance at least, to this immediate future; that the world, which has for a long time busied itself about other matters than the arts, and has carelessly let them sink lower and lower, till many not uncultivated men, ignorant of what they once were, and hopeless of what they might yet be, look upon them with mere contempt; that the world, I say, thus busied and hurried, will one day wipe the slate, and be clean rid in her impatience of the whole matter with all its tangle and trouble". However he also, as we saw regarded Victorian

nature, so realistic are they, and certainly not formed into any sort of growing pattern such as he was so insistent upon in his later work.²³ But this was, given the attitude to design which he was later to develop, clearly the right way for him to start: to begin with primitive renderings of things he knew and loved, and really primitive, not in any pseudo-Moresque or Indian or Arabian primitive style; for these first designs were genuinely made in ignorance of the principles of design and of the history of his art. It was only much later, nearly ten years afterwards in fact,²⁴ that Morris became in any way proficient as a theorist and began to design the works which we now associate with him, with their flowing curves, and

design as a sort of 'holding operation' for the future.

²³As e.g. in Works XXII, 109-110, 199 and passim. As Peter Floud points out in "Dating Morris Patterns", The Architectural Review, July 1959, 15, these three papers are "quite untypical of his mature style. The 'Trellis' -- the first of the three -- with its crudely squared up pattern, is without any parallel among the later designs. . . . The 'Daisy' is far naïver than any of the later designs, and is based on a simple row structure which Morris repeated in only one later design. The last of the three -- the 'Fruit' or 'Pomegranate' -- though much more sophisticated, is equally untypical". Floud does not in fact even include these three in his division of the patterns into "four clearly defined periods, each characterized by its own predominant style", because they are so isolated.

²⁴His art lectures only began in 1877, though before this he had actually been designing some of his best patterns, 1872-6. Paul Thompson, in The Work of William

interlacements, and rich visual texture.²⁵ Christopher Dresser, as we saw, had a style of his own when he cared to use it. Owen Jones, too, has some exquisite simple abstract diaper wallpapers, which are very hard to see nowadays,²⁶ but again much of his work demanded that he reconstruct old styles, Morris, however, not being a

Morris, p. 91, regards these as "his finest group of wallpapers. They are quite as naturalistic as the first, (i.e. Daisy, etc.) but now generally based on a subtly concealed but strong underlying pattern which gives their easy curves the reality of growth. They do not look absolutely flat, but rather as if arranged within a depth of about an inch. The drawing and colours are clear and fresh, conveying an extraordinary immediacy. One can almost smell the 'Jasmine' or touch the stiff blue and green fronds of 'Branch', the delicate double-swishing leaves of 'Marigold'; one longs to reach into the blue and take the orange-flecked fruit of 'Apple' or to pick the bunches of grapes that glisten against the luxuriant dark leaves of 'Vine'".

²⁵This free-flowing style (see also footnote 79) is particularly typical of the period 1872-6, as Peter Floud, "Dating Morris Patterns", p. 17, points out: "With one exception, all these twelve designs are based on meandering lines, flowing over the surface in loose informal curves, with the structure of the repeats deliberately concealed. The consequent effect of spontaneous growth is emphasized by the asymmetrical, and apparently haphazard, placing of the principal objects, and by the way in which buds and shoots seem to branch off as nature, rather than the formal logic of a repeating pattern, would require".

²⁶Because, amazingly enough, there is as yet no book on Owen Jones. However, two of his papers were on show at the Victoria and Albert Museum Travelling Exhibition of Wallpaper Design from the Sixteenth Century to the Present Day at Marble Hill House, Twickenham in October 1972, a sophisticated lilac and grey bud pattern of 1852, No. 8338.65, and a fawn, gold and grey of 1858, No. 8341.50, both of which are in many ways more 'modern' than Morris's designs. Jones's work in book design is also

teacher of design as these were, had no such temptation to 'simulate', and though he was quite strongly influenced at one time by some of the old work which he saw at the Victoria and Albert Museum,²⁷ it is so well absorbed into his own style that only recent research has detected it.

In a sense, this development of Morris's style out of primitive beginnings through a period of historicism into a renewed naturalism²⁸ mimics the development of art

interesting in relation to Morris's, though his curious combination of ordinary type with the techniques of the illuminated manuscript is quite unlike Morris's work. See, for example, the rather monstrous Psalms of David (no date, 1861?), where the spindly type is most inappropriate to the florid gorgeousness of the pink and blue borders. This of course was what Morris found when he wanted to print (black and white) borders for Love is Enough, that the available types were not heavy enough to sustain comparison with the woodcuts -- which is one of the reasons why his Kelmscott Press types are so heavy and black. Jones was much more successful with The Song of Songs (London 1849), where the green, gold and red that predominate in the borders accord far better with the modified gothic lettering to form what is really a very beautiful book, and a masterpiece of early colour printing.

²⁷See the section, 'The Influence of South Kensington' in Peter Floud's "Dating Morris Patterns", p. 16.

²⁸See the whole of Floud's article, where he traces the four periods of Morris's designs, from the early naturalism, through formalism and conventional detail to a final "return to a somewhat more flowing, less rigid, structure, with particular emphasis on designs with an upward movement swaying from side to side. The diagonal designs of the previous period disappear entirely. A marked characteristic of this last batch of designs is the blending in the same patterns of conventional symbols and naturalistically drawn flowers, or the super-imposition of decorative

itself as he understood it; to be at first unconscious of any laws or restrictions, and then, later, to learn from the past and use the past consciously: first to make the symbols, then to exploit them.²⁹ For all his symbols are contained, albeit unconsciously, in those first three papers: the whole of nature and of man's dealings with her

details on naturalistically drawn petals or leaves. Morris appears to be striving to combine a return to his earlier naturalism with the formalism derived from his study of historic textiles. His last design -- the 'Compton' -- completed a few months before his death, is certainly one of the richest of his entire output", p. 20. If I am right, this is also what he was doing in his literary development, the early prose tales paralleling the odd three first wallpapers, the gradual mastery of formalism in his verse and the prose translations, and his final attempt to combine the two aspects into a symbolic naturalism in the prose romances, their dates, incidentally, being almost synchronous with the dates of the last group of wallpapers.

²⁹As Christopher Dresser explains of the development of the lotus as a symbolic motif in art, Principles of Decorative Design, p. 6: "The fertility of the Nile valley was chiefly due to the river annually overflowing its banks. In spreading over the land, the water carried with it a quantity of rich alluvial earth, which gave fecundity to the country on which it was deposited. When the water which had overspread the surrounding land had nearly subsided, the corn which was to produce the harvest was set by being cast upon the retiring water, through which it sank into the rich alluvial earth. The water being now well-nigh within the river banks, the first flower that sprang up was the lotus. This flower was to the Egyptians the harbinger of coming plenty, for it symbolised the springing forth of the wheat. It was the first flower of spring, or their primrose (first rose). The priesthood, perceiving the interest with which this flower was viewed, and the watchfulness manifested for its appearance, taught that in it abode a god, and that it must be worshipped. The acknowledgement of this flower as a fit and primary object of worship caused it to be delineated on the mummy-cases, and

is here in little, the "great drama of the seasons"³⁰ and of birth and death and regeneration in meadow and garden-ground, wood and orchard, seed, fruit, and flower wild or cultivated, and "the innocent love of animals";³¹ just as it was there to teach the first savage, who "no sooner learns how to make anything than he learns also how to ornament it":³²

Indeed their teacher is not far to seek: whatever lived or grew about them: nay the mountains, the rocks themselves, the 'bones of the earth' as the Northmen called them, had something about them which they must have dimly known for beauty; the things which were useful to them for food and fuel and clothes were ornamented: the day and the night, sunrise and sunset which showed to their dim minds as beings of passions like themselves; the serpent whose lurking malice and swift wrath they feared, and whom they worshipped lest he should slay them: all these had been fashioned fair and lovely by forces of which they knew nothing: and they, the latest-born and maybe the most terrible force of nature, how could they choose but take up the

sarcophagi, and on all sacred edifices". Morris is not as explicit as this, but in his essay "Of the Origins of Ornamental Art" in The Unpublished Lectures, he too plots the progress of art from its earliest beginnings through the stage where the craftsman is seen as a god and acquires myths, as Thor, Weland Smith or Hephaestus, and at last to the modern loss of symbol.

³⁰"The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization", Works XXII, 138.

³¹"Some Hints on Pattern-Designing", ibid., 177.

³²"Of the Origins of Ornamental Art", The Unpublished Lectures, 138.

links of the chain and work as nature worked about them: many things she compelled them to, and this also.³³

The naïve naturalistic Daisy, with its background of grass³⁴ on which are scattered daisies and columbines, has the suggestion both of the meadow, and, with its rigid row-structure, of the garden, while the flowers themselves speak to us of summer and sunshine, the day's eye, as the folk etymology of the daisy has it; Trellis, again, "a realistic piece of woodwork with prickly climbing roses and birds and insects carefully drawn by Philip Webb",³⁵ is the garden with the hand of man at work in it, and also the natural world of birds and animals, reminiscent of "the close vine-trellis that keeps out the sun by the Nile side;

³³Ibid., pp. 138-9.

³⁴"The delightful and somewhat naïve 'Daisy'", says Philip Henderson, p. 68. "Their attractiveness lies in the naïve charm of their realism", says Paul Thompson, p. 91. Grass, yes, but is it not also a reminiscence, an unconscious one, of the Greek anthemion in its simplest form, of which Morris was later to write: "the ornament called the honeysuckle, which I rather suppose to be a suggestion of a tuft of flowers and leaves breaking through the earth, and which learned men think had a mystical meaning beyond that simple idea, like that other bordering, which, for want of a better name, I must call the flower and pine-cone", "The History of Pattern-Designing", Works XXII, 215-6.

³⁵Paul Thompson, p. 90.

or of the wild-woods and their streams, with the dogs panting beside them; or of the swallows sweeping above the garden boughs towards the house-eaves where their nestlings are, while the sun breaks through the clouds on them; or of the many-flowered summer meadows of Picardy";³⁶ and Fruit carries suggestions of autumn and orchards, again the nature cultivated which Morris, like Cobbett,³⁷ loved so much, of the natural fruitfulness of the earth, aided by the hand of man.

At the time of these early patterns, Morris does not seem to have thought consciously in terms of symbolism, but later, in "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing" (1881), he wrote:

You may be sure that any decoration is futile, and has fallen into at least the first stage of degradation, when it does not remind you of something beyond itself, of something of which it is but a visible symbol.³⁸

Are we not therefore to see, even in this early work, in

³⁶"Some Hints on Pattern-Designing", Works XXII, 178.

³⁷Morris was a great admirer of Cobbett, and like him tended to prefer cultivated land to the wilderness, though Iceland indeed touched him deeply. See for instance, his description of the English country-side in "The Lesser Arts", Works XXII, 17, and compare it with the sentiments Cobbett expresses in Rural Rides.

³⁸"Some Hints on Pattern-Designing", Works XXII, 179.

the recurring symbols of meadow, garden, and wood, and the hand of man at work in all of them, a reference to more than just the outward face of the earth? The truculent remark quoted by his daughter that "Wordsworth's primrose by the river's brim is quite good enough for me in itself; what on earth more did the man want it to be",³⁹ is a protest against the hunting of allegorical meanings in Wordsworth's poem, but not, surely, against the use of the flower as a symbol of spring and the regeneration of life. Had that been so then Morris could never have written as he did of the use of symbols in pattern designing with such affection, and especially of the sacred tree,⁴⁰ which was

³⁹ May Morris I, 429-30.

⁴⁰ "Furthermore, I believe the Persians have preserved and handed down to later generations certain forms of ornament which, above all, must be considered parts of pattern-designing, and which have clung to that art with singular tenacity. These forms are variations of the mystic symbols of the Holy Tree and the Holy Fire. The subject of the shapes these have taken, and the reasons for their use and the diversities of them, is a difficult and obscure one; so I must, before I go further, remind you that I lay no claim to mythological and ethnological learning. . . . However what I have noticed in my studies as a pattern designer is this. There are two symbols; the one is a tree, more or less elaborately blossomed, and supported, as heralds say, by two living creatures, genii, partly or wholly man-like, or animals, sometimes of known kinds, lions or the like, sometimes invented monsters; the other symbol is an altar with a flame upon it, supported by two living creatures, sometimes man-like, sometimes beast-like. . . . Now it is clear that the two symbols are apt to become so much alike in rude representations that sometimes it is hard to say whether the supporters have the tree or fire-altar

later to figure so largely in his prose romances that Yeats has called him one of "those that would have prayed under the shadow of the Green Tree, and on the wet stones of the Well, among the worshippers of natural abundance".⁴¹

These symbols, motifs if you prefer, which Morris expressed in his first patterns, he was always to return to. Later patterns like Daffodil (1891) and Blackthorn (1892) portray the flowers of spring, others, like Vine (1873) or Apple (1877) the fruits of autumn, and they find their

between them; and this seems to have puzzled those who used them after the Sassanian period, when, doubtless, they had forgotten or perverted their original meaning. They are used very often in Byzantine art in carvings and the like, where again they sometimes take another form of peacocks drinking from a fountain. . . . It would be absurd of me to attempt to be authoritative as to the meaning of these far-travelling symbols; but I may perhaps be allowed to say that both the fire and the tree are symbols of life and creation, and that, when the central object is obviously a fire, the supporters are either ministers of the altar or guardian spirits. As to the monsters supporting the tree, they also, I suppose may be guardians. I have, however, seen a different guess at their meaning; to wit, that they represent the opposing powers of good and evil that form the leading idea of the dualism that fixed itself to the ancient Zoroastrian creed . . .", "The History of Pattern-Designing", Works XXII, 226-8.

⁴¹Essays and Introductions, p. 54: "I do not think it was accident, so subtle are the threads that lead the soul, that made William Morris, who seems to me the one perfectly happy and fortunate poet of modern times, celebrate the Green Tree and goddess Habundia, and wells and enchanted waters in so many books. In The Well at the World's End green trees and enchanted waters are shown to us, as they were understood by old writers, who thought that the generation of all things was through water; for

parallels in pictorial art in his tapestries, Flora and Pomona (1885)⁴² and Forest (1887) and Orchard (1890), the first two of which show the second stage of his development of art in their use of the myths of nature rather than nature herself as subject matter.⁴³ But these were other men's myths that he was picturing, in the same way as he adapted Botticelli's Primavera as a tapestry (1896), for he was willing to take over the traditional symbols where they had meaning for him. In his prose romances, however, he is his own mythographer, and working from those early

when the water that gives a long and fortunate life and that can be found by none but such a one as all women love is found at last, the Dry Tree, the image of the ruined land, becomes green. To him indeed as to older writers Well and Tree are all but images of the one thing, of an 'energy' that is not the less 'eternal delight' because it is half of the body". Compare this with Morris's own words on the tree and the fire-altar and the peacocks drinking at the fountain, and you will see what I mean about his symbolism.

⁴²Flora and Pomona are now in the Whitfield Art Gallery in Manchester, Forest and Orchard in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The best series of illustration of Morris's pattern-design are collected in Aymer Vallance, The Art of William Morris, though the colouring is sometimes not quite true.

⁴³"Of the Origins of Ornamental Art", The Unpublished Lectures, p. 142: "And these thanks, the glory for his creations were indeed often his on strange terms, for the type of craftsman was sometimes exalted to the rank of a god swaying the terrible forces of nature; forging the bolts of the world ruler, fashioning the furniture of the house of heaven; building the rampart which was to guard for ages the holy city of the younger Gods against the frost and fire giants of the North: but again and not without some countenance from these older myths (note the

symbols of his creates no longer Flora and Pomona and Weland and Thor, but Walter and the Maiden, for whom the dead flowers revive at a touch (The Wood beyond the World), Habundia of the forest with her spiritual daughter Birdalone (The Water of the Wondrous Isles), or Ralph and Ursula and the Lady of Abundance (The Well at the World's End). Can it be that he was unconscious of what he was doing? Yeats, who wrote that "he knew clearly what he was doing towards the end, for he lived at a time when poets and artists have begun again to carry the burdens that priests and theologians took from them angrily some few hundred years ago",⁴⁴ did not think so. Is it not rather as it was with his late patterns where he returns through formalism to a new naturalism, for with the knowledge he had gained of the symbol in art it could not but be that he would have applied it to literature also?

lame and crafty Hephaestus) the type falls to the half-malignant and altogether guileful mountain spirit, conquering rather by cunning than force the huge giant and mighty warrior and still fully possessing the gift of miraculous power and creation".

⁴⁴Essays and Introductions, p. 64.

This then was the pattern of development that Morris later discovered for himself in art as a whole,⁴⁵ that it begins with the primitive symbol of the hunter or the farmer, which is taken up by the priests and elaborated into a religious system. Such was the hieratic art of the ancient Egyptians, with its organized symbolic pattern which went so strictly by rule, "kept rigidly within certain prescribed bounds that no fancy might play with, no imagination overpass, lest the majesty of the beautiful symbols might be clouded and the memory of the awful mysteries they symbolized, become dim in the hearts of men",⁴⁶ that it scarcely altered over a thousand years. When such a religious system fails, the remnants of the symbolism continue as imperfectly understood mythic patterns, like the sacred tree and fire-altar already mentioned, in which form they travel, as the Egyptian lotus and bud motif travelled half-understood across Asia to

⁴⁵ Whether or not this pattern is truly there is irrelevant, really. For Morris it was there because he was discovering an analogy to the growth of the individual's awareness of art, to his own growth, as the individual he knew best, in the growth of art in the world, microcosm -- macrocosm. Subjectively it is true therefore.

⁴⁶ "Art and the Beauty of the Earth", Works XXII, 158.

India,⁴⁷ and also via Assyria to Greece, where it developed into what Morris calls the "flower and pine cone",⁴⁸ and into the "egg-and-dart" moulding which eventually became such a popular neo-classical motif. A similar process lies behind the degeneration of myth into fairy-tale and folk superstitions, which Jacob Grimm discovered to be survivals from a formerly coherent symbol system.⁴⁹

These symbols and mythic patterns tend increasingly

⁴⁷ See, for example, Richard Glazier, A Manual of Historic Ornament . . . (London, 1899), p. 17: "The anthemion, which is the typical form, is derived from the traditional lotus and bud of Egypt, Assyria, and India. It differs however in its more abstract rendering and its absence of symbolism, having a charm of composition and a unity and balance of parts, yet lacking that interest and deeper significance associated with many periods of art".

⁴⁸ "The History of Pattern-Designing", Works XXII, 216. I cannot support my assertion of the identity of the lotus and bud and egg and dart motifs from art historical criticism, though I would think that it must have been made. However, by comparing plates VII, especially No. 27, and XII with the so-called anthemion and alternating buds of plate XVI in Owen Jones's Grammar of Ornament, it is easy to visualise such a progression. The actual egg and dart being a moulding and not a flat pattern, it is not well represented here, but if we refuse to be distracted by its extreme stylization and non-explanatory colouring we may see the resemblance of basic outline in plate XXII, Nos. 7, 11 and 29, the additional conventionalization being necessary for the carved form over against the merely painted.

⁴⁹ See Teutonic Mythology, translated from the fourth edition by James Steven Stallybrass (London, 1883-8).

to disappear as the spread of education destroys superstition, however, though in art they may linger on for a long time even when they have ceased to be understood. At this stage, they are what Morris calls "nonsense-work",⁵⁰ but still better than art which has no meaning at all, for Morris did not really think that the old symbols could ever become totally meaningless. They retained at least some of their power even when actual consciousness of their meaning was gone,⁵¹ and it was only when the designers of the West rejected the old symbols altogether, in the eighteenth century, that the art of pattern design became altogether meaningless. This is the process that Yeats explains for poetry in his essay "What is Popular Poetry?" when he describes Scott and Macaulay as "the poets of the middle class, of people who have unlearned the unwritten tradition which binds the unlettered, so long as they are masters of themselves, to the beginning of time and to the foundation of the world, and who have not learned the written tradition which has been established upon the

⁵⁰"Some Hints on Pattern-Designing", Works XXII, 195.

⁵¹"The Lesser Arts", ibid., p. 7: "I do not think it is too much to say that no man, however original he may be, can sit down to-day and draw the ornament of a cloth, or the form of an ordinary vessel or piece of furniture, that will be other than a development or a degradation of forms used hundreds of years ago; and these, too, very

unwritten . . ." ⁵² and it is the same for art, that at last in nineteenth century Europe the old symbol systems, whether of pagan myth or of Christianity, were all but dead because the people had been "civilized" out of their unconscious habits of thought and had not yet had time to learn a new conscious art.

Of course initially Morris did not perceive the problem in this sophisticated way, and he was as sympathetic as anyone to the idea of going back to the point at which art had "gone wrong" after Raphael, just as Blake, Pugin, Ruskin, Rossetti, and so many others were. ⁵³ According to this mode of thought, it was the Renaissance revival of the classical symbol system which had destroyed the old traditions of art, and Morris, like these others, was eager to

often, forms that once had a serious meaning, though they are now become little more than a habit of the hand; forms that were once perhaps the mysterious symbols of worships and beliefs now little remembered or wholly forgotten".

⁵² Essays and Introductions, p. 6. This whole essay is, really, about the nineteenth century dilemma of loss of style.

⁵³ Cf. Blake's comments on Raphael and the later Renaissance painters in his "Annotations to the Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds"; Pugin's attacks on the Renaissance in Contrasts (London, 1836), which greatly foreshadows both Ruskin's and Morris's attitudes in such comments as, p. 17, "art ceased when it is said to have been revived"; Part III of The Stones of Venice, "The Renaissance Period"; and of course throughout the work of Rossetti.

exalt the earlier periods at the expense of post-Raphaelite art.⁵⁴ Later, however, he began to realise that this revival of paganism was but a symptom, and not the disease itself, and that Gothic Revival or Pre-Raphaelitism, however much he might admire their productions, particularly those of the latter, were not going to the root of the matter. For the point was not that a tradition had been lost and needed to be recovered, or that the tradition had been lost, but that tradition itself had been lost. Let us make this distinction a little clearer. It was not that the symbol system had gone wrong at the Renaissance, but that at that point man had woken up to the fact that he was a symbol-creating animal. He had become conscious of tradition, and had therefore lost the power to use it unconsciously as he had done up till then, just as Yeats's "poets of the middle class" had done. It was not indeed until the end of the eighteenth century with Goethe and Schiller that this was really understood in so many words,⁵⁵

⁵⁴Cf. Works XXII, 56-7, 160 ff. and passim.

⁵⁵Werner Hofmann, Art in the Nineteenth Century, translated by Brian Battershaw (London, 1961), p. 22 onwards discusses this "conflict between allegory and reality" as perceived by Goethe and Schiller, which is really, at bottom, the beginning of an understanding of the whole question of symbol and tradition, "the decisive question which the century was called upon to answer".

for in the intervening period the change had been taking place but had not been analysed, but nevertheless it was the Renaissance which made the initial dislocation, and the death of unconscious art inevitably followed from it.

Morris saw this and realized that it was not possible any longer to draw on the old traditions and expect to be understood, and he asked himself how, other than by a massive programme of re-education, it was to be replaced. His own answer both in theory and in practice was to turn to socialism, to the building of a new society and a new symbol system along with it, both of which should be conscious of themselves and of their aims:

To what side then shall those turn for help, who really understand the gain of a great art in the world, and the loss of peace and good life that must follow from the lack of it? I think that they must begin by acknowledging that the ancient art, the art of unconscious intelligence, as one should call it, which began without a date, at least so long ago as those strange and masterly scratchings on mammoth-bones and the like found but the other day in the drift -- that this art of unconscious intelligence is all but dead; that what little of it is left lingers among half-civilised nations, and is growing coarser, feebler, less intelligent year by year; nay, it is mostly at the mercy of some commercial accident, such as the arrival of a few shiploads of European dye-stuffs or a few dozen orders from European merchants: this they must recognize, and must hope to see in time its place filled by a new art of conscious intelligence, the birth of wiser, simpler, freer ways of life than the world leads now, than the world has ever led.⁵⁶

⁵⁶"The Lesser Arts", Works XXII, 12.

In other words, now that tradition was dead, conscious manipulation of the symbols, such as Yeats wanted, must follow.

It was this recognition of the death of unconscious art which brought about Morris's final position with regard to art, the position which is expressed in the last pages of Socialism; its Growth and Outcome (1893), for though Morris continued to have the greatest fondness for mediaeval art, it was the same as with his socialism, that once he felt that he had perceived the way the future would shape itself, then he could no longer uncritically accept his earlier ideals. Mediaeval art, like mediaeval society, remained the closest of all periods of art and society to his wishes for the future, but could no longer entirely satisfy him, for the new barbarism which we discussed in the last chapter was to be controlled and conscious of its function unlike the unconscious mediaeval art, and the new art also, the new co-operative art of the future, was likewise to accept self-consciousness and to manipulate it, as Morris tried to do in his own writing and his designs. So he ceased to sanction attempts to revive the symbolic systems of the past, whether pagan or Christian, or to create a new idiom out of the remnants of the old, or even to support the arts and crafts movement, other than as the sort of "holding operation" mentioned above. Those were the ways of Pugin and Jones and Dresser, particularly

Dresser with his concept of the artist as scholar, though Morris calls him a pedant, who thought that because of the problems of symbolism and style in the nineteenth century art could only be addressed to an educated minority, and the rest must go hang.⁵⁷ No, art for Morris, to be art at all, must be for everyone or for no-one, not an "esoteric mystery shared by a little band of superior beings".⁵⁸ Given that prerequisite, in the absence of a tradition or even a common background of knowledge, the only possible external referent for the necessary symbolism could be nature, "for what else can you refer people to, or what else is there which everybody can understand?"⁵⁹

⁵⁷Studies in Design, p. 9: "If the decoration of an apartment is to be of the highest character, it must reveal a maximum amount of knowledge, of wisdom, and of purity on the part of its producer. If a man has knowledge, it is revealed by his words, his actions, his writings, his works. If he has wisdom, it shows itself in the manner in which he sets forth his knowledge. If he has refinement, it is manifested by his acts, and by every form that he draws. To the ignorant such manifestations may not be apparent, but by the educated they are always perceived. Can the ploughboy discern how a message passes along the electric wire? Can the street Arab decipher Egyptian hieroglyphics? For the ignorant we have no concern; to the educated who are possessed of knowledge and refinement we must appeal, and the opinions of such we alone regard".

⁵⁸"The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization", Works XXII, 133.

⁵⁹"Making the Best of It", ibid., 111.

Of the art that is to come who may prophesy? But this at least seems to follow from comparing that past with the confusion in which we are now struggling and the light which glimmers through it: that that art will no longer be an art of instinct, of ignorance which is hopeful to learn and strives to see; since ignorance is now no longer hopeful. In this and in many other ways it may differ from the past art, but in one thing it must needs be like it: it will not be an esoteric mystery shared by a little band of superior beings; it will be no more hierarchical than the art of past time was, but like it will be a gift of the people to the people, a thing which everybody can understand, and everyone surround with love; it will be a part of everyday life, and a hindrance to none.⁶⁰

This is where it all comes back to where Morris had started from: the only thing upon which he could found his own symbolism and yet still be "understanded of the people", was the natural world. But since he, in common with many of his contemporaries, thought that nature was the ultimate source of all our symbols,⁶¹ this is no more than a return

⁶⁰"The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization", ibid., 133.

⁶¹See, for example, G. W. Cox, An Introduction to the Science of Comparative Mythology and Folklore (London, 1881), p. 27: "The impression that comparative mythology resolves everything into the sun is very widely spread, and maintains itself with singular pertinacity. Few impressions are more thoroughly groundless. The science proves conclusively that the popular traditions which have come down to us in the form whether of myths strictly so called or of folklore generally, embody the whole thought of primitive man on the vast range of physical phenomena. There is scarcely an object of the outward world which has not been described or figured in these popular stories. We have myths and mythological beings belonging to the heavens and the light, to the sun, the moon, and the stars, to the

to first principles, allowing plenty of scope both for a new understanding of the old mythologies and also the formation of a new one. We have not quite formed a complete circle, however, for the Morris who returns to nature in this way is not at all the same as the Morris who started out with his naïve patterns in 1864. The naturalism which he now propounds, and which is evident again in his last patterns after the formalism which his study of the history of pattern design gave to his work in the 1880s, is not nature pure and simple such as Rousseau and Wordsworth had thought they could turn to in order to restore the natural condition of man and of his arts, but nature as she is revealed to us through the accumulated wisdom of the ages; nature as the ancient symbols of the people, which they have used unconsciously, but which the poet and artist must now begin consciously to manipulate, have revealed her to us. As Yeats also said, taught by Morris but always more explicit, because more conscious, than he:

fire and the winds, to the clouds and the waters, to the earth, the under-world, and the darkness". Cox, however, differs from Morris in assuming that nature-myths are early perceptions of "revealed religion" by which God gradually leads primitive peoples to the knowledge of himself. See A Manual of Mythology in the Form of Question and Answer (London, 1867), p. xviii. Thus he does not include the Bible in his study of myth, as Morris would have done. Nor does he see the need for any new mythology, since for him myths are charming stories from the childhood of the human race, which can entertain us still, but which, as adults, we have fundamentally outgrown. Morris, as we have seen, thought that a mythology, and a symbolism based

It is only by ancient symbols, by symbols that have numberless meanings beside the one or two the writer lays an emphasis upon, or the half-score he knows of, that any highly subjective art can escape from the barrenness and shallowness of a too conscious arrangement into the abundance and depth of Nature.⁶²

As Pater pointed out in his famous "Conclusion" to The Renaissance, it was an inescapable part of the condition of the artist in the nineteenth century that his art should be subjective, that he should be cut off from any true communication with his fellows, because of his new self-consciousness. Pater goes no further than this, though his study of the significance for the ancient world of the myths of Demeter and Persephone and Dionysus might have pointed out the direction to him, but Morris towards the end of his life began to understand that a new naturalism was possible, based on a conscious understanding of what nature means and has meant to man. This is the naturalism which he is striving for in his late pattern designs, and in his late prose romances also.

It was, however, only Yeats really who has put all this into so many words, for Morris came late to an understanding of symbolism, or indeed of art theory at all. His earliest lectures on art date from the late 1870s, and the

upon it, was a fundamental need of the human mind.

⁶²Essays and Introductions, p. 87.

first of them in which he is interested in symbolism, "Some Hints on Pattern Designing", from 1882, when he had already designed more than half of his papers and fabrics, and written all of his major poetry. It is only in the late prose romances, therefore, that we at all see the fruit of his ideas on symbolism, and in those last few patterns of the 1890s, when, as we already quoted Peter Floud as saying, "Morris appears to be striving to combine a return to his earlier naturalism with the formalism derived from his study of historic textiles", but it is all there in embryo in his critical writings also, and in his later patterns, and in the paintings of Burne-Jones, Morris's closest friend and collaborator over many years; for instance in his great Perseus sequence, which, though it nominally uses the classical myth, is really striving for a portrayal of all the snake and dragon myths of the world; the Midgard serpent and St. Michael and Christabel and Lamia and the Laithly Worm and "the serpent whose lurking malice and swift wrath they feared, and whom they worshipped lest he should slay them". Above all it is there in Morris's prose romances, not fully conscious yet, struggling after expression in the way his words on the meaning of pattern are but fumbings after the theory of art that Yeats was to reveal so clearly in Ideas of Good and Evil, but partaking of the true element of poetry of

which Yeats wrote:

There is only one kind of good poetry, for the poetry of the coteries, which presupposes the written tradition, does not differ in kind from the poetry of the people, which presupposes the unwritten tradition. Both are alike strange and obscure, and unreal to all who have not understanding, and both, instead of that manifest logic, that clear rhetoric of the 'popular poetry', glimmer with thoughts and images whose 'ancestors were stout and wise', 'anigh to Paradise' 'ere yet men knew the gift of corn'. It may be that we know as little of their descent as men knew of 'the man born to be a king' when they found him in that cradle marked with the red lion crest, and yet we know somewhere in the heart that they have been sung in temples, in ladies' chambers, and our nerves quiver with a recognition they were shaped to by a thousand emotions.⁶³

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

PART III

"THE APPLIED ARTS OF LITERATURE"

CHAPTER 1

AN APPROACH TO MORRIS'S LITERARY THEORY

The problems of writing on Morris's literary theory are rather different from those which obtained in the case of his theory of the visual arts, for here we are faced rather with a lack of material than a surplus of it. There are a few relevant essays, which will be dealt with fairly fully, as they are almost all we have to go on as direct evidence of his ideas on literature. These are: "'Men and Women' by Robert Browning", a review written for The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine in 1856;¹ "Review of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Poems", from The Academy, 14th May, 1870;² a lecture, unpublished in his life-time, called "The Early Literature of the North -- Iceland";³ and the prefaces to the first two volumes of The Saga Library (London 1891-1905) by Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon. Only

¹Reprinted in Works I, 326-48.

²In May Morris I, 101-5.

³Probably first given at Kelmscott House on 9th October, 1887. Published in The Unpublished Lectures, pp. 179-98.

parts of these last were actually written by Morris, but his close collaboration with Magnússon over many years probably ensures that all of it can be taken to reflect his opinion. However, discussion of these prefaces and of "The Early Literature of the North" properly belongs with the study of Morris's translations from Icelandic in Chapter 2, so that these will only be briefly touched upon in this chapter.

This is the total of the formal critical output of Morris, but there are also a few scattered comments in his letters, though he was not a very enthusiastic letter-writer and rarely mentioned literary matters. Most important of the remaining information we have on his literary views, therefore, are some remarks, sometimes lengthy, particularly in his socialist lectures and in Socialism, Its Growth and Outcome, on the iniquities of modern, that is for him post-Chaucerian, writers,⁴ and one important dialogue in News from Nowhere about the art and literature of the future. Aside from the five essays and

⁴Or so, I think, we may infer from his use of the term "modern" in other respects, though it is rather confusing, as, for instance, in "The History of Pattern Designing", Works XXII, 206-7, where he uses the term "modern art" to signify mediaeval art and architecture, while everything later than that date is given no specific name, but simply regarded as part of the decline of "modern art". His list of "modern poets" in his "Best Hundred Books" selected for The Pall Mall Gazette in 1885, reprinted in Works XXII, xii-xvi, begins with Shakespeare.

these few hints, however, any attempt to reconstruct Morris's theory of literature must necessarily be partly conjectural, and I shall therefore be making some use in this and the following chapters of what seem to me to be the only adequate treatments of Morris as a writer, and particularly as a prose writer, the essays by W. B. Yeats, Arthur Symons, and C. S. Lewis⁵ which have already been mentioned in Part I.

Since, as we saw in Part I, Morris's attitude towards literary critics was negative to say the least of it,⁶ it is

⁵To refresh the reader's memory: "The Happiest of the Poets" in Essays and Introductions by W. B. Yeats; "William Morris's Prose" in Studies in Prose and Verse and "William Morris" in Studies in Two Literatures by Arthur Symons; and "William Morris" in Rehabilitations by C. S. Lewis.

⁶Cf. his letter to the editor, The Pall Mall Gazette (1st November, 1866), "English Literature at the Universities": "I expect I shall be in a minority among those who answer your letter as to the proposed Professorship of English Literature, for I think the Universities had better let it alone. . . . If the function of the proposed chair were to be, or could be, the historical evolution of English Literature, including, of course, the English language, it might be well enough; but I do not think that this is intended, judging by the outcry raised about the filling of the Merton Professorship [by a philologist]. I fear that most professors would begin English literature with Shakespeare, not with Beowulf. What is intended it seems to me is a chair of Criticism: and against the establishment of such a chair I protest emphatically. For the result would be merely vague talk about literature, which would teach nothing. Each succeeding professor would strive to outdo his predecessor in 'originality' on subjects whereon nothing original remains to be said. Hyper-refinement and paradox would be the order of the day, and the

scarcely surprising to find that he himself only made two excursions proper into the genre of literary criticism. The first of these, a review of Browning's Men and Women, was written when he had just graduated from Oxford, but was still living there and studying architecture under George Edmund Street, the well-known Gothic revival architect. Morris was at this time editing, and paying for, the short-lived Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, which he had founded with a group of friends, including Ned Jones, later Sir Edward Burne-Jones, his closest friend throughout their lives. This review, which was written with great labour and discomfort, despite the admiration for Browning which prompted him to write it,⁷ was one of Morris's many contributions to the magazine, but his only critical one, most of the rest of them taking the form of short fantasy stories, which are usually known as the early prose

younger students would be confused by the literary polemics which would be sure to flourish round such a Chair; and all this would have the seal of authority set upon it, and probably would not seldom be illustrated by some personal squabble like the one which your note mentions. Pray, Sir, change your mind and do your best to deliver us from two (or more) Professors of Criticism", Letters, pp. 261-2.

⁷May Morris quotes from one of her father's letters in the introduction to Works I, xvii, footnote: "It has cost me more trouble than anything I have written yet; I ground at it in the other night from nine o'clock to half past four a.m., when the lamp went out, and I had to creep upstairs to bed through the great dark house like a thief".

romances.⁸ The other review, of Rossetti's poems, was written much later, but under circumstances of even greater discomfort, for Morris only wrote it at all because Rossetti, who was suffering from persecution mania, begged his friends to review his poems so that he would not have to face hostile criticism.⁹

On the face of it, the second of these reviews, written later in life, under more mature consideration, would seem the more promising document for Morris's ideas

⁸These romances, "The Story of the Unknown Church", "A Dream", "Gertha's Lovers", "Svend and his Brethren", "Lindenberg Pool" (which was much influenced by Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher"), "The Hollow Land", and "Golden Wings", together with Morris's only published attempt at modern realistic fiction, "Frank's Sealed Letter", were all printed in 1856 in The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, which only in fact ran for that one year, and are reprinted in Works I. Since they are separated from the late prose romances, which are the subject of this thesis, by more than thirty years, it is important not to confuse the terms early prose romances and late prose romances, especially as the two groups are quite dissimilar. I am not responsible for this terminology.

⁹See Mackail I, 215: "Rossetti's strange fancy of a literary conspiracy against him, and his elaborate attempts to inspire favourable notices of the volume, are matter of common knowledge. Morris, with other friends, had been dragged into the business; and his article bears all the traces of a task, for once, executed against his will. It is stiff and laboured, and as nearly colourless as anything of his writing well could be". Mackail does not add that one of the reasons for Morris's reluctance was that at that time Rossetti was if not actually having an affair with, at least enamoured of Morris's wife, so that Morris had had to take her abroad to recover from the fit of

on literature, but in fact the circumstances under which it was written, and the effort that went into its composition, have made it an extraordinarily opaque piece of work. Indeed, it reflects more Morris's unwillingness to give offence to Rossetti, who had been a very good friend to him once even if they were not then on good terms, than any positive opinions of his own about either Rossetti's poetry or poetry in general, and this of course means that it is likely to be less than reliable with regard to Morris's literary views as a whole. We are left, therefore, as our main source for Morris's theory of literature, with this one boyish essay of 1856, the review of Men and Women, and this in any case is concerned entirely with poetry, and does not deal at all with our main interest in this thesis, prose. Not a promising beginning, one might think. However, it is less of a difficulty than it might seem, for Morris's major pre-occupations came to the fore very early and changed little throughout his life, so that we may find already in this essay the themes of art, love, and duty which are always present in his later work also. Moreover,

nervous prostration which Rossetti's attentions had brought on, and perhaps to see if they could patch up their marriage. Some of the poems which Morris had to review were actually addressed to Jane Morris.

although he admired such novelists as Dickens and Surtees,¹⁰ whose work is almost the antithesis of poetry, Morris's own practice in his prose-writing is very close to poetry, whether in language, style, or subject-matter, so that we may the more readily extrapolate from his theory of poetry to his theory of prose style. On a more literal level also, Browning was, by Morris's own admission, the chief influence on his early poetry,¹¹ an influence which, though

¹⁰ See May Morris's introduction to Works XXII, xvii. This list of Morris's favourite books to read with his family is very interesting, for it shows how large a proportion of his reading was taken up with prose works other than novels, like the writings of George Borrow and Cobbett, Elizabethan translations like Lord Berner's Froissart and Holland's Pliny, and reference-type books, such as "that of the diligent master John Gerard, the pages of whose Herbal my father would turn, reading descriptions, now beautiful, now quaint, of favourite plants, and when not too nauseous, the uses of them and their virtues". Dickens he seems to have prized chiefly as a humourist, and this also accounts for his somewhat curious taste for Handley Cross, but he admired Huckleberry Finn not only because it was very funny, ibid., p. xix, but also because of Mark Twain's artistry, p. xx. In a letter of 1888, Letters, p. 301, he writes to a friend: "I am really surprised at your not liking 'Tom Sawyer', especially as it is so very like Shakespeare, not to say Shelley".

¹¹ See Mackail I, 136-7: "Mr. J. W. Hoole, the son of a neighbour of the Morrises in Essex, who was then an undergraduate at Queen's, contributes a curious remark that Morris made with regard to these Arthurian poems. 'He took me across to his lodgings opposite Queen's College and read me "The Defence of Guenevere", before it was printed. On my enquiring -- with not very good taste to an original poet -- in whose style the poem was written, he answered "More like Browning than any one else I suppose". This may at first seem a lightly uttered fancy; but the more one thinks over it, the more one is struck with its truth. The

it waned, never entirely lost its hold on him, so that he continued to admire the dramatic monologue form, for instance, even when he himself had largely ceased to use it, though there are perhaps traces of Browning's influence even as late as the heroic speeches of The House of the Wolfings. In Morris's reaction to Browning's poetry, therefore, we may trace not only the immediate influence of the older poet on the younger, but also, as we shall see, the beginnings of the theory of literature which was to lead to the prose romances.

In view of the importance of this essay, we shall deal with it in some detail, and, to get the least important matters out of the way first, let us begin by looking at what Morris has to say to Browning's critics. This will clear up some points about Morris's writing which were mentioned in Part I, for the gibes about facility and carelessness of versification, and consequent obscurity of meaning, against which Morris defends Browning, are similar to the charges that were to be laid against his own poetry,

author of 'The Defence of Guenevere' approaches poetry from the same side, one may so put it, as the author of 'Men and Women'. What both alike aim at and attain is the realization, keen, swift, and minute, of some tragic event or situation, and the expression with absolute sincerity of that exact event or situation precisely as thus realized and no further, disregarding conventions of poetical treatment, and too eager to pause over finesse of workmanship. . . . The range is much less than Browning's; but the intensity of realization is even greater, and it is free from the slightest trace of parade or pedantry".

though not, be it said, against The Defence of Guenevere where he is most like Browning, which was merely discarded as incomprehensible and probably meaningless,¹² when it appeared two years after this review. As we have already seen in Part I, it was out of these charges that most of the other misconceptions about Morris's methods of composition grew, so that when we look at Morris's defence of Browning we can read in it a defence in advance of his own poetic method also.

The first charge against Browning, that of carelessness, Morris rebuts with heavy undergraduate sarcasm, and lots of exclamation marks:

Oh truly! "The Statue and the Bust" shows this!
 or the soft solemn flow of that poem "By the
 Fireside;" "Paracelsus" -- that, with its wonder-
 ful rhythm, its tender sadness, its noble thoughts,
 must have been very easy to write, surely!¹³

¹²By those papers, that is, that noticed it at all, for few did, as Mackail points out, I, 134. The Athenaeum (3rd April, 1858), p. 427, was completely mystified, though it covers itself by reference to the way in which the early poetry of Wordsworth and Keats was misunderstood by reviewers, and suggests that it is just about possible that the same might be the case here. I suppose the fact that the volume received such a long notice at all, considering it was a first book, must indicate that the reviewer had perceived some quality in Morris's work.

¹³Works I, 347.

But if the manner in which it is couched is crude, what Morris has to say is by no means so juvenile, and we see here that, if he is not necessarily thereby an accomplished metrist himself, at least that he had an appreciation of metrics in advance of his own day, in that he has no difficulty in understanding how to read these poems. This of course would bear out George Saintsbury's contention that Morris knew very well what he was doing even as early as The Defence of Guenevere, and that there was never any question of "more by luck than judgement" with regard to his poetic technique in this or any of the later volumes either.¹⁴

To have established that Morris was interested in metrics as early as 1856, is important enough in view of the misunderstandings which have occurred over his versification, but what of the charge of wilful obscurity, which goes hand in hand with a lack of seriousness about artistic matters? In his rebuttal of this charge on Browning's behalf, Morris again also answers his own critics, and most vehemently; for he shows that he does indeed take poetry seriously, and that he thinks it "one of the very grandest of all God's gifts to men". He also

¹⁴See History of English Prosody III, 316-334.

shows that he himself knew the pains of composing poetry, and that whatever he may have said about craftsmanship, which is of course a very important part of the poet's work, that did not, to his mind, exclude the need for inspiration and emotional tension also:

Then they say, too, that Browning is so obscure as not to be understood by any one. Now I know well enough what they mean by obscure, and I know also that they use the word wrongly; meaning difficult to understand fully at first reading, or, say at second reading, even: yet, taken so, in what a cloud of obscurity would "Hamlet" be! Do they think this to be the case? they daren't say so at all events, though I suspect some of them of thinking so. Now I don't say that Robert Browning is not sometimes really obscure. He would be a perfect poet (of some calibre or other) if he were not; I assert, fearlessly, that this obscurity is seldom so prominent as to make his poems hard to understand on this ground: while, as to that which they call obscurity, it results from depth of thought and greatness of subject on the poet's part, and on his readers' part, from their shallower brains and more bounded knowledge; nay, often I fear from mere wanton ignorance and idleness. So I believe that though this obscurity, so called, would indeed be very objectionable if, as some seem to think, poetry is merely a department of "light literature"; yet, if it is rather one of the very grandest of all God's gifts to men, we must not think it hard if we have sometimes to exercise thought over a great poem, nay, even sometimes the utmost straining of all our thoughts, an agony almost equal to that of the poet who created the poem.¹⁵

¹⁵Works I, 347-8.

Those who have accused, and are still accusing, Morris of shallowness might do well to note his demand here for depth of meaning in poetry, and his perception of the agony of creation which they do not suppose him to have felt.

Again, it is instructive for an understanding of Morris's poetry and poetic theory to note in which order he chooses to treat some of the major themes of Men and Women, for he does not pretend to be able to deal with the whole volume in one small review, and he apologises for omitting even so many poems as he does.¹⁶ This order is not that of his admiration, present or future, but, given the decision which he had just made to renounce the church in favour of a career as an architect,¹⁷ is the order of his current preoccupations. First, therefore, he deals with

¹⁶Ibid., p. 347: "Pardon me, reader, that I have said little about many of the best poems; that I have said nothing at all about several; nothing about the sacrifice of life and its enjoyments, to knowledge in the 'Grammarians' Funeral;' nothing about the passionate 'Lovers' Quarrel,' about 'Mesmerism,' 'Any Wife to Any Husband' and many others. My consolation is, that we shall have a good deal more to say of Robert Browning in this magazine and then we can make amends". It is interesting, though, that those poems which he does look at in detail are almost all those which are most commonly included in selections of Browning's poetry still.

¹⁷Mackail I, 80-1 and 86-9. Later on, Morris pretty well ceased to believe in an afterlife altogether -- in 1892, Sidney Carlyle Cockerell recorded him as saying, "In

the group of poems on "belief and doubt",¹⁸ as he calls them: "An Epistle of Karshish", "Cleon", and "Bishop Blougram's Apology"; and from his comments on them and upon early Christianity, "in the days when Christianity was the true faith of a very few unknown men, not a mere decent form to all the nations",¹⁹ though a form he does apparently believe in, it is clear that Morris was feeling uncomfortable about the modern church in general, and not just about his own defection from the ministry.

Of these three poems, Morris admires "An Epistle" and "Cleon" particularly for their dramatic quality,²⁰ and it is the same with the artistic group: "Andrea del Sarto",

religion I am a pagan", Works XXII, xxxii -- and it may be that he was experiencing religious doubts even at this time. Certainly he was much more attracted to the Catholicism of the Middle Ages, when he could have been a Templar or a Crusader at least, as is shown by the ideas of a brotherhood "definitely including celibacy and conventual life" and with Sir Galahad as patron, which he shared with his friends as an undergraduate, Mackail I, 65.

¹⁸Works I, 326.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 326-7. In view of his own later development as an artist in a number of different fields at once, Morris's indignation at Creon's pride in the multiplicity of his attainments, which Morris treats just as if Creon were a real person, is rather entertaining. I must quote the Browning passage in question also:

"Fra Lippo Lippi", "Old Pictures at Florence", "A Toccata of Galuppi's" and "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha"; where it is their realism and vividness²¹ which he picks on as their first important quality. He is even ready, as he appreciates Fra Lippo Lippi's anger at being forced to paint in a way

"Marvel not.

We of these latter days, with greater mind
 Than our forerunners, since more composite,
 Look not so great (beside their simple way)
 To a judge who only sees one way at once,
 One mind point, and no other at a time;
 Compares the small part of a man of us
 With some whole man of the heroic age,
 Great in his way, nor ours, nor meant for ours,
 And ours is greater, had we skill to know.

"Saying wrongly, too, as I am sure, for it was a little more than mere restless vanity that made him try to master so many things, instead of giving up his mind to one, as the grand elders did". Since Creon's attitude to his work is similar to that which one is forced to apply to Morris in order to come to a fuller understanding of his artistic output, it is amusing to find him at the outset of his career so much against multiplicity of talents.

²¹Works I, 530-1: "What a joy it is to have these men brought up before us, made alive again, though they have passed away from the earth so long ago; made alive, seeming indeed not as they might very likely have seemed to us, the lesser men, had we lived in their times; but rescued from the judgement of the world, 'which charts us all in its broad blacks and whites', and shown to us as they really were". This emphasis on "not as they might very likely have seemed to us" but "shown to us as they really were" is particularly important, as we shall see, for Morris's concept of realism.

which pleases his superiors, and not in his own way, to get in a bit of contemporary reference,²² which is very rare with him. This looks rather odd at first, for we do not usually associate the qualities of realism, drama, and contemporaneity with Morris, but this is not because they are not present in his work -- as he interprets them, that is. For though this emphasis on realism seems, on the face of it, to be at variance with his own practice, this is only so because what he regards as realism, and praises as realism in Browning's poetry, is rather different from the usual use of the term. What Morris means by it is not the realism of the novel, which only mimics life, but the shaping imagination which makes dead things come alive for us, or previously non-existent things come into being: the creation of reality, not the imitation of it.

Let us take the first aspect of this realism, the making dead things come alive, first. In "Andrea del Sarto", the painter is not shown as we would have perceived

²²Works XXII, 333: "This, too, is an oft-told tale, to be told many times again, I fear, before the world is done with". I imagine that Morris is referring to the troubles with the critics experienced by Rossetti and the rest of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood shortly before, especially as he refers to them again at the end of the essay. It was about the time of writing this essay that Morris and Burne-Jones were first admitted to intimacy with Rossetti, who also became a contributor to The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine. See Mackail I, 102-9.

him had we lived in his time; that would be mere "verisimilitude",²³ as Morris calls it. What Browning depicts is Andrea as he really is in some eternal sense, the essence of him, not just the earthly and temporal semblance. This composite whole Browning has put together out of all the different temporal manifestations of Andrea, primarily as revealed in his life and work, of course, but also from the varied views which all the generations since have had of him. From these many partial Andreas comes one real Andrea, whose reality is independent of the accidentals of time and place.

If one wanted to put this attitude into Platonic terms, one might say that what Browning is aiming at, as Morris sees it, is the reconstruction of the Idea of Andrea. Certainly it is possible to view Morris's own prose in this way, which re-inforces the possibility that he himself might have so regarded Browning's work, especially as both often cloak the transcendental reality in mediaeval dress. As Theodore Watts-Dunton, who held this view of Morris's intentions, wrote in a review of The Water of the Wondrous Isles, explaining why Morris did not use modern dress for his prose works:

²³See News from Nowhere, Works XVI, 102. This passage will be discussed further and quoted below.

To write novels he must engage himself with the hideous Victorian framework in which the modern dramatic picture has to be set; he must contemplate the 'sorrow and shame' of wallpapers without even a dash of sage green in them, chairs and tables smelling of french polish and Tottenham Court Road, mirrors tricked out in Brixton millinery. For he knew full well that although as a poet he could deal with the elemental only in human life, as a writer of prose fiction he would have to deal with the accidental and the temporary too, and hideous indeed to him were the accidental and temporary of the present time. Was it not inevitable, therefore, that he should turn to his beloved Icelandic sagas for models?²⁴

Despite the curiously jocular tone in which it is couched, what Watts-Dunton has to say about the accidental and the elemental in relation to Morris's work is important, and though Morris was dead when Watts-Dunton wrote this, and could not contradict him, as he had done a reviewer a couple of years previously when an article on The Wood Beyond the World in The Spectator had displeased him,²⁵ I do not

²⁴The Athenaeum CX (4th December, 1897), 779.

²⁵The Spectator LXXV (13th July, 1895), 52-3, for the review, and ibid. (20th July, 1895), 81, for Morris's reply. The Spectator reviewer treated The Wood as an allegory of Capitalism and Labour, p. 53: "We read the fairy-tale with a grateful consciousness that Imagination is still alive, and passing us by clad in quaint garments of a bygone fashion, when we spy the serpent in his Eden; and then we are once more haunted by the shadow of the story with a purpose. It is borne in upon us that the Lady who raises false lions in the path, and allures the King's Son and the Merchant's Son with her honied words and false kisses, is a worse sorceress than Medea or Circe; she is the Lady Meed of Langland's vision; she personifies Capital itself, just as the Maid whom she holds captive

think that he would have wished to counter this interpretation of his work. That Morris regarded Watts-Dunton as a reliable reviewer of his work is clear from a letter of 1896, after Watts-Dunton had reviewed The Wood Beyond the World,²⁶ in which Morris had written: "I am so often praised for achieving what I never aimed at that it is quite refreshing to be criticized by a man like yourself who understands one's aim".²⁷ I think we may take it that Watts-Dunton's understanding has not failed him here

personifies Labour. Mr. Morris preaches his Socialism in the most seductive and poetical form, and he ends his story in a Utopia where Labour and the Merchant's Son, whom we imagine to be the ideal Englishman, are the sovereign powers, after Aristocracy, in the person of the King's Son, has been made to assume the likeness of the Merchant's son and then scotched, and Capital with her creature, the bloated aristocrat, has also come to a bad end. Capital spreads her nets in vain before the Merchant's Son; she tempts him with pleasure and luxury; she speaks fairly to Labour before him, but in secret she plots her downfall and ruin, and allows her creature the Dwarf to torment her". Morris's reply is short and to the point, p. 81: "I had not the least intention of thrusting an allegory into 'The Wood Beyond the World'; it is meant for a tale pure and simple, and with nothing didactic about it. If I have to write or speak on social problems, I always try to be as direct as I possibly can be. On the other hand, I should consider it bad art in any one writing an allegory not to make it clear from the first that this was his intention, and not to take care throughout that the allegory and the story should interpenetrate, as does the great master of allegory, Bunyan".

²⁶In The Athenaeum CV (2nd March, 1895), 273-4.

²⁷Thomas Hake and Arthur Compton-Rickett, The Life and Letters of Theodore Watts-Dunton (London, 1916), I, 98.

either, and that his suggestion of a semi-Platonism in Morris's work means that what we would regard as realism, to Morris would be merely expressive of accidentals and not of elementals, and therefore no more than pseudo-reality.²⁸

The suggestion that Morris was Platonizing, both at this stage in relation to Browning's poetry and later in his own prose writing, is reinforced by the fact that this was a not uncommon mode of thought in the nineteenth century, particularly among aestheticians who were also political theorists. For instance Mazzini, whom Morris, like Swinburne, seems to have admired,²⁹ wrote:

Art does not imitate, but interpret. It searches out the idea lying dormant in the symbol, in order to present the symbol to men in such form as to enable them to penetrate through it to the idea: were it otherwise, what would be the use or value of art?

Nature is for art the garb of the Eternal. The real is the finite expression and representation of the true; forms are the limits affixed by time and space to the power of life. Nature, reality and form, should, all of them, be so rendered and expressed by art, as to reveal to mankind some ray of the truth -- a vaster and profounder

²⁸ Cf. also another letter to Watts-Dunton, 1892, in Letters, pp. 349-50: "Yes the Briton has no interest in the book if it is merely a work of art, i.e. if it is meant to endure, the ephemeral is all he cares about. . . ."

²⁹ Morris never specifically praises Mazzini, but he read his works with considerable attention, and parts of the last chapter of Socialism bear a very close relationship

sentiment of life.

The opposite theory reduces the poet to a level with the photographer.³⁰

Here the same distinction that we discover in Morris between the merely photographic, which Morris calls verisimilitude, and the interpretative is maintained, though Mazzini uses real as in "real life", in distinction to Morris's tendency to use it as meaning Ideal. It is interesting also to note that in this passage Mazzini introduces the use of the symbol to express the Idea (though it is uncapitalized here), as Yeats was later to do.

This distinction between realism proper and pseudo-realism or verisimilitude is made clearer if we look at the list of "Best Hundred Books" which Morris compiled for The Pall Mall Gazette. In this, he contrasts the work of Herodotus, Plato, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Theocritus, etc., the "real ancient imaginative works", with the majority of Latin authors, whose works he calls "sham classics".³¹ In this context, the primary meaning of real is obviously

with "Of an European Literature", Life and Writings of Guiseppe Mazzini (London, 1864-70), II. Morris also took over Mazzini's critical category "bibles", for which see below.

³⁰Life and Writings II, vii.

³¹Works XXII, xiii.

in its opposition to sham, but nevertheless there is a secondary significance present here, in that the works of these writers have a kind of reality which makes them come alive for us in a way that Ovid's poems, say, do not. The pastorals of Theocritus are not what we would normally regard as realistic³² -- could such shepherds and shepherdesses ever really have lived? Since he wrote of them, however, they have come to life in his work. He has given them existence. As George Moore, a great admirer of Morris also, wrote of Theocritus:

How the very name of Theocritus brings up before our eyes sunny hill sides, with shepherds gathered under tamarisk trees, and for single ornament a torrent dashing over the face of the high rock. More real, more true are these than George Eliot's Norfolk hinds. The shepherds and shepherdesses have come down to us from more than two thousand years, gaining in every generation, it would seem, a new and more intense life. Battus is clearer to us now than he was, perhaps, to his creator, certainly more real than Tom Tulliver is to me, or his sister Maggie. And the incident of the thorn that Corydon picked from

³²Though Andrew Lang in his introduction to his translation of the poems of Theocritus, Theocritus, Bion and Moschus (London, 1889) has a good try at justifying Theocritus as an imitator of reality, probably thinking that he was doing the ancient poet a service, pp. xvi-xxvi. For example: "We can recover the world that met his eyes and inspired his poems, though the dates of these poems are unknown. We can follow him, in fancy, as he breaks from the revellers and wanders out into the night. Wherever he turned his feet, he could find such scenes as he has painted in the idyls. . . . It should be noticed, as a proof of the truthfulness of Theocritus, that the songs of his shepherds

Battus's foot under the ankle we would not exchange for the story of the flood.³³

This realism is the reality created where none was before, the realism of the imagination, and of the Idea of the shepherd as revealed by the imagination.

In keeping with his view of a realism which depends upon creation and not imitation, Morris naturally found the "elaborate realism" of the modern play a sham too,³⁴

and goatherds are all such as he might really have heard on the shores of Sicily. This is the real answer to the criticism which calls him affected . . .". And he goes on to cite a number of modern "Theocritan" songs from Sicilian shepherds, and their resemblance to those the ancient poet actually might have copied.

³³Conversation in Ebury Street, pp. 73-4. Moore continues, p. 75: "Why are these hinds and shepherdesses immortal, Mr. Freeman? Why are they real? Why are they enough? Because his Idyls tell of happy days and men and women who lead happy lives, following their flocks and their instincts". Morris, of whose prose romances many have said they are too happy to be real, would no doubt have agreed with Moore. Certainly Moore regarded Morris as poet as a species of realist, and calls him almost the only modern poet who has been able to "open his eyes and tell us all that his eyes see", p. 207.

³⁴See Works XXII, xxix.

both as far as acting and sets went, and in the concept of drama as a "slice of life" also, for he does not seem to have understood that the supposedly literal depiction of reality could function as a "criticism of life". It is doubtful anyway, though, whether he would have thought that a serious art form could or should be used in this way as social satire; he never took seriously as a work of art his own single venture into satiric drama, his playlet, The Tables Turned, or Nupkins Awakened, which he wrote for a socialist "benefit" performance in 1887,³⁵ and the one satirist he admired, Molière, he felt had wasted his talent in bitterness.³⁶ It was inevitable therefore that he should dislike the "realistic" novelists also, though we

³⁵ See Mackail II, 197-200. The play was, in Mackail's view, an "experiment in which the method of the Townley Mysteries was applied to a modern farce", but it was never really intended to be more than a sort of long "Beyond the Fringe"-type skit, and Morris did not publish it. It is reprinted in May Morris II, 528-67.

³⁶ Socialism, Its Growth and Outcome, p. 131: "Amidst them all one name stands forward as representing some reality -- Molière, to wit. But the life and genuineness of his comedies serves to show the corruption of the times as clearly as the dead classicalism of Racine; for he, the one man of genius of the time, was driven into the expression of mere cynicism".

know his opinion on them more by omission than by any actual information. As May Morris says in her comments on Morris's list of "Hundred Best Books": "I have mentioned tastes but said little about distastes. My father did not often allow antipathetic books to trouble him, unless as said above people pressed them on his notice".³⁷ She then goes on to list Charles Kingsley, George Eliot, and George Meredith as examples of those whose work he tried but could not really like. Balzac and Tolstoy were similarly regarded, though Morris recognized both as great writers in their way, while Zola and Flaubert and their followers in France and England are never even mentioned. For, as with the drama, the "realistic" novel, to Morris, seemed not only to be imitation, but imitation of something which was in itself without value:³⁸ a social system which he regarded as both obsolete and pernicious. In so far as

³⁷ See Works XXII, xxii-xxvi for this comment, and the list of authors that follows. It is perhaps to the "realistic" novel that May Morris is referring when she says: "He never gave way to the 'tyranny of taste' in regard to modern literature, though he would often honestly try to like certain classics that dear and intimate friends wanted him to enjoy", p. xxii. The only fiction writers included in Morris's "Hundred Best Books" are Bunyan, Defoe, Scott, Alexandre Dumas père, Victor Hugo, Dickens, and George Borrow, and of these only Defoe can with any truth be described as a "realist".

³⁸ This verisimilitude is what May Morris seems to mean when she writes of Morris's dislike of the "art (or artlessness)" of Ibsen, Works XXII, xxix. If a play is really "a slice of life", then it is not art, and should be

the novel was a product of that social system, therefore, he hoped that the future would see the end of both the imitation and the thing imitated:

I have often thought with a joyful chuckle how puzzling, nay inexplicable to the generations of freedom, will be those curious specimens of human ingenuity called novels now produced, and which present with such faithful detail the lives of the middle classes, all below them being ignored except as so many stage accessories; amongst them all, perhaps, Dickens will still be remembered; and that because of what is now imputed to him as a fault, his fashioning a fantastic and unreal world for his men and women to act in. Surely here again all will be changed, and our literature will sympathize with the earlier works of men's imagination before they learned to spin out their own insides like silk worms into dreary yarns of their sickly feelings and futile speculations; when they left us clear pictures of living things, alive then and for ever. We shall not desire and we

left where it belongs, in life. However, Morris did have a certain feeling that the visual arts at any rate should be more representative of modern life, if, that is, modern life were beautiful enough to form the subject-matter of art -- for he assumed that nothing can be art which is not beautiful. It is on this score of beauty that he justifies the lack of realism of the Pre-Raphaelite painters, May Morris I, 304: "Now I must just say one word about the fact that both Rossetti and Burne-Jones have had very little to do with representing the scenes of ordinary modern life as they go on before your eyes. One has often heard that brought against the 'Romantic' artists as a short-coming. Now, quite plainly, I must say that I think it is a shortcoming. But is the shortcoming due to the individual artist, or is it due to the public at large? for my part I think the latter. When an artist has really a very keen sense of beauty, I venture to think that he cannot literally represent an event that takes place in modern life. He must add something or another to qualify or soften the ugliness and sordidness of the surroundings of life in our generation".

shall not be able to carry on the feverish and perverted follies of the art and literature of Commercialism.³⁹

In fact the socialists of the future are to be so little introspective that they will not even be able to understand the nineteenth century novel.

The valuelessness of modern life is, of course, a social judgement and not an artistic one, in so far as these can be separated in Morris's case, and may readily be disagreed with by those who do not share Morris's revolutionary fervour. However, the fact that he regarded the novel as merely the adjunct of an immoral social system does help to explain why in his own practice he rejected the "literature of Commercialism", as he called it, and instead of developing, as would have seemed natural, in the tradition of social realism along with Gissing and Moore,⁴⁰ turned to what superficially seems to be a far less socially conscious form of literature, the romance.⁴¹ Since in his view the

³⁹May Morris II, 306.

⁴⁰Though Moore himself, of course, subsequently turned away from realism towards religious drama.

⁴¹Morris did, in fact, attempt a modern novel, but abandoned it as impossible. As he wrote in a letter of 1872 to Mrs. Alfred Baldwin (Georgiana Burne-Jones's sister), Mackail I, 296: "Herewith I send by book-post my abortive novel: it is just a specimen of how not to do it, and there is no more to be said thereof: 'tis nothing but landscape and sentiment: which thing won't do . . . I found it in the envelope in which I had sent it to Georgie to

novel was to be destroyed in the socialist future, however, the romance was the only obvious alternative for prose narrative, and his choice was therefore, by his criteria, a sensible one.

Morris was, of course, aware of the possibility of the development of new form of art, which he did not wish to try to predict, any more than he thought that he could really predict the future of the state under socialism.⁴²

see if she could give me any hope: she gave me none, and I have never looked at it since. So there's an end of my novel-writing, I fancy, unless the world turns topsides under some day". It was about the love of two brothers for the same girl, and fairly obviously reflects the situation in his own marriage at the time (about 1870) -- which accounts for the sentiment. He also wrote an unsuccessful modern short story, a contribution to The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine from 1856, "Frank's Sealed Letter". Again it is about a love gone wrong, a favourite theme with Morris, and could equally be described as "nothing but landscape and sentiment". It is only notable for its description of the Essex countryside of his boyhood, but the description is curiously infused with sentiment, as in his novel, in such phrases as "the sad lowland country" or "all the songs of birds . . . were very pensive to me", Works I, 319-20, which is all the more curious in that the attribution of emotion to nature is a literary convention which he very rarely used, being, in this respect at least, firmly on the side of objective fact.

⁴²The assumption that he was trying to do so has led to much misunderstanding of News from Nowhere, but, as he explains in Socialism, pp. 18-19, it is neither possible nor desirable to attempt to predict the course of development of a state after a revolution has taken place: "We propose to finish the book by giving our own impressions both of the immediate issue of the present stir and commotion in socio-political life, and also of what may be reasonably expected from the new society when it has at last supplanted the ever-increasing confusion of the present day. Only it

In general, however, he did think that, as he explains in Socialism, Its Growth and Outcome, the novel would tend to be replaced in the future by further developments of the art of poetry:

As to literature, fiction as it is called, when a peaceful and happy society has been some time a-foot, will probably die out for want of material. The pabulum of the modern novel in its various dressings is mostly provided by the anomalies and futilities of a society of inequality wielded by a conventional false sense of duty, which produce the necessary imbroglio herewith to embarrass the hero and heroine through the due number of pages. Literature, however, need by no means die; for we can neither limit nor foresee the development of the great art of poetry which has changed so little in essentials since the Homeric epics.⁴³

must be premised that this last part can be nothing more than the expression of our own individual views, and that we do not claim any further weight for it. Although it has been often attempted, it is impossible to build up a scheme for the society of the future, for no man can really think himself out of his own days; his palace of days to come can only be constructed from the aspirations forced upon him by his present surroundings, and from his dreams of the life of the past, which themselves cannot fail to be more or less unsubstantial imaginings".

⁴³ pp. 308-9. Cf. also Yeats in "The Autumn of the Body", Essays and Introductions, p. 194: "I think we will not cease to write long poems, but rather that we will write them more and more as our new belief makes the world plastic under our hands again. I think that we will learn again how to describe at great length an old man wandering among enchanted islands, his return home at last, his slow-gathering vengeance, a flitting shape of a goddess, and a flight of arrows, and yet to make all these so different things 'take light from mutual reflection, like an actual trail of fire over precious stones', and become 'an entire word', the signature or symbol of a mood of the divine imagination as imponderable as 'the horror of the forest or the silent thunder in the leaves'".

In News from Nowhere, where it is necessary, from the nature of the story, to describe the art and literature of the future somewhat, Morris estimates that, in painting at least, the subjects will be chiefly "taken from queer old-world myths and imaginations which in yesterday's world only about half-a-dozen people in the country knew anything about",⁴⁴ that is, from Grimm's fairy-tales, and other similar childhood stories. And in "The Society of the Future", a lecture of 1888, he adds that historical tales also will form part of the literature of the future.⁴⁵ In this

⁴⁴Works XVI, 100: "I found it difficult to keep my eyes off the wall-pictures . . . I saw at a glance that their subjects were taken from queer old-world myths and imaginations which in yesterday's world only about half-a-dozen people in the country knew anything about; and when the two Hammonds sat down opposite to us, I said to the old man, pointing to the frieze:

'How strange to see such subjects here!'

'Why?' said he. 'I don't see why you should be surprised; everybody knows the tales; and they are graceful and pleasant subjects, not too tragic for a place where people mostly eat and drink and amuse themselves, and yet full of incident.'

I smiled and said: 'Well, I scarcely expected to find record of the Seven Swans and the King of the Golden Mountain and Faithful Henry, and such curious pleasant imaginations as Jacob Grimm got together from the childhood of the world, barely lingering even in his time: I should have thought you would have forgotten such childishness by this time!'

⁴⁵May Morris II, 465: ". . . I feel sure that no special claim need be made for the art and literature of the future: healthy bodily conditions, a sound and all-round development of the senses, joined to the due social ethics which the destruction of all slavery will give us,

context, when "you will no longer be able to have novels relating the troubles of a middle-class couple in their struggle towards social uselessness, because the material for such literary treasures will have passed [a]way", Morris's own romances, semi-fairy-tale as they are, would obviously find a place.

All this discussion of realism and verisimilitude is something of a paradox, however, for while on the one hand Morris condemns the novel for its imitativeness, its presenting "with such faithful detail the lives of the middle classes", on the other hand he denies the actual existence of such verisimilitude in practice. As he writes of Thomas Hardy:

Let us take the novels of such a man as Hardy, or the others who write more or less in the same way. They are supposed to represent scenes of modern life in their novels. But do they? I say they do not; because they take care to surround those modern scenes with an atmosphere of out-of-the-way country life, which we ourselves never

will, I am convinced, as a matter of course give us the due art and literature, whatever the due may turn out to be. Only, if I may prophesy ever so little, I should say that both art and literature, and especially art, will appeal to the senses directly, just as the art of the past has done. You see you will no longer be able to have novels relating the troubles of a middle-class couple in their struggle towards social uselessness, because the material for such literary treasures will have passed [a]way. On the other hand the genuine tales of history will still be with us, and will, one might well hope, then be told in a cheerfuller strain than is now possible".

may chance to see. If you go down into the country you won't see Mr. Hardy's heroes and heroines walking about, I assure you. You will see a very different kind of thing from that when you meet the ordinary British farmer or the ordinary British agricultural labourer walking about, and more especially -- excuse me -- more especially when you see their wives and daughters walking about. I am very sorry, but so it is.⁴⁶

In other words, Hardy deceives us into thinking that he is a realist because he sets his scenes in places to which the reading public rarely goes. If they did, they would find Egdon Heath rather less "realistic" than Morris's Bear Hill and Bear Castle, for instance, on the chalk downs along which Ralph rode to Higham-on-the-way in The Well at the World's End,⁴⁷ or than Upmeads Water in the same book, all of which are immediately recognizable to anyone who knows the countryside south of Oxford as being drawn from Uffington Castle, White Horse Hill and the Vale of the

⁴⁶ May Morris I, 304-5.

⁴⁷ In Chapter 4 of The Well. Many more analogies can be found between Morris's descriptions of natural scenery and the real places about his Oxfordshire home, for those who find such identifications profitable. Morris's use of real landscape to create settings for his books will be further discussed in Part V of this thesis.

White Horse, and from the Thames around Kelmscott.⁴⁸ Even the path along which Ralph rides, the Greenway, can be identified as the Ridgeway, the ancient trackway which was part of a network of such paths covering southern England in Neolithic times, and still visible winding for miles along the tops of the Berkshire downs and over towards Stonehenge, where many of these paths seem to have met.

What is more than mere ability to identify the sources of Morris's descriptions, mere verisimilitude, however, is that Morris captures the spirit of the landscape, so that we really see it before us, as we do not when we read Hardy's description of his heath as a place suitable for nineteenth century introspective would-be hermits to frequent.⁴⁹ Once you have walked the Ridgeway and have read Morris's description of it, you can never again dissociate the one from the other. For unlike Hardy's, the actions and characters of Morris's books, whatever their

⁴⁸As May Morris says in the introduction to Works XVIII (Vol. I of The Well), the opening of the book is a description of Kelmscott Manor and its geographical location; Wulstead is Faringdon; the Wood Debateable is the Forest of Wychwood, now alas no longer a forest; and Ralph met the champion of the Dry Tree for the first time at Uffington Church, pp. xix-xxi.

⁴⁹The Return of the Native (London, 1878), I, 7-8.

strangeness in relation to modern life, are never out of key with their physical surroundings in his books. If he writes of merchants and outlaws and champions, it is because these figures instinctively belong in the landscape he is using; they are its historical heritage, part of what has contributed to form the curiously numinous quality of many of these ancient settlements and trackways, and Morris never goes against that spirit.⁵⁰ On the other hand, it is the essence of Hardy as a writer that he reads nineteenth century pre-occupations into the landscape, so that inanimate objects in his scenes take on an emotional

⁵⁰ As his daughter says in her introduction to Works XVIII, xxi, in relation to this mingling of real landscape with mythic reconstructions of its past: "In every romanticist there must be something of the 'eternal child' that weaves his wonders with everyday things, so that anywhere one may chance to be living on the edge of adventure; and after reading a while in The Well at the World's End, one feels that going out one fine morning along the meadows of our sweet uneventful country it would not be at all out of the way to meet a Dragon or at the least a Lady in distress on a white palfrey". Actually neither dragons nor ladies in distress play much of a part in Morris's romantic vocabulary, for his ladies are generally well able to take care of themselves, and often in fact end up rescuing their men from distress, but this is only part of May Morris's fundamental misreading of these romances (see Part I, p. 87, footnote 133). However, she does make the point of the very close relationship between action and landscape in his stories, and she reiterates it on pp. xxv-xxvi and p. xx, where she describes their family outings to the real settings of these stories, where Morris would people the scene for them with "pictures of life in war-time within the Encampment, of sacrifice to the tribal god from Dragon Hill, on to whose flat top we climbed to view the Horse galloping up the turf slope opposite, with eyes that saw crowds of 'blue Britons' below us, and by our side a

tone, even a malignity often, which they do not inherently possess.⁵¹ This is a thoroughly Victorian way of treating inanimate objects, an artistically valid way too, but it is certainly not realistic in any except the most tenuous sense of reflecting the emotional projections of Hardy and of his characters, who are themselves equally Arcadian and artificial; fine ladies and gentlemen acting in a pastoral masque, albeit, being Victorians, a melodramatic and not an idyllic one.⁵²

group of priests at their rites". Whether or not Morris was historically correct in his surmises about the purpose of the artificially constructed Dragon's Hill, he was undoubtedly imaginatively so, and therefore, if one might so put it, closer to the "real Andrea" than an archaeologically validated opinion of that particular site might be.

⁵¹As, for example, in the description of the malignant water-spout from the gargoyle on the church roof, which apparently deliberately washes away the earth from Fanny's grave in Far From the Madding Crowd (London, 1874) or The Return of the Native, I, 8-9: "It [the heath] was a place perfectly accordant with man's nature -- neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly: neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. As with some persons who have long lived apart, solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. It had a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities". This description tells us nothing about the heath as heath. If you left out that noun heath in the whole passage, which runs on for several pages, you would scarcely know whether Hardy was describing a heath, the sea, a mountain, or even a great city, so little is he concerned with the heath as it really is. But the description does tell us a great deal about the sort of man Hardy is, and about the action of the book and the characters in it.

⁵²By saying Hardy's novels are artificial and melo-

Why this verisimilitude should have been impossible in the nineteenth century, Morris is quite ready to explain. As we have already seen, he thought that the ugliness of modern life was such that it neither could nor should be considered a suitable subject for art, and he is therefore to some extent praising Hardy as he was Dickens when he says he is not a realist.⁵³ Had Hardy chosen to represent the agricultural labourer as he really was, in Morris's view, he would have ended up producing ugly and, no doubt, boring books -- one thinks here of George Gissing's New Grub Street and Biffen, whose chronicle of the life of a grocer is a failure because it is too boringly realistic.⁵⁴

dramatic I do not mean to imply any reproach. In fact I should be more inclined to go along with the attitude of the anonymous reviewer of Melmoth the Wanderer in The Edinburgh Review, XXXV (July, 1821), p. 354, who disliked that book because he thought it "singularly clumsy and inartificial", i.e. it had not enough of art or artifice in it.

⁵³ Though I do not think that Morris can have been very much of an admirer of Hardy, because he more than any other writer of the time, perhaps, may be castigated for introspection, for having "learned to spin out [his] own insides like silk-worms into dreary yarns of [his] sickly feelings and futile speculations", as Morris says.

⁵⁴ New Grub Street (London, 1891), III, 280-1: "'A pretentious book of the genre ennuyant," was the brief comment of a Society journal. A weekly of high standing began its short notice in a rage: 'Here is another of those intolerable productions for which we are indebted to the spirit of grovelling realism. . . .' . . . 'The first duty of a novelist is to tell a story:' the perpetual repetition of this phrase is a warning to all men who propose drawing from the life. Biffen only offered a slice of biography,

Morris therefore concludes that, "considering the evasions he is absolutely bound to make"⁵⁵ if he wishes to produce a work of art, it is unreasonable to expect verisimilitude from the nineteenth century artist, even if that verisimilitude has been shown to be theoretically desirable.

So much for the lack of realism in practice in the nineteenth century novel, but why it should be infeasible in theory as well as in practice is a different matter. Nevertheless, as Morris shows in News from Nowhere in relation to those fairy-tale pictures already mentioned, he did actually regard its realism as very unlikely to be much practised in the socialist future. For if real life cannot be described accurately and literally even in those days of the future when it would neither be too immoral nor too mean and ugly to be the subject of art, then, however much he may disclaim his ability or willingness to predict

and it was found to lack flavour".

⁵⁵ May Morris I, 305: "Well, of course Art is free to everybody, and by all means, if anyone is really moved by the spirit to treat modern subjects, let him do so, and do it in the best way he can; but, on the other hand, I don't think he has a right, under the circumstances and considering the evasions he is absolutely bound to make [my italics], to lay any blame on his brother artist who turns back again to the life of past times; or who, shall we rather say, since his imagination must have some garb or another, naturally takes the raiment of some period in which the surroundings of life were not ugly but beautiful".

the future of art, what Morris is saying is that verisimilitude is more-or-less impossible in practice:

. . . Clara came back to the question of the subject-matter of the pictures, as though it had troubled her.

She looked up at them, and said: 'How is it that though we are so interested with our own life for the most part, yet when people take to writing poems or painting pictures they seldom deal with our modern life, or if they do, take good care to make their poems and pictures unlike that life? Are we not good enough to paint ourselves? How is it that we find the dreadful times of the past so interesting to us -- in pictures and poetry?'

Old Hammond smiled. 'It was always so, and I suppose always will be,' said he, 'however it may be explained. It is true that in the nineteenth century, when there was so little art and so much talk about it, there was a theory that art and imaginative literature ought to deal with contemporary life; but they never did so; for, if there was any pretence of it, the author always took care (as Clara hinted just now) to disguise, or exaggerate, or idealise, and in some way or another make it strange; so that, for all the verisimilitude there was he might just as well have dealt with the times of the Pharaohs.⁵⁶

Why it is impossible, Morris cannot say, and the only coherent belief that can be made out of the two contradictory aspects of his views on realism is that verisimilitude is only attempted in times when it cannot result in art, while in the times when direct representationalism might be beautiful then no-one wishes to bother with it.

The problem of why Morris should have rated his contemporaries for attempts at verisimilitude, and

⁵⁶ One might compare here the attitude to the study of history expressed by Dick in News from Nowhere: "some don't care about it; in fact, I don't think many do. I have heard my great-grandfather say that it is mostly in periods of turmoil and strife and confusion that people care much about history; and you know . . . we not like that now", Works XVI, 30.

at the same time have declared that it was actually impossible to achieve, is insoluble. It cannot be that his views changed as he developed as a prose writer himself, for there are assertions that verisimilitude is bad in "The Society of the Future" (1888) and, Socialism, Its Growth and Outcome (1893), while the assertions that verisimilitude is impossible are from "An Address on the Collection of Paintings of the English Pre-Raphaelite School . . ." (1891), and from News from Nowhere (1890). Obviously he was confused himself, and his confusion was undoubtedly not made any clearer by the conflicts which must have arisen in his mind on the subject of his social duty as a writer; that he wrote so much (for him) latterly on the subject of realism proves that it was much on his mind, and even, perhaps, that he felt an apologia necessary for his fantasy writing. His attempts at socialist poetry in Chants for Socialists and The Pilgrims of Hope, an epic about the Paris Commune, show that he was prepared to use his art in the service of politics where he could. But whatever his difficulties, his final decision on the subject of realism, as evidenced by his romances, can only have been that, as George Moore suggested in his comparison of Theocritus and George Eliot, the closer verisimilitude is approached the further away true realism flees, or, as Blake said: "Men think they can Copy Nature as Correctly

as I copy Imagination this they will find Impossible. & all the Copies or Pretended Copiers of Nature from Rembrat to Reynolds Prove that Nature becomes [tame] to its Victim nothing but Blots & Blurs. Why are Copiers of Nature Incorrect while Copiers of Imagination are Correct this is manifest to all".⁵⁷ Having therefore attacked realism, so called, on all fronts at once, Morris can then retire satisfied into his paradoxically unrealistic realistic socialist future, where epic, romance, and pastoral, all thoroughly artificial forms in modern times at least, are to take the place of the apparently socially aware, but really bourgeois and decadent, and, what is worse, impossible, realistic novel!

Before we leave the subject of realism altogether, however, it might be well to add that Morris's desire for a true realism which is not imitation, not only excludes from grace the so-called realistic writers, but also the literary writers, those who draw their material from art and not from life. This includes even his friend Swinburne, much as he admired him as a stylist. As he wrote of Tristram of Lyonesse when it came out in 1882:

⁵⁷"Public Address", The Poetry and Prose of William Blake (New York, 1965), edited by D. V. Erdman and Harold Bloom, 563.

As to the poem, I have made two or three attempts to read it, but have failed, not being in the mood I suppose: nothing would lay hold of me at all. This is doubtless my own fault, since it certainly did seem very fine. But, to confess and be hanged, you know I never could really sympathize with Swinburne's work; it always seemed to me to be founded on literature, not on nature. In saying this I really cannot accuse myself of jealousy on the subject, as I think also you will not. Now I believe that Swinburne's sympathy with literature is most genuine and complete; and it is a pleasure to hear him talk about it, which he does in the best vein possible; he is most steadily enthusiastic about it. Now time was when the poetry resulting merely from this intense study and love of literature might have been, if not the best, yet at any rate very worthy and enduring: but in these days when all the arts, even poetry, are like to be overwhelmed under the mass of material riches which civilization has made and is making more and more hastily every day; riches which the world has made indeed, but cannot use to any good purpose: in these days the issue between art, that is, the godlike part of man, and mere bestiality, is so momentous, and the surroundings of life are so stern and unplayful, that nothing can take serious hold of people, or should do so, but that which is rooted deepest in reality and is quite at first hand: there is no room for anything which is not forced out of a man by deep feeling, because of its innate strength and vision.⁵⁸

Such work as this, beautiful as it may be, is not the way to the true realism that Morris desires, the realism of 'innate strength and vision', any more than is verisimilitude; the Idea can only be achieved through the contemplation of reality, even though it cannot be reached through literal depiction of it.

⁵⁸Mackail II, 79-80.

This rejection of literary poetry brings us back to the emphasis that Morris placed in his theory of pattern design on the need to understand the natural world properly, to know how plants and animals are formed, and to continually check that knowledge before basing designs upon it, even though no sort of verisimilitude is being attempted:

Now in our craft the chief of the limitations that spring from the essence of the art is that the decorator's art cannot be imitative even to the limited extent that the picture-painter's art is. . . . It does not excuse want of observation of nature, or laziness of drawing, as some people seem to think. On the contrary, unless you know plenty about the natural form that you are conventionalizing, you will not only find it impossible to give people a satisfactory impression of what is in your own mind about it, but you will also be so hampered by your ignorance, that you will not be able to make your conventionalized form ornamental.⁵⁹

Literature, similarly, is a conventionalization from the phenomenal world which presupposes an observation and understanding of that world, and Morris, in the late prose romances especially, was very much aware of it. His

⁵⁹"Making the Best of It", Works XXII, 106. The mention of "limitations" in designing is not intended to carry a derogatory meaning such as "limited" is sometimes given, but merely refers to the fact that all materials carry with them certain predispositions in the matter of their handling: e.g. making a piece of fabric look like an oil painting is both difficult and pointless, and vice versa.

critics have concentrated on the conventionalization of these romances, thinking that conventionalization meant a turning away from "real" life, whereas it was, on the contrary, an attempt at a different sort of realism altogether. This was the realism that the young Morris admired in Browning's poetry, in the "real Andrea", and which drew him to Spenser, Blake, and Shelley, and, later, W. B. Yeats, all idealist poets, rather than to Milton, Wordsworth, and the poets of the Enlightenment.⁶⁰

⁶⁰See Morris's list of "Hundred Best Books", Works XXII, xiii-xvi. Milton and Wordsworth are conspicuous by their absence, and there is a complete gap between Shakespeare and Blake, with the exception of Bunyan and Defoe. Yeats, of course, was not included in this list, but he records Morris as saying, after reading The Wanderings of Oisín: "You write my sort of poetry", Autobiographies (London, 1955), p. 146.

CHAPTER 2

THE PRIMITIVE IDEAL IN SAGA AND BALLAD

Morris did not stop his discussion of Men and Women at the point at which we left it, but carried on to talk about various other categories of poems in the volume, especially emphasizing those about love, perhaps rather surprisingly in view of the general tameness of the love scenes in his own work.¹ This part of his discussion does not, however, shed much further light on Morris's literary practice, and we shall therefore pass on to the last poem

¹Works I, 340-1: "And in these love-poems of Robert Browning there is one thing that struck me particularly; that is their intense, unmixed love; love for the sake of love, and if that is not obtained, disappointment comes, falling off, misery. I suppose the same kind of thing is to be found in all very earnest love-poetry, but I think more in him than in almost anybody else. 'Any Wife to Any Husband', 'The Last Ride Together': read them, and I think you will see what I mean. I cannot say it clearly, it cannot be said so but in verse; love for love's sake, the only true love, I must say. Pray Christ some of us attain to it before we die!" Perhaps Morris's tameness, after The Defence, may be attributed to the failure of his own love life, though in Sigurd there are some powerful scenes where Brynhild's passion is expressed, and one thinks also of Ralph's distress at the death of the Lady of Abundance in The Well at the World's End, and the rivalry of Atra and Birdalone for Arthur's love in The Water of the Wondrous Isles. In general, however, he prefers to depict deep affection rather than overmastering passion in his men and women, knowing, perhaps, that such passion is rarely fortunate in its outcome.

which Morris treats in any detail in the essay, "Childe Roland To The Dark Tower Came". This poem was Morris's favourite in Men and Women, so that what he has to say about it is particularly interesting to us: partly simply because it is his favourite Browning poem, and is therefore an indicator of his tastes present and future; and partly because his appreciation of this poem to some extent sums up his whole approach to Browning, and indeed to poetry itself. It also provides a link with Rossetti, the only other poet on whose work Morris wrote a critical essay, in that what Morris appreciates most in Rossetti's work, the mediaevalizing art-ballad or kunstlied is closer to "Childe Roland" than to any of Browning's other poems; but the chief reason is that in his criticism of "Childe Roland" Morris brings up some questions which are of considerable importance generally in relation to his theory of the arts and to his practice of literature. These questions are to be the subject of the next two chapters.

To return, then, to "'Men and Women' by Robert Browning": as might have been expected from the way in which Morris used material from chivalric and courtly stories in The Defence of Guenevere worked up in a style which he confessed to be modelled to some extent upon Browning's, it was only natural that "Childe Roland", Browning's most chivalric poem, should be Morris's favourite in Men and Women. This preference, however, is not, given

Morris's interest in things mediaeval as well as his later development as a prose romancer, entirely for the reasons which might have been expected, such as, for instance, the romantic mediaevalizing of the poem's setting, or the chivalric subject-matter. Or at least, it is not consciously for those reasons, for, as with "Cleon" and "An Epistle of Karshish" which we looked at in the last chapter, Morris's conscious interpretation of his interest in "Childe Roland" is again guided by his pre-occupation at that time with spiritual matters. Thus he reads this poem as being about duty and faithfulness and trust in God, much as he did those. Indeed, he is uncharacteristically dogmatic, in view of the fact that he did not, in general, approve of "translating" poems into prose terms,² in asserting his knowledge of the real meaning behind Browning's poem, that: "the poet's real design was to show us a brave man doing his

²Works I, 346: "It certainly does not sound very well as I have put it; in fact it does not often help poems much to solve them, because there are in poems so many exquisitely small and delicate turns of thought running through their music and along with it, that cannot be done into prose, any more than the infinite variety of form and shadow and colour in a great picture can be rendered by a coloured woodcut; which (in the case of the poem) is caused, I suppose, by its being concentrated thought". (On "Women and Roses".)

duty, making his way onto his point through all dreadful things. What do all these horrors matter to him? he must go on, they cannot stop him; he will be slain certainly, who knows by what unheard-of-death; yet he can leave all this in God's hands, and go forward, for it will all come right at the end".³

Another somewhat unexpected factor in Morris's liking for "Childe Roland" is that he connects the poem's undoubted ardour of spirit with the theme of love, and thus reinforces the emphasis which he put upon the intensity of the love poems: "for this and all the others seem to me but a supplement to the love poems, even as it is in all art, in all life; love, I mean, of some sort; and that life or art where this is not the case is but a wretched mistake after all".⁴ This emphasis on love, however, given

³Works I, 339. This trust displayed by Roland, however, is, as Morris describes it anyway, more like that of the Norse heroes who do not concern themselves much with what is to come after, so they but preserve their honour in this life, rather than like any Christian faith in God. In fact, as we shall see later in this chapter, this interpretation of Roland's attitude to death ties up with Morris's whole ideal of artistic propriety and, indeed of manly behaviour, as these are exemplified in the Icelandic sagas.

⁴Works I, 340.

the weight thrown upon the significance of love in Love is Enough, whether we interpret it as a positive or a negative force there, is perhaps of more significance than the religious emphasis, especially when we remember that one of the dominant motives both of Morris's love of mediaeval art and life and of his desire for a socialist future was his longing for fellowship and the brotherhood of mankind. The society of News from Nowhere is not supported, as was the society in Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward (1888) to which News from Nowhere was intended as an "answer",⁵ by a plethora of rules and regulations, but simply by the love of man for his neighbour.

Apart from this minor instance of Morris's connecting love and duty and, by extension, fellowship in this way, these aspects of his interest in "Childe Roland" have had little importance for the development of his later work. However, two things in his treatment of the poem have retained their importance in relation to his literary theory and to his artistic development generally, though as they stand in this early essay on Browning they

⁵Works XVI, xxviii: "When Bellamy's 'Looking Backward' appeared, a Socialist friend remarked that he had accepted the principles of Socialism on the strength of Morris's vision of the future though he (Morris) had never actually formulated that vision in detail; but now, having read 'Looking Backward', he saw how practicable a scheme it would be. This and similar remarks one day stung my father into saying that 'if they brigaded him

are no more than the germ of what was to be expanded later, in "Early England" (1886) and "The Early Literature of the North -- Iceland" (1887) among others,⁶ into the theory of literature that was to lead to the prose romances. The first of these is what Morris has to say about Browning's depiction, or, rather, non-depiction of Roland's suffering inside the tower in "Childe Roland". Here he is defending Browning against "some reviewer" who "rates the poet for not having told us what happened to Childe Roland inside the 'round, squat turret'":⁷

Yet for all this utter loneliness, for all these horrors, so subtly has the consummate poet wrought, through the stately flow of the magnificent rhythm, that we do not feel desponding, but rather triumphant at the glorious end; an end so glorious, that the former life, whatever it was, was well worth living with that to crown it; and it was well too for the poet to leave us there, so that we see not the mere struggle of physical courage, or the mere groans and tears of suffering humanity under those things which are to be borne indeed, but hardly ever very calmly, hardly ever very

into a regiment of workers he would just lie on his back and kick'. He writes to a Scottish friend, Bruce Glasier, about it: 'I suppose you have seen or read, or at least tried to read "Looking Backward". I had to on Saturday having promised to lecture on it. Thank you, I wouldn't care to live in such a cockney paradise as he imagines'. The same sentiment is embodied in all seriousness and dignity in News from Nowhere".

⁶We shall be looking in this chapter especially at "Feudal England" (1887), Works XXIII, and at Morris and Magnússon's prefaces to the Saga Library, as well as at "Early England" and "The Early Literature of the North", Unpublished Lectures.

⁷Works I, 339.

resignedly; but now Childe Roland passes straight from our eyes to the place where the true and brave live for ever; and as far as we go, his life flows out triumphantly with that blast he blew.⁸

This question of where Browning breaks off the poem is important, not for its bearing on the handling of the end of "Childe Roland", since it must be pretty generally agreed these days that Browning chose the obvious high-point at which to stop, but because it relates to Morris's whole aesthetic of the portrayal of emotion and suffering, both physical and mental, in works of art. For Morris does not praise Browning directly for stopping at the best point to maintain the high level of intensity of the poem, though this does rather follow from what he says, but because Browning has avoided showing us the "mere struggle of physical courage, or the mere groans and tears of suffering humanity . . .". In other words, Browning has avoided showing us the painful part of the story, the death of Roland, and given us only the glory. This is also Morris's own practice in similar poems of his own, like "Sir Peter Harpdon's End" or "The Haystack in the Floods" from The Defence of Guenevere, and, as we saw, he has been much criticized by modern critics for avoiding any sort of real suffering in his later poetry and prose. It must,

⁸Works I, 340.

however, be stressed at the outset that these critics are quite wrong in assuming that Morris was a namby-pamby because he was suspicious of emotion and suffering as subjects for art. In fact he was so cautious of them partly in order to avoid the namby-pamby sentimentalizing of so much Victorian writing,⁹ and his literary ideal, with which this question of portrayal of suffering is linked, was actually an heroic anti-sentimentalism, similar to that which is found in the writings of less sophisticated societies where personal honour and the worship of courage are the primary considerations in their literature. This anti-sentimentalism in Morris is therefore closely linked with his concept of oral literature and of the ballad and saga as literary ideals, which we shall be discussing later in this chapter, and our starting-point here will be what Morris has to say of Browning's reticence over Roland's death, if indeed he does die, in "Childe Roland" as it relates firstly to his appreciation of the terseness and reticence about emotion generally and suffering specifically in certain types of mediaeval literature, and ultimately to

⁹Morris has been criticized especially for the ending of The Roots of the Mountains, where the Bride, instead of dying when her betrothed marries someone else, herself eventually makes an appropriate alliance with the brother of her supplanter. See E. P. Thompson, pp. 785-6: "Moreover, we are already aware in The Roots of the Mountains of the motive for writing which becomes dominant

his concept of the literature of the future.

In the passage from Morris's review of Men and Women quoted above, Morris praises Browning because, although he makes us aware of what is likely to happen to Roland in the tower, he does not portray it on stage, as it were; does not force us, through a literal representation of it, to re-experience imaginatively the suffering and death which Roland is apparently about to undergo as the poem ends. "And it was well too," Morris says, "for the poet to leave us there, so that we see not the mere struggle of physical courage . . ." (my italics). Of course, if we do wish to re-experience Roland's suffering in the tower, we are given sufficient data to be able to reconstruct the scene for ourselves, since, in Morris's view anyway, it is not hard

in the other late romances -- that of pure self-indulgence in pleasurable reverie or dream, in which neither Morris's intellect nor his deeper feelings are seriously engaged. He had at first intended that the Bride should die during the tale, but he changed his mind, marrying her to Folk-Might, with the rationalization, 'it would be a very good alliance for the Burgalders and Silverdalers both, and I don't think sentiment ought to stand in the way'. Well and good: but such repeated compromises rob the tale of its dignity and sombre interest, and reduce it to the level of wilful fantasy. . . ." This reading of Morris's remark seems very odd to me. People do not die in "real" life from losing their partners. The Bride's marriage is not a romantic fairy-tale one, but a matter of dynastic convenience. There is less sentiment and more realism in Morris's conclusion than in having her die a romantic death, which is the "obvious" ending to a fantasy story of this type.

to see what the outcome of Roland's courage is to be.¹⁰ Only if we wish, as Morris clearly does, to have only the glory of courage before us, and not the dying animal, as the poem ends, so that "Childe Roland passes straight from our eyes to the place where the true and brave live for ever; and as far as we go, his life flows out triumphantly with the blast he blew", then Browning quite rightly does not force us to endure his hero's pain by describing it in so many words. According to this line of reasoning, the reviewer who demanded to be told exactly what happens inside the tower is lacking in both imagination and sensitivity, since he should be sufficiently perceptive to picture for himself what is to happen at the end if he wishes, nor should he need the emotional titillation of having painful scenes shown to him in all their detail.¹¹

¹⁰ Not all critics would have agreed with Morris's assumption that Roland is going to die, however. Mrs. Orr in A Handbook to Browning's Works (London, 1885) seems to be of the opinion that Roland survives, since "he lives to tell the tale", pp. 273-4. This living "to tell the tale" would not particularly have impressed Morris as a reason for Roland's survival, as may be seen from the fact that a number of his own early prose romances are narrated by men who die at the end of their stories, still narrating, as for instance "Golden Wings": "Then one thrust me through the breast with a spear, and another with his sword, which was three inches broad, gave me a stroke across the thighs that hit to the bone; and as I fell forward one cleft me to the teeth with his axe. And then I heard my darling shriek", Works I, 308.

¹¹ Morris would no doubt have included such emotional titillation among "the feverish and perverted follies of the

There are two interesting points which go to make up Morris's attitude here. One is the similarity which this desire to avoid emotional pressurizing of the reader reveals between his views on poetry and his teaching on applied art. The other is the way in which he adapts an old dramatic convention to apply to a modern poem, a dramatic poem indeed, but still a poem and not a drama. Taken together, these two points form an unusual view of the way in which suffering ought to be presented in poetry, and one which not only relates to Morris's ideas of the art of the future, but also explains somewhat his own habitual reticence on the subject of physical, and, to a lesser extent, mental suffering both in his verse and in his prose, a reticence which, as we saw in Part I, has caused many critics to regard him as an escapist.

One of Morris's criteria for design in applied art, to take the first point first, was, as we have already seen, that although there should be plenty of meaning, and even of very serious significance, in a pattern if we wish to look for it, yet that significance should not force itself upon us if we need to rest. His corresponding objection to fine art, sculpture and painting, as decoration for the home

art and literature of Commercialism", which were discussed in relation to "realism" in the last chapter.

was that these were too overpowering for us to be able to respond to them at all times, so that we were liable, if they were always present around us, to grow completely callous towards them. The difference between the application of this theory of levels of meaning to poetry as to pattern design, however, lies in the fact that poetry is a "fine" art like painting, and not an applied art. Moreover, poetry is usually hidden away in books, and cannot be said to impinge continually on the consciousness, even if we admit that the presence of great paintings on our walls might do so. One would not think therefore that poetry, at least most poetry, would need to partake of the restful aspect of applied art, especially given Morris's defence of the difficulty of Browning's poetry on the grounds that poetry is a serious art and not "merely a department of 'light literature'". Nevertheless, just as he was inclined to hope that fine art would become more adjectival in the socialist society of the future, so also Morris shows signs of thinking that poetry too would be somewhat toned down in order to take its due place in the wider intermedial unit of the music-drama. We shall look at what this toning down implies in a moment.

Similarly with the other implications of not portraying suffering directly in a poem; what it comes down to is a general toning down of the poem's impact, for

although the idea that physical suffering should not be portrayed on the stage directly was not uncommon in the classical and neo-classical periods,¹² that prohibition did not extend to verbal portrayal, and some of the descriptions of off-stage deaths as related by eye-witnesses are horrifying enough. Morris is therefore not only treating "Childe Roland" as a species of drama, but also extending the "rules" for the description of suffering beyond those commonly accepted, to the point of creating a new convention altogether for himself. This convention says that, while it is permissible, indeed sometimes desirable, to portray the mental strife, man in the merely animal part of his nature uncontrolled by reason and by his

¹²Especially in neo-classical times. Aristotle in fact has no absolute prohibition of the depiction of suffering on the stage, though he seems to regard it as better not to, and he expects the events of the tragedy, as simply related, to be sufficiently horrifying without actually seeing them, "De Poetica", Works of Aristotle, trans. under the editorship of W. D. Ross (Oxford, 1924), XI, 1453b: "The tragic fear and pity may be aroused by the Spectacle; but they may also be aroused by the very structure and incidents of the play -- which is the better way and shows the better poet. The Plot in fact should be so framed that, even without seeing the things take place, he who simply hears the account of them shall be filled with horror and pity at the incidents; which is just the effect that the mere recital of the story in Oedipus would have on one. To produce this same effect by means of the Spectacle is less artistic, and requires extraneous aid. Those, however, who make use of the Spectacle to put before us that which is merely monstrous and not productive of fear, are wholly out of touch with Tragedy. . . ."

spiritual part, is not a suitable subject for poetry. However, Morris does not seem to have anything against the portrayal of physical pleasure, and his descriptions of the body and of bodily desires, particularly in The Water of the Wondrous Isles, are often surprisingly direct and erotic for their period.

The implications of all this are, once one has become attuned to Morris's way of thinking, fairly obvious, and tie up with what he has said elsewhere about the future developments of the art of poetry, "which has changed so little in essentials since the Homeric epics", for this convention of reticence about suffering in general is one which prevails quite commonly in primitive writing. One thinks especially of the Icelandic sagas, in which the worship of courage and disregard of personal pain, together with habitual understatement on the subject of physical suffering and indeed of emotion of any sort also are so prominent:

Self-restraint was a virtue sure to be thought much of among a people whose religion was practically courage: in all the stories of the north failure is never reckoned as a disgrace, but it is reckoned a disgrace not to bear it with equanimity, and to wear one's heart on one's sleeve is not well thought of. Tears are not common in Northern stories though they sometimes come in curiously as in the case of Slaying Glum, of whom it is told that when some one of his exploits was at hand he was apt to have a sudden access of weeping, the tears rattling on the floor like hailstones; this of course was involuntary and

purely physical. For the rest I repeat self-restraint of all kinds is a necessary virtue before a man can claim any respect in the Northern stories. Grettir coming home from abroad learns as soon as he sets foot on shore that his father is dead, his eldest brother slain, and he himself outlawed, and changes countenance in no wise. . . . Another chief after a battle sits down to have his breeches drawn off; the thrall pulls and plulls and they won't come: truly says he you sons of Snorri may well be thought great dandies if you wear your breeches so tight. The chief bids him feel up his thigh, and lo there is a broken arrow-shaft nailing his breeches to him, of which he scorned to complain.¹³

Though Browning is by no means as reticent as this about Roland's emotions, he does spare us the "mere animal struggle", and this was what Morris, prefiguring his later interest in real folk literature, admired in the portrayal of Roland. Morris's own evasion of the direct presentation of emotion and suffering similarly is not intended to make for weakness and escapism, but for the ennobling of the man who endures them, for it was not that Morris was afraid to face up to the suffering and death, but that for him it was the facing up to it that was the most important thing, and all that happened after was irrelevant to the initial courageous act of decision. After all, he was realist enough to know that, of all the men who have the courage to resolve

¹³Unpublished Lectures, pp. 185-6.

on self-sacrifice, it must be few indeed who can actually carry out their sacrifice without a pang of fear and pain wrung from the animal part of man, "the mere groans and tears of suffering humanity", as Morris calls it. This physical giving way of self-control, though it need not necessarily diminish our admiration for the mind and spirit of man, cannot but represent the body in an aspect which, in Morris's view, it is of no moral or intellectual or aesthetic value for us to see, or at least not in any detail.

Similarly, the loss of emotional self-control was abhorrent to Morris, whether this was exemplified in the extensive self-analysis of the modern poet and novelist, distanced though the latter's might be under the guise of his characters,¹⁴ or in actual life, where Morris was a

¹⁴We have already quoted in the previous chapter Morris's strictures on novelists who "spin out their own insides like silk worms into dreary yarns of their sickly feelings and futile speculations", and in News from Nowhere, Works XVI, 151, he reinforces this. His use of "animals" as a condemnatory term in connection with human selfishness and introspection (a form of selfishness) reinforcing, I think, my linking together of loss of physical and emotional self-control: "As for books, they were well enough for times when intelligent people had but little else in which they could take pleasure, and when they must needs supplement the sordid miseries of their own lives with imaginations of the lives of other people. But I say flatly that in spite of all their cleverness and vigour, and capacity for story-telling, there is something loathsome about them. Some of them, indeed, do here and there show some feeling for those whom the history-books call 'poor', and of the misery of

firm advocate of the "stiff upper lip".¹⁵ Excessive introspection, in his view, not only tended to degenerate into

whose lives we have some inkling; but presently they give it up, and towards the end of the story we must be contented to see the hero and heroine living happily in an island of bliss on other people's troubles; and that after a long series of sham troubles (or mostly sham) of their own making, illustrated by dreary introspective nonsense about their feelings and aspirations, and all the rest of it; while the world must even then have gone on its way, and dug and sewed and baked and built and carpentered round about these useless -- animals".

¹⁵For instance, he behaved with an amazing stoicism over the failure of his own marriage, actually moving out of his beloved Kelmscott Manor so that the lovers could spend their time together there without shocking more conventional people too much -- though according to the present warden this made the local villagers dislike and despise him for being unmanly. In a long letter which somewhat obliquely refers to these troubles, quoted in Philip Henderson, pp. 134-6, he shows how much he valued self-restraint in such situations, even blaming himself for getting upset or complaining at all, and calling it pettiness and unmanliness: "When I said there was no cause for my feeling low, I meant that my friends had not changed at all towards me in any way and that there had been no quarrelling: and indeed I am afraid it comes from some cowardice or unmanliness in me. One thing wanting ought not to go for so much: nor indeed does it spoil my enjoyment of life always, as I have often told you: to have real friends and some sort of an aim in life is so much, that I ought still to think myself lucky: and often in my better moods I wonder what it is in me that throws me into such rage and despair at other times. I suspect, do you know, that some such moods would have come upon me at times even without this failure of mine. . . . Another quite selfish business is that Rossetti has set himself down at Kelmscott as if he never meant to go away; and not only does that keep me from that harbour of refuge (because it is really a farce our meeting when we can help it) but also he has all sorts of ways so unsympathetic with the sweet simple old place, that I feel his presence there as a kind of slur on it: this is very unreasonable though when one thinks why one took the place, and how this year

self-pity, but in any case showed a side of the mind which not only could be of no use or interest other than to the psychiatrist, but which actually degraded him who revealed too much of his inner workings to the public gaze without a seemly control. This rejection of public display of emotion one might well call emotional propriety, were it not that that word has been debased from its true sense of fitness and appropriateness to signify a mere conformity with conventional standards of behaviour -- something which Morris was never known to advocate.¹⁶

This sense of emotional propriety is one reason why Morris omitted certain parts of his original version of Sigurd the Volsung in the final printed version, for he was very much afraid of turning what was, in his opinion, one of the greatest stories in the world into a Victorian

it has really answered that purpose: nor do I think I should feel this about it if he had not been so unromantically discontented with it and the whole thing which made me very angry and disappointed. There, dear Aglaia, see how I am showing you my pettinesses! please don't encourage me in them; but you have always been so kind to me that they will come out. O how I long to keep the world from narrowing on me, and to look at things bigly and kindly!"

¹⁶ Propriety was a word unfortunately over-used in the nineteenth century, so that it has nowadays come to be associated with the hypocritical social conventions and double standards of morality, particularly where these conventions concerned the behaviour of women, which we think of, perhaps wrongly though, as being typically Victorian.

melodrama, as he thought Wagner had done.¹⁷ The scene between Sigurd and Brynhild printed by May Morris in her introduction to Sigurd in volume XVI of the Collected Works, for instance, is very moving, with "some beautiful snatches of the woman's long-drawn agony, an agony we are allowed but to guess at in the concentrated presentment of this supreme moment as we now read it",¹⁸ but this emotional expansion of the original saga tale really only serves to diminish the characters who have taken part in the scene, for by making them human Morris has taken away from their heroic stature, and therefore, he felt, from their immortality. Thus when he compared the emotional human element in his version with what he regarded as the heroic reticence of the Volsunga Saga, he could not but see it as an attenuation of the theme and a corresponding diminution

¹⁷See Mackail I, 308: ". . . I look upon it as nothing short of desecration to bring such a tremendous and world-wide subject under the gaslights of an opera: the most rococo and degraded of all forms of art -- the idea of a sandy-haired German tenor tweedledeeing over the unspeakable woes of Sigurd, which even the simplest words are not typical enough to express!" This shows that Morris has not understood Wagner, whose work, whatever it may be, is certainly not rococo. He is probably thinking of what he knew of Italian opera, and assuming that Wagner's work was similar, which of course it is not.

¹⁸May Morris introduction to Works XII, xxiv.

of the scale of the work.¹⁹ As May Morris points out:

In his final revision the poet has entirely eliminated the note of human tenderness and suffering, but (I hope it is not a fantastic remark to intrude here) I cannot help thinking that it very much relieved his feelings to have written down all this long passage, rightly sacrificed to the dramatic intensity of the moment. We, the readers, have but the story of the meeting before our eyes in all its epic simplicity, its terse bitterness -- left with the unsatisfied feeling of things unsaid. So be it: the poet designed it so; the things unsaid were no doubt unsayable for want of the Titanic language meet for them. Still, ruth for his heroic personages fulfilling their destiny against their will must have moved him to set down in passing the tragic human side of their encounter. The lines that tell of their woe have a certain elegaic quality, with an insistence as in a dream of returning phrases, like the heat and stress of the "ninth wave" -- the recurrent lamenting outbursts of the wronged woman. Out of scale with the epic plan as it is, the whole dialogue is eminently interesting for its subjective presentation of the feminine point of view.²⁰

Morris said of this scene as it appears in Völsunga: "the scene of the last interview between Sigurd and the despairing

¹⁹ Morris was somewhat idealizing Völsunga, which is often bald rather than reticent, and gains from being expanded. For instance, the scene in the river between Gudrun and Brynhild, Works XII, 206-8, and its sequel in the garden, pp. 209-213, is greatly expanded from the original but helps rather than hindering the epic movement in that it increases the tension of the situation most dramatically until we know that something drastic is about to happen. In Völsunga on the other hand, Brynhild dissimulates her feelings, so that the anger and violence of the next chapter come as something of a surprise, and lose some of their impact.

²⁰ Works XII, xxvi. In Morris's reduced version, this scene runs to sixty lines, forty-five lines of this being dialogue, about two and a half pages in all, which

and terrible Brynhild touches me more than anything I have ever met with in literature; there is nothing wanting in it, nothing forgotten, nothing repeated, nothing overstrained; all tenderness is shown without the use of a tender word, all misery and despair without a word of railing, complete beauty without an ornament, and all this in two pages of moderate print".²¹ Is it any wonder then that he should have regarded his own augmented version as superfluous?

It was this heroic reticence of the Völsunga Saga which made Morris prefer it to the mediaeval German version of the Sigurd story, the Nibelungenlied, which had been much admired both in Germany and England.²² At first,

is actually slightly shorter than in his prose translation of Völsunga, The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs, Works VII.

²¹May Morris I, 472.

²²Cf., Thomas Carlyle's essay on the Nibelungenlied which was used as a preface to the translation of the poem by Alice Horton, edited by Edward Bell (London, 1898). Carlyle evidently did not know Völsunga, but since the German poem to a very large extent rejects the supernatural elements that form so large a part of the Icelandic story, and Carlyle praises it because it is lacking in those elements, there seems little question as to which he would have preferred. His comment on Brunhild is particularly interesting, running counter as it does to all that inspired Morris and Wagner: "Fables we have met of this Brunhild being properly a Valkyr, or Scandinavian Houri, such as were wont to lead old northern warriors from their last battle-field into Valhalla; and that her castle of Isenstein stood amidst a lake of fire: but this, as we said,

Morris too had thought the Icelandic version somewhat crude, "rather of the monstrous order"²³ as he said, but once he understood the textual difficulties and had absorbed the story itself, independent of the accidental vagaries of the telling as we have it, he came to think of it as "above all art",²⁴ and said that "when the change of the world has made our race nothing more than a name of what has been -- a story too -- then it should be to those that come after us no less than the Tale of Troy has been to us".²⁵ Indeed, much though he was tempted to write an epic on the subject, as he eventually did, for a long time he was reluctant to begin because he felt that "though I still hanker after it,

is fable here. Brunhild, it is plain enough, was a flesh-and-blood maiden, glorious in look and faculty, only with some preternatural talents given her, and the strangest wayward habits", Miscellaneous Essays (London, 1887-8), II, 78.

²³Works VII, xx. Later he called it "the grandest tale that ever was told", ibid.

²⁴May Morris I, 472: ". . . here and there indeed it is somewhat disjointed, I suppose from its having been put together from varying versions from the same song; it seems as though the author-collector felt the subject too much to trouble himself about the niceties of art, and the result is something which is above all art. . . ."

²⁵Ibid., pp. 448-9.

I see clearly it would be foolish, for no verse could render the best parts of it, and it would only be a flatter and tamer version of a thing already existing".²⁶ The Nibelungenlied, on the other hand, he thought was dead wood, and though he at one time attempted valiantly to translate it, he was forced to abandon it because of its ponderousness.²⁷ The whole discussion of these two poems in William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist is too long to quote fully, but I will extract some of it:

"I have begun a translation of the 'Niebelungen' which I find very amusing; I have also another Icelandic translation in hand, the Volsunga Saga viz. which is the Ice: version of the Niebelungen, older I suppose, and, to my mind, without measure nobler and grander: I daresay you have read abstracts of the story, but however fine it seemed to you thus, it would give you little idea of the depth and intensity of the complete work. . . ." You see, he was also trying his hand on the Niebel-

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 472-3.

²⁷ Works VII, xxxiii: "One little piece of work my father projected -- it may only have been by way of exercise and comparison -- was the translation of the Niebelungenlied". He had the courage to render some two hundred and sixteen stanzas of this ponderous work -- about a tenth part of it -- and then wisely turned to more sympathetic tasks. Quite a contrast with Carlyle, who is reported to have said that "the dream of his youth" was to translate the Niebelungenlied, in Preface to The Niebelungen Lied, trans. A. G. Foster-Barham (London, 1887), p. viii.

ungenlied this year. But I don't suppose any magician could breathe life into the long record of small lords fighting and tourneying with the tantalizingly vague references to the ancient Hoard-legends and the Valkyrie legends turned into fairy-tale incidents. . . . The appeal to Morris of the Völsunga Saga, for all its grimness, for all the gaps and the over-lappings of a late piece of story-telling, was another matter. The Saga is not only far nearer to the chain of legends than Nibelungnôt, but in it tragedy and passion are brought on the stage with great intensity of representation, and the heroic figures are no gracious shadows in glittering embroidered clothing but beings who stand out sharp and clear against their background.²⁸

However, it was not only for its quality of reticence that Morris admired the Völsunga Saga, any more than it was for its reticence alone that he admired "Childe Roland". In the sagas he found also those qualities of intensity, realism, and drama, as he understood them, that is, which we have already marked as being his chief interest in those of Browning's poems which he mentioned specifically in "'Men and Women' by Robert Browning". Indeed his admiration for the sagas as "pieces of local history told in a terse and amazingly realistic and dramatic style which bring back to us Iceland and Norway

²⁸These are extracts from a discussion of several pages length in May Morris I, especially from 472-4. The comment about the "glittering embroidered clothing" is especially pertinent. Clothes amount almost to an obsession in the Nibelungenlied.

in the eleventh century"²⁹ is identical with what he liked best in "Andrea del Sarto" and "Fra Lippo Lippi", the bringing to life again of past times and people. As Eiríkr Magnússon, who collaborated with Morris in his Icelandic translations, said of this drama and life-likeness:

What charmed Morris most was the directness with which a saga-man would deal with the relations of man to man; the dramatic way in which he arranged the material of his story; his graphic descriptions of the personal appearance of the actors, and of the tumultuous fray of battle; the defiant spirit that as unflinchingly faced wrong-doing as open danger, overwhelming odds or inevitable death.³⁰

"You may think that their subject matter is undignified or petty", says Morris, "but certainly whatever they have to tell of they can make it most vividly clear to us, they

²⁹Unpublished Lectures, p. 167. Morris greatly regretted that no such tradition existed in England, ibid., pp. 175-6: "I have said that a[n] English History if apt to lack romance; yet the history of the great change for good and for evil which connected England forever with the continent could scarcely be more romantic. And here above all times does one regret that subjection of the native writers to monkish Latin, and longs for the story now never to be written which the English sagaman might have given us of that field of Hastings. . . . All this was worthy of being told in more words than the brief despair of the Chronicler, and in more life-like manner than the Latin scribbling Monk could compass".

³⁰The Saga Library, VI (Heimskringla, vol. IV), xiv.

are in short the best tellers of tales that have ever lived, and stuffed full of the closest detail as their stories are they are never long-winded".³¹

Because of his fascination with this sort of minute detail in story-telling, prose in the end turned out to be a more suitable medium for Morris's final development as a writer, to enable him to use the techniques he had learned from saga literature, but poetry was his first love and continued to be important to him. Indeed his two ideals

³¹Unpublished Lectures, p. 194. He adds, pp. 193-4: "Snorri has been called the Herodotus of the North not inaptly as the history [The Heimskringla] is told by way of anecdote as Herodotus tells his; but Snorri is far more personal and dramatic than the delightful old Ionian. Every character that he tells us of lives and moves before us, nor does any particle of partiality obscure the clearness of the pictures that he shows us: how often have I lamented that our own history has lacked such a poet, for Snorri was no less than that. Froissart alone amongst the mediaeval chroniclers can be named along-side of him: but then Snorri tells in a dozen words what the Hainaulter would take several hundred to tell, and that with a shrewdness and keen wit which pierces through the very bones and marrow of his subject.

"I have said Snorri: but after all these once for all are the characteristics of the Icelandic prose stories. . . ." And again, Saga Library, I, xi: "Realism is the one rule of the Saga-man: no detail is spared in impressing the reader with a sense of the reality of the event; but no word is wasted in the process of giving the detail. There is nothing didactic and nothing rhetorical in these stories; the reader is left to make his own commentary on the events, and to divine the motives and feelings of the actors in them without any help from the tale-teller. In short, the simplest and purest form of epical narration is the style of these works".

of poetry and of prose are very closely linked, and Morris looked for the same qualities which he admired in the sagas in poetry also, whether in modern work, such as that of Browning, or in that of the mediaeval period which was his favourite period in literature as it was in art. His ideal of poetry was framed to a very considerable extent from his reading of the English mediaeval ballad, the counterpart in poetry of the sagas, in which he found the same qualities of realism, drama, and heroic reticence, together with a forthright, courageous, outward-looking spirit, which he admired in the Icelandic prose. As he wrote in "Feudal England", again contrasting these valuable old qualities with the whining introspection of modern work, as he had also done in the case of prose:

. . . the ballad poetry of the people, wholly untouched by courtly elegance and classical pedantry; rude in art but never coarse, true to the backbone; instinct with indignation against wrong, and thereby expressing the hope that was in it; a protest of the poor against the rich, especially in those songs of the Foresters, which have been called the mediaeval epic of revolt; no more gloomy than the gentleman's poetry [i.e. Chaucer's], yet cheerful from courage, and not content. Half a dozen stanzas of it are worth a cartload of the whining, introspective lyrics of to-day; and he who, when he has mastered the slight differences of language from our own daily speech, is not moved by it, does not understand what true poetry means nor what its aim is.³²

³²Works XXIII, 52.

Once again reticence is one of the desired qualities, as it was in Morris's idea of the sagas, but the reticence of strength, not the evasion of cowardice. Again, as with what he had to say about prose fiction, we get a glimpse of Morris's ideal of the literature of the future, when no-one will any longer be able to understand the meaning of the sentimental, introspective Victorian novel, and poetry too will have returned to a more primitive cheerfulness and outward-lookingness.

Naturally enough, Morris carried this ideal of mediaeval writing into modern literature, whether in poetry or in prose, and his praise was therefore always most ready for those later writers in whose work he perceived something of the primitive spirit. Thus although he never mentions the term ballad in relation to Browning's poetry, it is clear from what he admires in Browning's style that some such ideal is at the back of his mind, only not yet fully formulated, for his admiration of the fusion in Browning's poetry of passionate lyric intensity with dramatic vividness, a fusion which is notable in his own Defence of Guenevere also, is very close to what he says in his review of Rossetti's poems, the only other extended piece of literary criticism that he wrote, about Rossetti's use of the ballad form. In fact, what Morris says about Rossetti altogether is in many respects only a more finished form of what he had

said of Browning fifteen years earlier:

The dramatic quality of Mr Rossetti's work has just been mentioned, which brings one to saying that, though it seemed necessary to dwell so strongly on the mystical and intensely lyrical side of his poems, they bear with them **signs** of the highest dramatic power, whatever its future application may be. This is shown not merely in the vivid picturing of external scenes -- as that of the return of the humbled exiles to Florence in the noble poem of Dante at Verona -- but more conclusively still in the steady purpose running through all those poems in which character or action, however lyrical, is dealt with; in ripeness of plan, and in the congruity of detail with which they are wrought out; all this, of course, in addition to their imaginative qualities. This is well seen in Sister Helen, which is, in fact, a ballad (the form of poem of all others in which, when it is complete, the lyrical and dramatic sides of art are most closely connected), and in which the wild and picturesque surroundings, and the growing force of the tremendous burden, work up surely and most impressively to the expected but still startling end, the effect of which, as almost always in Mr Rossetti's poems, is not injured by a word too much.³³

Again there is the emphasis on dramatic qualities and on the study of character, as there was in the essay on Browning, but this time the ballad is super-added: "the form of all others in which, when it is complete, the lyrical and dramatic sides of art are most closely connected"; this, surely is what Morris would have said of "Childe Roland" had his critical terminology been more settled at the time of the earlier review.

³³May Morris I, 104.

The result of this theory of literature, with its emphasis on primitivism, is that Morris has something of a gap in his appreciation of the literary arts, a gap which extends more or less from Chaucer to Blake: Shakespeare he rarely mentioned, beyond a token admission of his greatness; Milton he does not even include in his list of great works, since "the union in his works of cold Classicalism with Puritanism (the two things which I hate most in the world) repels me so that I cannot read him";³⁴ so that apart from Bunyan and Defoe there is a complete gap in his list between Shakespeare and Blake. Of this gap, which applied even more strictly and extensively in art than in literature, he wrote in "The Gothic Revival":

Nor can I pass by quite unnoticed the literature of this period of slavery, all the more as the revolt against it was first felt in literature: of that we must say that it entirely lacks all imaginative qualities, has in it in fact nothing save that cleverness, readiness and confidence which I have admitted to be possessed by the English 18th century school of painting: not only does poetry seem dead in the 18th century, but if you attempt to wade through the books of verses of the time which insult the name of poetry, you find that even the commonplace English of the time was too romantic to satisfy the writer's hatred of imagination and humanity, and

³⁴ Works XXII, xv. More will be said about this "list of great works" below.

that he has been obliged to invent a new language which can barely be understood without a dictionary by us of the 19th century.³⁵

Strong stuff, but certainly the comment on the language of eighteenth century poetry is not entirely unmerited.³⁶

Because of this hatred of the eighteenth century, it was only with the Romantic revival that Morris really began to take any interest in post-mediaeval work. When, therefore, he came to look at Romantic and Victorian prose and poetry, it was with such mediaeval revivals as the

³⁵ Unpublished Lectures, p. 69. He adds: "Here we are landed then in the prim and dull country of the 18th century . . . where poetry is come to mean copies of smooth verses with as little meaning as can be got into them, and without any glimmer of passion or imagination . . ." and in Socialism, p. 121: "a literature produced by a few word-spinning essayists and prosaic versifiers, like Addison and Pope, priding themselves on a well-bred contempt for whatever was manly or passionate or elevating in the past of their own language". Note the emphasis again on manly which ties up with all those other qualities Morris admired in saga and ballad.

³⁶ As H. A. Beers wrote in A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1899), pp. 82-3: "In 1715 John Hughes published his edition of Spenser's works in six volumes . . . Hughes' glossary of obsolete terms includes words which are in daily use by modern writers: aghast, baleful, behest, bootless, carol, craven, dreary, forlorn, foray, guerdon, plight, welkin, yore. If words like these, and like many which Warton annotates in his 'Observations' really needed explanation, it is a striking proof, not only of the degree in which our older poets had been forgotten, but also of the poverty to which the vocabulary of English poetry had been reduced by 1700". I do not suppose that many people would hold a brief for welkin or bootless nowadays, but dreary, forlorn and plight, at least, are common to-day even in spoken language, not just as poetic terms.

ballad that he was most concerned, and with the way in which these were used by modern writers. The qualities which he admired most in Browning's work were, as we have already seen, those which he found in the ballad and saga.

Coleridge, Keats, and Rossetti, who were all favourites of his, worked at times in a mediaevalizing style.³⁷ Indeed, the ballads of Rossetti, which Morris praises most highly, are, like Keats's splendid and important "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner", technically a form of kunstlied on the model of earlier real ballads, like the kunstmärchen or art fairy-tales which

³⁷ See, for example, what Morris says about the relationship between mediaeval and Romantic poetry, Unpublished Lectures, pp. 71-2: "All this was the beginning of the modern study of history by whose light we not only saw something of what our own ancestors were like, but also and more easily were able to put ourselves in the places of the great peoples of antiquity, and sympathize with their real feelings instead of ignorantly worshipping them from without as the Renaissance pedants had been content to do.

"It is clear that imaginative literature could not sit quietly by while historical research was providing her with so large a mass of material; and accordingly from this time poetry to use the word in its largest sense, was born again, and the school of what for want of a better word I am compelled to call the Romantic writers arose. I have said it was a long and weary way between the ancient poets of our race and the elaborate trifler Pope; but Coleridge and Keats and Shelley and Byron claim brotherhood not only with Shakespeare and Spenser, nay not only with Chaucer or even William Langland, but yet more perhaps with that forgotten man who sang of the meeting of the fallow blades at Brunnanburg, or who told of the old hero's death in the lair of the gold-guarding dragon; or he who bewailed the ruin of the ancient city, or he who sang so touchingly of the friendless, lonely man the Wanderer".

German writers such as Tieck and La Motte Fouqué had been creating since the early part of the century, in an offshoot of the movement to collect the folk-tales and ballads of the people which had been begun by the researches of Bishop Percy³⁸ into Morris's beloved Border ballads in the early eighteenth century.³⁹ Some of Morris's own early poems also may be described as kunstlieder, and the prose romances are to some extent a form of kunstmärchen. However, since the application of these terms will be discussed later in connection with the romances, we will not take this any further here.

An admiration for this sort of ballad ideal might have been expected when Morris was himself busy writing lyrical-dramatic poetry, such as most of his early work is. But after 1867, when The Life and Death of Jason was published, he worked in quite a different style, and one

³⁸J. G. von Herder, the first of the German folk-tale collectors, says in "Vorrede zu den Volksliedern", Sämmtliche Werke (Stuttgart und Tübingen, 1827-30), VII, 87: "Der Anblick dieser Sammlung gibt's offenbar, dass ich eigentlich von englischen Volksliedern ausging und auf sie zurückkomme. Als vor zehn und mehr Jahren die Reliques of ancient Poetry mir in die Hände fielen, freuten mich einzelne Stücke so sehr, dass ich sie zu Übersetzen versuchte, und unsrer Muttersprache, die jener an Kadenz und lyrischen Ausdruck auffallend ähnlich ist, auch ähnlich gute Stücke wünschte. . . ."

³⁹I don't know if I really need a complicated explanation here. The main names involved are: Bishop Percy, of course, Herder, the Schlegels, Scott, the Brothers Grimm. . . .

which was, for a time, almost the antithesis of ballad-writing. This makes his pre-occupation with the ballad in the 1870 review of Rossetti's poems, which was written at the height of the Earthly Paradise period, rather strange. However, although the apparent difference between the poems of The Defence of Guenevere and The Earthly Paradise is very great, as great as the formal differences, say, between ballad and epic, the difference between the theories of literature which account for the two sorts of work is not as great as it appears at first sight to those accustomed to designate the one as classical and the other as romantic. For Morris, both were forms of folk-literature.

It was not only because of the realistic-dramatic qualities that we have been talking about that Morris admired the ballad and the saga, or indeed modern poetry either. As might be expected from his preference in the visual arts for those periods at which he considered the products of popular and communal life to be foremost, his tastes in literature were also slanted towards the primitive, mythical, and "folk" tales and poems whose authors, being unknown, might be taken to be the "folk" as a whole. Morris therefore lumps together ballads, epics, and histories uncritically under the category "Bibles",⁴⁰ a term probably coined

⁴⁰Works XXII, xiii: "1.

by Mazzini to signify folk literature, more or less.⁴¹ For him, the essential matter was not one of form, but of mode of production, and of course of content also. The works of

1. Hebrew Bible (excluding some twice done parts and some pieces of mere Jewish ecclesiasticism).
2. Homer.
3. Hesiod.
4. The Edda (including some of the other early old Norse romantic genealogical poems).
5. Beowulf.
6. Kalevala, Shahnameh, Mahabharata.
7. Collections of folk tales, headed by Grimm and the Norse ones.
8. Irish and Welsh traditional poems.

These are the kind of book which Mazzini called 'Bibles'; they cannot always be measured by a literary standard, but to me are far more important than any literature. They are in no sense the work of individuals, but have grown up from the very hearts of the people.

Some other books further down share in the nature of these 'Bibles'. I have marked them with a star.*"

The other books which he includes in this list of "Bibles" are: Herodotus, Heimskringla, some half-dozen of the best Icelandic Sagas, Niebelungennot, the Danish and Scotch English Border Ballads, the Morte d'Arthur, and the Thousand and One Nights. This list is taken from Morris's "Hundred Best Books" contributed to the Pall Mall Gazette in 1885. He actually only managed to list 54 out of the suggested 100, the 54th interestingly enough being Grimm's Teutonic Mythology.

⁴¹Guiseeppe Mazzini, "On the Historical Drama -- II", Life and Works II, 110-1: "By Epopees, I mean not those epic poems which are purely works of art, like the Eneid, the Gerusalemme, the Lusiad, Paradise Lost, the Messiah, and which have generally been the work of poets writing towards the decay of an epoch, and inspired by I know not what unconscious but generous desire to perpetuate, by a sublime sepulchral monument, the memory of a great idea expiring. I mean rather those poems which I would fain denominate national Bibles, springing up -- the cathedrals of art -- from the collective genius of a people in the primary epochs of their existence, and containing, more or less clearly sketched forth, their traditions and the germs of their future and innate mission. Such are the Râmâyana, the

Homer and the Border ballads, in his view, are both productions of the people, though the former may have been written over by a court poet or a series of court poets, while the latter have retained entirely their popular characteristics, but both are, at bottom, "common stock".⁴² Similarly in his own poems, one of the things for which Morris is striving is to recapture some of the oral, folk quality: in The Defence through the use of ballad forms,

Mahâbhârata -- expressions of the two great Indian cycles; the Persian Shahnameh, the echo of the ancient Iranic traditions; the Iliad, the German Nibelungen Lied, the fragments of the Scandinavian Edde, the Divina Commedia -- all of them unknown authorship, with the exception of the work of Dante, whom the privilege of re-existence conceded to Italy has enabled to assume the position of a prophet standing between two epochs of national civilization".

⁴²H. A. Beers, A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century, p. 268: "Like all folk-songs, these ballads are anonymous and may be regarded not as the compositions of any one poet, but as the property, and in a sense the work, of the people as a whole. Coming out of an uncertain past, based on some dark legend of heart-break or blood-shed, they bear no author's name, but are feraenaturae and have the flavor of wild game. They are common stock, like the national speech; everyone could contribute toward them. . . ." Obviously the same theory is behind Morris's admiration of the mediaeval cathedral, though in fact modern research has revealed the names of some of the contributory designers of these. For a contemporary comparison of Homer with the English ballad poetry, see The Iliad of Homer, faithfully translated . . . by F. W. Newman (London, 1856), pp. iv ff. (This was the translation which irritated Matthew Arnold into writing On Translating Homer.) Herder in "Vorrede zu den Volksliedern", p. 69, says: "Der grösste Sänger der Griechen, Homerus, ist zugleich der grösste Volksdichter. Sein herrliches Ganze ist nicht Epopee, sondern επος, Märchen, Sage, lebendige Volksgeschichte".

and in his later work through the sort of verse forms which lend themselves to oral delivery. It is surprising how these later poems respond to being read aloud, or rather chanted as Morris's habit was, in a way that would not be suspected by anyone who first encounters them, especially The Earthly Paradise, lying heavily and sleep-inducingly on the printed page.⁴³

This liking for an apparently simple folk art form, whether it is the ballad or the figured fabric, which contains through its association with myth and tradition a depth of meaning which belies the simplicity, is analogous

⁴³This I think was one of the reasons why Morris took Chaucer as his model for The Earthly Paradise, though his attitude to life was so very different from Chaucer's, that The Canterbury Tales was the only available model for a long poem that had at least been delivered orally, if not composed by the "folk". Love is Enough was based similarly upon the mediaeval anonymous Miracle and Mystery plays, and his prose epics on the sagas and mediaeval romance, all orally delivered forms. For Sigurd there was no real English model, though the movement of the verse in the, again orally delivered, Odyssey is not entirely dissimilar, and his translation of it is in the Sigurd metre, a sort of loose hexameter.

Eiríkr Magnússon relates how Morris was capable of oral delivery of sagas from memory, preface to Saga Library, VI, x-xi: "That the Icelandic saga was such a constant source of pleasure to Morris was in a large measure owing to the vividness and retentiveness of his memory. This I will take the opportunity of illustrating here with a story from our travels in Iceland in 1871. . . . We reached late at night the church-stead of Ingjaldshóll and made ourselves snug in the Church. After the day's excitement Morris was not inclined to sleep and proposed to tell us a story, and we were all ears at one [sic]. He began the

to what we have already said of Morris's admiration for the Sicilian silk-weavers and Persian carpet-makers. Their art, like that of the ballad-makers, is only half-conscious, but drawn from a long tradition which enables their work to partake of thoughts and feelings which they themselves as individuals may scarcely have known to exist. Thus though the ballad, or whatever other folk art form you may choose to take, is on the surface a simple and unsophisticated, art-less one might say, work, through its use of traditional symbols and motifs it actually has access to the deepest thoughts and emotions that the human race has experienced, so that it is in fact the most powerful form of all literature for those who, like Morris can appreciate it at all. This is why he says of his "Bibles" that "they cannot always be measured by a literary standard, but to me are far more important than any literature",⁴⁴ and of the

short Saga of Björn, the champion of the Hitdale-men, and went on with it to the end, only once hesitating about a personal name. This was to me the more wonderful that we had only once read the saga together and he was not at all taken with it as a piece of literature". Morris also loved to read aloud to his family, Works XXII, xvii.

⁴⁴Eiríkr Mangússon, Preface to The Saga Library, VI, xv. Morris compares the sagas at some length in "The Early Literature of the North" with Greek poems and dramas dealing with similar material, in Unpublished Lectures, p. 188 with the Odyssey, pp. 193-4 with Herodotus, and in his preface to Saga Library, I, x with Greek drama.

Völsunga Saga that it is "above all art". For, running through and over the quality of homeliness which Morris loved in the sagas, he detected also, and was profoundly influenced by, that thread of high drama which resembled the informing spirit of Greek tragedy, the sense that "hard and fast Fate, concealed in the background, was the real author of the huge-featured tragedy". Without that sense, these stories of petty chieftains, whether Icelandic or Greek, or any others, could never have retained their power over so many generations as they have done. With it, Homer and the Greek tragedies at least have become some of the most powerful stories in the world.

This sense of fate was what drew Morris most to the great tragic stories among the sagas, to Völsunga and Laxdæla, and above all to the poetic style of the Elder Edda.⁴⁵ These stories were the ones that inspired him to write "The Lovers of Gudrun", "The Fostering of Aslaug",

⁴⁵Eiríkr Magnússon, Saga Library, VI, xiv: Much delight as he took in the Sagas, the work which fetched Morris most was the Elder Edda. . . . Many a time as we were struggling through these old lays Morris would rise and pace his room, discoursing on the high art these old poets possessed, in never allowing the description of these volcanic passions to pass into mere grandiose platitudes, although clearly the temptation lay near, seeing that hard and fast Fate, concealed in the background, was the real author of the huge-featured tragedy".

and, most important of all, Sigurd the Volsung. But through his prose romances too, especially the earlier ones, The House of the Wolfings, The Roots of the Mountains, and The Story of the Glittering Plain, are interwoven strands of saga material brooded over by this spirit of fate, the saga spirit. As May Morris wrote of The House of the Wolfings:

The House of the Wolfings is entirely conceived in the spirit of the Sagas, certain phrases in it, such as "and Thiodulf bore Throngplough to mound with him," carrying one to the Northern heroic times; it belongs to the Sagas in its remoteness, its breadth of handling and absence of elaborated detail. There is more of the epic quality about it: the thread of fate weaves in and out of the human action, the men and women speak little, and with stern high courage, about personal griefs and loves, and the Hall-Sun is a more truly heroic figure than any of the gracious women in The Roots of the Mountain.⁴⁶

The "thread of fate", the stern courage, and reticence and heroism of the sagas are all here, and perhaps more fittingly embodied even than in Sigurd where there were so many temptations to expand and augment the tale of verses.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Works XVII, xv. I quarrel with the "absence of elaborated detail" slightly -- absence of elaborated emotional detail indeed, but the sagas are full of details of battles, etc. which was, as we saw already, one reason why Morris enjoyed them so much.

⁴⁷There was also another reason; and a very important one, why Morris especially admired saga literature, and this is its language, which had a very considerable influence upon his own later prose style. A chapter was planned on

this subject, to be called "The Language of Translation", which would have dealt with the development of Morris's prose style from his Icelandic translations to the final style of the prose romances. However, it was not proved feasible to include it. A brief note on Morris's attitude to the modern English language therefore seems needed here before we leave the subject of Icelandic.

Morris's idea was that English was basically a Germanic language, but that it had been spoiled by the introduction of its large French element, French being a language that he particularly disliked, calling it "nosey Latin", Works XXII, xxi. Had we kept our own language and culture more pure, he felt, we might have done better work in the arts than we have. This attitude is expressed in various places, especially in "Feudal England", Works XXIII, 40 ff. and "The Gothic Revival I", Unpublished Lectures, p. 57. Thus, much as he admired Chaucer, his language, so Frenchified, was a disappointment, and Morris regarded him as the end of English literature proper, and the beginning of Anglo-French literature, which was not in general much to his taste, "Early England", ibid., p. 177: "Literature also became Frenchified and here to its great misfortune as I think. The great works of the English poets since Chaucer's time have had to be written in what is little more than a dialect of French and I cannot help looking on that as a mishap. If we could only have preserved our language as the Germans have theirs, I think we with our mingled blood would have made the world richer than it is now -- but these are vain regrets: it is all whistled down the wind with the last shout of the axes at Senlac". Morris's despair over his translations of the sagas was that they could not be rendered into an English worthy of them, that would really express their spirit. Hence his coinings and archaisms which have irritated so many critics -- see Magnússon's comments on these translations and their language in The Saga Library, VI, vii-x, and the preface to Works VII, xvii-xix: "It is not 'pseudo-Middle English', as some critics have thought. It is his own, the result of an endeavour by a scholar and a man of genius to bring about such harmony between the Teutonic element in English and the language of the Icelandic saga as the not very abundant means at his command would allow", p. xviii. However, by the time of the late prose romances, Morris had evolved a style which does not in fact contain very much larger than average share of Teutonic words, even though it does derive some of its flavour from what he learned in his translations. Certainly he did not, as Magnússon suggests, make any attempt to avoid Romance words altogether as, for instance,

William Barnes did in his late writings, though Morris does seem to have admired Barnes, and to have taken over some of his dicta on the re-Teutonizing of English. Cf. Barnes: Early England and the Saxon English . . . (London, 1869), An Outline of English Speech-craft (London, 1878) and An Outline of Rede-Craft (Logic) with English Wording (London, 1880), etc. Morris's main concern was to forge a style for the future which would reject "the dominant literary dialect of the day -- the English newspaper language", Works VII, xvii, which would make the best possible use of what was left of the Teutonic element in English, and especially the Teutonic power of forming compounds, but at the same time would not reject any really beautiful words and turns of phrases which came from the influence of other language stocks.

Morris similarly admired the language of ballad poetry because of the simplicity of its language. Cf. Unpublished Lectures, p. 57: "I will for the present set aside the literary side of the development, the lines of which became confused by pedantry even early in the Middle Ages at the time when our own tongue became confused and to my mind degraded as the result [of] our dealings in various ways with the Latinized countries of the continent leaving these islands nothing that had any unadulterated flavour of the soil save the fragmentary literature of Ireland and Wales, the oral tradition and ballads of Scotland and the northern border, and the fragments of songs of the early Germanic invaders among which towers majestically the noble poem of Beowulf, unsurpassed for simplicity and strength by any poem of our later tongue".

CHAPTER 3

SYMBOL AND PATTERN

In the last chapter, we said that there were two points of importance in Morris's discussion of "Childe Roland". Now we come to the second of them, the question of allegory. This was something of a vexed question for many nineteenth century writers. George MacDonald, for instance, discusses the relationship between allegory, parable and fairy tale with or without fairies, all the way through his Adela Cathcart,¹ and critics have still not got the subject sorted out yet. Morris, however, in his early essay, rushes gaily in asserting that all life is an allegory, and all art too:

"Childe Roland", how grand that is! Some reviewer thinks it an allegory, and rates the poet for not having told us what happened to Childe Roland inside the "round, squat turret". Well, it may in some sort be an allegory, for in a certain sense everything is so, or almost everything that is done on this earth. But that is not its first meaning. . . .²

¹(London, 1864). In the book a number of people tell various sorts of stories, and the main narrator, John Smith, makes comments on them for the benefit of the reader.

²Works I, 339.

And Morris then passes on to other things, dismissing this really very sweeping statement as if it were no more than a truism, for, as we saw, what he was really concerned with in Browning at that time was the vividness and reality of his portraits and the variety and mastery of his verse forms, not any possible mystical or symbolic significance of his work. But what then did he mean by "in a certain sense everything is so, or almost everything that is done on this earth"? What, if all life is an allegory, can it be an allegory of? And, more important here, what does this mean for Morris's practice of literature?

One thing is clear, that, if we accept the Platonic idealism suggested for Morris above, then this view of life as an allegory must somehow relate to it. Perhaps therefore something of this sort, together with the period of religious mysticism which Morris went through as an undergraduate,³ may have been influential on his views on literature at this point. Certainly the stories he wrote

³See Mackail I, 64 ff., for Morris's idea of a religious community of which Sir Galahad was to be the patron. Cf. his admiration at this period for Sintram and His Companions, The Heir of Redcliffe, and the works of Sir Kenelm Digby, a convert to Catholicism who "was actually led into the Catholic fold by his enthusiasm for chivalry romances . . ." and whose Broad Stone of Honour (London, 1822) "consists of four books entitled respectively 'Godefridus', 'Tancredus', 'Morus' (Sir Thomas More), and 'Orlandus', after four representative paladins of Christian chivalry", H. A. Beers, A History of English Romanticism in the 19th. Century, p. 363.

for the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine then, the early prose romances, are often heavy with religious mysticism, and verge on a certain confused allegorism, though they cannot be interpreted in any very thorough-going sense as allegories. "A Dream",⁴ for instance, the story of two lovers who are separated for centuries because of the girl's rash wish to prove her knight's love and courage, but are granted one meeting in each hundred years or so until "the end of all" when they shall have expiated their sin of preferring their love over his duty to the Lord, obviously has some significance beyond the surface tale of adventure and chivalry. The centuries of life granted them;⁵ the mysterious meetings

⁴Originally printed in the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, 1856, now in Works I, 159-75.

⁵After Ella's command to Lawrence, they cannot retract it, even though Lawrence would prefer to go on his original quest to fulfil his duty to God, so they pray for longer life and another chance to fight in God's cause, pp. 162-3: "then said Ella again: 'Moreover, let us pray to God to give us longer life, so that if our natural lives are short for the accomplishment of this quest, we may have more, yea, even many more lives.' 'He will, my Ella,' said Lawrence, 'and I think, nay, am sure, that our wish will be granted; and I, too, will add a prayer, but will ask it very humbly, namely, that He will give me another chance or more to fight in His cause, another life to live instead of this failure.' 'Let us pray too that we may meet, however long the time be before our meeting,' she said. . . ."

of which the old men who narrate the story are witnesses; the last meeting when "beneath the eyes of those four men the lovers slowly faded away into a heap of snow-white ashes";⁶ "the ivory house" in which the knight is kept, which is so very cold and white, "no fair colour there, nought but the white ivory, with one narrow line of gleaming gold over every window, and a fathom's-breadth of burnished gold behind the throne":⁷ all these things are too potently mystical to be taken as the mere result of the reading of mediaeval literature combined with the tales of Edgar Allan Poe working on a juvenile imagination, an explanation which might suggest itself at first sight. Similarly "The Hollow Land",⁸ one of the best of these early tales, is yet so confused in its mixture of real and unreal, of hallucinatory

⁶Works I, 174. The dissolving into ashes usually constitutes a sign that the atonement is complete, as in the story of the monk who thought that Paradise would be boring. He wanders out into the monastery garden for a moment, admiring the beautiful flowers and birds, and when he returns a hundred years have passed and no one recognizes him any longer. When he realizes the lesson that has been vouchsafed him, he too dissolves into a heap of ashes, as representing the state that his body would have reached by that time had his sin of doubt never been committed, and therefore expressing complete obliteration of the sin. (Old story of unknown source related to me by nuns when a child.)

⁷Works I, 170.

⁸Ibid., pp. 254-90. Originally in Oxford and Cambridge Magazine (1856).

effects combined with down-to-earth details of mediaeval warfare, of death and rebirth and death again, which, as in "A Dream", at times seems to suggest the doctrine of the transmigration of souls,⁹ that its meaning has become extraordinarily difficult to disentangle. One might be tempted to fall back on Morris's own comment on The Wood Beyond the World that it is just "a tale pure and simple", but that his use of folk and fairy-tale motifs and mediaeval religious symbols,¹⁰ which cannot but have been conscious, at least, as Yeats says, towards the end, suggests otherwise.

This, however, is early work, and this idea of all

⁹In "The Hollow Land", Florian's sojourn in the Hollow Land is obviously a death of some sort, since the land itself is a type of the Garden of Eden, an earthly paradise, and when he emerges from it his clothes have rotted from him, his armour is rusted, and his hair is filled with earth and worms. Similarly, the entry of Lawrence and Ella into the cave in the red rock and its subsequent collapse, his imprisonment in the ivory room, and their transformations into various different shapes over the centuries, suggest a series of deaths and rebirths. As we shall see, Morris uses a similar device from time to time in the late prose romances also.

¹⁰May Morris comments on these motifs in both early and late romances in Works XVII, xvii: "but in comparing my father's prose-tales, -- the first and the last -- I have been almost startled to recognize some of the later tale-teller's material in the 'queer' half-formed pictures that come tumbling to the young writer's untried pen, and the lovely dream-snatches that are indeed the gift of youth. There is the same romantic vision of human life on the borders of Fairyland, the swift-drawn scenes of the story's setting, there is the wonder-wood and the waste land, peopled with unknown beings who work weal or woe upon the human folk; the beautiful lady in an atmosphere of enchantment, the young man or maiden going out on a quest or in search of adventure. . . ."

life and art as being in some degree allegorical is also an early attitude on the part of Morris, and one that he was not to hold for very long. Indeed, his conception in the Browning essay of all art as being partly allegorical actually runs counter to his more usual later views on allegory, to which he was generally rather hostile. This hostility is revealed in a number of places. It is implicit in the letter to the Spectator already quoted in Chapter 1, of this part, which was written in response to a review of The Wood Beyond the World which claimed to be able to detect an allegory of Capital and Labour in that tale. In the essay on Rossetti it is somewhat clearer, and in some comments quoted by May Morris, the hostility becomes fully explicit, and resolves itself into an attack on the moralization of natural objects, and on those who insist on searching out double meanings, of a moral nature especially, in poetry.

In the letter to the Spectator, Morris not only denied that he had intended an allegory in The Wood Beyond the World but also, by his very act of writing a refutation, when, as he himself pointed out in his letter, "I make it a rule not to answer any criticisms of my literary work, feeling that the writers have formed their opinions on ground sufficient to themselves, and that they have a full right to express those opinions",¹¹ indicated that he was displeased

¹¹The Spectator (20th July, 1895), p. 81.

at his work being so taken. He protested that had his story been meant as an allegory then he would have made it clear that that was what he meant, since "I should consider it bad art in anyone writing an allegory not to make it clear from the first that this was his intention, and not to take care throughout that the allegory and the story should interpenetrate, as does the great master of allegory, Bunyan".¹² One is reminded here of George MacDonald, who became similarly indignant at allegorical readings of Phantastes, though there seems a little more justification for such readings in his case.¹³ And even if we do not quite admit the implication of hostility, the fact that Morris did take the trouble to deny the interpretation at any rate suggests that he had ceased to believe in 1895 that all art was an allegory of some sort.

That this later attitude of hostility towards

¹²Ibid.

¹³Greville MacDonald, George MacDonald and His Wife (London, 1924), p. 297: "I hope Mr. Scott will like my fairy-tale [Phantastes]. I don't see what right the Athenaeum has to call it an allegory and judge or misjudge it accordingly -- as if nothing but an allegory could have two meanings!" We shall discuss Greville MacDonald's comments on his father's note here later in the chapter.

allegory or double-meanings was the more common during most of Morris's life is confirmed by the evidence of May Morris. Her father, she claimed, was impatient of allegorical readings not only of his own work but also of that of poetry generally, even in the case of writers whom we would consider to-day to have themselves intended a symbolic reading of their work. As she said in her notes on Morris as a writer:

Turning a favourite story into a moral lesson was not to my Father's taste. I think you would have to feel very far removed from the personages of your story if you were dealing with them in this lofty fashion; and as we know, Morris on the contrary got very near his imagined people and saw each one of them 'in his habit as he lived'; and indeed would have found it very dull to do otherwise. But people would insist on looking for some meaning below the surface in his works. It was quite an ordinary occurrence that when he published a new volume, some serious-minded friend (people used to go about in those days with a Wordsworth in their pocket) would ask in the course of a Sunday afternoon gathering 'what his poem meant?' 'I told him I meant what I said when writing,' he would tell his home-circle afterwards: 'and you know, my dear, Wordsworth's primrose by the river's brim is quite good enough for me in itself; what on earth more did the man want it to be?'¹⁴

In other words, taking this passage entirely at face value to begin with, Morris would not allow any further underlying meanings to be attached to the surface meaning of his own work, and he objected to the attribution of such meanings to natural objects in the work of others, e.g. Wordsworth's

¹⁴May Morris I, 429-30.

primrose -- a strange attitude in one who was able to write of the green tree and the dry tree and the water of the mysterious well as Morris did.

However, there is more to the reference to Wordsworth's primrose than meets the eye at first. It is not just a simple denial of those who attach allegorical meanings to poetry, but an outright attack on the use of allegorical meanings by the poet also, at least when it is moral allegory. The whole stanza about this particular primrose runs:

In vain, through every changeful year,
Did Nature lead him as before;
A primrose by a river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more.¹⁵

The lines are from "Peter Bell", a poem about the conversion of a man from his evil ways through the agency of an unpleasant experience, an experience which was only necessary because Peter had refused the gentle teaching which Nature had been offering him year after year so that he needed a strong stimulus to make him alter his ways.

Now we shall see how cunning Morris was in his simple statement that "Wordsworth's primrose by the river's

¹⁵"Peter Bell", lines 246-50, The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, edited by Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford, 1944), II, 341.

brim is quite good enough for me in itself", and also, incidentally, how well ~~he~~ knew his Wordsworth, despite the fact that he did not consider him an especially great poet,¹⁶ for "Peter Bell" is not one of Wordsworth's best known poems by any means.¹⁷ Peter's sin, in Wordsworth's eyes, is an indifference to man and man's laws as mirrored in his indifference to nature; indeed, even as actually caused by that indifference, since "according to Wordsworth the lines from consciousness to conscience may be traced by reference to the sublimity of non-human nature".¹⁸ Thus

¹⁶ Morris does not include Wordsworth in his list of "Hundred Best Books", though he does include Blake, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron. See Works XXII, xv. He does not even make excuses for his omission, as he does for omitting Milton, clearly not considering Wordsworth in any way worthy of a place in his pantheon.

¹⁷ Matthew Arnold actually excluded "Peter Bell" from his Wordsworth edition of 1879 on the grounds that no-one but a dedicated Wordsworthian could gain any pleasure or profit from reading it; pp. xxv-vi: "I have spoken lightly of Wordsworthians: and if we are to get Wordsworth recognized by the public and by the world, we must recommend him not in the spirit of a clique, but in the spirit of disinterested lovers of poetry. But I am a Wordsworthian myself. I can read with pleasure and edification Peter Bell and the whole series of Ecclesiastical Sonnets, and the address to Mr. Wilkinson's spade, and even the Thanksgiving Ode; -- everything of Wordsworth, I think, except Vaudracour and Julia. . . ." Arnold's motive in his selection was, of course, to disengage the best poems of Wordsworth "from the quantity of inferior work which now obscures them", p. xiii.

¹⁸ Donald Westling, Wordsworth and the Adequacy of Landscape (London, 1970), p. 80.

Peter, apart from his general bad behaviour -- having six wives, etc. -- is being condemned by Wordsworth because to him a primrose is just a primrose and nothing more, because "nature ne'er could find the way / Into the heart of Peter Bell",¹⁹ because in fact Peter has not become conscious of nature and has therefore never developed a conscience about his deeds to man. When Morris, who was manifestly a passionate lover of natural beauty himself, far more indeed than Wordsworth who tended to use nature as an aid to moral reflection rather than loving it for its own sake, identifies himself with Peter therefore, he is not only asserting his own rejection of reading more into nature than is obviously there, but also explicitly condemning Wordsworth's whole attitude to nature and to life and ultimately to the composition of poetry also. In his view, Wordsworth's use of the primrose is unjustified and unjustifiable -- "What on earth more did the man want it to be?" In itself the flower was beautiful and wonderful, and it did not need the addition of lessons in ethics to make it more so.

Of course, Morris is being a bit unfair to Wordsworth, since we are obviously not meant to think that Peter found the primrose beautiful qua primrose either. He simply

¹⁹"Peter Bell", lines 244-5.

did not react to it at all. But it suits Morris's purposes to pretend that Peter liked primroses, and only offended Wordsworth by refusing to draw moral lessons from them, a mirror, in fact, of his own attitude. And no doubt the temptation to do this was the greater in that this poem must particularly have irritated him, since Wordsworth here explicitly rejects the fantastic, which Morris so much admired in Coleridge and Keats, in favour of the homely and everyday:

The dragon's wing, the magic ring,
I shall not covet for my dower,
If I along that lowly way
With sympathetic heart may stray,
And with a soul of power.²⁰

Morris of course also admired the down-to-earth concerns of ballad and saga, as we have seen, but Wordsworth's rejection of the romantic for the everyday was not, in Morris's view for any good reason, since Wordsworth only preferred everyday life because he could draw morals from it that are not to be found in "the wonders of a wild career",²¹ something which Morris, who hated to draw morals, could not have approved of.

²⁰"Peter Bell", lines 136-40.

²¹Ibid., line 125.

Taken together, these statements about his own stories and about the poetry of Wordsworth seem to add up to a determined anti-allegorical, anti-symbolic bias, but there are also a number of pointers which seem to indicate the presence of the opposite idea in Morris as well. For one thing, May Morris's testimony proves not entirely reliable, for when, a few pages after these comments on his own poetry and on Wordsworth quoted above, she comes to talk of Love is Enough, she quickly slips into an acceptance of a spiritual level of meaning for the play:

Maxen . . . was not a particularly attractive person, and the story, though full of the usual Celtic richness of detail, with its jewelled halls, its ivory and red-gold, is by no means on the spiritual plane. [May Morris then relates the Mabinogion story from which Morris took the main plot for Love is Enough.] From this bare outline taken from the Mabinogion you may see how far the modern poet has travelled from the Welsh legend in his Morality.²²

The obvious implication is that Morris's Morality, in contrast with the Welsh story, is "on the spiritual plane", as indeed to be truly a "morality" it must be. Besides this, May Morris also seems to find a certain autobiographical and even religious element in the poem, which suggest another level of meaning, rare though it is in Morris's work.²³ Nor

²² May Morris I, 444.

²³ May Morris I, 441: "No glimpse of the inner life of Morris was ever vouchsafed even to his closest friends --

is she above giving symbolic readings to aspects of Morris's design-work, though she denies them for his patterns,²⁴ saying that the watermark in the hand-made paper used in the great Chaucer printed at the Kelmscott Press, a perch with a branch in its mouth, is "a hieroglyph of the manor-garden and the river-side and their delights".²⁵ And what is a hieroglyph but a sacred or mystical carving, a symbol?²⁶

secretum meum mihi. It was a subject on which he never spoke except in Love is Enough. But here he certainly does reveal much of himself, as a poet must in developing a story which expresses the passionate desire of the soul to come into contact with something utterly beyond worldly experience. The old fancy of a dream within a dream has here become something of deeper significance".

²⁴Ibid., p. 36: "Without being a 'symbol' of any special thought, each of the more important patterns for papers or chintz had its mark, its standing, its bit of story". And in a footnote she adds: "Modern symbolism in design always bored Morris, and we know his remark about Peter Bell and the primrose after people had been asking him what a certain design 'meant'". However, her own point is somewhat damaged by the fact that, as you remember, she had used this story about Peter Bell and the primrose on two occasions: once in relation to his designs and once in relation to his poems!

Cf. also the angry comments about symbolism of this type in The Art of William Morris by Aymer Vallance (London, 1897), pp. 135-7, who gets well-nigh hysterical at the idea of chintzes having moral significance, or at the idea that the names of the chintzes suggested a meaning for the patterns they designated.

²⁵Works XXIV.

²⁶Cf. the O.E.D.

Another factor, more weighty than this, on the allegorical side of the question, is that Morris was himself rather inclined to interpret the works of others in an allegorical way. The most outstanding example of this is his extraordinary reading of Edgar Allan Poe's Voyage of Arthur Gordon Pym in the preface to Socialism, Its Growth and Outcome:

In one of Edgar Allen [sic] Poe's tales he recounts how a little group of wrecked seafarers on a waterlogged vessel, at the last extremity of starvation, are suddenly made delirious with joy at seeing a sail approaching them. As she came near them she seemed to be managed strangely and unseamanly as though she were scarcely steered at all, but come near she did, and their joy was too great for them to think much of this anomaly. At last they saw the seamen on board of her, and noted one in the bows especially who seemed to be looking at them with great curiosity, nodding also as though encouraging them to have patience, and smiling at them constantly, showing while he did so a set of very white teeth, and apparently so anxious for their safety that he did not notice that the red cap that he had on his head was falling into the water.

All of a sudden, as the vessel neared them, and while their hearts were leaping with joy at their certain deliverance, an inconceivable and horrible stench was wafted to them across the waters, and presently to their horror and misery they saw that this was a ship of the dead, the bowing man was a tottering corpse, his red cap a piece of flesh torn from him by a sea-fowl; his amicable smile was caused by his jaws, denuded of the flesh, showing his white teeth set in a perpetual grin. So passed the ship of the dead into the landless ocean, leaving the poor wretches to their despair.

To us Socialists this Ship of the Dead is an image of the civilization of our epoch, as the cast-away mariners are of the hopes of the humanity entangled in it. The cheerfully bowing man, whose signs of encouragement and good-feeling turn out to be the results of death and corruption, well be-

tokens to us the much be-praised philanthropy of the rich and refined classes of our Society, which is born of the misery necessary to their very existence. How do people note eagerly, like Arthur Gordon Pym and his luckless fellows, the beautiful hope of the softening of life by the cultivation of good feeling, kindness, and gratitude between rich and poor, with its external manifestations; its missionary enterprises at home and abroad -- hospitals, churches, refuges, and the like; its hard-working clergy dwelling amidst the wretched houses of those whose souls they are saving; its elegant and enthusiastic ladies sometimes visiting them; its dignified, cultivated gentlemen from the universities spreading the influences of a refined home in every dull half-starved parish in England; the thoughtful series of lectures on that virtue of thrift which the poor can scarcely fail to practise even unpreached to; its increasing sense of the value of moral purity among those whose surroundings forbid them to understand even the meaning of physical purity; its scent of indecency in Literature and Art, which would prevent the publication of any book written out of England or before the middle of the nineteenth century, and would reduce painting and sculpture to the production of petticoated dolls without bodies. All this, which seems so refined and humane, is but the effect of the distant view of the fleshless grinning skull of civilization seeming to offer an escape to the helpless castaways, but destined on its nearer approach to suffocate them with the stench of its corruption, and then to vanish aimlessly into the void, leaving them weltering on the ocean of life which its false hope has rendered more dreadful than before.²⁷

Obviously, this sort of interpretation was not intended by Poe, any more than Morris intended the very similar reading of The Wood Beyond the World, though it must be admitted that both readings are, in their way, not implausible if one did not know the context, and especially the reading of

²⁷Socialism, pp. 1-4.

Morris's story, since he was, after all, a Marxist and made Marxist interpretations of the work of others.

Apart from this piece on Edgar Allan Poe, and the early comment on "Childe Roland", Morris has no other allegorical suggestions as far as literature goes, though the fact that he especially admired the "magical" poems of Coleridge and Keats while disliking the homely but moralizing Wordsworth is perhaps suggestive -- of what, we will see below. Moreover, he was an enthusiast for the writings of De La Motte Fouqué, whose Sintram is near-allegory,²⁸ and not unattracted to Maeterlinck, a symbolist.²⁹ However, Morris was certainly not slow to pick up artistic symbolism and appreciate it: as a friend of Burne-Jones and Rossetti he could not fail to know the meanings of the simple Christian symbols, rose and lily and dove and pomegranate, such as fill his woven fabrics and recur over and over in his prose romances early and late,³⁰ even had he not learned through his own researches

²⁸ May Morris I, 384, for Morris's liking for this story.

²⁹ Works XXII, xxii. Morris was not an enthusiast for Maeterlinck, but he did read some of his work with pleasure, which was more than could be said for most modern work.

³⁰ Note the prevalence of lilies especially in his early prose romances, especially "A Dream", "The Hollow Land" and "Golden Wings".

of the symbols of ancient art; the Zoroastrian fire, the green tree, and all those motifs we spoke of in Part II. See how he describes for once a Christian symbol, the lean kine as carved in the stalls of the Cathedral of Amiens:

Pharaoh's dream, how splendid that was! the king lying asleep on his elbow, & the kine coming up to him in two companies. I think the lean kine was about the best bit of woodcarving I have seen yet. There they were, a writhing heap, crushing and crowding one another; drooping heads and staring eyes, and strange angular bodies; altogether the most wonderful symbol of famine ever conceived.³¹

Pharaoh's dream is of course one of the Biblical stories which is most readily and commonly interpreted in an allegorical sense, for the dream in itself is a prefiguring in allegorical form of future real events.

The same sort of interest in symbol is manifest in all Morris's writing on pattern and design generally, whatever May Morris may say of his boredom with modern symbolism in patterns. Indeed, as we have already seen, he thought it vital to artistic continuity that there should be some sort of coherent symbol system which everyone would be able to understand and take part in, even though he did not care for modern attempts to revive the symbolism without any belief in the meaning behind it, as, for instance, in the work of Christopher Dresser. As we know, Morris's idea was to change the life of civilized man to a simpler and more

³¹Works I, 352. Note that the opening exclamation is the same as that which prefaces his remark about allegory in "Childe Roland".

natural one so that a new symbolism of the earth and its crops would grow up naturally again among a rejuvenescent race. It seems therefore, from this appreciation of symbol on the one hand and apparent rejection of it on the other, that some sort of confusion must have taken place to obscure Morris's meaning at some point, for the double attitude does not seem consistent with his usual forthrightness, and it is impossible to believe that Morris's whole heart was not in his wishes for the future of applied art.

I would suggest that what has happened is that a confusion of terminology in fact is hiding some basic distinction of literary and artistic modes here, a distinction which Morris was aware or half-aware of, but which the vague terminology in this area made difficult to define in so many words. A hint of this is given in what he writes about Rossetti's poetry:

An original and subtle beauty of execution expresses the deep mysticism of thought, which in some form and degree is not wanting certainly to any poets of the modern school, but which in Mr Rossetti's work is both great in degree and passionate in kind; nor in him has it any tendency to lose itself amid allegory or abstractions; indeed, instead of turning human life into symbols of things vague and not understood, it rather gives to the very symbols the personal life and variety of mankind. No poem in this book is without the circle of this realizing mysticism, which deals wonderingly with all real things that can have poetic life given them by passion, and refuses to have to do with any invisible things that in the wide scope of its imagination cannot be made perfectly distinct and poetically real.³²

³² May Morris I, 101-2.

Rossetti does not lose himself in allegory or abstractions, nor turn human life into symbols, but gives to the very symbols the personal life and variety of mankind. Allegory/abstraction is condemned; human life turned to symbols is condemned; but the symbols themselves are acknowledged to exist independently of human life, since they can thus be clothed in human dress. Again there is that suggestion of a certain Platonism, of a certain mysticism in Morris. The symbols are seen, as Yeats saw them when the master answered his questions "by showing me flowers and precious stones, of whose meaning I had no knowledge",³³ as real and existing, if incomprehensible to lowly man except in the rare gleams and flashes vouchsafed to the poet and the artist, that Morris sees Rossetti as having caught and placed before us in human dress so that we too can comprehend them a little.³⁴

A similar distinction to that between allegory and symbol above may also be made in the case of Morris's reading of The Voyage of Arthur Gordon Pym, for the difference

³³Essays and Introductions, p. 151.

³⁴In this context it is interesting to note that Morris's first criterion for good art is "the embodiment in art of some vision which has forced itself on the artist's brain", Works XVI, xix.

between Morris's reading of Poe's story and the Spectator reviewer's interpretation of Morris's story is that Morris does not at all suggest that Poe intended such a reading to be made. He uses it as a very telling illustration of Socialist dogma, but without attributing any such intention to Poe. Indeed, he must have been quite well aware that any such intention would have been impossible for Poe, and this at any rate exonerates him from gross misreading of his author's purpose such as the Spectator reviewer made.

In contrast to Morris, the reviewer claims to have found the key to the real meaning of The Wood Beyond the World, that Morris intended a veiled Socialist allegory, which Morris was in fact not intending. Had he used Morris's work in the same way as Morris used Poe's, and said here was an enjoyable tale from which it was also possible to learn a good lesson about Socialism and Capitalism, then Morris would probably not have objected. He certainly would not have been entitled to object, given his own cavalier treatment of Arthur Gordon Pym, even though he claimed to dislike "turning a favourite story into a moral lesson".

Again one is reminded of Phantastes, and of what George MacDonald and his son between them said of it, and of the distinction which MacDonald seems to make between allegory and symbolism:

Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women, to give it its full title, was a new adventure, and one into the highest realm of imaginative literature, that of symbolic presentation. That such mode of teaching is more instant in appeal and leaves more permanent impression than others of exact formulation, my father well understood. It was indeed the mode of his Master. Yet, because of common-place, didactic mishandling, symbol, allegory, parable are nowadays often resented as puerile or pedagogical. We may be sure the scribes and pharisees would, in the cant of to-day, say Christ's parables and poetic symbols were unliterary and suitable only for the ignorant. Yet the finest art consists in allusive presentation of truth in outward form of beauty. . . .

In a letter to Mrs. A. J. Scott, my father thus refers to the book which he is sending her husband:

I hope Mr. Scott will like my fairy-tale. I don't see what right the Athenaeum has to call it an allegory and judge or misjudge it accordingly -- as if nothing but an allegory could have two meanings!

Yet I do not quite see why my father should object to the definition; though, if we accept, say, the Pilgrim's Progress as the typical allegory, then should Phantastes be likened perhaps rather to the Faerie Queen. It is a story of chivalric romance; and if its hero never reaches the country he sets out to discover, he gets sufficient touch with it to believe thereafter more in ideal Truth than the passing beauty of a ponderable world. It is full of priceless gems, with barely a hint of preaching.³⁵

MacDonald does not identify here what it is besides allegory that can have two meanings, any more than he did in Adela Cathcart where he discussed the same point in much the same words but at far greater length. Nevertheless he is right, and his son wrong, in his objecting to the calling of his

³⁵ George MacDonald and His Wife, pp. 296-7.

romance an allegory, for Phantastes really has little more in common with the methods of Spenser than with the methods of Bunyan, any more than Morris's Wood Beyond the World did. There must therefore be some other terminology which can cope with this other mode of doubly significant writing.

In terms of writers at this period, the difference between Spenser and Bunyan on the one hand and MacDonald on the other is the difference between what Carlyle called "extrinsic" and "intrinsic" symbolism.³⁶ "Extrinsic" symbolism more or less corresponds to what Morris and MacDonald call allegory, the turning of "human life" into abstractions. This, as Morris saw it, was the method of Wordsworth with his primrose, and the method of Spenser, with his puppet figures and their emblems, like Una's lamb or St. George's red cross, based either upon the doings of state or religion, or upon abstract virtues and vices, of which Morris wrote that he had read right the way through the Faerie Queen without once becoming interested in the characters.³⁷ Archimago and Duessa and Talus and

³⁶ See Sartor Resartus, edited by J. A. S. Barret (London, 1910), pp. 262-3.

³⁷ Works XXII, xxxi. The lamb and the cross have of course a significance given them by Christian usage, but this is still an arbitrary and not an intrinsic significance. Carlyle says: "Nay, the highest ensign that men ever met and embraced under, the Cross itself, had no meaning save an accidental extrinsic one", Sartor Resartus, p. 263.

Orgoglio, for example, have no significance in themselves beyond what Spenser has chosen to give them. "Intrinsic" symbolism, however, is quite different. As Carlyle says:

Another matter it is, however, when your Symbol has intrinsic meaning, and is of itself fit that men should unite round it. Let but the Godlike manifest itself to Sense; let but Eternity look, more or less visibly, through the Time-Figure (Zeitbild)! Then is it fit that men unite there; and worship together before such Symbol; and so from day to day, and from age to age, super-add to it new divineness.

Of this latter sort are all true Works of Art: in them (if thou know a Work of Art from a Daub of Artifice) wilt thou discern Eternity looking through Time; the Godlike rendered visible.³⁸

This "intrinsic" symbolism corresponds to what Morris in his essay on Rossetti calls "realizing mysticism", in which the heavenly reality, which can only be partially glimpsed even by the most visionary of men, is brought down to earth

³⁸Sartor Resartus, p. 263. Yeats, however, disagreed with Carlyle's distinction between "symbol and symbol", and I suppose it might indeed be said that when man "creates" an "extrinsic" or arbitrary symbol, then, since man also is part of the "intrinsic" symbol system himself and can only realize what already exists in some sense or other, he is not really creating but only making explicit something which already exists. This is why I do not actually wish to identify "extrinsic" symbolism with allegory, and "intrinsic" symbolism with the modern usage of symbolism as understood by Yeats. See, for example, Essays and Introductions, pp. 49-50: "I cannot now think symbols less than the greatest of all powers whether they are used consciously by the masters of magic, or half unconsciously by their successors, the poet, the musician and the artist. At first I tried to distinguish between symbols and symbols, between what I called inherent symbols and arbitrary symbols, but

and clothed in earthly dress through the agency of the poet's artistry. This, Carlyle says, is the method of all true artists, and it is no wonder, therefore, if MacDonald and Morris were unwilling for their work to be described as allegory.

Let us clarify this by a look at some more objective testimony than that of the poets themselves. Allegory, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is "the description of a subject under the guise of some other subject of aptly suggestive resemblance", and I would suggest that it is also, as it is in Bunyan, Spenser, Langland, and other writers in this genre, an intentional description thereof. The same is also true of an emblem, which is an intentional allegorical representation, related to the allegory as the part to the whole, though it can also stand on its own, as in the Emblem Books of the

the distinction has come to mean little or nothing. Whether their power has arisen out of themselves, or whether it has an arbitrary origin, matters little, for they act, as I believe, because the Great Memory associates them with certain events and moods and persons. Whatever the passions of man have gathered about, becomes a symbol in the Great Memory, and in the hands of him who has the secret it is a worker of wonders, a caller-up of angels or of devils. The symbols are of all kinds, for everything in heaven or earth has its association, momentous or trivial, in the Great Memory, and one never knows what forgotten events may have plunged it, like the toadstool and the ragweed, into the great passions". And this idea that all happenings on earth contribute to the symbols in the Great Memory becomes strikingly similar to that boyish remark of Morris's that all life is allegorical, if we but understand Morris's early con-

seventeenth century or in representations in the visual arts where extended allegory may be impossible.³⁹ For example, a picture of "Father Time" with all his appendages would be an emblem, but a picture of "Father Time" menacing Venus and Cupid, while an inset shows a young and beautiful couple before their grand house with its stately avenue of ancient trees, is a full-blown allegory, the individual emblems, Time, Venus, Cupid, explaining what is to happen to the love and beauty of the couple and to their home, in future years.⁴⁰

In both cases, of emblem and allegory, the allegorical representation means only what the author or artist intends it to mean, and it cannot be re-interpreted in any other way according to the whim of the reader or viewer. when Bunyan, for instance, writes of Mr. Badman or Christian or the Slough of Despond or the burdens his pilgrims carry, he does not mean us to re-interpret these how we wish. He has one definite real subject in mind to which his

fusion between symbol and allegory, and substitute symbol where he says allegory.

³⁹An allegory may in fact be defined as a series of emblems in temporal relation one to another.

⁴⁰Obviously this is a method particularly suited to the visual arts, since the novelist can perfectly well tell this sort of story without the emblematic appendages -- which is why this type of allegory is rare except when used for moral or satirical purposes -- while the painter, unless in a series of anecdotal paintings such as The Rake's

fictional tale bears "an aptly suggestive resemblance".⁴¹

To say therefore, as Morris did in the Browning essay:

"Well, it may in some sort be an allegory, for in a certain sense everything is so, or almost everything that is done on this earth"; is pretty much a meaningless statement, since only the most extraordinary conception of God -- and one which Morris certainly never shared then or later -- could allow us to see him as a puppet manipulator on this sort of level. In any case, what could life be an allegory of, given the definition of allegory as "the description of a subject under the guise of some other subject of aptly suggestive resemblance?"

However, if we take it that Morris erred in using the term allegory, and we substitute symbol, then we are on much firmer ground theologically, and we also have a much more coherent artistic statement to work with, and one which clarifies all Morris's later comments on the subject. For while it is nonsense to explain human life as an allegory with a one to one correspondance with some other sequence of events on a heavenly plane, to see it as

Progress, cannot tell extended stories in any other way.

⁴¹Though Bunyan, one might add, does not "turn a favourite story into a moral lesson, as Wordsworth might be said to do, but a moral lesson into a favourite story. As Esther Meynell says in Cottage Tale (London, 1946), p. 55: "It [The Pilgrim's Progress] was recognized as a great moral

symbolic in the sense that what we do on earth is one of the myriad ways in which true reality is partly revealed to us, in which, if you like, the real Andrea is partially revealed to us, makes far more sense, especially in relation to the concept of reality, of "Ideal Truth" as Greville MacDonald calls it, which has already been discussed in Chapter 1 above. This is the sense in which the Chorus Mysticus at the end of Faust sings:

Alles Verg ngliche
Ist nur ein Gleichnis;
Das Unz ngliche,
Hier wird's Ereignis;
Das Unbeschreibliche,
Hier ist's getan. . . .⁴²

The most usual meaning of Gleichnis is parable, but Harraps Standard German and English Dictionary gives also:

work -- the fact that it was a very fine story was less stressed, though not less enjoyed by those who regarded fiction as definitely sinful".

⁴²J. W. von Goethe, Faust, hrsg. von R. Brill (K ln, 1949), p. 229, lines 12104-9. These lines are translated by Bayard Taylor, Faust (London, 1871), II, 392, as:

All things transitory
But as symbols are sent:
Earth's insufficiency
Here grows to Event:
The indescribable,
Here it is done. . . .

Thomas Carlyle in Sartor Resartus also uses the term symbol in this way: "In the Symbol proper, what we can call a Symbol, there is ever, more or less distinctly and directly, some embodiment and revelation of the Infinite . . . the Universe is but one vast Symbol of God; nay if thou wilt

"3. poet: (a) symbol (of a higher reality, a greater entity); (b) indirect image (of a higher reality)", and this seems to render Goethe's meaning best, and also to come close to what Morris meant in the phrase that we have been discussing.

This, however, is a rather specialized use of the term symbol, and does not explain how it is possible to talk about "the mystic symbols of the Holy Tree and the Holy Fire", as Morris does in his discussions of pattern design. What then is a symbol outside the context in which it is used in Faust? Allegory, as we have seen, is the figuring forth of one thing under the guise of something else, but the symbol, is rather less tractable to manipulation by the writer, and cannot be forced into this sort of use. We are on rather more shaky ground in defining the symbol, however, for the Oxford English Dictionary is not so helpful here as it was in the case of allegory. It defines image, in one of its meanings, as symbol, and symbol as "something that stands for, represents, or denotes something else (not by exact resemblance, but by vague suggestion, or by some accidental or conventional relation);⁴³ esp. a

have it, what is man himself but a Symbol of God; is not all that he does symbolical . . .", pp. 259-60.

⁴³The distinction here between "vague suggestion" and "some accidental or conventional relation" suggests

material object representing or taken to represent something immaterial or abstract, as a being, idea, quality, or condition; a representative or typical figure, a sign or token".

This definition comes perilously close to our definitions of emblem and allegory, for "Father Time", our example there, is in one sense "a material object representing or taken to represent something immaterial or abstract", and allegory, as we saw, is extended use of these tokens. Nevertheless the dictionary does make it clear that a symbol is much less definite and easily defined than an allegorical representation, which is quite clear-cut, and that therefore when we speak of symbolism we are not speaking of something that can be readily translated or interpreted into other terms, but something, in fact, which can only be partially understood even by the poet or artist who uses it. Moreover, the extended use of symbols in temporal relation does not form an allegory as the extended use of emblems does. Rossetti and George MacDonald, to leave Morris out of it for the moment, are both much given to the use of symbols: MacDonald's flying fish in The Golden Key, the key itself, his grandmother with her doves in the

Yeats's attempted distinction between inherent symbols and arbitrary symbols quoted above.

Princess stories, and all the paraphernalia of Phantastes and Lilith, are obviously symbolic; but their work as a whole cannot be "translated" into something else, as Bunyan's can, even though individual symbols can sometimes be partially clarified by translation.

Perhaps the best definition of symbolism for our purposes is that of Charles Chadwick in his little book Symbolism, not his first meaning of the term, but what he calls "transcendental symbolism":

There is a second aspect, sometimes described as 'transcendental symbolism', in which concrete images are used as symbols, not of particular thoughts and feelings within the poet, but of a vast and general ideal world of which the real world is merely an imperfect representation.⁴⁴

He goes on to explain that the object of this type of symbolism, this Platonism, is, as Mallarmé expressed it, to express in poetry "not any real flower but 'l'absente de tous bouquets', the essential flower which is not to be found among any of the flowers of the world below",⁴⁵ Morris's "real Andrea", in fact. This is the symbolism which

⁴⁴Symbolism, The Critical Idiom 16, (London, 1971), p. 3.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 4.

Yeats, and indeed, if we wish to stray out of our field, Mallarmé, tried consciously to achieve, and which Morris seems half-consciously to have achieved in the best of his prose work.

If then we understand that Morris was rejecting allegory, as defined above, but accepted the symbolic interpretation of art and literature, the puzzle over his apparently conflicting views in the comments we have been quoting becomes clear. He objected to the reading of The Wood Beyond the World as an allegory because, though it may contain symbolic elements, and surely the Maiden and the Lady with their magical powers cannot but recall similar figures of myth and folk-tale of those symbolic value in relation to nature and the cultivation of the soil⁴⁶ "holy Grimm"⁴⁷ tells us, it is not a systematic, planned allegory of nature or of anything else. As Arthur Symons tells us in relation to that reply to the Spectator, in his essay on Morris in Studies in Prose and Verse:

⁴⁶As we shall see in Part IV, much of Morris's prose contains references to nature and fertility and the minor deities of field and wood, just as his design-work does.

⁴⁷Works IV, xviii: Grimm's Household Tales, "'Holy Grimm' it was called". And Morris also included Teutonic Mythology in his list of great books, despite some doubt as to its validity as a creative work in the terms of the list: "Though this last book is of the nature of the 'tools' above-mentioned [which he had excluded because they were useful rather than art-works], it is so crammed with the material for imagination, and has in itself such a flavour

In their simple remoteness, their cunningly woven pattern, their open-heartedness, so absolute that it seems to be itself the concealment of a secret, they have commonly been taken to be not so much romances as allegories, and many fruitless attempts have been made to find out what meaning is hidden away under so much mere decoration. Morris has set this question finally at rest in a letter to the Spectator . . . Morris was a poet, never more truly a poet than when he wrote in prose; and it was because he was a poet that he resented the imputation of writing allegories. Allegory is the prose writer's substitute for symbol; and, in its distressing ingenuity, it resembles what it aims at as closely as the marionette resembles his less methodical brother, man. Without the indwelling symbol, art is no more than a beautiful body without breath; but this breath, this flame, this indestructible and fragile thing, need be no more visible in the work of art than the actual breath of our nostrils, which needs the frost before it shows us its essential heat. . . . He was not a thinker; the time-woven garment of the unseen was too satisfying to him that he should ever have cared to look behind it; but wisdom came to him out of his love of the earth, and a curious pathos, touching one like the sight of wet blossoms or a child's smile, from his apprehension of what is passing, and subject to the dishonour of age, in earthly beauty.⁴⁸

No other interpretation of Morris's attitude can succeed, when we are faced with the prose romances, and with Morris's belief in the need for symbolism in applied art as the only appropriate mode to enable all, even the least of the arts and the humblest of the artists, to draw

of imagination, that I feel bound to put it down", Works XXII, xvi.

⁴⁸"William Morris's Prose", Studies in Prose and Verse, pp. 91-2.

on the common stock of tradition and myth, and thus to produce work which has its due meaning and its due beauty, such as it used to have once and should have again, "when art has really awakened".⁴⁹ Nor is this awakening to apply only in the visual arts, but in poetry, too, and prose, art is to return to its primitive oral and spontaneous character; to regain its allusiveness, likewise drawing on the common stock of tradition, handed down by word of mouth, added to here, perhaps losing a little there, but bearing always with

⁴⁹Works XXII, 55: "But indeed there seems no chance of art becoming universal, unless on the terms that it shall have little self-consciousness, and for the most part be done with little effort; so that the rough work of the world would be as little hindered by it, as the work of external nature is by the beauty of all her forms and moods: this was the case in the times that I have been speaking of: of art which was made by conscious effort, the result of the individual striving towards perfect expression of their thoughts by men very specially gifted, there was perhaps no more than there is now, except in very wonderful and short periods; though I believe that even for such men the struggle to produce beauty was not so bitter as it now is. But if there were not more great thinkers than there are now, there was a countless multitude of happy workers whose work did express, and could not choose but express, some original thought, and was consequently both interesting and beautiful: now there is certainly no chance of the more individual art becoming common, and either wearying us by its over-abundance, or by noisy self-assertion preventing highly cultivated men taking their due part in the other work of the world; it is too difficult to do: it will be always but the blossom of all the half-conscious work below it, the fulfillment of the shortcomings of less complete minds: but it will waste much of its power, and have much less influence on men's minds, unless it be surrounded by abundance of that commoner work, in which all men once shared, and which, I say, will, when art has really awakened, be done so easily and constantly, that it will

it in its myths and symbols the hopes and fears and beliefs of the people; a people who are no longer divided by artificial distinctions of wealth and poverty, of the educated and the artists separated from those who merely labour for their daily bread. Then, in Morris's dream of the future, everyman will be his own poet and craftsman again: to "[f]ettle a copy of verses on occasion",⁵⁰ as readily as he might take off his coat to sow his own cornfield, or to fight an enemy, as the Icelanders seems to have done,⁵¹ or to carve those elaborate ornamental pipes which Morris takes so much delight in in News from Nowhere, where they serve as a symbol of the leisure to make beautiful objects and to give them away for nothing that the new life is to give.⁵²

stand in no man's way to hinder him from doing what he will, good or evil".

⁵⁰Unpublished Lectures, p. 169. Lemire supplies the missing letter in the manuscript before -ettle as s, but this does not make much sense. The word fettle, however, contains just such an implied metaphor within it, of making poetry compared with making horse-shoes (as in Gerard Manley Hopkin's line: "fettle for the great grey dray-horse his bright and battering sandal") for instance, that Morris would have liked; fettle meaning to trim, beat, etc. as of metal.

⁵¹Ibid., and also pp. 184-5.

⁵²Works XVI, 37. The whole sequence of the pipe and tobacco is a beautifully idealized picture of the non-commerce of the future.

PART IV
THE DREAM QUEST

CHAPTER 1

"DREAMER OF DREAMS"

From the emphasis that has been placed on Morris's theoretical work so far, it has come to seem almost as if he were primarily an aesthete like Ruskin and Pater, rather than, as he was, primarily a practising designer and a creative writer. In the case of the visual arts, certainly, Morris's theory has had a considerable influence on subsequent designers which perhaps may entitle it to rank historically with his creative work, but this is by no means the case with his literary theory. It is now time therefore to redress the balance, to go back to the beginnings of Morris's literary career, before any of these theories which we have been discussing were fully formulated, to see how Morris was actually handling the themes and motifs which were later to provide the basic symbolic structure for the prose romances; for, just as Morris's early review of Browning's Men and Women revealed his future literary critical pre-occupations in embryo, so his early poetry and prose reveal the themes and techniques which were to come to their fullest expression in the late prose romances. In this section of the thesis, therefore, we shall be looking at some of the themes with which Morris worked during his literary career, and the relationship between his handling

of them in the earlier and the later work. We shall also be looking at his changing concept of the rôle of the artist in modern society, as expressed in his poetry and prose, and how this bears on the form and subject-matter of the late prose romances.

Morris's literary work may be roughly divided into three periods: the periods of unconscious creativity, approximately 1856-69; of historicism, 1870-88; and of conscious artistry, 1889-96; which will be called here the early, middle, and late periods. These three divisions, besides indicating Morris's development as a conscious artist, also represent more-or-less well-defined divisions in manner and matter. Thus most of the early period work is in poetry,¹ much of the middle period in translation

¹Morris's poetry is usually simply divided into "early" and "mature", "early" basically including only The Defence of Guenevere, and everything else being classed as "mature". As we saw in Part III of this thesis, however, there is a similarity of intention between the oral ballad style of most of The Defence volume and the oral romance style of The Earthly Paradise which suggests that there is not the break between them that has sometimes been suggested. Moreover both are inspired chiefly by the literature of romance, whereas Sigurd is an epic of the northern Germanic tribes, and marks a turning-point in Morris's literary development. Both southern and northern strains meet in the late prose romances.

and adaptation,² and most of the late work in prose,³ and these three divisions carry with them certain themes and attitudes. In the early work, the poet is a "dreamer of dreams"⁴ in quest of love and immortality. In the middle period, Morris the thinker emerges from the poet-dreamer, and begins to ask practical questions about the world and about the active life of past and present, though as always with Morris these practical concerns with life and work are masked in archaic costume of some sort. In the late period, the dreamer and the thinker are reconciled in a new dream of an ideal future which Morris believed could actually be

²These dates are rather approximate. Morris's Icelandic studies began in the autumn of 1868, and his first published translation, "Gunnlaug Wormtongue" appeared in the Fortnightly Review in January 1869. Latterly some of the Earthly Paradise stories were affected by these studies, and, as we said above, they will be treated in Chapter 2. 1887 is the date of Morris's last major translation, The Odyssey, but some other translations, notably Three Old French Romances (1893-4) and Beowulf (1895) were done for the Kelmscott Press. The unfinished venture The Saga Library (1891-1905) is also outside this middle period, but will be treated within it.

³This is the period of the late prose romances. Morris had almost given up writing poetry by this time, and very little of it falls into this section.

⁴The Earthly Paradise, Works III, 1. Morris says of himself: "Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time, / Why should I strive to set the crooked straight", a statement that has encouraged critics to take him at his word and assume that all his work is devoid of serious intention.

realized in practice. Whether or not we see his dream as either realistic or desirable to-day is irrelevant to his purpose in expressing it, or to the real practical intention behind those late romances, which, as we have seen, the majority of critics have interpreted as mere escapist fantasies.

In its three divisions of unconscious creativity, historicism, and conscious artistry, Morris's literary career closely paralleled his development as a designer, and we can trace the same progression from early to late work in both. Just as the naturalism of the early design-work directly foreshadowed the work of his last years, before he passed through the middle period of historicism which was necessary for him to establish his new conscious naturalism, so Morris's literary work passed from a period of spontaneous art, through the period of the translations and Sigurd the Volsung⁵ to a final period of conscious creativity where both design-work and writing come together in the productions of the Kelmscott Press. In order to understand the late work in both the visual and the literary

⁵ It is a little unfair to treat Sigurd as an historicist work, but in so far as it and "The Lovers of Gudrun" and "The Fostering of Aslaug" from The Earthly Paradise were inspired by Icelandic literature, they do have historicist elements, and properly belong in Morris's middle period.

arts, therefore, it is first necessary to look at the sources of its subject-matter in the early work, for, as in his designs, while Morris altered and developed the subject-matter of his pattern-work, yet he never wholly departed from those first naïve symbols of the natural world, so in his prose romances the themes of love, immortality, and the dream recur as major motifs even though they have been adapted to bear a weight of thought and significance which they do not carry in the early work. Thus in order to trace this development from naïveté to consciousness in the most important of Morris's literary themes, each chapter in this section takes its starting-point from the early work and leads towards the late prose romances.

This chapter, which is concerned rather with a mood than with a theme, the attitude of Morris towards himself as poet and dreamer, deals primarily with the poetry and prose of Morris's early period, when his self-concept as the "dreamer of dreams born out of my due time" was at its height, and before he had learnt that there was something he could do "to set the crooked straight". This is the period when Morris was trying to learn to paint under the tuition of Rossetti (1856-8), the time of the decoration of the Oxford Union (1857), when he found his vocation as a pattern-designer, and the time of his early naïve pattern-work of the eighteen-sixties, before he went to Kelmscott Manor or visited Iceland (1871), and before he took over full

responsibility for the firm of Morris and Company (1875), all decisive factors in his maturing both as man and as artist. The next chapter, "The Love Quest", will take a wider sweep over the work of Morris's early and middle period, examining one of his major themes, and the third chapter will take the theme of the quest for immortality right up to the first of the late prose romances.

The work of Morris's early period, especially the early prose romances which were published in the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine (1856), is full of dreams and dream-worlds, and the line between life and death, dream and reality, is often very shaky, as it is in the last prose romances. Indeed, in five of the early tales the narrator is either apparently dead, or hundreds of years old, or else involved in a dream of hundreds of years ago,⁶ and

⁶In "The Story of the Unknown Church", the narrator has been dead for six hundred years, and wakes up to narrate the story, which includes a lengthy description of a dream in which his friend died, closely followed by the actual death of the friend. In "A Dream", the internal narrators are either dead or hundreds of years old, though this is made plausible by the dreamer waking at the end. In "Lindenberg Pool", the dreamer and the internal narrator and the dream which he narrates all become confused together. In "The Hollow Land", the narrator disappears from this world at the end still narrating, even though at the beginning of the story he seems to be relating it after it has taken place. In "Golden Wings", the narrator dies and carries on narrating after he is dead.

a similar atmosphere pervades many of the stories of The Earthly Paradise (1868-70), even when those stories are not specifically stated to be dreams. This dream atmosphere reaches its zenith for the early period in Love is Enough (1872), in which Pharamond's quest for his love is based on the dreams he has had of her, declines in the middle period when Morris was exploring the sagas and traditional oral poetry, and then returns to prominence again with the two great dream-visions of Morris's late period. A Dream of John Ball (1886-7)⁷ and News from Nowhere (1890), which will also be briefly discussed in this chapter. Since, however, most of the important tales of The Earthly Paradise will be treated at length in relation to the themes of love and immortality in the next two chapters, as will the other early poetry, we shall be concentrating here chiefly on the early prose romances, together with some of the framework poems of The Earthly Paradise.

⁷A Dream of John Ball strictly speaking falls into Morris's middle period, especially as part of its inspiration derives from Froissart's Chronicles, but as it is also the first of the prose romances it counts as a transitional work between the middle and late periods.

In the early prose romances, Morris laid the foundation for the dream-world of the late prose romances in three ways: firstly through his development of the technique of mingling realistic details and presentation with scenes and events which could have no existence outside his imagination to create an hallucinatory world-picture reminiscent of that in early Pre-Raphaelite paintings, such as

Millais's "Christ in the House of his Parents" (1850); secondly through his extensive use of dreams in his stories, and of dream-vision settings, as, for example, in "Lindenberg Pool", which both is a dream and also contains a further dream within the dream; and thirdly through his concept of the artist as dreamer and of art itself as a form of dreaming. These factors, together with various themes and settings which also have their origin in the early prose romances, and certain character-types like the beautiful but mysterious, even unearthly, women and the young warriors with their high ideals and mysterious destinies, form the basis of the late prose romances, but with this difference, that in between the two periods Morris had passed through a period of conscious study and self-analysis. Thus when he used these themes and characters again it was as a conscious symbolist, not an unconscious dreamer, who therefore no longer had any need to justify his fantastic world

by the semi-plausible dream-framework which he used in his earlier work.⁸ Though his later work may still be said to be "the embodiment of dreams",⁹ they are now the dreams of the active man who would urge others to activity, and no longer the dreams of the recluse, the "idle singer of an empty day",¹⁰ who only hoped, as he said in The Earthly Paradise, to be able to give his hearers a respite from life.

In the first of the early prose romances, "The Story of the Unknown Church", all the elements of the dream-world are clearly shown: the combination of realistic details with an imaginary situation, the symbolism of dreams, and the problems of the artist-dreamer in relation

⁸The exceptions to this rule are of course A Dream of John Ball and News from Nowhere, which are both dream-visions. The reason for this seems to be that, while the other prose romances are primarily addressed to a sophisticated audience which would understand the concept of fantasy and symbolism, these two tales were written as socialist propaganda and directed to a much less sophisticated audience, which would probably not have understood what Morris was telling them if they had been confused by being plunged directly into a world of fantasy. Moreover, Morris wished to stress the truth of these events of the past and the future, which again he could not have done by presenting them as fantasies.

⁹Letters, p. 17.

¹⁰See "L'Envoi", Works VI, 330-4.

to the external world; for it is the story of an artist and dreamer who lost his art because he could not face up to the reality of death. When the story opens, the narrator, Walter,¹¹ has been dead for six hundred years, and is now waking up to tell his story. He was a master-mason working on the carving of a great abbey church in the thirteenth century, who lost his ability to cope with life in the outside world after his sister and his best friend, her lover, died. Without completing his work, he retired to the cloister of the abbey, and spent the remainder of his life carving the tomb of Margaret¹² and Amyot in his spare moments. When the carving was finished, he died "underneath the last lily of the tomb",¹³ and the abbey itself and all record of it, save where, in "autumn-tide, if you knew the place, you would see the heaps made by the earth-

¹¹This is a name to watch for. Morris seems to have found certain names especially suitable for his type of story, and he uses them over and over again. This one recurs most notably as the name of the hero of The Wood Beyond the World (1894).

¹²The name Margaret is also one that recurs in Morris's work, most notably in "The Hollow Land", where it is the name of the enchanted damsel who redeems Florian, despite the fact that he is considered damned by his followers because he was baptized by the devil. This redemption suggests Margaret's redemption of Faust.

¹³Works I, 158.

covered ruins heaving the yellow corn into glorious waves",¹⁴ was destroyed. Now therefore, apparently in obedience to some compulsive desire to perpetuate the memory of the lovers in some way now that their monument, the tomb, has been destroyed, Walter has returned from death to relate it to us in a different artistic medium.

Walter's gradual recollection of the story is presented very realistically, as he begins to visualize the scene, at first dimly and then "clearer, clearer, oh! so bright and glorious",¹⁵ just as if he were waking up from a long sleep, as, in effect, he is. At first it is but colours and vague shapes from the six hundred years that come to his memory; then we focus to autumn, and to one particular autumn day: "I remember one [day] more particularly", he says, and again, "so that day, that I specially remember, in Autumn-tide".¹⁶ Then the memories flood in upon him: the picture of the abbey and its surroundings;¹⁷ a pageant of men-at-arms; the countryside, gold, and red,

¹⁴Works I, 149.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., 149 and 151.

¹⁷The description of the setting of the church amid its cornfields suggests Chartres and La Beauce, which Morris had visited in 1854 and 1855. See Mackail I, 50 and 74. On

and blue; and the reasons for the building of the new church, that the old Norman one had burned down. As he recounts the story, Walter corrects himself at various points as his returning memory shows him that he has made a mistake in his description: no, he says in one place, I was not quite correct in what I said there, but now I remember more clearly, and it was really thus:

I said that nothing grew on the trellises by the populars but crimson roses, but I was not quite right, for in many places the wild flowers had crept into the garden from without. . .18

and then he describes the flowers, enumerates them and their places in the garden, just as if he were actually seeing what he describes.

This intensely real presentation of someone remembering the past gives a curious effect, for of course Walter is not an old man re-telling half-forgotten events of his boyhood as he seems to be, but a man who has been dead for six hundred years. Thus the very realism of the context in which he tells his story emphasizes the dream-

the same journey, he also visited the cathedral of Amiens, and an article he wrote describing it was published in the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine in February 1856, the month after the publication of this story. It seems likely that the act of writing the article sparked off Morris's imagination, therefore, and inspired "The Story of the Unknown Church".

¹⁸Works I, 151.

like quality of the plot. Similar twists occur in the other early prose romances: "The Hollow Land", for instance, appears at the beginning to be the straightforward narrative of an old man who once met a beautiful girl in an unknown country and then lost her again, but the tale gradually becomes more and more fantastic as we learn that the Hollow Land is an earthly paradise outside the world, and Margaret, Florian's love, a sort of faery lady whose task is to redeem him and lead him to heaven. "A Dream", similarly, reads in the beginning like an old man's tale of long ago in his youth, until we realize that the events that Hugh is narrating took place centuries ago, and he himself witnessed them and is apparently still alive. Then the second narrator, Giles, lets fall that he also was a witness of part of the story, which took place when he was already a man, on the day after Hugh, the first narrator, died, and these events, too, took place "more than a hundred years ago".¹⁹ This sort of age range is natural enough, given that the story is "a dream", but what makes it unusual is that Morris introduces two young men to listen to the story who are quite unaware that they are in a mad dream-world, and who are therefore frightened when Hugh and Giles reveal

¹⁹Works I, 172.

their ages:

'And that was long ago, very long ago.' So he ceased; then Osric, one of the two younger man, who had been sitting in awe-struck silence all this time, said, with eyes that dared not meet Giles's, in a terrified half whisper, as though he meant not to speak, 'How long?' Giles turned round and looked him full in the face, till he dragged his eyes up to his own, then said, 'More than a hundred years ago.'²⁰

The realistic presentation of their fear at the fantasy they are involved in thus adds further to the hallucinatory effect on the reader.

The hallucinatory effect of the combination of realism and fantasy in these stories is emphasized still more by Morris's powers as a descriptive writer. As we saw in Walter's description of the garden in "The Story of the Unknown Church" when he hesitates and corrects himself as if he were really seeing what he describes, Morris has a very solid conception of the things that he puts into his stories, for all that he claimed that he had not got "the painter's memory".²¹ He seems to be selecting details from a whole landscape that he knows well, rather than simply inventing a certain limited number of details specifically

²⁰Works I, 172.

²¹Letters, pp. 59-60.

for the purpose of the story. As Mackail wrote of Morris's visualization of the mediaeval world of his early poetry:

For to Morris the Middle Ages, out of which he sometimes seemed to have strayed by some accident into the nineteenth century, were his habitual environment: he lived in them as really and as simply as if he had been translated back to them in actual vision. The Little Tower and the Haystack in the Floods are as clearly before his eyes as if the riding of the knights had gone by but a day before: the talk of Sir Peter Harpdon and his man seems transcribed from memory. It is this amazing power of realization, when he is dealing with his own period, that gives to the masterpiece of his later years, 'The Dream of John Ball', so vivid a colour and truth. . . .²²

Thus when Walter tells us about the abbey church and its surroundings, he is able to tell us what lies to the north and what to the south, what to the east and what to the west of it, just as if the place had a solid three-dimensional existence in reality, and not just in Morris's imagination. The same solidity operates also, for instance, in "The Hollow Land", where the "debateable land" is so real that when their well-known pass to their mountain stronghold mysteriously disappears, we are able to feel with Arnald and his men what some witchcraft has taken place.²³ Had the

²²Mackail I, 136-7.

²³See Works I, 267-75. As the men move, fighting, gradually backwards towards the pass, until they are so near that they can see the rabbits playing, suddenly instead of the castle of the Lilies in the gap Florian sees "a great hollow land, the rocks going down on this side in precipices", so that the terrified men are forced to give in to the

setting simply been the usual nebulous faery land, we could never have shared the men's horror and fear at the change as we do.

This technique of three-dimensionality in natural description was expanded in the late prose romances, so that C. S. Lewis says of them: "other stories have only scenery; his have geography",²⁴ and again: "no mountains in literature are as far away as distant mountains in Morris".²⁵ The heroes and heroines in the world of the late prose romances are never allowed to wander about in a vague faery land, or to be mysteriously wafted from place to place as in fairy-tales: Ralph and Ursula tramp along every mile of the road to the well at the world's end, except occasionally when they have the loan of a horse to ease their journey; Birdalone in The Water of the Wondrous Isles walks or rides or swims miles in the course of the book, and is often really physically exhausted, even though she is allowed a little more supernatural help than Morris allowed to any of his other heroines.²⁶ They climb mountains or cross great

enemy. Florian himself mysteriously falls into the hollow without being killed, and then the scene presumably returns to normal.

²⁴ Rehabilitations, p. 40.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ For instance, when Birdalone attempts to return to

waters or pass through dark forests in the same solid physical way that the protagonists in "realistic" novels do, even though the mountains are those of the edge of the world, and the lakes contain magic islands, and the forests are inhabited by wood-women and witches.

However, the concrete detail that goes to make up this "geography", this three-dimensional solidity of objects and scenes in Morris's world, though it resembles the detail which, as we saw in Part III, Morris admired in the Icelandic sagas, is not realistic in the same way as the sagas. For one thing, though Morris's men and women have a solid physical existence they are not differentiated either physically or in any other way by the homely details that characterize the sagas. Both their appearance and their characters tend to be typical rather than individual. Thus just as the same names and types of names²⁷ recur from story to story, so the same types of man and maiden recur

the scene of her childhood by swimming across the lake, she exhausts herself physically to such an extent that she would have drowned had she not remembered that she could call on Habundia, the wood-woman, for assistance. Habundia cannot waft Birdalone to safety herself, but sends a floating log from her forest so that Birdalone can lean on it and rest. See Works XX, 310-15.

²⁷ Even when the same actual names do not recur, there is always a sort of family similarity between the names of Morris's characters. They divide into two groups: Northern names like Svend, Hallblithe, Hall-Sun, Gertha; and, more typically, aristocratic names, mostly Norman French in origin,

throughout Morris's work, from the early prose romances, through the poetry, to the late prose romances: Florian in "The Hollow Land" is not markedly different in type from Ralph or Walter or Hugh in the later tales; Gertha in "Gertha's Lovers", "grand and queenlike also; such a woman as might inspire a whole people to any deed of wise daring for her love",²⁸ is not markedly different from Birdalone or Ursula or the Hostage; and Margaret in "The Hollow Land" only differs from these other women in being half-faery, like the Maiden in The Wood Beyond the World or Hall-Sun in The House of the Wolfings.²⁹ Similarly in the natural descriptions, the details act not so much as differentiating marks between one mountain and another, one forest and another, but as "hieroglyphs" of the natural world, as May Morris called the recurring symbols in Morris's pattern designs. Only certain flowers, certain trees, certain birds find a place in his descriptions, and only a certain

like Hugh, Ralph, Giles, Guy. In some cases Morris does not bother to name his characters at all, but gives them generic names: the Bride, the Maiden, the Lady, the Hostage.

²⁸See Works I, 176.

²⁹Only the fully faery women of the late prose romances do not derive from the early prose tales. Habundia and the Lady of Abundance, for instance, come straight from descriptions of wood-goddesses that Morris found in Grimm's Teutonic Mythology, but they still look and behave much in the same way as the more earthly women. Habundia even resembles Birdalone facially in one of her manifestations.

limited number of adjectives are used to describes those flowers and trees and birds. As C. S. Lewis said of Morris's descriptive technique:

Long ago, Mr. Alfred Noyes noticed the self-imposed limitation under which Morris describes nature whether in prose or verse -- the birds that are merely 'brown', the sea that is never anything more remarkable than 'blue' or 'green'. Morris, in fact, obeys the doctrine of generality; he does not number the streaks on the tulip but 'exhibits in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features as recall the original to every mind.' That such 'just representations of general nature' can, as Johnson claims, 'please many and please long', his own writing, and that of Morris, will equally prove. . . . There are a dozen differences between them [Morris and Johnson], but there are two important similarities; both are content with recording obvious facts in very simple language, and both succeed so that we really taste the mountain air. It is, indeed, this matter-of-factness, as Clutton-Brock pointed out, which lends to Morris's stories their sober air of conviction. Other stories have only scenery; his have geography. He is not concerned with 'painting' landscapes; he tells you the lie of the land, and then you paint the landscapes for yourself. To a reader long fed on the almost botanical and entomological niceties of much modern fiction -- where, indeed, we mostly skip if the characters go through a jungle -- the effect is at first very pale and cold, but also very fresh and spacious. We begin to relish what my friend called the 'Northerness'. No mountains in literature are as far away as distant mountains in Morris. The world of his imagining is as windy, as tangible, as resonant and three-dimensional, as that of Scott or Homer.³⁰

³⁰ Rehabilitations, pp. 39-40. Later on, p. 42, Lewis talks of the influence of the saga-style on Morris's work: "The world of the sagas, at once homely and heroic, is in some ways more congenial to him than that of the romances, just as their hard-bitten style with its almost excessive use of litotes is of all influences on his language the most fruitful". For the comments of Alfred Noyes, see

This limitation of vocabulary gives Morris's descriptive passages, despite their solidity, an heraldic rather than a realistic quality. Look, for instance, at the description of the surroundings of the abbey in "The Story of the Unknown Church":

The abbey where we built the church was not girt by stone walls, but by a circle of poplar trees, and whenever a wind passed over them, were it ever so little a breath, it set them all a-ripple; and when the wind was high, they bowed and swayed very low, and the wind, as it lifted the leaves, and showed their silvery white sides, or as again in the lulls of it, it let them drop, kept on changing the trees from green to white, and white to green; moreover, through the boughs and trunks of the poplars, we caught glimpses of the great golden corn sea, waving, waving, waving for leagues and leagues; and among the corn grew burning scarlet poppies, and blue corn-flowers; and the corn-flowers were so blue, that they gleamed, and seemed to burn with a steady light, as they grew beside the poppies among the gold of the wheat. Through the corn sea ran a blue river, and always green meadows and lines of poplars followed its windings.³¹

Nothing in life has such intense colour, green and white and golden, burning scarlet and blue, the jewelled colours of

his William Morris, pp. 44-7, especially the part about conventionalization.

³¹Works I, 150. Morris has called attention only to the outstanding colour features of wheatfields, ignoring the dozen other flowers that habitually grow there, and the poplars, too, are only described by the most basic colours, ignoring their delicate gradations. It would make a crude painting, but is just right as the basis of a pattern design.

a stained glass window;³² nothing has such intense movement, swaying, bowing, waving, lifting, changing, in a restless continual motion which is in itself, like Spenser's mutabilitie, a sort of permanence. And the movement and colour resemble nothing so much as the rich colours and springing growth of the plants in Morris's own pattern designs, the controlled profusion of which use a similarly limited visual vocabulary in a way that is suggestive of a whole range of natural objects which are not actually depicted there.

This tendency towards "hieroglyphs" is even more marked when it comes to the dream sequences in the early prose romances. For instance, in Walter's dream of Amyot's death in "The Story of the Unknown Church", he describes a similar river to the actual one that wound about the abbey, except that there are no trees along its banks:

. . . I was quite alone, standing by the side of a river, and there was the sound of singing a very long way off, but no living thing of any kind could be seen, and the land was quite flat, quite without hills, and quite without trees too, and the river wound very much, making all kinds of quaint curves, and on the side where I stood there grew nothing but long grass, but on the other side grew, quite on to

³²It might be noted that on their visit to Amiens and Chartres Morris and Burne-Jones "took a volume of Keats with us, and no other book", Mackail I, 74, and by the end of the journey they must have known the poems very well indeed. Thus the similarity of the colouring of this story to the famous lines about the stained glass window of Madeleine's bedroom in "The Eve of Saint Agnes" should come as no surprise to the reader.

the horizon, a great sea of red corn-poppies, only paths of white lilies wound all among them, with here and there a great golden sun-flower. So I looked down at the river by my feet, and saw how blue it was, and how, as the stream went swiftly by, it swayed to and fro the long green weeds, and I stood and looked at the river for long. . . .³³

There are the same colours, gold and red and blue and green and white, and the same movement, except that it is in the weeds of the river instead of in the trees, but the introduction of the lilies and the sun-flowers, presumably signifying the souls of great heroes standing out among the less illustrious dead, among the poppies tell us that this is the country of death. The symbolism of the river, reminiscent of that in The Pilgrim's Progress or the Middle English poem Pearl,³⁴ the water of which vanishes as Walter tries to touch it, is also self-evident. But the most striking difference between the two descriptions of the river and its banks, and the one which best indicates the deathly connotations of the second river, is the negativity of the second description: Walter is "quite alone", and "no living thing of any kind could be seen"; the land is

³³Works I, 153.

³⁴The heroine of Pearl has the same name as the heroine of this story, Margaret, which means Pearl. In Morris's story, as in Pearl and The Pilgrim's Progress, the river is the boundary between the land of the living and the land of the dead.

"quite without hills, and quite without trees", and "there grew nothing but long grass". In the first description there are no people either, but this is simply not mentioned; nor, presumably, are there any hills; and Morris describes what did grow on the banks, not what did not.

The use of simple flower symbolism of the sort in Walter's dream is frequent in Morris when he wishes to conjure up a dream atmosphere, as also is the use of negative description. For instance, in "A Dream", lilies and roses and yew-trees are used to set the tone of the story,³⁵ and lilies continue to punctuate it at regular intervals, culminating in the meeting between Ella as queen and Lawrence as victorious knight when she crowns him, saying: "and see this wreath of lilies and roses for thy head; lilies

³⁵ See Works I, 163: ". . . so they knelt down and prayed, hand fast locked in hand meantime; and afterwards they sat in that chamber facing the east, hard by the garden of lilies; and the sun fell from his noontide light gradually, lengthening the shadows, and when he sank below the sky-line all the sky was faint, tender, crimson on a ground of blue; the crimson faded too, and the moon began to rise, but when her golden rim first showed over the wooded hills, Lawrence arose; they kissed one long trembling kiss, and then he went and armed himself; and their lips did not meet again after that, for such a long, long time, so many weary years; for he had said: 'Ella, watch me from the porch, but touch me not again at this time; only, when the moon shows level with the lily-heads, go into the porch and watch me from thence.'

"And he was gone; -- you might have heard her heart beating while the moon very slowly rose, till it shone through the rose-covered trellises, level with the lily-

no whiter than thy pure heart, roses no tenderer than thy true love",³⁶ and we know that their sufferings are almost at an end. In "Lindenberg Pool", dead trees, dead rushes, and mud serve a similar, if less romantic, purpose throughout the story, and these are combined with negative description as in "The Story of the Unknown Church" to create a sinister dream-world:

Fierce as the wind was, it could not raise the leaden waters of that fearful pool, defended as they were by the steep banks of dripping yellow clay, striped horribly here and there with ghastly uncertain green and blue. They said no man could fathom it; and yet all round the edges of it grew a rank crop of dreary reeds and segs, some round, some flat, but none ever flowering as other things flowered, never dying and being renewed, but always the same stiff array of unbroken reeds and segs, some round, some flat. Hard by me were two trees leafless and ugly, made, it seemed, only for the wind to go through with a wild sough on such nights as these; and for a mile from that place were no other trees.³⁷

Once again we have not, no, none, never . . . and further on Morris compounds the effect by describing what the stars would have looked like had they been out, and what sort of

heads; then she went to the porch and stood there.

"And she saw him walking down toward the gateway-tower, clad in his mail-coat, with a bright, crestless helmet on his head, and his trenchant sword newly grinded, girt to his side; & she watched him going between the yew-tress, which began to throw shadows from the shining of the harvest moon".

³⁶Works I, 173. Compare the use of flowers in The Wood Beyond the World, where the Maiden shows her magical power by revivifying the dead garlands she wears.

³⁷Works I, 245-6. The scene is reminiscent of the

flowers would have grown there had any flowers been able to grow in such a ghastly place.

Another factor that contributes to the dream-like atmosphere of much of Morris's early work is the elaborate structure of many of his stories. As we have already mentioned, in a number of cases in the early prose romances the narrators are either already dead or die at the end of the story, and this in itself of course makes a fantasy atmosphere. In other cases, particularly in the third person narratives "Svend and his Brethren" and "Gertha's Lovers", this atmosphere is simply provided by the mediaeval setting, which triggers off our expectations in such a way that we expect fantastic events to follow. In three of the romances, however, Morris triggers off our expectations by providing an elaborate dream-framework to indicate to the reader that he is in a world of fantasy, though he may combine this framework with either or both of the other elements as well. Thus in "A Dream" we have the outer framework of a dreamer who wakes up at the end of the story; within this, two narrators, the younger of whom recounts events which he witnessed "more than a hundred years ago",

dry tree and the poisonous water to which Ralph and Ursula first come in *The Well at the World's End*, before they find the true well, the water of which enables the dry tree to sprout again, and restores fertility and peace to the world.

and the elder events which presumably happened hundreds of years before that; and two listeners, who are also the witnesses of the last appearance and deaths of Lawrence and Ella. Inside this double framework is the story of Lawrence and Ella itself, rather in the same way that the play of Pharamond and Azalais is held within its double framework in Love Is Enough, where the rustic couple, Giles and Joan, have come to watch the wedding of the Emperor and Empress, who are themselves watching the play of Pharamond the Freed.³⁸ Similarly in "Frank's Sealed Letter", which is a modern story and therefore does not initially suggest fantasy to us at all, three levels of consciousness are provided by the letter of the dead Frank, the real events in which Hugh has taken part, and the dream which the combination of that letter and those events induces in Hugh.

Besides indicating to the reader that he is in a world of fantasy, however, this dream-framework also serves the function of making the fantastic seem plausible, of rationalizing it, because everyone knows that dreams contain

³⁸This play, including its structure, will be discussed at length in the next chapter, so that I shall not examine it further here.

fantastic events. Thus even the most "realistic" novelist can introduce fantasy into his work by setting it up as a dream. At the period of the early prose romances, Morris does not seem to have been particularly interested in this process of rationalization, though "A Dream" and "Frank's Sealed Letter" are plausible as "The Story of the Unknown Church" is not. In most of the late prose romances, also, there is little attempt at making the events seem "realistic", but in two of the late prose romances, A Dream of John Ball and News from Nowhere, Morris does go to the trouble to set up a dream-framework. This seems to have been caused by the fact that these two tales were written as socialist propaganda, and published in newspapers which were intended primarily to be read by a working-class, and therefore by definition at that period poorly educated, audience. Morris seems to have thought that they would not have been capable of understanding his tales had he simply plunged straight into a past or future setting, and therefore instead of providing a dream-framework to indicate that what follows was fantasy, he reversed the process by using the dream to give plausibility to the fantasy, and to set up these two tales as, to some extent, "realistic" novels. The realism was no doubt increased, for such an audience, by the fact that the dreamer in both the stories was Morris himself, a real person whose existence was an objective fact.

In the third of the early prose romances which uses a dream-framework, "Lindenberg Pool", the dreamer is also Morris, though this time with the difference that it is not the dreaming of sleep, as in A Dream of John Ball and News from Nowhere, but the dream of half-conscious artistic creativity. At the beginning of the story, Morris describes himself reading one of his favourite books, Thorpe's Northern Mythology, which inspired him so forcefully that he found himself compelled to start writing there in the middle of the night, "whether I would or no".³⁹ The story that follows is a sort of black comedy, in which Morris's protagonist, a nineteenth century murderer,⁴⁰ goes out to attempt to fathom a sinister "unfathomable" pool, and ends up dreaming that he is a thirteenth century priest who finds himself forced to give extreme unction to a pig disguised as a dying man.⁴¹ Morris starts off calling his dreamer the

³⁹Works I, 245. It might be added that a fair amount of the inspiration for this story may also be attributed to Edgar Allan Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher", which shares the idea of the disappearance of a house of madness and evil beneath a great unfathomable lake.

⁴⁰It is not quite clear in fact that the nineteenth century man is a murderer, for it is in the character of the priest that he says of the baron whom he thinks he is going to perform the last rites for: "Now don't you think it strange that his face should be the same, actually the same as the face of my enemy, slain that very day ten years ago?", Works I, 248.

⁴¹This suggests a sort of inverted version of the

"wanderer", but then abruptly changes to the first person with no transition or explanation, and simply enters his own story. This of course is another technique of realism, for we often do enter our dreams in this way, and the realism is re-inforced by the half-conscious awareness of the dreamer that he is dreaming; at one point he says: "I watched him in my proper nineteenth-century character, with insatiable curiosity and intense amusement; but as a quiet priest of a long-past age, with contempt and disgust enough, not unmixed with fear and anxiety",⁴² and later, hearing music around him in the baron's castle, the priest says: "many of the tunes I had heard before (in the nineteenth century)".⁴³ Finally, at the end of the story the priest-I rushes out of the castle, and abruptly changes back into the dreamer-I without apparently waking up. Morris, as distinct from the dreamer-I, does not re-appear at the end.

Wakefield Second Shepherd's Play. The pig, like the sheep, is wrapped in a sort of swaddling clothes to conceal its identity, but the pig, of course, is an emblem of the devil instead of an emblem of Christ.

⁴²Works I, 247.

⁴³Works I, 251.

The only more complicated structure in any of Morris's stories in prose or verse comes in one of the Earthly Paradise tales, "The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon", in which Gregory, the narrator, one of the seekers for the earthly paradise, recounts a series of three dreams which he has had, all on the same subject of a young man who wins, loses, and re-gains the love of an enchanted damsel.⁴⁴ In the first dream, Gregory dreams that a man very like himself, but dressed as a king, is telling the story of John and the enchanted damsel to King Magnus. In the second dream, Gregory himself is telling the tale, and in the third dream there is no tale, but Gregory has become John and is living the events which he formerly told. Mackail quotes a half-comic review of this story, which concerns the dream-structure:

'Mr. Morris', said a brilliant critic of this very story, 'dreams of certain old mariners of Norway who dream of Gregory, who dreams of someone else, whom he also dreams to be himself: and this two-faced Janus of a dreamer dreams of another dreamer still, who lives on the edge of two worlds, and

⁴⁴As this story will be discussed at length in the third chapter of this section, I shall not actually discuss more than the basic dream-structure at this point. The story appears in Works V.

like the old monk who sat before the Cenacolo, can hardly discriminate between the shadow and the substance.⁴⁵

The reviewer is not quite correct in his analysis of the dream within a dream within a dream -- there are not really quite so many dreams involved -- but he gives a fair impression of the sort of effect that Morris's dream-frameworks have on the reader.

This sort of confusion of the dreamer with his dream is important for understanding Morris's attitude towards literary composition, for it is obvious from the comments which he made at various times about his own work, for instance the remark already quoted that "my work is the embodiment of dreams in some form or another", and from his characterization of himself in the prefatory poem to The Earthly Paradise as a "dreamer of dreams", that Morris regarded artistic creativity as a form of dreaming. This attitude is best shown in the first of the early prose romances, "The Story of the Unknown Church", which has al-

⁴⁵ Mackail I, 213. Mackail continues with his own comments on the story: "This description is admirably exact; and the attitude of mind so described is the essence of that romantic mysticism from which Morris was recalled by the great imperious voice of the Icelandic epic, yet to which he kept perpetually reverting. It reappears in unqualified dominance in the prose romances of his latest years". The importance of the theme of "The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon" for the late prose romances will be discussed in chapters two and three of this section.

ready done much good service as a starting-point for talking about Morris's early work. In that story, Walter describes how he was carving a bas-relief of the Last Judgment in the central porch of the west front of the abbey church. Only one last figure remained to be completed, "Abraham, sitting with a blossoming tree on each side of him, holding in his two hands the corners of his great robe, so that it made a mighty fold, wherein, with their hands crossed over their breasts, were the souls of the faithful, of whom he was called Father".⁴⁶ As Walter stands on the scaffolding, chisel in hand, he begins to imagine Abraham, not as he is to carve him but as a mediaeval knight in full armour, "when he chased those kings so far",⁴⁷ and this leads him into the dream of the river of death which has already been partially described above. In this dream, Walter first sees his friend Amyot on the banks of the river, and then the scene changes to a vision of the last battle in which Amyot, as it later becomes clear, has received his death-wound. Finally he dreams himself walking with Amyot in a beautiful garden, an earthly paradise, and then, he scarcely knows how, he

⁴⁶Works I, 152.

⁴⁷Works I, 153.

finds himself carving away furiously, the dream and the pain at the loss of Amyot transmuted into artistic creation. But when Amyot really does return and die, and Margaret dies too, then Walter loses his grip on reality altogether, and the "bitter, bitter dreams" and the "bitterer reality"⁴⁸ become confused in his mind, so that "I was not as one on earth now, but seemed quite away out of the world".⁴⁹ All he can do is to carve and carve away at the tomb of the lovers:

I was a long time carving it; I did not think I should be so long at first, and I said, 'I shall die when I have finished carving it,' thinking that that would be a very short time. But so it happened after I had carved those two whom I loved, lying with clasped hands like husband and wife above their tomb, that I could not yet leave carving it; and so that I might be near them I became a monk and used to sit in the choir and sing, thinking of the time when we should all be together again. And as I had time I used to go to the westernmost arch of the nave and work at the tomb that was there under the great, sweeping arch; and in process of time I raised a marble canopy that reached quite up to the top of the arch, and I painted it too as fair as I could, and carved it all about with many flowers and histories, and in them I carved the faces of those I had known on earth (for I was not as one on earth now, but seemed quite away out of the world).⁵⁰

⁴⁸Works I, 157.

⁴⁹Works I, 158.

⁵⁰Ibid.

So long as Walter can dream, even if the dreams are bitter at times, he can create and be happy, but once the objects of his dreams are dead then he is locked into the production of art-as-contemplation of death, and life itself becomes a dream to him. The tomb of Amyot and Margaret may be his masterpiece, but it is a destructive masterpiece, for he can do nothing else but stay by it until he dies, and the monks who come to weep by the tomb are weeping not for the lovers but for Walter himself.⁵¹

There is obviously some similarity between the dream that brings inspiration to Amyot, and the inspiration that came to Morris himself after his midnight reading of Thorpe's Northern Mythology. Both experiences produced a sudden unplanned burst of creative activity. Morris, however, in his later work was rarely unconscious in this way, and indeed tended to insist that craftsmanship was more important than the impulse of inspiration for good work. Nevertheless, he did retain the idea of poetry as dream. For instance, in the passage about himself as "dreamer of dreams" in The Earthly Paradise he speaks of his poem as a dream:

⁵¹It is possible to read this story as a myth of integration. Walter is closely related to two people without whom he cannot properly survive. One of these is his sister Margaret, also an artist, and the other Amyot, a man of action. The union between art and the active life produces the integrated personality, but Walter is not active, and therefore must seek vicarious fulfilment of this part of

Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time,
 Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?
 Let it suffice me that my murmuring rhyme
 Beats with light wing against the ivory gate,
 Telling a tale not too importunate
 To those who in the sleepy region stay,
 Lulled by the singer of an empty day.⁵²

The ivory gate is of course the passage through which good dreams leave the underworld to come to the world of men, and presumably The Earthly Paradise is therefore to be interpreted as a pleasant dream, and the poet as a perveyor of dreams. Even in this very stanza, however, a hint of the future is evident. Morris protests too much when he says "Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?", and it is scarcely a surprise when, at the end of The Earthly Paradise, he shows his mariners weaned from their empty dreams and intent, as far as they can be in their old age, on "the pulse that mid the struggle dwells".⁵³ He himself, shortly thereafter, was to turn away from dreams towards the active desire to shape the future of his country, "to set

his involvement in the activities of Amyot. When Amyot dies, however, Margaret, representing Walter's creative aspect, must die too, and the result is Walter's collapse. Morris, who to begin with was very much against the idea of public life, eventually came to recognize, as Tennyson does in "The Palace of Art", that any attempt which the artist makes to shut himself away in a private paradise is bound to lead not only to failure but to the death of the artist's own creative powers.

⁵²Works III, 1.

⁵³Works VI, 327. This progression from dream to

the crooked straight", and his work after The Earthly Paradise and Love Is Enough, even if it is sometimes couched in the form of a dream, is nevertheless a product of this desire.

reality will be discussed further in relation to the idea of the earthly paradise in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 2
THE LOVE QUEST

Now that we have established the main structural and stylistic pattern of Morris's early work, it is time to pass on to some of the major themes with which he was concerned both in that early work and also in the late prose romances. The first and most important of these is the theme of love and the search for the beloved, and the chapter is called the love quest because very often that search is a long and arduous one, involving the seeker in adventures similar to those in mediaeval "quest" romances. Indeed, the keynote of the love theme in Morris's work is its mediaeval appearance, as evidenced both in his extensive use of Arthurian material and other stories from mediaeval sources such as The Mabinogion¹ or Gesta Romanorum,² and his

¹The story of Maxen Wledig in The Mabinogion is the source for the play within the play of Love is Enough.

²"The Man Born to be King", "The Proud King", and "The Writing of the Image", all from The Earthly Paradise, derive from Gesta Romanorum.

mediaevalizing of classical legends.³ All Morris's paintings of which we have any record are on the theme of love, mostly in a mediaeval setting,⁴ though only one survives, the portrait of Jane Burden, his wife-to-be, as Queen Guenevere (1858).⁵ Many of the poems similarly share this pre-

³As Mackail explains, I, 185-6; this mediaevalizing was conscious and deliberate: "It is, for instance, one of the commonest criticisms made on the Greek stories in 'The Earthly Paradise', that the atmosphere and treatment are not Greek but mediaeval; that the feelings, incidents, and decoration are neither those of classical poetry, nor yet of the stories of ancient Greece as interpreted and modernized by the taste of the present day. This is precisely true, and precisely what Morris meant. Ancient Greek poetry he admired for its own qualities, and appreciated more than is generally known -- a criticism which he once made on Pindar showed insight much greater than that of the average classical scholar -- but its way was not his way; and still less his way was the sort of modernization, beautiful and touching as that is, which other poets of his age have applied to the Greek legends -- the method of Tennyson in 'Oenone' or 'Tiresias', the method of Matthew Arnold in 'Empedocles', the method of Mr. Swinburne in 'Atalanta in Calydon'. To Morris the mediaeval method -- using the term to cover the whole period of four or five centuries from the age of the chansons de geste and the Icelandic epic to the close of the Middle Ages in Chaucer -- was beyond all question or comparison the best; was so much the best that it was practically the only one".

⁴Mackail lists: 1. an untitled subject from the Morte d'Arthur, "the recognition of Tristram by the dog in King Mark's palace" (1857), I, 118; 2. "The Soldan's Daughter in the Palace of Glass" (1857), I, 118; 3. Morris's Oxford Union painting, "How Sir Palomydes loved La Belle Iseult with exceeding great love out of measure, and how she loved him not again but rather Sir Tristram" (1857), I, 123; and 4. an unnamed painting which is probably to be identified with "Queen Guenevere" (1858), I, 140.

⁵"Queen Guenevere" is now in the Tate Gallery, London.

occupation, from the title poem of The Defence of Guenevere (1858), through the fragmentary Arthurian and Trojan cycles of 1859-64, The Life and Death of Jason (1867), and much of The Earthly Paradise (1868-70), to Love is Enough, or, the Freeing of Pharamond (1872).⁶ Sigurd the Volsung, and the Fall of the Niblungs (1876) and The Pilgrims of Hope (1885-6) from the middle period also share the same theme to some extent, though the latter has a modern setting.

The theme of the love quest breaks down into a number of divisions. First, there is the idea of the unsuccessful lover which was always to obsess Morris. His Oxford Union painting, "How Sir Palomydes loved La Belle Iseult with exceeding great love out of measure, and how she loved him not again but rather Sir Tristram", is an outstanding example of this. Mackail says of it: "The subject was one for which he felt a singular and morbid attraction, that of the unsuccessful man and despised lover. The motive was the same which he had treated in prose a year before in the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine with many details which

⁶Love is Enough overlaps into Morris's middle period, but is in effect the swan song of the "love quest" motif of the early period, and the most intense statement of that motif. When the "love quest" theme reappears in the late prose romances it has very different implications.

were directly taken from his own life".⁷ Indeed, it almost seems as if Morris were willing the situation to come true in his own life by casting himself so early in the rôle of unsuccessful lover. Next, there is the theme of a love which is initially successful but is later lost in some way, often through an error of one of the partners, who may or may not be reunited subsequently after a period of atonement. "The Man Who Never Laughed Again" in The Earthly Paradise is a typical example of this theme, which is probably the most important in Morris's early work, but which becomes less so later on, when, if the lovers are separated at all, they are always re-united eventually. The third type of love quest is not so important in the early work, but becomes increasingly so as we move towards the late prose romances. It is the theme of a love which, after many difficulties, is radiantly successful, and brings nothing but benefits to the lovers. The most typical example of this is The Wood

⁷Mackail I, 123. The prose tale to which Mackail is referring seems to be "Frank's Sealed Letter". In Works XXIV, there is an unfinished poem, "Palomydes' Quest", which dates from about the same period as the Oxford Union painting. It depicts the moment at which Sir Palomydes realizes that even when he does capture the questing beast he will not be any nearer to winning Iseult's love. The implication is that the winning of that love is what that quest is really all about. The nearest Morris ever came to writing about the story of Tristram and Iseult was in one of the unfinished Earthly Paradise tales, "The Wooing of Swanhild", which is the Icelandic version of the same theme. See Works XXIV for the fragment.

Beyond the World (1894). In addition, there are stories of faithful and unfaithful love, of love which endures beyond death, of love which gives life to the loved one, and of love which brings death, but none of these amount to major themes in Morris's work.

Of the prose tales, only Morris's least successful, "Frank's Sealed Letter", a modern story with "a cold proud heroine named Mabel",⁸ is directly on the theme of unsuccessful love as seen from the point of view of the failed lover. In three other tales, however, "Gertha's Lovers", "Svend and His Brethren", and "Golden Wings", there is an unsuccessful lover, who is described more or less fully to us, but who, except in the first of the three, does not receive the attention accorded to the successful lover.⁹

⁸A comment by May Morris, Works I, xvii. This one early story with a modern setting prefigures Morris's only other attempt at modern fiction, the novel of contemporary life which he began in 1871, but quickly abandoned. The comment which he made on it applied equally well to the early tale: "it is just a specimen of how not to do it, and there is no more to be said thereof: 'tis nothing but landscape and sentiment: which thing won't do". See Mackail I, 295-6.

⁹None of these couples gain any lasting happiness from their successful love, however: in "Golden Wings", Olaf and Gertha both die, he in battle and she because she cannot live without him; in "Svend and His Brethren", Cissela renounces Siur and marries King Valdemar in order to save her country; and in "Golden Wings", Lionel, and perhaps Alys also, is killed by the unsuccessful lover, Sir Guy le bon amant. We learn almost nothing about Valdemar and Sir Guy, and only Leuchnar in "Gertha's Lovers" is presented to us as fully as the lovers are.

There is also the rather curious case of the first of the early prose romances, "The Story of the Unknown Church". In this tale, Walter and his sister Margaret have lived alone together for many years in a near-marital situation, which is broken up when Walter's best friend, Margaret's lover, Amyot, returns from the wars. All seems happiness for a moment, but on the day after his return Amyot and Margaret die, and Walter is left alone unable to do anything but carve and carve away at their tomb. He has no proper existence without them, and cannot continue his work as a mason except in the sheltered environment of the monastery, where, after twenty years of half-life, he is able to die at last "underneath the last lily of the tomb".¹⁰

This idea in "The Story of the Unknown Church" of the third member of the triangle who is left after the loss or departure of the lovers with only a half-life, unable to achieve anything, and unable even to die quickly either because death cannot offer union with the beloved, is present also in "Frank's Sealed Letter", where Hugh, the unsuccessful lover, is left "a weak man, with no end to

¹⁰Works I, 158: "and I painted it too as fair as I could, and carved it all about with many flowers and histories, and in them I carved the faces of those I had known on earth (for I was not as one on earth now, but seemed quite away out of the world). And as I carved, sometimes the monks and other people too would come and gaze, and watch how the flowers grew; and sometimes too as they gazed, they would weep for pity, knowing how all had been. So my life passed, and

make for in the purposeless wanderings of my life".¹¹ In the tales that follow, however, the lover often gains strength from his rejection, as Leuchnar does in "Gertha's Lovers". His sacrifice of his love to Olaf ultimately makes him a better man, so that his fighting and death for Gertha are wholly without the irony and self-hatred which had earlier **vitiat**ed all his actions, and in his death he is able to achieve the heroic stature which had eluded him before he came to love and to lose Gertha.¹² This acceptance of love-

I lived in that abbey for twenty years after he died, till one morning, quite early, when they came into the church for matins, they found me lying dead, with my chisel in my hand, underneath the last lily of the tomb".

¹¹Works I, 309: "Love only, and the wild restless passions that went with it, were too strong for me, and they bent my strong will, so that people think me now a weak man, with no end to make for in the purposeless wanderings of my life. Yes, my life is purposeless now. I have failed, I know, but I know that I have fought too; I know the weary struggle from day to day, in which, with my loins girded, and my muscles all a-strain, I have fought, while years and years have passed away. I know what they do not, how that Passion trembled in my grasp, shook, staggered: how I grew stronger and stronger; till when, as I stood at last quivering with collected force, the light of victory across my lips and brow, God's hand struck me, and I fell at once, and without remedy; and am now a vanquished man; and really without any object in life, not desiring death any more than life, or life any more than death; a vanquished man, though no coward; forlorn, hopeless, unloved, living now altogether in the past".

¹²See Works I, 181-2, 188, and 122. This story has considerable similarities to Rossetti's tale of 1871, "The Cup of Cold Water", related by Philip Henderson, pp. 50-1, which may be a reflection of the situation between Morris, Jane, Rossetti, and Elizabeth Siddal in the years before the two couples were married in 1859. However, "Gertha's Lovers"

as-suffering, which Leuchnar takes to himself, which gives Siur strength to continue to love Cissela even though she is married to another, and which Frank's letter urged Hugh to attempt,¹³ becomes the norm in the late prose romances, where the Bride in The Roots of the Mountains (1889) eventually does her duty to her people, as Cissela does in "Svend and His Brethren", by marrying someone else, and Atra, in The Water of the Wondrous Isles (1895), whose lover deserts her for the friend who rescued her from bondage, turns for fulfilment towards the secret lore of the Wood-woman and of the natural world. Similarly in his own life, when the situation that he had so often pictured was actually realized, Morris tried to accept and embrace his fate as the unsuccessful lover of his own wife, and even blamed himself for not being able to do so more thoroughly.¹⁴

was written before Morris met Jane, and seems simply to be another instance of Morris casting himself in the rôle of the unsuccessful lover, which later he came to play in earnest.

¹³See Works I, 315. Frank's letter is couched in Christian terms which Morris never used again after this story, and is also rather sentimental, but nevertheless it expresses an idea which Morris was always to retain: that unrequited love when it is accepted and remembered is not wasted but becomes a redemptive force in this life at least, whatever it may be in the next.

¹⁴See the last stanza of "December" in The Earthly Paradise, Works VI, 1:

The theme of unsuccessful love is not of course as fully developed as this in The Defence of Guenevere, where the brevity of the poems mostly precludes it, but an interesting twist is given it by Morris's first use of a female narrator. Two poems, "Golden Wings" (not to be confused with the prose tale of the same name) and "The Sailing of the Sword", are about the unsuccessful girl in a group of women who are successful in obtaining and keeping their lovers, and this sexual transposition where the poet identifies himself with a woman character again prefigures The Water of the Wondrous Isles, where Morris identifies himself partly with Atra and partly with Birdalone, but not with any of the male characters. "The Sailing of the Sword" especially anticipates the situation in that story, for in both the third maiden, identified by her white dress in the poem and by her black dress in the prose story, is replaced by another when the men return:

"O thou who clingest still to life and love,
 Though nought of good, no God thou mayst discern,
 Though nought that is, thine utmost woe can move,
 Though no soul knows wherewith thine heart doth yearn,
 Yet since thy weary lips no curse can learn,
 Cast no least thing thou lovedst once away,
 Since yet perchance thine eyes shall see the day."

See also Philip Henderson's comment on one of Morris's poems to his wife, p. 94: "One can only wonder what Jane is being asked to pardon him for, unless it was his inability to accept the situation".

My heart grew sick, no more afraid,
When the Sword came back from sea;
 Upon the deck a tall white maid
 Sat on Lord Roland's knee;
 His chin was press'd upon her head,
When the Sword came back from sea!¹⁵

"Welland River" is a rather similar story but with only one girl, who is pregnant, and in this case the sight of his old love's misery causes Sir Roland to cast aside the new woman, and return to the old one. In addition, several poems which would not seem very relevant to the theme of unsuccessful love at first sight are also treated to some extent along these lines: in "The Defence of Guenevere" itself, Guenevere is shown as turning to Launcelot because Arthur did not love her, because she "was bought / By Arthur's great name and his little love;"¹⁶ "King Arthur's Tomb" shows Launcelot losing Guenevere just when he thought he would be able to keep her for good; and even the solitary and chaste Galahad, in "Sir Galahad: A Christmas Mystery", is tormented with thoughts of Sir Palomydes, who at least has Iseult to love even if she does not love him, and Launcelot, whose relationship with Guenevere is real and warm even if they cannot actually marry, while he has not even the good fortune to have an unsuccessful love to think about!

¹⁵Works I, 1.

¹⁶Works I, 3.

After this early work, Morris's use of the unsuccessful lover in his poems almost disappears for a while. It is absent from Jason and Love is Enough, and only occurs in The Earthly Paradise in "The Lovers of Gudrun", which, because of its Icelandic subject-matter, really falls into Morris's middle period.¹⁷ What takes the place of this first theme as the most important love-quest motif of the period of The Earthly Paradise is the theme of a love which was once successful but which for some reason has failed later. In its simplest form, where the lovers are separated for good, this theme is best expressed in "The Man Who Never Laughed Again", an Eastern story substantially taken from Lane's Arabian Nights,¹⁸ in which the hero at first

¹⁷In this story, which is based on Laxdaela Saga and is usually considered to be the most powerful of the Earthly Paradise tales, Gudrun marries Bodli even though she loves Kiartan the more, because Bodli has tricked her into thinking that Kiartan does not love her. Eventually Bodli finds himself forced to kill Kiartan, though they have been dear friends, and as a result he himself is subsequently killed. A similar situation obtains in Sigurd the Volsung, where Brynhild never really loves Gunnar, and is only induced to marry him through a trick. In both cases the story of the trick comes out through the injudicious boasting of the wife, and in both cases it is very difficult for the husband to kill the rival lover because they are sworn friends. As we shall see later, this theme of the close friends who love the same person reappears with a reversal of sexual roles in The Water of the Wondrous Isles, and to some extent in The Well at the World's End (1896).

¹⁸See Mackail I, 212. The archetype for this is obviously "The Story of Orpheus and Euridyce", which Morris wrote for The Earthly Paradise but for some reason did not include in it. Perhaps it went just too near the bone.

gains an earthly paradise and an immortal lover, but subsequently fails in the trial of his constancy, and as a result loses both girl and paradise.¹⁹ This loss of a love once gained is presented with similarly enchanted damsels in two other Earthly Paradise stories, "The Lady of the Land", in which the sailor's love is not strong enough for him to be able to release his beloved from her enchantment, and "The Watching of the Falcon", where the love of the faery lady is only granted to the watcher for one night, and at the price of his happiness for ever. In The Life and Death of Jason and a fourth Earthly Paradise story, "The Death of Paris", the theme is given a more realistic setting, with the hero turning away from his first love towards another girl.²⁰ The result, in Jason, is that Medea murders Glauce, the second girl, while in "The Death

¹⁹This is a typical "trial" story, recalling the fairy-tale of Bluebeard, and, of course, Genesis, where an earthly paradise is similarly lost. The Queen leaves Bharam with the key to a room which he must not open in her absence. He manages to keep away for a long time, but three days before her return succumbs to the temptation, and loses all.

²⁰The Pilgrims of Hope (1885-6), Morris's socialist epic about the Paris Commune, uses the same theme with a modern setting. Once again, as in "Gudrun" and Sigurd, the two men become close friends, and the younger then falls in love with the older man's wife, the reversal of the actual situation between Morris, Jane, and Rossetti. As this is a modern story, it cannot have the violent conclusion of the Icelandic tales, and therefore Morris conveniently allows the girl and her lover to die at the barricades, while the husband returns to England with his child. The message of

of Paris" Oenone leaves Paris to die because he is not prepared to renounce his love for Helen, and she cannot bear the thought of being deserted by him a second time.

Where this theme is most poignantly, if cryptically, realized in this period, however, is not in any of the tales at all, but in the month poems which link together the stories of The Earthly Paradise. Of these poems, Mackail says: "In the verses that frame the stories of 'The Earthly Paradise' there is an autobiography so delicate and so outspoken that it must needs be left to speak for itself . . .".²¹ As we saw in Part I of this thesis, this autobiographical element which Mackail never explains in his Life of William Morris, was concerned with Morris's failure to keep his wife's love. Whether or not Jane actually had an affair with Rossetti, she certainly turned

this poem also is to remember and cherish the love of the past as earnest of love in the future. See Works XXIV, 408.

²¹"Shy and reserved in life, as to many matters that lay near his heart, he had all the instinct of the born man of letters for laying himself open in his books, and having no concealments from the widest circle of all. In the verses that frame the stories of 'The Earthly Paradise' there is an autobiography so delicate and so outspoken that it must needs to be left to speak for itself. . . . People who have not this imaginative instinct often wonder how a poet can bear to lay open his inmost feelings, and uncover the weaknesses of which man is made: still oftener the self-revelation passes clean over the heads of his audience, and so far are they from wondering that they do not even notice. It is the knowledge, no doubt, that all of his innermost heart, his love and hope and sorrow, which he pours into his verses is to the unsympathetic reader

away from Morris, as Philip Henderson shows in his biography,²² and this turning away and Morris's reaction to it are shown throughout the link passages of The Earthly Paradise, and also in some of the unpublished poems of the same period which were printed in Collected Works XXIV.

In the early months of The Earthly Paradise, the month poems show Morris regretfully looking back to past years and longing "for that which never draweth nigh".²³ "July", for instance, depicts the lost love as a beautiful summer's day overtaken by thunder and rain:

Peace and content without us, love within
 That hour there was, now thunder and wild rain,
 Have wrapped the cowering world, and foolish sin,
 And nameless pride, have made us wise in vain;
 Ah, love! although the morn shall come again,
 And on new rose-buds the new sun shall smile,
 Can we regain what we have lost meanwhile?²⁴

The cycle of nature, new roses, new sun, instead of comforting the poet, emphasizes his loss. In "August", a more stoical

simply meaningless, which allows a poet to write fearlessly what, being a poet, he must write in any case", Mackail I, 216-8.

²²See the chapter "Of Utter Love Defeated Utterly", especially pp. 90-104.

²³(March is the first month of The Earthly Paradise.)
Works III, 169.

²⁴Works IV, 143.

attitude begins to prevail, and the poet rebukes Jane and himself for wasting their days in longing for things they cannot have.²⁵ In "September" he reproaches himself for dwelling on the past, for it is impossible for a dreamer to re-enter a dream that is past, and equally impossible for his love to be renewed:

Look long, O longing eyes, and look in vain!
Strain idly, aching heart, and yet be wise,
And hope no more for things to come again
That thou beheldest once with careless eyes!
Like a new-wakened man thou art, who tries
To dream again the dream that made him glad
When in his arms his loving love he had.²⁶

In "October", therefore, he calls on Jane also to forget the past and try to build a new relationship based on affection in the present.²⁷ This positive attitude of content with the present day which Morris is schooling himself to accept does not last, however, for in "November" he breaks down, and we have a frightening poem of one who is close to despair. One speaker in the internal dialogue urges the beauty of the "real world" and the comfort that lies therein, but the other speaker will not be comforted, for he sees only death and change there, which reinforces his despair of love:

²⁵Works IV, 187.

²⁶Works V, 1.

²⁷Works V, 122.

Are thine eyes weary? is thy heart too sick
 To struggle any more with doubt and thought,
 Whose formless veil draws darkening now and thick
 Across thee, e'en as smoke-tinged mist-wreaths brought
 Down a fair dale to make it blind and nought?
 Art thou so weary that no world there seems
 Beyond these four walls, hung with pain and dreams?

Look out upon the real world, where the moon,
 Half-way 'twixt root and crown of these high trees,
 Turns the dead midnight into dreamy noon,
 Silent and full of wonders, for the breeze
 Died at the sunset, and no images,
 No hopes of day, are left in sky or earth --
 Is it not fair, and of most wondrous worth?

Yea, I have looked and seen November there;
 The changeless seal of change it seemed to be,
 Fair death of things that, living once, were fair;
 Bright sign of loneliness too great for me,
 Strange image of the dread eternity,
 In those void patience how can these have part,
 These outstretched feverish hands, this restless heart?²⁸

Again the beauty of nature is used to express hope for the future, but the first speaker undercuts himself by speaking of the "dead midnight", the dead breeze, and "no hopes of day", so that he cannot really expect to convince the second speaker.

With "December", Morris reverts to the stoicism in the face of loss of love which we have already discussed in relation to "Gertha's Lovers" and "Frank's Sealed Letter". He admonishes himself again to stop his hopeless longing for the past, but yet not to reject the memory of his love in

²⁸Works V, 206.

case there is any possibility of future renewal.²⁹ This new hope is slightly reinforced at the end of "The Fostering of Aslaug", in a four line stanza in which loss of love is equated, as it was in "July", with winter and rain, and there is an implication, though it is not stated in so many words, that Spring may yet return:

Drag on, long night of winter, in whose heart,
Nurse of regret, the dead spring yet has part!
Drag on, O night of dreams! O night of fears!
Fed by the summers of the bygone years!³⁰

Now at least the poet is seeing the winter and darkness as a dream instead, as in "September", of seeing the past love as a dream. This hope gleams a little more brightly in "January",³¹ but is gone again in "February", despite the promise of spring in the world. Now the poet is no longer despairing, but drearily hopeless,³² a hopelessness that is reinforced in other poems of the same period which Morris did not publish, for instance, "Hapless Love", "May Grown A-Cold", "As This Thin Thread", and "Why Dost Thou

²⁹Works VI, 1.

³⁰Works VI, 64.

³¹Works VI, 65: "Be patient, heart, thy days they yet shall fill / With utter rest".

³²Works VI, 175. Now his lost love is no more than "useless hope, the useless craving pain, / That made thy face, that lonely noontide, wet / With more than beating of the chilly rain".

"Struggle",³³ in which the situation is portrayed from Jane's point of view:

A childish heart there loved me once, and lo
I took his love and cast his love away.

A childish greedy heart! yet still he clung
So close to me that much he pleased my pride
And soothed a sorrow that about me hung
With glimpses of his love unsatisfied --

And soothed my sorrow -- but time soothed it too
Though ever did its aching fill my heart
To which the foolish child still closer drew
Thinking in all I was to have a part . . .

He knew my heart and over-well knew this
And strove, poor soul, to pleasure me herein;
But yet what might he do some doubtful kiss
Some word, some look might give him hope to win.

Poor hope, poor soul, for he again would come
Thinking to gain yet one more golden step
Towards Love's shrine, and lo the kind speech dumb
The kind look gone, no love upon my lip --

Yea gone, yet not my fault, I knew of love
But my love and not his; how could I tell
That such blind passion in him I should move?
Behold I have loved faithfully and well. . . .³⁴

This autobiographical element gives an added poignancy to the tales of happy and unhappy love with which

³³All in Works XXIV. The last lines of the "Epilogue" to The Earthly Paradise give a final twist to the bitterness: we enjoy reading about the sufferings of these dead lovers, but wouldn't enjoy it if they were alive and known to us! See Works VI, 329.

³⁴"Why Dost Thou Struggle", Works XXIV, 362-5.

The Earthly Paradise is filled. The despairing poem, "November", for instance, is followed by "The Story of Rhodope" which is about a woman who was never contented in this life:

so, born for discontent,
 She through the eager world of base folk went,
 Still gaining nought but heavier weariness.
 God grant that somewhere now content may bless
 Her yearning heart; that she may look and smile
 On the strange earth that wearied her awhile. . . .³⁵

which recalls the description of Jane's discontent in "Why Dost Thou Struggle". Next comes "The Lovers of Gudrun", a disastrous tale of unsuccessful love. The nostalgic "September", in which Morris admonishes himself for trying to bring back the dream of the days when Jane loved him, is followed by "The Death of Paris", in which the unfaithful love is confronted with his deserted love again, and the happy "Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon", which is described most emphatically as no more than a dream of love with no substance in truth. At the beginning of it, the Wanderer who relates it says:

A dream it is, friends, and no history
 Of men who ever lived; so blame me nought
 If wondrous things together there are brought,
 Strange to our waking world -- yet as in dreams
 Of known things still we dream, whatever gleams
 Of unknown light may make them strange, so here
 Our dreamland story holdeth such things dear

³⁵Works V, 207.

And such things loathed, as we do; else, indeed,
Were all its marvels nought to help our need.³⁶

And at the end he adds:

How twain grew one and came to bliss --
Woe's me an idle dream it is!³⁷

Thus even the successful love of this tale is undercut at beginning and end because we know it is not real.

Nevertheless, despite the despair of love which Morris expresses in the autobiographical parts of the poem, The Earthly Paradise as a whole is an affirmation of love. This is shown in "L'Envoi", where the book itself speaks Morris's words to Chaucer:

'Children we twain are, saith he, late made wise
In love, but in all else most childish still,
And seeking still the pleasure of our eyes,
And what our ears with sweetest sounds may fill;
Not fearing love, lest these things he should kill;
Howe'er his pain by pleasure doth he lay,
Making a strange tale of an empty day,'³⁸

and again in the lines which he wrote in the copy of The Earthly Paradise which he seems, from internal evidence, to have given to his small daughters:³⁹

³⁶Works V, 23.

³⁷Works V, 120.

³⁸Works VI, 332.

³⁹The lines are clearly addressed to young people, for he thinks his poem too serious for them, and assumes that they will read it with greater understanding when he is dead and they have, presumably, grown up and experienced

Ah, my dears, indeed
 My wisdom fails me at my need
 To tell why tales that move the earth
 Are seldom of content and mirth.
 Yet think if it may come of this --
 That lives fulfilled of ease and bliss
 Crave not for aught that we can give,
 And scorn the broken lives we live;
 Unlike to us they pass us by,
 A dying laught their history.
 But those that struggled sore, and failed
 Had one thing left them, that availed
 When all things else were nought --
 E'en Love --
 Whose sweet voice, crying as they strove,
 Begat sweet pity, and more love still,
 Waste places with sweet tales to fill;
 Whereby we, living here, may learn
 Our eyes toward very Love to turn,
 And all the pain it bringesth meet
 As nothing strange amid the sweet:
 Whereby we too may hope to be
 Gains in the great world's memory
 Of pain endured, and nobleness
 That life ill-understood doth bless.⁴⁰

Love, despite the pain it brings, is exalted as an ideal
 by which to live, and we are thus prepared for the tri-
 umphant affirmation of the redemptive power of love which
 is the theme of Love is Enough, the next poem after
The Earthly Paradise.

This third theme, of successful love, which is
 portrayed in Love is Enough, is led up to by some of the
 other tales which are intermediate between it and the

love themselves. Also, he wishes that their lives may be so
 happy that they will not provide any subject-matter for a
 story. This is reminiscent of News from Nowhere, where
 people's lives are too full of contentment to be worth
 relating.

⁴⁰ "Written in a copy of The Earthly Paradise,

previous theme. These are the tales of love, loss, atonement, and reconciliation which bring the theme of the loss of love once gained to a happier conclusion. The second of the early prose romances, "A Dream", sets the pattern for this type of story, which is followed to some extent in "The Hollow Land", and also in two of the Earthly Paradise stories, "The Story of Cupid and Psyche" and "The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon". "Ogier the Dane" and "The Hill of Venus" also employ the pattern of love, separation, and reuniting, but to a rather different end, as we shall see in the next chapter.

In "A Dream", as in "The Man Who Never Laughed Again", the lovers are separated because of a weak moment on the part of one of them: Ella, who is momentarily possessed by an "evil spirit", dares Lawrence to prove his courage by spending the night in a certain cave.⁴¹ As a result, he disappears, binding her to follow in quest of him, and both go through successive reincarnations over several hundred years before their love has become sufficiently purified for them to be reunited in death.⁴²

December 25, 1870", Works XXIV, 343.

⁴¹Which, incidentally, much resembles the cave in "The Man Who Never Laughed Again".

⁴²"Love, you must promise that if I come not again by to-morrow at moonrise, you will go to the red pike, and,

The two Earthly Paradise stories similarly depend on a failure upon the part of one of the lovers: Psyche's doubts of her husband, induced by her sisters' cunning, are well-known, and John, the hero of "The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon", makes a similar error in demanding the presence of his beloved, which she has forbidden him to do.⁴³ In both these stories, the lovers come together at last not in death, as in "A Dream", but in a paradisa

having entered the cavern, go where God leads you, and seek me, and never leave that quest, even if it end not but with death.' 'Lawrence, how your heart beats! poor heart! are you afraid that I shall hesitate to promise to perform that which is the only thing I could do? I know I am not worthy to be with you, yet I must be with you in body or soul, or body and soul will die.' They sat silent, and the birds sang in the garden of lilies beyond; then said Ella again; 'Moreover, let us pray God to give us longer life, so that if our natural lives are short for the accomplishment of this quest, we may have more, yea, even many more lives'", Works I, 162-3. The names Ella and Lawrence recall the story of Elsa and Lohengrin, which is obviously one of the archetypes for the "unwise demand" motif.

⁴³Because she, like many of Morris's heroines, is under an enchantment. See, for example, Works V, 54-5:

thou mayst well be stirred
 By idle talk, or longing vain,
 To wish me in thine arms again;
 Long then, but let no least word slip
 Of such a longing past thy lip;
 For if thou dost, so strangely now
 Are we twain wedded, I and thou,
 And that same golden green-stoned ring
 Is token of so great a thing
 That at they word I needs must come
 Whereso I be unto thine home;
 And so were both of us undone:

situation, which, as we shall see in the next chapter, is partly to be identified with death,⁴⁴ so that the effect of the "happy ending" is somewhat undercut. This undercutting is scarcely surprising, however, given the general mood of The Earthly Paradise.

The third type of love quest, that which, after many difficulties, is radiantly successful, does not really form a part of the earliest work at all. The closest we come to it in the early prose romances is in "Golden Wings" and "Gertha's Lovers", which have already been discussed from the point of view of the unsuccessful lover. "The Hollow Land", which does end in a perfect love in a paradisaal setting, follows the pattern of love, loss, and

Because the great-eyed glaring sun
That lights your world, too mighty is
To look upon our secret bliss.

⁴⁴In "Cupid and Psyche", this equation of eros and thanatos is quite explicit: the oracle says that Psyche shall be wedded to a monster which "is the bane of every mortal thing, / And this world ruined, still for more he yearns . . .", Works IV, 6, which everyone naturally interprets as Death. In fact, she is wedded to Love, but the immortality which this eventually brings her represents a death to life. Venus says to her: "I think thy life on earth is well-nigh done"; she is then described as in a sense dying:

then in the wavering shade,
Amidst the sweetest garden was she laid,
And while the damsels round her watch did keep,
At last she closed her weary eyes in sleep,
And woke no more to earth . . .

and finally the speaker declares his inability, as a mortal

recovery, of the second love quest theme, but since Florian finds Margaret accidentally in the first place there is never, properly speaking, a love quest. In The Defence of Guenevere, "Rapunzel", which in many ways is very similar to Love is Enough, is the only major poem on this theme. Morris follows the fairy-tale of the same name quite closely, setting it in dramatic form, as he did so many of his early poems,⁴⁵ only with the curious addition that "Rapunzel" turns out to be the witch's name, so that the girl has to be re-christened when she is rescued from her tower. The implication that she and the witch are two sides of the same person gives us a foretaste of the ambiguous women with magical powers who people the late prose romances.⁴⁶

When we come to The Earthly Paradise, however, there are a number of tales of successful love, notably,

being, to describe or even imagine what immortal bliss is like, Works IV, 72. Cf. also the dialogue between Pharamond and Love in Love is Enough IX, 54-5.

⁴⁵In addition to many of the poems of The Defence of Guenevere, the incomplete "Scenes from the Fall of Troy" is in dramatic form, as are a number of the shorter poems printed in Works XXIV.

⁴⁶As for example, the Maiden in The Wood Beyond the World, who appears to be young but is actually very very old, and has magical powers until she marries the hero, whereupon she becomes an ordinary mortal, in the tradition of Undine or "The Little Mermaid". She, like the Lady of Abundance in The Well at the World's End, has her sinister aspect, as Rapunzel/Guendolen does.

"Atalanta's Race", "The Man Born to be King", "Pygmalion and the Image", "The Story of Acontius and Cydippe", "The Fostering of Aslaug", and "Bellerophon in Lycia". These, in fact, make up a quarter of the tales, though they do not impress us emotionally as so doing. Only in three of the tales, however, is the love quest the major theme. "The Man Born to be King" is a typical "kill the bearer" tale,⁴⁷ which Morris was to return to again in his translation, The Tale of the Emperor Coustans, (1894), and in the prose romance, Child Christopher and Goldilind the Fair (1895), which is an adaptation of the mediaeval English poem, The Lay of Havelok the Dane. "The Fostering of Aslaug" is another of Morris's Norse tales, though it is very different in spirit from its source, Ragnar Lodbrok Saga.⁴⁸ As its title indicates, it concerns the upbringing of Aslaug, the daughter of Sigurd and Brynhild, as much as her marriage. Similarly, "Bellerophon in Lycia", the sequel to "Bellerophon in Argos", only brings in the love motif towards the end of the poem. It too is a "kill the bearer" tale, but in this case there is no princess on hand to alter the letter as in "The Man Born to be King".

⁴⁷ Its sources are given by May Morris in Works III, xix-xx.

⁴⁸ See Works V, xxi-xxii.

Each of these three tales, moreover, is undercut in its final effect, because Morris continues them in some way beyond the successful marriage. "The Man Born to be King" ends, not with the emphasis on the happy couple, but partly on the regrets of the old king for having wasted his time in trying to prevent the marriage, and partly on the antiquity of the story and its fabulous nature:

Nor will the poor folk see again
 A king like him on any throne,
 Or such good deeds to all men done:
 For then, as saith the chronicle,
 It was a time, as all men tell,
 When scarce a man would stop to gaze
 At gold crowns hung above the ways.⁴⁹

In other words, this story took place in the Golden Age, which, as we all know, never really existed except in the imagination of poets. "The Fostering of Aslaug" similarly ends with the emphasis on Ragnar Lodbrok's death, and the long series of wars between England and the Scandinavian countries which only ended with the Norman Conquest,⁵⁰ and "Bellerophon in Lycia" brings us back again to the poet's own uncertain love, and his fear of death:

⁴⁹Works III, 167.

⁵⁰Works VI, 64.

My heart faints now, my lips that tell the tale
 Falter to think that such a life should fail;
 That use, and long days dropping one by one,
 As the wan water frets away the stone,
 Should change desires of men, and what they bring,
 E'er while their hearts with sickening longing cling
 Unto the thought that they are still the same,
 When all they were is grown an empty name.

O Death-in-life, O sure pursuer, Change,
 Be kind, be kind, and touch me not, till strange,
 Changed too, thy face shows, when thy fellow Death
 Delays no more to freeze my faltering breath!⁵¹

This prayer then leads straight in to the link passage between "Bellerophon" and "The Hill of Venus", in which is shown the effect of the two Bellerophon tales on the young people who have been listening to them, and especially on one young man who has no girl sitting with him. The description of his pain and loneliness causes Morris to add a further meditation on love:

Many-peopled earth!
 In foolish anger and in foolish mirth,
 In causeless wars that never had an aim,
 In worshipping the kings that bring thee shame,
 In spreading lies that hide wrath in their breast,
 In breaking up the short-lived days of rest, --
 -- In all thy folk care nought for, how they cling
 Each unto each, fostering the short-lived thing,
 Nought worth, grown out of nought, that lightly lies
 'Twixt throat and lips, and yet works miseries!
 While in this love that touches every one,
 Still wilt thou let each man abide alone,
 Unholpen, with his pain unnameable!
 Is it, perchance, lest men should come to tell
 Each unto other what a pain it is,
 How little balanced by the sullied bliss
 They win for some few minutes of their life . . . ⁵²

⁵¹Works VI, 277.

⁵²Works VI, 278-9.

Even the three remaining romantic stories have their sad places. There is no undercutting at the end of "Atalanta's Race", but the earlier part of the poem places a very heavy emphasis on the failure and death of the previous contestant in the race, and the attempts of various people to dissuade Milanion from entering the contest. Moreover we again have a suggestion of autobiographical material in the description of Atalanta dressed for the race like Diana:

A maid stood by him like Diana clad
 When in the woods she lists her bow to bend,
 Too fair for one to look on and be glad,
 Who scarcely yet has thirty summers had,
 If he must still behold her from afar;
 Too fair to let the world live free from war.⁵³

Not long before this poem, Morris had drawn Jane, whose grey eyes, like Atalanta's, are familiar to us from many of Morris's poems and stories,⁵⁴ as Artemis,⁵⁵ and at the time of writing the poem he was himself not much more than thirty. "Pygmalion and the Image" describes the loneliness of the artist, cut off from his fellow men, who "soothes

⁵³Works III, 87.

⁵⁴Cf. "Beata Mea Domina", Morris's description of Jane in The Defence of Guenevere.

⁵⁵See Works IX, frontispiece.

his heart and dulls thought's poisonous sting"⁵⁶ with creative activity. Nevertheless, it remains essentially an idyllic tale, like "Atalanta's Race", and Morris does not remind us, as he might well have done, that in gaining life the Image also gains death. Nor is there anything to sour the sweetness of "Acontius and Cydippe", though this is one of the least successful of the Earthly Paradise tales, and Morris, as we saw in Part I of this thesis, never really liked it.⁵⁷ Considering that it was written at Ems, where Morris had taken Jane after her health had broken down, presumably because of the strain of her relationship with Rossetti, it is scarcely surprising that a sugared tale of romantic love should have been difficult for him to write with confidence.⁵⁸ What seems to have happened is that Morris, consciously or unconsciously, put into the character of Acontius all the yearning for Jane's love which he could not express in any more direct way.⁵⁹ The result is, that

⁵⁶Works IV, 190.

⁵⁷See Works V, xiv and xxii.

⁵⁸See Philip Henderon, pp. 99-104.

⁵⁹See for example, the description of Acontius's behaviour on seeing Cydippe for the third time, Works V, 136-7:

though Morris tried hard to alter the tone of the poem, Acontius remained "a spoony, nothing less",⁶⁰ an expression into which Morris put all his disgust at his own inability to refrain from self-pity.

In this context, perhaps there might also be added the undercutting of two further Earthly Paradise tales which could have ended happily, as they usually do in the traditional versions, but which Morris deliberately slants towards sadness. In most versions of the story of Alcestis, the tale ends with Hercules rescuing Alcestis from the underworld and restoring her to her husband.⁶¹ Morris, however,

The third hope came,
And then his hungry eyes, aflame
With longing wild, beheld her pass
As though amidst a dream she was;
Then e'en ere she had left the place
With his clenched hand he smote his face,
And void of everything but pain,
Through the thronged streets the sea did gain,
No recking aught, and there at last
His body on the sand he cast,
Nigh the green waves, till in the end
Some thought the crushing cloud did rend,
And down the tears rushed from his eyes
For ruth of his own miseries. . . .

Or his self-pity, V, 144:

Acontius for self-pity's sake,
Must steal forth to the night to cry
Some wordless prayer of agony. . . .

⁶⁰See May Morris I, 642.

⁶¹Cf. the play by Euripides. Mackail points out

ends "The Love of Alcestis" with her death, and omits the subsequent happy outcome of her love. Similarly, the Perseus story is usually a hero-tale detailing Perseus's magnificent exploits and ending with his marriage to Andromeda. In "The Doom of King Acrisius", as the title indicates, the story is told from the point of view of Perseus's grandfather, who tries to prevent Perseus's birth because he has been told that his grandson will slay him.⁶² The story ends, therefore, not with a marriage, but with the death of Acrisius, and in a brief final section Morris adds also the deaths of Danaë, Andromeda, and finally Perseus himself. The comment of the hearers of the tale is fittingly gloomy:

how all stories end with this,
 Whatever was the midway gain and bliss:
 'He died, and in his place was set his son;
 He died, and in a few days every one
 Went on their way as though he had not been.'⁶³

Much the same thing happened also with The Life and Death of Jason, where Morris did not end with the successful

that this same substitution of death for escape from underground occurs also in "The Writing on the Image", in which Morris leaves the magician shut up in the death-trap from which he escapes in the mediaeval story. See Mackail I, 212.

⁶²This motif of the king who tries to tamper with fate and consequently brings about the very thing which he is trying to avoid is a very common folk-motif, and one of the dominant themes of the first half of The Earthly Paradise, where it appears in six of the first twelve stories.

⁶³Works III, 239.

quest for the Golden Fleece, to which sixteen out of his seventeen books are devoted, but added a further book about Jason's betrayal of Medea, attempted marriage with Glauce, and miserable death crushed by the rotting timbers of his own quest-boat, Argo.

Love is Enough, which followed The Earthly Paradise, is sometimes also read as if it were undercut in the same way that many of the Earthly Paradise stories are. Philip Henderson says of it:

Alas, the passionate lyric quality such as one found in his earliest work is not to be found in Love is Enough, unless heartache and despair be accounted such. Nor is there the least evidence of the bracing airs of Iceland. Indeed, this is one of Morris's most enervated works. One would think the title ironic, except that Morris was not given to irony. . . . The theme is the search for a dream mistress. King Pharamond has seen a vision of a beautiful girl singing in a garden and decides to devote the rest of his life to looking for her. . . . He finds her, only to lose her again at once. He has become, in effect, another idle singer of an empty day, returning to his kingdom at last to find his throne usurped and his people disaffected -- much as Morris had returned from Iceland to find Rossetti in his place.⁶⁴

This passage might be argued against in a number of ways. To begin with, as so often in Philip Henderson's book, the summary of the story is incorrect. For another thing, it

⁶⁴Philip Henderson, p. 128.

was Rossetti who said of Love is Enough: "the poem is, I think, at a higher point of execution perhaps than anything he has done, having a passionate lyric quality such as one found in his earliest work and of course much more mature balance in carrying out. It will be a very fine work."⁶⁵ Rossetti, who was one of the first people in England to appreciate Blake as a poet, was no mean judge of poetry, and, given the situation between the two men, is unlikely to have spoken of Morris's work unnecessarily enthusiastically. Moreover, as we shall see, the Icelandic influence had already taken hold of Morris, and it is partly the fact that Love is Enough is a transitional poem that makes it so hard to read adequately.⁶⁶ As for the title of the poem being ironic, it is, as we shall see, perhaps as much so as the dedication of The Earthly Paradise to his wife.

⁶⁵Quoted in Mackail I, 288.

⁶⁶Morris had great difficulty with Love is Enough. Philip Henderson quotes him as saying: "I have been in trouble with my own work, which I couldn't make to march for a long time; but I think I have now brought it out of the maze of re-writing and despondency . . ." and comments: "This was evidently Love is Enough, which was finally not published until the end of 1872", p. 130. The letter dates from the beginning of 1871. This was an unusually long time for Morris to be on one work, and his problems were probably similar to those which he had with "Acontius and Cydippe", that it was hard to write an optimistic poem when his own life was by no means satisfactory. When he did get Love

To begin with the story: Pharamond, the hero of the play within the play,⁶⁷ has not seen Azalais once in a vision, but in a series of dreams. He is a hero of his people, as well as their king, and has liberated them from bondage, but the country is now quiet, and, as becomes clear at the end of the play within the play, there is not much

finished, however, there was, pace Philip Henderson, no remnant left of the self-pity that had spoilt the Earthly Paradise poem, and had helped to make The Earthly Paradise as a whole "too long and flabby, damn it", May Morris I, 642. The reason why the self-pity had gone was that Morris had gained a new ideal of the active life from his study of Icelandic literature, as we shall see in the next two chapters. In Love is Enough, this new ideal is expressed by the Empress at the end of the play within the play:

Lo, love, our toil-girthed garden of desire,
 How of its changeless sweetness may we tire,
 While round about the storm is in the boughs
 And careless change amid the turmoil ploughs
 The rugged fields we needs must stumble o'er,
 Till the grain ripens that shall change no more,

Works IX, 85. And they thank God that they do not live in an earthly paradise, but have work in the world to do.

⁶⁷The structure of this mystery play, of which the part about Pharamond is only one section, is very complex, and is best explained in Mackail I, 289-92. I quote one part of this: "The outer frame is given by the rustic lovers, Giles and Joan. Within this is a second plane, in which stand the Emperor and Empress. Within this again, in the central plane, is Love as the interpreter, both inwards and outwards. On the fourth plane is the main action itself, the dramatic interlude of the Freeing of Pharamond: and on the last and inmost of all, subtilized out of any definite personality and charged with all the distilled emotion of the fourfold action, is 'the Music,' the final and interpenetrating spirit of the whole work. The detailed structure of this multiplex arrangement is worked out with an extraordinary ingenuity and elegance. Morris's best decorative designs have just such an ordered intricacy, such a free yet

left for Pharamond to do but be an administrator. As he himself comments, his people now, "grasping at peace and good days, / Careth little who giveth them that which they long for".⁶⁸ They remember Pharamond as a hero, but as one who made them uncomfortable by forcing them to arouse themselves and fight to be free:

Suffice it, folk need me no more: the deliverance,
 Dear bought in the days past, their hearts have forgotten,
 But faintly their dim eyes a feared face remember,
 Their dull ears remember a stern face they hated.
 What then, shall I waken their fear and their hatred,
 And then wait till fresh terror their memory awaketh,
 With the semblance of love that they have not to give me?
 Nay, nay, they are safe from my help and my justice,
 And I -- I am freed, and fresh waxeth my manhood.⁶⁹

These are not words of regret for a lost kingdom, but of relief because he can now leave these dullards to a suitably dull king, and return to Azalais, whom he has not lost but simply left again for a while in order to see whether he is needed in his kingdom.

What, then, is the significance of this new freedom which Pharamond has gained, through his long search for his

precisely adjusted pattern. Most notable of all is the instinctive art which keeps all these planes of action interlaced or interfused, so that the whole poem constitutes a single design", I, 290. Mackail then goes on to discuss the metrical patterns.

⁶⁸Works IX, 67.

⁶⁹Works IX, 69. Cf. Tennyson's "Ulysses".

love? The answer to this question is that Pharamond, had he remained a king, must either have sunk into dullness such as the people required, or else have made the people unhappy by continual war. He has been rescued from these fates by Love, who has jerked him out of his self-complacency:

I have sent
 A pain to pierce his last coat of content:
 Now must he tear the armour from his breast
 And cast aside all things that men deem best,
 And single-hearted for his longing strive
 That he at last may save his soul alive.⁷⁰

King Theobald, his successor, on the other hand, has never known love, and consequently is trapped in a set pattern of self-satisfied existence, "for thy dull morrow cometh and is as to-day is".⁷¹ Because he has never really suffered, he has never really come alive. Pharamond, on his visit to his discarded kingdom, comments:

Pass on in contentment, O king, I discerned not
 Through the cloak of your blindness that saw nought beside
thee,
 That feared for no pain and craved for no pleasure!
 Pass on, dead-alive, to they place! Thou art worthy:
 Nor shalt thou grow wearier than well-worshipped idol
 That the incense winds round in the land of the heathen,

⁷⁰Works IX, 23. Because Love knew that Pharamond was worth saving in this way, he gave him all sorts of gifts -- of discontent, for example -- which would make him crave something more than the mere glory of kingship.

⁷¹Works IX, 73.

While the early and latter rains fall as God listeth,
 And on earth that God loveth the sun riseth daily.
 -- Well art thou: for wert thou the crown of all rulers,
 No field shouldst thou ripen, free no frost-bounden river.
 Loose no heart from its love, turn no soul to salvation,
 Thrust no tempest aside, stay no plague in mid-ocean,
 Yet grow into thinking that thou wert God's brother,
 Till loveless death gripped thee unloved, unlamented.
 ---Pass forth, weary King, bear thy crown high to-night!
 Then fall asleep, fearing no cry from times bygone,
 But in dim dreams dream haply that thou art desired, --
 -- For they dull morrow cometh and is as to-day is.⁷²

This half-life is what Pharamond has been saved from, and is the reason why, at the end of the play, he can be thankful for all the difficulties and pain which he had to undergo in order to reach his love.⁷³ Had that love come easily, as it has to the Emperor and Empress to whom the morality is being shown, he could not have "grown wise in love"⁷⁴ through suffering, as the book says Morris too had at the end of The Earthly Paradise. For it is not the easy, successful love that brings wisdom, as Morris shows in

⁷²Works IX, 73-4. We may remember from the "Prologue" to The Earthly Paradise what the Wanderers thought of being worshipped as Gods, Works III, 62-77, and how so many of the stories in the volume show kings believing themselves gods in just this way, and being taught their lesson. The moral is obviously intended to come home to the Emperor who is watching!

⁷³Cf. the lines of Love, Works IX, 52.

⁷⁴Works IX, 37. Cf. Earthly Paradise, Works VI, 332: "late made wise / In love". The Emperor is aware that things have come too easily to him, and promises the Mayor, after he has seen the morality, that though his reward, in the shape of the Empress, has come before he has done any deeds to deserve it, yet he will now try hard to deserve it. See Works IX, 84.

The Earthly Paradise, but struggle and pain and loss:

Milanion, who has little trouble in winning Atalanta, is not shown as gaining any self-knowledge at all in the process; Acontius and Pygmalion are slightly more self-aware in proportion as they have had difficulty in obtaining their love; and so it goes on throughout the whole volume, with each story adding to the lessons in love. When we come to the unsuccessful lovers, or those who for some reason have lost their loved one, we find that Morris is now emphasizing the spiritual growth of the suffering lover. Leuchnar in "Gertha's Lovers" we have already given as the type of this gain in spiritual stature, and a similar growth is evident in most of those heroes who are either not successful or who have a long struggle to achieve fulfilment of their love. Psyche, for instance, is made fit to become a goddess through her katabasis. Had she been married off as her sisters were, she would simply have been another pretty girl of whom we should never have learnt anything. Had she not been tempted to look at Eros sleeping, she would never have been deprived of him, and eventually, as with almost all divine lovers of mortal beings, he would have tired of her and left her. As it was, through her "fortunate fall", through her suffering, she achieved

immortality.⁷⁵ Similarly, Alcestis gains immortal fame through her death, while her husband, who lived because of her, is only remembered because of her sacrifice:

And for Admetus, he too went his way,
 Though if he died at all I cannot tell;
 But either on the earth he ceased to dwell,
 Or else, oft born again, had many a name.
 But through all lands of Greece Alcestis' fame
 Grew greater, and about her husband's twined,
 Lived, in the hearts of far-off men enshrined.⁷⁶

This acceptance of love-as-suffering and the freedom and knowledge that comes thereby is the point of the title of Love is Enough, or, the Freeing of Pharamond, which is now seen to be by no means ironic. In the same way, The Earthly Paradise was dedicated to Jane because Morris knew that, however great his suffering, through his acceptance of it and through his continued love for Jane he had grown in stature as a human being, and perhaps also as a poet. It was from the time of writing Love is Enough onwards that Morris began to abandon his position as the "idle singer of an empty day", and to move towards the

⁷⁵Cf. also the speeches of Love in Love is Enough about immortal renown, Works IX, 12-13 and 22-3. As Love explains, he is the only god who can give immortality to his followers. Pharamond's war-like deeds and glory will only be remembered because he was a lover also, and abandoned his kingdom to follow his love. Sigurd's deeds pale beside his love for Brynhild; Tristram's beside his for Iseult. . . .

⁷⁶Works IV, 124.

position of work in the world, which was shown thenceforward in his actions and in his writings. In the late prose romances especially, when the love quest motif reappears, the debate about the value of love and the good and evil that it does has given way to the serene quietude of "the sort of love which is a function of health".⁷⁷ The relationship between the lovers remains passionate, sensual, but is no longer romantic in the way that it was in Morris's early stories and poems,⁷⁸ for the love quest is now combined with the quest for self-knowledge and the ideal of service and the active life, which Morris had learnt from his own troubles and also from his admiration for the sturdy self-sufficient heroes of ballad and saga. Ultimately this new synthesis was to find its fullest expression in the most elaborate of the late prose romances, The Well at the World's End, in which the love quest and the ideal of the active life are brought together with Morris's other great theme, the search for immortality.

⁷⁷C. S. Lewis, Rehabilitations, p. 42.

⁷⁸Indeed, in several cases in the late prose romances, one of the pair who finally marry has been involved with someone else first: Walter in The Wood Beyond the World has actually been married once already, and most of Morris's heroes have either been betrothed or at least had a very close relationship with another woman before meeting and marrying the heroine.

CHAPTER 3

"EAST OF THE SUN, WEST OF THE MOON"

The second major theme in Morris's work is the quest for an earthly paradise, a quest in which the hero seeks and sometimes finds immortality for himself, or must choose between mortal human life and immortality in an enchanted land. As its name would suggest, this theme is most prominent in Morris's early work in The Earthly Paradise. Indeed, it amounts almost to an obsession there, for not only is the whole structure of the poem built around the Wanderers' quest for immortality, but a quarter of the tales also are almost exclusively devoted to the theme of the earthly paradise and many of the rest partially so. The most important of these are: "The Story of Cupid and Psyche", "Ogier the Dane", "The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon", "The Man Who Never Laughed Again", "The Golden Apples", and "The Hill of Venus", some of which have already been mentioned in connection with the love quest theme. In addition, "The Doom of King Acrisius", "The Love of Alcestis", "The Son of Croesus", and "The Death of Paris" are all about people who try to evade their deaths, successfully only in the second story, and "The Lady of the Land" and "The Watching of the Falcon" show men involved with enchanted damels in

a rather similar way to that in, for instance, "The Man Who Never Laughed Again", though in both cases they fail to gain their loves, even for the length of time that Bharam enjoys his.

Of the other early period work, The Life and Death of Jason also is much concerned with the choice between mortality and immortality, and even Love is Enough is to some extent brought into the theme, though here it is the reverse side of the story which we are given, for what at first seems an attempt to escape from the world into an earthly paradise¹ is shown really to be an escape from a dead-alive state of passivity into the vital world of the passions and of close contact with nature, an escape in reverse which is continued in Sigurd the Volsung and in Morris's translations from the Icelandic. When we come to the late prose romances, however, the theme of the earthly paradise quest reappears, for, unlike the love quest, in which, as we saw, there is a clear-cut division between the romantic early work and the later work in which the influence

¹As Philip Henderson thought it was. In fact, as we saw in the last chapter, Pharamond leaves the constricting, artificial life of kingship in a country at peace to seek out a hard, physical life with Azalais in her mountain valley, a destiny which shows how Morris's reading of the sagas, and his visits to Iceland, were affecting his earlier romantic ideals. Of course in one sense it is no less romantic for leaders of men to dream of the simple life of the soil, but Love is Enough is not escapist in the sense that, for instance, "The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon" is.

of the sagas had helped Morris to take a more pragmatic view of sexual relationships, there is no sharp change in Morris's debate about the value of immortality, which continues unabated well into the prose romances, and is only resolved, if resolved it is, in The Story of the Glittering Plain, or, the Land of Living Men (1890).²

Such persistence, of course, suggests that there is more than meets the eye in Morris's poetic debate, and that his obsession with earthly paradises masks a problem

²In the opinion of C. S. Lewis, Morris never did give up his obsession with the theme of immortality. See Rehabilitations, pp. 44-54, especially p. 50: "But the fear of death was never one of Morris's chief concerns: it is only an aspect of something very different and much harder to extinguish -- the positive and passionate thirst for immortality. And so the solution is only momentary: in the romances that follow, the rebel passion breaks out again, never more impressive than when it is thus expressed by an old, unwearied poet", and p. 51: "If we were dealing with any author but Morris we should say that this is the conclusion of the whole matter. But in Morris there are no conclusions. The opposed desires change into their opposites and are lulled asleep and reawake; balance is attained and immediately lost; everything is always beginning over again: it is a dance, not a diagram". There is much truth in this analysis of Morris's treatment of the theme of immortality, but Lewis perhaps misses the fact that, although some of the earlier of the last prose romances do treat this theme in detail, as we shall see later in the chapter, after The Story of the Glittering Plain Morris wrote no more about earthly paradises, and little even about the immortal women who are so prominent in his earlier work. In The Wood Beyond the World (1894), for instance, the Maiden, one of the last of these enchanted damsels, puts off her immortality once she marries Walter, and comes into his world instead of him remaining in hers, as in the Earthly Paradise stories where such couples come together. In The Well at the World's End (1896), too, the Lady of Abundance, who has an extended life rather than true immortality and

of fundamental importance to his own life: after all, it is fairly fruitless to be continually asking whether or not a man³ should accept an earthly paradise which is never likely to be offered to him. Nevertheless, this is what Morris is in effect doing, for the theme of the earthly paradise is not simply presented to us in his poetry and prose, but passionately argued, as, for instance, in The Life and Death of Jason in the singing contest between Orpheus and the Sirens,⁴ or the wise advice of Circe to Medea, to insert which Morris had to do some violence to the traditional versions of the story of the Argonauts,⁵ or as late

can be killed, as she is, by violence, is shown to be unsuitable for Ralph, and disposed of.

³It should be noted that almost without exception in Morris's writings it is the females who are immortal and the males mortal, and therefore always the males who are offered the choice between mortal human life and immortality in an enchanted land. The only exception, Psyche, is not really given any choice in the matter once the gods have decided to confer immortality upon her, whereas most of Morris's early heroes deliberately choose immortality -- the exception here is Laurence in "The Ring Given to Venus", who, like Hallblithe in The Story of the Glittering Plain, obstinately prefers his human love to any immortal one, a choice which perhaps reflects the growing ascendancy of the saga spirit in Morris's later Earthly Paradise tales -- while most of his later heroes just as deliberately choose human life.

⁴See Works II, 194-204.

⁵See Works II, 186-189. Morris had to adapt the account of Appollonius Rhodius's The Voyage of Argo considerably in order to introduce the conversation between Medea and Circe on the subject of immortality, which shows

as The House of the Wolfings in the passionate dialogues of Thiodolf and Wood-Sun, where the desire for personal immortality and immortal love conflicts with Thiodolf's sense of duty and love for his people.⁶ The suggestion of some underlying significance is also reinforced by the fact that Morris had, as we have already seen in the case of the love quest, with which the earthly paradise quest is very closely linked, a tendency to use his poetry as a medium for working out the problems and preoccupations which his extreme reticence about revealing his own doubts and fears precluded his expressing in any other way.

The problem might, of course, simply have been, as contemporary reviewers of The Earthly Paradise suggested, Morris's morbid fear of death, but this seems unlikely to have been a major obsession so early as Jason, when, as Morris points out through Circe's words of advice to Medea, men rarely worry about death while they are young and

how important it must have been to him to discuss it. In The Voyage of Argo, translated by E. V. Rieu (Harmondsworth, 1959), pp. 165-7, Jason and Medea together visit Circe to be purged of their blood-guilt in killing Medea's brother. Circe does this without enquiring whom they have killed, and, when she finds out, drives them out of her house angrily. In Morris's poem, however, Medea alone lands on the island, and is very affectionately greeted, despite the death of Circe's nephew. Like Odysseus, Medea has "good counsel" from her about the rites of purification, even though Circe cannot perform them herself, and they part amicably. The implications of Circe's words will be discussed below.

⁶ See Works XIV, 110-3 and 164-73.

active.⁷ Besides, as we have already quoted C. S. Lewis as saying, it is not so much the fear of death as "the positive and passionate thirst for immortality" which motivates Morris's heroes, even those who, like Sigurd, for instance, are least interested in personal survival.⁸ However, given the resemblance of Morris's stories of mortal lovers and their immortal loves to the love stories of the Middle Ages which can often be read as allegories of heavenly love,⁹ it seems possible that what he was really debating was a choice between Christian immortality and pagan annihilation, a possibility that is reinforced by the

⁷See Works II, 188. Of course, the fact that Morris was aware that we spend most of our lives forgetting we must one day die suggests that he was unusually aware of death himself, in order to have analyzed the human reaction so clearly.

⁸See for instance Sigurd's answer to Regin's premature "egging" in Book II of Sigurd the Volsung, Works XII, 73:

Yet I know that the world is wide, and filled with
 deeds unwrought;
 And for e'en such work was I fashioned, lest the
 songcraft come to nought,
 When the harps of God-home tinkle, and the Gods are
 at stretch to hearken:
 Lest the hosts of the Gods be scanty when their day
 hath begun to darken,
 When the bonds of the Wolf was thin, and Loki
 fretteth his chain.
 And sure for the house of my fathers full oft my
 heart is fain,
 And meseemeth I hear them talking of the day when I
 shall come,
 And of all the burden of deeds, that my hand shall
 bear them home.

⁹Or indeed must be read as such, as some critics

close similarity between the structure of The Earthly Paradise and that of The Canterbury Tales, which, whatever the less worthy motives some of the pilgrims have for going to Canterbury, is, nevertheless, the story of a pilgrimage which is to lead eventually to a heavenly paradise.¹⁰ Indeed, steeped as he was in the lore and literature of the Middle Ages, it would be surprising if some underlying spiritual meaning were not to be found in Morris's paradises, even if we did not have the evidence of "The Hollow Land" to show that he had at one time used the idea of Christian redemption in connection with just such a faery damsel as is at first sought after and later rejected by his heroes.¹¹

would think.

¹⁰As. D. W. Robertson says in A Preface to Chaucer, Studies in Medieval Perspectives (Princeton, 1969), p. 373: "Among scriptural concepts which appear in The Canterbury Tales, the most important is the idea of pilgrimage. Any pilgrimage during the Middle Ages, whether it was made on the knees in a labyrinth set in a cathedral floor, or, more strenuously, to the Holy Land, was ideally a figure for the pilgrimage of the Christian soul through the world's wilderness toward the celestial Jerusalem". In Morris's poem, the Wanderers are, in a sense, also pilgrims, though the immortality they seek is not, ostensibly, a heavenly immortality, and we know before they start that their quest is foolish.

¹¹For instance, in the period of The Earthly Paradise, in "The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon", "The Watching of the Falcon", etc., the man is prepared to risk all he has to gain the enchanted maiden, but, by the time of the late prose romances, Morris has found more important goals for his heroes, and these can only be reached in the company of mortal women.

"The Hollow Land", in fact, provides the clue to this reading of the earthly paradise quest theme as a spiritual quest of Morris's own. The last but one of the early prose romances, and by far the most complex, it provides in the Hollow Land itself the archetype¹² for all Morris's earthly paradises, though in a Christian context which he never explicitly used again,¹³ and in Margaret it

12

Although the idea of an earthly paradise occurs first in Morris's work in "The Hollow Land", there is also a suggestion of such a concept earlier in the dream-worlds of several of the other stories, where the line of division between life and death is, as we saw in the last chapter, at times very shaky. For instance, in "The Story of the Unknown Church", where Margaret follows Amyot to death, or in "Gertha's Lovers", where Gertha follows King Olaf, there is obviously an implication that they will find some kind of heavenly paradise in which to fulfil their love. Indeed, in "Gertha's Lovers" it is not even clear that it is to be a heavenly paradise, for Gertha's handmaiden, Edith, who goes with Gertha to Olaf's grave, sees the lovers "together there for hours (talking it seemed), sometimes sitting on the flowers and grass . . . sometimes walking from tree to tree with fingers interlaced", Works I, 224, but when she goes to them, Olaf disappears and she finds only Gertha's dead body. Nevertheless, the lovers do seem to be still walking on the earth for those who have eyes to see them, and their state is obviously closely related to that of Florian in "The Hollow Land", where it seems that his physical body has remained alive but untenanted on earth while his spiritual body walked with Margaret in the Hollow Land. See Works I, 281-2. Similar dream/death situations recur in The Earthly Paradise, and later on in parts of the late prose romances, as for example in The Wood Beyond the World where the Maiden, the Lady, and the Dwarf have appeared apparently bodily to Walter at various times on his journey, but yet have never left the Wood. See Works XVII, 54, for the Lady's surprise at Walter having seen them all before at Langton on Holm.

¹³Margaret's song is: "Christ keep the Hollow

provides the archetype for all the half-faery damsels of the later work, again in a Christian context where her love has the redemptive power of a Pearl or a Gretchen, both, as we saw in the last chapter, variants of the name Margaret. But where Margaret is loved and courted, and her paradise leads eventually to the true fulfilment of the heavenly paradise, Morris's later faery damsels inspire fear as much as love, and the paradises they offer are specious dream-worlds from which his heroes must eventually seek in terror to escape, as Walter does in "The Hill of Venus" or Hallblithe in The Story of the Glittering Plain. The last of her line, and the culmination of it, is the Maiden in The Wood Beyond the World, who gives up her immortality to follow Walter into the

Land . . .", Works I, 276. Later, she rebukes Florian for saying that God is unjust to have allowed Arnald to die, I, 279, and finally she explicitly states that the Hollow Land is a place second only to Heaven: "only second best of the places God has made, for Heaven also is the work of His hand", I, 280. In other words, it is Eden, which is, of course, the archetype for most English descriptions of earthly paradises. Margaret's own function is to redeem Florian, teaching him by love what he could not have learned by living in the world, so that when he does eventually return there he is able to become reconciled with his enemy Harald, and the two of them then "painted God's judgements" instead of their own as they had formerly done: "And we would sit in the sunset and watch them [the paintings] with the golden light changing them, as we yet hoped God would change both us and our works", I, 287. The Hollow Land is thus a place of redemption in a Christian setting, which leads eventually to a true Heaven, and not, as in all the later work, an illusory paradise, a place beyond the world the inhabitants of which are removed from mortality and therefore from salvation.

world of men, and thereafter Morris's heroes turn entirely to women of earth who can help them in their work in the world, just, if we follow out our hypothesis, as Morris's own relationship to belief in immortality shifted away from the desire for any sort of afterlife, or, possibly, as May Morris suggests, settled down to a steady faith in life after death.¹⁴

If, therefore, it was really the problem of his own choice between belief and disbelief in a Christian afterlife that Morris was unconsciously working out in his poetry and prose, it is scarcely surprising that he devoted so much of his writing to the theme of the earthly paradise and the seekers for it, and scarcely surprising that his "exposure of the dialectic of time"¹⁵ should be so forceful as at times almost to drown out the other themes in his

¹⁴See May Morris I, 441-2. I do not really think it very likely that Morris settled down to a steady faith in an afterlife -- the evidence of the late prose romances certainly does not point that way, and we have already seen what Morris's only actual comments on his position were -- but either way he would presumably have stopped worrying about the problem, and therefore ceased to write about it so obsessively.

¹⁵C. S. Lewis, Rehabilitations, p. 53.

poetry.¹⁶ Such an hypothesis would explain why he placed so much emphasis in his later writing on immortality through the continued life of the Folk, a concept which we shall be examining later in this chapter, for though, as we saw in Part I, Morris considered himself a pagan, it may well have been very difficult for him to give up hope of personal immortality even when he could not rationally believe in it any longer. It would also explain why great deeds and passionate love are so highly prized both by Morris and by his heroes, for only such deeds and such intense emotions can ever "gain the Land of Matters Unforgot",¹⁷ which is the only personal immortality that men -- or books -- can know.

¹⁶As, for instance, the Athenaeum reviewer of The Earthly Paradise thought it had in that poem. See also May Morris's comments on "The Hill of Venus" and "The Man Who Never Laughed Again", May Morris I, 433: "They are, as we know, both stories of wild, barren passion and are built up in an atmosphere of such an unquenchable melancholy that if my Father had written little else of note, and if they stood for an expression of himself (as a poet's work, however consciously fanciful, must do in some degree) you would say, Here is an inward-looking being with scarcely a hope in his life, cursed with a sense of the futilities of the world while keenly alive to its beauties".

¹⁷See "L'Envoi" to The Earthly Paradise, Works VI, 330-1. Morris is sending his book itself on a pilgrimage, in which he hopes it will be more successful in finding an earthly paradise of immortal life than his Wanderers were:

I love thee; yet this last time must it be
That thou must hold thy peace and I must speak,
Lest if thou babble I begin to see
Thy gear too thin, thy limbs and heart too weak,

The story of "The Hollow Land" follows the pattern of love, loss, searching, and recovery which we found in the second type of love quest, and as such was briefly discussed in the last chapter. In it, the hero, Florian des Liliis, who is also the narrator, accidentally stumbles upon an earthly paradise, the Hollow Land, in which there lives a beautiful woman who has long been awaiting his coming. They live together there for a while, and then Florian suddenly finds himself back on earth, looking for and longing for the paradise and Margaret, his love. Eventually, after a period of what seems to be atonement, he is able to return

To find the land thou goest forth to seek --
 -- Though what harm if thou die upon the way,
 Thou idle singer of an empty day?

But though this land desired thou never reach,
 Yet folk who know it mayst thou meet or death;
 Therefore a word unto thee would I teach
 To answer these, who, noting thy weak breath,
 Thy wandering eyes, thy heart of little faith,
 May make thy fond desire a sport and play,
 Mocking the singer of an empty day.

That land's name, say'st thou? and the road thereto?
 Nay, Book, thou mockest, saying thou know'st it not;
 Surely no book of verse I ever knew
 But ever was the heart within him hot
 To gain the Land of Matters Unforgot --
 -- There, now we both laugh -- as the whole world may,
 At us poor singers of an empty day.

This, of course, recalls what was said in the last chapter about passionate emotions and great deeds, which could not have been very pleasant for anyone at the time, but which cheer those who come after and who only see the reflections of those emotions in the tales that are written about them. The whole attitude of Morris in the above stanzas forms something of an ironic comment on his own heroes!

there, and the two then pass through the golden gates of Heaven together. However, as Florian was not actually looking for a lover in the first place the tale cannot properly be described as a quest for love. Similarly it is not properly an earthly paradise quest either, as that quest will be understood in The Earthly Paradise itself, for Florian was not looking for an escape from the world when he found the Hollow Land. On the contrary, it was probably because he was not looking for it that he was able to find it.¹⁸ Moreover Margaret is not really a love to be sought for, since it seems from what she says, and from what his men had told him, that she was predestined to save Florian's soul.¹⁹

¹⁸ Arnald, Florian's brother, also falls into the Hollow Land shortly before Florian, but he dies. This seems to be because Arnald deliberately jumped over the cliff intending to commit suicide rather than fight any longer (though he may have had the praiseworthy motive of wishing to save his men), whereas Florian hung on to life as long as he possibly could, and only fell into the Hollow Land when the bush he was holding on to gave way. See Works I, 275.

¹⁹ In the middle of the battle, which was described in Chapter 1 of this section, one of Florian's men says to him: "Men say that at your christening some fiend took on him the likeness of a priest and strove to baptize you in the Devil's name, but God had mercy on you so that the fiend could not choose but baptize you in the name of the most holy Trinity: and yet men say that you hardly believe any doctrine such as other men do, and will at the end only go to Heaven round about as it were, not at all by the intercession of our Lady . . .", Works I, 271. Later Margaret explains: "O! do you know this is what I have

Although it is not technically a quest for an earthly paradise, however, the Hollow Land does have many features in common with Morris's later paradises. Its appearance, for instance, a slightly dryer version of the English countryside in late spring or early summer with fruit trees, beechwoods, and a river, and low hills in the distance, matches that of all Morris's paradises, including the transfigured England of News from Nowhere, where Morris goes up river to Kelmscott to help with the hay harvest.²⁰ Like many of the other earthly paradises, too, the Hollow Land is a secret country which can only be found when fate decrees, as is the case, for example, in "The Man Who Never Laughed Again" in The Earthly Paradise, where Bharam cannot get back to the land beyond the locked door once he has left it even though he knows the beginning of the path,²¹ or in

been waiting for all these years; it made me glad I know, when I was a little baby in my mother's arms to think I was born for this; and afterwards, as I grew up, I used to watch every breath of wind through the beech-boughs, every turn of the silver popular leaves, thinking it might be you or some news of you", ibid., 280. Clearly she, like Faust's Margaret, is to be Florian's special means of redemption.

²⁰ See Works XVI, 142 ff.

²¹ Works V, 201-3. When Bharam first enters the cave he has a long period of unconsciousness during which he is mysteriously transported to the end of the tunnel and emerges in another world. The same thing happens to Hallblithe when he is leaving the Land of Living Men, but he goes in the other direction, from the wonderful land back towards this world. In both cases we know how long the unconsciousness has lasted because their provisions have had time to turn mouldy.

The Story of the Glittering Plain, where Hallblithe, once he has left the Land of Living Men, can only return under the extremely rare circumstances of having found other seekers with whom to re-enter the Land.²² Florian himself has to wait until his hair has turned quite white before he is suddenly released from his task of painting "God's judgements" and permitted to return to Margaret.

That it is not a quest for an earthly paradise as such is also true of The Life and Death of Jason, but nevertheless in the course of their quest for the golden fleece the Argonauts, either individually or collectively, do encounter a number of earthly paradises, which are used by Morris as pegs on which to hang his own internal debate about immortality. The Sirens, of course, are the most obvious choice for such a debate, but Morris also introduces it into the visit to Circe, the passing of the Garden of the Hesperides, the winning of the fleece, the loss of Hylas, and

²⁰Works XIV, 279-86. What in fact would have happened if he had not been found by the three seekers is that Hallblithe would have died, for, as they point out to him when he continues to want to go in the direction of the human world, it is a month's journey to the nearest inhabited place where he may find food.

even into the words of Æson when he first delivers Jason to be educated in the woods by the centaur Chiron, and wishes that the child might always remain in that golden age world, untouched by kingship.²³ Indeed, we begin to wonder whether the Argonauts may not really be on an earthly paradise quest after all, so eagerly do they hail each new place they reach as such a paradise, even Colchis itself, though they know it may well prove deadly to them.²⁴

The first of these paradises, that described in the song which the water-nymph sings to Hylas to lull him to sleep, is more-or-less a paradigm of all; a country very like the Hollow Land, beyond the world we know, where dwells the maiden of the heart's desire:

²³See Works II, 4. Jason does not realize what he has lost in leaving his woodland paradise until he is actually reaching out his hand for the fleece, but then it is too late to draw back:

The prize is reached, which yet I am afeard
 To draw unto me; since I know indeed,
 That henceforth war and toil shall be my meed. --
 Too late to fear, it was too late, the hour
 I left the grey cliffs and the beechen bower,
 So here I take hard life and deathless praise,
 Who once was fain of nought but quiet days,
 And painless life, not empty of delight

Ibid., 130.

²⁴See Works II, 99. Circe's island is greeted with the same rapture, ibid., 181. As C. S. Lewis says, Rehabilitations, p. 47: "The Argonauts are teased and solicited over and over again by paradises, gardens, and islands, 'not made for men that die'"

The hills whose flowers ne'er fed the bee,
 The shore no ship has ever seen,
 Still beaten by the billows green,
 Whose murmur comes unceasingly
 Unto the place for which I cry.

For which I cry both day and night,
 For which I let slip all delight,
 That maketh me both deaf and blind,
 Careless to win, unskilled to find,
 And quick to lose what all men seek.

Yet tottering as I am and weak,
 Still have I left a little breath
 To seek within the jaws of death
 An entrance to that happy place,
 To seek the unforgotten face
 Once seen, once kissed, once reft from me
 Anigh the murmuring of the sea.²⁵

The weak efforts of the dying man to reach "that happy place" foreshadow the situation where the dying hero of "Ogier the Dane" strives, albeit unwittingly, to reach the earthly paradise which was promised him at his birth,²⁶ or that in The Story of the Glittering Plain, where the aged Long-hoary carefully conserves his strength on the journey to the Land of Living Men lest he die before he can be rejuvenated.²⁷

Unlike the Hollow Land, which is a true Eden in a Christian setting, however, the land described by the water-nymph is not entirely desirable. As Juno explains

²⁵ Works II, 70.

²⁶ Works IV, 224-7. The description of the gradual deterioration of Ogier's physical condition is, as usually with Morris, very realistically depicted.

²⁷ Works XIV, 241-55. Long hoary takes again the

to the remaining Argonauts:

And as for Hylas, never think to see
 His body more, who yet lies happily
 Beneath the green stream where ye were this morn,
 And there he praises Jove that he was born,
 Forgetting the rough world and every care;
 Not dead, nor living²⁸

The fact that Hylas, though happy, is neither dead nor alive suggests that the immortality conferred by such means is not really worth having, and this thought is reinforced in the singing contest between Orpheus and the Sirens in which they offer: "The changeless land where ye may be / Roofed over by the changeful sea", and Orpheus counters them with: "Toil rather, suffer and be free, / Betwixt the green earth and the sea".²⁹ All that they could give, even were their offer not specious anyway as is clear from Venus's rescue of Butes from their "deadly hands",³⁰ is the sort of life-in-death gained by Hylas:

name that he bore in his youth, Sea-Eagle, and the appearance that he had then, but this can only be preserved so long as he remains in the Land.

²⁸Works II, 73.

²⁹Works II, 199. Cf. also the opposition between Orpheus's two songs: "Alas for Saturn's days of gold", ibid., 150 ff.; and "O death, that maketh life so sweet", 176 ff.

³⁰Works II, 206.

And there to die and not to die,
 To be as if ye ne'er had been,
 Yet keep your memory fresh and green.³¹

This last point, that anyone who accepted such an offer would retain their memories of earth, indicates that Hylas can be happy only because he is too young to have any memories of great deeds and high adventure which would make him fret for a more active existence. Where older men reach earthly paradises in Morris's poetry, however, they must either, like Ogier, receive the crown of forgetfulness to blot out all remembrances of their life on earth,³² or else they eventually desire to leave again, as Walter tries to do in "The Hill of Venus" in The Earthly Paradise,³³ or

³¹Works II, 203.

³³See Works IV, 227. Morgan le Fay slips the magic ring on Ogier's finger to make him young, but he still remembers the past overmuch:

and good and bad
 Tormented him, because as yet he had
 A worldly heart within his frame made new,
 And to the deeds that he was wont to do
 Did his desires still turn, IV, 231.

It is only when she crowns him with the crown of forgetfulness that he turns wholly to her, and when she takes away the crown so that he can return again and fight for France he immediately take up his old life again, IV, 237. Cf. also the enchanted mail-coat in The House of the Wolfings, which causes Thiodolf to abandon his people and turn wholly towards Wood-Sun, but only so long as he is actually wearing it. See Works XIV, 147-73.

³³See Works VI, 299-303. And when he thinks he can

as Hallblithe insists upon doing despite almost insurmountable odds in The Story of the Glittering Plain.³⁴

Though the new England of the future is not an earthly paradise in the full sense³⁵ -- it does not confer immortality on its inhabitants, after all, only longer and more healthy lives -- yet the same problem of adjustment applies there. As Morris explains to us at the end of the book:

All along, though those friends were so real to me, I had been feeling as if I had no business amongst them: as though the time would come when they would reject me, and say, as Ellen's last mournful look seemed to say, 'No, it will not do; you cannot be of us; you belong so entirely to

not be forgiven, Walter returns to the Hill only to an eternity of remorse and suffering, VI, 323. For Walter's name, see May Morris's comment, VI, xvii: "Walter (who was Lawrence in the early draft, and thereafter Amyot, which name he kept till the printer came in sight)." All three are names which Morris used in the early prose romances. Barbara Fass in "William Morris and the Tannhäuser Legend: A Gloss on the Earthly Paradise Motif", Victorian Newsletter, XL (Autumn, 1971), 22-6 discusses "The Hill of Venus" in a way which fits well into my general interpretation of The Earthly Paradise.

³⁴At first, as we saw, Hallblithe tries unsuccessfully to escape over the mountains, and nearly starves to death. Later he builds a boat and escapes to the Isle of Ransom, where his life is in danger, and he prefers to face the chance of death, whether in his small boat in unknown waters or on the island, rather than submit to the eternal, unchanging life of the Land.

³⁵But Guest/Morris says to the Grandfather, who is a "grumbler", XVI, 152: "To me you seem here as if you were living in heaven compared with us of the country from which I came". Later Dick says of Ellen and her house, 155:

the unhappiness of the past that our happiness even would weary you.³⁶

Thus he, like so many of the heroes of his stories, must leave the world of dream. That it was by free choice that he did so, we shall see later in this chapter.

The most elaborate defence of human life in The Life and Death of Jason, however, comes, not from Orpheus or any of the human characters in the poem, but from Circe, herself an immortal. Though she regrets, in so far as any immortal can feel regret, Medea's not having come to her before she was foolish enough to fall in love with Jason and lose any chance of immortality, yet she comforts her with an account of the compensations of human life:

"Doesn't it all look like one of those very stories out of Grimm that we were talking about up in Bloomsbury? Here are we two lovers wandering about the world, and we have come to a fairy garden, and there is the very fairy herself amidst of it: I wonder what she will do for us". Morris thus stresses the relationship between Ellen and the faery damsels of his other dream-worlds.

³⁶Works XVI, 210. This perception of the wearying effect of too much happiness is curiously like Yeats's comment on Morris's own writing: "His poetry often wearies us as the unbroken green of July wearies us, for there is something in us, some bitterness because of the Fall, it may be, that takes a little from the sweetness of Eve's apple after the first mouthful; but he who did all things gladly and easily, who never knew the curse of labour, found it always as sweet as it was in Eve's mouth", Essays and Introductions, p. 61. Apart from Yeats's romanticization of Morris the man, there is some truth in this passage -- certainly News from Nowhere seems to have this wearying effect on many readers, as, indeed, it does on at least one of the characters! See Works XVI, 152.

What! do men think of death ere it draws near?
 Not so, else surely they stint their strife,
 For lengthening out their little span of life,
 But where each found himself there should he sit,
 Not moving hand or foot for thought of it.
 Wherefore the Gods, wishing the earth should teem
 With living wills like theirs, nor as a dream
 To hold but beauty and the lives of beasts,
 That they may have fair stories for their feasts,
 Have given them forgetfulness of death,
 Longings and hopes, and joy in drawing breath,
 And they live happy, knowing naught at all,
 Nor what death is, where that shall chance to fall.
 For while he lives, few minutes certainly
 Does any man believe that he shall die . . .
 Weep not, nor pity thine own life too much:
 Not painless shall it be, indeed, or such
 As the Gods live in their unchanged abode,
 And yet not joyless; no unmeasured load
 Of sorrows shall thy dull soul learn to bear,
 With nought to keep thee back from death but fear,
 Of what thou know'st not, knowing nought but pain.
 But though full oft thou shalt lift hands in vain,
 Crying to what thou know'st not in thy need,
 And blind with agony, yet oft, indeed,
 Shalt thou go nigh to think thyself divine,
 For love of what thou deemest to be thine,
 For joy of what thou dreamest cannot die.³⁷

Men, with their joys and hopes and passions, and the
 illusion of immortality which the Gods have granted them,
 are like Gods so long as they are alive, and if they live
 their lives to the full they may, as Jason and Medea will,
 leave enduring memories behind them. Surely this is more
 to be wished for than the sort of half-life granted to

³⁷Works II, 188. The idea that it is only those who
 are untouched by experience, who are still innocent, like
 Hylas, who can be happy in achieving immortality, is rein-
 forced in this conversation in so far as Medea could not
 now have immortality because she has experienced the passion
 of love, Works II, 186.

Hylas?³⁸

Unfortunately, however, Circe's words do not really convince Medea, still less Morris, and the quest comes to a depressing conclusion at the end of Book XVI with Medea's doubts and fears, and Morris's prophetic comment on Jason's apparent felicity:

So, having everything he once desired
 Within the wild, ere yet his heart was fired
 By Juno's words, he lives an envied man,
 Holding these things that scarce another can,
 Ease, love, and fame, and youth that knows no dread
 Of any horrors lurking far ahead
 Across the sunny, flowered fields of life: --
 -- Youth seeing no end unto the joyous strife.³⁹

The sudden intrusion of "horrors lurking far ahead" and the ending of "the joyous strife" into a celebration of the successful conclusion of the quest shows how intimations of failure and death were haunting Morris's thought at that time, and the fact that he added a seventeenth book to deal hurriedly with all the disasters which befel Jason afterwards adds to our impression of his unhappiness. Thus it is scarcely surprising that immortality, failure, and death, which are supposed to be subordinate themes in Jason

³⁸As Circe says to Medea also, II, 189: "Thy name shall be a solace and a song / While the world lasts". This is reminiscent of what Morris said of Alcestis.

³⁹See Works II, 258-9.

but keep thrusting themselves to the fore there, should in Morris's next poem, The Earthly Paradise, come into their proper place as the central pivot around which all the Wanderers' stories turn.

Though modelled outwardly on The Canterbury Tales, and with a mediaeval quest setting, The Earthly Paradise is actually a sort of Bildungsroman, in which the Wanderers are shown passing from the romantic dreams of youth, through a series of disillusioning experiences, and eventually in old age becoming reconciled to death. The "Prologue" gives the Wanderers' own analysis of their "tale of folly and of wasted life",⁴⁰ as spoken by Rolf, one of the three chief instigators of the quest for an earthly paradise. Subsequently, in the link passages between the tales which they and their hosts, the Elders of the City across the sea, tell alternately, two tales to a month, we are shown the Wanderers' gradual acquiescence in and acceptance of coming death, until, at the end of the poem, they have become contented with their lot:

But the old men learned in earth's bitter lore,
 Were glad to leave untouched the too rich store
 Of hapless memories, if it might be done;
 And wandered forth into the noonday sun,
 To watch the blossoms budding on the wall,

⁴⁰Works III, 6.

And hear the rooks among the elm-trees call,
 And note the happy voices on the breeze,
 And see the lithe forms; making out of these
 No tangled story, but regarding them
 As hidden elves upon the forest's hem
 Gaze on the dancers through the May-night green,
 Not knowing aught what troubled looks may mean.⁴¹

They have reached the condition described by Wordsworth in "Expostulation and Reply" as "a wise passiveness", and, in their recognition of the simplest pleasures of existence, divorced from its pains, they have come as close as man can to success in the quest for an earthly paradise.

This achievement of the Wanderers at the end is, however, somewhat ironic. Their hopes at the start of their quest were for immortal youth, or, at least;

a happy land,
 Where at the worst death is so far away
 No man need think of him from day to day.⁴²

What they find is a happy and peaceful land indeed, but one where men are, of course, mortal; yet even so they manage to reach a position where they no longer "need think of him from day to day", for extreme old age has brought them peace at last -- just as it would have done had they stayed at home to wait for it as the Elders of the City have done.⁴³

⁴¹Works VI, 326.

⁴²Works III, 20.

⁴³See Works IV, 186, the link passage following "The Watching of the Falcon", where the Wanderers perceive at last that they might just as well have stayed at home for all they have gained.

This irony is pointed further by the tales they tell, many of them being the tales of earthly paradises which had originally encouraged them to believe in the actual existence of such places.⁴⁴ As they tell them in the poem, however, these tales are seen as the "idle dreams" they really are: the best of the paradises, like the Land East of the Sun, are, as we saw in the last chapter, mere dream-worlds with no basis in reality; others, like Bharam's in "The Man Who Never Laughed Again", cannot be retained for any length of time by mortal men, or, like the Garden of the Hesperides, are not available to men at all; while in the last, the land inside the mountain in "The Hill of Venus", Morris shows us how such a paradise, if attained and retained, will turn into a hell on earth.⁴⁵

⁴⁴See the "Prologue", Works II, 6-8 and 12-14, and also, for example, the link passage immediately preceding "Ogier the Dane", Works IV, 209.

⁴⁵In fact, the tales that deal with the earthly paradise theme are arranged in descending order: from "The Story of Cupid and Psyche", which is completely successful and results in immortality for Psyche; through "Ogier" and "The Land East" which are successful at a rather lower level with fairies rather than gods and goddesses involved; to "The Man Who Never Laughed Again", where the paradise is lost very soon; and "The Golden Apples", where Hercules does not even attempt to stay, but carries away a curse with him because he has taken the apples. This last tale is backed up by Morris's use of the Garden of the Hesperides in Jason, which, it will be remembered, was originally intended to be one of the Earthly Paradise stories until it grew much too long for inclusion there. In Jason, the Garden is described as "a place not made for earthly bliss, / Or eyes of dying men", Works II, 207, and

This backlash on the tales comes as no surprise to the reader, however. At the very beginning, in the unnamed prefatory poem, we are made conscious that there is for Morris no such thing as an earthly paradise. Morris describes himself as striving "to build a shadowy isle of bliss / Midmost the beating of the steely sea, / Where tossed about all hearts of men must be".⁴⁶ The metaphor of the "sea of life" and man as a seafarer upon it is well-known and needs no elucidation, but Morris's "shadowy isle" which can give men a brief respite from their troubles is no more, and no less, than the poem itself, and the irony, in a poem about a quest for an earthly paradise, is that the only paradise that can be attained even briefly in this life is through a sort of "palace of art",⁴⁷ through the transformation of the deeds and sufferings of "mighty men"

the Daughters in their song warn the Argonauts that even their sight of the Garden can only do them harm, because it will make them dissatisfied with their lives. In the last of the Earthly Paradise tales, "The Hill of Venus", as we shall see, Walter wishes to leave "lest God should leave us twain / Forgotten here when earth has passed away", Works VI, 302 but when the Pope tells him, wrongly as it turns out, that his soul cannot be saved, he returns to the Hill to spend his life "In sleepless nights, of horrors passing hell, / Of joys by which our joys are misery; / But hopeless both, if such a thing may be", VI, 323.

⁴⁶Works III, 2.

⁴⁷The Earthly Paradise, of course, was never intended to be the exclusive palace of art such as the subject of Tennyson's poem had built for himself. In fact, it was a move on Morris's part towards the public, away from the

into the material of art in some way. This transformation is, of course, what the tales themselves represent, and although if taken in isolation, as they often are, some of them appear to advocate the search for a dream-world, in fact Morris is intentionally undercutting their effect on every side by the ironic commentary in the framework of the poem and in the link passages.

This perception of irony in the earliest part of The Earthly Paradise was at one time followed by a further, less delicate, statement of intent. The "Prologue" to the poem was originally called "The Fools' Paradise",⁴⁸ a title which would have given the reader too much information too soon, and revealed The Earthly Paradise immediately as, to some extent, a satire on the "dreamers of dreams" who lose touch with reality to the extent that Morris's Wanderers do. For the poem is not going to be the escapist work that it may at first appear, and as many readers, from the majority

"small Palace of Art of my own", Mackail I, 142, which the Red House had been. Such writing of a more "public" poetry was the first step, for Morris, towards work in the world. The last step was described by May Morris thus: "The inevitable came: the man who once had built his Palace of Art as a refuge from inharmonious things without, will before long stand at Dod Street for Free Speech, and at the corner of mean roadways address a few careless listeners, in a growing, burning understanding of the difficulties of industrial life: from now until his strength failed, Art and Socialism cannot be spoken of apart", Works XIII, xxxvii.

⁴⁸This first version of the "Prologue" appears in Works XXIV. It is written in rather jaunty four-line stanzas,

of its contemporary reviewers up to critics of the present day, have thought it: the wizard may show his king the promise of spring, the flowers of summer, and the fruits of autumn, but he does not attempt to exclude the sound of the winter wind which forms the background to his visions, and, indeed, a commentary on them.⁴⁹ Morris, similarly, will himself, by the very structure of the poem, heavily emphasize the passing of time and the coming of age and death to man, both through the seasonal cycle of the poem (the stories are told over a year from March to February, and each month has a prefatory poem and a link passage describing the season of the year and the accompanying emotions of the old men who tell the stories and of the young people who listen to them), and through the contrast between this passing of the Wanderers' lives and the subjects of the stories, who have never lived and therefore can never die.⁵⁰ It is part of his point that we should be deceived

and is very different in tone from the published version. Mackail comments on the defects of this version in I, 194, though some might think it more lively than the version finally published.

⁴⁹See Works III, 2, stanza 5.

⁵⁰See Works III, 7: "So let me sing of names rememberèd, / Because they, living not, can ne'er be dead". The general effect of the contrast between the Wanderers and their stories is that which Keats described as his reaction to the "cold pastoral" in the ode "On a Grecian Urn": the characters in the stories are frozen into the static poses

at first, and think the poet really the mere "idle singer of an empty day" that he calls himself, so that, at the last, he can reveal to us, "if ye will read aright",⁵¹ that escapism, turning away from the fact of death, and the fact, perhaps, of eternal death, in his view brings only the sort of immortality granted to Hylas: "still to be dead-alive, while all things else / Beat with the pulse that mid the struggle dwells".⁵²

It is not the place here to discuss the trials and dangers that the Wanderers pass through in their quest for the earthly paradise, nor to analyse in detail the tales and their significance. Suffice it to say that when the Wanderers reach the first of the islands in the west, they

of art, and though they may move us, even make us sad, their stories still produce pleasure as they would not were the actors in them still alive and suffering. See Works VI, 329:

And all those images of love and pain,
Wrought as the year did wax, perfect, and wane,
If they were verily loving there alive,
No pleasure to their tale-tellers could give.

The connection between this coldness of art and the dead-alive state of earthly paradises is emphasized in the poem which comes after the "Prologue" and before "March", where Morris describes himself gathering his stories in an earthly paradise, presumably "The Land of Matters Unforgot".

⁵¹Works III, 2. This would be a rather odd warning to give at the beginning of a poem, unless the poet expected some readers to be aware of secondary meanings which would not be obvious to everyone.

⁵²Works VI, 327.

immediately think it to be "the gates of Paradise / And endless bliss", and that they are disillusioned both here and again and again afterwards, until only a handful of them, "old and grey / Before our time", reach the City at last, with no hopes left and desiring no more than "a little slumber ere the end of day".⁵³ What is important, and what the main body of the poem is about, is what these men learn after they have given up hope of everything, through object lessons about the quest for immortality in the stories themselves, and through discussion and analysis of their changing attitudes to death in the link passages.

The learning process for the Wanderers begins with the presentation in "March" of the seasonal cycle and the renewal of the world in spring, for though these month poems, which have already been treated as autobiographical material in the last chapter, do not relate directly to the experience of the Wanderers, they do often set the tone for the month and for the stories that are told in that month, and thus provide a context for the tales and for the framework of the Wanderers in relation to the external realities of time and change. In "March", therefore, while emphasizing the renewal of life through the reappearance of the warm sun and the singing of the "brown birds", Morris also introduces

⁵³Works III, 28, 79, and 6.

the theme of death, urging us to understand that it is the perception of death that gives so much sweetness to life, something which the Wanderers have still to learn:

Yea, welcome March! and though I die ere June,
 Yet for the hope of life I give thee praise,
 Striving to swell the burden of the tune
 That even now I hear the brown birds raise,
 Unmindful of the past or coming days;
 Who sing: 'O joy! a new year is begun:
 What happiness to look upon the sun!'

Ah, what begetteth all this storm of bliss
 But Death himself, who crying solemnly,
 E'en from the heart of sweet Forgetfulness,
 Bids us 'Rejoice, lest pleasureless ye die.
 Within a little time must ye go by.
 Stretch forth your open hands, and while ye live
 Take all the gifts that Death and Life may give.'⁵⁴

The "brown birds" are nightingales, a typically understated description of them such as Morris often uses in his poetry, and their contentment with the present, "unmindful of the past or coming days", reflects what is to become the state of mind of the Wanderers at the end of the poem.

"March" also functions as a contrast to the "St. Luke's Summer" of the Wanderers: they are now, at the start of the poem, "not quite unhappy, rest they had, / And with their hope their fear had passed away",⁵⁵ so that they almost think themselves at the spring of life again, which

⁵⁴ Works III, 82.

⁵⁵ Works III, 82-3.

of course they are not. Nevertheless, the first story, "Atalanta's Race", is apparently designed to encourage their illusion, for it is set in springtime, the time of hope, with overtones of a fertility ritual, and it has a happy ending. Listening to it brings the old men a certain pain, however, because they cannot help but contrast the happiness of the tale with their own age and approaching death, and so realize that they are not, in fact, in the spring of life as they had half thought before the tale began. The pain is revivifying also, for with it the Wanderers' numb hopelessness passes away:

withal once more there dawned
The light of common day on those old hearts,
And all were ready now to play their parts,
And take what feeble joy might yet remain
In place of all they once had hoped to gain.⁵⁶

After this, they will again suffer, but without that suffering they would not be able to reach the peaceful joy of their state at the end of the poem.

The next tale, "The Man Born to be King", reminds the Wanderers of their own country, Norway, for it is a northern tale,⁵⁷ and this again provides a necessary pain, for they must learn to be able to bear their memories with equanimity, which they will not do by running away from them. Their hosts, who are observing the Wanderers with great

⁵⁶ Works III, 105.

⁵⁷ Works III, 105-6.

interest, "noted well the ghosts / Of old desires within their wasted eyes, / Till one by one the fresh-stirred memories, / So bitter-sweet, flickered and died away",⁵⁸ as the healing process begins. Thus in "April" Morris can place heavier emphasis on death, reflecting the Wanderers' perception of it in their youth when they feared it so,⁵⁹ and this emphasis is continued in the two stories for April: first, in "The Doom of King Acrisius", which, as we have already seen, portrays the Perseus story from the point of view of the man he is doomed to kill; and, secondly, through the memories of "our deserted home"⁶⁰ which "The Proud King", itself a relatively happy story, conjures up for the Wanderer who relates it.

By "May", the title poem of which describes the perceptions of "Eld and Death" which come to young people on their first failure in love⁶¹ -- this perhaps was originally the source of Morris's own heightened awareness of the transience of human life -- the Wanderers are ready for the

⁵⁸Works III, 168.

⁵⁹Works III, 169.

⁶⁰Works III, 241.

⁶¹Works IV, 1. Cf. also the "Epilogue", VI, 328, where Morris says:

first of the stories which deals explicitly with the theme of immortality and the earthly paradise, "The Story of Cupid and Psyche". The setting in which the tale is told is the spring festival of "maying", and the Elders of the City are so absorbed by their contemplation of the young people that they almost forget to tell their story,⁶² a forgetfulness that is significant in that it again foreshadows the state of the Wanderers themselves at the end of The Earthly Paradise when they have become content simply to enjoy the pleasures of observing the world around them. Like three of the four preceding stories, "Cupid and Psyche" on one level concerns the fates of those who try to bend fate, whether to avoid a marriage, or a birth, or, as the Wanderers have tried to do also, a death, but, unlike the other stories, its setting is a sort of earthly paradise: fruit and flowers grow on the trees together, and birds

Yet, O belike, ye know not much of love,
 Who know not that this meant the fearful threat,
 The End, forgotten much, remembered yet
 Now and again, that all perfection mocks.

⁶²Works IV, 2-3.

sing there which do not sing on earth,⁶³ a situation like that which the Wanderers had themselves been seeking.

The reaction of the Wanderers to the telling of this story is, of course, a certain sadness as they reflect on the illusions of their own quest, but again the pain is revivifying in that "hopes of life arise"⁶⁴ which were certainly not there for them when they first began the story-telling. Thus in the second story for May, "The Writing on the Image", Morris is able to present the Wanderers with a starker picture of this world than he had as yet done, showing life as a mere interlude between the darkness before birth and the darkness after death, a pagan view of this world reminiscent of that expressed in Bede's Ecclesiastical History in the image of the bird that flies

⁶³Works IV, 17. Psyche is, of course, successful in gaining immortality eventually, but it is important to remember that, like Florian in "The Hollow Land", she was not seeking it. In fact, she originally went, if not quite willingly at least submissively, to what she thought was to be her death for the good of her threatened people, an act quite opposite to that of the Wanderers, who fled their own plague-stricken land. The immortality she achieves, therefore, only comes after she has died to her familiar life, and it takes her to heaven eventually, as death is also supposed to do to those who believe in Christ as the Wanderers are supposed to do. Moreover, as Morris must have known, the story of Cupid and Psyche was, in the Middle Ages, commonly understood as an allegory of the love of God for the immortal soul, a reading which encourages the idea that Morris may also, consciously or unconsciously, have thought of Psyche's apotheosis on a spiritual rather than a literal level.

⁶⁴Works IV, 74.

through a lighted hall, from dark to dark.⁶⁵ The story itself continues the emphasis on death, for, as we saw in the last chapter, Morris altered the original ending of the story, in which the Scholar escapes from the cave, into a climax of horror and fear as he finds himself trapped forever in the darkness underground.⁶⁶ A similar altering of the end of the story to produce a darker effect takes place also in the next story, "The Love of Alcestis", and the three stories that follow it: "The Lady of the Land", an unsuccessful serpent-slayer story, in which the "hero" runs away in fear from his beloved when she appears to him in her enchanted form as a dragon, and soon afterwards dies of shame and grief at his lack of courage; "The Son of Croesus", in which the king tries unsuccessfully to prevent the death of his son; and "The Watching of the Falcon", in which the King loses everything, including his life, for one brief night with an enchanted lady; are all death-oriented stories.

The effect on the Wanderers of this group of stories emphasizing death is mixed. After the story of Alcestis, they begin to lament that they are "deedless men" because in running away from death they have also lost the glory of

⁶⁵ See Beowulf translated by David Wright (Harmondsworth, 1957), p. 16, where Wright shows how this image is relevant to Old English literature generally. For Morris's use of the same idea see Works IV, 76.

⁶⁶ Works IV, 84.

life that they might have had,⁶⁷ a perception which Morris reinforces by following it with "The Lady of the Land". Their grief is also encouraged by the reaction of the young men of the City, who now begin to think they will sail eastwards to do the noble deeds from which the Wanderers ran away.⁶⁸ This is again pointed by the story that follows, "The Son of Croesus", for Atys, the son, who knows that he is doomed to die by an iron weapon, prefers the idea of dying gloriously in battle, as he perhaps would even were he not so doomed, to being mollycoddled ignominiously at home in order to die eventually by the same weapon.⁶⁹ On the other hand, "The Love of Alcestis" also shows the Wanderers an emblem of their own old desire for immortality in the person of Admetus, but instead of being poignant, as "The Story of Cupid and Psyche" was, this now only makes them realize how much immortality has become more or less indifferent to them:

⁶⁷Works IV, 125.

⁶⁸Works IV, 142.

⁶⁹Cf. the dialogue between Croesus and Atys, IV, 151-3.

Strange felt the wanderers at his tale, for now
 Their old desires it seemed once more to show
 Unto their altered hearts, when now the rest,
 Most surely coming, of all things seemed best . . .⁷⁰

They, being old, are ready for the rest of death.

This acceptance of coming death on the part of the Wanderers prepares us for "The Watching of the Falcon", where, for the first time, Morris actually portrays death as necessary and desirable, not merely as better than cowardice, as in the previous two stories, or better than the loss of the loved one, as in "The Love of Alcestis". Like winter, which serves an important function in the seasonal cycle by purifying the insect-ridden air and waters and resting the soil, Death is now shown as necessary for the human race, which would otherwise in time totally and irredeemably vicious:

And all is well as it can be
 Upon this earth where all has end.
 For on them God is pleased to send
 The gift of Death down from above,
 That envy, hatred, and hot love,
 Knowledge with hunger by his side,
 And avarice and deadly pride,
 There may have end like everything
 Both to the shepherd and the king:
 Lest this green earth become but hell
 If folk thereon should ever dwell.⁷¹

⁷⁰Works IV, 125.

⁷¹Works IV, 161-2.

In view of the supposed escapism of The Earthly Paradise, this eminently realistic, if somewhat cynical, statement of man's fundamental corruption is rather interesting.

After this climactic statement of the need for death, Morris does not have very much more to add to the progress of the Wanderers towards contentment, though they have not yet really begun to take pleasure in their lives again. A number of times, therefore, Morris stresses the importance of being satisfied with what one has, both for the Wanderers, for example, at the end of "The Watching of the Falcon",⁷² and in his own life in "August" and "October".⁷³ The stories that follow are mostly more "marvellous" and dream-like to the Wanderers than those that have gone before.⁷⁴ "Pygmalion and the Image" makes them only "glad to have lived so long";⁷⁵ "Ogier the Dane", another earthly paradise story, is told because the end of August and harvest-time

⁷²Works IV, 186.

⁷³Works IV, 187 and V, 122.

⁷⁴See "Pygmalion", IV, 188 and "The Death of Paris", V, 22. As Morris points out at the end of "Bellerophon at Argos", VI, 134, the Wanderers cannot be hurt any more by any of the stories, however sad, because they no longer take them as the personal messages that they seemed to be at the beginning of their quest.

⁷⁵Works IV, 208.

makes them think of their own approaching deaths, so that they "were fain / Of something new somewhat to dull the pain / Of sad, importunate old memories . . ." ⁷⁶ but at the end all they feel is that such a paradise -- it is one of those that originally had inspired their quest -- really does not seem very desirable any more, and they are even able to laugh a little afterwards for the first time in the poem; ⁷⁷ even "The Death of Paris", with its sad ending, is "not sad enow to load the yoke, / E'en by a feather's weight, of those old folk". ⁷⁸ By the end of October, therefore, despite the sadness of the second tale for that month, "The Man Who Never Laughed Again", they are completely contented:

Painless, and waiting for eternity
 That will not harm, were these old men now grown.
 The seed of unrest, that their hearts had sown,
 Sprung up, and garnered, and consumed, had left
 Nought that from out their treasure might be reft;
 All was a picture in these latter days,
 That had been once, and they might sit and praise
 The calm, wise heart that knoweth how to rest,
 The man too kind to snatch out at the best,
 Since he is part of all, each thing a part,
 Beloved alike of his wide-loving heart. ⁷⁹

⁷⁶Works IV, 209.

⁷⁷Works IV, 254-5.

⁷⁸Works V, 3.

⁷⁹Works V, 205.

Moreover, they are beginning to see themselves as part of all things, and therefore beginning to have a glimmering of the sort of immortality, that which comes from the immersion of self in the good of the whole, which Morris was to celebrate in The House of the Wolfings.

In this new contentment, the Wanderers can not only accept the present but also look back on their past with equanimity, as they do in the link passage for December,⁸⁰ and this is fittingly followed by "The Golden Apples", the one story in The Earthly Paradise which deals neither with love nor with suffering nor with death, and "The Fostering of Aslaug", an idyllic tale of love which causes the eyes of the Wanderer who relates it to brighten as he begins,⁸¹ in contrast to the telling of most of the other northern tales, which have brought at least a sombre mood if not actual sadness to them. However, idyllic tales at this point are really no longer necessary to the Wanderers, and, regardless of the subject-matter of the remaining tales, they are able to continue the progress of their renewed pleasure in life; as, for example, in the Swabian priest's "pleasant smile" when his look makes a young maiden redden

⁸⁰Works VI, 2.

⁸¹Works VI, 20.

before he reads "The Ring Given to Venus", and interesting suggestion of renewed sexuality in old age,⁸² or his "pleased and thoughtful look" at the end of it;⁸³ or in the pleasure the Wanderers show at the beginning of February despite the inclemency of the weather and "little as the tale seemed made for mirth".⁸⁴ The differing attitudes of the old and young listeners to "The Hill of Venus", the last story, finally reveal how far the Wanderers have come in their spiritual journey, for the young people are disturbed by it, while the old, despite its relevance to their former hopes, are left quite indifferent to all but the pleasure of hearing it. Their epilogue, therefore, is fittingly:

⁸²Works VI, 135. It is interesting, in view of the sexual hint, that the hero of "The Ring", like the priest who reads the story, is called Laurence, as also, it will be remembered, was the hero of "The Hill of Venus" in early drafts of that poem.

⁸³Works VI, 174. Curiously, Morris makes this pleasure a little ambiguous in that it is unclear at the end of the story whether or not the priest is still alive. We only find out for certain in late February, a month and a tale later, when he relates the last story in the book, "The Hill", again smiling and in a rather rakish mood, VI, 279-80.

⁸⁴Works VI, 176.

So is a year passed of the quiet life,
 That these old men from such mishap and strife,
 Such springing up, and dying out of dreams
 Had won at last. What further then? Meseems
 Whate'er the tale may know of what befell
 Their lives henceforth I would not have it tell;
 Since each tale's ending needs must be the same:
 And we men call it Death. Howe'er it came
 To those, whose bitter hope hath made this book,
 With other eyes, I think, they needs must look
 On its real face, than when so long ago
 They thought that every good thing would be won,
 If they might win a refuge from it.⁸⁵

They have changed, and now, approaching it, they see the real face of Death as "we men call it", and are no longer afraid.

Despite this emphasis on the change in attitude that has taken place in the Wanderers and on their progressive education during the course of the poem, Morris, however, refuses finally to assert that their quest was vain in the first place. Although they regarded themselves as "deedless men", yet Morris does not so regard them, for in fact, through their very running away from death they have, paradoxically, also taken up arms against it, have "stood up to" death.⁸⁶ Such a stand is, in Morris's opinion, all that anyone, even poets, can make, but more, it is what must be done by anyone who wishes to achieve anything in this life;

⁸⁵ Works VI, 327.

⁸⁶ Works VI, 329.

for, and this takes us back to Circe's admonition to Medea, the gods have given most men forgetfulness of death most of the time -- otherwise they would simply sit and wait for death, "not moving hand or foot for thought of it" -- but to some people, poets, heroes, unhappy lovers, they have given an abnormal consciousness of death which goads them into violent action of some sort, just as Love in Love is Enough goaded Pharamond out of his comfortable kingship. This consciousness of death was the motivation of the Wanderers, and this is what justifies their mad quest in the end, that they have fought against death knowing that the fight was vain.

This is somewhat of a new attitude on the part of Morris. In his essay on Browning, it will be remembered, he had praised Childe Roland's heroism in going to the dark tower despite the fact that he was certainly going to die there,⁸⁷ but this was in a Christian context: "yet he can leave all this in God's hands, and go forward, for it will all come right at the end", Morris says there. In The Earthly Paradise, however, there is no suggestion whatever that there will be any reward after death for the Wanderers. Indeed, the indications are all the other way,

⁸⁷ See Works I, 339-40.

for even the so-called priest, Laurence, seems to have given up his faith in God. As he says in his prologue to

"The Writing on the Image":

'Ye know from what has gone before,
That in my youth I followed mystic lore,
And many books I read in seeking it,
And through my memory this same eve doth flit
A certain tale I found in one of these,
Long ere mine eyes had looked upon the seas;
It made me shudder in the times gone by,
When I believed in many a mystery
I thought divine, that now I think, forsooth,
Men's own fears made, to fill the place of truth
Within their foolish hearts'⁸⁸

He is ostensibly talking about belief in magic, but "many a mystery / I thought divine" is too suggestive of the terminology of Christianity not to be suggestive of loss of Christian faith.⁸⁹ In any case, at the beginning of the "Prologue" the Christianity of the Wanderers was shown to be rather superficial in that they still told stories of Odin, which moved Ralph, for one, more than the stories of Christianity ever did.⁹⁰ Thus the Wanderers are shown

⁸⁸Works IV, 75.

⁸⁹His going on the quest in any case declares a pretty weak faith in Christian doctrine, and would no doubt have been condemned by the Church. And surely it was no accident either that the series of tales in The Earthly Paradise ends with the Pope's mistaken curse on Walter in "The Hill of Venus", a tale which is actually told by Laurence.

⁹⁰See Works III, 6. In this matter of Christianity, it is interesting to compare Sir Thomas More's Utopia, which is one of the analogues for The Earthly Paradise. Hythloday

to be striving blindly against death without any apparent reward being offered, a form of behaviour which can only be paralleled in what Morris describes in "The Early Literature of the North -- Iceland" as the natural behaviour of the saga heroes "whose religion was practically courage".⁹⁷

The attitude to life and death in the sagas, as we saw in Part III, Chapter 2 of this thesis, greatly impressed Morris, as did the literature of Iceland itself, and for several years during and after the period of The Earthly Paradise he devoted much of his literary effort to translating and adapting saga-material. Two of the Earthly Paradise stories, "The Lovers of Gudrun", often considered to be the best tale in the poem, and "The Fostering of Aslaug", as well as the fragmentary "Wooing of Swanhild", were adapted from sagas,⁹² and Morris'

and his friends convert many of the Utopians to Christianity, but Morris's Wanderers make no such attempt. See Utopia, translated by Ralph Robinson, edited by H. B. Cotterill (London, 1909), pp. 129-30.

⁹¹See Unpublished Lectures, p. 185. Though a sort of after-life is available to some -- the most heroic -- in the sagas, it is not really immortality, any more than is the long life of the gods themselves. Nevertheless, in the sagas it is regarded as important for a man to strive, to be valorous, in order "to make his fame safe for ever", p. 191, and whether he succeeds or fails in his heroic undertakings is considered more or less unimportant provided he has striven and has not broken under his failure, as Rolf and Laurence have not.

⁹²"Gudrun" derives from Laxdæla Saga, and the others from the same sources as Sigurd. For further information

greatest poem, Sigurd the Volsung is of course based on Volsunga and The Elder Edda. Thus it is scarcely surprising that he should have imbibed the saga spirit and the attitudes of the saga-men. That he did so very thoroughly is clear not so much from his treatment of, say, Sigurd, when he could not alter very much because of the exigencies of the story-line which was already laid down, though of course his choosing to treat such a story of heroic effort is in itself significant, as from his portrayal of heroism and death in the two main prose romances with Germanic settings which deal with the problem of death, A Tale of the House of the Wolfings and all the Kindreds of the Mark (1888) and The Story of the Glittering Plain which has been also called the Land of Living Men or the Acre of the Undying (1890).

In both these tales, the hero is offered a choice between an immortality under enchantment, or life and death with their people, and both choose the latter alternative, despite the love that would accompany the choice of immortality. Unlike Ogier, who was not offered a choice of whether or not he wished to don the magic ring and the crown

about Morris's sources in Icelandic literature, see, inter alia: Oscar Maurer, "William Morris and Laxdæla Saga", Texas Studies in Literature and Language, V (Autumn, 1963), 422-37; G. T. McDowell, "The Treatment of the Volsunga Saga by William Morris", Scandinavian Studies and Notes, VII (February 1923), 151-68; Karl Litzenberg, "William Morris and Scandinavian Literature: A Bibliographical Essay", Scandinavian Studies and Notes, XIII (August, 1935), 93-105.

of forgetfulness, Thiodolf in The House of the Wolfings does after some difficulty, find out the enchantment attached to the magic hauberck, according to which:

whoso weareth the same,
 Shall save his life in the battle, and have the
 He shall live through wrack and ruin, and ever have battle's shame;
 And drag adown his kindred, and bear the people's curse. ⁹³
 the worse,

Nevertheless, having once worn it,⁹⁴ he would not have been strong enough to put it away from him if Wood-Sun herself had not commanded him finally to remove it,⁹⁵ for its enchantment, like that on Ogier, was too powerful for a man to be able to break through it. As soon as he emerges from

⁹³Works XIV, 172.

⁹⁴Actually twice Thiodolf either removes it or has it removed for him, which indicates how much of a hero he is, but the third time he wears it for so long that its magic begins to destroy his manhood. Cf. Works XIV, 166-7, the beginning of the dialogue between Thiodolf and Wood-Sun, and XIV, 169: "And by then so evil was I grown that my very shame had fallen from me, and my will to die: nay, I longed to live, thou and I, and death seemed hateful to me, and the deeds before death vain and foolish".

⁹⁵She is finally persuaded to release Thiodolf through the agency of their daughter, Hall-Sun, who points out to her that Thiodolf, made immortal but with the shame of fear in his heart, can be of no use to her or to anyone:

This man that should leave in his death his life unto
 many an one
 Wilt thou make him a God of the fearful who live lone
 under the sun?
 And then shalt thou have what thou wouldest when amidst of
 the hazelled field
 Thou kissed the mouth of the helper, and the hand of the
 people's shield,

its influence, however, he knows clearly that what he wants is to die for his people as he has lived with them:

For mine eyes are cleared again, and I can see the kindreds as they are, and their desire of life and scorn of death, and this is what they have made me myself. Now therefore shall they and I together earn the merry days to come, the winter hunting and the spring sowing, the summer haysel, the ingathering of harvest, the happy rest of midwinter, and Yule-tide with the memory of the Fathers, wedded to the hope of the days to be. Well may they bid me help them who have holpen me! Well may they bid me die who have made me live!

For whereas thou sayest that I am not of their blood, nor of their adoption, once more I heed it not. For I have lived with them, and eaten and drunken with them, and toiled with them, and led them in battle and the place of wounds and slaughter; they are mine and I am theirs; and through them am I of the whole earth, and all the kindreds of it; yea, even of the foemen, whom this day the edges in mine hand shall smite.

Therefore I will bear the Hauberck no more in battle; and belike my body but once more: so shall I have lived and death shall not have undone me.⁹⁶

Shalt thou have the thing that thou wouldest when thou
broughtest me to birth,
 And I, the soul of the Wolfings, began to look on earth?
 Wilt thou play the God, O mother, and make a man anew,
 A joyless thing and a fearful? Then I betwixt you two,
 Twixt your longing and your sorrow will cast the sundering
word,
 And tell out all the story of that rampart of the sword!
 And bid my mighty father make choice of death in life,
 Or life in death victorious and the crownèd end of strife,
XIV, 170.

This is the same death-in-life again that Hylas received, that Ogier had, that the Wanderers eventually learned to do without, but that Thiodolf and Hallblithe rejected, Hallblithe of his own free will.

⁹⁶Works XIV, 170.

"I will not hinder; I will not help. Depart in Peace!"⁹⁸

Thus Hallblithe's rejection of the offered immortality has even more force than Thiodolf's, especially given the additional problems of escape from the Land, which have already been mentioned. What gives him strength to make his rejection is his realization of the lies and dreams that surround him, which are all that this immortality seems to him to be. Like Walter who cries as he leaves the Hill of Venus "nought but a dream",⁹⁹ Hallblithe declares to Sea-Eagle and his love: "I am captive in a land of lies", and "I seek no dream . . . but rather the end of dreams".¹⁰⁰

He would prefer even immediate death in his own land to the dream-world of the Glittering Plain:

Oh, if I might but get me back, if it were but for
 an hour and to die there, to the meadows of the
 Raven, and the acres beneath the mountains of
 Cleveland by the Sea. Then at least should I
 learn some tale of what is or what hath been,
 howsoever evil the tidings were, and not be bandied
 about by lies for ever.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸Works XIV, 272.

⁹⁹Works VI, 302.

¹⁰⁰WorksXIV, 267 and 273.

¹⁰¹Works XIV, 271.

He can see, as the inhabitants of the Land either cannot or will not, that all that they have gained is a life-in-death like the romantic dream-worlds of Ogier or of Hylas.

It is this perception of the fundamental untruth of immortality which preserves Hallblithe from the unmanning effect of the Land of Living Men,¹⁰² for, as is generally true in fantasy and fairy-tale, once the hero has recognized the truth and faced up to it, he is armed against everything, and fantasy and false appearance fade away.¹⁰³ This is what has happened to the Wanderers at the end of The Earthly Paradise -- and perhaps like Laurence's rejection of the mysteries made by men's own fears "to fill the place of truth within their foolish hearts", so Hallblithe's rejection of untruth also carries a suggestion of the rejection

¹⁰² Similar to the effect which the hauberk had on Thiodolf, for Sea-Eagle's love says: "If perchance any came into this land to bring war upon him, their battle-anger should depart when once the bliss of the Glittering Plain had entered into their souls, and they would ask for nought but leave to abide here and be happy", XIV, 259.

¹⁰³ As for example in George MacDonald's Phantastes where Anodos realizes that he can open the door to the tower in which he has thought himself trapped: "Hardly knowing what I did, I opened the door. Why had I not done so before? I do not know". See Phantastes, with an introduction by C. S. Lewis (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1968), pp. 160-3. Or in The Faerie Queene, where the false Florimell melts away into nothing when she is set beside the true Florimell, Book V, Canto iii.

of any sort of afterlife as being mere illusion -- when the tales of earthly paradise that once affected them so profoundly have become no more than dreams to them; this is the truth that Orpheus opposes to the Sirens' song; or Pharamond to the illusions of kingship; or Sigurd to the "egging" of Regin; or Hall-Sun to the lies of Wood-Sun. All these reach a position at last where the last truth, the only truth, is before them, and they do not mind because it is the truth. Thus Hallblithe, when he at last sees the Hostage again on the Isle of Ransom says: "Yet would I say a word or two unto the woman that sitteth yonder. For I have been straying amongst wiles and images, and mayhappen I shall yet find this to be but a dream of the night, or a beguilement of the day",¹⁰⁴ and they test each other before each will believe the other is real. Then, and only then is the Hostage released from her bondage, and they and the Puny Fox with them are able to leave the Isle of Ransom, which is the gateway to the Land of Living Men and has a share in its lies and illusions, and come again to Cleveland by the Sea. There the Puny Fox becomes "Hallblithe's thrall, and his scholar, to unlearn the craft of lying",¹⁰⁵ and is accepted into the House of the Raven as a brother, and the three then have life and valiant deeds and death with the

¹⁰⁴Works XIV, 315.

¹⁰⁵Works XIV, 318.

people to whom they belong.

After The Story of the Glittering Plain, Morris deals in immortality and the choice between eternal life and human life and death no longer. Some of the women in the later romances are immortals or have longer lives than the human span: Habundia in The Water of the Wondrous Isles is related to Wood-Sun in The House of the Wolfings, and perhaps the Lady of Abundance (The Well at the World's End) and the Lady (The Wood Beyond the World) are of similar kin also, but Habundia has no lover, and the Lady of Abundance and the Lady of the Wood are killed, leaving only their mortal rivals to succeed them,¹⁰⁶ while in the last romance, The Sundering Flood, there are no immortal women at all. Moreover the water of the Well, which, in an earlier story by Morris, might have offered an earthly immortality, as, perhaps, is signified by the fountain in "Ogier the Dane", or, in Christian terms, a heavenly immortality,¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ It is characteristic of Morris's "long-lived" women that they can be destroyed by violence, but the death of the Lady of the Wood is somewhat ambiguous -- given her magical powers, it is not quite clear that she may not revive again after a time. Also the Maiden in The Wood is either immortal or long-lived to begin with, but, as aforesaid, becomes mortal when she marries Walter.

¹⁰⁷ As for example the fountain in The Faerie Queene Book I, Canto XI, which is at once the fount of all water in the Garden of Eden and also the fount of baptism into the New Jerusalem.

is transmuted in The Wall at the World's End into a symbol of renewed fertility and peace in the physical world, as the dry tree buds and tyrants are overthrown and Ralph and Ursulâ pledge their dedication to service in the world of men.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ See for example Works XIX, 86: "But now that I am on the green grass of the earth I called to mind a dream that came to me when we slept after the precious draft of the Well: for methought that I was standing before the porch of the Feast-hall of Upmeads and holding thine hand, and the ancient House spake to me with the voice of a man, greeting both thee and me, and praising thy goodliness and valiancy. Surely then it is calling me to deeds, and if it were but morning, as it is now drawing towards sunset, we would mount and be gone straightway".

It is significant also that Ursula was a serving-maid and Ralph a king's son, another symbolic union in Morris's romance-world.

PART V: "ADAM IN A PARADISE REGAINED"

CHAPTER 1
FELLOWSHIP

When we come to the late prose romances, we find that many of the same themes which were discussed in "The Dream Quest" are again present, but that now there is something superadded. As we saw in Part IV, Morris was already beginning to change from the "idle singer" of an empty day", the "dreamer of dreams" who would not "strive to set the crooked straight" at the time when he was writing those very words about himself in The Earthly Paradise, and the growing unease about social problems which had helped to make thoughts of love and immortality unsatisfactory to him then, even apart from the bitterness caused by the difficulties in his personal life, was soon to push him, after Love is Enough, into a more active life in the world and into a more action-oriented phase of literary production. In the ten years between Sigurd the Volsung (1896-7) and A Dream of John Ball (1886-7), this process of change was greatly accelerated:¹ no longer were Morris's heroes the

¹1876-7, the years of the composition and publication of Sigurd mark a turning-point for Morris in more ways than one: in the autumn of 1876, he first entered public life with his involvement in the Eastern Question Association; his first public lecture, "The Lesser Arts", was written in 1877; and from then on, as we know, a great deal of his energy went into public work of various sorts.

fleers from death of The Earthly Paradise; in Sigurd as in his translations at this period from the Icelandic sagas, together with The Aeneid (1875) and The Odyssey (written 1885, published 1887),² which, by the way, probably provided the archetype for Morris's immortal women and their offers of immortality to mortal men, the heroes he chooses are kings and leaders of men who disregard the threat of death and loss of loved ones in order to do brave deeds for the benefit of the whole kindred. To these men, life and love for the individual are secondary to the well-being of the Folk as a whole.

This heroic temper was to continue and flourish until the end of Morris's work, but it dominates most strongly in the earlier of the late prose romances: The House of the Wolfings (1888), The Roots of the Mountains, wherein is told somewhat of the lives of the Men of Burgdale, their friends, their neighbours, their foemen and their fellows in arms (1889), and The Story of the Glittering Plain (1890), together also with A Dream of John Ball (1886-7) a romance by courtesy only as it is based, as also was one of Morris's projected but unfinished stories, Kilian of the

²Morris also began The Iliad about this time, but never completed it. Beowulf he began in 1892 in collaboration with the notable Old English scholar A. J. Wyatt. It was printed in 1895.

Closes, on factual events of the past: John Ball on the English Peasants' Rising of 1381, and Kilian on the rising of the Ghent Guilds under Philip van Artevelde in the same year. News from Nowhere; or, an Epoch of Rest: being some chapters from a Utopian Romance (1890), which is closer to this group of romances in date and in its attitude to Fellowship if not entirely in subject and setting since it is a much less active story than the others, forms a bridge between the active ideals of the more socially-oriented romances set in real or near-real worlds and the later group of more fantastic stories set in a romantic landscape largely or Morris's own invention:³ The Wood Beyond the World (1894),

³News from Nowhere is, after all, England, even if idealized; Wolfings and Roots have considerable basis in what was then known of the settlements of the Germanic tribes in the third and seventh centuries respectively and Wolfings is fairly directly based on The Mark by F. Engels (1883), according to R. Page Arnot, pp. 102-3; Glittering Plain is more fantastic, but still based on what Morris understood to be the condition of life of the pre-English tribes in their continental home -- nor is the fantasy of the discovery of an island of immortals inappropriate to the way of thinking of fairly primitive civilizations. On the other hand, in the later group of romances, there is little attempt at the representation of any actual society past or present, though most have some approximation to an idealized mediaeval England. However, a certain element of realism is brought in, especially in The Well by the use of geographical features from the country round Kelmscott, and also from Iceland. See above Part III, Chapter 1 for a comment on this.

Child Christopher and Goldilind the Fair (1895),⁴ The Well at the World's End (1896), The Water of the Wondrous Isles (1897) and The Sundering Flood (1897), though this last story does mark something of a return to the scenery and subject-matter of the earlier group of tales.⁵ This chapter and the next will follow this natural division in the romances, including News from Nowhere in both groups, and Chapter 3 will then attempt to draw together the threads of the whole by dealing chiefly with the longest and most complex of the late romances, and the last which was fully completed, The Well at the World's End.

⁴This romance, loosely based on the mediaeval English poem The Lay of Havelok the Dane, is often not included among the prose romances, presumably because of the element of translation in it. For instance, in The Late Prose Romances of William Morris: A Biographical Interpretation, an unpublished Ph.D. thesis by M. F. Hawkins (Berkeley, 1970), it is not mentioned at all in the basic list of romances, and does not even, as John Ball does, merit a note about its omission. See p. 1. The element of translation is, however, so slight, the story-motif so familiar in mediaeval romance, and Morris has made it so much his own, that I do not hesitate to include it here.

⁵May Morris says of this tale: "Once more the historian lies behind the romance-writer in his pictured life, and Morris shows us in this tale the life and movement of a great Icelandic chieftain's home . . .", I, 515.

Of the earlier group of stories, John Ball and News from Nowhere are somewhat set apart by the manner of their writing, which was not out of any pure desire for artistic creation such as presumably inspired the other prose romances. The occasion for writing A Dream of John Ball, for instance, seems to have been the need for some sort of serial story to put over the principles of socialism while holding the interest of those readers of Commonweal who found straight socialist propaganda too difficult or too dry,⁶ and even the historical studies which appeared there from time to time not really to their taste.⁷

The Pilgrims of Hope, a sequence of poems printed at intervals during 1885-6 had to some extent served these functions.

⁶May Morris relates: "[John Ball] was written partly to meet the demand of the comrades for a serial story", Works XIX, xxxvii, and: "In this story, written for The Commonweal, he was definitely talking to the working-people with whom he came into contact daily now . . .", May Morris I, 498. And of News: "News from Nowhere was, as has been told, written for The Commonweal to fill a need there seemed to be in its pages for a serial story", ibid., 503.

⁷In 1888, for example, Morris "was in the middle of a vivid and detailed account of the Revolt of Ghent in the fourteenth century, including long passages of admirable translation from Froissart, which runs through the issues [of Commonweal] of seven weeks", Mackail II, 217. As we know in relation to The Defence of Guenevere, Morris was much interested in and inspired by Froissart. Presumably here also it was these historical studies that suggested Kilian of the Closes, the hero of which has considerable similarities with Philip van Artevelde, as also has Osberne, the hero of The Sundering Flood. In A Dream of John Ball, the chief character of the "hedge-priest", John Ball himself, derives from Froissart's account. Morris had begun designs for the

Its central subject is the coming of a young couple from the country to London because there is not enough work in their home village -- a typical situation in early and mid-nineteenth century England -- the gradual dawning of political and social awareness, and finally their participation in the Paris Commune of 1871, where the wife and her lover, but not the husband,⁸ are killed. However, a poem sequence, moving as it is in parts, and dealing with "a heroic episode whose defence was a matter of honour to the revolutionary Socialist",⁹ is not really the most

printing of the Chronicles at the Kelmscott Press but he died before they were completed, and only thirty-two pages were ever set up. See also Morris's account of Wat Tyler and John Ball in his article "The Lord Mayor's Show" written for Justice, May Morris II, 143-7. The historical basis for A Dream of John Ball is given by C. H. Kegel, "William Morris's A Dream of John Ball: A Study in Reactionary Liberalism", Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters, XL (1955), 303-12.

⁸The story has Morris's favourite triangle: the husband whose best friend falls reluctantly in love with the wife, their former friendship and their common involvement in socialism combining to force the three into behaving in the same sort of "civilized" way that Jane, Morris, and Rossetti chose. The story was also, as May Morris points out, drawn from Morris's experience in other respects: "Piece by piece it was written, after he had returned home -- he wrote late usually -- from poor quarters full of sights and stories which had wrung his heart by their sordidness and dull endurance: it was written in sorrow and anger, in revolt at things he saw and things he divined, and the slight, effective sketches of the narrative bring home to many of us who have lived on into the time of tragedy and violence of the twentieth century, the meetings and street-corner gatherings of those days of scarcely articulate unrest and discomfort", Works XXIV, xi.

⁹A. L. Morton, p. 20. Morton adds: "Morris never

suitable vehicle for propaganda, particularly when, like all Morris's poems, it is complex in metre and has a heroic tone more like Sigurd the Volsung than perhaps fits a modern subject. As A. L. Morton says in his introduction to Three Works by William Morris (A Dream of John Ball, News from Nowhere, Pilgrims of Hope):

Moving as much of it is, The Pilgrims of Hope must perhaps be judged as only a partial success. Morris's poetic technique was not really suited to a narrative on a contemporary theme. This was not so much a personal failure as a common weakness of the time, and, indeed, it may fairly be said that he came nearer to success than any other English poet of the nineteenth century There is reason to think that Morris himself was dissatisfied with his work. At any rate he did not attempt to repeat the experiment, and when, later in the year, he began a new serial in Commonweal, it was the prose romance A Dream of John Ball.¹⁰

The subject of John Ball, like that of Pilgrims, is one of great relevance to the socialist history,¹¹ the

tired of defending the Commune and glorifying its memory. To him it was the highest point yet reached in the workers' struggle, and it was next to inevitable that he should turn to it when seeking a theme for a socialist poem. The Pilgrims of Hope resembles all his long poems in its heroic character. It differs from the rest in being the only one dealing with contemporary life. Hitherto, when seeking the heroic, he had felt it necessary to turn to an older and simpler world: now that he had entered the Socialist movement, the world as it was became heroic to him for the first time", p. 20.

¹⁰Morton, pp. 21-2.

¹¹See May Morris I, 502: "The year following the production of The Pilgrims of Hope my Father wrote A Dream of John Ball. There is a likeness in the dissimilarity of these two, the tale in verse, and the tale in prose: in the former he writes of the nineteenth-century Socialist,

Peasants' Revolt of 1381, when the Middle Ages came closest to a successful socialist revolution. The story tells how Morris falls asleep and dreams that he is in a Kentish village on the eve of the great march to London. The countryside, with its open fields and neat, clean villages, the dress, speech, and manners of the villagers are all described and both implicitly and explicitly contrasted with the unpleasantness of the life and manners of "labourers in civilization".¹² Morris himself is portrayed within the story as a "rhymer" from Essex, and in his dress as well as his occupation there is more than a hint of a comparison with Chaucer, who was of course writing at this period.¹³ He is accepted as a fellow by the villagers, despite their perception of something odd about him, and he meets, among

and in the latter of the Socialists of the end of the fourteenth century: both fighting for their new ideas of freedom, with five centuries between them, the hedge-priest faced with the tyranny of Feudalism, the London workman faced with that other tyranny of the modern Commercial system. In either case they are doomed to go down fighting; in the mouths of both the writer has put words of hope in their gospel of discontent"

¹²Works XVI, 219. See also May Morris's comment on "the startling realism of this vision of the past . . .", Works XVII, xiii-xiv.

¹³Though Morris tells an Icelandic tale, he claims to have learned it at Dunwich, the town, now submerged, in which Chaucer is sometimes said to have been born. There is also perhaps an implied criticism of Chaucer, who never wrote about the stirring times he lived in. Morris, we may remember was, in Socialism; Its Growth and Outcome, to call him disparagingly "the gentleman", and to contrast him unfavourably with the balladeers contemporary with him.

others, John Ball, the "crack-brained priest of Kent",¹⁴ as Froissart calls him. This meeting gives rise to the two great "set-pieces" in the story, John Ball's sermon at the market-cross, which Morris used to read aloud at socialist gatherings, and the conversation between Ball and Morris in the church, where Morris explains something of the future of English society and the renewed struggle for equality among men in the nineteenth century.

In this last dialogue, Morris is able to describe both the primitive "socialism" of the fourteenth century and that of the nineteenth when "their remedy shall be the same as thine, although the days be different: for if the folk be enthralled, what remedy save that they be set free?"¹⁵

¹⁴See the Chronicles, selected, translated, and edited by Geoffrey Brereton (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 212. Froissart's account of John Ball's sermon, which Morris sticks to fairly closely in essentials, is on pp. 212-3. Among other things, it includes a call for the common ownership of all goods, equality among men, and the comment which inspired Morris and Burne-Jones's frontispiece to John Ball: "When Adam delved and Eve span / Who was then the gentleman?"

¹⁵Works XVI, 276. In News from Nowhere, Morris makes a similar analogy between the fourteenth and the twentieth centuries. Speaking of the meadows around Oxford, he says: "I thought with interest how its name and use had survived from the older imperfect communal period, through the time of the confused struggle and tyranny of the rights of property, into the present rest and happiness of complete Communism", Works XVI, 186. Jessie Kocmanová in "Two Uses of the Dream Form as a Means of Confronting the Present with the National Past: William Morris and Svatopluk Čech", Brno Studies in English, II (1960), 113-48, comments on this use of comparison between past and present with special reference to A Dream of John Ball.

He also explains to John Ball, and therefore indirectly to his readers as well, the condition of the working-class in the modern world, which he considered to be in some respects worse than their condition in the fourteenth century. Thus Morris's story serves the purpose both of explaining part of the historical basis of Marxism, as he did again later in more orthodox fashion in his account of socialist historical theory in Socialism; Its Growth and Outcome, and also of explaining some of the modern socialist doctrine in an attractive and simplified form. Above all, however, both John Ball's sermon and Morris's dialogue with him in the church stress the importance of "fellowship", one of Morris's primary concerns in all his mature work. As Ball says:

"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

The tone here obviously recalls those parts of The House of the Wolfings which were quoted in the last chapter, with its emphasis on the waning of individual life but the permanence of the life of the people as a whole, and later the similarity increases as Morris sets forth his own creed

¹⁶Works XVI, 230.

as a corrective to John Ball's Christian-based communism: "that though I die and end, yet mankind yet liveth, therefore I end not, since I am a man" ¹⁷ Finally, in Morris's parting words of comfort to John Ball, who is discouraged by the thought that five centuries after his own supreme effort the poor will be in some respects even worse off than they were in his own day, we have the full-grown doctrine of the "Fellowship of Men" which is to lead to communism, ¹⁸ and shortly afterwards Morris wakes again to the modern world of Victorian villadom and the problems of England in the nineteenth century.

¹⁷ Works XVI, 265.

¹⁸ See Works XVI, 284-6. The speech begins: "John Ball, be of good cheer; for once more thou knowest, as I know, that the Fellowship of Men shall endure, however many tribulations it may have to wear through", and ends, apocalyptically: "Then shall these things, which to thee seem follies, and to the men between thee and me mere wisdom and the bond of stability, seem follies once again; yet, whereas men have so long lived by them, they shall cling to them yet from blindness and from fear; and those that see, and that have thus much conquered fear that they are furthering the real time that cometh and not the dream that faileth, these men shall the blind and the fearful mock and missay, and torment and murder: and great and grievous shall be the strife in those days, and many the failures of the wise, and too oft sore shall be the despair of the valiant; and back-sliding, and doubt, and contest between friends and fellows lacking time in the hubbub to understand each other, shall grieve many hearts and hinder the Host of the Fellowship: 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". And see the paragraph following for further comment on this paralleling of past and present. Morris

In none of this is there any hint of escapism, even though Morris is writing about a mediaeval subject in a mediaeval setting, for though A Dream of John Ball is sometimes read as an idealization of mediaeval life, as of course is much of Morris's other work, in fact, even apart from its direct purpose as socialist propaganda, the story is not a nostalgic looking-back at an idyllic past time but a conscious search for valid parallels with the nineteenth century, which might show how and why the revolution failed then and how a similar failure might be avoided now. As we may remember, Morris's theory of history interpreted time as a spiral, with the Middle Ages directly beneath the nineteenth century, and therefore closer in spirit if not in linear time to the nineteenth century class struggle, so that to him it seemed possible to learn more from this period than from later ones closer to his own day. As A. L. Morton says:

It is this dialectic of history with which he is concerned in the last chapters, in the night-long dialogue between John Ball and the narrator. These chapters look forward from the fourteenth century to the nineteenth, telling of the growth of bourgeois relations, the transformation of peasants and guild

himself is quoted by May Morris as saying: "In sober earnest I say no man is good enough to be the master over others; whatever the result to them. It at least ruins him: equality of fellowship is necessary for developing the innate good and restraining the innate evil that exists in everyone", May Morris II, 193-4.

artisans into wage labourers, the accumulation of capital, the development of large-scale industry and the emergence of the workers as the new revolutionary class. It ends with the prospect of victory and a free and happy life for all. In this way, Morris linked the contemporary struggle with the long history of the nation and the struggle of the exploited in other days and under other forms. We ought not to allow his sometimes archaic language to prevent us from seeing how precisely his analysis is that of Marxism.¹⁹

Thus we see that the first of the late prose romances was born not out of the senile ramblings of an escapist late romantic, but out of a direct political need which, whatever we may think of its methods, still has relevance to-day.

The same direct political relevance also operates in the case of News from Nowhere, which is prophesied at the end of John Ball when the priest says: "and scarce do I know whether to wish thee some dream of the days beyond thine to tell what shall be, as thou hast told me, for I know not if that shall help or hinder thee" ²⁰ The occasion for writing it was Morris's dislike of Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward (1888), which presents a picture of Boston in the year 2,000, a highly mechanized society with regimented periods of labour for all the population. Mackail, who gives a summary of the book and of Morris's

¹⁹Morton, p. 23.

²⁰Works XVI, 286.

reaction to it, calls it an: "apotheosis of machinery and the glorification of the life of large towns . . . in which the phalanstère of Fourier seems to have swollen to delirious proportions, and State Socialism has resulted in a monstrous and almost incredible centralization".²¹ Morris had to review Looking Backward for Commonweal in 1889, which he did with reasonable grace, but he commented privately that "if they brigaded him into a regiment of workers he would just lie on his back and kick".²² Thus News from Nowhere, an idealized pastoral view of the future of socialism when the state has withered away, is deliberately the antithesis of Bellamy's over-regimented world, and perhaps somewhat fails in its effect as propaganda because it has gone too far in the opposite direction from Bellamy.

This pastoral emphasis, apart from perhaps discouraging more serious seekers of Marxist doctrine, has often led critics to assume that Morris was not very serious in his commitment to socialism. Again A. L. Morton puts us right on this point: News from Nowhere shows for him "how far Morris is commonly misrepresented and how correctly he

²¹Mackail II, 256-7. Mackail, and Morris too, is a bit unfair to Bellamy's book, which is more readable than he suggests -- and unfortunately closer to present reality, with its "monstrous and almost incredible centralization", than Morris's vision.

²²See Works XVI, xxviii.

applied the principles of Marxism".²³ E. P. Thompson also says that it is a "scientific utopia", not, of course, a literal picture of the Communist life of the future, for "Morris knew perfectly well that the quality of the life portrayed in his Communist society could no more rise above the level of his own experience (enriched by his study of the past) than water can rise higher than the level of its source",²⁴ but a valid ideal for the future none-the-less:

The science lies not only in the wonderful description of "How the Change Came", the scientific mastery of historical process, the understanding of the economic and social basis of Communism; it is present also in the element of realism embodied in the artistic construction of the work itself, the manner in which the world of dream and the world of reality are re-united. And yet it is still an utopia, which only a writer nurtured in the romantic tradition could have conceived -- a writer

²³Morton, p. 28.

²⁴E. P. Thompson, p. 803. Karl Litzenberg in "The Social Philosophy of William Morris and the Doom of the Gods", University of Michigan Publications in Language and Literature, X (1933), 183-203, points out how close Morris's idea of a violent revolution followed by peace is to the Icelandic ragna rök and the peaceful days of Baldur which follow it. Another analogy, of course, may be found in the Book of Revelations in the Bible, and it was perhaps archetypes like these which drew Morris to Marx's apocalyptic vision of an areligious future, and thence to the writing of his own apocalypse, News from Nowhere.

ever conscious of the contrast between the "ideal" and the "real". A writer imbued with the spirit of a new realism would find it impossible to employ the form of dream with such fluency and delight; a writer imbued with the spirit of romanticism, and without the re-born hope and understanding of Marxism, could never have employed the dream to illuminate reality in such a profound way. At the same time, this emphasizes the fact that News from Nowhere must not be, and was never intended to be, read as a literal picture of Communist society. One half of its purpose is a criticism of capitalist society, the other half a revelation of the powers slumbering within men and women and distorted or denied in class society.²⁵

This blending of reality and dream is, as we saw in relation to the early prose tales, characteristic of Morris's prose fiction both here and in the later romances, where, if the dream seems sometimes to predominate, that is because we too are too much "imbued with the spirit of a new realism" to see the truer realism of the Ideal.

It is in the last part of Thompson's paragraph that we find an important clue to the meaning both of News from Nowhere and of the other prose romances, the comment about the "revelation of the powers slumbering within men and women and distorted or denied in class society". The vision of men and women attaining their full natural growth

²⁵E. P. Thompson, pp. 805-6. Thompson's treatment of News is one of the best short pieces on the subject, and the section on News in A. L. Morton's The English Utopia (London, 1953) is also very valuable, and supplements his preface to Three Works, which we have been quoting at length here. And see also R. Page Arnot's chapter, "Morris's Revolutionary Writings", William Morris, the Man and the Myth, pp. 109-23.

both mentally and physically is one that haunted Morris, not only in News, where he so poignantly contrasts what those men and women are there with what they would have been in nineteenth century England: Ellen, for instance, who might well have become a prostitute for lack of any other outlet for her beauty and intelligence if she had been born poor;²⁶ not only in A Dream of John Ball, where Will Green comments at the end of Morris's Icelandic tale: "Yea in that land was the summer short and the winter long; but men lived both summer and winter; and if the trees grew ill and the corn throve not, yet did the plant called man thrive and do well";²⁷ but also in the less realistic prose romances. In The House of the Wolfings and The Story of the Glittering Plain, for example, it is human life and growth which is emphasized: the full development of man's powers as man,

²⁶See Works XVI, 203-4. Morris hesitates to come directly out with such a suggestion, but Ellen, who, like her fellows of the future, has no false shame, suggests it for him. See also Old Hammond's comment on education: "In this as in other matters we have become wealthy: we can afford to give ourselves time to grow", ibid., 64, and Morris/Guest's comment on Old Hammond: "I wondered how at his age he should think of the happiness of the world, or indeed anything but his coming dinner", ibid., 66-7.

²⁷Works XVI, 224. The emphasis on "real men" here is of course a continuation from what Morris had to say about the manliness of the sagamen in his critical writings, a subject which has already been discussed in Part III, Chapter 2 above.

set against the stunting effect of earthly paradises where men cease to think and feel because they have ceased to grow and change, and because they are separated from their proper relationship to the world of men, the fellowship of men.

The Roots of the Mountains also traces the development of an unformed youth into a fully human thinking adult, a natural leader of men,²⁸ and all the rest of the late prose romances in their own way show some turning-point between youth and maturity in the lives of their central characters, where each chooses to live, and to die, strenuously, rather than to remain protected and unthinking in their home environment.²⁹

²⁸For example, Folk-might says to Face-of-god in the war council: "Thou wert a boy methought when I cast my spear at thee last autumn, Face-of-god, but now hast thou grown into a man", Works XV, 248; and the Sun-beam says to him: "Gold-mane, my dear, sorely I wonder at thee and at me, how we are changed since that day last autumn when I first saw thee. Whiles I think, didst thou not laugh when thou wert by thyself that day, and mock at me privily, that I must needs take such wisdom on myself, and lesson thee standing like a stripling before me. Dost thou not call it all to mind and make merry over it, now that thou art become a great chieftain and a wise warrior . . .", ibid., 261. Face-of-god himself says: "I am become a man; for my friend, now she no longer telleth me to do or forbear, and I tremble. Nay, rather she is fain to take the word from me; and this great warrior and ripe man, he talketh with me as if I were a chieftain meet for converse with chieftains. Even so it is and shall be", ibid., 136.

²⁹Walter's sailing in the Katherine, Birdalone's in

This turning-point, choice of life and death, is presented most realistically in A Dream of John Ball and News from Nowhere. John Ball knows, after his conversation with Morris in the church, that he is going to his death and that his death will change nothing, yet he continues on his way, for to be deflected from it would be to deny the meaning of his life, which lies in his ideal of service and fellowship.³⁰ Morris/Guest in News from Nowhere, as we saw in the last chapter, cannot stay in that ideal world where trouble has passed away because he has work in the present, however futile it may seem to later generations.³¹

the Sending Boat, Ralph's flight from Upmeads and his quest for the Well, and Osberne's quest for Elfhild, added to those instances of more explicit choice of human life which were dicussed in the last chapter, all make up this sort of turning-point, which, though in the later romances it sometimes seems to be an individualistic quest rather than one of fellowship, always as we shall see, ends in a return to the world of men.

³⁰See especially Chapter 10 of John Ball, where Morris tells him that he is going to his death, and he does not mind, so long as the people may one day be free, and the last chapter where he understands that this freedom is still a long way distant, but goes to his death none-the-less. In his article "The Lord Mayor's Show", May Morris II, 147, Morris praises him for the sacrifice despite its apparent futility: "Nor will we say that he [Wat Tyler] and John Ball died for nothing, however doleful is the story" E. P. Thompson discusses this from a modern Marxist viewpoint, pp. 837-41.

³¹Or to other men of his own time. Cf. the chapter "How the Change Came", Works XVI, especially 104-7. It is, by the way, the growing "fellowship" of the workers which eventually succeeds in bringing about the change.

As May Morris says: in News from Nowhere "as in John Ball, the Dreamer and his Dream confront each other and know that they belong to different times in this world and that they must part".³² So also it is in the romances in which "the dream-form [is] employed to take us entirely out of our own world into a world that is strange".³³ The country of the Wolfings may be only partly historical, that of the men of Burgdale even less so, and the later stories scarcely at all, but in all of them Morris is still concerned with human matters and with human choices, and in each case the Dreamer confronts his Dream and learns that he must return to the real world of men if he wishes to fulfil his destiny as a human being.

In all the late prose romances, what precipitates the change, whether it is the change of the advance into manhood, or the change of the acceptance of death, is, ultimately, Fellowship, the love of one's fellow men, and the desire to serve them. This, of course, was an important

³²May Morris I, 505.

³³E. P. Thompson, p. 804. Thompson is especially interested in the complex relationship between reality and dream in News and John Ball, but the same characteristics are present in the other romances.

driving force in Morris's own life, the reason, above all, for his joining the socialist movement,³⁴ and it was also the inspiration behind the two socialist romances. Ellen, after all, could never have developed as she had without the tolerance, the simple good comradeship of a society in which all men regarded themselves as brothers. Ellen's grandfather,³⁵ the "grumbler", the "Obstinate Refusers", and the girl with them who says: "I am the lucky one who doesn't want to work",³⁶ even Old Hammond himself, all need this fundamental tolerance in order to survive -- as they certainly could not have done in Bellamy's regimented society -- and all but the "grumbler" return that tolerance to others in full measure. The lesson of the relationship between Dick and Clara is important here, too. It is almost certainly an idealized picture of what might have happened to the relationship between Morris and Jane had their society been one in which such affairs were regulated

³⁴The Pall Mall Gazette reviewer of The Roots of the Mountains rather hit the nail on the head when, in a not very good parody of Morris's style -- Morris would never have spoken of an "inwitful doomsman" -- he calls him jokingly: "William the Hall-Bedecker, by some called the Folk-Fellowship furtherer" See E. P. Thompson, p. 787, note. The Saturday Review had parodied The House of the Wolfings the preceding year, though their reviewer had actually rather liked the book, Saturday Review, LXVII (26 January, 1889), 101-2.

³⁵Or father -- Morris is rather unclear on this point.

³⁶Works XVI, 174.

by natural affection among mankind rather than by convention.³⁷ Similarly, a system of society based on free co-operation, without the use of money and without most people having any fixed jobs, could not operate unless it was based on fellowship. As Old Hammond says to Morris/Guest, comparing the society of News with that of the Middle Ages:

More akin to our way of looking at life was the spirit of the Middle Ages, to whom heaven and the life of the next world was such a reality, that it became to them a part of the life upon the earth; which accordingly they loved and adorned, in spite of the ascetic doctrines of their formal creed which bade them contemn it.

But that also, with its assured belief in heaven and hell as two countries in which to live, has gone, and now we do, both in word and in deed, 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 existence wins for us: and consequently we are happy. Do you wonder at it? In times past, indeed, men were told to love their kind, to believe in the religion of humanity and so forth. But look you, just in the degree that a man had

³⁷ As it was, they seem to have managed the whole business fairly well by contemporary standards, but Jane could not actually have gone off and set up house with Rossetti, as Clara evidently did with her lover, and then returned to Morris a couple of years later without causing considerable scandal -- there was enough as it was. See Philip Henderson, p. 147. Morris's attitude in other sexual matters in News is refreshingly open also. Cf. News, Works XVI, 62-3: "They believe that a child born from the natural and healthy love between a man and a woman, even if that be transient, is likely to turn out better in all ways, and especially in bodily beauty, than the birth of the respectable commercial marriage bed, or of the dull despair of the drudge of that system. They say, Pleasure begets pleasure".

elevation of mind and refinement enough to be able to value this idea, was he repelled by the obvious aspect of the individuals composing the mass which he was to worship; and he could only evade that repulsion by making a conventional abstract of mankind that had little actual or historical relation to the race; which to his eyes was divided into blind tyrants on the one hand and apathetic degraded slaves on the other. But now, where is the difficulty in accepting the religion of humanity, when the men and women who go to make up humanity are free, happy, and energetic at least, and most commonly beautiful of body also, and surrounded by beautiful things of their own fashioning, and a nature bettered and not worsened by contact with mankind?³⁸

When we turn to The House of the Wolfings, the first of the late prose romances proper, we find the same idea of fellowship pre-dominating. The people of the Wolfing tribe, while not without individual initiative, as is shown, for example, in Hall-Sun's organization of the guard on the approaches to the Mark, do not conceive of themselves as individuals in the way in which modern men do.³⁹ Morris

³⁸Works XVI, 132-3. And cf. also Dick's reaction to the idea of prisons, which he principally deploras because he thinks that no-one could be happy if they were aware that a fellow human being were suffering in such a place, Works XVI, 44.

³⁹Take, for example, the uniformity among the men of the Wolfings: all dwell together under one Roof; all are equal, "nor were there many degrees amongst them as hath befallen afterwards, but all they of one blood were brethren and of equal dignity;" Works XIV, 5; all bear the mark of the Wolf on their breasts; nor may they marry with the women of the Wolfings, but only those of certain houses with which they have affinity, "and this was a law that none dreamed of breaking", ibid., 5. This uniformity is further emphasized by the lack of differentiation between the characters, which is almost certainly deliberate, here and elsewhere in the prose romances.

said that he wrote The House of the Wolfings in order to "illustrate the melting of the individual into the society of the tribes",⁴⁰ and of course this is what happens to Thiodolf, whose name, the first part of it meaning "folk" or "people", is significant in explaining his character. He has the choice of breaking away from his society, the potential to become an autonomous individual in the world outside his small tribe, especially aided as he is by Wood-Sun's revelation of the fact that he is of alien blood, and not really one of the Wolfings at all, but he will not choose to separate himself from what he regards as his people.⁴¹ His rejection of the Wood-Sun's proffered immortality is therefore more than simply the assertion of his love for and duty to his people, as we said in the last chapter; it is an abnegation of self in the interest of the whole.⁴²

⁴⁰Letters, p. 302.

⁴¹The relevant passage here has already been quoted in the previous chapter.

⁴²It is interesting that it is always the most intelligent among Morris's characters who are offered this choice and opt for the ideal of fellowship, when, in the passage quoted above from News, he himself seemed rather disillusioned about the ability of the sensitive and intelligent to sacrifice themselves in this way in the modern world. Perhaps it has something to do with what E. P. Thompson calls "the organic and personal life of the tribe or folk" in contrast with the "mechanical" organization of modern society, p. 784.

Rather the same thing happens in the case of the Hall-Sun, who has not even a name of her own, but only the name of the lamp that she guards, which her predecessor held before she did. Despite her intelligence and far-sightedness, she has no will apart from the will of the Wolfings, and it is said of her that "thy death seemeth to thee a small matter beside the life of the Wolfing House".⁴³ May Morris, putting this story in the context of Morris's earlier work, writes:

Love of the tribe and the kindred is the keynote of The House of the Wolfings and The Roots of the Mountains. The effacement of personal happiness in service of the people hangs over all the action in The Wolfings. The Hall Sun -- the Vestal Virgin -- is not ordained for personal happiness, but to be the soul of the kindred, gaining peace at least. One might contrast Morris's frame of mind now with that in which Love is Enough was written. In the poem of the earlier period all leads up to the absorption of self in the Eternal Love; in the later work we get the absorbing of self in love of kindred. Morris is entering into the feeling of the free man; comradeship and the comfort that it brings is the note that glows throughout in the melancholy temper at the back of this romance.⁴⁴

It is only the Hall-Sun who can persuade her mother, the Wood-Sun, who is a Valkyrie, a "chooser of the slain", to release Thiodolf from his enchantment, and she has this power

⁴³Works XIV, 90.

⁴⁴May Morris I, 509. Cf. also The Atlantic Monthly review of The House of the Wolfings, "William Morris's New Work", LXV (June, 1890), 854: "The delight of Thiodulf

because she seeks nothing for herself, but only the good of the people, whom Wood-Sun also loves. Similarly, Thiodolf is ultimately victorious over the Roman host because he seeks nothing for himself, while the Roman leader, competent soldier though he is, is too intent on self-glory to be victorious against the combined will of the Markmen.⁴⁵

The abnegation of self in The House of the Wolfings is much less prominent in the next romance, The Roots of the Mountains. As Morris himself pointed out, this group, the men of Burgdale, are at a much later stage of development

[sic] in the thought that his life, through his deeds, will live on and become immortal in their destiny as a folk among men springs certainly from a modern feeling, or gains by it; so that the doctrine of the brotherhood of men in races and kindreds, and their duty to society as a part of the larger life, has seldom been so nobly and almost triumphantly expressed".

⁴⁵See Works XIV, 133-4: "He was both young and very rich, and a mighty man among his townsmen, and well had he learned that ginger is hot in the mouth, and though he had come forth to the war for the increasing of his fame, he had no will to die among the Markmen, either for the sake of the city of Rome, or of any folk whatsoever, but was liefer to live for his own sake". This attitude is, of course, deliberately contrasted with that of Thiodolf and his fellows, as, later, the undisciplined rapaciousness of the "dusky men" was to be with the ordered but fiercely patriotic fighting of the men of Burgdale and the people of the Wolf, who are perhaps the scattered descendants of the Wolfings at a later day. See Works XV, 127 where the Dusky Men are spoken of as a "swarm", and 130, as "like the winter wolves that swarm on and on, how many soever ye slay".

than the Markmen,⁴⁶ and individualism is already more marked, though the hero, Face-of-god, still takes his name, as Thiodolf did, from the name of his House, in this case the House of the Face. Thus while, for instance, the rules about kindred and marriage which applied in The House of the Wolfings still operate here, it is only among the more noble families that this is the case, and even so it is still possible for Face-of-god eventually to marry the Friend, who, though racially from the same group as he is, is very much an outsider to Burgdale.⁴⁷ However, Face-of-god's apparently

⁴⁶ See Mackail II, 229: Morris writes: "This time I don't think I shall 'drop into poetry,' at least not systematically. For one thing the condition of the people I am telling of is later (whatever their date may be) than that of the Wolfings".

⁴⁷ Thiodolf, for instance, was unable to confess his relationship with the Wood-Sun, because she was of the Wolfing kindred, as he had thought he was also, and this would have been against one of their most stringent taboos. Thus he can only be foster-father to his daughter the Hall-Sun, much as he loves her, and she must be brought up in ignorance of her parents lest shame fall upon her also. As it is, Face-of-god's father, Iron-face, who is of course naturally more conservative than the younger generation, says, when the Bride breaks her troth formally and publicly: "Who is it that is devising guile with thee to throw aside this worthy wedding in a worthy House, with whom our sons are wont to wed?", Works XV, 181. He immediately assumes Face-of-god's guilt in the matter, and stresses the weight of tradition behind the betrothal. However, when Morris began to treat the same problem in one of his unfinished romances, The Folk of the Mountain Door, which in some ways looks as if it might have been very similar to The Roots of the Mountains, and possibly was an alternative version of it, Morris takes care to provide in advance against the

individualistic, anti-social journeys into the mountains do ultimately result in benefit to his people, who otherwise would almost certainly have been overrun and enthralled by the Huns. Even the Bride, though Face-of-god's defection gives her much pain initially, is eventually better off marrying Folk-might and settling in Silverdale, for she has the characteristics of a warrior-maiden,⁴⁸ which the Sunbeam has not, and therefore fits better into the harder and more primitive life of the Silverdalers than she would

father's opposition to such a match. The ancient founder of the race appears at the baby's birth-feast, and says: "Hearken then Host-Lord, the Father of Host-lord, for we have looked into the life of thy son; and this we say is the weird of him; childless shall he be unless he wed as his will is, for of all his kindred none is wilfuller than he. Who then shall he wed, and where is the House that is lawful to him that thou hast not heard of? For as to wedding with his will in the House whereof thou wottest, and the line of the Sea-dwellers, look not for it. Where then is the House of his wedding, lest the Folk of the Door lose their chieftain and become the servants of those that are worsen than they?", Works XXI, 307.

⁴⁸ See the descriptions of the Bride in her armour, Works XV, 178 and elsewhere, especially when she says, XV, 180-1: "and since I have learned to be deft with mine hands in all the play of war, and that I am as strong as many a man, and as hardy-hearted as any, I will give myself to the Warrior and the God of the Face; and the battle-field shall be my home, and the after-grief of the fight my banquet and holiday, that I may bear the burden of my people, in the battle and out of it" Folk-might also is much more a follower of the traditional heroic values than is Face-of-god, as indeed his name, which is so like Thiodolf's, suggests.

have into a quiet marriage with Face-of-god in Burgdale.⁴⁹

A similar pattern is followed in The Story of the Glittering Plain, where Hallblithe's quest for the Hostage, while partly justified by their relationship, is an individualistic one which might well have ended in the loss of one of the chief fighting-men of the House of the Raven, and, in terms of the community values of the period, for a somewhat insufficient cause, since, as aforesaid, in none of these romances is personal happiness allowed to be the primary consideration.⁵⁰ The Friend, in The Roots of the

⁴⁹ See, for example, where Face-of-god asks the Sunbeam if she will be satisfied with a quiet life in Burgdale, Works XV, 140: "and ill indeed it were if it wearied thee and thou wert ever longing for some day of victorious strife, and to behold me coming back from battle high-raised on the shields of men and crowned with bay; if thine ears must ever be tickled with the talk of men and their songs concerning my warrior deeds. For thus it shall not be", and the Sunbeam answers that she is not like the Choosers of the Slain, such as the Wood-Sun really was and the Bride almost seems to be, but will be well-content with peace and plenty.

⁵⁰ I do not, however, agree with M. F. Hawkins that this romance shows that: "The conditions and concerns of his society are totally irrelevant; the tribe is now no more than a convenient starting-point for the hero", p. 29. As Jessie Kocmanová points out in "The Aesthetic Purpose of William Morris in the Context of his Late Prose Romances", Brno Studies in English, VI (1966), 113: "Hallblithe, though at times he behaves somewhat in the fashion of a palely loitering knight-at-arms, is nevertheless based firmly on the kindred and the whole tale is motivated by his conception of his duty to the Ravens, which sends him across the sea to find his stolen Bride the Hostage, and culminates with his rejection of the enticements and entanglements of the Land of the Glittering Plain".

Mountains, when she first drew Face-of-god to her,⁵¹ was concerned not with her own happiness but with gaining a powerful ally for her people. In Roots again, it is said that the women of old time did not mourn overmuch at the death of husbands and sons in battle, for their purpose in life was to bear sons for the protection of the kindreds.⁵² So also, Bow-may, who loves Face-of-god, marries in Burgdale when he and the Sun-beam advise her to, for she is strong

⁵¹See Works XV, 117-9 and 121-2. The Sun-beam is not a witch or an immortal of any sort, as Face-of-god thinks she is at first, but has used ordinary arts to bring him to her. But her intention was the good of her people, and not any sort of love for him. So also Folk-might, though he loves the Bride, persuades her not through love but through the value of the union to their people, and she assents to this. In fact, Morris had intended to kill off the Bride, but decided that such an ending would be over-romantic and too neat. See Works XV, xi: "He had thought of killing off the Bride at first, I remember, but she was spared to marry Folk-might; 'it would be a very good alliance for the Burgdalers and Silverdalers both, and I don't think sentiment ought to stand in the way'". This attitude infuriated E. P. Thompson, who declared that "such repeated compromises rob the tale of its dignity and sombre interest, and reduce it to the level of wilful fantasy", p. 786, but to say this is to misunderstand Morris totally. It would have been very crude and conventionally Victorian of him to kill the Bride off, as he himself saw, while to keep her alive and marry her thus is fully in the spirit of service to the wider community which is what Morris is stressing in the tale. It was also much more "realistic" of Morris to end in this way, since, after all unwanted people rarely die off so conveniently in "real life".

⁵²See Works XV, 110: "Our men were not little-hearted, nor did our women lament the death of warriors overmuch, for they were there to bear more warriors to the Folk".

and of good stock and ought to do her duty to her people by bearing sons.⁵³ Thus a personal quest and a personal love is a threat to the traditional pattern of society, and ultimately appears to forebode the destruction of fellowship altogether.

This destruction, however, need not necessarily come to pass, as Morris sees it. As must always be remembered, though Morris tended to idealize the history of the Germanic peoples and the Middle Ages, he did not by any means regard these times as ideal, and though he obviously has a certain nostalgia for the world of the Mark or of Burgdale, he is not suggesting a return to such a society. It is neither possible nor desirable to put the clock back. For one thing, although in many ways these early tribesmen are free and happy, in some respects they are governed by rules of religion and of kindred which Morris would not have had apply again.⁵⁴ Though super-

⁵³ See Works XV, 409-10: "Said Bow-may: 'Sun-beam bade me wed him when he pressed hard upon me'. She stayed awhile, and then said: 'Face-of-god also deemed I should not naysay the man; and now my son by him is of like age to this little one'.

'Good is they story,' said Folk-might; 'or deemest thou, Bow-may, that such strong and goodly women as thou, and women so kind and friendly, should forbear the wedding and the bringing forth of children? Yea, and we who may even yet have to gather to another field before we die, and fight for life and the goods of life'". Thus Bow-may's marriage is put firmly into the same context as that of the women mentioned in footnote 52.

⁵⁴ Cf. Morris's comments on the deadening effects of

stitution in the three Germanic stories is understated, it is present, and Morris must have been aware that religious practices were in fact much more prominent than he allows them to be. Similarly in the case of marriage: both Markmen and Burgdalers make much of not marrying outside the permitted kindreds. This is especially emphasized in The Roots of the Mountains, where the Silverdalers are shown to have become soft and unwarlike through inter-marriage with a local population "not of the kindreds".⁵⁵ Much could be made of this "purity of the race" idea, which has most unpleasant overtones for anyone acquainted with

too many rules and regulations (laid down by religion) on the visual arts, which have already been discussed in Part II, Chapter 2, especially in relation to Egyptian art. Moreover, Morris's discussion with John Ball, where Morris says that he does not believe in any god, and neither does the modern world, and the use of churches as communal meeting places in News, all show how Morris himself felt about religion.

⁵⁵ See Works XV, 111: "And some of our Houses wedded wives of the strangers, and gave them their women to wife. Therein they did amiss; for the blended Folk as the generations passed became softer than our blood, and many were untrusty and greedy and tyrannous, and the days of the whoredom fell upon us, and when we deemed ourselves the mightiest then were we the nearest to our fall. But the House whereof I am would never wed with these Westlanders, and other Houses there were who had affinity with us who chiefly wedded with us of the Wolf, and their fathers had come with ours into that fruitful Dale"

twentieth century history, but it is made completely evident in News from Nowhere that this was by no means part of Morris's own plan for the future of society, where he insists that sexual relations are to be free and ungoverned by formal rules, and specifically says, of intermarriage between southerners and northerners: "the cross between us and them generally turns out well".⁵⁶

Thus in the later romances, Morris turns further and further away from the unthinking acceptance of fellowship which animates the earlier tales, and forces his heroes to be more and more conscious in their choice of the life they will lead. Thiodolf, Face-of-god, and Hallblithe were all exceptions among their people, but everyone in News from Nowhere is conscious, though some of course more than others, of the possibilities and disadvantages of individualism. They remember, as Morris does, the havoc it caused in nineteenth century industrial development, where it was a case of every man for himself,⁵⁷

⁵⁶Works XVI, 25.

⁵⁷See especially the chapters "How the Change Came" and "The Beginning of the New Life", with their emphasis on fellowship. As we have already seen at length in Part II, Morris was also much concerned about excessive "individualism" in the arts, and the effect which this had had in dividing the "fine arts" from their natural allies the "applied arts", and thus, inevitably, making them incomprehensible to the majority of the public.

and they have therefore consciously made the choice of fellowship as their way of life. In the romances that follow the three Germanic tales, the same choice is made, more and more consciously, as the condition of the people advances. The last and latest in setting of them, The Sundering Flood, shows the break-up of mediaeval feudal society as the guilds successfully organize themselves into fellowships and become strong, so that we have returned full circle to the spirit of the earliest of the prose romances, A Dream of John Ball, in which this organization was still not strong enough to withstand the malpractices of king and nobles.⁵⁸ Thus, like the art of the future,

⁵⁸ It is no wonder that Morris, realizing that he was dying, abandoned his revision of The Water of the Wondrous Isles in order to complete, if only in first draft, the statement which was needed to round off his political and literary career, The Sundering Flood. Of course it is a wish fulfilment. In fact, the liberation of the small craft guilds only heralded the complete breakdown of the mediaeval system, and the beginning of the system whereby the modern workman sells his own body to the manufacturer: Morris had explained that to John Ball, much to his horror and disbelief; but in the later romances, he prefers to portray a mediaeval world before fellowship has failed. As he says in The Sundering Flood, Works XX, 178: "Thus then these two hosts looked across the Sundering Flood on each other; and surely, unless the Craftsmen had been valiant and stubborn beyond most, they had lost heart, whereas war was not their mystery". In A Dream of John Ball, with its historical basis, they do lose heart; in this tale they need not, and Morris leaves us with a picture of what England might have been like had the peasants in 1381 really taken the law into their hands and deposed the king, as the small craft guilds do here. The end of the book, however, shows the struggle renewed, as Morris brings us back to what actually did happen to the guilds in Flanders under Philip van Artevelde.

which is to do consciously what the older societies did unconsciously, so the men of the future are consciously to choose fellowship where the men of the past chose it without really understanding that that was what they were doing, and the men of the future will therefore succeed where, in the real past, the old unconscious fellowship could not succeed in bringing about a truly egalitarian society.

CHAPTER 2

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL

As became evident in the last chapter, News from Nowhere holds a pivotal position between the two groups of late prose romances, the earlier ones with their strong Northern bias, and the later group of more chivalric tales. Set in the England of the future instead of the past, it nevertheless looks back in theme, structure, and political motive to A Dream of John Ball, and so forms a neat mid-way conclusion to the series of romances dealing primarily with fellowship, in much the same way as The Sundering Flood rounds off the complete series of prose romances by reminding us of John Ball both in its period and in its concern with the liberation of the oppressed. News also looks forward in theme and setting, as we shall see, to the later group of stories in which, though Morris creates a much less historically based world, he still explores the same problems and preoccupations as in the earlier group of tales. In these later tales, the concept of fellowship remains important, but it is supplemented by a new emphasis on the full development of the individual and the special virtues of individualism: intelligence, initiative, and free-will; a change of emphasis which is

first shown in the more closely analysed character studies in News from Nowhere. Thus the type of fellowship in the later romances is somewhat different from that in the earlier group, for it arises from the free association of fully developed individuals instead of from the suppression of individualism which marked the old tribal fellowships.¹

The central position of News from Nowhere in the late prose romances is emphasized by the gap in the

¹As will be seen, I quarrel from the outset with the interpretation of News and the later romances give by M. F. Hawkins. He argues that: "A man dedicated to the principle of fellowship would not be expected to create an ideal world in which a heroic individual completely dominates his environment and every other human he encounters. Yet the late prose romances are obviously the product of a consciousness that sees itself increasingly separated from others, self-motivated, seeking solitary goals", p. 25; and later: "Although News from Nowhere begins with the same social emphasis [as John Ball], the reader becomes more and more interested in the personal fate of the narrator. The basic theme changes from the analysis of a sane society to the adventure of the hero's journey up the river. . . . As Ellen and the narrator row on together, and especially when they finally wander through the beautiful old country house, we become concerned with them as individuals rather than as representatives of a certain society or social ideal", p. 124. In the first place, our interest in Ellen and Guest/Morris serves to show how Morris's narrative technique is developing and coming more into line with modern novel-writing, and this was likely to expand the audience for his propaganda rather than turn attention away from it. In the second place, a man dedicated to the improvement of the condition of mankind might well seek to advance his ideals through the presentation of the heroic individual who ultimately turns his talents to the use of the community as a whole, as Ralph and Ursula in The Well at the World's End do, for example.

composition of romances which occurred after News and The Story of the Glittering Plain were completed in the early part of 1890 and before the publication of The Wood Beyond the World in 1894. This gap was occasioned largely by Morris's absorption in the setting up of the Kelmscott Press: at first by the designing of the Golden type, his Roman fount which he half-jokingly called "the regenerate type or Jenson-Morris",² and by the cutting of the punches for it in the latter half of 1890; then by the designing of the Chaucer type, his modified Gothic fount, of which the Troy type is simply a larger version; and finally by his concern with the revising and reprinting of those books which he had already had published elsewhere, and in editing his old favourites for the Kelmscott Press.³ Morris was not, however, idle during this period as far as romance-writing went, even though nothing was published, for he wrote to Georgie Burne-Jones in June 1890:

²Mackail II, 262.

³Morris was at this time re-reading much of his own poetry for publication at the Press and elsewhere. See Mackail II, 260, for instance, for Morris's comment on The Earthly Paradise. He was also translating from Old French, for instance, "L'Ordene de Chevalerie", translated 1892-3, and The Tale of King Florus and the Fair Jehane, 1893. See "An Annotated List of All the Books Printed at the Kelmscott Press in the Order in which they were issued", in H. H. Sparling, The Kelmscott Press and William Morris, Master-Craftsman, pp. 153-4 and 156. In order to distinguish this list from the main body of Sparling's book, it will be referred to henceforth as "An Annotated List".

"'The Glittering Plain' I have finished some time, and begun another".⁴ The fact that that other, which was probably "The King's Son and the Carle's Son", an unfinished early version of what was to become The Wood Beyond the World, took so long to write shows as we shall see not so much that he was busy -- Morris was always busy -- as that his methods and attitude to his writing were changing in this apparently fallow time.⁵

Besides the effect of its central position both in date and theme among the late prose romances, News from Nowhere is also pivotal itself both in its subject-matter and in its time-structure. The first half of the book is a piece of historical analysis in a dream-context; the second half a dream-quest in an historical context, the context of the many similar journeys that Morris had made by river from Hammersmith to Kelmscott Manor, to the extent that, as he told Ellen in News; "Indeed, I may say that I know

⁴See Mackail II, 260. For more details about "The King's Son", see Works XVII, xxxvii-viii.

⁵The earlier romances seem to have been written very much "off the cuff", especially those designed for serial publication like John Ball, News, and The Story of the Glittering Plain. For the later group, we have much more evidence of trial and error -- The Water of the Wondrous Isles, for instance, like The Wood Beyond the World, had an alternative trial attempt called "The Widow's House by the Great Water", for details about which see Works XX, xvii-xix -- and more evidence of revision, not only from May Morris's comments in Works XVII and XIX, but

every yard of the Thames from Hammersmith to Cricklade".⁶ This doubling up of dream and reality gives the book its curious double time-structure, the first half looking back to a revolutionary past which for Morris/Guest has not yet happened, and the second half looking forward to a future, the immediate future of haymaking at Kelmscott and the later journey to the North with Ellen, which for Morris/Guest will never happen; while at the same time Morris and his readers are looking forward to a revolutionary future, and Morris himself can look back on haymaking at Kelmscott, in the world outside the book. The result of this is that News has, both from its position in the late prose romances, its internal structure, and its political motivation, a double movement towards the past and towards the future at one and the same time, a movement which is also characteristic of A Dream of John Ball and The Sundering Flood.⁷

also from comparison of the revised portions of The Water with the unrevised latter half, and of the unrevised Sundering Flood with those romances in which the revisions were completed.

⁶Works XVI, 183-4.

⁷The Sundering Flood in fact has a structural pattern the reverse of News: instead of showing an old man going away from the centre of action towards the source of the river in a pastoral landscape, Flood shows a young man leaving his farm and following the river down towards the sea to the city which is the centre of action; and in both books the heroes return to their starting-point without

This double structure has caused many problems in interpretation. When most people think of News from Nowhere, what they remember is not the Marxist analysis and discussion of the past and future societies which is its didactic centre and in fact occupies at least half its pages, but the dream-like journey with a beautiful young girl up the Thames from Kelmscott House to Kelmscott Manor which forms the smaller latter part of the book. These readers thus conclude that the book is no more than a self-indulgent dream in which Morris pictures himself as achieving the intellectual and sexual companionship which he could not get from his wife in his own life. Philip Henderson is typical of this type of reader, commenting:

News from Nowhere is peculiarly youthful in feeling for a man of fifty-seven, at times almost embarrassingly so with its 'light chaff', though Morris is throughout only too conscious of himself as an 'oldster' among all these happy young folk. This, however, does not prevent him from being very susceptible to the charm and grace of all the young women, who treat him with the kindness and sympathy evidently denied to him by his own wife. In fact, one is struck in all Morris's late prose romances by the prevalence of these compliant, white-armed maidens, who make up to him in imagination for what, one suspects, he had been too shy to claim in his own life.⁸

following, or indeed being aware of, the river which was so important to them on their original journey.

⁸Philip Henderson, p. 327. I have said elsewhere that Henderson often seems to me to misread Morris, and the "happy young folk" here is an example. There are many old people in News, and Morris/Guest is as much, if not more,

Recent socialist critics have tried to counterbalance this tendency by stressing the revolutionary nature of "Now the Change Came", and by underplaying the dream-element in the story, but this, in its way, is almost equally misleading: while it is true that on one level News is an attempt at the portrayal of the state in what Marx called the "higher phase" of communism,⁹ a sort of historical projection of the future based on Marx together with Morris's own very wide-ranging knowledge of the social and economic structures of past societies, on another level, but integrated with

out of place among them as among the young people. Moreover many of the young people are shown as unhappy or discontented: Ellen, for instance, and the young men to whom she is so disturbing; the people at Walter Allen's, the second house at which they stay on their journey up river, where an accidental murder has taken place and two suicides are likely to follow; and even Dick and Clara, whose new-found happiness has only come to them after a period of estrangement; all serve to show that the passions of the world of the future are no more idyllic than in the nineteenth, or any other, century. However, they are, as we have already seen in the case of Dick and Clara, taken more sensibly on the whole; nor is there any question of punishing the murderer, but only of preventing him, if it is possible, from punishing himself too much. Morris is, in fact, concerned to show us that News represents a really possible world, and not an earthly paradise, though our view of it is complicated by the fact that Morris/Guest does see all of it, even the suffering, through rose-coloured spectacles, thus providing another double focus to the already complex structure of the book. If we compare the England of the future with the Land of Living Men in The Story of the Glittering Plain, however, it becomes obvious that a difference there is between a living society and a land of illusion from which all suffering, and hence all action and all life, has been excluded. The two stories were written at the same time, and provide a valuable commentary on each other.

⁹R. Page Arnot, p. 117.

the first, the story is equally a "quest of the golden girl",¹⁰ the ideal woman of the future, and as such resembles the "dream-quests" of the Earthly Paradise period.

This is not to say, however, that News from Nowhere is not an integrated work, or that it really splits into two halves. The journey up the Thames is structurally necessary to complete the figure of eight pattern of the book, with its move from Hammersmith to Kelmscott and back to Hammersmith again and from present to future and back to present again, and it is structurally desirable because it ties the story to a reality that was familiar to Morris, the reality of the river and Kelmscott Manor, and so prevents his speculation about the future from degenerating into mere castles in the air. The journey is also valuable, too, for the social propaganda which Morris intended it to convey, since if we had only Old Hammond's description of the theory behind the change, we would not really have any sense of the quality of life in Nowhere. Similarly, looking in the opposite direction, from the journey back towards the dialogue with Hammond, we find that the historical analysis is necessary to give solidity to the

¹⁰ Title of a romance by Richard le Gallienne, The Quest of the Golden Girl (London, 1896) in which the narrator sets out on a trip through Southern England to find his ideal woman.

life in Nowhere, establishing it as not just another mysterious and distant countryside, outside time, a Utopia with no relation to our everyday world, but as a valid continuation of the life of the English countryside as Morris knew it. The figure of the nineteenth century labourer whom Morris encounters as he turns sadly away from the feast in the church at the end of News from Nowhere is the appropriate symbol of this double vision from past to future and future to past. He serves not only to point out the difference of his degraded servility and prematurely aged body from the free intelligence and well-developed bodies of the people of the future, but also to stress the continuity of the past and future worlds: Kelmscott is and remains a farming community with its roots in the land and in the concerns of the land, far less changed than the cleaned and shrunken and rather unlikely version of London which is the scene of the earlier part of the book.¹¹

As we see the people of Nowhere living and working and playing during the journey up the Thames, we experience with Morris/Guest his gradually increasing understanding

¹¹The use of Kelmscott Manor, the "old house amongst new folk", and the new but also ancient use of the church as village feast-hall also reiterates this continuity between old world and new. And perhaps the "tall handsome woman, with black wavy hair and deep-set grey eyes" who welcomes the journeyers to Kelmscott in her "stately" manner is more than a little reminiscent of Jane Morris, the lady of Kelmscott.

not only of the superficial differences between the old world and the new which were all that he perceived before his conversation with Old Hammond -- little ironic comments on the use of the Houses of Parliament as a dung market, or the absence of politics, a non-topic which, jokingly, receives a whole chapter to itself, or the more serious indictment of money and a civilization based upon payment instead of on giving and receiving freely as in Nowhere -- but also of the change in the people themselves and in their relationships with each other. They are fundamentally contented, despite the continuance of unfortunate love, of dissatisfaction, and even of manslaughter, none of which Morris is idealistic enough to think could be dispensed with in Nowhere. They are also fundamentally, as we saw in the last chapter, good-fellows, ready and willing to share their good fortune with each other, and, especially, with their visitor, Morris/Guest. Dick's concern for him, for instance, is a little surprising in view of his own new-found relationship with Clara, since they are, after all, on their "second honeymoon", but it is all part of the genuine and extra-ordinary good nature of the people of Nowhere. Nor, perhaps, was Morris idealizing as much as we might like to think. As E. P. Thompson suggests, if "such neighbourliness, such sense of the common

good, such general comradely goodwill and interest",¹² seem unreal to us, might it not be our own inhibited development as human beings, because of the deficiencies of industrial society, which prevent us from seeing how News really is "a vision rather than a dream".¹³

This neighbourliness has, of course, its basis in the peace and plenty which obviates any need for the struggle for livelihood as it was known by the poor in the nineteenth century,¹⁴ and it suggests the open-handedness

¹²E. P. Thompson, p. 808. Thompson quotes an instance of "neighbourliness" from the autobiography of Samuel Bamford: about the turn of the eighteenth century, he was "trudging the road" between Mountsorrel and Loughborough and came upon a party of women coming from the hayfield -- as a number of Morris's most friendly characters in News are doing. They danced and sang round him, and then made him join them in their supper there in the fields. This, expanded to a countrywide scale, is the atmosphere of News.

¹³Works XVI, 211. These, the last words of News, emphasize the sharp contrast Morris intended between the land of dreams and lies of an earthly paradise tale, such as is the Acre of the Undying in The Story of the Glittering Plain, and the visionary but true idealism of paradise brought about by man's own efforts in the human context of life and death. It is no accident that these two books were written more or less simultaneously, for their themes, both quests to an ideal world and then home again, are similar both in structure and in content, and both convey the same message of work in the world and rejection of escapism.

¹⁴Of course the struggle for livelihood in the sense of hard physical labour still continues in News, and no doubt good and bad harvests make variations in the quality and quantity of material goods in any given year, but all are assured of a share in whatever there is.

of, for instance, the people of Burgdale in The Roots of the Mountains, who have enough for themselves and are only too willing to take into their homes the poor runaways from Rosedale and Silverdale,¹⁵ or that of the Wolfings who take under their Roof the Bearings whose home has been destroyed by the Romans.¹⁶ But the neighbourliness of these people is that of a more-or-less primitive social structure, and does not include such ready good-will towards those who are "not of the kindreds". Of the Bride, for instance, in The Roots of the Mountains, it is said that "for all her pity for the other folk, she thought chiefly of those fearless tall men who were of the blood of those with whom it was lawful to wed",¹⁷ and though subsequently she takes some of the sorriest-looking into

¹⁵Works XV, 214-6. Indeed, those who do not manage to get one of the runaways as a guest are "ill-content", so that there is some competition in hospitality. Similarly in News when Morris comments on Dick's kindness "to me, a perfect stranger", Old Hammond replies: "if he were not 'kind', as you call it, to a perfect stranger he would be thought a strange person, and people would be apt to shun him", Works XVI, 55. The runaways, however, are not "perfect strangers" in quite the same way, but war-refugees from a group closely allied to their hosts, and they may have important military information to impart, all of which creates a rather different situation from Morris/Guest's in Nowhere.

¹⁶Works XIV, 159. Or, rather, allow the Bearing women and children to stay with them in the woods, and later, when all is over, help them to rebuild their "Great Roof", XIV, 208.

¹⁷Works XV, 214. There is even a suggestion that the Bride's interest in the three men of the kindreds arises

her own house, they are never on terms of equality with her. The good-fellowship in Nowhere, however, does not depend upon any automatic social reaction, but upon the genuine interest of one individual in another individual, so that differences and strangenesses, which provoke suspicion in primitive societies, are welcomed and even encouraged. Thus, while the efforts of the Burgdalers are concentrated on "normalizing" the run-aways as soon as possible, Dick will not let Morris/Guest change his odd clothes until Hammond has seen him, and, though he is careful about his guest being worn out with questions, takes a naïve pride in showing off his "catch".

The difference of emphasis in the hospitality of the two types of society is important as symbolizing the different social structures that Morris is describing. The earlier type, in which, practically speaking, all men are treated as equals, except in the case of external danger when a temporary war-leader is necessary, has strict laws for the treatment of outsiders and for the regulations of life generally, and, as we saw in the last chapter,

because she is unconsciously seeing in them a foreshadowing of her own future relationship with Folk-might: "and ever amidst shame and pity of all that misery rose up before her the images of those tall fierce men, and it seemed to her as if she had seen something like to them in some dream or imagination of her mind", Works XV, 214. These men are Silverdalers and therefore of the same kindred as Folk-might and his people.

individual initiative is suppressed except where it is valuable to the tribe as a whole. The later type of society, where all men are also treated equally, has, on the other hand, no rules for living, and encourages an easy tolerance of individualism which was a feature neither of primitive societies nor of the class system as Morris knew it in the nineteenth century. This sort of equality, combined with tolerance of individual eccentricities, was what Morris hoped socialism would bring about: not the obliteration of differences between people, but obliteration of the divisive differences which made it impossible, in the nineteenth century, for the ferryman to be friends with the scholar as Dick is with Old Hammon and Henry Morsom in News from Nowhere, or for a dustman to write novels and a weaver to be a serious mathematician, and indeed vice versa.¹⁸

¹⁸In this context, we may recall Morris's dislike of the Fabians, despite his agreement with them politically on some points. As Shaw explains in "Morris as I knew him", the Fabians met in upper-middle-class drawing-rooms, and if any working-man perchance strayed among them he was immediately and perforce ill-at-ease. What Morris wanted was that he should be able to mix with everyone at ease everywhere; that no man should be made uncomfortable by the richness or poverty of another's house; that no man should be condemned for differences in his manners or speech or education, since all these things would be a matter of conscious choice and not of necessity in a truly moral society. See *May Morris II*, xvii-xviii.

What this tolerance of individualism means is that, unlike the societies which Morris had been describing in the earlier group of late prose romances, in Morris's ideal society everyone is to be free to develop to their maximum potential, without inhibition either from social factors, as in primitive societies, or from economic factors, as in so-called civilized societies.¹⁹ Thus Ellen, the ideal of News from Nowhere, in many ways resembles the Hall-sun or the Bride, especially in her physical prowess, but she is not tied down as they are to one narrow society and its laws, and she has also been able to develop intellectually in a way that was not really possible to them despite their obvious intellectual potential. We recall that the Hall-sun, in taking on herself the captaincy of the "stay-at-homes", only does so because the men are away.²⁰ She would not consider competing for leadership with the men when they were present even though she does influence them to some extent through her position and her gift of fore-seeing. Nor do any women speak, or

¹⁹There is some gentle satire of this term "civilized" in News, when Old Hammon asks jokingly: "What! are we still civilized?", Works XVI, 62.

²⁰See Works XIV, 89-90. They are to take her for their captain "while this House is bare of warriors", and she relinquishes her rule when the men return.

even sit, in the high councils of either the Wolfings or the men of Burgdale, with the exception of the Hall-sun who in this case is merely the representative of the "soul of the Wolfings" and does not count as an individual woman. Ellen, on the other hand, is shown to have done quite a lot of reading, even though she does not approve of too great a reliance on books, and reading is an activity which is evidently rather unusual in Nowhere, as we learn from Morris Guest's comment on Dick's knowledge of books.²¹ Her intellect is clearly well-developed, as Dick especially perceives,²² and as is evident from her response to Guest/Morris, and the fact that she does housework and looks after her grandfather in no way detracts from her mental development, nay, it adds to it, just as

²¹Works XVI, 140: "Indeed, I may say here, that, though as you will have noted, my friends had mostly something to say about books, yet they were not great readers, considering the refinement of their manners and the great amount of leisure which they obviously had. In fact, when Dick, especially, mentioned a book, he did so with an air of a man who has accomplished an achievement. . . ." See Works XVI, 150-1 for Ellen's tirade against her grandfather's dependence on books, in which, incidentally, she shows her own knowledge at least of the nineteenth century novel as well as of "history-books". Moreover she has been taught about history by the most learned men in Nowhere, Works XVI, 157. Cf. also the discussion of "book-learning" XVI, 30-1, and the general discussions about "education", for the attitude of Nowhere to this subject.

²²See Works XVI, 193-4.

the male characters also are proud to be both physically and mentally developed.

In this emphasis on full human development, both mental and physical, not only News from Nowhere but all the romances that follow it also partake of Morris's ideal. Birdalone particularly is extremely athletic, as her marathon swim, for instance, shows, in The Water of the Wondrous Isles, and Ursula in The Well at the World's End, the Maiden in The Wood Beyond the World and Elfhild in The Sundering Flood all show themselves capable of strenuous journeys through the mountains, for they are as strong and fit, and sometimes more so, than the lovers they accompany or are in search of. They are also well-developed mentally, despite, often, their apparent lack of formal education and their sometimes lowly social status, and in this respect they are always at least a match for their men, and sometimes, like the Maiden in The Wood, more than a match for them. The men, too, are uniformly strong and intelligent, though this is so much more characteristic of heroes than heroines in novels of the period that it needs less emphasis. However, it is notable that, as in News from Nowhere, it is not just the heroes and heroines but the entire population that ^{is} healthy and intelligent, whatever their social status, so that there is no question of anyone resembling the bent and servile labourer who so

shocks Morris/Guest as he returns from Nowhere to nineteenth century England. Nor is this escapism on Morris's part, as is usually suggested, but part of his deliberate attempt to portray men as they might be were their minds and bodies allowed the necessary freedom to grow.²³

The problem of social class and status in the later romances also reveals its significance when we examine further the idea of full human development. Morris's use of the whole range of late mediaeval social categories, and especially the upper part of this range, has been a stumbling-block to critics who assume, perhaps naturally, that he is reverting to a rather simple-minded nostalgia for the Middle Ages in reaction to the shattering of his socialist dream. However, as we saw in Part I of this thesis, Morris's adherence to socialist ideals was by no means weakened, as Mackail had suggested it was, nor was Morris ever the worshipper of the Middle Ages that he was sometimes made out to be. There is thus no motive for nostalgia. In fact what seems likely is that Morris, far from recommending a return to a sort of mediaeval society, is actually making use of the methods of the mediaeval

²³We may notice here what Morris has to say, not only about the bad effects of poverty, over-crowding, etc. on mind and body, but also what he says in News about the crushing effect of "education", so-called. In News there is no formal educational system at all. See Works XVI, 63-5. Dick does not even understand what Guest/Morris is trying to ask him, though he succeeds well enough in con-

romances which he knew and loved so well to make a modern point; to figure forth the spiritual condition of his characters under the symbolic guise of their physical activities in a way which the conventional modern novel could not well do.²⁴ What is signified by the re-introduction of knights and ladies and merchants and priests as his chief actors, therefore, is the difference of levels of development and levels of self-awareness in his characters.

That it is a difference in spiritual rather than social status that is represented may be seen from the way in which class differences are treated in the later group of romances. For instance, though The Well at the World's End may at times recall the heirarchical society of the Middle Ages, Ralph, a king's son, can marry Ursula, a

veying the breadth of real knowledge (as opposed to artificial "education") that prevails in Nowhere. See pp. 28-31.

²⁴George MacDonald, of course, uses the same methods in Phantastes and the Princess books, and the typical pattern of fairy-tales is for the poor boy to marry the princess. Some writers, however, tried to combine a modern setting with this sort of usage, and the result tended to be a rather mawkishly sentimental. A contemporary example is J. H. Shorthouse, Sir Percival: A Story of the Past and of the Present (London, 1886), which of course drew on the mediaeval legend, making the contemporary hero attempt to model himself on his namesake.

yeoman's daughter, with no feeling of incongruity, or even of special daring being attached to the act. There is no question of King Cophetua stooping to the beggar maid. As Ursula boldly explains to the King of Upmeads, she comes of good yeoman stock which has just as ancient, if less well-recorded, a history as his lineage has, and the king fully accepts this justification.²⁵ More important, at a deeper level, Ralph shows her worthiness when he tells his brother Hugh: "I am become a Friend of the Well, and were meet to wed with the daughters of the best of the Kings: yet is this one meeter to wed with me than the highest of the Queens; for she also is a Friend of the Well".²⁶ Ursula is at the same spiritual level as he is, and therefore is the only suitable mate for him.

Similar apparent incongruities of social status occur in the other romances and reinforce this interpretation of status as a device for revealing the inner strengths of Morris's characters. In The Water of the Wondrous Isles, for instance, the almost completely untutored Birdalone, who has only known one single human being,

²⁵Works XIX, 214.

²⁶See Works XIX, 191-2. I leave aside for the moment the question of the significance of the Well, which will be examined in the next chapter.

and that one a witch, between the ages of two and about eighteen, is able to mix as readily with knights and their ladies as she can with the townspeople of the City of the Five Crafts or the country folk she meets on her wanderings, and all acknowledge her to be something out of the ordinary. In The Sundering Flood, too, Osberne, despite his extreme youth and inexperience -- he is only about sixteen -- is immediately recognized as a potential leader by the captain of the men of East Cheaping, though he protests: "Master, I pray thee consider my youth, and how I have had no schooling herein, and know nought of ordering men or arraying a battle".²⁷ Birdalone and Osberne, like Ursula, are what might be called natural aristocrats, were it not that aristocracy implies exclusiveness, and for Morris it was possible for all to attain this ideal development in some degree or other. Of course not everyone is capable of achieving the same level: not all can be Friends of the Well in this life, but all may be helpers or hinderers on the way, as their social positions very often reveal. It is, however, important not to make a simple equation between kingship and goodness, for example, or we might find ourselves praising the Lord of Utterbol, when, in fact,

²⁷ Works XXI, 82. Ralph also seems extremely young to be leading the seasoned Men of the Dry Tree. His brother Hugh calls him a "lad" and "little lord", 191, and asks how such rough men come to be following him. Again, it is the effect of the Well.

as we learn at the end of The Well at the World's End, he was not worthy of his position and therefore has been supplanted by the somewhat uncouth but worthy Bull Shockhead, who has been a helper to Ralph as the Lord of Utterbol was was a hinderer.

This difference in levels of development is very clearly shown in News from Nowhere, which in many ways acts as a key to the later group of romances. All the women in the story, like those in the romances, are healthy, handsome, and intelligent, but they are differently characterized by Morris/guest. Thus Clara, despite the fact that she works in the fields and is married to a ferryman, which would make her a member of the labouring classes in nineteenth century terms, is to Morris/Guest "not unlike a very pleasant and unaffected young lady",²⁸ but Ellen, who, in Morris/Guest's view, has reached a higher level of spiritual, intellectual, and physical development, is more than just a "young lady", as Ursula and Birdalone are. Morris, in a semi-real projection of the future, cannot turn her into a Queen or a Lady, as he does them, but he can give us Dick's version of her as a fairy in an enchanted garden,²⁹ or Morris/Guest's

²⁸Works XVI, 182, and Morris/Guest adds that Ellen is more beautiful and more interesting than just "a young lady".

²⁹Works XVI, 155. Her personal magnetism and disturbing effect on men are other marks of Ellen's special status, and resemble Ralph's effect on Women in the Well.

last view of her at the end of News from Nowhere, to set her apart from the other less finely developed and perceptive characters in the story. She is, in fact, a queen among men in all but name.

In the cases of Birdalone, Ursula, Elfhild in The Sundering Flood, and the Maiden in The Wood Beyond the World, the new social status is conferred by marriage, though of course they have first to make themselves worthy of their marriages. With the men, however, things work a little differently. Ralph in The Well is already a king's son, Arthur in The Water of the Wondrous Isles already a knight, so their status does not change as markedly as that of the women. Walter in The Wood Beyond the World, on the other hand, is only the son of a rich merchant, and for this he is despised by the King's Son, who does not consider him fit to associate with the Lady.³⁰ Moreover Ralph is only the youngest son of the King of Upmeads, and would not therefore normally expect to inherit the throne, especially, as he virtually does, while his father is still alive. Arthur and Osberne, neither of whom actually changes their rank, Osberne refusing a knighthood because it would not be of much use to him in his home environment

³⁰ Cf. Works XVII, 44 where he says Walter is "low-born", and implies that he is a coward, and p. 45 where he says "the man I dream of no account", and p. 46 "a gangrel churl".

of comfortable, independent bonders,³¹ both become leaders of armies, as Ralph actually does, and Walter potentially does also,³² because of their unusual powers of leadership.

All these men have therefore changed their status like the women, though perhaps less obviously, and they have done so on the whole by confirming their original positions by their prowess rather than acquiring new positions. The obverse to this affirmation of position is, obviously, to be seen in characters who start with a high status and are shown to be unworthy. The Lord of Utterbol is one example already cited, but so, also, in The Well at the World's End, are Ralph's father and brothers. His father, King Peter, has not been able to protect Upmeads from invasion, and so has lost his country, while his brothers have either turned to success in other fields or failed miserably: Blaise, the oldest, becomes a rich merchant and Lord of the Porte, which shows his might in some respects, but not the quality of mastery that Ralph gains; Gregory becomes a monk; and Hugh, the youngest next to Ralph, has degenerated into a

³¹Cf. Works XXI, 106, when Osberne refuses Sir Medard, and p. 148 when he refuses Sir Godrick.

³²When Walter is given a choice of garments in his kingship test, he chooses the battle-garb, and thereby proves to the testers his willingness to be their war-leader. See Works XVII, 119.

common soldier. Similarly the King's Son in The Wood Beyond the World begins by despising Walter because of his low social status, but he himself is considered by Walter unfit to fill the position of king's son. As Morris says: "for all his goodliness Walter accounted him little, and no wise deemed him to look chieftain-like".³³ None of these can support their original social statuses.

Both the movement from low status to high and the reverse movement from high to low are most clearly brought out in Child Christopher and Goldilind the Fair, a romance which has scarcely been mentioned in our analysis so far. There are two reasons for this omission. The first is that, based as it is on a mediaeval romance,³⁴ Child Christopher naturally occupies something of an isolated place among the other prose romances which are the direct product of Morris's imagination. As has been observed already, however, Morris's translations -- and Child Christopher is a free

³³Works XVII, 39. Another and more dastardly example than these is the King of the City of the Sundering Flood. He goes over to the Outlanders when the Small Guilds win the battle against king and Porte, and in the end neither merchants nor common people will accept him back, but prefer to elect Sir Godrick as Burgreve, for "since the City had a Porte and a great Council, and a Burgreve under these, the office of King was little needed there", Works XXI, 182. Not only is he demoted, therefore, but his position is **abolished** altogether.

³⁴Havelok the Dane, the source of Child Christopher, occurs in both English and French versions, the English

adaptation anyway rather than a translation and bears little more resemblance to Havelok the Dane than Love is Enough does to the Mabinogion -- are always very close in theme and setting to the mainstream of his imaginative work, and very often shape the course of that work and provide a commentary upon it, as his involvement with Icelandic literature did for many years. Thus Child Christopher is especially significant in indicating the trends of Morris's interests in other literatures at the time of the composition of the later group of the late prose romances, it has therefore been deliberately reserved for special attention. The second reason is that Child Christopher provides the best summing-up of the entire theme of kingship in Morris's work. The most important of the "king-making" romances, The Wood and The Well, only show the adult quest of the hero, while The Water of the Wondrous Isles and The Sundering Flood, which do show the childhood of the main characters, do not end definitively in a "king-making". Child Christopher, however, shows the full process from birth to adulthood of both the hero and the heroine.

In Child Christopher, both hero and heroine are

perhaps being a redaction of the French. Morris would probably have been particularly interested in it because "it was obviously written for the uncultivated". See Bruce Dickins and R. M. Wilson, Early Middle English Texts (London, 1951), p. 34.

already the legal heirs to their respective thrones at the outset, but for various reasons they are not treated as their status deserves. Christopher's parents, the King and Queen of Oakenrealm, die within a few days of his birth, and Rolf, the Earl-Marshal of Oakenrealm, unable actually to contemplate killing the sickly motherless child at this point, sends Christopher to a distant place to be brought up more or less as a peasant, hoping that he will either die or be forgotten. Thus he grows up in ignorance of his status, which is only revealed fully almost at the end of the book, after his marriage with Goldilind. She, on the other hand, has not lost her parents so early, and is fully aware of her true status as Queen of Meadham,³⁵ but is all the more helpless thereby, in that the regent, Earl Geoffrey of the Southern Marches, has imprisoned her in a distant castle on the borders with Oakenrealm. In both cases, therefore, although there is no change of status as such, the true kingship of Christopher and Goldilind must be revealed and confirmed by the events of the story.

³⁵Oakenrealm and Meadham both obviously signify different types of the English countryside, the wilder, wooded country, and the gentle, low-lying meadowland, and their names appropriately symbolize the nature and sex of their true rulers.

Christopher, then, grows up in ignorance of his position, which is known to no more than two or three men in the kingdom, but he grows up so strong and beautiful that his real status reveals itself readily to those about him, in the degree in which they are capable of understanding that status. Thus the common people with whom he associates call him "King Christopher", and crown him with flowers when he is pre-eminent in their village sports.³⁶ Then, the powerful outlaw-lord, Jack of the Tofts, realizes by his looks and manner whose son Christopher must be, and he takes a secret part in educating Christopher for his future position. Rolf himself also has a dream in which the Landwight of Oakenrealm appears to him with Christopher:

³⁶ See Works XVII, 146, where Christopher comes before Rolf crowned with flowers, and seeming to Rolf like a mockery of his own usurped status. The flowers are, of course, significant of the ancient fertility aspects of kingship, as are also the flowers of the Maiden in The Wood Beyond the World. Similarly, Christopher's beauty and luck in love are associated, like Ralph's in The Well, with fertility and regeneration in the natural world. As Yeats says, in relation to this regenerative aspect of Morris's heroes, they are all "men with lucky eyes and men whom all women love", Essays and Introductions, p. 54. The same is true of Morris's heroines, and we may note that Goldilind, like the rest, has the power of drawing men's love to her, and is thereby instrumental in dividing Christopher from his friend David because David involuntarily loves her too much for his peace of mind. Ellen, the Maiden, Elfhild, Birdalone, Ursual, all share this disturbing power.

For him seemed that there came through the garth-gate a woman fair and tall, and clad in nought but oaken-leaves, who led by the hand an exceeding goodly young man of twenty summers, and his visage like to the last battle-dead King of Oakenrealm when he was a young man. And the said woman led the swain up to the Marshal, who asked in his mind what these two were: and the woman answered his thought and said: "I am the Woman of the Woods, and the Landwight of Oakenrealm; and this lovely lad whose hand I hold is my King and thy King and the King of Oakenrealm.³⁷

Finally, when Rolf is about to try and have Christopher murdered, he accidentally gives him an ancient seal-ring which belongs with the crown of Oakenrealm, so that even inanimate objects seem to him to be conspiring to help Christopher.³⁸

The most important evidence of Christopher's natural qualities of kingship, however, is revealed in his relationship with Goldilind. She has been nursing her pride of lineage in her semi-prison at Greenharbour, for she is ill-treated there, though not with Earl Geoffrey's knowledge, and her pride is all she has had to sustain her. Thus when she meets Christopher although she falls in love with him

³⁷Works XVII, 144. In Havelok the Dane, it is Havelok himself who dreams of his status, which is revealed to Goldboru by an angel. Morris turn the angel into a pagan figure resembling Habundia in The Water, in keeping with the generally much more pagan ethos of the romances, though we notice that Christopher and Goldilind are married by a priest, and he gives the dream, more dramatically, to the villain.

³⁸Works XVII, 148.

she cannot, of course, consider stooping to his level,³⁹ though her love for him ought to have given her evidence that he was more than he seemed. After Christopher has killed some of Earl Geoffrey's men in attempting to defend Goldilind, Geoffrey offers her the choice of either marrying Christopher and going free with him to Oakenrealm, or remaining a prisoner herself and letting Christopher be killed, and she then has to debate whether being a queen in captivity is better than being the wife of a poor man. She chooses to marry Christopher, though she is very angry at so demeaning herself, and at first it seems that she will refuse to sleep with him. Only when she is able to accept his status as a mere "Forester" and fulfil their marriage contract contentedly can Christopher's kingship be revealed.⁴⁰

Geoffrey's justification for the choice he gives Goldilind -- and as it turns out it is a good justification -- is that the King her father had made him swear to marry

³⁹See Works XVII, 198. In fact Goldilind says: "I love him with all my body and soul; and I would have had him love me par amours, and then should I have been his mistress and he my servant. . . ." In other words, she wanted a courtly lover, not a husband.

⁴⁰See Works XVII, 204-8 and 215-7. Eventually Goldilind is almost regretful that Christopher is not just "the Churl, the Woodman, the Wolf-head" she thought him, because his kingship means war and tumult and perhaps the loss of their idyllic love.

Goldilind to "none but the loveliest and strongest that might be".⁴¹ Of course his statement that he has searched throughout Meadham for such a man is mere pretence, and it obviously suits him very well to get rid of Goldilind in this way. Nonetheless, however, it is quite true that Christopher most conspicuously fulfils these conditions, which the old King of Meadham had unconsciously been correct in assuming would only be capable of fulfilment by a noble man. Thus Geoffrey, in fulfilling the letter of the King's commands in order to be treacherous to their spirit, has accidentally been loyal to his promise, just as Rolf was when he accidentally gave the King's seal-ring to Christopher. And Geoffrey is further loyal eventually when, after Christopher has regained the throne of Oakenrealm, he gives the throne of Meadham back to Goldilind in order to avert an imminent rebellion there. He is then restored to his proper position as Goldilind's regent, and rules successfully in her absence now that she is his acknowledged superior as he could not do so long as he kept her in bondage.⁴²

⁴¹Ibid., p. 200.

⁴²It is important to contrast the "before and after" situations here. When Goldilind's father is dying, everyone recognizes Geoffrey as the most suitable person to be Goldilind's guardian, but they do not love him, Works XVII, 139. He rules therefore successfully with the Lords' consent until it becomes apparent that he has disposed of Goldilind, when they rise against him. But when Goldilind is restored to the throne, everyone is actually pleased

This bald outline reveals Child Christopher as basically similar to Havelok the Dane, though the two stories could not well be more dissimilar in the manner of telling and the setting of the incidents of the plot. Morris has, however, removed two of the most important tokens by which Havelok's true status is revealed: the mysterious flame which issues from his mouth when he sleeps, and the "birthmark in the shape of a golden cross on his shoulder".⁴³ These indices would be too crude to fit in with the tone of Morris's version of the story. Besides, he wishes to emphasize the natural revelation of Christopher's kingship. Like Walter, Ralph, Birdalone, and Osberne, who reach their high status by going on quests, and by excelling all others in their various virtues, Christopher, in his woodland journeys -- his knowledge of the ways of the woods well-nigh matches Birdalone's -- lays the basis for his ability to avoid the murderous attempts of Simon,

that Geoffrey is to be Earl-Marshal again: "and they rejoiced at her words, for Sir Geoffrey was no ill ruler . . .", Works XVII, 259. Geoffrey has thus risen in everyone's esteem despite his treachery, and he keeps himself worthy of that esteem by truly fulfilling the status that formerly had not seemed enough for him.

⁴³Early Middle English Texts, pp. 39-40. As we saw, Morris also omits the angel, which he transforms into a part of Rolf's dream.

Rolf's paid assassin.⁴⁴ He also meets Jack of the Tofts, whose house in some respects resembles that of Folk-might and the Friend in The Roots of the Mountains, and so makes his most important ally for his attempt to regain the throne. Similarly, it is his prowess in sports that first endears him to the villagers and then to Goldilind, and this and his beauty which bring about their marriage. In all these things, Christopher reveals himself to be truly a king.

However, as we have seen, this does not mean, in Morris's terms, that only the true aristocrat can manifest such virtues. That, indeed, would have been the view of the mediaeval chronicler, at least on the whole,⁴⁵ but it was not Morris's. In Child Christopher, he was, of course, confined by his story, but we have ample evidence from the other late prose romances to show how kingship functions as a measure of a man's less tangible attainments in Morris's work. What Child Christopher does therefore is to focus

⁴⁴Goldilind, too, is attracted to the woods, and her first meeting with Christopher comes about through her running away to the woods. There Christopher thinks her "a wood-wight, or some one of the she-Gods of the Gentiles come back hither", Works XVII, 177, thus linking her with Habundia and Birdalone and the Lady of Abundance, and indeed with the Friend, whom Face-of-god thought a wood-goddess.

⁴⁵Two of Morris's translations from Old French contain exceptions to this generalization. A Tale of the

the kingship theme, to show how Morris took typical romance and fairy-story situations and characters, and used them to say something about the nature of man and his relationship to society. As we shall see in the next chapter, in The Wood Beyond the World, The Water of the Wondrous Isles, The Well at the World's End, and The Sundering Flood, Morris reintroduces the sort of magical incidents which he excluded from Child Christopher, but he can do this because he is himself fully in control of the narrative, and can show the reader that these occurrences are but minor reinforcements to the natural qualities of the heroes and heroines. In the last analysis, Osberne does not need Steelhead's arrows, for he has in himself the power to overcome his enemies; Steelhead is but an external manifestation of that power. Like Ellen and Dick and Old Hammond and the Golden Dustman, he is a fully developed individual, and, like them, he chooses at last to stay and serve his own community, and Walter, Christopher, Ralph, and Birdalone are but stages on the way to that final reconciliation.

Emperor Coustans and King Florus and the Fair Jehane both show women marrying men who are socially beneath them. We shall say more about this in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

WOOD, WELL, AND WATER

In the last chapter, we analysed the increasing individualism of the Morrisian hero, his movement away from an unconscious tribal fellowship as depicted in the earlier group of late prose romances towards the new conscious ideal of self-fulfilment which predominates in the later group of romances. Now it is time to examine the activity of the hero, the means by which he attains that self-fulfilment, and ultimately thereby renders himself better able to contribute to the life and strength of the community to which he belongs. We shall be doing this, in this chapter, chiefly through an analysis of three of the late prose romances, The Wood Beyond the World, The Water of the Wondrous Isles, and The Well at the World's End.

As we have seen, in each of the five last romances the protagonists move from a lower social position to a higher one, and, correspondingly, from a relatively low degree of self-awareness to a higher level. They do this in all, with the partial exception of Child Christopher and Goldilind the Fair,¹ by means of a quest; not a love

¹In this tale, there is actually a certain amount

quest such as was the predominant motif of The Earthly Paradise, though love comes out of their journeyings;² not a quest for immortality, another important early theme in Morris's work, though Ralph and Ursula at least gain extended life spans through their efforts; but a quest for fulfilment in the world through knowledge of the self and its powers in the service of the community.³ This quest for self-knowledge, and the return to the everyday world to use that knowledge, is most fully developed in The Well at the World's End, which in many respects represents the summation of Morris's artistic -- and therefore also

of unelaborated journeying: Christopher has already lived so much in the woods that he knows them well before he goes there with Simon, in what amounts to a testing encounter though of course Rolf does not intend it as such, and it is his acquaintance with Jack of the Tofts that saves his life. His championing by the Landwight of Oakenrealm indicates here not only his title to the kingship of Oakenrealm by birth, but also his title by nature and nurture in the woods. One might suggest that Morris chose not to elaborate Christopher's woodland journeys because the result would have been too similar on the one hand to Face-of-god's unconscious questing in the woods in The Roots of the Mountains and on the other to Birdalone's upbringing in the romance that follows Child Christopher, The Water of the Wondrous Isles.

²The motive of Osberne's quest in The Sundering Flood is, of course, love, but Elfhild, despite the elfin suggestion of her name, is a real human being, known to the hero already, and not a faery lady or a dream-ideal as in Morris's earlier love-quest stories.

³Obviously this service to the community is not as fully developed in all the romances as it is in The Well

social and political -- creed,⁴ but it is implicit in all the romances that he wrote, and perhaps may be said to be their chief purpose.

In Mediaeval Romance: Themes and Approaches

(London, 1973), John Stevens, apropos of the quest motif, says:

The heroism of romance is often and characteristically of this searching pattern: the hero is involved in a mystery; he is on a quest but does not know what he has to look for; he is engaged in a struggle but does not know who his adversary is. Where epic is static, romance is dynamic. In epic the world around closes in, inexorably, predictably, on the hero, whereas in romance the hero goes to search for the final meaningful encounter that will crown his quest and, one often feels, enable him to know himself. This is why, in romance, the hero can be at a loss, can make mistakes and not understand what is happening to him. In epic this is almost impossible. An epic hero does not know the meaning of the word 'dilemma'; life presents him with no problems, intellectual or spiritual, only with struggles. He has simply to screw his courage to the sticking-place. But Perceval, for example, in Chrétien's Grail romance, is always failing and always learning. The typical crisis of epic is a battle; of romance,

and The Sundering Flood, but, as I have suggested, this service is one of the implications of kingship in Morris's work.

⁴Of course, I do not mean to imply that any political allegory is discernible in The Well or in any of the other romances, but a reading of News from Nowhere indicates that the basis of the free society must be self-awareness -- this is the purpose of the ritual of "The Clearing of Misery, as it is called", for instance, to keep the memory of the horror of the East End slums alive in the minds of future generations, who otherwise might tend unconsciously to slide back into the old ways, Works XVI, 66. Note also Ellen's reasons for her interest in Morris/Guest,

an aventure which may or may not result in actual combat. Aventure (literally an 'event') could perhaps be glossed as 'meaningful encounter'. At least, this is what it is in Chrétien: Calogrenant's encounter with the Giant Herdsman; Lancelot's encounter with the dwarf and the felon's cart; Erec's encounter with the knight of the Enchanted Garden; Perceval's encounter with the graal in the Castle of the Fisher King. Only one of these aventures culminates in armed combat; but they all have meaning -- for the hero, and for us -- even if the meaning is not fully explicit. These romances ask the question -- What is Man? What is Man Alone? -- and try to give an answer.⁵

What this seems to add up to -- the search without known object, the testing encounters, the failures in understanding followed ultimately by success, the questions about man and the meaning of life -- is some sort of initiation ritual, and, as Northrop Frye points out, this ritual is one of the emergence of the self into adulthood, with successive aventures, encounters with positive or negative parental figures, and the success or failure of the protagonist in these testing encounters representing

ibid., 194. This sort of self-awareness is also the motive-force of Morris's ideals of art, as we saw in Parts II and III of this thesis.

⁵ Mediaeval Romance, p. 80. The title of the chapter from which this quotation comes is, significantly, "Man and Superman: the Romance of the Self". I say significantly because, if we can dissociate the term "superman" from its comic strip associations, it seems a not inappropriate description for those who have drunk of the Well at the World's End.

successive stages on the way to full initiation and the final "victory of fertility over the waste land".⁶

This analysis of the quest-motif is relevant to Morris's late prose romances in two ways. In the first place, in so far as these romances are strongly influenced by the type of tale that Stevens is describing, then it is clear that theories about that type of story will have a certain bearing on Morris's romances also, whether or not he was conscious of the aims of romance as Stevens and Frye analyse them. In the second place, as has been suggested in the foregoing chapters, part of Morris's conscious intention in his romances, regardless of any influence from mediaeval work, was to ask questions about man in fellowship and man alone. If this is so, then the "meaningful encounters" of the late prose romances should yield to the same sort of analysis as Stevens and Frye

⁶ See the whole section "The Mythos of Summer: Romance" in Anatomy of Criticism, especially p. 193: "The quest-romance has analogies to both rituals and dreams, and the rituals examined by Frazer and the dreams examined by Jung show the remarkable similarity in form that we should expect of two symbolic structures analogous to the same thing. Translated into dream terms, the quest-romance is the search of the libido or desiring self for a fulfilment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality. The antagonists of the quest are often sinister figures, giants, ogres, witches and magicians, that clearly have a parental origin; and yet redeemed and emancipated paternal figures are involved too, as they are in the psychological quests of both Freud and Jung". What Frye then goes on to say about fertility and the waste land will be found especially relevant to The Well.

bring to bear on the quest-romance form, and indeed when we think of Osberne's encounter with Steelhead, Walter's successive encounters with the Dwarf, the Maiden, and the Lady, and Birdalone's magical encounters on the various islands in the Great Water, then it seems likely that some similar type of testing situation is deliberately intended by Morris also. Certainly The Well at the World's End, like Chrétien's stories, can be said to represent the hero's "search for the final meaningful encounter that will crown his quest and . . . enable him to know himself".

That the later group of Morris's prose romances was strongly influenced by mediaeval romance is clear from the context in which these romances were written. In the gap in the composition of romances after News from Nowhere and before The Wood Beyond the World, which was commented on in the last chapter, Morris was, among other things, doing quite a lot of translation from mediaeval French, and he was also editing and reprinting older translations from mediaeval French and Latin at the Kelmscott Press. Thus in 1892-3, he brought out five of Caxton's translations,⁷ among them some of the earliest books ever

⁷The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine (1892), The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye by Raoul Lefevre (1892), the first book ever printed in English, The History of Reynard the Foxe (1892), The Order of Chivalry (1893), and The History of Godefrey of Boloyne and of the Conquest of Iherusalem (1893). For details, see An Annotated List,

printed in English, and in 1893 he began printing his own translations from French with L'Ordene de Chevalerie, a significant work in view of the "chivalric" nature of the last group of prose romances. This was followed in 1893-4 by his own translations of four mediaeval French romances: The Tale of King Florus and the Fair Jehane (1893), Of the Friendship of Amis and Amile (1894),⁸ and The Tale of the Emperor Coustans and of Over Sea (1894), a series which Morris made so much his own that May Morris included them in the Collected Works, in the same volume with their natural companions The Wood Beyond the World and Child Christopher, whereas she omitted many of his translations from Icelandic. Indeed, Joseph Jacobs in his introduction to these romances in the volume Old French Romances (London, 1914) explicitly intermingles them with Morris's own work:

nos. 7, 8, 10, 13, and 15. Of fifty-three works printed at the Press, twenty-one are mediaeval, thus forming the largest single group in the Press's output. Most of the rest were either poetry, or Morris's own work.

⁸Morris had already written an Earthly Paradise tale on this theme, though he did not include it in the published work. See An Annotated List, p. 157. The Tale of the Emperor Coustans and of Over Sea is acutally two stories: The Tale of the Emperor Coustans, and The History of Over Sea; but the title of the Kelmscott Press volume conflates the two. See An Annotated List, p. 158.

Events happen in a sort of sublime No Man's Land. They happen, as it were, at the root of the mountains, on the glittering plain, and, in short, we get news from Nowhere. . . . It is tales such as these that William Morris wished to see told in tapestry on the walls of the Moot-Hall of the Hammersmith of Nowhere.⁹

Later, Morris also reprinted some English mediaeval poetry, notably the "Thornton Romances", Syr Perecyvelle of Gales (1895), Syr Isambrace (1897), and Sire Degrevaunt (1897),¹⁰ and of course his well-known, monumental, Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (1896).

It was in this sort of context that Morris was working on The Wood Beyond the World and Child Christopher and Goldilind the Fair, which both appeared not long after The Emperor Coustans; The Wood, in the following month and Child Christopher the following year, by which time he had already begun work on The Water and The Well. It is no wonder, therefore, if these two stories and those that follow are suffused with the fairy-tale atmosphere of this world "on the borderland between folk-tale and romance",¹¹

⁹Old French Romances, p. 8.

¹⁰These three romances were reprinted from the Camden Society's Thornton Romances, ed. J. O. Halliwell, Old Series XXX (1844), which Sparling says "was a favourite with Morris from his Oxford days", An Annotated List, p. 160.

¹¹Old French Romances, p. 10.

as Joseph Jacobs calls the setting of the four French romances. In particular, Child Christopher has taken colouring from the French tales, for Havelok the Dane is an essentially northern story, as its hero's racial origin indicates, whereas Morris, under the influence perhaps of the romances which he had been so recently translating, turns Child Christopher into a much more chivalric and romantic narrative, as his hero's name shows. The early mediaeval Viking kings and chiefs of Havelok are softened into later mediaeval knights and barons, and the wild England of the Danelaw transformed into the comparatively gentle petty kingdoms of Oakenrealm and Meadham, which give us the foundation for the geography of The Well at the World's End.¹²

The Wood Beyond the World, while influenced thematically more by Celtic tales of the other world such as inspired Love is Enough,¹³ also takes certain details from these French romances. For instance, in The Emperor Coustans the heroine has no name, but is called simply the Maiden, and other actors in the story are called simply the Abbot, the Burgreve (a northernization, reversing the

¹²Upmeads is obviously the descendant of Meadham, and Oakenrealm sounds as if it may have had some influence on the Wood Masterless (or vice versa).

¹³The Mabinogion of Lady Charlotte Guest was, of course, the source for Morris's mystery play, and her "Lady

movement of Child Christopher), and the Emperor. Similarly in Over Sea, the heroine is simply called the Lady,¹⁴ and, despite her extraordinary adventures, which are the centre of the story, she is never further identified. These adventures themselves may also have been significant in shaping Morris's stories, though more in their tone than in the actual plot structure. Both the Lady in Over Sea and Jehane in King Florus suggest Morris's heroines in their resourcefulness and daring, Jehane especially rather

of the Fountain" may also have suggested some of the well and water imagery for the prose romances. Part of the source for The Water of the Wondrous Isles is obviously the Irish "Voyage of Maildun", in which Maildun visits a series of strange islands very like those encountered by Birdalone. Analogies for lands beyond the world can be found in the Irish stories of Tir-na-nóg, "the land of the ever-youthful" which is also known as "the land of the living" and "the plain of pleasure", names reminiscent of the title of The Story of the Glittering Plain, or, the Land of Living Men. For Maildun and a note on "the land of the living", see Old Celtic Romances, trans. P. W. Joyce (London, 1907), especially p. 464. The Wood Beyond the World also shows a certain northern influence. The Goldings and the Readings are obviously descendants of the Wolfings, Bearings, etc., and the king-making customs of Stark-wall are more suggestive of the choosing of war-leaders among Morris's primitive social groups than of anything in mediaeval romance. The Wood also has a somewhat similar plot structure to The Story of the Glittering Plain, though it is obviously set much later in time.

¹⁴ Morris could also have found this sort of use of the term "Lady" in Charlotte Guest's version of The Mabinogion. Rhiannon, the name of the chief female character in "pwyll Prince of Dyved", apparently means simply "Lady", and the notes add: "Rhiannon would seem therefore to be a Celtic Venus". See The Mabinogion, trans. Lady Charlotte Quest, 3rd edition (London, 1910), p. 382. This interpretation would be very appropriate to

resembling Ursula in The Well in her wearing of men's clothes and following her husband through all sorts of difficulties. Perhaps also the disguised Jehane's magnificent baking, which attracts many customers and makes a lot of money for Sir Robin, may remind us of Birdalone's sewing for her living when she is hiding from Arthur and her friends in the City of the Five Crafts, and Ursula's serving in the hostelry at Bourton Abbas is reminiscent both of Jehane's hostel and of Annie, the serving-woman who se attracts Morris/Guest in the Hammersmith guest-house.

Another factor which must have interested Morris in the four French romances is the subject of social class. In both King Florus and The Emperor Coustans, and to some extent in Over Sea, the plot turns on the marriage or proposed marriage of a high-born lady to a man less exalted

the Lady in The Wood Beyond the World, who combines the darker attributes both of an Artemis and an Aphrodite, as a sort of huntress love-goddess with man as her prey, accompanied by the eternal child Eros metamorphosed into a monstrous yellow dwarf. As Walter says of her in his first visions, Works XVII, 4, she is "so radiant of visage and glorious of raiment, that it were hard to say what like she was; for scarce might the eye gaze steady upon her exceeding beauty; yet must every son of Adam who found himself anigh her, lift up his eyes again after he had dropped them, and look again on her, and yet again and yet again". In other words, she has the changing and compelling beauty, to be all things to all men, which is the attribute of Beauty's self, Aphrodite. (I suspect that Morris may be remembering here the descriptions of Helen as "Beauty itself" in The World's Desire by H. Rider Haggard and Andrew Lang (London, 1890). Later, the Lady is described as dothed "for the greenwood as the hunting-goddess of the Gentiles, with her green gown gathered unto her girdle,

than herself. This theme is most fully worked out in King Florus, where Jehane's father can find no man so suitable to marry her as his own squire, for the knights in the land "are of no avail, all of them", whereas Robin "was the valiantest squire to be found in any land, and by his prowess and good fame oft he bore away the prize for his lord from the tourney whereas he wended".¹⁵ Thus despite the objections of his high-born wife and her family, he insists upon wedding Robin to Jehane and investing them with a part of his own land. Similarly in Over Sea, the Lady is wedded to a poor man, though of noble lineage, who, like Robin, cannot at first believe that she will stoop to marry him; but both for her and her father his courage and prowess are more important than lands or money.¹⁶ On the other hand, one of the reasons why the Emperor tries so hard to prevent Coustans marrying his daughter in The Emperor Coustans is that, as is several times emphasized, Coustan's father is a mere "churl".

and sandals on her feet; a bow in her hand and a quiver at her back . . .", Works XVII, 50.

¹⁵Works XVII, 265-6.

¹⁶See Works XVII, 326. When her father somewhat hesitantly proposes the match to Jehane, she replies: "Ha, sir . . . if thy country were a kingdom, and should come to me all wholly, forsooth I should hold me right well wedded in him".

Ironically, it is of course through the Emperor's efforts to prevent the match that Coustans is first educated as a gentleman, so that he grows up "so fair and gentle as never before had he [the Emperor] seen the like fair person",¹⁷ and then married to the Emperor's daughter, who does not care at all about class but only about Coustan's beauty and his knightly appearance. Thus in three of these four tales are the normal rules of courtly relationship overthrown; the man's knightliness is shown to be of more importance than his actual social standing; and he is thereupon elevated to the rank that his merits deserve, just as, in Morris's romances, the ultimate status of his heroes and heroines reflects their inner worth.

What influenced Morris most in mediaeval literature in his last romances, however, was not such comparatively minor details of plot, but the idea of the quest itself. In his readings of Malory, of Froissart, of the Greek and northern and eastern tales that go to make up The Earthly Paradise, he had always picked out the wanderers, the seekers, on whom to concentrate his attention. Lancelot and Galahad, the seeker for love and the seeker for paradise,

¹⁷Works XVII, 316. Morris had already used the "kill the bearer" folk-tale motif from The Emperor Coustans in "The Man Born to be King" in The Earthly Paradise.

are typical of the heroes that he chose for The Defence of Guenevere, and in The Earthly Paradise, which we have already discussed at length in relation to various specific types of quest, the heroes are only different from these two in that they take on a certain local colouring from the settings of the stories and the customs of the countries in which they find themselves. Later, in his translations from other literatures, it was still to the seekers, to Odysseus and Aeneas, and to the tales of those pre-eminent wanderers, the Icelanders, that Morris chose to devote himself. Thus in the last phase of his writing, when he returned to mediaeval French and English sources of inspiration, it was natural that he should again take the questing knight as the model protagonist of his stories.

The four French romances which we have been discussing are not quest tales, though the wanderings of Amis and Amile, of Robin and Jehane, and of the Lady in Over Sea, do have some similarity to quest themes, but one of the three "Thornton Romances", Syr Percyvelle, does show the quest par excellence. Basically, the story of Perceval, in whatever version,¹⁸ is this: the hero, who is closely

¹⁸There are three main versions of the story: the Perceval of Chrétien de Troyes, the Parzival of Wolfram von Eschenbach, and the Welsh "Peredur Son of Evrawc", which appears in Lady Charlotte Guest's Mabinogion, and would therefore be familiar to Morris. Perceval is also an important figure in Malory. In order to preserve some

related to King Arthur, is brought up in the woods by his mother who does not wish him to learn anything about chivalry lest he be killed in battle as his father was. After a time the young innocent, whose innocence in some versions amounts to foolishness, meets Gawain, Ywain, and Kay, and is fired with enthusiasm to go to Arthur's court. There he is ridiculed by Kay for his uncouth appearance, and told that he cannot be a knight until he has proved himself worthy. He thereupon jousts with and overcomes the Red Knight, and then rides off on his adventures, pursued by some of Arthur's knights who now realize his quality. In some versions, this quest leads eventually to the Grail Castle, but in Syr Percyvelle there is no mention of this, and it ends with Perceval bringing his mother back to her rightful position at court, followed by a slight mention of his subsequent adventures in the Holy Land.¹⁹

degree of uniformity, I am using Malory's spellings of Arthurian names, except when referring to particular texts.

¹⁹This sort of down-to-earth version of Perceval's story was more likely in many ways to have appealed to Morris than the sort of religious symbolism which impressed Wagner, the greatest modern interpreter of the Grail story, for, after his early fascination with mysticism, Morris always tended towards the more realistic areas of mediaeval literature, as we saw from his interest in the Icelandic Sagas and English ballad poetry.

From this simplified retelling, it will be evident to the reader that the plot of the Perceval story is in part very similar to that of The Water of the Wondrous Isles.²⁰ There, Birdalone is brought up in the woods by a substitute mother;²¹ she has no proper name -- "Birdalone" is a Scottish dialect word which means "all alone" or "only child" -- which parallels Perceval's early ignorance of his name;²² when she leaves the woods she comes first on three women as Perceval does on three knights, the sex change being appropriate to Birdalone's sex since she must learn feminine arts of them as he does of Arthur's knights; she is ridiculed by the Witch-Wife's sister for her foolishness and nakedness; she encounters and vanquishes through

²⁰The opening lines of Syr Percyvelle may also have suggested or contributed to the central motif of The Well at the World's End: "His righte name was Percyvelle, / He was fosterde in the felle, / He dranke water of the welle, / And ³gitt was he wyghte!", Camden Society, XXX, 1. As it turns out, this simply means that Perceval drank well-water instead of, presumably, wine like a gentleman. "Wyghte" here signifies something like "a real he-man".

²¹Whether the Witch-Wife or the Wood-Mother most appropriately represents the substitute mother does not really matter; they are to some extent merely the negative and positive aspects of Evilshaw, and as such are closely related in their importance to Birdalone's upbringing.

²²See R. S. Loomis, Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes (New York, 1949), p. 335: "He did not know his name, for he was always called 'biaus fils', 'biaus frère', 'biaus sire'".

her beauty and purity "the Red Knight's captain and headman";²³ and eventually she finds her real mother and re-establishes her in her appropriate social milieu, as at the end of Syr Perecyvelle. Parallels can obviously not be carried right the way through the two stories, but enough of the basis is similar to show how Morris's imagination was working on the mediaeval material.²⁴

Other threads intertwined in The Water of the Wondrous Isles are, as aforementioned, the theme of the uncharted voyage past a series of mysterious islands, which resembles such tales as "The Voyage of Maildun" and "The Voyage of the Sons of O'Corra",²⁵ and the treatment of Arthur's madness in Evilshaw, which is a fairly elaborate

²³Works XX, 196.

²⁴Further parallels may be made: for instance, the ring that Birdalone has from Atra to return as a pledge to Arthur may be referred to the ring which Perceval takes from the first damsel he meets, and in both stories the meeting and the ring lead though in different ways, to great sorrow for the actors in it; Perceval's innocence of love and the ways of courtesy parallels Birdalone's innocence in the face of the love she inspires in Lawrence the Priest; her escape from the Castle of the Quest and her proving herself in the City of the Five Crafts reflects, on a feminine level, Perceval's proving of himself before he will return to fellowship with Arthur's knights.

²⁵Both these stories, in which many of the islands are inter-changeable, may be found in Old Celtic Romances. None of the islands correspond in detail to Morris's, but there is an island apparently inhabited by none but a Queen and her damsels, and another which is divided into four parts, with all the kings in the first quarter, all

parallel with the madness of Tristram when he cannot have Iseult.²⁶ The "sending boat" is perhaps partly descended from Phaedria's boat in Book II of The Faerie Queene, only with a realistically primitive magic ritual added to it, and the Bowre of Bliss is one prototype for the Isle of Increase Unsought, as Belphoebe, brought up in the woods by a virgin-goddess foster-mother, is for Birdalone.²⁷ The Castle of the Quest could derive from almost any romance castle, or all of them, but the closest seems to be Malory's version of the Grail Castle, which is also on the edge of a Great Water and is approached by a "sending boat", to which three successful knights come, and where

the queens in the next, all the youths in the next, and all the young maidens in the last, and other islands which Maildun and his companions are afraid to land on. "The Voyage of St. Brendan" is another similar tale, and of course the voyage of Morris's own Wanderers in The Earthly Paradise may also have been in Morris's mind here.

²⁶ See Malory, Morte D'Arthur (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 413-9. In Caxton's version, Tristram is discovered by Iseult's knights, naked except for animal skins, by a well in a wood; Arthur by Habundia, who has taken on the appearance of Birdalone, in a similar state by a stream in a wood. Both have gone mad at the loss of their loves, and are only restored by the sight of them.

²⁷ Of course many of these motifs have more than one source. Besides the two sources for Habundia and Birdalone mentioned in this chapter, we have also referred earlier to the relationship of Habundia and her Green Men, and the Lady of Abundance and Wood-Sun and the Lady of The Wood, to figures in Germanic folk-lore such as Morris would have found in his favourite inspirational source-book, Grimm's Teutonic Mythology.

strange visions may be seen.²⁸

No prototypes as definitive as the Perceval story can be found for The Wood and The Well, and The Wood is especially unusual in that Walter does not return home from his quest as heroes seem invariably to do in mediaeval romance.²⁹ A certain amount of paralleling to The Wood may be found in part of the Launcelot story,³⁰ and Gereint's encounter with the dwarf, the lady, and the knight in "Gereint Son or Erbin" in The Mabinogion, which leads him to a distant magic country on the other side of a wood where he meets and marries a poor damsel,³¹ is somewhat

²⁸ See Morte D'Arthur, Book XVII. The boat is directed by Perceval's sister, and when she dies, they put her in it and it sails, unmanned, to the City of Sarras.

²⁹ I cannot, of course, affirm this definitively, but certainly those quest-heroes who do not die always do seem to return home in the end to narrate their quests.

³⁰ See, for example, Chrétien's Lancelot in Arthurian Romances, trans. W. W. Comfort (London, 1970), in which Lancelot encounters successively a surly dwarf, a helpful damsel, and a great lady, Guenevere. The surly dwarf helps Lancelot on his way to the castle where Guenevere is held captive, on the other side of a perilous water, as the Dwarf in The Wood helped Walter on his way to the Lady's house, where he displaces the knight in residence and sleeps with the lady himself, as Lancelot does. Later, Lancelot is beguiled by the dwarf, as Walter almost is, but is released from his durance by a damsel whom he had met and helped by a river earlier in the quest. Both stories have illusory lions, and the hero in both cuts off someone's head at the behest of the damsel.

³¹ "Gereint Son of Erbin" is the same story

similar. The dwarf Melot, who spies on Tristan's meetings with Isolde by the stream in the Tristan of Gottfried von Strassburg, also may have had some influence on Morris's conception of his Dwarf-king,³² and of course Morris's own earlier quest stories of magic loves in other worlds must have contributed to the general setting of the story, especially "The Hill of Venus", where the hero was called Walter like the hero of The Wood.

The Well at the World's End has even less than The Wood in the way of direct sources, though it may be considered as to some extent a continuation of the Perceval story into the Grail quest part of it. Morris's, however, is a pagan grail, as we shall see later, and does not correspond, except in its similar relation to ritual and to the unconscious, to any actual details in the Christian Grail stories. Closer to the motif of the well

basically as Chrétien's Erec and Enide. Enid, in both versions, is poorly dressed, as the Maiden is, to indicate her lowly status, and the hero will not let her change her poor clothes until she gets to Arthur's Court, for she, like the Maiden, must be brought away from the half-magic land in which she has been living. In "Gereint", too, Enid has no name until they reach the court, but is simply called "the maiden".

³² See the sections "Melot" and "The Assassination by the Brook" in the Tristan of Gottfried von Strassburg, trans. A. T. Hatto (Harmondsworth, 1960), pp. 227-39.

itself is the mysterious spring in "The Lady of the Fountain" in The Mabinogion, which is associated with a leafless tree, and which brings about Owein's wedding with the Lady of the Fountain after he has killed the knight who guards it.³³ In this story, as in The Wood and The Well, there is both a lady and a helpful damsel, though it is the lady that Owein marries. There is, however, no need to seek for specific sources here, when faery foster-mothers, flower-maidens, dwarves, fights at fords like Ralph's with the two lovers of the Lady of Abundance at the ford before the rock-cave, changes of affection from damsel to lady and back to damsel again as in The Wood and The Well, and the eventual achievement of the knight, through his quest, of the rule over castles or cities or even whole countries, are all familiar ingredients in mediaeval romance.³⁴

³³This ritual killing cannot but remind us of ritual killings in Frazer's Golden Bough, the short early version of which was just published early enough for Morris to have seen it before writing these romances. See the The Golden Bough, Sir J. G. Frazer (London, 1890). "The Lady of the Fountain", in which the Lady has no name, is the same story as Chrétien's Yvain, and in both stories it is clear that, ritually and mythologically, the Lady is herself the spring, and that her land will be laid waste if there is no strong knight to protect her.

³⁴See Loomis's Arthurian Tradition, *passim*. As we have already commented, some of these motifs are also present in Northern myth and legend, and Morris is often synthesizing from the two traditions, Celtic, which is the source ultimately of most mediaeval romance, and Norse. Thus another source for the well is obviously the well of

Now that we have indicated something of the relationship between mediaeval literature and the three Morris romances, let us turn more specifically to the romances themselves. In The Wood Beyond the World, the first of the three, we have the typical romance situation of the lady, the damsel, and the dwarf encountered by the questing knight, who has to follow them through perilous adventures in order to find their dwelling-place, vanquish the knight in residence, and obtain the lady. In Morris's story, however, the initial meeting with the "wondrous three" is not a real encounter but a vision, a "fetch" as Birdalone calls the appearances of the Witch-Wife in the Castle of the Quest,³⁵ more like Morris's own version of the dream

wisdom at the base of the world ash-tree, Yggdrasil, in Icelandic myth: "the spring of Mimir, whose waters contained wisdom and understanding. Odin had given one of his eyes for the right to drink a single draught of that precious water". See H. R. Ellis Davidson, The Gods and Myths of Northern Europe (Harmondsworth, 1964), p. 26. I am concentrating chiefly upon the romance tradition here partly because I have already dealt to some extent with Morris and the saga-ideal, but chiefly because the form of these three prose tales is based on romance rather than on the more down-to-earth sage or folk-tale.

³⁵ See Works XX, 289. Birdalone explains the "fetch" as being intended to drive everyone away from the Castle, though it is not clear why. It is not a haunting in the usual sense, for the visions can only be maintained so long as the Witch-Wife is alive.

of Maxen Wledig in Love is Enough, which draws Pharamond over the seas to a hidden mountain valley to seek his love, than like the encounters of Chrétien's stories. Moreover, Morris has complicated the story by making Walter unsure which of the women he is interested in initially, and by investing both women and the dwarf with certain magical attributes, which necessitate the killing of the Lady³⁶ -- something which, as far as I know, never happens in mediaeval romance -- before knight and damsel can escape back to the human world.

A further complication is added by the setting of the story. Arthur's knights often leave his court and adventure to strange lands, but the court is itself a conventionalized, unreal place, not much less shadowy than the faery land of their quests. Morris, however, places his story of a quest beyond the world we know in an everyday "real" situation, albeit somewhat distanced by its

³⁶This killing and the method of it suggests that, besides the attributes of pagan goddesses, there is an element of mere witchcraft in the Lady's composition. Although she has obviously been very long-lived, as the testimony of the Bears indicates, she is not immortal, any more than was the Lady of Abundance, a similar figure in some respects, though positive instead of negative in that she gives the maid to Ralph instead of withholding her. Presumably she must be decoyed into killing herself lest a curse follow Walter and the Maiden. Or possibly she cannot be killed by human agency, but only by her own hand. The beheading and burial of her Dwarf, with the severed head placed by the buttocks in the grave, is a traditional method of disposing of vampires.

mediaeval atmosphere, in which Walter has a job and a family, including an unfaithful wife and a wealthy and indulgent father to give him a realistic motive for his sea-journey and the means to be able to carry it out. Everything proceeds normally, with Walter engaging in trading activities, like a true merchant's son, in the ports to which they sail, until, on the return journey, after old Bartholomew Golden has been killed in a fight with the kindred of Walter's wife, the ship is blown off course and, like Arthur Gordon Pym's ship, ends up in a strange land to the south. It is only then, well into the book, that the strange adventures of the quest begin.

As we may remember, this type of "real" setting was characteristic of Morris's short early prose romances, which were rendered all the more fantastic by the disturbing juxtaposition of real and dream worlds. The same is true here. Walter's journey out of the world, set in an ordinary trading venture, gives, and is intended to give, the reader a vertiginous feeling that he may himself turn the next corner and leave the world behind. His fear and surprise and doubts of his sanity when he realizes that the people around him do not see the "wondrous three" contribute to this effect, especially when Arnold apparently confirms their objective but miraculous existence by seeing them too. So also in The Well, the setting of Upmeads in the

country around Kelmscott, like the setting of News from Nowhere along the Thames and at Kelmscott also, and the familiar paths that Ralph at first follows before he steps beyond the world we know, give a curiously possible quality, which mediaeval romance probably never had, to the fantastic quests of Morris's heroes. And the positioning of Evilshaw, with its mysterious inhabitants, and the Great Water, with its strange islands, so close to the otherwise perfectly normal towns of Utterhay and the City of the Five Crafts -- Birdalone's mother, after all, has been able to travel from Utterhay to the City without going through the sort of experience that Birdalone and her friends find³⁷ -- has the same real, unreal, hallucinatory effect on the reader.

This hallucinatory effect, however, is no longer just the clever dramatic trick that it was in Morris's early prose tales, which built up an atmosphere of mystery and romance by the use of motifs from mediaeval literature combined with some of the techniques of "realism", but

³⁷This distinction is very important. In all three of the romances there are, besides the main characters who become involved in the strange adventures, certain sympathetic characters who understand what is going on but do not participate -- Dame Katherine in The Well is the best example of this -- and others, the majority, who do not understand that anything special is happening at all. They tend to either ignore the quest, or to regard the questers as somewhat unbalanced, much as people to-day tend to regard anyone seeking spiritual enlightenment as rather odd. Birdalone's mother, Ralph's parents, etc.,

which, at bottom, lacked control and did not really mean anything. In the late romances, both the use of mythological and romance motifs and the shock effects produced by their juxtaposition with the "real" world do mean something. They serve at once to disguise from and to reveal to us the startling truth that it is quite possible to turn the corner and leave the world behind, that the realms of fantasy really are just over the horizon.³⁸ For, to descend from the realms of metaphor, what is happening in the romances is that we are being given a vision of something which we do not normally see consciously, of the myth-making process which goes on continually inside our own heads as we seek to analyse and to come to terms with the conflicting experiences of the external world. As Northrop Frye says:

despite the trials they have gone through, have been quite unable to advance towards any conception of what is going on in the minds and the lives of their children. Though they may know that Evilshaw, the Great Water, the Wall of the World, the Wood Perilous exist, they cannot come into any experiential relationship with them.

³⁸Understanding of this point, that the romance form both disguises and reveals an underlying significance, depends upon Morris's theory of adjective art, and will be discussed further in the Conclusion to this thesis. Suffice it to say that only those who wish to see below the surface need do so. As Frye says, Anatomy, p. 188: "If we are reading the story for fun, we need not bother".

The romancer does not attempt to create "real people" so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes. It is in the romance that we find Jung's libido, anima, and shadow reflected in the hero, heroine, and villain respectively. That is why the romance so often radiates a glow of subjective intensity that the novel lacks, and why a suggestion of allegory is constantly creeping in around its fringes. Certain elements of character are released in the romance which make it naturally a more revolutionary form than the novel. The novelist deals with personality, with characters wearing their personae or social masks. He needs the framework of a stable society, and many of our best novelists have been conventional to the verge of fussiness. The romancer deals with individuality, with characters in vacuo idealized by revery, and however conservative he may be, something nihilistic and untamable is likely to keep breaking out of his pages.³⁹

Thus, while Morris's prose romances arise, initially, out of his attempt to explain his own human situation to himself, ultimately they take on the wider significance of the life-quest of everyman.

In The Wood Beyond the World, there is a considerable amount of psychological autobiography. Obviously, the faithless Redding woman on one level represents Jane Morris; Walter's trading ventures are at once his own merchant firm of Morris and Company and the inheritance of his rich father whose early death enabled him to achieve independence and marry Jane; and Walter's quest is the quest of Morris's "own desiring self for a fulfilment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will

³⁹ Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 304-5.

still contain that reality". Hence the emphasis in Morris's work generally on the beautiful available women who will not be unfaithful to the hero; hence the wished for achievement of the mastery of life, emotions, spirit, represented by kingship, a symbol which can be discarded in the last of the romances, The Sundering Flood, when such a public acknowledgement of mastery is no longer necessary to the fully integrated hero.⁴⁰ At the same time, Walter's journey goes beyond Morris's individual experience to the experience of everyman. We do not all have rich fathers who die early leaving us the burden of adulthood and headship of the family while we are still too young to cope with it adequately; we do not all have dominating, long-lived mothers who try to steer our choice of career, as Morris's did his;⁴¹ we do not all have unfaithful wives or husbands; but we do all share the need to come to

⁴⁰This romance is a much more simplified version of the theme of the integration of the personality than the earlier three. All reference to mother-figures, false anima-figures, has been swept away; the gulf between Osberne and Elfhild must be bridged, and that is all. Even the father-figures are easy to come to terms with for the strong, self-confident hero.

⁴¹Morris's father died when he was about thirteen; his mother lived to the age of ninety and died only two years before Morris himself. He was the eldest son, and came into a considerable income at twenty-one, which gave him much more freedom of action than he would otherwise have had. Nevertheless his mother had destined him for the Church, and seems to have made difficulties for him in giving it up. She certainly made him complete his degree

terms with our inheritance and to participate in the quest "to bring to light again the lost Atlantis of the coordinated soul".⁴²

Walter's journey, therefore, though it takes its point of departure from Morris's individual experience, very quickly broadens out into a pattern of wider significance, the typical pattern of the hero story. In this pattern, the hero must first rid himself of his attachment to the familiar society of family, city, country, must die to this world, and enter upon a quest into his own psyche,⁴³ a question which, in romance terms, is objectified into

at Oxford, which otherwise he would not have bothered with, and it took a long time to reconcile her to his choice of the disreputable professions of architect and then designer. See Mackail I, 86-9. It seems also that he was at home considered unstable and easily led, which probably means that a lot of attempts at "leading" took place, ibid., I, 81-2.

⁴² See Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (New York, 1956), p. 388.

⁴³ Joseph Campbell describes the initiation of this quest thus: "Professor Toynbee uses the terms 'detachment' and 'transfiguration' to describe the crisis by which the higher spiritual dimension is attained that makes possible the resumption of the work of creation. The first step, detachment or withdrawal, consists in a radical transfer of emphasis from the external to the internal world, macro- to microcosm, a retreat from the desperations of the waste land to the peace of the everlasting realm that is within. But this realm, as we know from psychoanalysis, is precisely the infantile unconscious. It is the realm that we enter in sleep. We carry it within ourselves for ever. All the ogres and secret helpers of our nursery are there, all the magic of childhood. And more important, all the

the hero's quest for a lady and a kingdom. Joseph Campbell in The Hero with a Thousand Faces, a book which is about the common pattern underlying the myths and hero-tales of all peoples and all times, typifies this process thus:

The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation -- initiation -- return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth.

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.⁴⁴

Walter, Ralph, Ursula, Osberne, and, in a somewhat different way, Birdalone, all fulfil his "standard path", as also did the heroes about whom Morris had written earlier,

life-potentialities that we never managed to bring to adult realization, those other portions of ourself, are there; for such golden seeds do not die. If only a portion of that lost totality could be dredged up into the light of day, we should experience a marvelous expansion of our powers, a vivid renewal of life. We should tower in stature. . . . In a word: the first work of the hero is to retreat from the world scene of secondary effects to those causal zones of the psyche where the difficulties really reside, and there to clarify the difficulties, eradicate them in his own case (i.e., give battle to the nursery demons of his local culture) and break through to the undistorted, direct experience and assimilation of what C. G. Jung has called 'the archetypal images'", pp. 17-18.

⁴⁴Hero with a Thousand Faces, p. 30.

especially in The Earthly Paradise, Love is Enough, and Sigurd the Volsung.⁴⁵

The first stage of the hero's quest is a form of ritual death. Ralph and Birdalone perform this rite by stealing away secretly from their parents, real or adoptive. Walter, on the other hand, is helped on his way by his father, and it thus takes him much longer to embark on his quest proper: he is actually hindered rather than helped by the too ready compliance of the paternal figure from whom he must escape in order to carry out the rite properly, and so he later has to repeat the process by stealing away from the old man who tells him about the Wood beyond the World.⁴⁶ But Walter does perform the "night-

⁴⁵The Pilgrims of Hope is an attempt at a modern version of this monomyth: fighting at the barricades in the Paris Commune represents the hero's deeds in wonderland here; and of course Morris's main translations, The Odyssey, The Aeneid, Volsunga Saga, Beowulf, are examples of the same thing, in all of which the full process of the myth is developed. N.B., in Cambell's view it is not possible to depart from the myth -- all stories are part of "the one, shape-shifting yet marvelously constant story. . .", p. 3 -- but it is possible to deal with fragments of the full process, as most novelists, for instance, do.

⁴⁶It is worth noting that the old man himself had to kill the previous inhabitant of his house before he could go towards the Wood, because the first man, who had been there himself, would have prevented him from going. Walter is fascinated by this, and repeats three times variants of the words: "Was it through younder shard that the road lay, when thou must needs make thy first stride over a dead

sea journey"⁴⁷ part of the initiation fairly effectively, for, when he leaves Langton, he does so in a ship named the "Katherine", which is significant because it is also the name of the church in which he and his father were baptized and in which his mother and grandparents lie buried⁴⁸ -- "mother church" is in this case more than a mere form of words, though the belly of the ship, even if it were not so named, would do well enough in itself to represent the "worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale".⁴⁹ In effect, he has re-entered his mother, and thus

man?", Works XVII, 18 and 20.

⁴⁷Hero with a Thousand Faces, fig. 5, p. 95.

⁴⁸The name is also significant because it is re-used by Morris in The Well, where it is the name of Ralph's Godmother, Dame Katherine, who initiates his quest for the Well by her gift of the magic necklace, a necklace which, we may as well note here is a pagan one, and may not be blessed by a priest lest harm come thereby to giver and to wearer. See Works XVIII, 12. This is one of the indications that the quest of the Well is a pagan quest. That Dame Katherine is a substitute mother for Ralph is clear from her childlessness also, and from the words of her husband that when Ralph returns from the quest "who knows but in a way he may deem himself our son". Ibid., 17. That such substitute mothers are closely related to the older women temptresses, like the Lady of Abundance, and for Walter the Lady, is also clear from this scene, for Morris shows very explicitly that Katherine both loves Ralph as a child and desires him as a man, a factor we shall see more of later in the chapter.

⁴⁹Hero with a Thousand Faces, p. 90. The ship and the sea-farer are of course familiar literary images for the body and the wandering soul, especially in Christian

prepared himself for a new birth into the otherworld. The parental significance of the "Katherine" is further reinforced by the ship in which Walter begins his journey home, the "Bartholomew". The object of this second voyage is aborted because Walter is obviously not ready for the return journey before he has completed his quest, which is then still only in its early stages, but the fact that he takes a ship which is named by the name of his dead father shows how he is attempting already to take on the rôle of the father,⁵⁰ something which he cannot do successfully until the end of his quest when he returns to the

poetry in English. Birdalone also takes ship for her rite of passage, and must symbolically shed her blood in ritual death to make it sail; the boat sails through the darkness of night, and when Birdalone wakes in the morning at the Isle of Increase Unsought, like Adam and Eve in the Garden, or an innocent baby, "she beheld her nakedness and knew not what it meant", Works XX, 53. Ralph, however, as befits a warrior and a king's son, undergoes his rite by riding the Wood Perilous, after he has parted from his second mother, Dame Katherine.

⁵⁰ Again, this may well be compared with Morris's own experience in replacing his father at an early age, but it is often characteristic of the hero figure that he has either no known father at all, e.g., Perseus; or is posthumously born, e.g., Sigurd the Volsung; or has lost his father early for some reason, in which case it is sometimes necessary to avenge him, e.g., Hamlet; or, sometimes, has a decrepit father with whom he reverses rôles, e.g., Aeneas. Part of the hero's task then is often to find out who his parents are before proceeding on his quest.

world to become head of a family and, going beyond his father, of a country.⁵¹

The next stage in the quest of the hero is "the road of trials",⁵² or, as Morris himself calls it in The Well at the World's End, "the road unto trouble".⁵³ For Walter, this is not an especially difficult path. At first when called to the quest, though he had been interested, even fascinated, by his vision of the three, he had done little about following it up. Then, after his third vision of them -- three is a magical number, and important occurrences often take place at the third call or on the third occasion -- the forces of nature take over, and he is simply propelled involuntarily by the storm to the place from which his quest proper is to start.⁵⁴

⁵¹Walter's choosing of the war-gear which "called to mind the array of the Goldings in the forefront of battle", Works XVII, 119, firmly establishes Walter in the tradition of his ancestors.

⁵²Hero with a Thousand Faces, pp. 97 ff.

⁵³Works XVIII, 140. It is the title of the second part of Walter's journey.

⁵⁴See Joseph Campbell's account of the call, refusal of the call, and the involuntary inception of the quest, Hero, pp. 49-77.

After this, once he has tricked the old man and entered the pass, his journey south is comparatively uneventful, and certainly nothing to compare with the rigours endured by Ralph and Ursula: he suffers thirst briefly, and then hunger at greater length and consequent weakness, but that is all;⁵⁵ no monsters even appear until he enters the land beyond the mountains, and even then the Dwarf, though hideous and hostile, turns out to be a helper of a sort, and brings him bread;⁵⁶ the Maiden takes him immediately

⁵⁵ Morris had already described in detail in The Story of the Glittering Plain one man's lonely and terrifying passage through the mountains, and he was to deal in considerable detail with Ralph's experiences in this part of the quest. There was little direct personal need therefore for him to elaborate Walter's mountain journey.

⁵⁶ If we wish to view The Wood Beyond the World in terms of a myth of integration, the Dwarf, with his yellow coat paralleling Walter's golden hair and name, must represent the anti-self, the Shadow. The Maiden, of course, is the Anima, and the Lady a "bad mother", the devouring mother-love-goddess from whom the hero must separate himself before he can recognize his true other self, the Maiden, and so achieve full integration. There is a considerable element of this "bad mother" in the Lady of Abundance, for all that she wishes well to Ralph, for she knows that Ursula is the more fitting mate for him, Works XVIII, 195, yet cannot let him go. Thus far, the men who say she has hindered them on the quest for the Well, and ruined their lives, are right, and it is perhaps doubtful whether Ralph would ever actually have got there had the Knight of the Sun, her appropriate mythological partner, not destroyed her power over him. See the book which Ralph reads in the Castle of Abundance, her own account of it and of her first husband's failure in the quest to the Well, and the Knight of the Sun's admonition to him "to depart while it is yet time", Works XVIII, 137.

to be her "speech-friend", and though certain difficulties, as we have already seen, ensue, they are overcome quickly by Walter's trust and the Maiden's magic powers, until eventually they achieve their return to the world and the recognition of society as King and Queen of Starkwall and founder of a long and stalwart lineage of kings.

In the case of Birdalone, the process is somewhat different and much longer. After her "night-sea journey", or perhaps in a continuation of it, she has a number of important "encounters" before she reaches the Castle of the Quest and can begin her own personal search.⁵⁷ The first of these encounters is with another "bad mother" figure, the witch-wife's sister, and with the three maidens, Atra, Aurea, and Viridis, who, to some extent, represent various qualities of adult womanhood which the naked and newly reborn Birdalone must learn. As she symbolically dons portions of their garments, she is told of the existence of men and of love between men and women, of which, since Habundia knew nothing of sexual desire and of relationships between human men and women, she had been

⁵⁷ Effectively, Birdalone's quest is divided into three parts: her journey to the Castle, in which her basic education in the ways of the world is given her; her escape from the Castle and her life in the City of the Five Crafts, in which she finds her mother and makes her own way in the world; and her return to the scenes of her childhood to exorcise her memories of that time and to find her love.

completely ignorant before.⁵⁸ Her sexual awakening is continued on the Isle of the Young and the Old, where the belated sexuality of the old man arouses her fear, and by the sight of the motionless Queens mourning over the one dead King and the motionless Kings over the one dead Queen, and on these islands she also re-learns of the existence of childhood, which stirs dim memories of her own infancy in Utterhay, of old age, and of death, finally coming close to her own death in the mists of the Isle of Nothing, when only her presence of mind in remembering Habundia's gift of the tress of hair saves her from annihilation herself.⁵⁹

⁵⁸As is clear from her attitude to Birdalone's love for Arthur, which she simply does not understand. See Works XX, 326-7. Birdalone also learns of the perversions of sexuality from Atra's stories of the witch-wife's sister's behaviour to the few men who have come to the island, and, like Dick in News from Nowhere, is shocked by her first concept of prisons and imprisonment.

⁵⁹The tress of hair has the same significance as Dame Katherine's necklace and Steelhead's arrows, though it has rather different properties. They are what Joseph Campbell describes as "amulets against the dragon forces he [the hero] is about to pass", Hero, p. 69, and they are always provided by a protective figure, often a goddess or a god in disguise. Interestingly, the Lady of Abundance, who is a mother-lover figure of somewhat doubtful import to Ralph, becomes the protective figure of her rival, Ursula, who has neither mother nor gossip to guide her.

These islands, besides continuing Birdalone's education by the experiences they provide, have also a further importance both for this story and for the interpretation of The Well, for all of them, including the apparently fertile and productive Isle of Increase Unsought, are images of sterility, one of the main themes of these two romances, and, indeed, of romance in general. Birdalone has herself recently emerged from a sterile environment of three women into one of four, where the only men who have appeared in three years have been destroyed for their refusal to fulfil the lusts of the witch-wife's sister. The sterile image of this woman is increased by her keeping Atra, Aurea, and Viridis from their due sexual partners, and by the artificial means which she uses to keep herself young in defiance of time and the island fruitful in defiance of nature.⁶⁰ The same sterility is evident on the other islands, for even where there are living inhabitants, on the Isle of the Young and the Old, they

⁶⁰ It should be no surprise to the reader to learn, on Birdalone's return journey when the other islands have reversed their sterility and begun to return to the normal cycle of birth, procreation, and death, that this island has become a waste-land, an "Isle of Nothing". The lady's keeping of the "water of might" for herself, in fact, is probably what has produced the sterility of the other islands, and when that is spilled, all returns to normal.

are locked in an unnatural stasis, where the children cannot grow up because the old men cannot die because the children cannot grow up, and so on, a stasis, which, psychologically, has much validity to it, and is very relevant to Morris's general interpretation of the passage from childhood into adulthood.⁶¹ Finally, even the Castle of the Quest itself has become sterile, because the separated lovers will admit no women to their stronghold,

By her journey across the Great Water, by bringing together successfully even one of the pairs of lovers, Birdalone helps to break the enchantment and release the forces that bind this sterility, so that when she returns across the water the conditions of all the islands has reversed: the fertility of plants, animals, and humans is emphasized on the Isle of Nothing,⁶² and even the

⁶¹All Morris's quests represent at least partly the need for the child to break away from the adults in order to assert its own identity. In The Well, for instance, Richard explains that only now that Ralph is an adult, and has broken away of his own accord, can he tell him about the Well: "and why should I tell it to the merry lad I knew in Upmeads? but now thou art a man, and hast seen the face of sorrow, it is meet that thou shouldest hear of THE WELL AT THE WORLD'S END", Works XVIII, 212. The painful experiences that all his characters go through, are necessary preliminaries to the quest.

⁶²An interesting incident occurs here. Birdalone, like the Maiden in the country of the Bears, is accepted as a sort of fertility goddess, and Morris tells that: "in after times, when this folk waxed a many, and tilled all the isle and made ships and spread to other lands

other islands will evidently soon remedy their deficiencies.⁶³ But she does not do this without assistance. The quest of Arthur, Baudoin, and Hugh also plays its part, and especially Arthur's deeds in it. This is interesting, for at first sight it would seem that Arthur had helped to maintain the infertility. He is the one to break the fellowship by loving Birdalone; he is the one who sleeps

and became great, they yet had a memory of Birdalone as their own very lady and goddess, who had come from the fertile and wise lands to bless them, when first they began to engender on that isle, and had broken bread with them, and slept under their roof, and then departed in a wonderful fashion, as might be looked for of a goddess", Works XX, 296-7. Thus we see a piece of myth-making being initiated.

⁶³ Whether this will be by the men "achiev[ing] the adventure of the dead ladies", or by their voyaging to the Isle of Kings is unclear, but things are evidently on the way to bettering. On the Isle of the Young and the Old, neatly, Birdalone introduces sexuality to the eldest boy by giving him his first kiss, in return for her first experience of male sexuality there earlier. However, although for these islands Birdalone represents a fertility goddess, in fact, she helps to perpetuate sterility for the mainlanders. Her foolhardiness causes the death of Baudoin, and her flight from the Castle of the Quest, while perhaps necessary to enable her to find her own identity and to know herself better, also maintains the sterility of herself and Arthur, and indeed Atra, who is not benefitted by her absence, and there are also the Gerardsons, and other men who love her, none of whom will marry so long as she remains unattached. Similarly, the Lady of Abundance, while a sort of fertility figure, as her name indicates, causes this type of sterility through men's love for her, and her leadership of the Men of the Dry Tree is iconographically appropriate to her function in the story, and shows her fundamental differences from Ralph, whose emblem is "a fruitful tree by the waterside", Works XVIII, 215.

with the witch-wife's sister, which would seem a means to perpetuate her rule. The transference of love to Birdalone, however, is a necessary condition of the success of the quest, for all it seems to us, and later to Birdalone, to be a destructive factor. The reason for this is that, had his disengagement from love for Atra not taken place, all three lovers would have been destroyed before ever reaching the Isle of Increase Unsought; they would undoubtedly have plunged into the water, if not at the first "fetch" of the witch-wife's sister, at least at the second (though Arthur himself has to be restrained by the others at the third), because there would have been no-one calm enough to perceive that the visions were mere shows to frighten them. Moreover, he is the only one whose disengagement enables him to sleep with the lady of the isle long enough to give them time to explore the enchantments of the island, even though it is Hugh who actually finds the flasket of the "water of might",⁶⁴ and so brings the quest to a successful conclusion.

⁶⁴ Obviously this water must bear some relationship to the water of the Well. It is what keeps the woman beautiful and young and the island fertile, but it also contributes to the sterility of the other islands: thus only in proper hands does it work the right magic, as it does in Hugh's. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the Well is so difficult of attainment. Were it not approached with dedication and self-abnegation its gifts of power and long life could bring great evils on the

The theme of fertility and the waste-land is yet more important in The Well at the World's End, both because that is the significance of its central symbols, the Well and the Dry Tree, and because while a large part of The Water of the Wondrous Isles is dedicated to the education of Birdalone, this is not necessary in The Well where Ralph and Ursula are already young adults with fairly stable self-concepts and considerable self-consciousness when the story opens. Ursula especially has evidently been looking after herself and her younger brother and their lands and hostelry at Bourton Abbas alone for some time, and when she first meets Ralph she has already lost one lover in the Wood Perilous. He is not so experienced, though he becomes so before they meet again, and this is why so much more time is spent on his preliminary adventures than on hers, but he is well aware of his status as king's son and knows, or thinks he knows, what he wants of life. Neither Ralph nor Ursula therefore needs the extensive quest for personal identity and self-

world. Thus all the snares set in the way are actually on the side of good, though they seem evil to those who undergo them. And the Lady of Abundance, for example, though she denies it, may well be one of those good-bad snares. As Ursula says to Ralph when she first refuses his companionship: "thou wouldst scarce be dealing truly in being my fellow in this quest: for they that take it up must be single-hearted, and think of nought save the quest and the fellow that is with them", Works XVIII, 54.

consciousness that occupies much of Birdalone's story, and in fact their quest, which is more like an extended version of The Wood Beyond the World,⁶⁵ could almost be said to start at the point of attainment at which hers ends. What they must learn is not to find the self but to lose it.

What this means is that they must stop thinking of themselves as the centre of the world, stop thinking about gratification for themselves as individuals, and begin to work for others.⁶⁶ They must learn that their personal sorrows, overwhelming though they may seem at the time, are no more than a due part of the pattern of nature and the loss and the renewal of life in which the whole

⁶⁵In fact, though The Wood does not seem particularly to be about fertility, that is one of the secondary motifs in it, for, since presumably former lines of kings in Stark-wall have not been long-lasting enough to eradicate memories of the City's king-making customs as Walter's line does, there has evidently been some problem about kingly fertility. Their solution of procuring kings of an alien race who have made the arduous journey through the mountains points to the same problem.

⁶⁶This does not, emphatically not, mean self-denial, self-sacrifice, which is as deadening as selfishness (of which it is but another form). Morris, as we shall see, and indeed as the reader should have realized already, hated all that was life-denying. It means the merging of the self in the other and finding that there is no self and no other but only one inevitable thing to be done, step by step: "the work that is nearest thee".

world of man, if they but understood it, participates as much as the worlds of animals and of plants and of rocks do. So also are their joys and achievements, their gains and losses, part of the pattern. Dame Katherine tells Ralph in her first words about the Well, "I hear say that it saveth from weariness and wounding and sickness; and it winneth love from all, and maybe life everlasting",⁶⁷ and Richard says it is "a thing to be sought, which should cure sorrow, and make life blossom in the old, and uphold life in the young".⁶⁸ But this does not mean literally that no more sorrow shall come to those who drink of it, for sorrow comes to the Lady of Abundance in plenty during her long life, and finally death comes, but that those who drink of the water with a good will receive the natural sacrament of the affirmation of the life-principle in all things, and learn to bless the world, as Ralph innocently does on Bear Castle at the beginning of his wanderings,⁶⁹ despite their knowledge of sorrow and care and disease and death, which cannot be wholly eliminated in this life.

⁶⁷Works XVIII, 11.

⁶⁸Works XVIII, 212. Ursula, too, turns to the Well for the healing of sorrow, though she does not need that by the time she reaches it.

⁶⁹Works XVIII, 20: "Now, welcome world, and be

This joyful acceptance of life, despite its pains, was the most important lesson of News from Nowhere, in which the condition of the whole society is designed to prove forcefully that the separation of man from his natural environment brings suffering and ultimately bloodshed, but the close connection of the two brings peace and fulfilment. Because the people of Nowhere accept their lives as part of a natural process, they are able to remain in a manner detached from their own troubles and to see them in perspective. As Clara says of the industrial society of the nineteenth century:

Was not their mistake once more bred of the life of slavery that they had been living? -- 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. It was natural to people thinking in this way, that they should try to make 'nature' their slave, since they thought 'nature' was something outside them.⁷⁰

This attitude connects up also with Morris's feelings about the bourgeois literature of the nineteenth century with its

thou blessed from one end to the other, from the ocean sea to the uttermost mountains!" This may well recall Ellen's words, Works XVI, 202: "O 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. . . ."

⁷⁰Works XVI, 179.

novels about people's "sham troubles of their own making", and it reinforces his reasons for his attachment to heroic literature: the Sagamen never magnified their troubles by proclaiming them to the world at large because they were able simply to accept and endure them as a necessary part of their hard and demanding life, which had, after all, its own consolations built in along with those troubles;⁷¹ it is only modern man who cries out at the slightest hardship, and demands to be protected from sun and wind and rain and cold in his cozy but, at bottom, life-denying urban environment.

A baptism of blood was needed to bring this knowledge and acceptance of man's place in nature home to Clara's ancestors, for the modern industrial society had already, in the nineteenth century, become so divorced from the life of the countryside that only violent means could reverse its deadening tendencies.⁷² For Ralph, who is already living in the right place and in the right way

⁷¹Ursula is admired by her captor, Bull Nosy, for her stoicism, for "when she was taken, there was no weeping or screeching in her, but patience rather and quietness, and intent to bear all and live . . .", Works XVIII, 246.

⁷²We may remember what he said about After London, Richard Jefferies's tale of a new feudal age following the destruction of modern civilization: "Absurd hopes curled round my heart as I read it", Arthur Compton Rickett, p. 301.

if he but knew it, only a baptism of natural water is necessary. That he does not know it at the beginning is the theme of the story; but he should know it at the end is the object of the quest, for if he had been wise enough initially to accept the uneventful life of Upmeads with joy and patience no baptism would have been necessary at all. As the Innocent Folk, who do not go to the Well themselves though they help others on the way, explain, for them to desire longer life or greater strength and wisdom than they already have would be mere foolishness, and would perhaps bring sorrow upon them. Only for those from the World beyond the Mountains who need to be healed and made strong is the water of the Well a suitable draught:

But for you, guests, it is otherwise, for ye of the World beyond the Mountains are stronger and more godlike than we, as all tales tell; and ye wear away your lives desiring that which ye may scarce get; and ye set your hearts on high things, desiring to be masters of the very Gods. Therefore ye know sickness and sorrow, and oft ye die before your time, so that ye must depart and leave undone things which ye deem ye were born to do; which to all men is grievous. And because of all this ye desire healing and thriving, whether good come of it, or ill. Therefore ye do but right to seek to the Well at the World's End, that ye may the better accomplish that which behoveth you, and that ye may serve your fellows and deliver them from the thralldom of those that be strong and unwise and unkind, of whom we have heard strange tales.⁷³

⁷³Works XIX, 66. The Innocent Folk also make it clear that drinking of the Well for the wrong motives can only bring sorrow even to the men of the World beyond the Mountains.

Thus, though Ralph's original departure is, as M. F. Hawkins pointed out, selfish, it is also necessary. So long as he suffers discontent in his own world, he can do no good there. As he says to Dame Katherine:

My father and mother would have me stay at home when my brethren were gone, and that liketh me not; therefore am I come out to seek my luck in the world: for Upmeads is good for a star-gazer, maybe, or a simpler, or a priest, or a worthy good carle of the fields, but not for a king's son with the blood running hot in his veins.⁷⁴

And she replies: "I could weep for thy mother; but for thee nought at all". He must be allowed to go, so that he can be purged of his tendency to despise a quiet life such as Upmeads offers, a life which, as is clear from his description, is well able to serve all the natural needs of man, whether of body or spirit,⁷⁵ and, like Anodos in Phantastes when he returns from fairyland, recognize that there is as much work at home in being a good ruler of his

⁷⁴Works XVIII, 13.

⁷⁵It is, admittedly, a life tied to the seasons and the land, even for simpler and star-gazer, but Ralph meets no better alternative for all his questing, and he certainly meets worse in the thralldom of Cheaping Knowe and the sufferings of the free poor in Goldburg (which last evidently represent the condition of the nineteenth century wage-slave). In this context, his marriage with Ursula is particularly appropriate, for she, as a yeoman's daughter, is more closely associated with the soil than Ralph is, and is therefore the appropriate wife to help him in his endeavours, as she is the appropriate partner for his quest.

people and of himself as there is in doing stirring deeds in the world at large.

That the water of the well is natural water is important to this final acceptance of his life. Morris considered that the baptism of the Church, the infertility of which is amply illustrated by its monastic ideals, had become a life-denying sacrament, and he stresses this throughout The Well at almost every encounter with the priesthood. Ralph's stay at the Abbey of St. Mary at Higham-on-the-Way is a fair example. It is a pleasant place, and Ralph could have high honour there, but it is a place that is kept pleasant only by the warding of an extensive army, and on his second visit on the return journey we see how suspicion and even cruelty have taken hold of the embattled town. The monk who takes care of Ralph, kind though he seems to be, is only trying to lure him into the service of the Abbot, and he keeps attempting to put life-denying thoughts into Ralph's head -- as witness their conversation when Ralph is leaving the Abbey. Ralph, however, asserts the beauty and fundamental holiness of the natural world with his questions "Wilt thou tell me, father, whose work was the world's fashion?" and "Forsooth, did the craftsman of it fumble over his work?"⁷⁶ and of

⁷⁶Works XVIII, 36. It should be noted that it is

course the monk has no reply.

The chaplet for which the monk tries deceitfully to get Ralph to exchange his is also an emblem of the life-denying infertility of the Church. It resembles Ralph's most exactly, except that the little box at the end of the beads has been replaced by a cross. What this signifies to Morris is that Christianity has exchanged its natural foundation, the four corners of the world symbolized by the square box if you like, for that dry tree, the Cross.⁷⁷

characteristic of Ralph throughout The Well that his eyes are wide open to the beauty of the world around him. His first action on leaving the Abbey is to look about him and sigh for pleasure at the things he sees. Even at the height of his grief for the lady, when he was "so heavy of heart that not one of the things he saw gave him any joy, and the world was naught to him", Works XVIII, 206, he very soon comes to himself enough to start looking at the scene before him, and taking note of its beauty and its significance, and is comforted thereby.

⁷⁷The similarity of the beads indicates that Christianity did have a natural basis once, and that its rite of baptism is a descendant of the natural baptism of The Well, but the rite has been perverted by the emphasis on monasticism, on Heaven as opposed to Earth instead of as complementary to it, and, above all, on redemption for man through the sufferings of another instead of through his own efforts towards wisdom and understanding among men on this earth. It is fitting that Ralph's two weak-willed brothers, Hugh and Gregory, end up in the arms of the Church. Hugh has to be rescued by Ralph from Higham, and Gregory, of whom even his father says that he is close to being a "dastard", Works XVIII, 4, and Richard says that he has "no mastery over himself", ibid., 211, becomes a monk. Hugh, by the bye, was offered "choice of the gallows-tree or service for the Church", ibid., XIX, 191.

It has replaced Adam's tree, a natural symbol of the fertility of Eden, for a gallows tree of dead wood which may save on a heavenly level but in the process has come to equate the world with the work of the devil, and thus has in effect turned itself into a religion without leaves and without fruit. Ralph therefore fittingly opposes to it his own emblem, the fruit-bearing orchard tree, which signifies his Edenic innocence,⁷⁸ as he later does to all the other dry trees that he meets on his wanderings: the gallows-tree on which the men of the Burg of the Four Friths sacrifice the Wheat-wearers, whose beauty and strength signify their connection with the natural beauty of the world as their emblem of an ear of wheat does with the fertility of the earth;⁷⁹ the Dry Tree of Hampton under Scaur, which is an image of the men's outlawry, and of the

⁷⁸King Peter is first seen "sleeping . . . amidst the grass of his orchard after his dinner", Works XVIII, 2, and the description of the fertile and gentle beauty of Upmeads immediately suggests a little Eden, even were it not for this emblem of the fruited tree. Indeed there is no little resemblance between The Well and Book I of The Faerie Queene generally.

⁷⁹Correspondingly, the ugliness and drabness of the women of the Burg represents their lack of connection with these things. It is notable that all the positive women in The Well are dressed in beautiful clothes embroidered with flowers and leaves, while the negative women are drably dressed.

lack of women in their society, which resembles a sort of Templar group in its monkish and military ideals; the dry tree of Utterbol, a fetichistic replica of the tree on the other side of the Wall of the World;⁸⁰ and finally the Dry Tree itself in the desert waste, which, with its poisonous water, is the anti-type of the true Well and the Green Tree:

. . . a huge and monstrous tree, whose topmost branches were even the horns which they had seen from below the hill's brow. Leafless was that tree and lacking of twigs, and its bole upheld but some fifty of great limbs, and as they looked on it, they doubted whether it were not made by men's hands rather than grown up out of the earth.⁸¹

That Christianity is associated with the Dry Tree of man's making, and the Well with the old, life-affirming, natural religion of pagan times, is clear also from the circumstances in which Ralph and Ursula receive their knowledge about the way, and by the words with which the

⁸⁰Works XVIII, 304: "Such a tree, much worshipped . . . we have, not very far from Utterbol, on the hither side of the mountains. Yet have I heard old men say that it is but a toy, and an image of that which is verily anigh the Well at the World's End".

⁸¹Works XIX, 73. The point of it, of course, is that this tree is an unnatural work, whether or not it grew there itself, for it is man who lays waste the fertile lands, as around the Land of Abundance or between Goldburg and Utterbol, through his hatred of other men, and therefore of himself, and through his disregard of the natural world and his due place in it.

Sage of Swevenham admonishes them before they set out on the last stage of their journey. When Dame Katherine first delivers the "chaplet of the seekers" to Ralph, he is doubtful about its pagan nature, and wants it blessed by a priest, but she tells him, "That shall he not . . . that shall he not, who wotteth what may betide to thee or me if he do so?"⁸² Later, when he and Ursula meet the Sage of Swevenham, they find that his knowledge can only be imparted to them in the open air under the trees of the forest, and that it has most efficacy if he reads his ancient book to them on a pagan altar, "where of old time the ancient folks did worship to the Gods of the Earth as they imagined them",⁸³ If they are not prepared to accept this paganism, then they can go on their way towards the

⁸²Works XVIII, 12. Yet paradoxically, as Katherine explains at the end, the chaplet came to her from Sarras, the holy city of the Grail, XIX, 221.

⁸³Works XIX, 29. The Sage, however, finds no necessary dichotomy between Christianity and paganism, for his house is surmounted by a Cross, and yet he keeps the pagan book there. Similarly Ralph talks about being buried in the church of St. Laurence. The answer to this apparent contradiction lies in the Sage's reference to "the Gods of the Earth as they imagined them", for it is evident, as with the chaplet, that we are intended to understand the possibility of Christianity being reconciled with affirmation of the natural world. It should be noted that the token of the way to the Well is also a sort of cross, "a sword crossed with a three-leafed bough". We shall see what this means shortly.

Well, but the Sage will help them no further. Finally, he tells them "that if ye love not the earth and the world with all your souls, and will not strive all ye may to be frank and happy therein, your toil and peril aforesaid shall win you no blessing but a curse", and Ralph replies:

Father, I will say the sooth about mine intent, though ye may deem it little-minded. When I have accomplished this quest, I would get me home again to the little land of Upmeads, to see my father and my mother, and to guard its meadows from waste and its houses from fire-raising: to hold war aloof and walk in free fields, and see my children growing up about me, and lie at last beside my fathers in the choir of St. Laurence. The dead would I love and remember; the living could I love and cherish; and Earth shall be the well beloved house of my Fathers, and Heaven the highest hall thereof.⁸⁴

He has learnt already that lesson which was set him at the beginning of his quest, so that he no longer needs the blessing of the water of the Well, but, paradoxically, it is only those who have learnt this lesson of love that can ever come to the Well and receive its blessing.

When Ralph and Ursula have drunk of the water of the Well, Ralph is immediately eager to return to the world of men and to make use of his new-found strength. As Joseph Campbell says:

⁸⁴Works XIX, 37.

When the hero-quest has been accomplished, through penetration to the source, or through the grace of some male or female, human or animal, personification, the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy. The full round, the norm of the monomyth, requires that the hero shall now begin the labour of bringing back the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or his sleeping princess, back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds.⁸⁵

Ralph is not as ambitious as this, and only hopes to help his own little world of Upmeads as he had already intended before he set out on the last stage of his quest. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why he does not suffer the reluctance to return, and the difficulties of the return journey, which Campbell says pertain to the hero-quest.⁸⁶ The main reason, however, is undoubtedly the nature of the Well itself, for, as we have seen, its water only confirms that which is already present in those who drink it -- it

⁸⁵Hero, p. 193.

⁸⁶See Hero, pp. 193-216, especially p. 216: "This brings us to the final crisis of the round, to which the whole miraculous excursion has been but a prelude -- that, namely, of the paradoxical, supremely difficult threshold-crossing of the hero's return from the mystic realm into the land of common day. Whether rescued from without, driven from within, or gently carried along by the guiding divinities, he has yet to re-enter with his boon the long-forgotten atmosphere where men who are fractions imagine themselves to be complete. He has yet to confront society with his ego-shattering, life-redeeming elixir, and take the return blow of reasonable queries, hard resentment, and good people at a loss to comprehend".

is the quest itself and its "encounters" that have really changed the hero before he ever gets to the end of it -- and Ralph has already gained in stature so much that all men either love him or fear him ^{before he ever reaches the wall of the World. Besides, the Well does not teach him} any secret of mysticism that it would be difficult to impart to his fellow-men, but only an intenser affirmation of the life of the world, which others like Bull or Dame Katherine or the people of the Land of Abundance have to some degree without ever going to the Well.⁸⁷ This makes him excel on the human plane, but does not make him in any way strange even to simple country people, like the Shepherds of the Downs, who have always acknowledged their kinship with the earth.

On the other hand, a certain magical significance undoubtedly does go with the draught of the Well, even though it is a natural magic.⁸⁸ This is revealed as Ralph and Ursula and the Sage travel back by the revolutions in governments that have taken place since those two drank

⁸⁷ This is why those who love life follow him, while the life-deniers fear him and exclude him from their company. This is especially the case with the Church, or at least that part of it represented by the monastic/military ideals of the Abbey at Higham, is particularly hostile to him, because he must seem to them to be setting up Earth in opposition to Heaven, whereas in fact he and Ursula, as the Sage says, only bring "down Heaven to the Earth for a little while", Works XIX, 36, and make no opposition at all between the two.

⁸⁸ This healing in the body of the world is symbolized on a microcosmic level by the disappearance of the scars on

of the Well: Bull Shockhead has conquered Utterbol and sworn to make the land fruitful and free;⁸⁹ Goldburg has a new and wiser lord; and above all the Burg of the Four Friths and Hampton under Scaur have completely changed their character. Only Cheaping Knowe and Higham-on-the-Way have retained their life-denying attitudes, and that, with Bull working from one direction and Ralph from the other, cannot be long in changing.⁹⁰ Of these changes, those in the Burg and Hampton are the most momentous, and seems a direct, if long distance, result of the draught of the Well.⁹¹ For, as the Shepherds sing, the Dry Tree has borne leaves and is green again, and this has been brought about by the quest of the Well:

the bodies of Ralph and Ursula after they have drunk of the water, Works XIX, 84-5.

⁸⁹Bull swears, significantly using the Biblical terminology of renewal which has become traditional in our culture: "I swear by the Bull and they that made him, that in three years' time or less I will have purged all the lands of Utterbol of all strong-thieves and cruel tyrants, be they big or little, till all be peace betwixt the mountains and the Mark of Goldburg; and the wilderness shall blossom like the rose. Or else shall I die in the pain", Works XIX, 99.

⁹⁰In fact, the kinsmen of Bull kill the Lord of Cheaping Knowe in Ralph's presence, so that this change has already begun also.

⁹¹Bull's rule over Utterbol is also a result of the quest, but, interestingly, because his association with Ralph before he ever drank of the Well had made him a new man. See Works XIX, 108.

The Dry Tree shall be seen
 On the green earth, and green
 The Well-spring shall arise
 For the hope of the wise.
 They are one which were twain,
 The Tree bloometh again,
 And the Well-spring hath come
 From the waste to the home.⁹²

What this means in practice is an aspect of the indirect power of the Well, acting through those who desire it and those who deny it, as a force for fertility. The Men of the Dry Tree, saddened by the loss of their Lady, who, by her presence, had unconsciously subdued their need for wives of their own and so acted as an anti-fertility force, have turned to an alliance with the Wheat-wearers and taken wives from amongst them. This crossing of images of death, the Dry Tree, and rebirth, the seed of wheat which is the emblem of the Wheat-wearers, produces in them a life-affirming contentment with the natural world, but, as one of the women says, their renewed pleasure in life is such that "mayhappen . . . none of us shall seek to the Well until we have worn our present bliss a little threadbare".⁹³ In order to maintain this happiness, the combined people set out to cleanse the Burg of its

⁹²Works XIX, 196.

⁹³Works XIX, 169-70. They, in fact, do not now need the quest to the Well.

cruel inhabitants, and then live there themselves instead of in the gold castle of Hampton under Scaur, which is too much associated with their old life as Men of the Dry Tree to be a suitable dwelling-place for them any longer. To complete the symbolism of their change, in fact, they turn Hampton over to Ralph, who, as a Friend of the Well, is the only one who can reverse its death-oriented atmosphere.

All that remains is for these people to join their renewed society of tillers of the soil, together with the Shepherds, the craftsmen and merchant-folk of Wulstead, and the herdsmen of Upmeads,⁹⁴ a symbolic grouping which embraces all the soil-oriented occupations of man, under Ralph's banner of the fruited tree, and restore peace and fertility to Upmeads and all the lands about it. In this, they do as the emblem of the Well, "a sword crossed by a three-leafed bough",⁹⁵ foretold, modifying the strength

⁹⁴As is suggested by the cows wandering over the grass of the battlefield when Ralph brings Ursula home to Upmeads, the lush pastures of this little land are those of a herding rather than a tilling society like that of the Wheat-wearers.

⁹⁵Works XIX, 39. This is rather reminiscent of Yeat's image in Explorations (London, 1962), p. 306: ". . . I made a certain girl see a vision of Eden. She heard 'the music of Paradise coming from the Tree of Life', and, when I told her to put her ear against the bark, that she might hear the better, found that it was made by the continuous clashing of swords".

of the sword by the olive branch of peace and the green tree of fertility, and thus bringing together all Morris's major symbols: knighthood, the quest, wood, well, and water, and the ancient wisdom of the natural world.

AFTERWORD

As Roland Barthes points out in Le Degré Zéro de l'Écriture, the novel is a characteristic product of bourgeois society, which, in the nineteenth century at least, demanded from its authors an adherence to the norms of narrative style, norms which then inevitably imposed upon them, to some degree, the value-system of that society.¹ French "Realists" like Zola attempted to escape from that norm by introducing slang and dialect words in order to forge a political mode of writing; modern French political writers have attempted, more successfully, to produce a colourless, "neutral" mode of writing, but, in Barthes's view, even this is a blind alley, for it, too, very quickly becomes identified as a "style" appropriate to certain political and social orientations. The only hope he offers for escape from this process is

¹See Writing Degree Zero, trans. A Lavers and C. Smith (New York, 1968), especially the sections "Writing and the Novel", "Writing and Revolution", "Writing and Silence".

that literature should look forward to a future homogeneous society in which, only, modes of writing could be liberated from the pressure of class values, of whatever class:

There is therefore in every present mode of writing a double postulation: there is the impetus of a break and the impetus of a coming to power, there is the very shape of every revolutionary situation, the fundamental ambiguity of which is that Revolution must of necessity borrow, from what it wants to destroy, the very image of what it wants to possess. Like modern art in its entirety, literary writing carries at the same time the alienation of History and the dream of History; as a Necessity, it testifies to the division of languages which is inseparable from the division of classes; as Freedom, it is the consciousness of this division and the very effort which seeks to surmount it. Feeling permanently guilty of its own solitude, it is none the less an imagination eagerly desiring a felicity of words, it hastens towards a dreamed-of language whose freshness, by a kind of ideal anticipation, might portray the perfection of some new Adamic world where language would no longer be alienated. The proliferation of modes of writing brings a new Literature into being in so far as the latter invents its language only in order to be a project: Literature becomes the Utopia of language.²

This analysis of the position of the littérateur and the strategies he adopts in the face of Revolution is one that is not only most applicable to Morris, but also one that Morris himself anticipated when he worried lest both his design and his writing should, in the long run, prove to be no more valid than "Louis XVI's lock-making".

²Writing Degree Zero, pp. 87-8.

For he also faced this problem of how to design, how to write, in the idioms of a decadent modern society which he was himself trying to help overthrow. He solved his qualms with regard to design by justifications about craftsmanship, and by the adoption of a natural symbolism which he felt would be intelligible to everyone in the homogeneous society tied to the earth and its ways which he hoped would follow the revolutionary period. In literature, however, he was dealing with a rather more complicated situation, and one in which he felt much less at ease. The eye, to appreciate natural beauty, does not have to be trained in the same way as the reader must be trained to understand the conventions of literature, which therefore are much more constricting than the conventions of design.³ Thus the problems of writing for a revolutionary present and a post-revolutionary future seemed to Morris even more acute than the problems of design.

In his attempts at a solution to this dilemma, Morris turned first to primitive modes of literature, to oral poetry of whatever sort. This surely, he felt, would retain its meaning in a homogeneous post-revolutionary society, for had it not remained compelling in the nine-

³Of course in "fine art" these conventions are much more prominent, and need a lot of training to understand, which was one of the reasons for its disappearance, as such, from Morris's scheme of the adjective art of the future.

teenth century, despite the over-sophistication of its readers.⁴ A revival of oral literature, and especially poetry, was what Morris, and, following him, Yeats, predicted for the future. But Morris, having re-written or translated or at least begun to translate most of the major epic poetry and prose of Europe, including large parts of Greek, Roman, and Norse myth and legend, was not satisfied. On the pattern, therefore, of his new/old symbolism in design, he began to model his own hero tales from elements of mythology and folklore, combined, in the last romances, with myths of his own taken from his own intimate knowledge of the natural world, and analogous to what he was doing in his last pattern designs.

To express these myths, Morris constructed a new language, a language which rejected the "unconsidered journalese" of the modern writer in favour of a personal idiolect in which he strove to make the reader aware of the roots of English in the speech of uneducated people, who never learnt Latin or to use latinate words and

⁴It was, in fact, the very sophistication of nineteenth century readers that brought about the fad for "simple" and "primitive" literature and art, so that perhaps Morris's argument here was based on rather shaky foundations. However, the fad is still continuing, so perhaps he was right after all.

and linguist. constructions. This language often seems archaic to us, but much of what has been attributed to his scholarly absorption in mediaeval literature was in fact still to be found in the living dialects of country people in Morris's time. Other parts of it do indeed derive from his work in the translation of Icelandic or other languages, for if he found a colourful epithet which appealed to his imagination he treasured it and used it in his own work, as he might a rare flower in his pattern-work, and why not? The resulting language, whatever else it is, is certainly an escape from the conventional norms of the bourgeois novel, and as such, even if his writings were not read then by the people -- and how could they be when the people had no leisure for more than struggling for their daily bread? -- Morris always had a hope that they might survive in some way, perhaps even orally, since they, like the old folk-tales, were rooted in the lore of the earth. This hope is shown, touchingly, in News from Nowhere, where among paintings of scenes from Grimm's fairy-tales, Morris/Guest recognizes scenes from his own stories painted on the walls of the Guest-house at Hammersmith.

The same considerations dictated the form of Morris's late prose romances. Folk and fairy-tales, he felt, had survived in Northern Europe as long as they had not only because, as the Brothers Grimm showed, they were

able to offer something to all sorts of people: from simple entertainment and thrills for their peasant narrators and for children and child-like adults in all classes, to the sophisticated pleasures of the mythographer, and to-day the psychoanalyst. It was possible to read and enjoy such tales on a number of levels. This multi-level significance was, as we have seen, what Morris wanted in adjective art, which was to have depth for those who wanted depth, but plenty of surface light and colour for those who did not wish to or were not capable of going beneath the surface. The late prose romances fulfil these requirements in that they are at once stirring stories of high adventure, using themes and character types which have delighted readers for hundreds of years and continue to delight them in modern science fiction and fantasy-writing, and yet at the same time, as Stevens and Frye assert of mediaeval literature, they deal with the same fundamental issues of human life with which we are all concerned, with man and his place in the universe.

Morris's theory of adjective art also affected the way in which he chose to present his romances in the exquisitely printed and sometimes elaborately decorated Kelmscott Press editions. In these editions, text and illustrations are designed to harmonize with the content of the stories, so that it is delightful to turn over the

pages even if you do not wish to read. I myself, in examining the Kelmscott Press books, have found myself drawn into re-reading books which I had only intended to glance at cursorily from the bibliographic point of view. More important, however, is the actual reinforcement of the significance of the stories in their full Kelmscott Press form, for by embellishing them with imagery of flowers and leaves appropriate to the symbolism of his tales, Morris was attempting to create new, composite works of art in which the outward form would reflect the inward spirit, beauty without to draw us to the beauties within. Thus The Well at the World's End, for example, is printed in double column Chaucer type, so that it looks like the ancient book which the Sage of Swevenham reads to Ralph and Ursula, with tiny leaves scattered about the text for paragraph marks, and, on some openings, great branching trees growing up between the two columns and spreading out at the top of the page to embrace the text. In The Wood Beyond the World, similarly, the text is sprinkled with leaves and decorated with borders of pinks and columbines, cornflowers and anemones, or climbing vines, while the frontispiece shows the Maiden as she appeared to the Bears, with flowers about her waist and in her hair.

Thus we see how Morris's thought and art, modified by the needs of his political ideals, developed from his early naïve work in design and in literature towards a highly sophisticated but at the same time simply appealing adjective art, in which historicism and natural symbolism blend in equal parts. The fruit of this development is the late prose romances in their complete form as printed at the Kelmscott Press.



1.



2.

BLACK HORN, HAND PRINTED
WALL PAPER
No. 1 B. 10 B.
The Victoria and Albert Museum
London, E.C. 4



3.

Those
four fare
their
ways

Chapter XI. How Christo-
pher came to Littledale to
abide there a while.

IN about a week's time
from this, those four
fellows went their
ways southward from
the Tofts, having
with them four good
nags and four sump-
ter beasts laden with such
things as they needed, where-
of were weapons enough,
though they all, save Chris-
topher, bare bows; and he
& the others were girt with
swords, and a leash of good
dogs followed them. Two
milch kine also they drave
with them.

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MERRY they were all They ride
as they went their the wood-
ways through the land
woods, but the gladness of
Christopher was even past
words; wherefore, after a
little, he spake scarce at all,
but sat in his saddle heark-
ening the tales and songs &
jests of his fellows, who
went close beside him, for
more often they went a foot
than rode. And, forsooth,
as the sweet morning wore,
it seemed to him, so great
was his joy, as if all the fair
show of the greenery, & the
boles of the ancient oaks,
& the squirrel running from
bough to bough, & the rab-

k 2

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THIS IS THE PICTURE OF THE OLD HOUSE BY THE THAMES TO WHICH THE PEOPLE OF THIS STORY WENT. HEREAFTER FOLLOWS THE BOOK ITSELF WHICH IS CALLED NEWS FROM NOWHERE OR AN EPOCH OF REST & IS WRITTEN BY WILLIAM MORRIS.

NEWS FROM NOWHERE OR
AN EPOCH OF REST.
CHAPTER I. DISCUSSION AND
BED.



At the League, says a friend, there had been one night a brisk conversational discussion, as to what would happen on the Morrow of the Revolution, finally shading off into a vigorous statement by various friends, of their views on the future of the fully-developed new society.



AYS our friend: Considering the subject, the discussion was good-tempered; for those present, being used to public meetings & after-lecture debates, if they did not listen to each other's opinions, which could scarcely be expected of them, at all events did not always attempt to speak all together, as is the custom of people in ordinary polite society when conversing




Chapter XII. The wearing of four days
in the Wood beyond the World. ✻ ✻

HE arose betimes, but found no one to greet him, neither was there any sound of folk moving within the fair house; so he but broke his fast, and then went forth and wandered amongst the trees, till he found him a stream to bathe in, and after he had washed the night off him he lay down under a tree thereby for a while, but soon turned back toward the house, lest perchance the Maid should come thither and he should miss her.

IT should be said that half a bow shot from the house on that side (i.e. due north thereof) was a little hazel/brake, and round about it the trees were smaller of kind than the oaks and chestnuts he had passed through before, being mostly of birch & quick/en/beam and young ash, with small wood betwixt them; so now he passed through the thicket, and, coming to the

edge thereof, beheld the Lady and the King's Son walking together hand in hand, full lovingly by seeming. He deemed it unmeet to draw back & hide him, so he went forth past them toward the house. The King's Son scowled on him as he passed, but the Lady, over whose beauteous face flickered the joyous morning smiles, took no more heed of him than if he had been one of the trees of the wood. But she had been so high and disdainful with him the evening before, that he thought little of that. The twain went on, skirting the hazel/copse, and he could not choose but turn his eyes on them, so sorely did the Lady's beauty draw them. Then befell another thing; for behind them the boughs of the hazels parted, and there stood that little evil thing, he or another of his kind; for he was quite unclad, save by his fell of yellowy/brown hair, and that he was girt with a leathern girdle, wherein was stuck an ugly two-edged knife: he stood upright a moment, and cast his eyes at Walter & grinned, but not as if he knew him; and scarce

Walter
sees the
Evil
Thing
again, or
one like
him



thou shouldst go seek the Well at the World's End not all alone: & the seeker may find me: & whereas thou wouldst know my name, I hight Dorothea."

SO fell the words again: and this image stood awhile as the other had done, & as the other had done, departed, and once more the chamber became dark, so that Ralph could not so much as see where was the window, & he knew no more till he awoke in the early morn, and there was stir in the street and the voice of men, and the scent of fresh herbs and worts, and fruits; for it was market day, & the country folk were early afoot, that they might array their wares timely in the market place.

Chapter XVI. Of the Tales of Swevenham

LD Richard was no worse than his word, & failed not to find old acquaintance of Swevenham in the Saturday's market: and Ralph saw naught of him till midweek afterwards. And he was sitting in the chamber of the hostel when Richard came in to him. forsooth Blaise had bidden him come dwell in his fair house, but Ralph would

not, deeming that he might be hindered in his quest & be less free to go whereso he would, if he were dwelling with one who was so great with the magnates as was Blaise.

NOW Ralph was reading in a book when Richard came in, but he stood up & greeted him; and Richard said smiling: "What have ye found in the book, lord?" Said Ralph: "It telleth of the deeds of Alexander." "Is there aught concerning the Well at the World's End therein?" said Richard. "I have not found aught thereof as yet," said Ralph; "but the book tells concerning the Dry Tree, and of kings sitting in their chairs in the mountains nearby"

"Well then," said Richard, "maybethou wilt think me the better tale teller." "Tell on then," quoth Ralph. So they went and sat them down in a window, and Richard said:

WHEN I came to Swevenham with two old men that I had known young, the folk made much of me, and made me good cheer, whereof were over long to tell thee; but to speak shortly, I drew the talk round to the matter that we would wot of: for we spake of the Men of the Dry Tree, and an old man be-





SHE rose from her knees, and stood before him humbly, and said: "Nay, I shall requite thee thy pardon thus far, that I will fashion some tale for my lady which will keep us in the woods two days or three; for we have provided victual for our adventure" Said Ralph: "I may at least thank thee for that, and will trust in thee to do so much" Quoth she: "Then might I ask a reward of thee? since forsooth other reward awaiteth me at Utterbol" "Thou shalt have it," said Ralph. She said: "The reward is that thou kiss me ere we part." "It must needs be according to my word," said Ralph, "yet I must tell thee that my kiss will bear but little love with it."

SHE answered naught, but laid her hands on his breast and put up her face to him, & he kissed her lips. Then she said: "Knight, thou hast kissed a thrall and a guileful woman, yet one that shall smart for thee; therefore grudgenot the kiss nor repent thee of thy kindness." "How shalt thou suffer?" said he. She looked on him steadfastly a moment, & said: "farewell! may all good go with thee." Therewith she turned away and walked off slowly through

the wood, and somewhat he pitied her, & sighed as he got into his saddle; but he said to himself: "How might I help her? Yet true it is that she may well be in an evil case: I may not help everyone." Then he shook his rein and rode his ways.

Chapter II. Ralph rides the Wood under the Mountains.

A LONG way now rode Ralph, and naught befell him but the fashion of the wood. And as he rode, the heart within him was lightened that he had escaped from all the confusion and the lying of those aliens, who knew him not, nor his kindred, and yet would all use him each for his own ends: and withal he was glad that he was riding all alone upon his quest, but free, unwounded, & well weaponed.

THE wood was not very thick whereas he rode, so that he could see the whereabouts of the sun, and rode east as far as he could judge it. Some little victual he had with him, and he found woodland fruit ripening here and there, & eked out his bread therewith; neither did water fail him, for he rode a good way up along a woodland stream that cleft the thicket, coming



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