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THE AESTHETIC PURPOSE OF WILLIAM MORRIS IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS LATE PROSE ROMANCES

INTRODUCTION

1.

By the first three decades of the present century the basic material required for a serious historical and critical assessment of the creative, critical, educative and theoretical work of William Morris was available in the 24-volume *Collected Works* and in the two supplementary volumes by his daughter May Morris. In his recent book, *Morris the Man and the Myth,*[1] R. Page Arnot has shown that it is to May Morris's supplementary volumes that we owe the publication of much that was rejected for the *Collected Works.* Arnot quotes a letter written by the Oxford University Press, who published Morris's *Collected Works,* to Joan Tuckett, the theatrical producer, in answer to her enquiry as to why Morris's socialist play *The Tables Turned, or Nupkins Awakened,* had never been published. In reply, the OUP asserted that they had not wished to publish anything "beneath the dignity" of the poet's reputation and had rejected everything which according to them did not possess "literary merit". This had in effect the result of rejecting a large part of Morris's Marxist work.[2] Page Arnot as a historian carefully followed the development of this process of distorting Morris's literary and theoretical legacy. In the anniversary year 1934 almost alone even among Marxists it was he who protested both against the revisionist distortion of Morris and also against the dogmatic attempt to show that Morris had been a Utopian anarchist.[3] Only when May Morris issued in 1936 the two volumes above mentioned, *William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist,* in which she assessed the whole artistic, literary and social activity of her father, did certain vitally important theoretical works achieve publication at least in fragmentary form. Nevertheless much material still remains in MS. and in periodicals, especially in the files of the socialist paper *The Commonweal.* Most of this material, though not all, is in the British Museum. Thanks largely to the activity of the William Morris Society, founded in 1955, this material is gradually being critically examined. Among the most important of these editorial and critical works is the edition of *Ten Unpublished Lectures* of William Morris, to be issued by the Canadian Professor Eugene Le Mire.[4]

Perhaps the William Morris Society, owing to the prevailing interests of some influential members, devotes more attention to the aesthetic aspect of

his work than to that of his political and social philosophy. It could not be said that sufficient attention has been paid so far to the relationships between Morris's aesthetics and the philosophical position of scientific communism, which Morris accepted. This is the aspect of his work which I wish to examine.

After Morris's death three main reasons combined to obscure such significant issues as the actual nature and value of Morris's work in itself, and the true character and extent of his influence. These reasons were: firstly, the political need of the British Labour Party and its Fabian philosophers to exploit the figure of William Morris as part of the framework of their non-revolutionary view of socialism, an attempt not only to misinterpret but even to suppress Morris's views, misrepresenting him as a dewy-eyed Utopian who in the end cut himself off from the evils of Marxism; secondly, the course of development of modern poetry, especially in the later Yeats and the T. S. Eliot of the thirties — with its bias towards Freudian psychology, heavily-weighted symbolism and contemporary jargon — which appeared to render invalid not only the practice of Morris but also his whole attitude to poetry; and thirdly, the development of what has been called the Modern Movement in art (a name only acceptable in default of a better), which covers the contemporary concept of functionalism in design, enlightened use of materials, machines and structural methods, town and country planning, of an art, architecture and design acceptable for an age of machinery, speed and collective planning.

Especially since the fifties there has been evident a strong tendency to reassess more accurately the whole achievement of William Morris, shown in the work of English, American, Soviet, Scandinavian and other European scholars, and finding one centre of activity in the above-mentioned William Morris Society, but also with repercussions beyond the sphere of the Society. We may say that the political and philosophical misinterpretation of Morris is no longer possible in serious work, especially thanks to R. Page Arnot and Edward Thompson.[5] As regards the debt of twentieth-century art and design to Morris, Nikolaus Pevsner, Peter Floud and other art historians have succeeded in defining with clarity at least the main aspects of the creative impulse given to it by Morris, and Pevsner recognizes this as one of the three basic elements in modern art design and concept.[6]

The position of Morris as a leader in the field of a) modern design and b) political theory and practice is thus acknowledged as an objective fact, although much remains to be done to clear up various points. Especially the question of the relation of his creative art to his communism requires to be worked out logically from the viewpoint of a Marxist aesthetic.

With regard to the third misconception, that of Morris as a writer, the position is much less clear. In a previous work[7] I tried to show the specific value of Morris's central poetic corpus and to demonstrate that opinions which would

relegate most of it to the forgotten shelves of our libraries are wrong. It seems to me that further fruitful lines of enquiry would lead us to ask what is the relationship of Morris's early, maturing and mature poetry, and late prose, to his general conception of the purpose of creative art, to examine his critical opinions of literature as well as the fine arts, to enquire into possible contradictions in these opinions, and to try to assess the degree to which his expressed opinions on creative art were fulfilled in his own creative work in literature.

By at least fifteen years before his death William Morris had evolved certain principles about art, namely on the fine arts, applied art and architecture, which — along with his own practical achievement in craft production — provide sufficient material for formulating a coherent, if not always irrefutably logical, theory of aesthetics. His theoretical pronouncements on literature are few and sporadic in comparison with his reasoned statements on art and art history. The latter were carefully thought-out, based on life-long study, and in the last years of his life were confronted with Marxism and worked out anew with the increased assurance which the Marxist conception of society and social development gave him. Morris had however a profound distrust of "literary criticism" and at times certainly a distrust of literature itself.

This distrust of criticism was based on his justifiable dislike for the mass of contemporary review criticism and the lack of standards of many of the journalistic critics of the time, and certainly not on the absence in him of a serious attitude to literature. His distrust of literature itself was due to his feeling that the literature of his own day — including his own writing — was not sufficiently related to the most urgent problems of society. It was not based on a superficial or non-committed attitude to literature itself. The idea that Morris was a facile writer who knew nothing of the struggles of creation is another of the legends about him which will not stand up to critical examination. One common conception of Morris is that he composed absolutely effortlessly, pouring out streams of verse almost as it were automatically. On the contrary, however, perhaps more than with most writers — due to his preoccupation with end and means — Morris's works can be divided into clearly defined stages (namely the early poems, *The Earthly Paradise, Sigurd the Volsung,* and the period of the prose romances), while each stage is marked by the author's stock-taking of his literary aims and a clear departure in a new direction. Evidence in the form of manifestoes or explanatory essays is not plentiful but nevertheless internal statement of purpose — apart from the early poems — along with evidence from letters and the memoirs of his friends, is specific enough. The *Guenevere* poems were pioneering attemps to render the Middle Ages as a living and vivid phenomenon without the decent veils of Victorian propriety. In *The Earthly Paradise* he was endeavouring to bring back to the tired and jaded 19th century the fullness and beauty of the medieval

heritage of legend. In *Sigurd the Volsung* he was searching in the distant and mythical past for fundamental human values which would be valid also for his own time, and in the prose romances, to quote Lionel Munby, he was "trying to peer into the nature of a future Communist society, to understand its morality".[8]

2.

If we draw the parallel between Morris's artistic purpose and achievement in all these developments we see that his creative work very clearly corresponds to the development of his thought at each stage. At first Morris as a young man was striving for attainment of a complete sincerity of action and identity of thought and deed. This corresponds to the directness and immediacy of his realization of the Middle Ages in poetry. And yet the true, scientifically based content of the early works depends on a few perceptions and intuitions only. To take one example, his rudimentary conception of the class struggle in the Middle Ages is represented time and again in such poems as "The Haystack in the Floods", "Sir Peter Harpdon's End", even in a decorative song such as "The Eve of Crecy". The basis of the passion and clear vision of the cruel, violent life which we find in these poems rests on Morris's recognition of the social split within the ranks of feudalism, his conception of the poor knight pitted against the force of feudal power, and if we are tempted to call this an idealization, we should not forget the reality that many "poor knights" fought on the side of the yeomen and peasants in the Peasants' Revolt. The poetical realization of this Morris worked out in terms of startling and unusual juxtapositions, especially by his use of the "stream of consciousness" method years before it became a commonplace of the modern novel. But the thought behind it has not yet really advanced towards a fully conscious and logical assessment of social history and forces.

Similarly, the *Earthly Paradise* poetry represents Morris's first maturing attempt to come to terms with the world as it is, to hand on something from the past which will be of use to the present, and above all, this is a sense of values. And this corresponds to his practical attempts to establish a valid way of life (attempts so practical that they led to his cooperation with the pioneer of modern domestic architectural conception, Philip Webb).[9] By this time Morris had reached a stage of formulation of his thought which enabled him, with his friends, to conceive the announcement of the Firm for the production of art and craft products,[10] marking in practice the initiation of the modern Art and Crafts Movement, which gave the impulse that has changed the whole conception of industrial and manufacturing design and procedure.

But even so, Morris was not satisfied either with his practical achievement or with his conception of society and the needs of society.

His endless questing led him in the first place to a very different background in the past than was Western European mid- and late-feudal society. This was Iceland and the Icelandic sagas. Here again the intellectual conceptual, cognitive aspect was by no means the least important. It was precisely the h u m a n and m o r a l values which Morris appreciated in Icelandic society. At the same time, he had already begun to understand something of the true conception of European history, and as I tried to show in my book on Morris's *Poetic Maturing,* his thought was becoming ever more dialectic. In *Sigurd* he has whole passages which deal with the different stages of social development, with the material origin of the arts in work processes, with the significance of the bond of kindred in promoting human progress, and other thoughts which are in essence Marxist and which Morris expressed actually before he had, so far as we know, encountered any specific Marxist philosophical statement.[11]

Finally, the fairest flowering of his mature Marxist thought we must see not in his experimental *Pilgrims of Hope* (experimental and pioneering not so much in the formal sense as from the aspects of c o n t e n t and a i m) but in the Prose Romances, into which he poured the ripest thoughts of his entire outlook on life, not only his conclusions about history, prehistory and the formation of society, but also his conception of human relationships as they might develop in a communist society.

CHAPTER ONE

EARLY POETRY

1.

Many writers on the poetry of Morris, from Dixon Scott in 1912 to Thompson and Jack Lindsay at the present day, have stressed the creative originality of Morris's early *Guenevere* volume, but little has been done to relate this poetry to his later work other than by stressing the different character of that work, in the attempt to demonstrate that Morris's later poetry is of less value than the earlier. It seems to me however essential to find the point of contact between the early and later poetry and to relate this to Morris's general ideas on art, which bear so striking a resemblance to many tenets of modern Marxist aesthetics.

Walter Pater in his essay on the poetry of Rossetti[12] gave a classic definition of Pre-Raphaelitism, that ignores the surface and accidental characteristics of the movement and makes straight for the essential quality: "a perfect sincerity,

taking effect in the deliberate use of the most direct and unconventional expression, for the conveyance of a poetic sense which recognized no conventional standard of what poetry was called upon to be". This definition can apply above all to the earlier poems of William Morris, collected in *The Defence of Guenevere,* while we can find this attitude to poetry expressed also by Morris himself in at least two of his own specifically literary critical utterances: his article on Browning's poetry (1856) and his later article on Rossetti (1870). In the first, Morris concerns himself as far as analysis goes mainly with content rather than poetic approach or style, but he makes some fundamental pronouncements which let us have an insight into the attitude of the young Morris to poetry at the time he was composing and publishing *Guenevere.* "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 thoughts 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."[13] This passage, along with his analysis (of content, not of form) of "Childe Roland", lets us see that Morris's challenge to the reader's comprehension in "Guenevere", "King Arthur's Tomb", "The Haystack in the Floods", and others was a deliberate one. If poetry is "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".[14] In the review of Rossetti's poems, which he wrote with reluctance and difficulty,* Morris speaks of the "spontaneous and habitual interpenetration of matter and manner, which is the essence of poetry", and says of Rossetti's poetry that it has no 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.[15]

We see from these two statements that what Morris was looking for in poetry was a heightening of human experience based on such a use of poetic means as would render the means indistinguishable from the material, some impalpable mingling of verse and language, image and life which would depend not on deliberate structure but on a ballad-like inevitability. Such at least are the most typical characteristics of that part of Morris's poetry and that part of Rossetti's poetry which we may designate as Pre-Raphaelite, and Pater hit on the two aspects, the "perfect sincerity" combined with the "deliberate use of . . .

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* cf. *Letters,* pp. 33, 34. It is possibly wrong to interpret such expressions as indisposition arising from antagonism to Rossetti personally. Morris took his theoretical prose writings very seriously and frequently complains of the difficulty he has in working out his ideas.

unconventional expression". The deliberation was not by any means that of Edgar Allan Poe, much though that poet had to do with the origins of Rossetti's poetry,[16] but the result of the perception by both Rossetti and Morris that only deliberate unconvention would enable them to express in the face of what had already been said in romantic poetry, the particular vision which was theirs.

The poems of *The Defence of Guenevere* volume (1858), some of them already published in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine,* others issued first in this volume, struck Morris's contemporaries with the force of a newly-discovered dimension. For example, Browning, himself one of the strongest literary influences on Morris, later wrote of the pleasure he had found in those early poems.[17] All his friends, including Rossetti, bore plentiful witness in letters and conversation to this effect. The Guenevere volume shows a more considerable range and variety than is sometimes realized: apart from one or two weaker poems such as "The Little Tower", or "Welland River", which may be juvenilia but need not be, since even in later life Morris inclined to produce occasional poems rather feeble both in matter and in poetic worth,[18] by way of purely decorative "tapestry" poems ("The Gillyflower of Gold") and swinging full-blooded songs and lays whose background is obviously Froissart, down to the dramatizations of medieval incident and legend ("The Chapel in Lyonesse", "Sir Peter Harpdon's End") and the magnificent dramatic monologues which are the most important poems in the volume — "The Defence of Guenevere", "King Arthur's Tomb", "The Haystack in the Floods".*

Much true and relevant criticism of these poems has been written from the days of Morris's immediate contemporaries and friends down to Thompson and Lindsay at the present day.[19] Yet appreciation of these early poems often seems to accompany a denigration of the maturer poetry. On the other hand, appreciation of Morris's later prose work of his socialist days too often goes along with a lack of understanding of the significance of his earlier work in the context of his entire literary production, and at the same time for the general development of English literature. Thus for example Mrs. Elistratova in the Soviet Academy *History of English Literature,* Vol. III, pays no attention to *The Defence of Guenevere,* stating that *"The Life and Death of Jason* and *The Earthly Paradise* were the first significant works of Morris. (He himself considered the early literary attempts of his student years to be weak.)"[20]** On the other hand, W. B. Yeats — and it is through Morris's influence on Yeats

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* Though related in the third person this last poem is in effect a monologue told in the "stream of consciousness" manner out of the direct experience of the protagonist.

** Though Morris on occasion referred to the weakness of some of the *Earthly Paradise* tales, I am not aware of a source for the statement that in later life he considered his e a r l y poems weak.[21]

that his bequest to English literature was fulfilled — found inspiration both in his earliest works of poetry and latest works of prose.[22]

One of the pioneer studies of the early poetry, setting the key for much later criticism of the type which places a severe distance between the Morris of *Guenevere* and the poet of *The Earthly Paradise,* to the detriment of the latter, is that of Dixon Scott, in "The First Morris".[23] Scott stresses the wrought-up pitch of the poems, their "stumbling intensity" which deprives the reader's mind of "all intellectual food" and yet by its spell brings him into a state "akin to trance".[24] He emphasizes the power of the imagery in his poetry, where "thought has become pure vision" and states that "We have crossed the bridges that divide symbol from reality", explaining the power of the *Guenevere* volume as arising from this abandonment of intellectual content, abandonment to pure vision.

This interpretation leads Scott to the conclusion that Morris, by choosing to develop as he did in *Jason* and *The Earthly Paradise,* betrayed his poetic gift, that he chose to be the poet of sunlight and happiness and content, thereby losing his chance of being a truly great poet, that he allowed the "art of creation" to become "simply a jolly recreation", that "he resolutely refused to enter the dark place of the mind where the last efforts of imagination take place in torment, and the supreme revelations are received".[25] Morris, according to Scott, was a man "specially incapable of abstract speculation".[26]

There is a certain degree of justification for Scott's far too sweeping generalizations in the fact that it has enabled him to see something of the specific nature of the *Guenevere* poems — the concrete character of their imagery. Morris himself said, in a remark which has been suggested by various critics to suggest an escapist tendency: "My work is the embodiment of dreams."[27] The point of this remark lies in the word "embodiment", and Scott has succeeded in appreciating this quality: "He saw similes as solid things,"[28] and in coming to the same conclusions about Morris's use of his poetic sources as did George Ford in his study of the poet's debt to his romantic predecessors. Scott perceives that it was Morris's "insatiable power" of "sucking up sense-impressions through the eye and storing them with absolute security" that "enabled him to pillage all the poets without plagiarising them".[29] Ford however rightly sees this not as a "pillaging" of the poets but as a transformation,[30] and in fact Morris himself was aware of this method of his of using literary source material.[31]

Scott's basic position is however very much open to question, since he implies that the *Guenevere* volume is the main fruit of the poet's creative struggle. "*Guenevere* shows the message he was charged to deliver but which he shrank from and smoothly suppressed. *Guenevere* declares the poet Morris refused to become."[32] According to Scott, from the *Life and Death of Jason* onwards Morris's further poetry is only the expression of how Morris, by adopting

a "snug social philosophy" which was "as simple as his mind"[33] defeated his own poetic genius. Scott thus rejects the body of work which includes *Jason, The Earthly Paradise,* and *Love Is Enough* and merely suggests at the end of his study that Morris's poetic genius finally drove him to the North and to Iceland thus enabling him "to gather the material which he of all men could use, and ultimately to produce, strengthened by his own weariness, his second great masterpiece *Sigurd*".[34]

Although it may be expressed in different language and based on a different view of literature and the literary process, in general this opinion of Morris's poetry and its worth is that most widely accepted at the present day.[35] A notable exception is C. S. Lewis's spirited defence of Morris's narrative poetry.[36] However, not all critics who accept the view that between *Guenevere* and *Jason* Morris experienced a poetic crisis and defeat agree that Sigurd is a masterpiece.

A less subjective and better reasoned appreciation of the *Guenevere* poems is given by Thompson, who expresses the opinion that the violent intensity of the poems results not only from their being a truer imaginative realization of the life of medieval times than "Tennyson's domestic bourgeois moralities in medieval dress", but also that "The intensity of feeling in these poems comes, not from the Middle Ages, but from William Morris, the young nineteenth-century poet: it is a measure of the intensity of his own revolt against the impoverished relationships of his own society".[37]

Further Thompson points out that the introduction of violence is part of the same revolt against the sentimentality of Tennyson that is to be found in Browning, that in these poems Morris is the "true inheritor of the mantle of Keats", that "After this volume, no English romantic poet, within the main tradition, succeeded in achieving so successful an illusion of the very appearance and movement of life", and that "It is not difficult to find in the Morris of these poems the master of W. B. Yeats".[38]

Thompson sees Morris's further development as a surrender to "the encroaching mists of Victorianism" and asserts — though he adduces no evidence — that "At some time between leaving off work on the *Scenes (from the Fall of Troy)* and the full adoption of his plans for *The Earthly Paradise,* Morris took a c o n s c i o u s d e c i s i o n* to alter the whole manner of his writing. Moreover, in this alteration he turned his back upon much of what is strong and moving in his earlier work, while maintaining — in a more sophisticated and self-conscious form — the weakness and immaturities".[39] Thompson makes this view of Morris support and coincide with his thesis of the degeneration of the English Romantic movement, by which he apparently means the softness combined with pessimism which he claims to find in the post-*Guenevere* work

* My emphasis.

of Morris. Our view of the correctness of the general historical theory of "degeneration" depends of course not merely on our assessment of the late 19th-century poets, the Edwardians and the Georgians, but also on whether we are to look on the poetry of the later Yeats, the body of Eliot's work and the work of the poets of the Thirties as something so diametrically different to romantic poetry as was the Augustan classicism against which the romantics originally revolted, or whether we are to regard the later development of Yeats, the poetry of Eliot and later poets as a development f r o m romanticism, organically connected with it and making use of many of its assumptions about art. These are questions which cannot be examined here, but the answers to them are not today so clear and uncontroversial as they were, say, twenty-five years ago.

In the present work it is not possible to go into the question of the historical assessment of modern English poetry; but in order to arrive at a correct historical view it is in my opinion necessary to stress the c o n t i n u i t y of Morris's poetry rather than the alleged b r e a k in his development as a poet.*

Among the best informed and most satisfactory critics of Morris was his daughter May. It appears to me that in her two introductory chapters in Volume I of *William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist — William Morris as a Writer,* she approaches nearer to the solution of the subsequent direction of Morris's development than does any other critic. In Chapter I, "Experiment", she points out that in one of his earliest rough attempts of 1853, on a Prize Poem subject, Morris's "rambling verse" shows "the curious little homely touches, so distinctive of the Guenevere volume, which link the life of romance to the world of reality".[40] She expresses in a different way her recognition of the same quality in Morris's poetry which Dixon Scott attempted to analyse, but without the mystical overtones of Scott's interpretation: "It is his consciousness of colour and form, this power of seeing in a landscape all the harmonies and rhythms of mass, of light and atmosphere that go to make up a picture-subject which was to strike a new note in English poetry. It was an intuitive gift of composition as of memory, and it was to serve him well in Iceland. No one without such a gift would have been able to carry in his head the shifting scenes of those Icelandic journeys, noting them down roughly at the end of a long day, amid the work and hurry of camp-life:"[41] In other words, not a land of poetry where the symbols and the vision become more real than reality, but a poetic gift which pierced to the reality at the heart of the romance — the most characteristic rationalization of this attitude was Morris's joking but profound remark that noone could draw armour unless he could "draw a knight with his feet on the hob toasting a herring on the point of his

* The most remarkable continuity, to which I want to draw attention by this study, is between the view of life in the early poetry and that in the romances which concluded Morris's career as an imaginative writer.

sword".[42] May Morris points out too that even in his earliest work Morris found romance in the background of his own country in the flats of Essex or the Wiltshire Downs. In fact this chapter is a penetrating commentary on lasting themes and lasting methods in Morris.

At the same time, if we cannot altogether accept the sweeping allegation of a "break" and a "degeneration" in Morris's poetry, yet it would be idle to pretend that there is not a very real change in poetic quality between *Guenevere* and *Jason*. The essence of this is again expressed by May Morris in her second chapter, "Dramatic Verse".

Morris's unique propaganda drama, *The Tables Turned, or Nupkins Awakened*, which sprang directly from his own experience of police courts during the Free Speech agitation of the eighties, lived long in the memories of those associated with the socialist movement in London who had witnessed its performance. Bernard Shaw was not indulging in typical Shavian paradox when he suggested that had Morris devoted himself to the modern drama he might have revolutionized the theatre as he revolutionized the decorative arts.[43] At the same time it was a fact well-known to Morris's circle that he would not as a rule visit either theatre or opera. Having regard to the then state of the English theatre it is of course absurd to take this abstinence as an indication of dislike or lack of comprehension for the drama. On the contrary, Morris, with his love of the Middle Ages, was bound to feel sympathy for dramatic forms. This sympathy was not, however, felt for the dramatic form of 19th-century drawing-room comedy, but for the late medieval, early Renaissance chronicle or interlude, from which perhaps *Nupkins* stems by way of Bunyan and Fielding and the sturdy English prose tradition in which both Shaw and Morris delighted. On the other hand, the dramatic monologues of the *Guenevere* volume, and the highly-mannered *Love Is Enough*, are early precursors of a type of poetic, psychological drama which was not to come into its own until the present century.

It has already been pointed out that many of the poems in the *Guenevere* volume are in essence dramas. May Morris claims that a (20th-century) private performance of "Sir Peter Harpdon's End" "brought out in a surprising manner the fitness of this poem for the stage". — "This performance, in which the lines were spoken with simplicity and strong poetic feeling, made one feel that Morris was, consciously or unconsciously, trying for something that his mind was eager to deal with, and that the English stage lost something when other interests crowded out the experiment."[44] May Morris, who was not yet born at the time when Morris first plotted the scenes for *The Fall of Troy* (not published until 1915 in Volume XXIV of the *Collected Works*), can give us no direct evidence as to the reasons for the "crowding out" of his dramatic experiments. Perhaps it is sufficient to realize that in the early sixties Morris

had literally no hope under the conditions then prevailing in the English theatre of achieving any kind of performance of his dramas.[45] Amateur dramatic performances — such as *The Tables Turned* received, with Morris playing in the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury — were to become popular in intellectual middle-class circles in the late eighties and early nineties, along with the revival of the drama itself. Doubtless had the friends of his youth in the Red House days been dramatically inclined, Morris with his preference for collective forms of work, would have continued to produce dramatic poetry. But the collective form of work which immediately presented itself to him in those days, besides his enterprises in the decorative arts, was the production of the "book of the age" — *The Earthly Paradise* with the long-planned illustrations by Burne-Jones. Yet surely it is going too far to claim, as Thompson does, that the quality of the dramatic poems of the early period is so entirely different from the *Earthly Paradise* poems as to signify "a conscious decision to alter the whole manner of his writing".[46] The difference between the mature and balanced structure of *The Earthly Paradise* and of *Sigurd,* and the roughly vivid dramatic scenes of the *Guenevere* and *Fall of Troy* poems arises from the fact that the development of a more deliberate and more carefully thought-out poetic technique coincided with the choice of narrative form rather than dramatic. Yet the instinct for drama was not destroyed in Morris so much as latent, finding expression in many individual dramatic scenes of *The Earthly Paradise* and above all in *Sigurd the Volsung,* while *Love is Enough* is of course itself an experimental dramatic masque. To associate the idea of a further stage in "the degeneration of the English Romantic movement"[47] with a deliberate decision of Morris's to relinquish the dramatic form is a not very helpful critical short-cut.

2.

The Life and Death of Jason

What is the part played by this poem in the artistic and intellectual development of William Morris? May Morris has drawn attention to the fact which so struck contemporary critics, namely that throughout the poem Morris completely avoids any reference to the framework of Christian morality. "It worried many of the poet's critics that he refrained from bringing modern morality and modern religion into a poem on an ancient theme."[48] This exclusion on Morris's part is of course deliberate. One feature of the *Earthly Paradise* tales, in their varied character and background, is that Morris seeks to show the thoughts and motives of the characters as conditioned by and relevant to their historical circumstances.[49] The feeling for historical situation alone would have

been quite enough to prevent Morris from intruding Christian ethic or philosophy into *Jason*. But this lack, which of course does not strike us today so forcibly as it did Morris's contemporaries, is also symptomatic of the change taking place in Morris's own outlook — his gradual rejection of formal religion and Christian belief which had led him in 1855 to explain to his mother that he could no longer contemplate a clerical career in the Church of England.[50]

Jason was originally intended as the first tale for *The Earthly Paradise*, but Morris found that the poem, treated as he found necessary, became too long to fit into the framework, and thus it came to be published separately. We may thus assume that Morris's purpose here was the same as in *The Earthly Paradise* — to bring "back to folk weary" what he considered to be valuable in the legacy of antiquity.[51] John Ruskin acknowledged Morris's success in this attempt not long after the publication of *Jason*: "You may obtain a more truthful idea of the nature of Greek religion and legend from the poems of Keats, and the nearly as beautiful, and, in general grasp of subject, far more powerful, recent work of Morris, than from frigid scholarship, however extensive. Not that the poet's impressions or renderings of things are wholly true, but their truth is vital, not formal."[52] Morris certainly was not setting out to give a scholarly "classical" rendering of the tale. Nor can we accept the viewpoint expressed by Robert Graves in his preface to his own version of the *Argosy*:[53] "William Morris published his Life and Death of Jason in 1867, but English verse epics are out of fashion and Morris's is now seldom read . . . Morris was a pre-Raphaelite romantic; that is to say, the more mysterious and even nonsensical he found a legend, the more poetic he considered it. Rejecting the obvious tradition that the Argo returned to Greece from her Black Sea voyage by the way that she came, namely the Bosphorus, he wilfully follows the most fantastic account available — the one given in the anonymous Argonautica Orphica, written about the year 350 A.D. — which sends her up an unidentifiable Russian river, with occasional aid of rollers, to the Gulf of Finland and so home by way of the Baltic, the Channel, Ireland, and the Straits of Gibraltar."*

We need not, however, see in this choice anything more than an early manifestation of the preoccupation with the North, not surprising when we consider Morris's early respect for Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, which includes in the very Chapter on Gothic which Morris took as his guide, a glowing

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* Graves continues: "Morris also shows his lack of classical conscience by omitting the one incident of the voyage on which all authors agree — the merry repopulation of Lemnos — I suppose for fear of offending against Victorian good taste." Morris of course was not subject to the Victorian prejudices against whatever "would call a blush into a young person's cheek". But he did believe, as Chaucer did, in the importance of "keeping", and could no more have included the incident in his *Jason* than Chaucer could have combined, say *The Miller's Tale* in one poem with the tale of *Palamon and Arcite*.

panegyric of the North and its "barbarian" influence. Above all, Morris is endeavouring to tell the story from the viewpoint of the participants, to make a guess at the possible feelings and sensations of those concerned — this is the "vital" truth of which Ruskin speaks. Morris was pioneering in a direction which can hardly be termed romantic or unrealistic — namely, seeking for a more human approach to the classical heritage than that handed on by the English public-school and University tradition. Morris was trying to interpret the classics not as classics, of unalterable Augustan majesty, but as if they were works of literature read for the first time. If we consider Morris's later translation of the *Aeneid* (1875), we can assess it as a further stage in his attempt to actualize the conception of history and literary tradition. Not that this is a translation of outstanding poetic quality; yet its style and metre imply that Morris was seeking for a form which would suggest a pre-classicist conception of the heritage of antiquity. It is very rough verse, rather pre-Spenserian in quality, and suggests that Morris was vehemently rejecting both what he called "cold classicism",[54] and also the smoothness of the Augustans. A few lines may show the quality of the translation as well as demonstrating that it may represent a stage in the developing of the Sigurd line.

> Night fell and over all the world the earthly slumber deep
> Held weary things, the fowl of air, the cattle of the wold.[55]

This 14-syllabled iambic line is however without the exciting variety of the *Sigurd* line, and without the characteristic caesura. Its very artlessness demonstrates that here at least Morris was not concerned with a romantic underlining of the classicist conception of the past, but was trying to recapture at once something of the original experience of antiquity, as well as what the new acquaintance with that antiquity had meant for the early Renaissance.

It is true that such an attempt might perhaps be regarded by scholars as being just as quixotic as his choice of the Argo's Northern route. This perhaps eccentric choice is also probably connected with Morris's need to actualize. In common with many an English poet who wrote of ancient Greece, Morris never saw that land. But while most of his brother poets felt by no means inhibited from describing scenes they had never known, Morris, with his intense feeling for accurate, decorative but terse natural description, found this lack a real drawback.[56] Doubtless it was with some relief that he seized on the idea of describing the journey to the North, where his imagination could feel more at home.

The poetry of *Jason* is smoother, much smoother, than that of the translation written eight years later. Yet its poetic c o n t e n t is not so different:

The woods grew dark, as though they knew no noon;
The thunder growled about the high brown hills,
And the thin, wasted, shining summer rills
Grew joyful with the coming of the rain.[57]

Both in original poem and in translation Morris is seeking to realize an atmosphere of breathless wonder, which in the case of *Jason* is most marked in the passages dealing with Medea.

So much more striking are the moments when Medea becomes the centre of interest, than those dealing with the rather colourless Jason, that we may legitimately regret that Morris did not write a poem centred on Medea, as *The Lovers of Gudrun* is centred on the latter heroine, in preference to keeping so closely to the classical outline of his tale. *Jason* as a first experiment in epic narrative is overweighted by the deadening influence of the classicist tradition which is felt, too, in the "classical" tales of *The Earthly Paradise*. The poem comes to real life in the last book with the movement towards the tragic end; the psychological change in Jason and Medea is related with growing mastery — as if the often-quoted invocation to Chaucer in Book XVII had indeed taken effect — and Medea becomes a truly imposing tragic figure.

We must however be glad that Morris did not dissipate his poetic energy in further full-length epic tales, until he had arrived at the technical and intellectual ripeness of *Sigurd the Volsung*. The method and form which he selected for *The Earthly Paradise*, by means of which he was enabled to contrast and confront a great variety of source material, not only produced a fabric of surprising richness and freshness, but also enabled the poet to realize where his own true interest and future as a creative writer lay: not in the re-telling of classic tales set in a land in which he never set foot, and which were already over-familiar both in the originals and throughout centuries of re-telling; but in the bringing back to life in modern times of the forgotten heritage of the North, a work of reclamation to which Morris devoted not only his poetic genius but also many hours of tenacious study, and weeks of arduous travel.

It was the combination of inculcated reverence for the classics, built into the English upper-class educational system of the time, along with the florid romantic presentation typical of the English 19th-century poetic approach, which paralyzed Morris's talent in his recreation of Greek antiquity. This is the hampering veil, hanging between the poet and reality, which is responsible for any sluggishness and "decadence" in the poetry of the *Jason* and *Earthly Paradise* period, the elements which Thompson and Lindsay, for example, so much condemn. It is not the medieval influence which is at fault. On the contrary, I have tried to show[58] that the element of medieval and early Renaissance romance, ballad and carol is the vivifying element in *The Earthly Paradise*, just as it is in *Jason*, the element which gives us for example the often-quoted

ballad-like lament of Medea over the children she is plotting to murder —

Now doth the rain wash every shining bone.[59]

While *The Life and Death of Jason* represents a certain stage in the poetic development of William Morris, which he afterwards left behind, yet we must note even here how lasting were Morris's preoccupations and motifs — those elements of his poetry, to which he himself denied the significance of symbols, but which certainly contain more than their surface meaning.[60] The basic themes of the Argosy — a quest, a voyage, landings on many islands, companionship, changing relationships, the changing pattern of love, trust, betrayal, acceptance of life and death — remained latent in Morris's thought and at the end of his life served him for the structure of the most perfect of his fantastic romances — *The Water of the Wondrous Isles.*

INTERCHAPTER

THE MATURING YEARS

It is appropriate here to consider shortly the development of Morris's life and personality between the publication of Jason and the first of his later prose tales (*A Dream of John Ball,* 1887). During the years from 1867 to 1887 profound changes had come over the Victorian English scene. The prosperous varnish of commercial success which Dickens had so well characterized in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864—1865) in the world of the Veneerings and Podsnaps had begun to crack under the strain of growing economic problems and social dissatisfaction. "Podsnappery" was a term in familiar use with Morris.[61] The stuffy upholstery of mid-Victorianism, whether in poetry, the arts, or social morals, had always aroused Morris's aversion; by the end of the sixties he had come to realize that the Warfare against the Age could not be carried on effectively either in poetry or in art alone. Although by the seventies his own position as poet and designer was one of authority, which secured him a hearing in the Press and the political world as soon as he took his decision to speak as a citizen to the nation of the matters which lay nearest to his heart,[62] his first experiences of direct political action showed him clearly that no middle-class or liberal organization would suffice to destroy the entrenchments of class prejudice and class power which he had always recognized as the greatest enemy of human progress.

By the beginning of the eighties Morris was arriving at a practical solution of the problem of how to change society. Unlike Ruskin, with his ineffective League of St. George,[63] Morris went straight to the target not only in the field

of effective protest against ignorant vandalism in the arts ("Anti-Scrape") but above all in the field of practical politics. Two points about Morris's political activity can never be too much stressed: firstly, that the Marxist organizations with which he was associated and which without his intellectual leadership would have undoubtedly developed a less clear-cut Marxist line, formed the basis of Marxist contact with the working masses and later, the nucleus of the Communist Party of Great Britain; and secondly, that Morris, in the *Commonweal,* laid the foundation of Marxist propaganda in the working-class press. The two ideas which he never failed to stress — and for which he could often find so little real sympathy — were the preservation of uncompromisingly Marxist principles, and the widest possible unity of all sections of the proletarian and progressive movements that could be attained without essential sacrifice of those principles. To use the vocabulary of a later day, he was consistently anti-revisionist and anti-fractionist.

Much stress has been laid by some writers on the alleged weakness, melancholy and "decadence" of Morris's poetry of the *Earthly Paradise* period. I have endeavoured to show elsewhere that this poetry on the contrary represents a conscious and deliberate striving to work out a method, within the limits of mid-Victorian English poetry, for expressing a content of traditional legend which would bring the "hoarded seed" of the ages "back to folk weary".[64]

So far as there was weakness, melancholy, decadence in the poetry of Morris's middle years, then it lay primarily neither in Morris's character, poetic gift, or outlook on life, but resulted from the unresolved crisis of English poetry in the third quarter of the century, when that poetry was, with few exceptions, formally and technically incapable of expressing the true experience of contemporary society in anything like its full range. Morris himself, in *Love is Enough, Sigurd the Volsung,* and *The Pilgrims of Hope,* was a pioneer in the attempt to find new forms as well as to express new experiences, but his achievement in this has been considerably distorted by the more striking advances in poetic expression reached by Yeats, Manley Hopkins, Eliot and the American poets. Morris, perhaps the first to realize the "flabbiness" of late "romantic" English poetry, suffered immeasurably in his reputation by the very success of the revolt which he helped to initiate.

That he had not single-handed carried out a successful poetic revolution he himself was only too well aware. Fortunately for his sense of fulfilment as a creative writer, in his later years, having realized the difficulties of expressing his full experience of life in verse form, he had already at his command another instrument, the highly individual prose style which he had worked out in the years of his lecturing and propaganda activity. This was now to serve him as the unique vehicle for the series of prose tales and romances which some critics consider the crowning expression of his creative literary work.

CHAPTER TWO

LATE PROSE

1.

The Socialist Romances

In spite of a certain tendency today to reassess positively the value of Morris's prose romances,[65] we must note that even the most appreciative of Morris's critics have not always been altogether appreciative of the prose tales he wrote between 1888 and his death. Shaw, for example, called them a "startling relapse into literary pre-Raphaelitism", though he admitted that as a refuge from reality he himself had "found them perfectly effective".[66] Yeats, on the other hand, found them the only books he ever read slowly "that I might not come too quickly to the end".[67] In the opinion of a 19th-century historian of Old Norse influence on English literature, Conrad Hialmar Nordby,[68] Morris was the greatest of the English interpreters of saga literature and the Norse influence extends also to his romances: "The impulses that swayed men and women in the sagaman's tales, and the motives that uplifted them, are found here". Characteristic for Morris's interpretation of the sagas is not only the rendering of heroism, but also that of the conception of daily life: "Wherever we turn to note the effects of Icelandic tradition, we find the presence of daily toil, always associated with dignity, never apologised for. The connection between Morris's art and Morris's socialism is not hard to explain."[69]

Turning to more recent specialist critics, we again find considerable variety of opinion. D. M. Hoare, in her very critical analysis of Morris's use of the sagas, finds most justification for his rendering of saga material and method in the romances: "of all his work, the prose romances are the most individual and living", though even here, in *The House of the Wolfings,* she condemns as unsuccessful the "attempt to catch the heroic tone".[70] C. S. Lewis, again, in his essay on Morris in *Rehabilitations,* has spoken eloquently of the moral content of the entire body of Morris's work, but especially of the late romances: "The travels of the Argonauts or of those more ambitious wanderers in the Earthly Paradise, the quest for the well at the world's end or the wood beyond the world, the politics of Mirkwood and the sorrow of Odin the Goth — all these are attached in a dozen ways first to Morris's life and then to the lives of us all. They express the author's deepest sense of reality, which is much subtler and more sensitive than we expect." But he reserves his greatest praise and most penetrating analysis for the "great prose romances, which are the real crown of his work".[71] On the other hand, Edward Thompson, while acknowledging certain positive features, is doubtful about the relevance of the romances for

us: "It may be that the world will be too busy for many years to turn back to these fairy stories: there is little in them from which it can learn."[72] In the face of these conflicting views we may well ask. what, then, are these prose romances and what, if any, is their relevance and value for today?

By the eighties, Morris was addressing a much wider audience than the audience for poetry. Although he still wrote in verse, he was not particularly satisfied with the narrative poetry he wrote for publication in the *Commonweal (The Pilgrims of Hope),* while on the other hand, in *A Dream of John Ball* he had succeeded in finding a form of prose historical romance which enabled him to express some of his deepest thoughts and emotions in a new and original way, but which yet bore a relation to one strong and characteristic native prose tradition. Even though the subsequent prose works of a definitely fictional and romance character were not to be offered to this wider circle of readers, these prose romances are not cut off by any gulf of method or even material from the tales intended directly for his working-class audience, *John Ball, A King's Lesson,* and *News from Nowhere.* Especially the short fable, *A King's Lesson,* is in the mood and mode of the later romances.

I have already pointed out in an earlier analysis of *A Dream of John Ball*[73] the remarkable u n i t y of the work from the view-point not only of form, but also of matter and clarity of purpose. Munby has rightly remarked that although the fantastic or fairy-tale romances are not specifically didactic, whereas the Socialist romances were written with a definite purpose of converting his readers to certain conclusions and even of inducing them to undertake a certain course of action, nevertheless "familiarity with these latter [i.e. the Socialist romances] deepens the pleasure obtained in reading the romances".[74] This is so partly because the form and language already known from the two Socialist romances, relating to more or less familiar surroundings, render the strange and remote world of the fantastic tales more immediately acceptable to us. Indeed the robust attitude that life is life, be it lived in whatever age or circumstance, that the main joys of life are those inherent in man's very physical nature, is one of the most valuable lessons of Morris's magnanimous humanism. We need never question the sincerity of Morris's implication that the basic human values he saw in Viking society or 14th-century peasant England, should be accepted and developed by the modern proletarian movement, because we cannot doubt Morris visualized these societies not as an exotic background for heroic gestures, but as something full-blooded and real which had once existed on earth, above all a society where he himself in his own person would have felt as much at home as did the dreamer in *John Ball.* Morris was not an advocate of the "simple life" in the sense that, say, Edward Carpenter was, because it was clear to him that such an attitude was escapist; but he realized sooner than anyone else that the great productive forces of modern society

were more often than not being used for producing completely unnecessary litter. The clear-cut vision of *John Ball* and *News from Nowhere* have played their very important part in formulating the conception of "uncluttered" surroundings as a background for life, which is so important a part of what we call "modern" or "contemporary" design.

Apart from the aesthetic texture of life as lived in the two Socialist romances, there are also certain definite ideas and principles conveyed by them which are important for understanding the later romances. In *John Ball* it is the idea of fellowship: "Fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death";[75] further, the need to strive, even though defeat is a foregone conclusion: "How men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name." (p. 231) These two ideas find expression again and again in the intricate windings and intertwinings of the later romances.

In *John Ball,* Morris was carrying on the tradition of the Chartists in preserving and handing down the memory of the centuries-old struggle of the English people against the usurpers of power.[76] In *News from Nowhere* he was, to be sure, carrying on the English tradition of the Utopia, but he was at the same time striking a direct and very deliberately calculated blow in favour of theoretical clarity in the ranks of the Marxist socialists. A previous 19th-century Utopia attacking bourgeois civilization had been Butler's *Erewhon,* published in book form in 1872, parts of it even earlier in periodicals. Presumably Morris's title bears a reference to Butler's book, and May Morris has pointed out that the physical beauty and health of Morris's dwellers in Communist England may well stem from the similar qualities of the Erewhonians.[77] However, there is a basic difference between Morris's book and that of Butler, namely that Butler's is a satire, at times even a savage satire, on contemporary English society, while Morris's is in essence a non-satirical vision of the type of society which would give a chance of development to the human qualities, relationships and activities in which he was interested.

Far more closely connected with the origin of *News from Nowhere* is Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1889), which immediately aroused Morris's indignation and led to such impromptu reactions as the reported saying that "if they brigaded h i m into a regiment of workers he would just lie on his back and kick",[78] (a statement which arose of course not from Morris's aversion to manual work but precisely because he thought so highly of work and its place in human life), and, in a letter to Bruce Glasier: "Thank you, I wouldn't care to live in such a Cockney paradise as he imagines."[79] Before he wrote his Utopia, Morris analysed *Looking Backward* in a review which he published in the *Commonweal* in 1889.[80] In this article we may see the genesis of *News from Nowhere* both

as a work of art, and as a scientific Utopia, in whose scientific basis, as Thompson rightly points out, lies the key to its artistic power and unity.[81]

Morris has two main aesthetic grounds of opposition to Bellamy's book, first that it is not a work of art,[82] and secondly, that in being the expression of only a limited temperament, of what he calls the "unmixed modern", "unhistoric and unartistic" temperament, it loses validity because Bellamy has failed to realize that the q u a l i t y of modern bourgeois daily life has characteristics which it is not desirable to perpetuate in a socialist society (p. 503). Morris, of course, is scrupulously fair here and says that "the only safe way of reading a Utopia is to consider it as the expression of the temperament of its author" (p. 502). He does not base his s c i e n t i f i c criticism of Bellamy only on a personal preference. In this criticism, the essential opposition of Morris's political and social theory to evolutionary or Fabian socialism is well brought out. As well as his penetrating perception — surely a remarkable one for his time — that the necessary democratic quality of life in a socialist state could never be ensured by what he calls a "huge national organisation, working by a kind of magic for which no one feels himself responsible" (p. 507), Morris has fundamental objections to Bellamy's historical conception. He refuses to accept Bellamy's theory of a gradual evolution from the highest stage of monopoly into a highly centralized state organization for ensuring the working of the industrial army of conscripts which Bellamy envisages as the ideal socialist solution. Further, he points out that "individual men cannot shuffle off the business of life on to the shoulders of an abstraction called the State, but must deal with it in conscious association with each other" (p. 507). He thus rightly condemns the non-revolutionary character of Bellamy's picture, and the non-communist character of the society he depicts. Neither the society which Bellamy describes, nor the means by which it was achieved, are compatible with Marxist theory, and Morris in *News from Nowhere* set out to remedy this fault. But undoubtedly the greatest weakness in Bellamy's book, the fault which renders it practically unreadable today, is his conception of life and work — his fear of labour, which leads him to consider the ideal state one where men and women in the prime of life cease working at their chosen task, and where his heroine has no more worthy occupation than to spend her time shopping around in the superluxury self-service department stores which are the highest achievements of Bellamy's State. Morris rightly points out that Bellamy has no conception of or interest in village and country life, that "with unconscious simplicity" he "shows that they do not come into his scheme of economical equality, but are mere servants of the great centres of civilization" (p. 505). He fails to see "that variety of life is as much an aim of a true Communism as equality of condition, and that nothing but a union of these two will bring about real freedom" (p. 507). Above all, Bellamy failed to realize that man will not cease

to challenge nature: "Surely the ideal of the great reduction of the hours of labour by the mere means of machinery is a futility" (p. 505); that "the development of man's resources, which has given him greater power over nature, has driven him also into fresh desires and fresh demands on nature" (p. 506); that work and above all pleasure in work is a vital aspect of human nature; and finally, that art "is not a mere adjunct of life which free and happy men can do without, but the necessary expression and indispensable instrument of human happiness" (p. 507).

The year after his book review Morris began to publish *News from Nowhere* serially in the *Commonweal.* It must have interested American readers, presumably because of its contrast to Bellamy's book, since it was first published in book form, direct from the *Commonweal,* in Boston, in 1890, while in England it was not issued in book form till the next year. Morris merely "touched it up" for publication in book form, and May Morris says of the work: "It was written from week to week as published in *Commonweal,* and bears the traces of serial writing in one or two unimportant inconsistencies which of course have not been interfered with."[83]

A rather frequently expressed though superficial attitude to *News from Nowhere* is that life in such a placid Utopia would be incredibly boring. This simply bears out what Morris himself said, that a Utopia is an expression of its author's temperament. Certainly the quality of life which he depicts was well calculated to show that life in a communist land need not be the regimented affair which Bellamy depicted, although the absence of the outward accompaniments of modern "civilization" might indeed suggest boredom to some temperaments. Morris, however, never makes the claim of exhaustiveness for his picture of a possible life. G. D. H. Cole, although opposed to Morris's most revolutionary Marxist ideas and concerned to show that he really did not hold them, nevertheless remarks very wisely of the book: "We must judge *News from Nowhere,* not as a complete picture of a possible society, but as a picture of something that a decent society will have to include, and to foster."[84] Morris succeeded remarkably well in transferring to his imaginary society the values of life which he himself rated most highly and according to which he lived his own daily life as far as he could.[85] At the same time, one of the main artistic qualities of Morris's book, which few other Utopias share with it, is the suggestion of further horizons beyond the small piece of earth which he describes. We have surely lost something when he did not take his dreamer on the promised trip to the north, or show us something of the other countries beyond the sea.

In the early reprints, Morris called his book An Epoch of Rest,[86] although this sub-title is not quoted in the Nonesuch Press edition, and in the Collected Works, strangely, it is printed as An Epoch of Unrest. Internal evidence shows that Morris was indeed thinking of "rest" as a feature of his society, e.g. Ellen

says: "Your outward eyes have learned that in spite of all the infallible maxims of your day there is yet a time of rest in store for the world, when mastery has changed into fellowship — but not before." (p. 210) There is no suggestion, however, that the inhabitants of Morris's Utopia have attained some static happiness. Especially his heroines bring implications of something still to be longed for; and this is a society where weavers require to go for a South-country holiday and a change of work — because intensive part-time study of mathematics has worn them out! Human follies and peccadilloes have not disappeared (e.g. the delightful "Golden Dustman" and his resplendent attire) nor has human unhappiness. But the artificial perversions of passion and folly caused by property relationships in class society have vanished.

Did Morris achieve in *News from Nowhere* what he set out to do?[87] He sets before us a society not only credible, but attractive, where "the reward of labour is l i f e" (p. 91), where "The wares we make are made because they are needed . . . Nothing c a n be made but for genuine use; therefore no inferior goods are made." "All work which would be irksome to do by hand is done by immensely improved machinery." (p. 97) It is true that many questions are begged, including that of the precise process whereby the state has withered away; the processes of l o c a l administration are however suggested. We may say here that there was no reason why Morris should have described at length such processes, which after all he could not have anticipated correctly. He does stress the really important point, that the position had not been attained without a revolutionary transfer of power. But what he was aiming at in his book was not to provide a blue-print for setting up a communist society, which would have been far too unrealistic a purpose for Morris, but to demonstrate the quality of life which such a society should aim at. Above all he stresses the variety of life, the variety of occupation and aim, the variety of human relationships, possible only in a society where economic exploitation of man by a man has been rendered impossible.

2.

The Fantastic Romances

How precisely are we to qualify these prose tales, *The House of the Wolfings* (1888), *The Roots of the Mountains* (1889), *The Story of the Glittering Plain* (1890), *The Wood Beyond the World* (1894), *Child Christopher* (1895), *The Well at the World's End* (1896), *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* (1897), *The Sundering Flood* (1897)? They are not to be judged by any pedantic or fact-grubbing standard of accuracy; still less are they "allegories".[88] But does this signify that Morris asserts they are without meaning, merely a way of passing the time, like

the games of whist he and his companions used to play in their tent in Iceland or the tales he told his schoolmates as a boy? Surely not. The term allegory, for Morris, certainly had a precise meaning, in the sense of Langland, Spenser or Bunyan: each character must represent a particular quality, and usually also a particular worldly institution or personality, and the relevance must be consistent and worked out in terms of the plot. The romances are certainly not allegories in this sense. The relevance of these tales must not be sought in allegorical, i.e. fixed and formal identification of characters and events, with other, known, characters and events outside the story.

However, we are sometimes apt to use the word "allegory" in a rather loose sense, when we say for example that *Robinson Crusoe* or *Moby Dick* are allegories of man's fight against nature. Further, the word "vision" can be used, as Langland used it, to mean an actual allegory, or in a somewhat extended and less precise sense, as when Shaw calls Wagner's *Ring* "a poetic vision of unregulated industrial capitalism as it was made known in Germany in the middle of the nineteenth century by Engels's Condition of the Labouring Classes in England".[89] It can even have the wider sense of "penetrating insight". This type of vision or loose allegory often has a profounder meaning than the immediate allegorical reference of the formal allegory — and the author need not always be completely aware of the significance and relationships which he is revealing.

Morris's insight into society was however highly conscious, especially by the late eighties and nineties. Whatever of profound insight we may find in his romances we can be sure is there with the author's knowledge. Morris could no more help putting his own view of life forward in his romances than could the makers of the sagas or the ballads.

Morris's own immediate purpose in writing them was certainly to provide relief for himself from the strain and worry of daily life, especially from the strain of the "day-to-day struggle", often a very petty one, of the socialist movement of the time. There was no spirit of grudging in the devotion which Morris showed in carrying out the less spectacular tasks of socialist organization and agitation; but it was work which was bound to bring considerable weariness of spirit especially to one of Morris's generous outlook, and he has expressed this weariness with great effect and reticence in the brief introductory and concluding passages of both *News from Nowhere* and *John Ball*. He loved the writing of his romances and regretted finishing them. In that sense, they were "escapist". But to recognize this is a vastly different thing from condemning the romances as an "escape from reality", and "very nearly unreadable to-day", as Philip Henderson does, or as evidence that "he will not permit himself to suffer imaginatively", as Dorothy Hoare considers.[90] The romances were in fact the fruit of Morris's lifelong search for reality. "My work", he said of himself as we have seen, "is the embodiment of dreams."[91] Too often this is quoted with in-

sufficient emphasis on the word "e m b o d i m e n t". Only by giving concrete and credible form to his longings and dreams, could Morris find relief from the cares of the world. And in his most mature period, he requires to give concrete expression not only to his d r e a m s about life and what it might be, but also, and above all, to his i d e a s and o p i n i o n s about life, which he certainly had not worked out without considerable mental strife and imaginative suffering. The prose romances are much more the expression of coherent and definite opinions about life, how it may have been lived in the past, but still more how it might and should be lived at any time, than escapist fantasies.

The first two romances deal with the early history and prehistory of the Germanic peoples and are complementary to each other. In pointing out the wrongness of the view that the prose romances are "something quite separate from his other work", Page Arnot asserts: "It should also have been clear that a peculiar aptitude in dealing with historical materialism would be shown by Morris who from boyhood had made the past his own, who had respired from 'every holt and heath' the past life of mankind on the earth and the deeds they had done. His Marxist studies in this field bore fruit in his next romance, *The House of the Wolfings.*" Page Arnot relates Morris's interpretation of early European history to Engels's work *The Mark,* published in 1883, an influence reflected in the full title of the romance, "A Tale of the House of the Wolfings and all the Kindreds of the Mark".[92]

The House of the Wolfings "was written in the midst of Socialist agitation, after the particularly hard years of 1886 and 1887".[93] It is the romance in which Morris kept closest to the saga atmosphere and method. Critics such as Dorothy Hoare, who objects to *The House of the Wolfings* as "pseudo-heroic", as merely "superficially influenced by the Norse sagas, and somewhat unsuccessfully attempting to catch the heroic tone",[94] are rather beside the point. There was no reason why Morris should have r e p r o d u c e d the sagas in his romance. The significance of his use of such a model or source lies not in the degree of accuracy with which he did or did not reproduce certain features of his original regarded by specialist critics as particularly "authentic" or "modern", but in the propriety with which he used this particular literary genre to reveal some aspect of truth.

The mood of *The House of the Wolfings* is very much that of Morris's epic *Sigurd the Volsung*; but whereas in *Sigurd,* Morris wanted to re-create for his own time the heroic grandeur as well as the heroic simplicity of the Northern myth, to get rid of the artificiality and rococo upholstery with which he felt the *Sigurd* theme had been smothered by Wagner, and to give his own interpretation of the "sorrows of Odin the Goth" — even though he had earlier felt that it was impossible to render the *Volsungasaga* material in modern poetry — now, in *The House of the Wolfings,* he expressed the theme of the credible everyday life

of simple and recognizably human people. Morris was himself acutely aware of the historical phases which had successively gone to the construction of the *Volsungasaga* as it now exists,[95] of the "curious entanglement of the ages" which had produced the final version, and it is as if he wanted in *The House of the Wolfings* to show us something of the historical reality of the society which preserved, adapted and handed on the tales of the gods and heroes. Morris intensely realizes the life of his Wolfings, and he wants us to realize it as intensely — not for the sake of escaping into the past, but because he wants us to experience and be affected by the v a l u e s which motivate these men and women of the Germanic tribes. There are thus two valid standpoints from which his book can be evaluated: first from the historic point of view, asking the question, to what extent is Morris's picture a fair and adequate version of the possible or probable historical reality; and secondly, from the aesthetic point of view, asking what artistic purpose is served by Morris's choice of theme and his method of working it out.

Thompson has rightly pointed out that Morris "knew perfectly well that he could not reconstruct with accurate detail the lives of the Germanic peoples at the dawn of the Middle Ages",[96] and that this was not his purpose. Nevertheless, in spite of Morris's scorn of the German archaeologist who, we are told,[97] asked him what were his sources of information, there is obviously, as in the background of all Morris's work, a great deal of carefully studied information. Whether or not Morris had read — or perhaps, through Bax, was acquainted with the main arguments of — Engels's *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State,* which was published in German in 1884, we do not appear to know. As Morris did not read modern German adequately, and a French translation of this work was not published till 1891, then, unless he could have seen the Italian translation of 1885, he could not have been fully acquainted with Engels's arguments, though as Page Arnot has suggested (supra p. 99) he must have known something of Engels's views. *The House of the Wolfings* itself is sufficient evidence of the thoroughness with which he had grasped the main lines of historical materialist interpretation of this period. May Morris states that Morris "read with critical enjoyment the more important modern studies" of this period "as they came out", but unfortunately does not cite any titles.[98] Certainly the moral and social qualities which Morris stresses in his Wolfings are precisely those which Engels gives in his Eighth Chapter as characteristic of the "barbarian" tribes of the Mark society — "Their personal strength and courage, their love of freedom and democratic instinct, which saw in all public matters their own personal matter".[99] It is for these social and personal qualities that Morris has chosen to write about them. But whatever were his historical sources, Morris applied his own recipe for re-telling an old tale: Read it through, then shut the book and write it out again as a new story for yourself.[100]

The first pages of *The House of the Wolfings* (*Works,* Vol. XIV) follow the method of most of the subsequent romances: they give a very graphic and realistic description of the geographical setting. But this first chapter is no mere topographical introduction: the significance of the tale — "the melting of the individual into the society of the tribes", as Morris himself described it[101] — is immediately implied in the summary of the growth of the Mark. "an isle in the sea of woodland", over the generations of men. With greater certainty than in *Sigurd,* Morris gives a detailed description of the growth, economy and daily life of these successive civilizations. In a sense, this chapter forms an introduction to the world of all the romances: the romance is that placed furthest back in historical time (the latest romances are of course timeless), and in this introductory chapter Morris presents his reasoned explanation of the growth of this society and of the features he uses with varying effect in subsequent tales: the Hall of the Kindred, the Doom-ring, the Folk-Thing, and the rest. Yet the exposition is never diffuse. If Morris learned nothing else from the sagas, he learned the lesson applied now in his romances of limiting detail, but making every detail count. We may contrast the very specific and concrete description of the Hall of the Wolfings, which never descends to mere architectural enumeration, yet gives us a very definite background for the action of the tale, with the more ornate, more emotionally expressed, but less vividly, less concretely imagined references in *Sigurd* to the Hall of the Volsungs. In *Sigurd* we have intense feelings about the hall that is "a candle in the dark", but in *The Wolfings* we have in addition thought, and informed thought, as to what it meant for those who lived in it.

The next chapter passes from the general to the particular and calls up the atmosphere of evening relaxation from toil (p. 8). The very rhythm of the prose expresses the combination of unceasingly repeated traditional activities with the constant freshness of living experience which is the special atmosphere Morris could conjure up for his descriptions of the life of the land in almost any period of time. If Morris in John Ball could seem to catch the very moment of time when the assembled villagers hear through the clear quiet evening the sound of the horse's hoofs that bear tidings of attack, no less impressively does he bring home to us the moment when the action of this tale starts. It is as if he had imaginatively realized the quality of all those historical moments when men have waited breathless for the tidings which are about to change their collective fate.

Morris has been much criticized for introducing verse into *The House of the Wolfings,* though even here there exists a variety of opinion. Thompson considers that the "unsuccessful combination" of prose and verse mars the work, while Saintsbury held that the lament of the Wood-Sun was the "most beautiful and successful example" of Morris's use of the *Sigurd* metres.[102] The introduc-

tion of verse has however a specific aesthetic purpose: it is used in *The Wolfings* not for all speech, but for formal or especially significant communication. Certainly its use is evidence of the closeness with which Morris was following his purpose of relating the world of the sagas to the world of historical truth. Like the fragments of Eddic song in the *Volsungasaga,* the verse passages in *The Wolfings* underline the most significant passages. Just as the song passages in the actual saga deal with traditional and often mythological and magic matters, so too it is the mythological and magic elements in *The Wolfings* which are treated in this way. Yet this is not the only use. Verse first appears in Thiodolf's welcome to the messenger bringing tidings of war, and in the messenger's reply. It is used for such memorable communications as we might well suppose could be preserved in metrical form in some unknown folk epic, some lost verse saga. The meeting between Thiodolf and the Wood-Sun shows even more clearly what Morris intends by his use of verse: for in this conversation the two drop into and out of verse alternately. The verse passages give the mystical relationship between Thiodolf and Wood-Sun in regard to the history of the folk and the beliefs of the folk in a supernatural power, especially the power of Doom; while the prose interlocutions give rather the personal reactions of the protagonists to these beliefs and traditions and to the need to act in accordance with them. In this way Morris avoids identifying himself with the supernatural beliefs of the tribes, while showing how their lives and actions are affected by these beliefs.

What is Morris's purpose in introducing the Wood-Sun? The passages between her and Thiodolf have a ballad-like quality which is different from the parts of the tale describing the life and fighting of the Wolfings. The Wood-Sun is really a Valkyrie, a chooser of the slain, a Brynhild who is not yet a mighty queen, but a being of the forest, discovered not in a castle on the top of a burning mountain, but in the midst of a silent moonlit forest clearing. She is the "daughter of the Gods" of the kindred, and her wisdom concerns the future of the kindred and their enemies. These passages have a remarkable texture which includes many of the elements of romance; so that Wood-Sun shares the qualities of Brynhild, of the fairy ballads, of Malory's wandering damsels, and of Keats's Belle Dame. Her real significance in the development of the story, as C. S. Lewis points out, is that she offers Thiodolf supernatural help — the mysterious hauberk — which on this occasion he accepts, but later refuses, when he discovers that its effect is to prevent his sharing the fate of his people.[103]

The meeting in the forest also has the effect of deepening our knowledge of the character of Thiodolf. In his talk with the Wood-Sun he reveals his own inmost thoughts and motives, his longing, like Sigurd, for the praise of the people, his whole outlook on life: "I love life, and fear not death." Yet Thiodolf is at first persuaded to accept the magic armour. To the suspense of the kindred

on the verge of war against an unknown and more powerful foe, Morris adds the different quality of suspense of the individual faced with the decision between duty and inclination.

Thompson has also objected that *The House of the Wolfings* is marred "by the intrusion of the Pre-Raphaelite maiden, the Hall-Sun", and that the treatment of "intimate personal relationships" is weak in this and in *The Roots of the Mountains*.[104] I have endeavoured to show that the use of verse is not merely a technical device or fad, but plays an organic part in the structure of the romance; this is no less true of the Hall-Sun, who is the conscience of the kindred. It is true that she is rather more contemplative and less active than the energetic maidens of the later romances, but we should see her intervention and that of the Wood-Sun as not merely part of a romantic theme, but as the attempt to embody a certain level of experience. Having reached his picture of the kindred society by combining the sagas and mythology with the materialist conception of history, Morris, in the light of his historical knowledge, is trying to realize the type of individual experience and relationship which might lie behind the rise of myth.

Morris's devices for informing us of the historical formation of the kindred society, without holding up the action, are many. He uses for example the journeying of all the houses of the kindreds to the assembly as an opportunity for summing up in a few paragraphs the way in which the various kindreds of the Markmen had mingled down the centuries till they formed the present confederation of tribes; and then goes on to use the conversation of the warriors to discuss the civilization of the Romans against whom they are marching. Certainly the use of verse here, represented as quotations from a Lay, is an enrichment of the fabric. This "Lay" is composed not in the *Sigurd* metre which is usually chosen for the verse passages, but in a variety of anapaestic dimeter (like the familiar "Lines for a Bed in Kelmscott Manor", but with a stronger rhythm), which passes into a line of double length that might be scanned as three amphibrachs followed by an iamb. This metre is frequently used by Morris in the later romances to represent songs supposed to be of a traditional character.

Perhaps there is some reminiscence of Anglo-Saxon poetry here, not in metre but in subject and mood, when the harrowed city of the Romans is described:

> All lonely the street there, and void was the way
> And nought hindered our feet but the dead men that lay
> Under shield in the lanes of the houses heavens-high . . .
> For the Welsh-wrought shield
> Lay low on the field.
> By man's hand unbuilded all seemed there to be,
> The walls ruddy gilded, the pearls of the sea:

Yea all things were dead there save pillar and wall,
But t h e y lived and t h e y said us the song of the hall;
The dear hall left to perish by men of the land,
For the Goth-folk to cherish with gold gaining hand.
(p. 45)

This Lay in turn leads to discussion of the nature of Roman society, as it appears to the Wolfings and Elkings:

... It may be said of them that they have forgotten kindred, and have none, nor do they heed whom they wed, and great is the confusion amongst them. And mighty men among them ordain where they shall dwell; and what shall be their meat, and how long they shall labour after they are weary, and in all wise what manner of life shall be amongst them; and though they be called free men who suffer this, yet may no house or kindred gainsay this rule and order. In sooth they are a people mighty, but unhappy. (p. 45)

And we may note that the description is not inappropriate to Victorian society in England. Morris weaves together many strands and levels of knowledge and consciousness; for part of this information comes not from the lays, but from the reports of escaped slaves; and a further element enters the conversation, binding it together with the ballad atmosphere of the mythological Wood-Sun; namely, the relation of a dream, in which defeat and death are foreseen by a child, and this again leads to the expression of the stoicism of the tribesmen:

'Well,' said Wolfkettle, 'let it be as it may! Yet at least I will not be led away from the field by the foemen. Oft may a man be hindered of victory, but never of death if he willeth it.' (p. 48)

The first climax of the tale comes with the gathering of the host at the Thing-stead of the Upper-mark. Morris is much concerned to give an adequate picture of that feature of the kindred society which he so much admired — the assembly where all may speak their mind, but where all will abide by the decision which is made. The men of the kindred come forth one by one and state the problems they are facing. Again Morris uses subtle mingling of prose and verse, prose for conveying detailed information about the Roman method of attack, but verse when speech ceases to be informative and becomes emotive, dealing with the fundamentals of the life of the Markmen and their enmity to the Romans — the "deeper meaning of the struggle", to use a phrase of Morris's in another connection.

Morris does not give us an idealized and idyllic picture of the life of the tribes; but by showing us that what they hate in the lives of the Romans is also that which any humanist society should hate, he emphasizes the positive features of the kindred society and their significance for reminding us of what a true society might possibly be like.

Perhaps we might compare Morris's picture of the Folk-Thing with his often-quoted depiction of the radical meeting in *The Pilgrims of Hope,* and its trenchant characterization of the audience and the hostile or indifferent reception of the Communist speaker.[105] How often Morris, compelled by his sense of duty to attend endless meetings where debate was only too often carried on by querulous pedants not for the sake of reaching agreement on a course of action, but for the sake of perpetuating disagreement, must have longed for a type of democratic discipline and self-discipline which would have given the infant socialist movement something of the dignity and purposeful seriousness of the Folk-Thing — which, as Morris describes it, is a classic example of democratic debate for the sake of reaching a decision which all will cooperate to carry out. Thus Morris has called in his vision of the ancient kindred society, not for the sake of Utopian glamour, but in order to suggest a possible contrast to Victorian mock-democracy.

That Hall-Sun is something more than a "Pre-Raphaelite maiden" might be substantiated by the description of her when the scene of the story shifts back to the Roof of the Wolfings. She is sitting by the Women's Door on a stone, watching the women return into the hall in the late afternoon from work:

> She had been working in the acres, and her hand was yet on the hoe she had been using, and but for her face her body was as of one resting after toil: her dark blue gown was ungirded, her dark hair loose and floating, the flowers that had wreathed it, now faded, lying strewn upon the grass before her: her feet bare for coolness' sake, her left hand lying loose and open upon her knee.
>
> Yet though her body otherwise looked thus listless, in her face was no listlessness, nor rest: her eyes were alert and clear, shining like two stars in the heavens of dawntide; her lips were set close, her brow knit, as of one striving to shape thoughts hard to understand into words that all might understand. (p. 75)

This is no Blessed Damozel leaning on the bar of heaven, but something much closer to the vision of another contemporary of Morris's, to James Thomson's imposing allegorical figure based on Dürer's drawing of Melancholia:

> . . . she gazes
> With full set eyes, but wandering in thick mazes
> Of sombre thought beholds no outward sight . . .
> . . . Sustained by her indomitable will:
> The hands shall fashion and the brain shall pore
> And all her sorrow shall be turned to labour . . .[106]

Now the three strands of the tale are woven together — the life of the Hall, the love of the Wood-Sun for Thiodolf, and the story of the fighting. The evidence of the scenes between Wood-Sun and Thiodolf (especially Chapter XVII) alone would suffice to refute the suggestion that Morris could not deal in psychological subtleties. Trying to concentrate on the coming battle,

Thiodolf's mind wanders off to the events of his past life, and the whole landscape with the gentle but irresistable flow of the stream enters into his consciousness and without meaning it, he takes his decision. On his awakening, he faces the Wood-Sun and refuses to wear the hauberk: "I could not but deem that this mail is for the ransom of a man and the ruin of a folk." However he is won over for the present by the vehemence of her love. The tale now goes to the development of the fight against the Romans, who have made their way into the Mark lands on the flank and are attacking the unguarded and scattered halls of the other families of the kindred. The conduct of the fighting demonstrates why the Wolfings were victorious over the better armed Romans — it is thanks to their determination to fight for their homes, to their knowledge of the country, but above all to the implicit trust between the different bands of the kindred, to the manner in which one group can anticipate the decisions of the other, and to the strategical support of the women and old men. The miscalculations of the Roman Captain and his misunderstanding of the kindred in the end lead to his defeat. For the kindred of the Mark the decisive factor is not the agreed plan, but above all the feeling of kindred which leads them to press on together to the help of their besieged kin; the need above all to preserve the unity of action of the kindred.

The magic hauberk, as the symbol of individualism, now affects the outcome: Thiodolf under its influence is prevented from leading the onslaught. Hall-Sun, who has left the House for the shelter of the woods, in the depths of the night leads Thiodolf to a confrontation with Wood-Sun, in which the daughter faces her mother with the fact that she has degraded the man who might be "the very joy of the people", and obliges her to decide that she will give back Thiodolf his own will. In spite of herself, Wood-Sun faces the parting with him, so that he should be "no changeling of the Gods, but the man in whom men have trusted, the friend of Earth, the giver of life, the vanquisher of death . . ." (p. 170)

There have been many speculations about Morris's relations with Janey Morris and how this is reflected in his work. At this point we may recall that he too was a man who had embraced the cause of a "kindred" other than his own, probably against the inclination if not the will of his wife,[107] that he had a daughter who shared his beliefs, and that he refused to wear any magic hauberk of position or wealth to keep him from the blows in battle that were waiting for him:

> 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; yes, even of the foemen, whom this day the edges in mine hand shall smite. (p. 170)

Thiodolf now returns to the fight, prepared to die. The battle ends with the encounter of Thiodolf and the Roman leader on the threshold of the burning Hall, and the death of the two leaders.

So the tale concludes with an account of the impressive return of the host to the House of the Wolfings and the funeral of Thiodolf and the rest. After Thiodolf has "born Throng-plough to mound with him" we hear no more of the Hall-Sun or any individuals, but only how "The Wolfings throve in field and fold, and they begat children who grew up to be mighty men . . . and the House grew more glorious year by year". (p. 208)

Thought and emotion, theme and poetic image form a remarkable unity in all Morris's work. When he led us in *The House of the Wolfings* back "across the waste that hath no way" to reveal to us something of the "ancient glimmer", he was merely putting in a different form his message to the radical workingmen of London:

> From out the dusk, from out the dark,
> Of old our fathers came,
> Till lovely freedom's glimmering spark
> Broke forth a glorious flame . . .[108]

He sought to embody in this tale the specific social qualities of the kindred society, in which the "barbaric" strength of the people of the Mark lay.

The Roots of the Mountains (1889, *Works,* Vol. XV), is the other of Morris's romances which is comparatively definitely based in space and time. Like *The House of the Wolfings* it is preceded by a short lyric which expresses the relationship of the modern reader to the subject matter of the tale: it is a glimpse of a far land which offers us "such rest, such stay" as we long for as "the iron road" bears us swiftly past a peaceful landscape — another gleam from the past which is to help us face the problems of today.

The historical background of *The Roots of the Mountains* differs considerably from that of *The Wolfings.* If *The Wolfings* is strikingly reminiscent of the society described by Engels in Chapter VIII of *The Origin of the Family,* dealing with those qualities of the "barbaric" Germanic kindreds of the Mark which infused new life into the effete civilization of Europe under the Romans, then *The Roots of the Mountains* is equally reminiscent of the society dealt with in Chapter IX, on the beginnings of the state, describing the beginnings of specialization in production between various tribes and peoples and regions — "the first great social division of labour" — leading to the development of crafts and trade.

It is precisely such a region where the specialization of various communities has developed, that Morris describes in loving detail in the early chapters of *The Roots of the Mountains,* the sixth- or seventh-century Germanic tribes

somewhere in the foothills of the Alps, defending their homes not now against the Romans, but against the Huns or a similar nomadic people who attack from the East, and in the process forming war-alliances among themselves which gradually lead to the growth of larger and more complicated social and political units.

As is appropriate for this society emerging from the ancient forest and the mists of prehistory, the general atmosphere of *The Roots of the Mountains* is one of benign clarity and serenity. The mystery- and legend-steeped Mirkwood of the Wolfings gives place to the broad pastures and "fair and fertile plain" of Burgstead. The task of showing the relationship of the individual to the kindred at this period when the kindreds had formed a "folk" and elements of class society were already developing, was more complicated than in the simpler society of the Wolfings. Certainly Morris, in showing the only enemy of this society to be an enemy from without — his "Dusky Folk" or "Dusky Felons" — was begging one or two historical questions. It is surely the absence of the enemy within which renders *The Roots of the Mountains* less dramatic and less absorbing than *The House of the Wolfings*. The inner tension between the interests of the individual and the interests of the kindred is effectively projected in *The Wolfings* in the theme of the magic hauberk; but the love relationships which in *The Roots of the Mountains* provide the element of tension are treated in a more naturalistic manner, and lose some force as types of socially significant relationships. Perhaps this is what Thompson means when he speaks of the "Victorian overtones" which "are incompatible with the more serious intention of the whole".[109] However it is not so much the lack of an "aloof and impersonal manner" which detracts from the effectiveness of the tale, as a certain failure completely to embody in the persons of the story all the vital features of the society of the time, including the early class tensions within that society itself. Thompson criticizes as a compromise, in the treatment of the Bride, the fact that instead of allowing her to be killed in battle, Morris marries her to Folk-Might, the leader of the Silverdalers. This however is not a compromise concession to sentiment[110] but a concession to the facts of history, which Morris has not quite succeeded in making explicit in this tale. It is, to be sure, a certain sacrifice of the individual to a community — but Morris either fails to see or will not make clear that already this sacrifice, partaking of the nature of early feudal marriage alliance between ruling houses, is not merely an inter-kindred marriage bond, but already a step in the process of cementing the incipient class power of the growing state. In this he has departed from his clear conception of the Niblungs as the embodiment of early feudal aggression, as he showed it in *Sigurd the Volsung*. Morris's conception of history is so much a part of his later work that any compromise with history is reflected in imperfect artistic realization.[111]

A further lack of historical definition is shown by the fact that Morris has not very clearly envisaged the "Dusky Folk". There is a loss both in historical realism and in artistic pathos which springs from the very shadowy and entirely negative depiction of the enemy, very unlike the concrete, historically accurate and penetrating, however succinct, characterization of Roman civilization in *The House of the Wolfings*. This is another reason why we feel that the struggle in *The Roots of the Mountains* is less real and near to us. Nevertheless, the cause of this is not to be sought so much in an alleged reluctance "to suffer imaginatively", as rather in lack of i n f o r m a t i o n about who these enemies were, and what was their background and culture.

These inadequacies or weaknesses thus seem to spring rather from objective causes such as lack of precisely defined historical knowledge available at the time Morris wrote, than from a change of purpose or compromise in Morris himself. What Morris consciously set out to do in this tale he has achieved. The main purpose is to give a picture of the differentiating of the various folk and of their coming together again as a stronger unit, and it is this realization of the exact atmosphere and cultural level of all these different communities which rings so authentically.

As usual in Morris's romances, the first chapter sets a very definite scene. We have not only the geographical characteristics of the neighbourhood of Burgdale, but also the social characteristics of the different communities — the Woodlanders, who are the far-off descendants of the society described in *The Wolfings*, somewhat lacking behind the development of the rest of their kin (the Silverdalers), but with valuable characteristics of their own.

Equally clearly is distinguished the community of the Shepherd-Folk, specialists in sheep and cattle breeding but obliged to acquire their corn from the Dalesmen. The society of the Dalesmen is on a higher economic level, gathered within a stone-built wall and with stone-built houses. The different families have reached different social levels. In the small town of the Burgdalers one house, the House of the Face, is the largest and the family which dwells in it supplies the Alderman.

Yet in spite of all this precise description we are warned that we must not take it all too literally: for the tale begins: "Once upon a time amidst the mountains and hills and falling streams of a fair land there was a town or thorp in a certain valley", and in all tales which begin in this way the m o r a l f a b l e must be of more importance than even the most minute and graphic description of a society. As in so many fairy tales, it is again a case of a young man who has at home all that his heart can desire, and yet longs for something else, he does not know what. Face-of-god, eldest son of the House of the Face, has been hunting in the woods, but instead of seeking his prey, has "fared as if I were seeking something, I know not what, that should fill up something

lacking to me, I know not what" (p. 19). Not even his love for the Bride, his betrothed, not even the warnings of old Stone-face against the dwarfs and other beings which are to be feared in the wood, nor the displeasure of his father, the Alderman, can keep him from rising early the next morning and setting out again for the wood, pressing onwards with a feeling of compulsion until he falls in with the strangers who are dwelling there, Folk-might and his sister, the Friend, who "seemed to him as if she were the fairest and noblest of all the Queens of ancient story". Face-of-god does not immediately learn the significance of this meeting but is bidden to return home and wait for a summons. His love for his betrothed has now changed, and she becomes aware of this and is sad.

We are still left in some doubt as to the identity of the people Face-of-god has met in the forest and he himself is no wiser. His emotions become even more complicated after the incident of the Yule play in the House of the Face, and the tales of Stone-face about the woods. Here we have the underlying note of some medieval romances and lyrics, rather than the wilder ballad-note of *The Wolfings*, as Stone-face tells of the mysterious woman he followed over the fells to the woods long ago, while ever since he has been

> A wanderer through the wood and up the fell, and up the high mountain, and up and up to the edges of the ice-river and the green caves of the ice-hills. A wanderer in spring, in summer, autumn and winter, with an empty heart and a burning never-satisfied desire... who hath seen many things, but hath never again seen that fair woman, or that lovely feast-hall. (p. 74—75)

Growing rumours of trouble and enemies surrounding the outlying communities of the Woodlanders disturb the peace of the Dale and strange enemies appear. A slain Woodlander is mourned in his own simple hall, with a song about the weaving of the Norns which recalls Morris's translations of the Eddic songs:

> Why sit ye bare in the spinning-room?
> Why weave ye naked at the loom?...
> We weave the Wolf and the gift of war
> From the men that were to the men that are.
> (p. 89—90)

Meanwhile the Bride has come to realize that Face-of-god no longer loves her, resigns herself, but speaks to him openly of it. Now Face-of-god receives the expected message from the wood and makes his way towards the Shadowy Vale, over the slopes of the pinewood. Shadowy Vale is an almost sunless valley in the mountains where the people of the Wolf — the folk of Folk-might and the Friend — have taken refuge from the Dusky Folk who have overrun Silverdale. The Friend hopes through Face-of-god to gain the help of the Burg-

dalers against the Dusky Folk. The apparently magical influence which drew Face-of-god to the wood is seen to have a real basis:

'But dost thou not remember, Gold-mane, how that one day last Haymonth, as ye were resting in the meadows in the cool of the evening, there came to you a minstrel that played to you on the fiddle, and therewith sang a song that melted all your hearts, and that this song told of the Wild-wood, and what was therein of desire and peril and beguiling and death, and love unto Death itself?' (p. 118)

Is it entirely true to say that the "romantic love themes" in this tale are "incompatible with the more serious intention of the whole"?[112] In the first place, the introduction of the two pairs of lovers is not intended merely to give an opportunity for "pleasurable reverie". C. S. Lewis has pointed out that Morris's frank delight in depicting the beauty of physical love has rendered him "immune from anti-romantic criticism . . . 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".[113] But Morris, apart from describing physical beauty, is interested in describing seriously real relationships between men and women. A special feature of Morris's treatment of love, above all in the prose romances, is that he shows us so many different kinds of love. We see Face-of-god pass almost imperceptibly from his older, placid love for his childhood's companion and betrothed, the Bride, to passionate longing for the Friend; while the Friend's love for him, though equally passionate, is governed by the need to think of what will best serve the kindred. The love of Folk-might for the Bride is simple, direct and unsubtle; and the Bride, almost broken-hearted by the realization that Face-of-god no longer loves her, seeks herself to make the breach definite, as she is willing to accept no less than his full love, while she says to him later, after she is betrothed to Folk-might: " 'Let us be happy still . . . now begrudging is gone. Belike the sundering came because we were so sure, and had no defence against the wearing of the days; even as it fareth with a folk that hath no foes.' " (p. 385)

Morris's picture of love here as an aspect of social life is the opposite of the romantic love which knows no laws or limits. In fact the lesson driven home again and again in all the romances is that the only kind of love which can thrive is love which recognizes duty; even though love is incalculable and cannot be commanded, yet it must not be indulged in regardless of other commitments. Purely sensual love, even when it is "hapless love", is always condemned in his romances. This is made eminently clear in the last romances, especially in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles,* but it is implicit in all the tales.

The working out of this four-sided love story, on which the plot of *The Roots of the Mountains* depends, is thus much closer to more enlightened ideas of love than those prevalent in Morris's own time. While love between man and

woman retains as much of his interest as in the early period of his literary work, his conception of love has developed from the days of *The Earthly Paradise* and even of *Sigurd the Volsung*. Certainly the heroes and heroines of the romances cannot be accused of "wanting to nurse a sham sorrow like the ridiculous characters in some of those queer old novels", which were so condemned by Ellen in *News from Nowhere*.[114]

Along with this attitude to love goes another of the prominent themes in most of the romances, the activity and influence of women. The type of active, independent, healthy, hard-working and far-seeing woman, "born to be the ransom of her Folk" (p. 17), had been foreshadowed in earlier work of Morris, even as early as *The Earthly Paradise* in some of his female characters such as Rhodope, Aslaug, even Psyche. Perhaps the socialist movement, by no means without its heroic female figures, had given Morris further data on which to exercise his invention. Behind the heroines of the late romances, as behind the heroines of Shaw's plays, one seems to see the shining galaxy of brilliant, heroic and sometimes tragic women of the eighties and nineties, whom no novelist, and in fact no biographer, has yet adequately portrayed.

The Roots of the Mountains is a much longer and more complicated romance than *The House of the Wolfings*, but this is of course appropriate to the more complicated state of society which Morris depicts. If the Folk-Mote of the Burgdalers is less monumentally impressive than that of the Wolfings, this is redressed by the remarkable chapter which tells of the Weaponshaw of the Men of Burgdale and their neighbours (Chapter XXXI). The scene is a much gayer and more colourful one than any in *The House of the Wolfings*.* Even more impressive are the further chapters on the combined Folk-Mote, where Morris gives still greater depth and detail to his picture of the different peoples, and indicates the different types of cultural development from the same origin, illustrated by the various songs or lays sung by the different folk.

The reunited communities set out together to attack the foe, and the book ends with the victory of the Burg- and Silverdalers, the resettlement of the Silverdalers, the return of the Burgdalers home, and the cementing of the alliance for the future. And yet the work of Face-of-god and the rest is not finished, for as the Friend reminds him:

> 'Shall thy Dale — our Dale — be free from all troubles within itself henceforward? Is there a wall built round it to keep out for ever storm, pestilence and famine, and the waywardness of its own folk?'
>
> 'So it is as thou sayest,' quoth Face-of-god, 'and to meet such troubles and overcome them, or to die in strife with them, this is a great part of a man's life.' (p. 391)

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* Indeed, in the whole of *The Wolfings* there is very little colour, because of course they had not yet mastered much subtlety in the processes of dyeing, as the later and wealthier Burgdalers — whose more primitive neighbours, the Shepherds, also know little use of colour.

With this suggestion of the "waywardness of its own folk" Morris half-acknowledges that there is something missing from his picture of the Silverdalers and Burgdalers. He was so much in sympathy with certain aspects of very early feudal society as leading to the development of the arts and crafts of the Middle Ages, that he has omitted to show the class conflicts within this society. Morris, after all, knows more about the development of society than did the authors of the ballads; and his suppression of this knowledge, however delicately done in this tale, removes something of life and vigour from the protagonists of his romance. When he later gave up a comparatively precise and definable historical background and resorted to fantasy, as in the last romances, his characters gain in vigour and their fate engages us more.

Of *The Story of the Glittering Plain* (1890, *Works*, Vol. XIV) Mackail writes that it is "notable as marking the full and unreserved return of the author to romance".[115] This dictum is in accordance with Mackail's tendency to emphasize at all costs the romantic and minimize the realistic element in Morris's work and thought, and he attributes very little importance to the romances at all. It is true that with the *Glittering Plain* Morris's romances cease to have an immediate historic or semi-historic reference; but this does not mean that they exclude reality. On the contrary, the *Glittering Plain*, just as much as the two previous tales, acclaims reality. As Thompson has pointed out, the hero Hallblithe significantly decides to leave the Acre of the Undying, the Earthly or Unearthly Paradise he has found, and return to the land of mortality.[116] And this land of mortality, however simple are the means used to call it up to our sight, is a real land of real men. Moreover, it is a land which can be set up against the "guile and lies and dreams" which Hallblithe comes to hate — and thus it also is a land its author can set up against the "humbug", the "damned greasy pot of scum", of which he felt so weary amid the revisionism and deviations of the latter days of the Socialist League.[117]

The Story of the Glittering Plain is without the firm historical or topographical background of the first two romances. With its atmosphere that is not quite ballad, not quite fairy-tale, we might imagine it as belonging to some missing literary type between the saga and the romance. The characters exist in the two-dimensional world of the medieval romance, they come and go as it seems good to them, bound only by the slightest of bonds to the necessities of daily life. Yet one bond ties them to reality — that of moral duty. 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.

The most striking feature of the two initial chapters in the land of Clevedon is their reticence and economy of means. Hallblithe's sister and the other maidens return from gathering sea-weed with the news that the Hostage has been stolen by sea-raiders. Hallblithe receives the news in silence, for "he knew that now he was the yokefellow of sorrow". His sister brings his sword and armour and he rides off. Certainly Morris was drawing on his knowledge of the saga method here, which presupposes acceptance of the part of the hearer of a certain code of behaviour, just as the scenery of the tale is markedly based on some of the scenes first noted in the Iceland *Journal*, and not only the Iceland scenery proper, but also that of the sea-voyage past the Faroe Islands, which so impressed him. This provided the basis for the voyage of Hallblithe with the mysterious stranger waiting for him off-shore.

It has at times been suggested that Morris was not particularly interested in character and that especially in the late romances there is a sameness of character. But one of the delights of these romances is precisely the way in which Morris with great economy of means suggests variety of character and especially development of character. We need not insist that this method is that of the sagas; but certainly he is considerably indebted to the sagas for the working out of his own method of indicating character. This is also bound up with his interest in the moral growth of his characters. Nor does he any longer confine himself to the comparatively narrow scale of characters, hero, heroine, god, goddess, evil king or queen, wise or evil counsellor, which predominate in his poetry, especially of the *Earthly Paradise* period. He is now more interested in characters of the "folk" type — we may instance Bull Shockhead in *The Well at the World's End* — and he is particularly interested in change or development in such characters. Perhaps the most original is the rather grim yet not unattractive Puny Fox, in the present tale, who perhaps owes something to such saga characters as Grettir the Strong (Morris had published his joint translation of the *Grettissaga* with Magnússon in 1869). During the journey Puny Fox speaks of Hallblithe's desire to ransome the Hostage, but "there was a mocking in his voice and his whole huge body, which made the sword of Hallblithe uneasy in his scabbard" (p. 221). The exchanges between the two are excellent for their sardonic humour; Puny Fox cries out:

> 'Crag-nester, I am one of seven brethren, and the smallest and weakest of them. Art thou not afraid?'
>
> 'No,' said Hallblithe, 'for the six others are not here. Wilt thou fight here in the boat, O Fox?'
>
> 'Nay,' said Fox, 'rather will we drink a cup of wine together.' (p. 222)

The toasts they call underline the characteristics of the two. Hallblithe drinks to his kindred of the Raven, which, with his love for the Hostage, is the main-

spring of his life. But Fox drinks to "The Treasure of the Sea! and the King that dieth not!"

The character of Fox shows how well Morris had mastered the art of presenting different levels of relevance without specific statement. In the first part of the tale, Fox is a semi-deity, who has power over the sea and elements and shares in their life. When they come into the haven in the cave and climb up to the shore of the island, "all that tumult of the wind had fallen, and the cloudless night was calm, and with a little light air blowing from the south and the landward". At the same time, Puny Fox changes too: "Therewithal was Fox done with his loud-voiced braggart mood, and spoke gently and peaceably like to a wayfarer, who hath business of his to look to as other men." (p. 224—5) But as we shall see, once Hallblithe has made his choice of returning to the world of men, Fox too becomes a human being, and himself makes a moral choice.

Hallblithe, now alone, comes at length to a long, low building, "not over shapely of fashion, a mere gabled heap of stones". Inside the hall is silence, though at last an old man lying in a "shut-bed" addresses him. The dream element now prevails and the hall which was a mere hovel becomes the scene of a great feast taken part in by men and women, and a masque or play is presented, followed by minstrelsy. The song which is sung is a summing-up of the motifs of the poem — the barren land, the warmth and company of the hall, the danger from the sea. The next morning Hallblithe is brought along with the old man aboard a ship which sets sail for the Land of the Undying King. The old man is impatient to reach the land, and sits up in bed, "as ghastly as a dead man dug up again". Hallblithe asks him if he is going to meet someone there.

'Some one?' said the elder; 'what one? Are they not all gone? burned, and drowned, and slain and died abed? Some one, young man? Yea, forsooth some one indeed! Yea, the great warrior of the Wasters of the Shore; the Sea-eagle who bore the sword and the torch and the terror of the Ravagers over the coal-blue sea. It is myself, MYSELF that I shall find on the Land of the Glittering Plain, O young lover!' (p. 245)

Now the action of the tale passes to the dreamland of the Glittering Plain, with its flowery meads and friendly people, where Hallblithe can hear no word of the Hostage. Sea-eagle appears with his youth renewed, but Hallblithe asks him what he has gained, if he cannot return to his own land and life. He remains determined to find the Hostage and to bring her back to real life, as

... the fair woman who shall lie in my bed, and bear me children, and stand by me in field and fold, by thwart and gunwale, before the bow and the spear, by the flickering of the cooking-fire, and amidst the blaze of the burning hall, and beside the balefire of the warrior of the Raven. (p. 256)

Hallblithe spends many months in this land, seeking for the Hostage, and is himself sought by the daughter of the Undying King. Though he knows he has incurred the anger of the King by refusing his daughter, he approaches him once more to ask his permission to leave the land. Here he is helped in his purpose by his memory of the kindred:

> ... On the way it came into his mind what the men of the kindred were doing that morning; and he had a vision of them as it were, and saw them yoking the oxen to the plough, and slowly going down the acres, as the shining iron drew the long furrow down the stubble-land, and the light haze hung about the elm-trees in the calm morning, and the smoke rose straight into the air from the roof of the kindred. And he said: 'What is this? am I death-doomed this morning that this sight cometh so clearly upon me amidst the falseness of this unchanging land?' (p. 272)

And when Sea-eagle asks him where he is going, he replies: " 'Away out of this land of lies ... I seek no dream ... but rather the end of dreams.' "

Hallblithe makes his choice to leave the land not once, but several times in the course of his adventures. It is a choice involving difficulties, which he must overcome. He must defy the wrath of the king; then bid farewell to Sea-eagle and his damsel; and worst of all, must encounter and overcome the difficulties and terrors of the wilderness. The chapter dealing with the wanderings in the mountains provides some of the most striking passages of prose description, which can be paralleled in the Iceland *Journal* but which have in the course of the twenty years or so that had elapsed, been transmuted and enriched in Morris's imagination:

> ... At last he looked, and saw that he was high up amongst the mountain-peaks: before him and on either hand was but a world of fallow stone rising ridge upon ridge like the waves of the wildest of the winter sea. The sun not far from its midmost shone down bright and hot on that wilderness; yet was there no sign that any man had ever been there since the beginning of the world, save that the path aforesaid seemed to lead onward down the stony slope. (p. 279)

The way in which Morris the writer carried out his own dictum: "Cast no least thing thou once hast loved away" is illustrated by the description of how Hallblithe led the three seekers back to daylight through the cavern (p. 285—6). This is based on Morris's own account of the visit to the great cave of Surtshellir.[118] At this crisis in the mountains Hallblithe is also cheered by the sight of two ravens, which remind him of his kindred, and bring into his memory "an old song of his people, amidst the rocks where few men had sung aforetime".

Hallblithe now, after these adventures — which we may take as a test of the firmness of his moral purpose — finds no difficulty in building his boat and setting sail from the Glittering Plain. Coming to the Isle of Ransom, he greets Puny Fox as his enemy. Puny Fox demurs: "But as to my being thine enemy,

a word or two may be said about that presently." However, he is willing to fight, but turns the fight to mockery by dragging out the rusty armour of his great-grandfather from his grave in the cliff. Hallblithe asks him: "Why didst thou bewray me, and lie to me, and lure me away from the quest of my beloved, and waste a whole year of my life?", and attacks him in rage, but Puny Fox unarms him and promises to help him, "For in my mind is it that I may be taken into another house, and another kindred, and, amongst them I shall be healed of much that might turn to ill." (p. 299—305)

After a masque-like fight in the hall of the Ravagers, which ends with Puny Fox rejecting lies and magic, the tale ends with the Ravagers handing over the Hostage and the return of Hallblithe, the Hostage and Puny Fox to Clevedon, where Puny Fox admits to the kindred of the Raven that he had stolen the Hostage and Hallblithe by sleight and as a reward for this admission he demands to be accepted as a member of their kindred:

'O chieftain, and all ye folk! if a boat-load of gold were not too much reward for bringing back the dead bodies of your friends, what reward shall he have who hath brought back their bodies and their souls therein?' (p. 323)

for acceptance by the kindred is the greatest possible reward.

We thus see that not only has Hallblithe made a moral choice in this tale, but so too has Puny Fox. Hallblithe has chosen mortal life and reality rather than immortal death and dreams; and Puny Fox has chosen honesty and comradeship in place of guile and sorcery.

The Story of the Glittering Plain is in many ways a projection of Morris's almost twenty-years-old experience of Iceland into the timeless world of romance and moral fable. *The Wood Beyond the World* (1894, *Works*, Vol. XVII) is set against a very different initial background — a "great and goodly city by the sea", which is a medieval trading centre. The device for getting the hero into the land of romance is not that of the dream (which Morris used in traditional medieval manner in *John Ball* and *News from Nowhere*) but the no less traditional device of the voyage and the storm which drives the ship off its course. Walter of the Goldings, a young son of a rich merchant, unhappily married, decides to leave his wife and set out to visit other lands. Twice as he is on the point of setting sail, he has a curious waking vision of three people who pass by: a hideous dwarf, a fair maiden wearing a ring on her ankle, and a tall stately woman. He sees them only for a "moment of time", but longs to see the two women again. During his travels he repeatedly sees this vision. In *The Roots of the Mountains* the longing desire of the hero to seek some unknown thing, which impels him to leave his home, is provided with a rational explanation; but in this tale, where Morris fully uses the convention of romance, the magic is quite frankly left as magic.

After the shipwreck on the shore of an almost uninhabited land, Walter sets out to find a distant mountain pass, where he believes he may find the "wondrous three" of his vision. After many days' journey in a stony waste in the mountains he comes to a fair land. Here he encounters the loathsome Dwarf and the Maid, who tells Walter that he is come into a land "perilous for any one that loveth aught of good". She is a thrall, bound to an evil mistress, who may or may not be a goddess, but certainly is a wanton, seeking for goodly young men, and her latest prey is the King's Son, who has now wearied of her and longs for the thrall. But like her mistress, he too is a cruel fool.

The maid warns Walter that in order to escape from this "death in life" they will both have to use guile, and therefore bids him swear along with her that whatever guile they must use will be forgiven when they are free to love each other. Morris's criteria of morality and of faithfulness as expressed in the romances are far from conventional. He stresses more strongly than a formal faithfulness such qualities as lack of self-seeking treachery, willingness to suffer for a principle if need be, the consistent placing of comrade or kindred above self, compassion, forbearance and courage. These are the qualities which the romances are designed to demonstrate.

Walter now reaches the palace of the Lady who endeavours to win his love by magic and deception. Eventually Walter and the Maid succeed in killing the three evil characters and escape. They spend their first night of freedom in the open air:

> . . . And they ate, both of them, in all love, and in good-liking of life, and were much strengthened by their supper. And when they were done, Walter eked his fire, both against the chill of the midnight and dawning, and for a guard against wild beasts, and by that time night was come, and the moon arisen. Then the Maid drew up to the fire, and turned to Walter and spake. (p. 85)

The motif of the healing power of nature and living on the land becomes prominent first in this romance. It has doubtless a certain literary background in Thoreau and perhaps Edward Carpenter, but even more so it is an expression of Morris's own delight in outdoor life, for example the hunting and cooking exploits which he relates proudly in his Iceland *Journal*, the fishing he so loved at Kelmscott.

The maid now tells Walter of her past life as a child " 'in a great and a foul city' ", where " 'there are a many folk about me, and they foul, and greedy, and hard; and my spirit is fierce, but my body feeble; and I am set to tasks that I would not do, by them that are unwiser than I' ", and she has no friend but an old woman who " 'telleth me sweet tales of other life, wherein all is high and goodly, or at the least valiant and doughty, and she setteth hope in my heart and learneth me, and maketh me to know much . . .' " (p. 86). She was then stolen by the Dwarf for his mistress, who at first behaved almost kindly

to her, but then " 'came to know that I also had some of the wisdom whereby she lived her queenly life' ". and began to persecute her until Walter's arrival and the subsequent events.

Walter and the Maid must still pass through the country of the primitive people of the Bears, and the Maid pretends to be their goddess and promises them rain. The flowers in which she covers herself by magic regain their freshness and the rough, simple Bears conclude this passage of fairy-tale fantasy by conducting the Maid to the entrance of the pass through the mountains by which they must go. Walter here loses her in a storm, and begins to fear that she is indeed a fairy. At length the storm ceases and he makes his way down to the valley where he falls asleep. He wakes to find it broad day, and the Maid appears out of a thicket. We are now back to the real world and the importance of ordinary human things. The Maid asks him how he has sped:

'Ill, ill,' said he.

'What ails thee?' she said.

'Hunger,' he said, 'and longing for thee.'

'Well,' she said, 'me thou hast; there is one ill quenched; take my hand, and we will see to the other one,'

and she leads him to a fire by the side of the stream where two trout are waiting to be cooked.

They now leave the wilderness and come to the walls of a great city. The Maid looks to it for protection, but Walter warns her that " 'there be evil things in yonder city also, though they be not fays nor devils, or it is like to no city that I wot of. And in every city shall foes grow up to us without rhyme or reason, and life therein shall be tangled unto us'." But the Maid argues that "manly might and valiancy", which were of no use in the wilderness, where they needed guile and wizardry, can be tested in the city. So Walter agrees to go there. When they arrive in the City of Stark-wall they are acclaimed as King and Queen. The concluding chapters with their panoply of kingship and medieval chivalric atmosphere do not however form a completely satisfactory conclusion after the magic of the wilderness and the simple joys of the woodland. Even the Maid's uneasiness at having deceived the Bears, and her further cares for their welfare, do not round off the tale as inevitably as Morris usually did in the romances.

The Wood Beyond the World certainly seems to have some weaknesses which are overcome in his later two romances. The cause of these weaknesses would seem to be an incomplete working out of the terms of reference, the precise points at which the romance is to touch real life. A tale of imagination may be as fantastic as it chooses, but we must be clear about just how and where it has relevance to life. This is what Morris manages so skilfully in his greatest prose tales, whether historical, semi-historical, utopian or fantastic. But *The Wood*

Beyond the World, though it has won the praise of some critics, seems to fall short of perfection in this respect. There are discrepancies or at least disharmonies between the original realistic city background, the magic land, the not completely successful Bears (we may compare them with the Shepherds or the Bulls in *The Well at the World's End* and the very short but perfect "entry" of the shepherd theme near the end of *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*) and the rather unreal kingdom where Walter becomes king. For perfection we should have had some sort of moral reference to Walter's first wife. Perhaps Morris originally intended to develop this motif, but as the tale stands the hero might as well have left home for some other reason. This romance is perhaps most interesting as showing the first form of motifs which are repeated with greater effect in later tales: the wise maiden who saves her lover; the stupidity, ugliness and selfishness of vice and evil; the possibility of meeting guile with guile but remaining untouched by it; the healing power of nature and the open air; the need to keep stubbornly to the path once chosen.

It was of *The Wood Beyond the World* that Morris wrote his letter of protest to *The Spectator:*

> 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, 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 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 that great master of allegory, Bunyan.[119]

Yet there was more to the romances than the mere telling of a tale. *The Wood Beyond the World* went through a preliminary stage, when a similiar plot was treated in a rejected fragment, called *The King's Son and the Carle's Son.* Traces of this can still be seen in the rather unsatisfactory and incomplete figure of the King's Son in the finished romance. But if the romance was a mere telling of a tale, why should one way of telling it be more satisfactory to the author than the other? May Morris, in comparing the two versions, speaks of the greater sense of reality in the finished form,[120] and surely this was what Morris was aiming for in his romances.

The *Glittering Plain* was short enough to retain complete unity of tone and feeling from beginning to end without any great complication of character or incident. *The Wood Beyond the World* remains somewhat less than completely satisfactory, in spite of the vividly realistic touches of the introduction and of the journey of the Maid and Walter through the wilderness. Although this is a tale of magic and love, Morris often seems to be hankering after something else, to be seeking for the method and form which he brought to perfection in *The Well at the World's End* and *The Water of the Wondrous Isles,* and which we might perhaps term the moral romance or r o m a n c e - m o r a l i t y. Frag-

ments of the original theme of the King's Son and the Carle's Son still seem to keep cropping up without being completely absorbed. Lacking the ballad-like conciseness of the *Glittering Plain,* it has not yet attained the wide canvas of the two later romances, and not all the elements quite slip into place. Above all the conclusion seems out of keeping and the character of the Maid is not fully developed. She remains a not very satisfactory compromise between the Hall-Sun and Birdalone, and just as she does not succeed very convincingly in explaining her origins, so her sudden concern for the Bears at the end of her tale is rather surprising.

Since Morris had already started *The Well at the World's End* in 1892, leaving it and going back to it again, and as that tale is so much more closely knit together by an inner logic, we may suppose that he was meanwhile learning by his attempts at shaping *The Wood Beyond the World.* This latter was really his first, not altogether successful longer essay in this new form of romance, which in his own words has "nothing didactic about it", and yet, without being an allegory, must impose some pattern on reality if it is to be a work of art at all. Though not allegories in the strict medieval or Renaissance sense, the romances do more than tell us a tale pure and simple: the story they all tell is that of the struggle to escape from the world of lies and guile, separation and alienation into a world of truth, fulfilment and companionship. But the next romance which Morris published, *Child Christopher,* was also still at the experimental stage, when the author simply made "a new story for himself" out of old material.

Child Christopher (1895, *Works,* Vol. XVII) is a tale based on the Middle English romance of *Havelok the Dane.* Though Morris has considerably changed the plot and environment of the tale, nevertheless there remain weaknesses in this work which can probably be attributed to its close relationship to the medieval courtly romance. The moral theme is not so strong, there is no very strongly marked choice or decision, the characters on the whole are less clearly cut, and the atmosphere is more prevalently that of medieval chivalry than in any of the other romances of Morris.

The story begins in the kingdom of Oakenrealm where the rightful king is an infant and the realm ruled by the usurper, Marshal Rolf. The child, Christopher, is sent to be brought up in a house in the wood near the southern border between Oakenrealm and Meadham.* After twelve years the Marshal sends word that he no longer wants to hear of the boy.

South of Oakenrealm through the forest is Meadham, where the king has also died and left a young daughter. Earl Geoffrey, to whom the kingdom is

* The words of C. S. Lewis especially apply to this romance: "Other stories have only scenery: his have geography." (*Rehabilitations,* 1939, quoted Munby, loc. cit. n. 65.)

entrusted, behaves the same way as Rolf. The child Goldilind is sent to the northern border to the Castle of Greenharbour on the edge of the forest, under the care of Dame Elinor, a shrewish elderly woman who reminds us of the witch-wives in other romances. She is however without the magic powers of the witches, and also without the educative significance for the heroine that the witch-wives have in *The Well At the World's End* and *The Water of the Wondrous Isles.*

In this way the hero and heroine grow up, till Christopher is "such an youngling as most might have been in the world, had not men's malice been, and the mischief of grudging and the marring of grasping". (p. 147) He is helped by the outlaw Jack of the Tofts. The outlaws lead a kind of patriarchal life — rather like a border clan — in the land lying between the two countries. Jack is the most vivid character in the tale: "a man, past middle age, tall, wide-shouldered and thin-flanked, with a short peaked beard and close-cut grizzled hair; he was high of cheek bones, thin-faced, with grey eyes, both big and gentle-looking," (p. 159) and lives with his seven sons and his clan in their Hall between the two tofts. With three of the clan, Gilbert, David and Joanna, Christopher leads an idyllic woodland life in a wooden hall on a grass knoll by a small river.

Meanwhile Goldilind is constantly punished by Dame Elinor. One day she escapes, and stealing a horse, she rides away in the early morning to the north. This is perhaps the most significant piece of initiative of any of the characters in the tale, for by leaving her prison Goldilind — who in some ways is an early sketch for Ursula and Birdalone — first begins to free herself from her courtly prejudices and becomes aware of other more important values. On her travels, which take her through some of the most delightful woodland and pastoral scenery ever described by Morris, she meets Christopher, but being still bound by courtly prejudice she looks down on him as a churl. The two are captured by men-at-arms from Greenharbour. Goldilind defies Earl Geoffrey, saying: "'But now I am overcome, and since I know that I must die, I have now no fear . . . And now I tell thee I repent it, that I have asked grace of a graceless face.'" (p. 190) This last phrase is only one of several recalling the Border Ballads (within a few pages we have "gangrel churl", and a proverb, "Many a ferly fares to the fair-eyed") which illustrate how Morris was blending romance and ballad together. The Earl now conceives the plan of wedding Goldilind to Christopher and thus getting rid of them both. Goldilind's feelings are mingled. She loves Christopher, but feels that a match with such a "gangrel churl" is a degradation. Nevertheless, to save his life, she agrees, and the two are turned out of the castle to seek their fortune in the wood.

Goldilind's angry mood and discontent vanish when in the forest they change into their own garments and she acknowledges her love for Christopher. They

return to the Tofts, where Goldilind's doubts about Christopher's position are now to be resolved. At a dramatic evening gathering in the hall of the outlaws, Jack of the Tofts comes in at the head of his armed men and calls: "Men in this hall, I bear you tidings. The King of Oakenrealm is among us to-night!" Christopher at first thinks it a jest, but the outlaws carry out the old ritual of raising him as their war-leader on their shields, and a mote of the clan is held on the top of one of the tofts, before they set out to meet the force of the usurper. The description of the fighting in this tale is however rather dull and cannot be compared to the interest of the conflicts in *The Well at the World's End.* Christopher becomes King and Jack of the Tofts his main adviser: "Wise was his counsel, and there was no greed in him, and yet he wotted of greed and guile in others, and warned the King thereof when he saw it, and the tyrants were brought low, and no poor and simple man had need to thieve. As for Christopher, he loved better to give than to take; and the grief and sorrow of folk irked him sorely; it was to him as if he had gotten a wound when he saw so much as one unhappy face in a day; and all folk loved him . . ." (p. 254)

In spite of the insistence on Child Christopher as the beloved ruler, and in spite of the vividly rendered landscape background, the conception of this tale is much weaker than that of the other romances. There is not the same rendering of the q u a l i t y of life — apart from the woodland life of the Tofts community, which is a mere interlude. The limitations of his plot obliged Morris to begin and end in feudal medieval kingdoms. But as Morris no longer believed that kings and queens could represent life as it should be lived, so both beginning and conclusion are somewhat lacking in the conviction of the central part. The personality and background of Jack of the Tofts, the self-reliant heroism of Christopher, the gradual discovery by Goldilind of what is valuable in life, the woodland scenes — these are the most attractive and interesting elements in the tale. But we have little of the deep-felt emotion of *The House of the Wolfings* or the suspense of *The Well at the World's End.*

The Well at the World's End, begun in 1892 and carried on for such a length of time that it came to be referred to in Morris's circle as the "Interminable", was published in 1896 (Works, Vol. XVIII and XIX). It is based on yet another medieval convention — the quest. But this quest is not a mystic seeking for a mystic solution: the search for the legendary Well of long life and happiness is turned into a tale of the acquiring of self-knowledge and self-discipline and the return from the marvels of the world to the simplicity and content of home. Like *John Ball* and *News from Nowhere,* it starts and ends with familiar surroundings — but here, not to protest against them, as in the former two tales, but to give the deepest expression to the author's profound love of his home.

May Morris has paid eloquent tribute to "the passion for the soil and loving observation of familiar country mingled with marvels beyond sea", and points out that the King's sons "start on their adventures from the very door of Kelmscott Manor transformed into the palace of a simple-living kinglet".[121] The intimately described scenery and topography of the earlier part of the tale is that of the country about Kelmscott, while of all Morris's books this is perhaps the richest in memories of towns and countries seen, from the centre of Europe to the wilds of Iceland.

Traces of a further literary influence may perhaps be found in *The Well at the World's End,* as well as in some of the other romances. A. L. Morton has pointed out that Richard Jefferies' fantastic *After London,* which impressed Morris in 1885 (it was published in 1884) was undoubtedly "among the influences that went to the final shaping of" *News from Nowhere.*[122] But this strange book, of which Morris said "absurd hopes curled round my heart as I read it", must also be considered as one of those works which Morris read, then "shut the book", and used afterwards in his own time and his own way in building up the fabric of his romances. Not only various elements in *After London* — the hero's preparation for a voyage, storms, shipwrecks, landing on a mysterious island, primitive shepherd folk who succour the hero, the separation of heroine and hero by an immense forest — but their very manner of presentation, appear again and again in Morris's romances. "The woodlands creep back, river valleys become lakes or swamps, remnants of population survive here and there in tiny principalities and city states, all but the crudest and most necessary arts and crafts have vanished, corruption, serfdom and endless petty warfare are universal" — Morton's description[123] of the scene of *After London* could apply perfectly to much of *The Well at the World's End.* Above all the mood of f a m i l i a r i t y i n s t r a n g e n e s s, perseverance of admired moral qualities and preoccupations in changed, fantastic circumstances — all these are elements in *After London,* which occur in several of the romances, notably in *The Wood Beyond the World, The Well at the World's End,* and *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* — transmuted, of course, from the underlying pessimism of Jefferies to serve the reasoned optimism of Morris. Very much more of course went to the making of the romances than any literary "source", yet they are fundamentally an expression of the "absurd hopes" for the regeneration of civilization, or as Morris wrote shortly after reading *After London:* "How often it consoles me to think of barbarism once more flooding the world, and, real feelings and passions, however rudimentary, taking the place of our wretched hypocrisies. With this thought in my mind all the history of the past is lighted up and lives again to me."[124] Morris may quite have forgotten Jefferies by the time he wrote the romances, but certainly *After London* played a part as the suggestive background of some of that atmo-

sphere of heightened reality blended with fantasy which at first sight seems so completely personal to Morris.

The tale begins in "the medieval manor-house which doubtless stood once on the site of our home",[125] now seen as the king's hall of the little "kingdom" of Upmeads; and when we travel south from Kelmscott over the downs, instead of being brought up short by the English Channel, we can go on and on, meeting with adventure after adventure, until at length we reach the Well at the World's End.*

King Peter has four sons, who are longing to see the world, but Ralph the youngest has to stay at home. Nevertheless, without his parents' knowledge he arms himself and rides over the river to the south to the town where he visits the merchant Clement Chapman, whose wife Dame Katherine is Ralph's godmother and loves him very dearly. When she hears he is going to see the world, she gives him a present of a necklace, with the words that it will bring him as much good luck as if he had drunk of the Well at the World's End. This is the first time that Ralph has heard of the Well, and his "gossip" says that "it saveth from weariness and wounding and sickness and it winneth love from all, and maybe life everlasting". Her husband says he has heard it is beyond the Dry Tree.

The relationship between Dame Katherine and her husband, who knows she loves Ralph and suffers at his going, is drawn very delicately in a few words of Clement's after Ralph's departure:

'Sweetheart, it availeth nought; when thou wert young and exceeding fair, he was but a little babe, and thou wert looking in those days to have babes of thine own; and then it was too soon: and now that he is such a beauteous young man, and a king's son withal, and thou art wedded to a careful carle of no weak heart, and thou thyself art more than two-score years old, it is too late . . . Let it rest there, sweetheart! let it rest there! It may be a year or twain before thou seest him again: and then belike he shall be come back with some woman whom he loves better than any other; and who knows but in a way he may deem himself our son . . .' (p. 17)

Ralph rides off south, meeting with a series of adventures, some of a normal character, others of strange and sinister meaning. He crosses the downland, lovingly described by Morris, with its

. . . long line of hills, one rising behind the other like the waves of a somewhat quiet sea: no trees thereon, nor houses that he might see thence: nought but a green road that went waving up and down before him greener than the main face of the slopes.

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* A similar imaginative transfer takes place in *After London*. David Garnett has pointed out that the characters in *After London* are really those of *Bevis*, and the great lake which Jefferies imagines as stretching across England from the Severn to the Thames, is "nothing more nor less than the reservoir at Coate". cf. Introduction to Everyman's Library edition of *After London*, 1939, p. xiii.

He looked at it all for a minute or two as the south-west wind went past his ears and played a strange tune on the innumerable stems of the bents and the hard-stalked blossoms, to which the bees sang counterpoint. Then the heart arose within him, and he drew his sword from the scabbard, and waved it about his head, and shook it toward the south, and cried out, 'Now, welcome world, and be thou blessed from one end to the other, from the ocean sea to the uttermost mountains!' (p. 20)

When Ralph meets in with some shepherds, he greets them in a friendly way and sits and talks and drinks with them. He swears that if he becomes a lord, he will do well for them. As in the basic fairy tale of the sons setting out on their travels, here the apparently weak and unimportant shepherds give the youngest son a watchword to use if he is in need on his way back.

Ralph now comes to the Abbey town of Higham on the Feast of St. John's Eve. He refuses the offer of service with the wealthy Abbot: "'I wot not that I am come forth to seek a master.'" Resisting the arguments of a monk that his determination to see the world will most likely make him unhappy, he rejects the feudal Church as master and rides on out of the town.

On the way he stops at a tavern in the little village of Bourton Abbas, where he is served by a maiden who looks very sad, and tells him that her "very earthly love and speech-friend" has not returned from a journey through the Wood Perilous, though his horse has come back covered with blood. The contriving of this encounter is interesting for the down-to-earth and matter-of-fact relationship which is established between Ralph and the maiden. This is the damsel who later becomes his companion in the quest and finally his dearest love, but their first meeting is marked by no very dramatic emotion on the part of Ralph and the maiden is scarcely described. Her beauty grows as Ralph comes to know her. He is first really interested in her when she cries: "'O if I might but drink a draught from the Well at the World's End!'"

After various further adventures including his encounter with the Men of the Dry Tree and his first meeting with the beautiful bejewelled lady who is later to cause his undoing, Ralph arrives at the Burg of the Four Friths, a prosperous feudal town of merchants and lords, whose policy of conquering other states is precisely worked out:

'Such of their wealth as we have a mind to, we can have now at the cost of a battle or two, begun one hour and ended the next: were we their masters sitting down amidst of their hatred, and amidst of their plotting, yea, and in the very place where that were the hottest and thickest, the battle would be to begin at every sun's uprising, nor would it be ended at any sunset... The slaying of a Wheat-wearer is to us a lighter matter than the smiting of a rabbit or a fowmart.' (p. 82)

Its political strategy is not the only respect in which the Burg somewhat resembles Victorian England, for the citizen warns Ralph not to ask too many questions: "'For here is the stranger looked upon with doubt, if he neither will take the wages of the Burg for battle, nor hath aught to sell.'" (p. 82)

Now follow various Malory-like adventures in the forest where the ambiguity of the Lady's character appears in a four-sided drama which is played out between the Knight of the Sun, a friar, Ralph and the Lady, at the conclusion of which Ralph asks the Lady if she is good or evil, and she replies: "'How shall I tell thee of myself, when, whatever I say, thou shalt believe every word I tell thee?'" (p. 145) They go on through the forest, happy in the fulfilment of their love, and the Lady tells the long tale of her adventures. In the course of these, she herself has sought the Well at the World's End, to which she now wishes to journey with Ralph. Earlier, she had befriended the maiden from Bourton Abbas and sent her too on the way to the Well, saying of her: "'She was so sweet and yet with a kind of pith in her both of soul and body, and wise withal and quiet, that I feared her, though I loved her; yea and still do: for I deem her better than me, and meeter for thee and thy love than I be.'" (p. 195)

Ralph and the Lady now come to a cliff by the side of a stream where they prepare to spend the night in a cave. They play happily, as it were, at housekeeping together, and Ralph goes off to catch some game for supper. But when he comes back, he finds the Lady attacked and slain by the Knight of the Sun, and himself kills the knight. Thus at the moment of greatest happiness and apparent security, Ralph loses his beloved. He is in despair, but nevertheless feels impelled to continue, and "did what he might to seem like other folk, that he might nurse his grief in his own heart as far asunder from other men as might be". (p. 209) His state of mind is one of utter desolation, and yet in the course of his further adventures the goodness of life cannot be denied as it reasserts itself. After Ralph has a vision both of his dead Lady and of the Maiden, he wakes in the early morning in Whitwall,

> ... And there was stir in the streets and the voice of men, and the scent of fresh herbs and worts and fruits; for it was market-day, and the country-folk were early afoot, that they might array their wares timely in the market-place. (p. 220)

A similar moment of wakening from trouble to hope, quickened by the ordinary working life of the early morning going on round about, is quoted by Thompson from *The Water of the Wondrous Isles,*[126] as an instance of the freshness, the continuity of life, which underlies the romances.

Having heard that the Maiden has been captured to be sold to the Lord of Utterbol, Ralph sets out to seek her. A newcomer now offers to lead him to Utterbol; he is a eunuch, Morfinn the Minstrel, who has a pass from the Lord of Utterbol, whom he fears. This strange character is perhaps without parallel in the work of Morris. It may be that he, and even his name, are far off reminiscences of Peacock — who, according to Mackail, was a favourite author of Morris's.[127] Peacock's romance-like novels, especially *Maid Marian* and *The*

Misfortunes of Elphin, have more than one feature in common with Morris's romances.

Now Ralph begins to see beyond the heath a cloud which never changes. This is the highest peak of the mountains called the Wall of the World. They come to a field with a pavilion pitched, where Ralph finds the Lord of Utterbol, who is completely evil and at the same time completely contemptible. When Ralph asks the old counsellor why the Goldburg folk suffer all the evil of their masters, he is told they cannot help themselves: the robbers can always raise enough men to fight, and the Goldburg folk are not good fighters. Yet even the Lord of Utterbol would not like to see Goldburg destroyed: "'All we deem that when Goldburg shall fall, the world shall change, so that living therein shall be hard to them that have not drunk of the Well at the World's End.'" In other words, Goldburg is a wealthy city whose inhabitants prefer to endure their imperfect lives because they fear to lose what they imagine to be the advantages of wealth; and not having drunk of the Well, they can imagine no other values in life but wealth. They f e a r c h a n g e much as the English workers of the eighties and nineties whom Morris could not persuade to believe in socialism, or to wake up to destroy their own tyrants.

The Lord of Utterbol, though so dreaded, is himself terrified of his wife, to whom he gives Ralph as a thrall. She, however, like all women, loves Ralph and seeks to gain his love by the help of her servant Agatha. Her love gives her some insight into her own personality and she sees herself as coarse and little-minded, foolish, empty-hearted and unclean. Ralph escapes, hoping to find the Sage who knows of the way to the Well, and hoping later to help the Maiden, whom he knows to be in Utterbol.

Ralph becomes involved in the plot of the Lady to gain his love, and when he is enlightened by Agatha he is angry, for "he called to mind he had been led hither and thither on other folk's errands ever since he left Upmeads". (II, p. 4) With the closer approach of his goal, Ralph's determination to reach it becomes clearer and stronger.

Now he rides on towards the mountains, seeing "from time to time the huge wall of the mountains rising up into the air like a great black cloud that would swallow up the sky, and though the sight was terrible, yet it gladdened him, since he knew that he was on the right way". (II, p. 9) In the pine-forest in the night he meets the Maiden, whose name is Ursula, and the two go on in friendship. At length they meet the Sage, who welcomes them, as one "who hath found what ye seek, but hath put aside the gifts which ye shall gain; and who belike shall remember what ye shall forget". (II, p. 26) He teaches them the way to the Well, and at last they come within close sight of the mountains,

which now looked so huge that they seemed to fill all the world save the ground whereon they stood. Cloudless was the day, and the air clean and sweet, and every nook and cranny

was clear to behold from where they stood: there were great jutting nesses with straight-walled burgs at their topmost, and pyramids and pinnacles that no hand of man had fashioned, and awful clefts like long streets in the city of the giants who wrought the world, and high above all the undying snow that looked as if the sky had come down on to the mountains and they were upholding it as a roof. (II, p. 36)

As they stand and look at it, the Sage warns them that a dangerous journey lies before them across the lava sea, and also warns them:

'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. Therefore I bid you be no tyrants or builders of cities for merchants and usurers and warriors and thralls... But rather I bid you to live in peace and patience without fear or hatred, and to succour the oppressed and love the lovely, and to be the friends of men, so that when ye are dead at last, men may say of you, they brought down Heaven to the Earth for a little while.' (II, p. 36)

They spend the winter in a valley and Ralph comes to realize that he loves Ursula. When messengers come in the spring from the Innocent Folk, a primitive stone-age people, they are wed according to their rites. The Folk guide them across a terrible waste for many days, and before they leave them Ralph asks why they do not wish to seek the Well. They reply that they have all they want, but admit it is different for the strangers:

'...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.' (p. 66)

The primitive society of the Innocent Folk has not yet the driving power of the higher and more complicated form of society which alone can lead mankind to still higher things.

Ursula and Ralph cross the waterless desert, finding on the way many dead and wind-dried bodies of those who have tried to find the Well and have failed. They come to a stony amphitheatre, filled with men and women, all dead, and in the midst a "huge and monstrous tree... Leafless... and lacking of twigs", standing in the centre of a pool of clear water, its branches hung with shields, swords and other weapons. This is the Dry Tree. Ralph would quench his thirst, but Ursula with her greater wisdom saves him from drinking the poisoned water. The sense of horror and devastation given by this picture of those who have failed to reach their desire is exceedingly powerful and provides a strong artistic

contrast to the concluding moment of the quest when the two come to the mountain top and see before them the blue landless sea. In the morning, when the receding tide has left the black sand bare, they climb down the rocky stair to a basin enclosing a spring. This is the Well of their quest, and it is engraved with the warning to drink only if they are strong enough in desire to bear length of days. Ursula and Ralph drink. Ralph calling a health "To the Earth, and the World of Menfolk!"

Having achieved their purpose, they now set out on the road home, encountering those who have helped them and learning what has happened to them. The wise old man Richard congratulates Ralph on having won Ursula: " 'For now hast thou wedded into the World of living men, and not to a dream of the Land of Fairy.' " (II, p. 137)

They decide to hasten on to Upmeads as they have no news of it and fear it may have been attacked by enemies. Taking the shortest way, they come to the cave and the stream where the Lady of Abundance was murdered.

> Hard looked Ralph on the stream, but howsoever his heart might ache with the memory of that passed grief, like as the body aches with the bruise of yesterday's blow, yet he changed countenance but little, and in his voice was the same cheery sound. But Ursula noted him, and how his eyes wandered, and how little he heeded the words of the others, and she knew what ailed him, for long ago he had told her all that tale, and so now her heart was troubled, and she looked on him and was silent. (p. 145)

Upmeads has meanwhile been attacked by the men of the Burg, so Ralph gains the support of the Men of the Dry Tree and of the Shepherds, who thus redeem their pledge to help him. Ursula says to Ralph's father and mother about her kindred:

> 'We be come of the Geirings of old time: it may be that the spear is broken, and the banner torn; but we forget not our forefathers, though we labour afield, and the barons and the earls call us churls. It is told amongst us that word is but another way of saying earl, and that it meaneth a man.' (II, p. 214)

The Burgers laugh to scorn the army which comes against them: " 'Ye broken reivers of the Dry Tree, ye silly shepherds of silly sheep, ye weavers and apprentices of Wulstead!' " (II, p. 230) But they are routed by Ralph and his men, and Ralph and Ursula take their place as rulers of Upmeads, where they lived long and happily, were much loved, and died on the same day.

The background of *The Well at the World's End* is a rich and changing fabric of men and cities, towns and communities, each highly individual, providing more variety than any other of the romances. The adventure of the finding of the Well never loses interest, even after the climax, because the validity of the Well has to be tested in r e a l l i f e, by the return home. The moral theme underlying the search for the Well is that of man's finding of his true self,

the rejection of fairy love for the world of living men. The tale teaches us that to reach the Well at the World's End — the secret of earthly happiness — we must dare many dangers and overcome many difficulties; and in the end, after all our adventures and trials, we must return home to everyday life in order to reach the fulfilment promised by the Well.

Before dealing with Morris's last completely finished romance, we may mention briefly the tale of *The Sundering Flood,* which is formally complete, but was unrevised and has obvious inconsistencies and gaps which May Morris has drawn attention to in her Introduction to the volume in the *Collected Works.* The last pages of this tale were dictated as Morris's life was reaching its close, and it was published posthumously in 1897 (*Works,* Vol. XXI).

The central idea, May Morris tells us, was taken from a modern Icelandic novel — that of two lovers who grow up parted by an impassable river. This idea and the description of the river are among the best things in the tale; the scenic description here however does not represent the most fruitful use of his Icelandic travels — there are more impressive instances of this in other romances, especially in the *Glittering Plain* and *The Well at the World's End.* The character of the young Osberne, the details of his childhood, are attractive, and, while they owe much to saga material, put this to original use. The character of Elfhild is however rather slightly dealt with and the pattern of the plot is not satisfactorily worked out. The lovers meet before we hear the tale of Elfhild and the carline, so that this comes as something of an anticlimax. The central theme of the parted lovers and their eventual coming together is too much overloaded by incidents of plot which have really little to do with this theme. Nevertheless there is much that is interesting, especially in the early pages. The fact that this tale, dramatic in its conception of the lonely boy who works out his own way to become a hero, is not satisfactory without the revision which its author did not live to carry out, must certainly be taken as negative evidence of the fact that Morris did work hard at his best romances. The finest of the romances are those where most care has been taken to work out the interpretation of moral theme, character, incident and landscape. The last of the romances which can be regarded as finished is *The Water of the Wondrous Isles.*

Though *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* (1897, *Works,* Vol. XX) was not completely revised by Morris, the few discrepancies or verbal repetitions referred to by May Morris are not such as to affect the quality of the work. Originally begun in verse, then tried in prose and verse, it was finaly written entirely in prose.[128]

Birdalone, the heroine of this tale, is perhaps the most clearly envisaged

of all the persons of the romances and the one of whom we know most. The tale is told almost entirely from her "point of view", through her consciousness, rather than as a straight narrative, and we share her thoughts and dreams, joys and apprehensions. The first few chapters, however, are a kind of induction, telling of the "walled cheaping-town hight Utterhay, which was builded in a bight of the land a little off the great highway which went from over the mountains to the sea" (p. 1). In this tale, Morris has attained the greatest mastery in telling us precisely what we need to know about a place, person or situation, so that the story moves forward from one vivid moment to another, without delay or monotony. Thompson has pointed out that the form of the tale is "almost like a perfect figure of eight".[129] It is the most logically formed and most carefully completed of the tales, and as Munby points out "Morris' ideal of womanhood and of woman's place in society blossoms here".[130]

Utterhay is on the borders of Evilshaw, a wood which all men dread and avoid. One day a woman, "tall, and strong of aspect, of some thirty winters by seeming, black-haired, hook-nosed and hawk-eyed, not so fair to look on as masterful and proud" (p. 1—2), arrives in the market-place. She persuades a poor townswoman to take her home for payment, sends her for food, and meanwhile steals her little daughter and makes off for the wood:

> And whatsoever might be told concerning the creatures that other folk had met in Evilshaw, of her it must needs be said that therein she happened on nought worser than herself. (p. 5)

She brings the child to a clearing on the shore of a great water, where they live in a little cottage. Though this is the place of Birdalone's captivity, and the witch is horrible, yet the place itself is beautiful and becomes in the end the scene of Birdalone's greatest happiness. It is a kind of enchanted Innisfree which draws Birdalone back again at the end of all her wanderings.

The next day the child is frightened because the witch-wife has changed her appearance: still "stark and tall", she now has "golden-red hair flowing down from her head; eyes of hazel colour, long and not well-opened, but narrow and sly. High of cheek-bones she was, long-chinned and thin-lipped; her skin was fine and white, but without ruddiness; flat-breasted she was, and narrow-hipped" (p. 7). This is her real shape, but she is afraid to enter the wood without changing it.

The child is fed well but otherwise neglected till she is old enough for work:

> She learned of the ways and the wont of all the creatures round about her, and the very grass and flowers were friends to her, and she made tales of them in her mind; and the wild things feared her in no wise, and the fowl would come to her hand, and play with her and love her. A lovely child she was, rosy and strong, and as merry as the birds on the bough; and had she trouble, for whiles she came across some ugly mood of the witch-wife, she bore it all as lightly as they. (p. 8)

This is the development of a motif hinted at in Goldilind, treated more explicitly in the upbringing of Ralph's Lady of Abundance — the evil of the mistress has no power to mar the happiness of the innocent child.

As she grows, the witch sets her to work about the house and fields. She is cruel to her and Birdalone often goes to the wood:

> Amidst all this she lived not unmerrily; for the earth was her friend, and solaced her when she had suffered aught: withal she was soon grown hardy as well as strong; and evil she could thole, nor let it burden her with misery. (p. 9)

As she grows up, she begins to see "that her mistress was indeed wicked, and that in the bonds of that wickedness was she bound". She is poorly clad, and when she asks the witch-wife for better clothing she is given cloth to sew and embroider. One day as she sits sewing in the wood, at "the point of high noon", she is visited by her double, who is the wood-nymph or goddess Habundia, and becomes her friend and counsellor.

Among the freshest and loveliest descriptions in the whole of Morris's works are those of Birdalone's swimming in the great water, and her wanderings on the two islands, Green Eyot and Rocky Eyot. She finds a mysterious boat in a dark, forbidding creek near the cottage, and it is by this boat that she finally escapes, learning by stealth the magic words that govern it. The moment when she flees is the first of the several moments of choice which try Birdalone's courage. Returning one day from the swimming in the lake she finds that the witch-wife has taken her garments, and realizes she must escape now or never:

> Birdalone wasted no time in seeking for the lost; she looked down on to the smooth sand, and saw there footprints which were not her own, and all those went straight back home to the house. Then she turned, and for one moment of time looked up toward the house, and saw plainly the witch come out adoors, and the sun flashed from something bright in her hand.
>
> Then indeed she made no stay, but set off running at her swiftest along the water-side toward the creek and the Sending Boat. (p. 50)

The boat bears Birdalone to a beautiful island with a great white house where she meets the three friends Aurea, Viridis and Atra, courtly maidens who have been stolen away from their lovers, Baudoin the Golden Knight, Hugh the Green Knight and Arthur the Black Squire, and kept by enchantment to serve the wicked and cruel Queen of this Isle of Increase Unsought, who is the sister of Birdalone's witch. The Queen is beautiful, but her beauty is marred by the stupidity of her face. She has no power of memory, and the sisters hope that if they keep Birdalone in the prison to which she is condemned, their mistress will forget about her, and they will be able to send Birdalone away once more in the Boat as their messenger to their lovers. The heavy, luxurious atmosphere of the Isle of Increase Unsought, whose mistress has a magic coffer that supplies all her needs without toil, reminds us somewhat of the *Earthly Paradise* tale

of *The Lady of the Land* — though stupidity, selfishness and cruelty are the evil moral qualities which have taken the place of the monstrous shape-changing of the Lady in the verse tale. Against this evil background of unproductive ease, the simplicity and directness of Birdalone are striking. Accused by the Lady of being too bold in her replies, Birdalone says: " 'If I be bold, lady, it is because I see that I have come into the House of Death. The dying may well be bold.' " (p. 59) The sisters admit to Birdalone that if it were not for the magic coffer of their mistress, they would starve, as they have no knowledge of tilling the earth or hunting — unlike Birdalone. They have been unable to escape because of enchantments and have lived on the isle for three years "in lazy sorrow and shameful ease". Now they trust that the active and courageous Birdalone will be the means of their rescue. The three friends — with the possible exception of Atra, who is wiser and more farseeing even than Birdalone — are passive participants in the tale. Only Birdalone, with her unpampered upbringing, is able to fight against the enchantments and win release for her friends.

When Birdalone is to leave, the sisters give her tokens for their lovers, but Atra has a foreboding of some evil. Birdalone now journeys over the waters and comes to one island after another, on each of which she must land. whatever danger she finds there: the Isle of the Young and the Old, where she finds noone but an old man and two small children, the Isle of the Queens, where an enchanted company of women mourn a dead king, the Isle of the Kings, where a company of kings mourn a dead woman. Next she comes to the Isle of Nothing, which is absolutely flat and featureless. and where nothing grows. Here a thick mist comes down and she is lost, but her Woodmother, Habundia, appears on her summons and leads her back to the boat.

The next day Birdalone arrives at the Castle of the Quest. the knights of which are seeking the ladies they have lost. Birdalone is received with friendship by the knights. but the Black Squire is moody and downcast. for he has been struck with love of Birdalone and is perplexed about his relation to Astra. Before the three knights leave in the Sending Boat, Birdalone too realizes her love for him. When she is left alone at the Castle with the castellan and the chaplain Leonard. she is overcome with sorrow and longing for Arthur the Black Squire.

Leonard the chaplain, who has longed for her since the moment he saw her. speaks to her and she is glad to have someone to talk to about her friends. but Leonard's love is selfish and in the end harmful to Birdalone and to himself. To pass the time, he teaches Birdalone to read and write. and she spends the rest of her time embroidering, a craft of which she is mistress. It is typical of Birdalone's character that she becomes impatient with her own grief and impatience, and argues with herself:

So she strove with herself, and became of better heart, and set herself strongly to the learning of the clerkly lore; she gathered her wits together, and no longer looked for every day and every hour to bring about the return of the Champions, nor blamed the day and the hour because they failed therein, and in all wise she strove to get through the day unworn by vain longing. (p. 145)

She is unable to leave the Castle alone because of the enmity of the Red Knight, who has laid waste the countryside round about, but one day the castellan decides to take her with a band of armed men and her women attendants for a journey into the woods and mountains, to help to pass the time. Birdalone has never seen mountains, and when she comes within sight of them, she is filled with delight:

When Birdalone's eyes beheld this new thing, of a sudden all care left her, and she dropped her rein, and smote her palms together, and cried out: 'Oh! but thou art beautiful, O earth, thou art beautiful!' (p. 148)

There are further reminiscences of the Iceland *Journal* in the descriptions of the mountain passes, of the narrow, steep-sided valley, "how it winded away up toward the mountains, like to a dismal street". This is the mysterious Valley of the Grey Wethers, the name given to the standing stones which are scattered through the valley. Birdalone returns to the Castle, confident that news of the Quest will have come. In her vain longing for news she is somewhat solaced by her growing desire to return to the Valley of the Grey Wethers, as "one nail knocks out the other". Leonard tells her the legend that the Wethers are giants turned to stone and that to anyone who is wise enough and constant to wait for the moment of their coming to life, and to demand the fulfilment of his desire, it will be granted, and adds: " 'This were a fair adventure, lady, for a hapless one, but for the happy it were a fool's errand.' " (p. 151) Leonard, however, is willing to help her to leave the Castle, as he will do anything to gain some kindness from her. Birdalone, like Ralph in *The Well at the World's End*, is often unconscious of the love and longing she inspires, and is even thoughtlessly cruel to the chaplain. Yet before she sets out, she asks him if she has done him any wrong, and he replies: " 'Thou hast done me no wrong. There is this only betwixt us, that I love thee, and thou lovest not me.' " (p. 156)

Birdalone reaches the Valley, and rides till she comes to a circle of the Gray Wethers round a still larger stone. Thinking that she sees something dark moving behind the stone, she believes that the magic moment has come, and placing her hand on the stone, utters her wish: " 'O Earth, thou and thy first children, I crave of you that he may come back now at once and loving me.' " We now see that her impatience and grief have been caused by doubt as to whether the Black Squire loves her or Atra. The moment she speaks, she regrets it, for "her voice sounded strange and unkent to her in that solitude".

A tall knight clad in black comes out from behind the stone, and though he is handsome, Birdalone fears him. He compels her to go with him, but as they move up the valley he speaks courteously to her and she begins to have some trust in him. He promises not to harm her and to allow her to spend the night among the Grey Wethers to wait for the fulfilment of her wish. However, Birdalone catches sight of some armed men, and the Black Knight says they must escape by a secret way from the dale. Birdalone is now filled with confusion and grief at the idea that her friends may arrive at the Castle and find her gone. She has won a moral ascendancy over the Black Knight, who now confesses to her that he is the henchman and kinsman of the Red Knight and that his purpose was to capture her and take her to the Red Hold, but that he is now willing to lead her back to the Castle of the Quest. Yet he begs her to spend just one day with him in the quiet dale where he has built a secret bower, so that he may have one happy day at least, if never another. The Black Knight is aware of the evil of the Red Hold, and tells Birdalone that he has built the bower with his own hands as a place of refuge, and that " 'I have come to this place time and again when my heart was overmuch oppressed with black burdens of evil and turmoil, and have whiles prevailed against the evil, and whiles not.' " (p. 178) But he cannot wholly prevail against his evil master, because he fears him. Nevertheless, faced with Birdalone's scorn for his weakness and sympathy for his struggle, he too makes the moral choice to reject the Red Knight, to fight against him, and to return Birdalone to her friends. We shall see, however, that this decision came too late.

Meanwhile the tale returns to tell of what has happened at the Castle. The Sending Boat returns with the knights and ladies, of whom only Atra looks downcast, for she has realized that she has lost the love of the Black Squire. The chaplain admits that he has helped Birdalone to leave the Castle, and the knights set out to find her but are hindered in the Valley by a thick white mist and a storm, enchantments sent by the Red Knight, who is believed to be a wizard. At last they come out on the side of a treeless mountain, where they hear the sound of clashing swords, and shortly meet in with the Red Knight, who is leading Birdalone bound behind his horse with the Black Knight's head hung round her neck. In the fight which follows the Red Knight is killed, but not before he has slain Baudoin the Golden Knight. Now Birdalone is in despair at having caused the death of the Golden Knight: " 'I am the fool whose folly has slain your friend and mine. Wherefore I am not worthy of your fellowship and ye shall cast me forth of it; or to slay me were better.' " She is only kept from dying of grief and self-blame by her "woodland breeding and the toil of the days she had won through in the House under the Wood." (p. 196) When they return to the Castle Birdalone tells the tale of her adventures, including the death of the Black Knight, who had refused the offer of the Red Knight

that he should reenter his service. Her friends will not expel Birdalone from their fellowship, but Arthur says that now they will carry on the fight against the Red Hold to the end, and Atra foretells the success of this fight: " 'Thus hath the evil arisen that shall destroy the evil, as oft hath been when the valiant have been grieved, and the joy of the true-hearted hath been stolen from them; then the hand doth the doughty deed and the heart hath ease, and solaced is sorrow.' " (p. 213)

Nevertheless, Birdalone cannot rid herself of the feeling of guilt towards her friends: "Yet despite of all, trouble and care was on Birdalone's soul betwixt the joy of loving and being loved, and the pain and fear of robbing a friend of her love. For Atra's face, which she might not hate, and scarce might love, was a threat to her day by day." (p. 245)

After the knights have set out against the Red Hold, Birdalone makes up her mind that she should leave, so that Arthur will be free to love Atra on his return. She decides to go to the town of Greenford nearby and earn her living by her two crafts of writing and embroidery. When she comes to Greenford, however, she hires an old man and his two sons as servants and sets out on her travels.

The journey with Gerard and his sons is a pleasant one, "and Birdalone wondered to herself that she might so much as hold up her head for bitter thoughts of the days and the longings but late passed away, but so it was, that it was only now and again that they stung her into despair and silence". Her choice of the active life is teaching Birdalone that it is possible to continue to live in spite of sorrow. On the way over the downs they are the guests of the shepherd-folk, and Birdalone sings to them

> ... certain songs which she had learned in the Castle of the Quest, though it made her heart sore; but she deemed she must needs pay that kindly folk for their guestful and blithe ways. And thereafter they sang to the pipe and harp their own downland songs; and this she found strange, that whereas her eyes were dry when she was singing the songs of love of the knighthood, the wildness of the shepherd-music drew the tears from her, would she, would she not.
>
> Homelike and dear seemed the green willowy dale to her, and in the night ere she slept, and she lay quiet amidst of the peaceful people, she could not choose but weep again, for pity of the bitter sweet of her own love, and for pity of the wide world withal, and all the ways of its many folk that lay so new before her. (p. 263)

They come to the City, and Birdalone gains permission from the Master of the Embroiderers' Guild to ply her craft. He also sends her a woman of middle age, in appearance rather like Birdalone, also a skilful embroideress. This woman is from Utterhay, and when Birdalone tells her the story of her life, they realize that they are mother and daughter. Birdalone now lives on in the City of the Five Crafts, working industriously, "in such rest and peace as her

heart would let her; and dear and good friends she had about her", as well as many suitors, whom she rejects.

In course of time her mother dies of the pestilence and Birdalone would like to leave the City. She has a dream of the House under the Wood, and though it is a troubled dream, she wakes happily to the sounds and sights of spring.[131] She decides to go to the Castle of the Quest and seek for her love Arthur, and discover what has become of him. Setting out armed like a knight, she comes to the Castle where Leonard is living alone as a hermit. Birdalone enters the Castle and finds the Sending Boat still lying by the jetty, and is borne by it away over the water past the islands of her first journey. Visiting each of them in turn she finds that they have all changed and are the opposite of what they were before. She succeeds in passing all their enchantments, reaches the Isle of Increase Unsought, and knowing from the story of her friends that the witch-queen is dead, she lies down to sleep, but wakes to find the Sending Boat gone. She now feels in a trap, and that "all her past life of hope and desire and love and honour was all for nought, and that she was but born to die miserably in that foul ruin of an isle envenomed with the memories of bygone cruelty and shame." (p. 312) But at the height of her despair, she remembers her Wood-mother, Habundia, and uses a charm to summon her. "No visible tokens came to her, but her heart grew stronger, and she seemed to see herself yet alive and in hope on the other side of the water." She determines to trust in the strength of her own swimming and slips into the water "which lay before her as calm and plain as a great sheet of glass". After swimming for many hours, she is on the point of exhaustion when she is saved by a floating log which magically bears her to the shore beside the Eyots and the House under the Wood. There she finds the witch sitting dead, and falls "to digging a grave for the corpse of her dead terror." (p. 318) She then meets Habundia in the forest, who helps her to find Arthur, wandering in the forest in the madness that has come on him from the loss of Birdalone. Habundia nurses him back to health, and he comes to Birdalone who is waiting in the House under the Wood. There they spend many happy days, resting and playing in the wood and coming back at night to the cottage, where there is now no evil, and when they open the door they can see "nought worse therein save the strange shadows that the moon cast from the settle on to the floor". And Birdalone sets about her household tasks, "lighting the candles and quickening a little cooking-fire on the hearth, till the yellow light chased the moon away from the bed of their desire." (p. 353)

With Habundia's help they now come together with Hugh, Viridis and Atra and decide to live all together in Utterhay, as a company of friends, who become honoured leaders of the townsfolk. And the tale ends with no more to tell of them, "save that their love never sundered, and that they lived without shame

and died without fear." (p. 387) In its deepest meaning, *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* is a tale of the duties and rewards of friendship, faithfulness, and courage. Perhaps Morris, when he wrote these last words, may have thought of his own early company of friends, among whom passion and separation and alienation had certainly played their destructive part, though of some at least it could be said that "their love never sundered".

The material in this extended survey of the prose romances has been selected with a view to illustrating what were Morris's preoccupations in the course of writing them. It is certainly a quality of life that he is concerned to convey. As C. S. Lewis says: "The great use of the idyllic in literature is to find and illustrate the good — to give a real value to the x about which political algebra can then work. The tribal communities which Morris paints in *The House of the Wolfings* or *The Roots of the Mountains* are such attempts, perhaps the most successful attempts ever made, to give x a value."[132] But Lewis conceives of Morris as rather an exception among socialist theorists, in that he takes thought for the q u a l i t y of life under socialism or communism. This of course is not accurate. Morris could not have arrived at his opinions or at his dreams without the corpus of communist theory on which he worked. The opinions he expresses about life through the medium of his romances are those which he worked out in the course of his apprenticeship to socialism and Marxism, in the course of debate, and argument, and study. As Munby has pointed out, he was "trying to peer into the Communist future", trying to work out the moral relationships of a future communist society.[133]

The value of the romances and their claim to bear relation to reality lie in the fact that Morris tries in them imaginatively to show us what happens when certain ideas about society and morality are put into practice, and that these ideas are the best ideas for the regulation of life. Again and again we are reminded of the limitations and weaknesses of human beings and of the means that can be taken to combat these weaknesses.

Each of the romances in its own striking way is a variation on certain themes: the individual is alone in his own suffering and his own choice; yet he is never completely alone, for if he wants it and knows how to win it, he has the support and love of the kindred or the fellowship; it is they who will help him to lay bare his own weaknesses and combat them; love is unpredictable, and its joys and delights immeasurable, but it must never become the occasion of selfishness and neglect of duty, or it destroys itself; courage is something which we owe to ourselves and to our fellows; though we must sometimes meet guile with guile, our most effective weapon in dealing with evil is outspoken opposition and frank expression of conviction; work and faithfulness in small duties will preserve us from despair at the most hopeless moments; work well

and skilfully done, a task well and faithfully carried out, are the most satisfactory achievements in life. The individual is often faced with a choice in life: to go or stay; to risk or to be cautious; to distinguish good from evil; to recognize life from death. Those who will not commit themselves to their choice and abide by it, are doomed, like the Black Knight in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*. The wrong choice leads to confusion, disaster, despair; the right choice also leads to suffering; but for those who have the strength to endure, the reward of happiness and life will come in the end.

These were the ideas and opinions on life which Morris considered would be of practical use and application not only in the course of wading the tangled wood of capitalism, but also for building and living in a socialist society. Morris's purpose was not immediately didactic; and yet the inner meaning of the fantastic prose romances, especially the great four, *The House of the Wolfings, The Roots of the Mountains, The Well at the World's End* and *The Water of the Wondrous Isles,* is so clearly identical with that of his two socialist romances, and with the ideas expressed in his lectures, journals and letters, as well as being a restatement of the fundamental preoccupations of his poetry, that we are surely justified in seeking to summarize and analyse the concepts which find expression in the intricate fabric of these tales. When we read one of the prose romances, and "feel ourselves a part of it", we may well suppose that we have been privileged to

"see the light of life
Gleam through the tangle of to-day".[134]

NOTES

[1] Robin Page Arnot, *Morris the Man and the Myth,* London, 1964.

[2] ibid., p. 109.

[3] Robin Page Arnot, *William Morris: A Vindication,* London, 1934.

[4] See E. D. Le Mire, "Morris's Reply to Whistler", *Journal of the William Morris Society,* I, 3, Summer, 1963. (London.)

[5] R. Page Arnot, works cited n. 1., n. 3 and *Bernard Shaw and William Morris,* Transactions of W. Morris Society, London, 1957; Edward P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary,* London, 1955.

[6] See Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (later, *Pioneers of Modern Design*), London, 1936, and lecture of 1957, *Architecture and William Morris,* W. Morris Society; *Tributes to Peter Floud,* W. Morris Society, 1960.

[7] J. Kocmanová, *The Poetic Maturing of William Morris,* Brno Studies in English, V, Prague, 1964.

[8] Lionel Munby, "William Morris' Romances and the Society of the Future". *Zeitschrift für Anglistik u. Amerikanistik,* X, 1, 1962, p. 57, cf. infra n. 65.

[9] For significance of Philip Webb see Pevsner, *Pioneers,* etc., Chapter II, esp. p. 65—66.

[10] cf. J. W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris* (New impression), London, 1922, I, p. 149—157; May Morris, *William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist*, 2 Volumes, London, 1936, I, p. 13. seq.; E. P. Thompson, op. cit., p. 121, seq., Pevsner, *Pioneers*, etc., Chapter II.

[11] cf. Kocmanová, op. cit., p. 140, 153, 157—8, 169, 174—7.

[12] Walter Pater, *Appreciations*, London, 1889.

[13] "Men and Women", *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, March, 1856.

[14] ibid.

[15] Review of D. G. Rossetti's Poems, May Morris, op. cit., I, p. 101; (*The Academy*, 14th May, 1870).

[16] cf. T. Hall Caine, *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, London, 1882.

[17] See Mackail, I, p. 137.

[18] See e.g. some of the poems published in *Poems By the Way, Works*, Vol. IX.

[19] e.g. the poet and friend of poets, Canon Dixon, cf. Mackail, I, p. 95—6; also George Saintsbury, esp. *History of English Prosody*, Vol. III. For Lindsay, see "William Morris, Writer", lecture for W. Morris Society, November, 1958, published London, 1961.

[20] Elistratova, op. cit., p. 299.

[21] He considered them "young", cf. the extensive sketch of his own life written to Andreas Scheu in 1883, *Letters*, p. 186, of the *Guenevere* volume: "exceedingly young and very medieval".

[22] W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, London, 1926, The Trembling of the Veil, p. 172 seq.

[23] *Primitiae: Essays . . . by Students of the University of Liverpool*, Liverpool, 1912, p. 183—236.

[24] ibid., p. 185, 190.

[25] ibid., p. 232, 233.

[26] ibid., p. 229.

[27] *Letters* (1850), p. 17—18. Morris was here excusing his non-participation in politics, not referring to the unreality of his art.

[28] Scott, op. cit., p. 210.

[29] ibid., p. 209.

[30] George H. Ford, *Keats and the Victorians*, New Haven, 1944, Chapter X "William Morris and his Masters", p. 149—163, esp. p. 157, "Morris was indebted to Keats's example, but he went beyond this to explore the passion and brutality of medieval life".

[31] cf. *Works*, III, Intro., p. xxi—xxii: "When you are using an old story, read it through, then shut the book and write in your own way."

[32] Scott, op. cit., p. 196.

[33] op. cit., p. 228.

[34] op. cit., p. 235.

[35] Notably by Thompson and Lindsay, but negative evidence lies in the fact that his name is rarely quoted in present-day critical and historical works on modern poetry.

[36] C. S. Lewis, *Rehabilitations and other Essays*, Oxford, 1939.

[37] Thompson, op. cit., p. 98.

[38] op. cit., p. 109, 111.

[39] op. cit., p. 143.

[40] May Morris, op. cit., I, p. 378.

[41] ibid., p. 380.

[42] quoted by Philip Henderson in *The Letters of W. Morris to his Family and Friends*, edited by Philip Henderson, London, 1950, Intro. p. xxxviii.

[43] G. B. Shaw, *Pen Portraits and Reviews*, London, 1931. "W. Morris as Actor and Playwright."

[44] May Morris, op. cit., I, p. 389.

[45] cf. ibid., p. 391, "At that time, the English stage had sunk almost to its lowest point, and there was certainly not the slightest opportunity for a new writer to force his way among the adaptations from the poorer French stage which were the mainstay of the English theatre".

[46] Thompson, op. cit., p. 143.

[47] ibid., loc. cit.

[48] *Works,* II, Intro., p. xiv.

[49] cf. J. Kocmanová, *The Poetic Maturing of W. Morris,* p. 13—14, p. 97, p. 101, p. 109 footnote, etc.

[50] *Letters,* p. 15—17.

[51] cf. J. Kocmanová, op. cit., p. 116. For inclusion in *Earthly Paradise,* see *Works,* II, Intro. p. xxi.

[52] From *The Queen of the Air.* Quoted M. Morris in *Works,* II, Intro., p. xvii.

[53] Robert Graves, *The Golden Fleece,* 2nd Edition, London, 1947, p. 10.

[54] *Works,* XXII, Intro., p. xv. In a remark on Milton.

[55] *The Aeneids of Virgil. Works,* XI (1875), p. 162. (*Aeneid,* Book VIII, l. 26).

[56] Morris gave up the writing of the *Tale of Aristomenes* for *The Earthly Paradise* because he felt that to treat it sufficiently realistically he would have to visit Greece. See Mackail, I, p. 188—9.

[57] *The Life and Death of Jason,* Book I.

[58] cf. J. Kocmanová, op. cit., Chapter I passim, esp. p. 56—7, p. 106.

[59] *The Life and Death of Jason,* Book XVIII, l. 935.

[60] cf. infra p. 97—99, 107.

[61] cf. Thompson, op. cit., p. 165—7. Also *Letters.*

[62] 1879, letter on threatened war with Russia, 1877, Manifesto of the Eastern Question Association, 1877, letter on "restoration" of ancient buildings, 1877, foundation of Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

[63] A short but effective and objective comparison of Morris with Ruskin is given by G. Vidalenc, *William Morris,* Paris, 1920, p. 109 seq.: "Il (Morris) avait un admirable sens pratique et comprit qu'une protestation isolée, quelque sincère et justifiée, quelque éloquente qu'elle fut, n'avait aucune chance d'être entendue."

[64] For a summary of Morris's development as a poet in the years in question see Kocmanová, op. cit., p. 136, 177, 178.

[65] The study of which the second part (The Fantastic Romances) of the present chapter is a shortened and revised version was completed in June, 1961. It was not until later that I had the opportunity of reading the outstanding contribution to the problem by Lionel M. Munby ("W. Morris' Romances and the Society of the Future", cf. n. 8) and was immediately struck with the similarity of our conclusions about the significance of the romances. We are also in agreement in considering C. S. Lewis, in spite of ideological differences, to be "outstandingly the best literary critic of Morris", (ibid., p. 58, n. 7). In the present chapter I have treated the individual romances extensively with the purpose of throwing light on lasting themes and lifelong preoccupations in Morris, and providing evidence to show that his creative literary work is closely bound up with his ideas and theories about aesthetics.

[66] G. B. Shaw, *Morris As I Knew Him,* in May Morris, op. cit., II, p. xxviii—xxix.

[67] W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* London, 1926, p. 174.

[68] C. H. Nordby, *The Influence of Old Norse Literature upon English Literature,* New York, Columbia University Press, 1901, p. 70.

[69] ibid., p. 72.

[70] D. M. Hoaré, *The Works of Morris and of Yeats in Relation to Early Saga Literature,* Cambridge, 1937, p. 145.

[71] C. S. Lewis, *Rehabilitations and Other Essays,* London, 1939, p. 44.

[72] E. P. Thompson, op. cit., p. 789.

[73] J. Kocmanová, "Two Uses of the Dream-Form: W. Morris and Svatopluk Čech", Brno Studies in English, II, Prague, 1960.

[74] Munby, op. cit., p. 68.

[75] *Works,* XVI, p. 230.

[76] *An Anthology of Chartist Literature,* Moscow, 1956.

[77] In 1882, *Erewhon* was one of the books which Morris read aloud on Sunday mornings at Burne-Jones's house, the Grange. Mackail, II, p. 96 — "a book that Morris greatly admired."

[78] *Works* XVI, Intro. xxviii.

[79] *Letters* (1889), p. 315.

[80] See May Morris, op. cit., II, p. 501 seq.

[81] Thompson, op. cit., p. 804.

[82] May Morris, op. cit., p. 502.

[83] *Works,* XVI, Intro. p. xxviii and *Letters,* p. 328.

[84] *William Morris* (Selections edited by G. D. H. Cole), Nonesuch Press, London, 1946, Intro. p. xvii.

[85] This point is made too by L. W. Eshleman (Lloyd Eric Grey) in *A Victorian Rebel. The Life of W. Morris,* New York, 1940. He says that the "particular point" of the last section of *News from Nowhere* is that it "presents a very true account of Morris's own life among his own friends". (p. 294) Apart from some occasional excellent perceptions, this book however is marred as a serious study of Morris by its purpose of eliminating the influence of Marx. (cf. Thompson on Eshleman, op. cit., p. 741—3.)

[86] See *The Work of William Morris* (Catalogue of an Exhibition arranged by the W. Morris Society), published for the Society by The Times Bookshop, London, 1962, p. 65, 66. cf. Works, XVI, p. 1.

[87] For one of the best discussions of *News from Nowhere* see A. L. Morton, *The English Utopia,* London, 1952.

[88] H. H. Sparling, quoted Thompson, op. cit., p. 784, note 1, and *Letters* (to Lady Burne-Jones), p. 369—70, (to *The Spectator*), p. 370—1.

[89] G. B. Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite.* Tauchnitz edition, n. d., p. 12.

[90] Philip Henderson (ed.), *Letters* of W. Morris, Intro., p. lxii, D. M. Hoare, op. cit., p. 49.

[91] *Letters,* (1850), p. 17, cf. n. 27.

[92] R. Page Arnot, *W. Morris, the Man and the Myth,* p. 102.

[93] May Morris in Intro., *Works,* XIV, p. xxiii—xxiv.

[94] D. M. Hoare, op. cit., p. 45.

[95] cf. Letter to Prof. Franklin Pearson of 1895, quoted May Morris, op. cit., I, p. 474.

[96] Thompson, op. cit., p. 783.

[97] H. H. Sparling, *The Kelmscott Press and William Morris, Master-Craftsman,* p. 50.

[98] *Works* XIV, Intro. p. xxv. See also R. Page Arnot, op. cit. supra n. 92. Also May Morris, *Works* XXII, Intro. p. xxvii, where among "familiar volumes on the shelves" are mentioned Catlin's *Illustrations of the Manners, Customs and Conditions of the North-American Indians* and *The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish* with O'Currie's Introduction and Notes.

[99] Friedrich Engels, *Der Usprung der Familie, des Privateigentums u. des Staats,* 1884.

[100] cf. n. 31.
[101] Quoted Thompson, op. cit., p. 783, *Letters*, p. 302.
[102] cf. Thompson, op. cit., p. 784, George Saintsbury, *History of English Prosody*, Vol. III, p. 329.
[103] cf. also Munby, op. cit., p. 61—2.
[104] Thompson, op. cit., p. 784.
[105] *Works* XXIV, p. 382—3.
[106] James Thomson, *The City of Dreadful Night*, Thinker's Library edition, London, 1932.
[107] See for evidence on this G. B. Shaw, *Morris As I Knew Him*, in Vol. II of May Morris, op. cit., p. xxiii—xxv.
[108] "Wake, London Lads." 1878.
[109] Thompson, op. cit., p. 785.
[110] cf. Morris's own comment, quoted by May Morris in Intro., *Works*, XV, p. xi.
[111] cf. Thompson, op. cit., p. 786.
[112] Thompson, op. cit., p. 785.
[113] C. S. Lewis, op. cit., p. 41.
[114] *News from Nowhere*, p. 198, and cf. also "Commonweal" Notes, May Morris, op. cit., II, p. 306.
[115] Mackail, II, p. 254.
[116] cf. Thompson, op. cit., p. 787.
[117] Letter to Bruce Glasier, quoted Thompson, op. cit., p. 666.
[118] *Journals of Travels in Iceland. Works*, VIII, p. 82—4.
[119] Quoted in Intro., *Works*, XVII, p. xxxix.
[120] May Morris, Intro., *Works*, XVII, p. xxxix.
[121] May Morris, Intro., *Works*, XVIII, p. xix.
[122] A. L. Morton, *The English Utopia*, London, 1954, p. 158—9.
[123] Morton, op. cit., p. 158.
[124] Quoted Mackail, II, p. 152.
[125] May Morris, op. cit., I, p. 515.
[126] Thompson, op. cit., p. 788—9.
[127] Mackail, I, p. 226.
[128] May Morris, Intro., *Works*, XX, xvii
[129] Thompson, op. cit., p. 788.
[130] Munby, op. cit., p. 67.
[131] cf. supra p. 100.
[132] C. S. Lewis, op. cit., p. 49.
[133] Munby, op. cit., p. 57.
[134] "Drawing Near the Light." *Works*, IX, p. 188.

ESTETICKÝ CÍL WILLIAMA MORRISE V KONTEXTU JEHO POZDNÍCH PROZAICKÝCH ROMANCÍ

Od padesátých let našeho století se v literární kritice projevuje silná tendence k pokusům o přesnější hodnocení celé tvorby a životního díla W. Morrise. Teze o jeho vedoucím postavení v oblasti a) moderní umělecké koncepce a b) politické teorie a praxe je přijata jako objektivní skutečnost. V otázce jeho postavení jako spisovatele a básníka je však stanovisko kritiky méně jasné. Již ve své dřívější práci *Básnické dozrávání W. Morrise* autorka poukázala na specifickou hodnotu stěžejní části jeho básnické tvorby a v této práci se zabývá hodnocením trvalých básnických impulsů a zájmů, které prolínají Morrisovou tvorbou od nejranějších básní a nacházejí zralý výraz v pozdních prozaických romancích.

Ačkoliv v posledních několika desítiletích svého života W. Morris dospěl k některým jasně formulovaným názorům na estetické problémy, zejména k názorům týkajícím se užitkového umění a architektury, jakákoliv formálně teoretická vyjádření o literatuře jsou u něho vzácná. Tato okolnost neznamená, že se Morris nezabýval literárněvědnými otázkami, nebo že podceňoval význam literatury, nýbrž vyplývá z jeho nedůvěry k literární kritice jeho doby, kterou považoval za neseriózní. Přesto však v některých básních, jako např. v *Pozemském ráji*, vyjadřuje nebo implikuje dosti jasně svůj záměr a svědectví jeho dopisů a vzpomínek jeho přátel nám umožňují, abychom určili a hodnotili jeho tvůrčí záměr v literatuře v každé etapě jeho vývoje. Jeho literární tvorba jasně odpovídá jeho názorům a předsevzetím, jak se vyvíjely v jednotlivých fázích jeho tvůrčího růstu.

Mnozí autoři, kteří se zabývali básnickou tvorbou Morrisovou, zdůraznili tvůrčí původnost prvního svazku *Obhajoby Guenevery*, ale většina kritiků považovala tyto básně za básně lišící se svým druhem a kvalitou od jeho další tvorby. Ve své první kapitole autorka hledá prvky, které spojují ranou a pozdější tvorbu Morrisovu a pokouší se vyvodit spojitosti Morrisovy tvorby s jeho názory o umění, které jsou tak překvapivě blízké názorům dnešní marxistické estetiky. Při hodnocení raných básní autorka shledává, že se Morris v této poezii snažil dosáhnout jistého zintenzívnění lidských zážitků sotva postižitelným prolínáním jazykových, obrazových a reálných prvků, jejichž efekt spočívá nikoliv v cílevědomé stavbě básní, nýbrž v nenucené samozřejmosti lidových balad. Autorka přijímá příznivé hodnocení této rané tvorby v souhlase s kritiky Edwardem Thompsonem a Jackem Lindsayem, nesouhlasí však s nimi v jejich záporném hodnocení Morrisovy zralejší poetické tvorby. (Tento názor plně dokumentovala ve shora uvedené dřívější práci.) Autorka se naopak domnívá, že je nemožné dospět k správnému historickému hodnocení vývoje moderní anglické poezie, aniž bychom zdůraznili spíše kontinuitu básnické tvorby Morrisovy, než hájili hypotézu přetržky v tomto vývoji. Nejpřesvědčivějším dokladem této kontinuity, na který je tato studie zaměřena, je souvislost Morrisových názorů na život, jak se obrážejí v rané básnické tvorbě, se světovým názorem vyjádřeným v prozaických romancích, které uzavírají básníkovu literární dráhu.

Autorčina studie je zaměřena především na podrobný rozbor osmi fantastických prozaic-

kých romancí, které byly vydány od r. 1888 do r. 1897. Ačkoliv Morris nepovažoval tyto romance za alegorie, neznamená to, že nemají hlubší význam. Morris v nich vyjadřuje, a to zpravidla vědomě, své názory na společnost a svou interpretaci života. Jeho romance jsou plodem celoživotního hledání pravdy a Morris v nich tlumočí své zralé a zcela vyhraněné názory na život, na to, jak snad lidé žili v dávné minulosti, ale ještě více na to, jak by mohli a měli žít vůbec a kdykoliv.

První dvě romace se zabývají ranými dějinami a prehistorií germánských kmenů a vzájemně se doplňují. *Rod Wolfingů* se zabývá okamžikem, kdy se jednotlivec rozhoduje obětovat se za svůj národ. Autorka souhlasí s názorem Page Arnota, že obraz společnosti marky je velmi blízký obrazu, jaký podává Engels. V *Kořenech hor* Morris vypravuje o době, kdy různé germánské kmeny dosáhly různých vývojových etap a kdy se objevují první znaky třídní společnosti.

Důležitým prvkem ve všech romancích je autorův postup při zobrazování lásky a jiných lidských vztahů. Morris chápe lásku mezi mužem a ženou v prvé řadě jako aspekt společenského života, který nesmí znemožnit řádné plnění jiných společenských povinností vůči přátelům a kolektivu. Jeho názory jsou osvícené a mnohem zdravější, než bylo ve viktoriánské době obvyklé. Dalším příbuzným tématem je obraz ženy jako vlivného a činného člena společnosti.

V dalších romancích Morris přechází od dávné minulosti do fantastického světa, vyňatého z jakéhokoliv časového rámce. Za své podmanivé kouzlo tyto romance částečně vděčí středověké rytířské romanci, lidové baladě a sáze, avšak básníkův tvůrčí přístup není totožný s metodou žádného z těchto žánrů. Kritéria, podle kterých Morris posuzoval morální hodnoty, nejsou konvenční a kladou důraz především na nesobeckost, obětavost, věrnost příteli nebo rodu. Případné slabiny a nedůslednosti některých romancí, např. romance *Les za světem*, vyplývají z nedostatečně propracovaných výchozích tvůrčích principů, z nedostatečně cílevědomého vytyčení těch bodů, v nichž se fantazie dotýká skutečnosti a splývá s ní. Vztah ke skutečnému životu je nejvýznamnějším aspektem umělecky nejzdařilejších romancí.

Názory na život, které Morris vyjadřuje prostřednictvím svých romancí, jsou názory, které na základě celoživotního zájmu propracoval během let, která věnoval studiu a praxi socialismu a marxismu. Umělecká hodnota romancí je nerozlučně spjata s Morrisovým pokusem zobrazit svět, v němž by mohly být uplatňovány jeho názory na společenské a morální problémy. Jeho cíl nebyl didaktický, vnitřní význam fantastických romancí je však natolik totožný se světovým názorem vyjádřeným v socialistických romancích i s názory vyslovenými v jeho přednáškách a dopisech, že autorka považuje svůj pokus o rozbor světonázorových a realistických prvků v romancích za nutný. Tímto rozborem se snažila přispět k úplnějšímu hodnocení celého tvůrčího přínosu W. Morrise.