A STUDY OF THE COLOR AND IMAGERY OF THE POETRY OF WILLIAM MORRIS

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by

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PREFACE

The artistic development of William Morris (1834-1896), dictated by an extreme sensitiveness to color and craftsmanship, is almost wholly contained in the first well-defined period of his life. Until 1877 Morris was principally concerned with poetry and the fine arts, and from that time he concentrated on combating the rise of drabness, the result of Victorian capitalism, and worked for the cause of social reform. However, despite the great variety of Morris' achievements a unity was maintained in his love of beauty for its own sake. The scope of this paper, then, is limited to the first period of his life. Its purpose is to discover the relationship between Morris' interests in craftsmanship, particularly dyeing, tapestry work, and stained-glass windows, and the color and imagery of poetry.

William Morris wrote poetry as a change from the physical work of handicrafts, and although he deemed it secondary in importance, he employed all his knowledge and skill in design, color, artistry, and above all, architecture. He literally paints his pictures or traces his design in words, using the same colors and intricate structures as he would use in a tapestry, or a stained-glass window.

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CHAPTER I

Drawing and architectural design were Morris' first creative outlets, and his volume, The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems (1858) was his first published effort in poetry.[1] The method of versification used by Morris is not the primary concern here, but it will be necessary from time to time to compare briefly the mechanics of Morris' poetry with the mechanics of his craftsmanship.

The truest record of an artist, and a poet, is to be found in his actual work. In any type of activity Morris undertook he gave his best to the world without stint and without pretension. J. W. Mackail gives the best explanation of the importance architecture held for Morris:

> But for Morris, then and always, the word architecture bore an immense, and one might almost say a transcendental meaning. Connected at a thousand points with all the other specific arts which ministered to it out of a thousand sources,

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[1] Albert C. Baugh and others, A Literary History of England (New York, 1948), p. 1430.

> it was itself the tangible expression of all the order, the comeliness, the sweetness, nay, even the mystery and the law, which sustain man's world and make human life what it is. To him the House Beautiful represented the visible form of life itself, not only as a craftsman and manufacturer, a worker in dyed stuffs and textiles and glass, a pattern designer and decorator, but throughout the whole range of life, he was from first to last the architect, the mastercraftsman, whose range of work was so phenomenal and his sudden transitions from one to another form of productive energy so swift and preplexing because, himself secure in the centre, he struck outwards to any point of the circumference with equal directness, with equal precision, unperplexed by artificial subdivisions of art, and untrammelled by any limiting rules of professional custom. 2

With architecture as the center, Morris always worked outward, caring little for what portion of the circumference he struck in his energetic excursions.

Although Morris wrote many poems and stories, he was expending most of his energies on more than one handicraft--clay modeling, carving in wood and stone, and illumination. A page of his illumination done in 1856 is extant and shows his great certainty and mastery in color, and his amazing knowledge and eye for color. He is often thought of as a man who wished to beautify the world, at least drab Victorian England, as he would a cabinet door or a manuscript. He loved the bright colors, particularly the gold or golden yellow, the reds, blues, and greens so popular in old tapestries, stained glass and old

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[2] J. W. Mackail, The Life of William Morris (London, 1901), I, 78.

ballads, and the fine craftsmanship of the decorations of the medieval illuminators.[3] The most obvious thing about Morris' work as an artist, whether the work be an epic or a tapestry, is spaciousness of design. Morris was fascinated by medieval life, and his early poetry bears the richness of decorative color and dimness of outline, which seems to stem directly from the beauty of medieval architecture and illuminated manuscripts.

John Ruskin approvingly referred to Morris as "the great conceiver and doer, the man at once a poet, an artist, and a workman."[4] There was never a time when Morris did not associate art with the problems of living. "The tremendous import of his teaching depended," said his daughter, May Morris, "upon his experience as a poet and an artist."[5] It is impossible to separate the poet and designer from the social reformer because of the intense subjectivity of his designs and his poetry, even the earliest poetry. The words beauty and happiness were not abstract ideas to Morris but a practical and concrete antidote for the ills of uncontrolled industrialism. He had no use for

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[3] R. Lynd, The Art of Letters, p. 150 in Poetry of the Victorian Period, ed. George Benjamin Woods and Jerome Hamilton Buckley (Chicago, 1955), p. 1024.

[4] Holbrook Jackson, Dreamers of Dreams, The Rise and Fall of Nineteenth Century Idealism (London, 1948), p. 27.

[5] May Morris, preface to John Bruce Glasier, William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement (New York, 1921).

beauty which did not lead to happiness, or for happiness which did not lead to beauty.

Despite Morris' preoccupation with medievalism, Holbrook Jackson in Dreamers of Dreams maintains that

> Morris has all the audacity, energy, and versatility of an artist of the Renaissance, which rang down the curtain on the long drama of the middle ages and inaugurated a new era of which our civilization is the culmination--and perhaps the end. However much he may like to imagine himself as the reincarnation of a guildsman of the twelfth century, his spiritual prototypes are Michael Angelo and Leonardo da Vinci.[6]

Jackson goes on to say that for "purely personal reasons, Morris looks upon any plain surface, no matter how beautiful in form, as an invitation to indulge his passion for decoration." However, according to our present day standard of purity of line, this makes Morris' work, no matter how beautiful, seem overornamented.[7]

It is Morris' own cry that comes from the girl in his story News From Nowhere:

> She led me up close to the house, and laid her shapely sun-browned hand and arm on the lichened wall as if to embrace it, and cried out, "O me! O me! How I love the earth and the seasons, and weather, and all things that deal with it, and all that grows out of it--as this has done." 8

All his life William Morris loved this thing called craftsmanship. He loved using his hands to make things, things that could be

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6 Jackson, p. 162.

7 Ibid., p. 165.

8 Alfred Noyes, William Morris (London, 1908), p. 34.

used. He loved to give beauty to them, and he loved the joy of making a good, useful, and beautiful thing. The sense of craftsmanship and the love of beauty filled all his life and controlled all his actions. He himself mastered a host of crafts and finally, when he saw that the industrial capitalist society that was developing rapidly around him was destroying good taste and craftsmanship, he became a rebel, too, working for the creation of a society in which everyone would have an equal chance of developing his talents and enjoying all the good and beautiful things that could be for all.

In 1857 the Pre-Raphaelite painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti invited Morris, Burne-Jones, and some others to undertake the decoration of the walls of the Oxford Union Debating Hall. The painters descended upon the staid old university with little practical preparation and less knowledge, and the now famous scheme ended in disaster, for the "frescoes" soon faded. The value of the undertaking was the reawakening of Morris' interest in the Arthurian cycle, coupled with the infectious enthusiasm Rossetti held for medievalism. To these influences we can attribute much of the color and atmosphere of The Defence of Guenevere volume which appeared the following year. However, in that summer of 1857 Rossetti wrote to Burne-Jones, "If any man has any poetry in him, he should paint, for it has all been said and written, and they have scarcely begun to paint

it."[9] This attitude was adopted wholeheartedly by Morris, and he worked very hard at his painting, but his poetry indicates that he was a better painter with pencil than with brush. This probably accounts for the fact that Morris considered poetry in second place, as a relief from his more important work as an artist and craftsman. Morris felt, with others at Oxford, that Tennyson had carried poetry to its ultimate.

Perhaps it was because poetry came so easily to Morris that it held but little challenge. On the other hand, painting was extremely difficult for him despite his sense of color, and tapestry making had to be relearned from the almost forgotten modes of dyeing and clothmaking to the actual weaving. Legend had it that Morris was master of poetry at his very first try. One evening at Exeter, Burne-Jones announced to friends that Morris was a "big poet," and one of them, Canon Richard Watson Dixon, immediately concurred that the poem, "The Willow and the Red Cliff," was original and truly striking and beautiful. Morris' reply is now famous and is found in nearly every biography and biographical sketch: "Well, if this is poetry, it is very easy to write." Hugh Walker says in _The Literature of the Victorian Era_, "Mr. Robert Bridges, . . in a note to _Selected Poems of Richard Watson Dixon_, declares. . .that a copy of the

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[9] Mackail, pp. 110-111.

first poem 'abundantly refutes the notion that he [Morris] appeared on that occasion as a full-fledged poet.'"[10]

In the introduction to the first volume of her edition of The Collected Works of William Morris, May Morris says that Morris destroyed the manuscript of the early poems he did not wish to be included in the Guenevere volume, and that his first poem was among them. However, Canon Dixon retained a copy, and the poem can be found in a later volume of May Morris' work.[11] Mackail suspects that the loss is irreparable, for the poems appear to have begun something new in poetry. He says the poems represented "the keen scent and frail beauty of the first blossoms of spring, which is more moving, and more penetrating than even the full flower of a mature summer."[12] In any case, the poems that survived and were printed in the Guenevere volume contain Morris' sensitiveness to the charm of color and soul and scenery, to all the beauty of the visible world. But it may be that the lost poems were "much under-valued by the impetuous author."[13] It is extremely difficult to quote from Morris because of his

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10 H. Walker, The Literature of the Victorian Era (Cambridge, 1921), p. 529.

11 May Morris, The Collected Works of William Morris (London, 1910-15), I, xi, [Appendix B].

12 Mackail, I, 53.

13 May Morris, Works, I, xix.

broad effects. Morris does not use color or imagery in small easily isolated patches, but throughout an entire poem. It is a diffuse, over-all effect rather than a detailed picture that can be quoted from context as the reader will see when reading the poems, even the short pieces designed especially as mood poems. May Morris says, again in Volume I of The Collected Works:

> In these early poems and prose stories of my father's real places seen are as vividly felt and described as the dream places, and a great deal of his local colour is taken from the wide flat Essex country where he passed his childhood. The eldest boy in a large family, his early time went by in contented open-air activity in pleasant surroundings which throughout his life were keenly and effectionately remembered. . .It need hardly be said how deep an impression was made upon his writings by this harmony and contentment, this delight in the open country and in the noble woodland. 14

This should be borne in mind when we consider that the volume of 1858 "roused very little interest in the literary world at large,"[15] although it became more popular after the publication of his later poems. It has been suggested by May Morris that since several poems and fragments seem to fit with the poems in the Guenevere volume the poet had planned a complete Arthurian cycle. One of them, "The Maying of Queen Guenevere," contains the following excellent image of Sir Mellyagraunce

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[14] Ibid., p. ix.

[15] Noyes, p. 21.

brooding on his castle roof:

> This time a-maying went the Queen,
> But Mellyagraunce across the green
> Fresh meadows where the blue dykes were
> Stared out and thought of Guenevere.
> "If I could get her once," he said,
> "Whatever men say, by God's head
> But I would hold her." Here he glanced
> Across his strong courts, for he chanced
> To be on a tower-roof that tide,
> And his banner-staff up beside
> His bended-knee. "St. Mary, though,
> When I think well, I do not know
> Why I should give myself this pain
> About the Queen, and be so fain
> To have her by me; God to aid
> I have seen many a comely maid--
> Ah! and well-born too--If I said:
> 'Fair lady, may I bear your glove?'
> Would turn round quick and look all love:
> While she laughs at me--laughs aloud". . .[16]

She has included in The Collected Works other fragments such as a poem on Iseult of Brittany and fifteen verses of "Sir Palomydes' Quest."

Morris planned several ways to introduce the Guenevere volume; there is an extant fragment of a descriptive opening for the title poem in the "Guenevere" measure which has been replaced by the dramatic version he published.[17] It is important because it indicates Morris' preference to remake rather than to revise, and as an excellent example of color and description.

"The Defence of Guenevere," like the fragment just mentioned,

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16 May Morris, Works, I, xix.

17 Appendix C.

is in a rambling terza rima which sucessfully conveys the distracted feelings and feverish thoughts of the queen. From the very beginning the reader is aware of the tapestry-like quality of the images, particularly in the following passages describing the challenge of Launcelot to Mellyagraunce:

> Did you see Mellyagraunce
> When Launcelot stood by him? what white fear
>
> "Curdled his blood, and how his teeth did dance,
> His side sink in? as my knight cried and said:
> 'Slayer of unarm'd men, here is a chance!
>
> "'Setter of traps, I pray you guard your head,
> By God I am so glad to fight with you,
> Stripper of ladies, that my hand feels lead
>
> "'For driving weight; hurrah now! draw and do,
> For all my wounds are moving in my breast,
> And I am getting mad with waiting so.' 18

The dramatic opening is highlighted by the queen's flaming cheek framed by her wet hair as she faces her accusers. There is color, too, in the "choosing" cloths; heaven's blue to signify hell is significant in the face of the queen's chastity and her sin. This poem also sets the use of the yellow, red, blue, and gold so often found throughout these early poems.

The first four poems in the Guenevere volume were written under the influence of Rossetti during the work on the Oxford Union.[19] The second of these, "King Arthur's Tomb," has a more

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18 Ibid., p. 7.

19 Noyes, p. 21.

profound theme than "The Defence of Guenevere," that of Guenevere's greater constancy to the memory of Arthur than to his person when he was alive, and a greater sense of passion. Its rich color and greater clarity show Rossetti's hand in Morris' study of painting:

> And every morn I scarce could pray at all,
> For Launcelot's red-golden hair would play,
> Instead of sunlight, on the painted wall,
> Mingled with dreams of what the priest did say;
>
> Grim curses out of Peter and of Paul;
> Judging of strange sins in Leviticus;
> Another sort of writing on the wall,
> Scored deep across the painted heads of us.
>
> Christ sitting with the woman at the well,
> And Mary Magdalen repenting there,
> Her dimmed eyes scorch'd and red at sight of hell
> So hardly 'scaped, no gold light on her hair. 20

The poem is a slowly changing kaleidescope of color from Launcelot's memory of Guenevere's hair that

> fell
> Upon my red robe, strange in the twilight
> With many unnamed colours. 21

to the black robes, the long white veil, the purple bed, and golden hair of the queen which disturb her dreams; and as she awakens, "the cloudless blue/Drew the sun higher."[22]

In the midst of the hot, burning passion of Launcelot and Guenevere a cool breath blows through

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20 May Morris, Works, I, 20.

21 Ibid., I, 12.

22 Ibid., p. 15.

when the wind ran
One cool spring evening through fair aspen-tree

And elm and oak about the palace there.[23]

The queen describes the return of Arthur bearing the dead emperor Lucius, killed by Launcelot:

A royal bier, hung round with green and blue,
About it shone great tapers with sick flame.[24]

These cold colors and the lifeless fire of the candles did not kindle the ardour of the king then as it now serves to cool the passion of the lovers. Representative of the best in the *Guenevere* volume, this poem presents an immediate, clear picture--a bold sketch around which the beauty of Morris' suggested detail is carefully etched. Guenevere's recollections of the happier times with the thrushes singing in the lonely garden, and the clanging of arms about the joyous pavilions are extremely fine lines:

There, as I well know,

Rode Launcelot, the king of all the band,
And scowling Gauwaine, like the night in day,
And handsome Gareth, with his great white hand
Curl'd round the helm-crest, ere he join'd the fray;

And merry Dinadan with sharp dark face,
All true knights loved to see. . . 25

Certainly one sees here the influence of Morris' studies in

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23 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

painting translated into poetry. What a magnificent wall decoration the tourney that follows would make with the colorful equipages of the knights: red-headed Palomydes and his bright shield; the colorful ladies of the court and the flashing weapons. All this caught by Morris in a few bold, sure strokes and in no more than twenty-four lines:

And by him Palomydes; helmet off,
  He fought, his face brush'd by his hair,
Red heavy swinging hair; he fear'd a scoff
  So overmuch, though what true knight would dare

To mock that face, fretted with useless care,
  And bitter useless striving after love?
O Palomydes, with much honour bear
  Beast Glatysaunt upon your shield, above

Your helm that hides the swinging of your hair,
  And think of Iseult, as your sword drives through
Much mail and plate--O God, let me be there
  A little time, as I was long ago!

Because stout Gareth lets his spear fall low,
  Gauwaine and Launcelot and Dinadan
Are helm'd and waiting; let the trumpets go!
  Bend over, ladies, to see all you can!

Clench teeth, dames, yea, clasp hands, for Gareth's spear
  Throws Kay from out his saddle, like a stone
From a castle-window when the foe draws near--
  "Iseult!" Sir Dinadan rolleth overthrown.

"Iseult!"--again--the pieces of each spear
  Fly fathoms up, and both the great steeds reel;
"Tristram for Iseult!" and "Guenevere!"
  The ladies' names bite verily like steel. 26

The guilty lovers are now farther apart than when the king was alive. This effect is heightened by their meeting at Arthur's

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26 Ibid.

tomb so that his presence is more vital than if they were at Camelot, and Arthur stood watching a lance-length away. The picture does not fade from the wall, but it is suddenly shattered by the tragic force of Guenevere's passion and grief as it leaps across the tomb to Launcelot:

> They bite--bite me, Lord God!--I shall go mad,
> Or else die kissing him, he is so pale;
> He thinks me mad already, O bad! bad!
> Let me lie down a little while and wail.
>
> No longer so, rise up, I pray you, love,
> And slay me really, then we shall be heal'd,
> Perchance, in the aftertime by God above.
> Banner of Arthur--with black-bended shield
> Sinister-wise across the fair gold ground!
> Here let me tell you what a knight you are,
> O sword and shield of Arthur! you are found
> A crooked sword, I think, that leaves a scar
>
> On the bearer's arm, and so he thinks it straight,
> Twisted Malay's crease beautiful blue-grey,
> Poison'd with sweet fruit; as he found too late,
> My husband Arthur, on some bitter day!
>
> O sickle cutting hemlock the day long!
> That the husbandman across his shoulder hangs,
> And, going homeward about evensong,
> Dies the next morning, struck through by the fangs![27]

A considerable effect can be achieved if Morris' verses are read slowly and carefully with due regard to their childlike medieval naiveté. This artistic effect consists in varying the normal iambic pentameter in both of the first two poems. There is an excellent example of the way Morris departs from metrical regularity in the following lines:

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[27] *Ibid.*

Clench teeth, dames, yea, clasp hands, for Gareth's spear
Throws Kay from out his saddle, like a stone. 28

Sir Galahad muses on his thus-far empty life in a scene made dismal by the blacks, whites, and greys of a sterile winter scene. There are flashes of color in "Sir Galahad: A Christmas Mystery," but not for Galahad. Not for him the "gay-dress'd minstrel," only the "sere damp fern." Then the reason for Galahad's lonely life suddenly becomes clear, as Christ or Christ's angel comes forth in "raiment half blood-red, half white as snow" to commend Galahad's purity and grant him his vision.

In his dream, Galahad's triumph is painted in warm colors as the "stage directions" indicate:

Enter two angels in white, with scarlet wings;
Also four ladies in gowns of red and green;
Also an angel, bearing in his hands a Surcoat
Of white, with a red cross. 29

For him there are pure colors of great clarity, but for Sir Bors and Sir Percival, who only glimpsed the Grail, there was only blurred color in the distance, "with many-colour'd raiment, but far off."

There is no action in "The Chapel in Lyoness" except the death of Sir Ozana, for the poem exists only for pictorial description. There is a roughness due to a deliberate avoidance

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28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., p. 28.

of Victorian patterns. This gives Sir Ozana's speech a blurred, dreamlike quality, the confused ramblings of a feverish, dying mind. This dream-quality is set off by the gilded screen between the altar and the nave, and the cloth of samite of white and red. Ozana's quiet death contrasts with the shining golden tress of his love's hair--shining against the green of the jasper sea.

For one of his most powerful narrative poems, "Sir Peter Harpdon's End," Morris turned to the fourteenth century tales of Froissart and made effective use of blank verse. There is little of the dim outlines of the tapestry here, rather the cold clarity of a steel engraving. It is the picture of the triumph of a brave man in battle--and then his triumph in defeat and death.

In "Rapunzel" Morris took one of Grimm's fairy tales and turned it into a study in gold, green, and scarlet. The color scheme centers around Rapunzel's golden-yellow hair which is contrasted with the witch's scarlet cloak; the green grass; the marble of the tower; the "fire of sunset"; the golden twilight; and

> Some crimson thing had changed the grass from bright
> Pure green I loved so.[30]

The prince, too, has had his dream of "yellow hair/Betwixt green leaves. . .," and of Golden Guendolen. After the lovers in the poem escape, Rapunzel, now named Guendolen, returns happily to her beloved colors of yellow hair and green kirtle. Morris has

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[30] Ibid., p. 70.

constantly turned our attention to Rapunzel's hair, and even after the pair live happily, her hair bothers her. In the last stanza we hear the ominous lament of the witch:

The Witch

Woe! that any man could dare
To climb up the yellow stair,
Glorious Guendolen's golden hair.[31]

In the poems thus far we have seen Morris' entire range of background material: the Arthurian cycle as in "King Arthur's Tomb" and "Sir Galahad"; those derived from Jean Froissart, chief chronicler of the Hundred Years' War; and the remaining purely romantic poems which are inspired by the Middle Ages. "Sir Peter Harpdon's End" is representative of the tense, vivid dramas drawn from Froissart's Chronicles of England, France, and Spain. Others are "The Haystack in the Floods," "Geffray Teste Noire," and "The Judgement of God." Among the romances we find "Rapunzel," "Gold Wings," and "The Sailing of the Sword." In all three of the divisions are the colors of armoured knights carrying bright battle pennants and flashing shields; castles with scarlet brick and yellow lichened walls; golden-haired maidens in beautifully colored gowns and glittering jewels--"in fact, all the colour and courtesy of the Age of Chivalry."[32]

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[31] Ibid., p. 74.

[32] James Ormerod, The Poetry of William Morris (Derby, England, 1938), pp. 7-9.

The dramatic monologue "Concerning Geffray Teste Noire" is another return to the fourteenth century, and Geffray is actually found in Froissart's Chronicles. The story of the death of the Gascon freebooter Geffray is told by John of Newcastle while he also tells of the discovery of the skeletons and the story of the fight with the Jacquerie. There is little use of color for effect, but there is good imagery, for instance, in the following lines:

> Lord God!
> What have we lying here? Will they be cold,
> I wonder, being so bare, above the sod,
> Instead of under? This was a knight too, fold
>
> Lying on fold of ancient rusted mail;
> No plate at all, gold rowels to the spurs,
> And see the quiet gleam of turqoise pale
> Along the ceinture; but the long time blurs
>
> Even the tinder of his coat to nought,
> Except these scraps of leather; see how white
> The skull is, loose within the coif! He fought
> A good fight, maybe, ere he was slain quite. 33

Even so, Morris cannot resist deft touches of color here and there as in "the soft green moss"; the "gold rowels to the spurs" with the "quiet gleam of turquoise pale/Along the ceinture," and "The small white bones that lay upon the flowers." There is a return to the tapestry style once again in the last two stanzas:

> In my new castle, down beside the Eure,
> There is a little chapel of squared stone,
> Painted inside and out; in green nook pure
> There did I lay the, every wearied bone;
>
> And over it they lay, with stone-white hands

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33 Ibid., p. 77

> Clasped fast together, hair made bright with gold;
> This Jaques Picard, known through many lands,
> Wrought cunningly; he's dead now--I am old. 34

"A Good Knight in Prison" returns to the days of the Crusades and combines imagery and color as the following lines attest:

> For these vile things that hem me in,
> These pagan beasts who live in sin,
> The sickly flowers pale and wan,
> The grim blue-bearded castellan,
> The stanchions half worn-out with rust
> Whereto their banner vile they trust--
> Why, all these things I hold them just
> Like dragons in a missal book,
> Wherein, whenever we may look,
> We see no horror, yea, delight
> We have, the colours are so bright;
> Likewise we note the specks of white,
> And the great plates of burnish'd gold.[35]

The story of deliverance from prison is more simple than the subtle colors, perhaps denoting court intrigue, would indicate. But the joy in the last stanza is obvious in the flash of beautiful golden hair that so fascinated Morris:

> I kiss the Lady Mary's head,
> Her lips and her hair golden red,
> Because to-day we have been wed. 36

"Old Love" pictures two old knights discussing the troubles of Constantine on the Continent and the once bright love of beautiful ladies. The scene is cleverly introduced with dim and faded colors of age set against the Duke's robe of gold and the

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34 Ibid., p. 81.

35 Ibid., p. 83.

36 Ibid., p. 86.

cushions with "broidery of apples green." But these are only a contrast to the faded summer lilies and time-dimmed colors:

> Her hair is bright still, yet it is
>   As though some dust were thrown on it.
>
> Her eyes are shallower, as though
>   Some grey glass were behind;. . .37

"The Gillyflower of Gold," a near ballad with a French end-line, tells of a knight's double victory in the lists. Morris was fond of French phrases, perhaps because he realized that lyric poetry began in France and Italy and came to England when that country was still bilingual. The bright colors of golden yellow and flame red are merged with stirring action, giving the reader a feeling of life and energy in contrast to the subtle shades of age in "Old Love." There is something vital in Morris' continued use of gold or yellow, here even more dramatic with the red:

> I almost saw your quiet head
> Bow'd down o'er the gillyflower bed,
> The yellow flowers stain'd with red--

The red is the blood of the wounded, but triumphant hero.

"Shameful Death," an excellent example of compression and simplicity in narrative, is a dreary picture of death and revenge. The scene is painted by an old man of seventy whose brother, during their youth, was ambushed and hanged--a death without honor. His revenge is painted in the grey shades of early morning and on a summer day

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37 Ibid., p. 88.

When the sky was overcast
And the smoke roll'd over the reeds of the fen.[38]

"The Eve of Crecy" embodies the musings of a French knight before that decisive battle. He considers the fruits of victory, wealth, and Marguerite, and although there is no action in the poem, his doom is sealed. The implied action is indicated by the dominance of gold, for gold is nearly always the color of movement in Morris' poetry:

Gold on her head, and gold on her feet,
And gold where the hems of her kirtle meet,
And a golden girdle round my sweet:--
Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite. 39

The image of the French soldier contemplating the spoils of victory is especially effective since the reader is aware that at this battle the English crossbow proved invincible against armor:

Yet even now it is good to think,
While my few poor varlets grumble and drink
In my desolate hall, where the fires sink,. . .
*   *   *   *   *
Of Margaret sitting glorious there,
In glory of gold and glory of hair,
And glory of glorious face most fair;. . .40

"The Judgement of God" returns to the lists with a father trying to infuse the joy of the single combat into his son. The son feels that his cause is unjust because the wrong had been done by his family:

The blue owls on my father's hood
Were a little dimm'd as I turn'd away;
This giving up of blood for blood

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38 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

> Will finish here somehow to-day.[41]

Blue and white is the color scheme; blue owls, the blue of the sea, and the white of linen and purity.

"Grey rain" and the grey of wet slate roofs set the tone in "The Little Tower" at first, but as the returning lord of the castle reaches his stronghold, he is met by torchlight and his lady's yellow hair. There is the bustle of preparation for a long siege mingled with confidence in eventual victory:

> The Little Tower will stand well here
>
> Many a year when we are dead,
> And over it our green and red,
> Barred with the Lady's golden head;
> From mere old age when we are dead. [42]

"The Sailing of the Sword" contains a very intricate color pattern, but not a confusing one, as the scheme is carried through by only three colors--scarlet, brown, and white. Three sisters bid farewell to their true knights who are off to the wars in France. Alicia, dressed in scarlet, begs for a ruby on her lover's return; Ursula, in russet brown, wishes for a brown falcon; but the third, dressed in white, simply requests her lover's return:

> A quick shriek came from me:
> "Come back, dear lord, to your white maid."[43]

The knights return bearing their promised gifts, but the maid in

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41 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 101.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 103.

white grows heartsick as she sees her Roland:

> Upon the deck a tall white maid
> Sat on Lord Roland's knee;
> His chin was press'd upon her head
> When the Sword came back from sea!

"Spell Bound" is a mood piece, the sad song of a wanderer who longs for the comfort and delight of his waiting love, but who knows that he is held in thrall by the wide world. The pearls on the white samite make it a study of white on white, and the haunting quality of the golden days of old is the only real color in the piace.

"The Wind" is a haunting melody with a timeless quality belonging to all ages. The image is of an old warrior who can now only dream of his past and his lost love. The great carved chair with the green hangings behind it, the orange with the gash, and the wildly burning torches enhance the mood of tragic passion, dreadful remorse, and horror set by the "blind wind." Then there is the blue sky, the spring-green hill, and "tufts of the daffodil" with only the wind as a chorus to keep the reader balanced between past and present. The pleasant memory of the old knight brings him to the tragic accident of his love's death, and he is wrenched back to the present:

> My hands shook and shook as the green gown
> show'd again
> Clear'd from the yellow flowers, and I grew
> hollow with pain,
> And on to us both there fell from the sun-shower
> drops of rain.

Then the realization as:

> I shriek'd and leapt up from my chair, and the
> orange roll'd out far
> The faint yellow juice oozed out like blood from
> a wizard's jar;
> And then in march'd the ghosts of those that had
> gone to the war. 44

And with the fading memory, the fading of the colors on the shields:

> I knew them by the arms that I was used to paint
> Upon their long thin shields; but the colours were all
> grown faint,
> And faint upon their banner was Olaf, king and saint.
>
> Wind, wind! thou are sad, art thou kind?
> Wind, wind, unhappy! thou art blind,
> Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.[45]

"The Blue Closet" is another mood picture of a lost love, this time enhanced by the wind-tolled bell in the chorus. The ladies wear purple and green and play on a golden harp in a blue room. Lady Louise sings with the other maids, but dreams of her lost sweetheart. It is an image that might be frozen in stained glass containing the simple, true colors beautifully intermingled. Patches of bright color are added by the "long scarlet scarf," the favor given the lost knight's spirit in her dream. Gold is used as the bright promise of a better life after death:

> O, love Louise, this is the key
> Of the happy golden land!
> O, sisters, cross the bridge with me,
> My eyes are full of sand.
> What matter that I cannot see,

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44 Ibid., p. 109.

45 May Morris, ~~Works~~, I, 110.

If ye take me by the hand?

And ever the great bell overhead
And the tumbling seas mourn'd for the dead;
For their song ceased, and they were dead. 46

In the next poem the castle is empty and barren, and the only color left is the grey of the roof and the white of ghosts. The fair Yoland, who sings "The Tune of the Seven Towers," sings it a little madly as if her mind were wandering from one thing to another like an aimless butterfly in a garden of flowers. There is just a suggestion of doom in the last stanza:

If you will go for me now
I will kiss your mouth at last;
[She sayeth inwardly]
(The graves stand grey in a row.)
Oliver, hold me fast!

"Therefore," said fair Yoland of the flowers,
"This is the tune of Seven Towers." 47

"Golden Wings" is a story; a whole picture which might be called a triptych, for there are three distinct scenes or moods. First, there is the image of the untroubled castle with its serene and happy inmates painted in bright, beautiful colors as the central panel:

Many scarlet bricks there were
In its walls, and old grey stone;
Over which red apples shone
At the right time of the year.

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46 Ibid., p. 113.

47 Ibid., p. 115.

On the bricks the green moss grew,
  Yellow lichen on the stone,
  Over which red apples shone;
Little war that castle knew. 48

and the people:

Whosoever wander'd there,
  Whether it be dame or knight,
  Half of scarlet, half of white
Their raiment was; of roses fair

Each wore a garland on the head,
  At Ladies' Gard the way was so:[49]

The second panel shows the one unhappy figure in this castle of peace, "Jehane du Castel beau," in a moonlight night as she sings, calling for her sweetheart "across the sea." There is grey light, a silver-hilted sword, and white swans to set the mood of longing as Jehane slips down to the water's edge where she mysteriously meets her death:

O Jehane! the red morning sun
  Changed her white feet to glowing gold,
  Upon her smock, on crease and fold,
Changed that to gold which had been dun.

The last panel contains the desolated castle as it appears after mourning the death of Jehane, and after the knights had met reality on the open field:

Giles and Miles and Gervise there,
  Ladies' Gard must meet the war
  Whatsoever knights these are
Man the walls withouten fear! 50

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48 Ibid., p. 115.

49 Ibid., p. 117.

50 Ibid., p. 122.

And the once idyllic scene is now represented as

> The apples now grow green and sour
> Upon the mouldering castle-wall,
> Before they ripen where they fall:
> There are no banners on the tower. 51

"The Haystack in the Floods" is another example of compression and simplicity. Morris invented this sordid drama of an English knight after Poitièrs, the battle in 1356 that saw the introduction of gunpowder in warfare. The dominant ornaments of this stark tragedy are the grey, slanting rain, "old soak'd hay," and the flooded ground. This atmosphere blends excellently with the miserable death of a brave soldier vindictively murdered before the eyes of his mistress. This poem demonstrates Morris' grim, realistic medievalism, completely unrelieved by romance of any kind, as contrasted with the pictorial type in "The Chapel in Lyoness."

"Two Red Roses Across the Moon," with its English end-line is a love ballad of warmth and color. A knight on his way to battle passes a castle at noon, and hears a lady singing in her hall. However, he continues on his way to battle taking the song he heard as a battle cry:

> And they cried, as they cut them down at the noon,
> Two red roses across the moon! 52

Returning victorious from the battle, at noon on another day, he stops by the hall to see the lady. Since it is raining, he decides

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51 Ibid., p. 123.

52 Ibid., p. 129.

to tarry, ready for love, and

> Under the may she stoop'd to the crown,
> All was gold, there was nothing of brown;
> And the horns blew up in the hall at noon,
> Two red roses across the moon. 53

In "Welland River" the fair Ellayne bids her Sir Robert return home soon from the wars and not to forget her golden hair among the dark beauties of the East:

> For every day that passes by
> I wax both pale and green,
> From gold to gold of my girdle
> There is an inch between.
>
> I sew'd it up with scarlet silk
> Last night upon my knee,
> And my heart grew sad and sore to think
> Thy face I'd never see. 54

Although Sir Robert did bring an Eastern beauty home, he forsook her for the golden-haired Ellayne whom he had once possessed. The color scheme is again dominated by gold; yellow gold of Ellayne's hair, red gold of the knight's coat, golden shoes, and golden hangings in the hall of Ellayne. Other colors are subsidiary and do little to set the scene. The scarlet pennon and mending silk, a grey horse, ruby jewelry, and the pale green of sickness and sorrow merely fill out figures in the tapestry.

In "Riding Together" Morris has carefully set the impression gained from the sunny, hot spring weather in contrast with sudden death in battle. Perhaps the long black shadows of the trees were

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53 Ibid., p. 129.

54 Ibid., p. 131.

a portent of tragedy as they lay against the "flowers in the sunny weather." As Christian knight met pagan and

> Up the sweep of the bridge we dash'd together,
>   It rock'd to the crash of meeting spears,
> Down rain'd the buds of the dear spring weather,
>   The elm-tree flowers fell like tears. 55

The Christians are defeated, the companion is killed, and the spring weather holds no more pleasure for the survivor:

> We ride no more, no more together;
>   My prison-bars are thick and strong,
> I take no heed of any weather,
>   The sweet saints grant I live not long.[56]

In "Father John's War-Song" gold is again the most important color as old John seeks a son. John's daughter Mary loves a fine young man, and John feels that here is a son he can love. There are sheaves of golden grain, and there is "maiden Mary with hair like corn,/As red as the reddest of golden corn." The next poem is "Sir Giles' War Song," a short song of triumph with a combination English and French end-line. There is the impression of buoyant spirits, and the hint of excitement in the air.

The colors in "Near Avallon" are red-gold, green, scarlet, and

> In all their heaumes some yellow hair.[57]

The yellow may signify the hopeless love of the knights for gay maidens. Avallon is an ocean paradise, the island, according to

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55 Ibid., p. 136.

56 Ibid., p. 136.

57 Ibid., p. 140.

Layamon and Tennyson, where King Arthur waits to return to England.

"Praise of My Lady" is a hymn to the beauty of Jane Burden, the woman who became the living ideal of the beauty so much admired by Morris and his circle:

> Not greatly long my lady's hair,
> Nor yet with yellow colour fair,
> But thick and crispèd wonderfully:
> Beata mea Domina! 58

This is part of the detail which fits a portrait by Dante Gabriel Rossetti of the woman who became Morris' wife in 1859.

"Summer Dawn" and "In Prison" are both short pieces; the first pictures the world in the false light before dawn, the second from the dim confines of a prison. Morris seems to dream without energy in "Summer Dawn"; it is one of his earliest poems.

It seems evident, from the Arthurian poems as well as those founded on Froissart, that Morris recreated the life of the Middle Ages, that he was more completely at ease in this medieval element than in his own generation. If this is true, then it is also evident that Morris did not try to revive the past--its color, pagentry, and beauty--by slavish copying, but by recapturing and bringing to life the essence or spirit of the past. It is at this point that his work as an artist and craftsman touches his work as a poet. It is here that the colors of tapestries, stained-glass windows, and illuminated texts meet those of "Rapunzel," "Golden Wings," and "Two Red Roses Across the Moon."

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58 Ibid., p. 141.

CHAPTER II

The Defence of Guenevere was published in 1858, and it was not until 1867 that Morris published his second volume of poetry, The Life and Death of Jason. The intervening years had been profitably spent in the development of the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., and with that firm Morris attempted to reintroduce beauty into common objects of everyday life. The book won immediate fame and popularity, enough to bring Morris to the forefront of the poets of his time. The nine years between the two volumes of poetry were filled with such varied activities as mural decorations, carving, stained glass, metal work including jewelry, and figure and pattern painting.[59]

In order to find the creation of The Life and Death of Jason, it is necessary to look ahead to Morris' plan for a collection of tales told, like Boccacio's Decameron and The Arabian Nights, in a

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59 Walker, pp. 535-536.

framework. The connecting web was to be the narrative of the Wanderers, and the first of the tales to be the "Deeds of Jason." May Morris says that this poem grew so long in comparison to the other tales that Morris decided to publish it separately to test public reaction to the romantic narrative form.[60] That Morris intended it for first place in the Earthly Paradise is borne out by two pages from a notebook which contain about forty-one lines of poetry in Morris' hand followed by the words: "To come between 'March' and 'The Deeds of Jason.'"[61]

Jason is in Chaucerian rhymed iambic couplets like the "Prologue" and "The Knight's Tale" and is episodic. All of Morris' narrative verse possesses the simplicity and felicity of diction that characterize Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. Morris' verse is at once simple, sensous, and passionate; it is charged with the joy of life, and significantly rich in color. Because he used Chaucer as a model, Jason is unlike the poems in the Guenevere volume in design and execution. The pieces in the earlier volume are either dramatic or lyrical, more in the manner of Rossetti than in the manner of any other poet. The rhymed couplets that make up the even, gently flowing verse of Jason are in direct contrast to the vigorous, highly-colored poetry of Guenevere. The metre of the later poem, Jason, has come to be accepted as one of the chief

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60 May Morris, Works, II, xiv.

61 Ibid., II, xvi, Appendix D .

characteristics of Morris' poetry. It consists mainly of the use of run-on lines similar to the manner in which Keats uses run-on lines to break down the rigidity of the heroic couplet with the end stops of Dryden and Pope.[62] Because of Morris' diffuseness the poems of the Guenevere volume were examined separately and in detail, but Jason and the Earthly Paradise have a unity of vision allowing a more general consideration of the poet-draftsman's use of color and imagery.

It was Morris' intention to tell the old story of Jason and the Fleece in the manner of a troubador. The impression gained is that Morris adapted the stcry from many sources without striving for exact detail, and that there is a medieval rather than a classical flavor. To map the course of the Argonauts would perhaps be a difficult task, for Morris' style is pictorial with episode blending into episode without any abrupt break. He has taken us out of our known world and provided the quest for the Fleece, the heroes' adventures, and King Pelias' treachery as the cotton warp on which the love story of Jason and Medea is woven. Morris has placed this classic story in the era of medieval Chartres or Bruges, told as the dream of a medieval poet, a dream within a dream.[63]

Morris' seriousness of mind and purpose is everywhere evident in Jason because, although there are seventeen books, there is not one

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62 James Ormerod, The Poetry of William Morris (Derby, England, 1938), p. 11.

63 Noyes, p. 41.

obscure passage. There may be some subdued coloring, but generally the story is as clear and as limpid as anything by Chaucer. There were only a few shades of color in fifteenth century tapestry weaving, but most of them were light-fast hues of shrill intensity, and Morris' dexterity in the handling of these colors and fabrics has presented the reader a medieval wonderland. The Greek girls in their thin green gowns, the precious stones and burnished metals, and the colors themselves gold, blue, and the vermilion of cinnabar--help create the effect. Noyes, in his study, continues to compare Morris' poetic methods to tapestry-making by saying that the pages of Jason slip past the reader as if he were strolling through a long hall hung with many tapestries which tell the story without words.[64]

Old tapestries were only one facet of Morris' interests in the crafts, and although Noyes' comparison is apt, there are other types of hand work that use clear, compelling, refreshingly simple blues and golds and reds. There is the illumination of ancient texts and the pure colors of beautiful stained-glass windows, both of which were of great interest to Morris and his associates. These crafts taught him economy of material, and it will be found again and again that the waves over which the Argo sails are simply green or sometimes blue. During the adventure of a story they might be white or tumble with energy, but usually they are calm and we find the oft-repeated inversion "the water wan." Graham Hough in

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64 Ibid., p. 49.

The Last Romantics says that Morris' Jason means nothing beyond itself; that it shows us "figures on a tapestry, in which it would be idle to look for any further significance"; and it has "no more relation to nineteenth-century life than Morris' tapestries have to nineteenth century methods of industrial production."[65]

Jason was the son of Aeson and nephew to King Pelias of Iolcos in Thessaly. To prevent Jason from taking his rightful place on the throne of Iolcos, Pelias sent him to seek the Golden Fleece which had been borne through the air to Colchis in Asia. Aetis, King of Colchis, had placed the Fleece in a grove under the guard of a sleepless, invincible dragon.

With the help of the gods, Jason built an enchanted ship, the Argo, and, accompanied by fifty of the greatest Greek heroes, set out on the adventure. Among the Argonauts with Jason were Nestor, Orpheus, Hercules, and Theseus. King Aetis promised Jason the Fleece if he would perform the deeds to be enumerated by his beautiful daughter, Medea. She told Jason that he must harness two magic bulls and sow a field with dragon's teeth, overcome the crop of warriors produced, and then kill the dragon guarding the Golden Fleece. During her speech Medea and Jason fell deeply in love. With the help of her sorcery and wiles Jason secured the Fleece and fled with Medea toward Iolcos. They went to Corinth where they lived happily for about ten years.

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65 Graham Hough, The Last Romantics (London, 1936), p. 132.

While in Corinth Jason fell in love with Glauce, the daughter of King Creon, and prepared to marry her. Medea, now scorned by Jason, took steps to prevent the marriage. She destroyed the king and his daughter with a magic robe, killed the children she had by Jason, and fled to Athens. Jason became king of Corinth on the death of Creon, but did not live long after. He wandered to the beached Argo one afternoon, fell asleep beneath its rotting hull, and was crushed by a loosened timber.

Despite the often-repeated allusions to the tapestry-like effect of Morris' poetry, the poetry is not hazy. Morris is suggestive rather than direct, but he saw things as well-defined, concrete pictures. It is this quality that indicates that Morris is essentially a narrative poet. He did not possess that genius for depicting character attributed to Chaucer, and he depended on the broad effect. The landscape, decoration, and story hold us when the characters do not. It is neither desirable nor possible to include minute detail in such works as tapestries or stained glass. Morris realized this and by not striving for the ultimate phrase, applied this same method to his poetry. He did, however, write some lovely lyrics, and these are often anthologized as representative of Jason.

"I know a Little Garden-close" from Book IV is one of the most popular of his lyrics. The song is sung by a water nymph to Hercules' armor bearer, Hylas, to lure him into her watery domain. The gods decreed that Hercules stay in Greece; so he followed his lost aide,

and remained on Mysia for other deeds. The songs of Orpheus are also fine lyrics. "O Death, That Maketh Life So Sweet" from Book XIII is sung by Orpheus to give heart to his comrades on the return journey. The song comes just before the sighting of land when the Argonauts had tired of the "landless seas."

Morris' power of suggestion is more easily experienced by the reader than described. Both May Morris and Mackail dwell on Morris' dislike of revision and polishing. He preferred the effects produced by the colors rather than those produced by fitting the exact phrase to the thought. The earlier poems indicated this broad effect to a lesser extent, but The Life and Death of Jason shows it to a marked degree. "He never wrote better, in this even style, than in Jason; there is an alternation of brilliant and softer markings, which are never vague or muddy in colouring, and are fully harmonized."[66] The following description of the palace of King Aetis is one of the finest examples of Morris' tapestry method:

> The pillars, made the mighty roof to hold,
> The one was silver and the next was gold
> All down the hall; the roof, of some strange wood
> Brought over sea, was dyed as red as blood,
> Set thick with silver flowers, and delight
> Of intertwining figures wrought aright. 67

The imagery continues to describe the walls which are so cunningly painted that they seem to be forests, towns, seas, and palaces.

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66 Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature, 1780-1880 (New York, 1920), IV, 36.

67 May Morris, Works, II, 56.

The floor, inlaid with colored stones, has two running streams in its center, but the streams are filled with stones of brown and green. Here again we find Morris' clever use of uncomplicated hues which gives such a strong effect of clarity.

There are many verbal pictures throughout Jason, as there are in all of Morris' poetry. Almost every line brings forth a scene or bit of color, but not to the detriment of the narrative. The building of the Argo is described with a more concrete imagination than the building of the Ark in the old mystery play, Noah. Even the "second rafter in the royall hall" is used, and it is this very piece that finally falls on Jason and kills him. The description of the flight of the lovers through the fresh night, neither touching hands nor speaking, and that of the shrine which holds the Fleece tend to heighten suspense even when the outcome is known. The temple that holds the Fleece is of blood-red and white marble set on "jasper green" pillars. Its door is of silver inlaid with a glittering gold sun, the brightness of which defies the sun in the sky.

At the beginning of Book IX, just as Jason and Medea are to win through to the Fleece, Medea stops to speak tenderly and suggestively of their doom:

> O love, turn round, and note the goodlihead,
> My father's palace shows beneath the stars,
> Bethink thee of the men grown old in wars,
> Who do my bidding; what delights I have,
> How many ladies lie in wait to save
> My life from toil and carefulness, and think
> How sweet a cup I have been used to drink,

How I cast it to the ground for thee.[68]

Jason's answer is in keeping with the urgency of the moment, and Medea continues pathetically, but without foretelling so much as to spoil the story. Then there follows the flight of the _Argo_ with the triumphant Greeks getting ready for war with the Colchian ship commanded by Absyrtus, and the fight itself is vivid with rolling clouds of exquisite color:

> Ere Argo's mighty prow had thrust apart
> The huddled oars, and through the fair ship's heart
> Had thrust her iron beak, and the green wave
> Rushed in as rush the waters through a cave
> That tunnels half a sea-girt lonely rock. 69

In Book XIV Morris describes the Garden of the Hesperides in the manner of Keats in "The Eve of St. Agnes." The mood is quiet and suppressed for gaiety is in the distance as the mariners half fear the very lushness of the garden. But every sense is exploited as we see ripe fruit, beautiful flowers, and smell the odor of thyme and blossoms. To complete the fascinating picture are the maidens bathing in the blue stream or gathered in their marble summer house. But for the purely pictorial--pictorial in the sense of making a picture for the mind--we must hark back once again to Book IX and the escape with the Fleece. Here is a passage describing the triumphant but stealthy arrival of Jason and Medea at "the long white quays" where the _Argo_ is moored. It is a scene Morris must have remembered from a night in some small medieval French channel town.

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68 _Ibid_., II, 125.

69 _Ibid_., II, 136.

He describes the rows of ships' masts "black against the stars" and the "night-wind twitching the loose straw/From half-unloaded keels." Coming where they do in the context, the thirteen lines are a master stroke of restraint filled with the very spirit of romance. Morris has artfully captured a feeling of restlessness and of change as if both Jason and Medea felt, with the reader, the impending step from the known to the unknown. True, Jason is returning to his homeland, but he is also aware that things will not be the same. This mood is not heightened by the night-wind so much as by the sudden mysterious sound of a caged bird breaking the stillness from a quiet Indian ship. The reader senses a feeling of relief when the lovers at last reach their ship safely.

It seems strange that in the poetry of a man whose life was so completely filled with the myriad pursuits he loved, a note of sadness should be found--not brash, obvious sorrow, but a restrained undercurrent of melancholy. Perhaps he was possessed with the pain of realization that life is all too brief, and that death will make its claim before the minutest part of all that is to be learned and done is tried. The Golden Fleece represents all the desires and ambitions, the longing for immortality and community happiness; and, at the same time, it represents their inadequacy to satisfy. There is joy among the wanderers as they eat and drink at the banquet by torchlight, but it is the joy akin to pain, because although life is sweet, it is also too brief. All of Morris' narrative verse is at once simple and passionate; rich in color, and charged with this

resurgent passion of the joy of life,[70] and the torches seem to illuminate a little space amidst the eternal darkness.

The Life and Death of Jason is a long poem containing many passages of clear imagery, beautiful color, and restrained and pertinent description. A good example is the hunt of Diana, the glory of which is barely hinted at by Chiron, the young Jason's tutor in Book I. Jason's meeting with King Pelias in Book II is colored by the king's scarlet clothes, his grey head, and ivory throne, by Jason's "yellow head" and russet hood. The vivid account of the encounter with the Harpies in Book V, and the languid beauties in the garden of Circe "wrought with white and red" in Book XIII are stirring and beautiful passages, but the whole poem is transfused with emotional color. Noyes lists this poem as one of the great English examples of the effect of "atmosphere," and says that the Argo plunges to her goal through "enchanted and exquisitely colored mists of legend."[71]

It is in the seventeenth and last book that Morris rises to his dramatic best, and the climax and crown of the whole story is in the scenes where Medea's doom is fulfilled and Jason tires of her:

> She saw the happy time fade fast away;
> And as she fell from out that happiness

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70 Ormerod, p. 12.

71 May Morris, Works, II, 271.

Again she grew to be the sorceress,[72]

Morris first sets the mood of Medea's bitter despair and restlessness with the oft-repeated "Once more" beginning several lines. The mood then changes to resolve as Medea tests the magic fluid that can be ignited by the sun's rays, and the care with which she chooses a garment of the finest web for Glauce's wedding and burning death (there is a touch of the craftsman even in this dramatic scene as Morris includes a description of the method an Indian slave employed to weave the cloth). The deaths of Glauce and her father occur while Jason is out of the room and all that he finds of his love is a "heap of ashes white." This is a neat dramatic stroke, for all that is left of Jason's life is also a heap of burned ashes.

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72 Noyes, p. 57.

CHAPTER III

The Earthly Paradise contains twenty-four tales written in the four-stress and five-stress couplet of Chaucer, and the seven-line stanza of Troilus and Criseyde.[73] Morris' skill in the design and construction of this long poem gives the work its merit as art and is the final step in the perfection of the epic manner he began in the unpublished Troy cycle and in Jason.[74] Ormerod's use of the word architectonic is particularly apt, for Mackail says that Morris always worked in the spirit of an architect; that is, as a craftsman who held building in the highest esteem.[75]

The Earthly Paradise was published in four volumes in two installments between 1868 and 1870. The tales are set in a frame somewhat in the manner of Chaucer, and this frame is explained in

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[73] Charles Grosvenor Osgood, The Voice of England (New York, 1935), p. 545, [Appendix E].

[74] Ormerod, p. 18.

[75] Mackail, I, 79.

the "Prologue" by Morris. To escape the plague that spread over Europe in the fourteenth century, and to find a fabled Earthly Paradise, a company of Germanic, Norse, and Celtic folk sail to the West until they reach an island inhabited by descendants of the ancient Greeks. The Wanderers have sailed many years and are old men when they reach the island, and the Greeks have been cut off from the world so that their civilization is also very old. The Greeks are true descendants of the ancient people unspoiled by change over the centuries. They agree to entertain the travelers for a year, and would like

> To hear some tales of that now altered world,
> Wherefrom our fathers in old time were hurled
> By the hard hands of fate and destiny. 76

In return they will tell stories of their own people and time. They propose "two solemn feasts" in every month at which the two parties will exchange stories.

Since the Elders and the Wanderers are at the end of their lives, the stories look back to the olden days--the Greeks telling their ancient myths, and the visitors their phantasies of barbaric times. The twenty-four tales that result contrast the tales of classical legend with those of Scandinavian saga and medieval romance. Walker, however, divides the stories into three groups according to their source. He lists classical, medieval, or Scandinavian with the possible exception of "The Man Who Never

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76 May Morris, Works, III.

Laughed Again," which comes from the Arabian Nights. Walker goes on to say that Morris treats his classical and medieval themes alike, and that both had much the same setting in his imagination.[77] The reader will probably discover that there are two main divisions--the classical and the medieval, with the latter divided into the Norse and the English sources.

It is noticeable that there is a transition near the tenth month, a change in tone between the earlier and later parts. The change is a deepening of tone, the fulfilling of a need for something stronger after ten months in paradise. The transition is from romance to epic, and the temper and style are modified as well. Perhaps this change stems from Morris' study of the literature of Iceland. Through the pages there runs a note of languor and despondency very appropriate to the ancient speakers. The narrative is generally slow-moving, but the easy-flowing fountain of pure language carries everything through. There is little attempt to individualize the characters except for their clothes, the colors of which are the glittering ones of mosaic, or of tapestry figures, and his restraint is everywhere apparent. But the style is never common or unpoetical, and the general design is one of order and symmetry.

It is difficult to explain the total effect of a poem like The Earthly Paradise in abstractions. It is much easier, and

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[77] Walker, pp. 536-537.

clearer, to compare it with a known object, and a good analogy would be to a Gothic cathedral. The poem in its entirety has a massive effect that must be realized before the separate stories can be appreciated. This effect is grasped from the "Prologue" which can be easily borne in mind during the reading of the individual stories, especially with the aid of the short introductions that serve as a base for the more delicate tracery of the separate stories. The separate stories when taken alone, are beautiful, but as in all Gothic art, they contribute to a whole more wonderful than themselves. Morris in writing his tales was careful never to destroy the mass effect for the sake of an individual design, but each story can be read alone and enjoyed as a single entity. Morris was never gaudy in his decoration of narrative verse or of illuminated manuscripts, for he felt that it would detract more than it would add, and in truth it was not necessary, for the "texture itself was of extraordinary richness and shot with a hundred colors."[78] On this point Arthur Clutton-Brock has this to say:

> No modern English poet had written a long poem of any kind so easy to read as The Earthly Paradise. Begin one of the tales. . .and you will find that it draws you along with its own current. The poetry of The Earthly Paradise has been rather foolishly compared to the design of his wall papers and chintzes; but it is true that Morris often gives as faint an image of reality in a story as in a pattern, and that he relies

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[78] John Drinkwater, William Morris--A Critical Study (London, 1913), pp. 114-115.

> on the story, as on the pattern, to justify the
> faintness. 79

Morris' pictorial tendencies are more in evidence in the poems translated from the Norse originals or based on Northern stories in which a stronger and more sinister tone would be expected. In "The Lovers of Gudrun" the rugged reality of the Laxdaela Saga is retained, but Morris has added a great deal of description.[80]

Morris begins the cycle with an "Apology" in which he disclaims equality with earlier poets who used the same themes, and further states that he has no vital message in philosophy nor a world-view to present. Instead, he is "The idle singer of an empty day"; that is, his idle song is a song for pleasure. There follows, then, the "Prologue" of the wandering Norsemen and Celts which accounts for their presence on the island. The first few lines admonish the reader to imagine himself in Geoffrey Chaucer's time when London was

> small and white and clean,
> The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green;
> Think, that below bridge the green lapping waves
> Smite some few keels that bear Levantine staves,
> Cut from the yew wood on the burnt-up hill,
> And pointed jars that Greek hands toiled to fill,
> And treasured scanty spice from some far sea,
> Florence gold cloth, and Ypres napery,
> And cloth of Bruges, and hogsheads of Guienne;[81]

The scene shifts to a "nameless city in a distant sea: which

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79 Arthur Clutton-Brock, William Morris, His Work and His Influence (New York, 1914), p. 90.

80 Hough, p. 130.

81 May Morris, Works, III, 3.

is ruled by the descendants of ancient Greeks. There is vivid description in the short passage which sets the scene. The city rulers are discovered on golden thrones holding ebony wands of state banded with silver, but age and decay are evident in the armed retainers grouped around the rulers. Here the wanderers tell the story of their flight and of their adventures. One of their first encounters is with the English King and his fleet, and this is described in beautiful colors and rich imagery. The fleet glittered with shields, shining weapons, and beautiful sails. Added to this color is the bright sail of the smaller of the travelers' two ships, The Fighting Man:

> The ruddy lion with the axe of gold,
> And Marcus Erling's sign set corner-wise,
> The green, gold-fruited tree of Paradise.[82]

Their first landfall is described in heady colors of yellow sand, lush green forests filled with gay colored birds, and the rich gold ornaments of the natives. Here again Morris depends on beautifully wrought gold to create an effect of richness and well-being. One of the strange cities they visit is described in the familiar colors:

> with many a hue
> The house walls glowed, of red and green and blue,
> And some with gold were well adorned, and one
> From roofs of gold flashed back the noontide sun.[83]

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[82] Ibid., III, 26.

[83] Ibid., III, 54.

Rolf, the spokesman and captain of the Wanderers, has many such opportunities to speak eloquently with color and imagery of the scenes they had seen on their long journey. One recurring theme in the "Prologue" is the certainty of death unless their goal is reached. It was to escape death that they first began their travels, and as each new adventure is encountered, there is a different outlook on death. One savage land embalms the king, his household and family; another land has a prophecy of everlasting life to be granted by pleased gods. This theme of death must have been deeply impressed on Morris' mind from his medieval studies. May Morris feels that Morris was interested in two ideas widely prevalent in the Middle Ages, the death which hunted men from their homes and the wild belief in a still undiscovered paradise. She thinks that the idea of an Earthly Paradise may stem from St. Brendan's voyage in the Golden Legend.[84]

The Greeks welcome the weary band and offer hospitality in exchange for stories of olden times. The new year begins in March as it did in the Julian calendar, not changed in England until 1752, and it is at the New Year feast that the first tales are told. The song "March" bids all to enjoy life before it is gone, and then the Greeks propose the series of tales. They are now old men, "old before their time," but they no longer fear death as they while away the passing years with stories of a past which

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[84] Ibid., III, xviii.

they scarcely regret. This atmosphere of antiquity is introduced near the end of the "Prologue." It is enhanced by the poem of "March," and pervades the stories themselves throughout the cycle.

The classical tales come mostly from the obvious sources; the first, "Atalanta's Race," is mainly from Apollodorus and Ovid. The details in all of them, however, areMorris' as he reworks the old story to fit the mood of the whole cycle, but within the main lines of the story itself. This first story is in the easily read, seven-line stanza that seems to keep the story moving at the fast pace necessary to the action. The beginning of the story is told from Milanion's (Hippomenes') point of view, but during the race there is a change. Good suspense is created even when the outcome is known, but it is Atalanta's feelings that are described as the golden apples appear before her one by one like rays of light upon the sand.

The second tale, near the end of March, is "The Man Born to Be King" told by "a Wanderer." A great king is warned that his line of descent will end with him and a commoner will have the throne. Out hunting, the king is separated from his party and takes refuge in a peasant hut where a child is about to be born. The child's mother dies in abject poverty, and Morris paints the unlovely scene with precision and truth, but makes it beautiful because he is concerned only with the essentials of reality that delight the eye:

> On the straw the poor dead woman lay;
> The door alone let in the day,
> Showing the trodden earthen floor,
> A board on trestles weak and poor,
> Three stumps of tree for stool or chair,

A half-glazed pipkin, nothing fair,
A bowl of porridge by the wife,
Untouched by lips that lacked for life,[85]

But the peasant-born boy foils the king at every turn and marries the princess in a court filled with happiness, damsels in gold raiment, minstrels in "coats of flame," and colorfully dressed nobles and knights. The old king admits that he has lost and that life is nearly ended; again the atmosphere of fast-fleeting life is expressed by the king and the tale teller.

The month of April has the Greek story of "The Doom of King Acrisius," the sources of which are again Apollodorus and Ovid. The story is of a king of Argos who had only one child, a daughter, Danaë. She was the most beautiful girl in the land, but the king wished for a son. The Oracle of Delphi told him that he would never have a son, and prophesied what was worse by far: that his daughter would have a son who would kill him. The coming of Jove in a shower of gold to the imprisoned Danaë is beautifully described:

And on the gold was spread her golden hair,
And like an ivory image still she lay,
* * * *
And by her head a gold-robed man there stood,
At sight of whom the damsel's shamefast blood
Made all her face red to the golden hair,
And quick she covered up her bosom fair. 86

Danaë's child became the man Perseus, who secured the snake-haired head of Medusa, rescued his mother, rescued Andromeda, and founded

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85 Ibid., III, 116.

86 Ibid., III, 181.

Mycenae. In a contest Perseus struck his grandfather, Acrisius, by mistake and

> He died, and in a few days everyone
> Went on their way as though he had not been.[87]

A note of sadness and futility is evident in the poem, and the nearest approach to humour is found in the irony of "The Proud King," the Wanderers' story for April. Morris has taken from Gesta Romanorum the story of a king who became so powerful that he thought himself a god. An angel takes the king's place on the throne, and the king is not recognized by his people even though his appearance is not altered. When the proud king becomes humble, he regains his throne and no one remembers the mad man who claimed to be king.

Morris' first plan was to publish The Earthly Paradise as an elaborately illustrated and illuminated volume. With Burne-Jones he planned some two or three hundred woodcuts, and in the manuscript there are many references to subjects for them. Burne-Jones had prepared designs for "Cupid and Psyche" and "The Hill of Venus." May Morris says that as "one turns over the pages of the manuscript . . .some breath of the old enthusiasm and romantic yearning come from them.[88] Morris was enthusiastic, too, about the plans for the woodcuts, but he realised the magnitude of the undertaking and settled for a less ornate edition. It did not prevent his

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87 Ibid., III, 269.

88 Ibid., III, xxiii.

writing with a view to illustration, however, and his delight in describing events, places, and people is everywhere evident in the poem. Perhaps he did not delineate character as well as Chaucer, for instance, but his stories are nonetheless fascinating.

The lyric for May is very lovely. It begins the second part of Morris' cycle and demands a tale that is commensurate with the season, such as "The Story of Cupid and Psyche." The source of the tale is a second century A. D. Latin writer, Apuleius, who wrote for pleasure rather than from belief, and in the manner of Ovid.[89] This story serves to indicate Morris' method of reworking his poetry. There exist three manuscripts which indicate that the tale was largely rewritten. In the Latin story Psyche's grief over the loss of Cupid causes her to bring her sisters to their death, but Morris plays this episode down and has Psyche performing tasks as penance to Venus, who finally forgives Psyche and makes her immortal. There is a delicate little song sung to Psyche which was finally chosen by Morris over two others:

> O pensive, tender maid, downcast and shy,
> Who turnest pale e'en at the name of love
> *　　*　　*　　*
> Come then, beloved one, for such as thee
> Love loveth, and their hearts he knoweth well,

The garden of Venus is delightfully pictured:

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89 Edith Hamilton, <u>Mythology</u> (New York, 1955), p. 92.

90 May Morris, <u>Works</u>, IV, 21.

small flowers as red as blood
Were growing up amid the soft green grass 91

with doves, fallen roses, and pensive music. The flowers crushed underfoot give off a heady perfume and roses are piled high for the goddess. A fitting contrast is Psyche's first sight of the Styx described with just the right amount of liquid sound:

until she could espy
The wan, grey river lap the leaden bank. 92

Psyche wins through and becomes an immortal and the wife of Cupid.

The first of the Wanderers' tales was told by Captain Rolf; this next one, "The Writing On The Image," is told by Laurence, the Swabian priest. Rolf, Laurence, and Nicholas, the Breton tutor, made up the original three men who began the search. Nicholas, however, died on the way. This old monkish anecdote is told to illustrate or point a sermon; the old scholar discovers a miracle, but perishes grimly. By solving a riddle the scholar finds a hidden subterranean vault about which he speculates before entering. It may bring him wealth, pleasure, and power--or death. In the vault he finds a royal group with their attendants seated around a table--dead. The description is, as usual, sparkling clear:

And next beside him sat his queen
Who in a flowery gown of green
And golden mantle well was clad[93]

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91 _Ibid._, IV, 48.

92 _Ibid._, IV, 65.

93 _Ibid._, IV, 81.

The scholar is on the point of escaping with a vast treasure when he spies a huge gem. He cannot resist this extra wealth and he is sealed in the vault forever by a secret lever set in the gem.

The poem for June, loveliest of all the lyrics, contains Morris' vision of his new home on the upper Thames in Oxfordshire, and the embodiment of the spirit of this popular month. In the lyric there is a quiet music which is wafted to us by the gentle spring breeze with the sweet odor of flowers and twittering of birds. In the background we hear the pleasant gossip of water over the weir and see the air alive with the color of pretty butterflies. There is still a gentleness and a subdued quality about the tales and the connecting links.

The story, "The Love of Alcestis," concerns Admetus, a king who learns that if he can find a substitute he need not die. No one will consent except his wife, Alcestis--he accepts, but mourns. The song in this tale has a haunting note admonishing us again to enjoy life while we are still able. Admetus goes through a long and wearying time, at least for the reader, before he weds Alcestis. They have only a short, fleeting happiness before they are separated by death.

The eighth story in the cycle is probably one of the best. It follows Morris' original idea of placing subjects of lucid classic outline in contrast to subjects of greater fantasy or terror. Thus "Alcestis" is told in the same month as "The Lady of the Land," and "The Story of Rhodope" placed next to "The Lovers of Gudrun." For the reader the classic tales are juxtaposed with those of fantasy even though they are almost a month apart in the minds of the Elders

and their guests. The account of "The Lady of the Land" is from Sir John Mandeville's Voiage and Travell. The "lady," who had angered Diana by thinking of a night of love, was transformed by a spell into a dragon, and the spell could only be broken by a kiss. Morris' story is of a man who tried to set her free, failed from a lack of courage, and died insane. He even knew of her true form because he blundered into her apartment while she was in her womanly figure. The Florentine was overawed by the apartment he saw:

> Upon the floor uncounted medals lay
> Like things of little value; here and there
> Stood golden caldrons, that might well outweigh
> The biggest midst an emperor's copper ware,
> And golden cups were set on tables fair,
> Themselves of gold; and in all hollow things
> Were stored great gems, worthy the crowns of kings.
>
> The walls and roof with gold were overlaid,
> And precious raiment from the wall hung down;
> The fall of kings that treasure might have stayed,
> *   *   *   *   *
> Then in a room he stood wherein there was
> A marble bath, whose brimming water yet
> Was scarcely still; a vessel of green glass
> Half full of odorous ointment was there set
> Upon the topmost step that still was wet,
> And jewelled shoes and women's dainty gear
> Lay cast upon the varied pavement near. [94]

Here again we can see Morris' use of sensuous detail to draw a vivid picture; the step that is still wet, the jewelled shoes, and the "women's dainty gear" all highlight the effect. The meeting of man and dragon is very graphic, and it is probably safe to say

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[94] Ibid., IV, 131-132.

that most readers sympathize with the Florentine's inability to remain steadfast to his purpose.

"July" fairly imitates the sound of lazily humming bees with its rhyming "trees" and "memories" broken now and then with the echo of a thunderstorm. There is, however, a building up of a tension in the air, a stillness as before a summer storm. The Greek's story is "The Son of Croesus," and it treats of a prophecy made in a dream concerning the death by an iron instrument of Atys, Croesus' son. Croesus adopted Adrastus, son of Midas, who became a companion and brother to Atys. On a hunting expedition Adrastus was charged with the care of Atys, but it was his spear that killed the young man. He went to Atys' father:

> Then as a man constrained, the tale he told
> From end to end, nor spared himself one whit
> And as he spoke, the wood did still behold,
> The trodden grass and Atys dead on it. [95]

Adrastus threw himself on the funeral pyre, then stabbed himself. Their ashes were kept together in a golden vessel carefully engraved with a history of the boar hunt.

Laurence, the Swabian, again tells a story, "The Watching of the Falcon," also from Mandeville's Voiage and Travell. If a person watched the falcon constantly for seven days and seven nights, he could have whatsoever he desired from a fay-lady. The king, who had everything, wished for that lady's love, received it, but was

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[95] Ibid., IV, 157.

ruined. The falcon lived in a castle which was described in Morris' usual pellucid style:

> Hangings of gold and red and blue,
> And tables with fair service set;
> * * * *
> Dorsars with pearls in every hem,
> And fair embroidered gold-wrought things[96]

The king was granted the love of the lady for one evening, but at the cost of complete misfortune in anything he undertook. It may be an expression of an idea that there is no pleasure without retribution; no joy without sorrow, nor life without death. The king enjoyed the most intense pleasure and therefore paid the grimmest retribution.

There is one more passage of fine romantic description in the tale. The king enters the castle of the falcon and

> Thereby he saw a walled pleasance,
> With walks and sward fit for the dance
> Of Arthur's court in its best time
> That seemed to feel some magic clime;
> For though through all the vale outside
> Things were as in the April-tide,
> And daffodils and cowslips grew
> And hidden the March violets blew,
> Within the bounds of that sweet close
> Was trellised the bewildering rose;
> There was the lily over-sweet,
> And starry pinks for garlands meet;
> And apricots hung on the wall,
> And midst the flowers did peaches fall,
> And nought had blemish there or spot, 97

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96 Ibid., III, 163.

97 Ibid., IV, 166.

May Morris says that the three stanzas of "August" plus a fourth, which was not used, describe Sinodun Hill and the abbey church of Dorchester. It is her contention that Morris' compressed description of places gives a less cluttered image than a longer, and more prosy account.

"Pygmalion and the Image" is a tale recounted by the Greeks at the beginning of harvest. Perhaps it indicates the fulfillment of life as the harvest indicated fulfillment of growth. Pygmalion,, the sculptor and woman-hater, created an ideal woman and fell unreasonably in love with the statue. Venus pitied him and brought the maiden to life. The piece is done with admirable restraint if the depth of Pygmalion's passion is considered. Morris could have written purple passages although his controlled style is more effective. The statue is described partly as follows:

> No smile was on the parted lips, the eyes
> Seemed as if even now great love had shown
> Unto them, something of its sweet surprise.[98]

Now a new mood begins in the tales the older folk wish to hear, something "that fits their ancient longings well." Captain Rolf returns to tell the story of "Ogier the Dane." Morris based this story on an old French romance, and the telling fits an observation he often made: "When you are using an old story, read it through, then shut the book and write it in your own way."[99] He was able to

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98 Ibid., IV, 194.

99 Ibid., III, xxi.

catch the essential mystery in the tale and present it simply.

Ogier was born at the cost of his mother's life, but six fay-ladies gave him such gifts as bravery and happiness. The sixth lady, however, chose him to be her lover when his days on earth were ended. Ogier died after becoming a hero among heroes, and then lived again in blissful happiness with Morgan le Fay in the pleasant dreamland of Avallon. He returned to earth once in medieval times to fight again for France. He rallied to the Queen in defence of King Charles, but fell in love with the queen and was loved by her. He returned to his fay-lady in Avallon, and his farewell to the queen is contained in the delightful song, the parts of which are labelled HAEC for "she" and ILLE for "he":

> HAEC
> In the white-flowered hawthorn brake,
> Love, be merry for my sake;
> Twine the blossoms in my hair,
> Kiss me where I am most fair--
> Kiss me, love! for who knoweth
> What thing cometh after death? 100

Walker in Literature of the Victorian Era says:

> Mathew Arnold rendered into beautiful verse the story of the death of Balder. It is interesting to contrast his manner with that of Morris. The latter as we have seen, throws a mediaeval atmosphere over the classical tales he tells. Arnold reverses the process: his Balder Dead is Scandinavian in origin, but classical in manner. It is a great tribute to the force and orginality of the Scandinavian stories that they will not be mediaevalised. In the hands of Morris they remain Scandinavian. 101

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100 Ibid., IV, 247-248.

101 Walker, p. 538.

"Ogier the Dane" ended the second part of The Earthly Paradise.

Mrs. William Morris became ill during the writing of The Earthly Paradise and went to the Ems River country in Germany for her health. Morris, who accompanied her, was impressed by the beauty of the district and incorporated the scenic impression in "September." The first tale, "The Death of Paris," was also written at Ems. Paris' death, because of Oenone's refusal to heal his wounds, is a well-known story. Morris applies his own interpretation by revealing Paris' thoughts as he is borne to the woman he has forsaken, and also Oenone's feelings as she looks down upon his litter:

> Watching the well-wrought linen rise and fall
> Beneath his faltering breath, and still her blood
> Ran fiery hot with thoughts of ill and good,
> Pity and scorn, and love and hate, as she,
> Half dead herself, gazed on his misery.
> *   *   *   *
> Turn back again, and think no more of me!
> I am thy Death! . . 102

The Wanderers' tale is a dream, not a history, full of wondrous things. "The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon" is a story of Norway in King Magnus' time. Gregory, the Stargazer, a carle of romantic ideals, dreamed of a wonderful land and a beautiful woman who shared a deep and abiding love with a man called John. Gregory recognized himself as John in another world who so deeply loved the swan-lady from this new world that he gave up his old home and

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102 May Morris, Works, V, 13, 18.

personality for her. He returned to his world, but only to suffer great longing for his lady. He set out to find the "land" and after a long, tedious journey found it and his love. Throughout the story there are scenes of great beauty and clear imagery. There is a quantity of gold, silver, and white in clothes and ornaments. The profusion of flowers is a veritable bouquet in the following:

> Red roses fair
> To wreathe my love that wanders here,
> Gold-hearted lilies for her hand!
> And yet withal that she may stand
> On something other folk think sweet,
> March violets for her rosy feet;
> The black-heart amorous poppy, fain
> Death from her passing knee to gain,
> Bows to the gilliflower there:
> The fiery tulip stands to stare
> Upon her perfect loveliness, 103

After many miles of searching and much despair, John finds his lost love again. Gregory then awakened from his dream as himself and was suddenly aware of how cold the earth is to men. Now he had something to help him escape from the world and its cares

> And, waking, seemed no less to be
> _East of the Sun, West of the Moon_;[104]

The description in "October" is reminiscent of the area around Kelmscott Manor that Morris loved so well. The first tale, "The Story of Acontius and Cydippe," is similar in many respects to "The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon," as well as to

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103 _Ibid._, V, 105.

104 _Ibid._, V, 120.

several of his other love stories. One major likeness is the theme carried out by the lovers, especially Johan and the swan-lady, and the two people in this tale. Their love is so deep and their passion so strong that they fear it will not last, that it is too good. Morris carefully creates the atmosphere of burning passion, but with a restraint that enhances the suspense:

> Thou knowest what the Fates deem good
> For wretches that love overmuch--
> One mad desire for sight and touch;
> *   *   *   *
> O fools, who know not all has sworn
> That those shall ever be forlorn. 105

In late October Captain Rolf began a tale he had heard in his childhood. "The Man Who Never Laughed Again" is drawn bodily from the Arabian Nights "where it appears as the 'Story of the King and His Son and the Damsel and the Seven Wezeers.'"[106] The story opens with a description of the Eastern splendour of a shiek's palace marred only by a poor ragged man with a sad tale of his downfall. This wretch, Bharam, is found by an old friend and taken to a garden with sweet-blossomed trees and a leaping fountain. The friend, Firuz, who acts as if his very life were cursed, shows him to a splendid castle of which he will be master even unto the wealth contained therein if he will but take care of the wretched beings it now houses; until they come to their deaths in but a very short time. They are all cursed

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105 Ibid., V, 154.

106 Ibid., V, xxi.

with such suffering as Bharam noted in his friend, but none will tell him of it as one by one they die. Firuz tries to steer him away from the horrible course they had taken, but Bharam finally investigates and is borne away from a cave to a Western land past all description. The song that he hears upon nearing this land, beginning "O thou who dravest night across the sea," is a lovely lyric which far surpasses some of Morris' early work.[107]

Bharam becomes king of this strange, beautifully described fairy world, and distinguishes himself as a wise and benevolent ruler. There is a touch of reality in Morris' description of this land, but beauty, too, and he fills it with golden palaces and beautiful gardens. Bharam has everything a man could desire; a beautiful queen who loves him dearly, a rich and peaceful kingdom filled with loving subjects, and all the ease and wealth and power to make a man happy. He does desire more and in trying to fulfill this wish, loses everything and is back once again in the world of men--forlorn and fordoomed to be "the man who ne'er shall laugh again."

The "November" poem imparts a feeling of quiet waiting and of a chill stillness as a background for the first tale of the month, "The Story of Rhodope." An elderly couple whom fate was allowing to slide down the scale in wealth and property was gladdened by the birth of a daughter. Their continuing ill-fortune was now not so difficult to bear. Rhodope grew to be a beautiful, but reserved

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107 Ibid., V, 188.

woman while

> the brown plain far and wide
> Changed year by year through green to hoary gold
> *   *   *   *   *
> The green hill-slopes, besprinkled o'er with kine
> And a grey neat-herd wandering here and there,
> And then the greener squares of well-propped vine.[108]

Her aloofness was marked by all the folk of the rich valley in which she lived as well as by her parents. As his wealth declined, Rhodope's father gave her his last treasure--a pair of wonderfully worked, bejewelled slippers--to sell, but Rhodope lost one to an eagle and was allowed to keep the now worthless remaining shoe. One day a strange man visited her fertile valley, and carried with him the lost mate to the gem-encrusted slipper. A far-off king claimed the owner of the mate to the shoe as his queen. Rhodope wished to take her father with her, but he would not go, and she went to her destiny in a strange land with the same calm forebearance with which she had accepted her poverty.

Bitter November winds introduce "The Lovers of Gudrun," a story of Iceland and the dwellers of "Laxdale." Morris had been studying the sagas with his Icelandic friend Eiríkr Magnússon, and was steeped in the Northland lore.[109] There is a pensive sentiment lingering in the late November, and the tragic atmosphere of the story is set in the very beginning with the prophecy of Guest the Wise as he reads

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108 Ibid., V, 208, 221.

109 Ibid., V, xi.

the fate of Gudrun in the dreams she relates. There is an acceptance of the tragic conditions and limitations of human life which Gudrun recognizes as inevitable and not to be avoided. It is one of the most intense stories in The Earthly Paradise, and throughout the relentless drama there runs an undertone of pity and tenderness.

Morris further set the scene by writing the poem in stately iambic pentameter couplets which, when added to the heavy sounding vowels and consonants of the Icelandic and Norwegian names, gives an ominous and martial tread to the verses as the following lines indicate:

> In another place
> Thor's hammer gleamed o'er Thor's red-bearded face;
> And Heimdall, with the gold horn slung behind
> That in the God's-dusk he shall surely wind,
> Sickening all hearts with fear; 110

The alliterative use of the "d" gives the entire poem a strong, solid sound. The description of the bringing of Kiartan's body to Gudrun at Bathstead is unequaled in the volume:

> But when they reached the stead, anigh sunset,
> There in the porch a tall black figure stood
> Whose stern pale face, 'neath its o'erhanging hood,
> In the porch shadow was all cold and grey,
> Though on her feet the dying sunlight lay. 111

The stern grey face was that of Gudrun who faintly bid them enter with Kiartan's body--he was the only man whom she had ever loved. Bodli, Kiartan's best friend and Gudrun's husband, was there despite

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110 Ibid., V, 236.

111 Ibid., V, 382.

the fact that he was the one who had killed his friend. There comes a time when Gudrun has a chance to think of all her husbands and to say which she loved most. She then realized that in denying Kiartan's love by not waiting for him, she "did the worst to him she loved the most."

The poem of December begins the fourth part of The Earthly Paradise, which was published in early December of 1870. About this time, too, Morris was very busy decorating manuscripts, a work which was consuming a great deal of his time and interest. At the December feast the old men again discuss their present trouble, but the Greeks prefer to talk of things long past and so begin their tale, "The Golden Apples."

A ship of Tyre with a shapely prow and unwilling sailors takes Hercules into the West to a land with a green grass shore, no breakers from the sea, and a wall of gleaming brass bricks. Morris did not describe the garden of the Hesperides with nearly as much detail or beauty as Milton described Paradise. The voyage was more important to Morris, but it is certain that he had read descriptions of beautiful gardens in The Faerie Queene, and probably of those described in the classics: the garden of the Sun; the garden of Midas, which is the rose garden where Silenus was found; and the garden of the Hesperides which figures in the eleventh labor of Hercules.[112]

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[112] J. A. K. Thomson, Classical Influences on English Poetry (London, 1951), p. 56.

The Wanderer's tale is "The Fostering of Aslaug," about the daughter of Sigurd, "his people's best beloved man," and Brynhild whom he loved. Aslaug was reared by a miserable couple who used her roughly although she made no complaint, indeed she spoke not a word even though her beauty was matchless in all respects:

> She turned, and wandered slim and fair
> 'Twixt the dark tree-boles: strange and rare
> The sight was of golden head,
> So good, uncoifed, unchapleted,
> Above her sordid dark array,
> That over her fair body did lay
> As dark clouds on a lilied hill.[113]

She was finally found in the full bloom of her youth by Ragnar, the man whose glory was so great that there was atonement for his death only in the death of Harold at Senlac in 1066. The two spent the remainder of their lives in happiness.

May Morris in her introduction to volume VI of the Collected Works includes alternate poems for several of the months, but the poem chosen for January is far superior in imagery to the ones rejected. There is both reality and a sense of unreality in the view of the dead, white world as seen from the watchman's tower in this poem.

The first story is about the adventures of Bellerophon, but as it was orginally written it was so long that Morris separated it into two episodes, one for January concerning his adventures at Argos, and the other for February concerning his further trials in

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[113] May Morris, Works, VI, 38.

Lycia. Bellerophon unwittingly killed his beloved younger brother, fled his country in disgrace, and came to Argos as a ruined fugitive:

> His broken sheath now held a sword no more
> With rust his armour bright was spotted o'er,
> Unkempt and matted was the yellow hair
> That crowned his head. . .[114]

The Argive king, Proetus, tried to relieve the guilty man's gloom by befriending him, and although he earned a position of trust in the kingdom, nothing dispelled his sense of guilt. He met Proetus' queen who felt a deep love for the sad man, but it was scorned and for that she played him false. Proetus, believing his queen, sent Bellerophon to Lycia with a message to the Lycian king, father of his queen, asking that Bellerophon be sent to his death. This tale awakened the buried pain of the old men's hopes, for they, too, were wanderers on the face of the earth.

At the next feast, at the end of January, the Swabian priest takes out a "yellow book" and tells the story of "The Ring Given to Venus." The story begins with a description of an ancient sea side city containing great wealth of dull blue lead, white silver, red copper, golden sand, and dark basalt. Morris continues the colors in the surrounding landscape with its "porphyry cliffs red as blood;/ From the white marble quarries' edge." He describes, too, the white sheep on the hill, the purple dye from the sea, and the madder waving in the wind. This delightful fairy tale contains much that is colorful

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[114] Ibid., VI, 68.

as well as some fine imagery. The ghost scenes are graphically and expertly drawn, and the disappearance of the ring is realistically done.

On his wedding day Laurence scornfully placed his marriage ring on the finger of a statue of Venus. When he returned for it, it was gone. This mystery had serious effects, for he could not consummate his marriage because of his excess fear and because of Venus' visit to him in the guise of a mist. Their first meeting is eerily drawn:

> Then round about him closed the mist;
> It was as though his lips were kissed,
> His fingers lovingly enlaced
> By other fingers; until he
> Midst darkness his own ring did see.[115]

When realization struck, he fell to the floor in a faint, for up to that point he believed it to be some prank played by his friends.

Laurence, with the help of his father-in-law, gets the help of a learned priest, and they go to the "dark man's fair abode" which is described in blacks and sunset colors:

> The grey tower with the sunset glowed,
> The daws wheeled black against the sky
> About the belfry's windows high. 116

Laurence must go to a lonely strand at dusk and tell the leader of a phantom procession that he wished his ring back. Morris deftly describes the feeling of being lonely, of being the only living thing left in the world as Laurence waits on the lonely shore for the

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115 Ibid., VI, 152.

116 Ibid., Vi, 158.

ghostly procession to begin. The moon is "cloud-barred" and the marshes and dunes along the shore are weird in its light. The wind sounds dreary over the waste, and the world "no more seemed made for sons of men." Then comes the ghostly procession which is almost more than mortal man can bear, but Laurence is determined to have his ring--and his marriage--and he gets them.

As the old Wanderer puts away his worn book we note the "flowers therein/Drawn on the margin" as if he had gotten one of Morris' own flower-bordered notebooks. He smiles at the effect his story has had on the assemblage, but soon becomes withdrawn into the days of long ago.

The last month, February, is rain-washed and windy, but it is a change from the dread of winter. There is a promise of hope in the air as the second part of Bellerophon's tale is begun. It is the longer of the two sections, but even at that Bellerophon's final days are not recounted. His entrance into the new land of Lycia is made colorful by his rich and bejewelled attire amidst the plainer garb of the seafarers who brought him there. His adventures in Lycia are robust and exciting, and Morris tells them with such clarity and reality that the heart pounds as would that of an eyewitness. He defeats a tribe of barbarians, then a horde of warrior women whose fierceness and aspect made many a man quail, then a pirate, only to return to find Lycia prostrate from fear of an unknown menace. The deliverer is promised the hand of the king's daughter, the very girl with whom Bellerophon is passionately

in love. Morris builds up the terror line by line until we face the fear itself:

> a mass, from whence there came
> That frightful light, as from a heart of flame;
> But black amid its radiance was that mass,
> And black and claw-like things therefrom did pass,
> * * * * *
> And midst thereof two orbs of red flame shone.[117]

Bellerophon is triumphant, however, and not only wins the girl but the kingship as well, for the Lycian king has been trying to kill him to discharge an old debt to Proetus, but preferred to abdicate instead of killing the thrice-great savior of Lycia.

The last of the tales, "The Hill of Venus," is again told by the Swabian priest Laurence. May Morris says: "The wild romantic legend which concludes the book taxed Morris' skill and he did not bring it to a satisfactory conclusion without a good deal of labour."[118] Morris' version varies from that of the German tale of Tannhäuser; in the poem it is Walter's declaration that he belongs to the Hill of Venus that brings down the curse upon him.

The tale begins in the hot and stifling atmosphere of an approaching summer thunderstorm which exactly meets the mood of the passionate, world-weary knight, Walter. The storm reaches its climax just as Walter throws off the cares of the world and strides into the cave of the Hill of Venus--his mood one with the fury of the

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117 Ibid., VI, 250.

118 Ibid., VI, xvii.

storm. In the aftermath of the storm, when a hush has descended, broken only by the sound of dripping leaves, peace has also descended upon Walter, and he then hears the lovely song, "Before Our Lady Came On Earth," which prepares him for a meeting with Venus.

The next scene is in the garden of Venus, distinctly visualized and described by Morris in his most sensuous poetry. There follows, an almost classical catalog of famous lovers; Pyramus and Thisbe, Sigurd and Brynhild, and Tristram and Iseult, and also those who had lost their loves. But the memory of his past life has broken into Walter's idyll and he is aware that he must go back to the world without his soul.

In the world of men Walter met a band of pilgrims with whom he journeyed to Rome for the Pope's blessing, but once there Venus' influence caused him to reiterate his kinship to the Hill of Venus. The Pope then said: "just so much hope I have of thee/As on this dry staff fruit and flowers to see!" And later as the Pope brooded over his words, leaves sprung from the dry staff.

In the "Epilogue" Morris tells no more of the Wanderers except that they finally meeth their death. The poet, even as this reader, seems loath to end the book, for in the "L'Envoi" he speaks respectfully to his master, Chaucer, and to his Book. He hopes that the tales have called up pleasant memories of olden times, and if so:

> --No little part it was for me to play--
> The idle singer of an empty day.

Morris had planned an illuminated edition of The Earthly Paradise,[119] and it is proper to assume that he had this in mind when he wrote much of his poetry. His highly developed sense of craftsmanship was a great aid in the creation of delicate word pictures and startling imagery.

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119 Ibid., IX, xix.

CHAPTER IV

The chronological order of Morris' poetry places _Sigurd the Volsung_ between the two works to be covered in this chapter. Although _Sigurd_ is a high point in Morris' poetic achievements, it is less important to a study of color than _Love is Enough_ and _Poems by the Way_. Another reason is that May Morris has used this arrangement in the _Collected Works of William Morris_.

Love is Enough; Or, the Freeing of Pharamond, a morality, to give it its full title, is a verse drama combining the morality play and the masque. The use of alliterative verse was in the nature of an experiment and never became very popular with Morris, and it is the least familiar to most readers of his long poems. It is distinctly medieval in structure following a type of drama which reached its height just before the Renaissance in England. Sometime later Morris was heard to say that he had written an "alliterative poem himself once on a time."[120] The play is more remote from reality

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[120] _Ibid._, IX, xxxi.

than any of his other poems, but it is not difficult to read if Mackail's account of its peculiar form is read first. There are five receding planes of action, the aim of which is, starting from a representation of the outerworld and particular persons, the peasants Giles and Joan, to react in the furthest plane to an expression, almost in pure music, of that passion which possesses the chief character of the verse play. Mackail says:

> In his use of receding planes of action which yet do not lie in what might be called, by an easy metaphor from another art, any real aerial perspective, he approximates dramatic poetry to the manner of treatment of those late mediaeval tapestries, the finest of which were his ideal of decorative arrangement. 121

The total effect is one of great delicacy and brittleness; the feeling is that it should be handled with great care lest the fragile glitter might break asunder from the least disturbance.

The outer frame is given by the peasant sweethearts as they discuss the wedding ceremonies of the Emperor and the Empress, who stand in the second plane. The mayor speaks and introduces a morality play concerning a King Pharamond who "Fled away to find love from his crown and his folk," and the player-king and player-maiden step forth as Love, the interpreter of the actions, begins the central or third plane. Master Oliver, Pharamond's foster-father, opens the fourth plane by telling the Lords and Councillors of the king's pining by drawing startlingly clear images of the king's actions.

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121 Mackail, II, 281.

He compared him, on the hunt, to a carven figure of King Nimrod outlined by the flicker of dying candles and moonlight; during the tourney he is compared to "red Mars in the Council-room window." Even the excitement of the lists does not rouse the king, who is led away

> while the lists were fallen silent
> As a fight in a dream that the light breaketh through.[122]

Again, he is taken to the high court to pass judgement, and for a short while he seems to be King Minos carven in marble who might "mid old dreaming of Crete give doom on the dead."

"The Music," the last and inmost plane, interprets the emotions of each scene as Pharamond seeks his love throughout the world. Finally love speaks directly to the king and tells him to look around him and listen, and the king hears the beautiful song of his dream-love, a fragment of which follows:

> Dawn talks to Day
> Over dew-gleaming flowers
> Night flies away
> Till the resting of hours.
> *   *   *
> O love, set a word in my mouth for our meeting
> Cast thine arms around about me to stay my heart's beating.[123]

Pharamond has been delighted with this song in his past dreams, and it is doubly lovely to him when he hears it from Azalais when they finally meet.

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[122] May Morris, Works, Ix, 17.

[123] Ibid., IX, 56.

Pharamond discovers that he has lost his kingdom during his wanderings, but to a man as good a king as Pharamond. He has lost everything because of his quest, but his quest was successful, because in finding Azalais he found that "Love is Enough." Pharamond is not so much a man as mankind, Everyman. Oliver is a symbol of the better nature of man and Azalais is another figure of human love. Pharamond left kingship, fame, everything, and set out to find this thing, love, and in finding it proves and finds himself.

Rossetti thought highly of this poem and wrote in a letter in October, 1871:

> Morris has set to work with a will on a sort of masque called "Love is Enough" which he means to print. . .with wood cuts by Ned Jones [Edward Bourne-Jones] and borders by himself, some of which he has done really beautifully. The poem is, I think, at a higher point of execution perhaps than anything he has done--having a passionate lyric quality such as one found in his earliest work, and of course much more mature balance in carrying out. It will be a very fine work. 124

The passages which show the most evidence of having been especially worked on by Morris are the scene in the palace "pleasance" where Pharamond tells his foster-father of his dream-love, and the scene in which Pharamond and Azalais meet.

Important to a discussion of Morris' predilection for color and imagery is a description of the ingenious and detailed metrical structure of the poem. It is as intricate, and as beautiful as one

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[124] Ibid., IX, xxxii.

of his decorative designs, for each of the five planes has a different metre, but the most important metres are the alliterative unrhymed verses of the body of the play and the rhymed dactylics of the "Music." Ormerod's use of the word "architectonic" is as fitting here as it was when used with The Earthly Paradise at the beginning of Chapter III of this paper. In Love is Enough his touch is lighter, especially in his use of the fairly rare dactylic metre with many delicate variations as in the following stanza:

> Ye know not how void your hope and your living:
> Depart with your helping lest ye undo me!
> Ye know not that at nightfall she draweth near to me,
> There is soft speech between us and word of forgiving
> Till in dead of midnight her kisses thrill through me.
> --Pass by me and hearken, and waken me not! [125]

This was the last poem of any length that Morris finished for several years, for he became engrossed in his handcrafts and the various arts and crafts coming from his firm. His next major poetic work was Sigurd the Volsung, but for reasons already stated it will be discussed in the last chapter.

Poems by the Way is a delightful collection made by Morris in 1891 containing verses written at different periods from 1867 onwards reflecting his various poetic styles. Some are in the style of the Guenevere volume, "God of the Poor" and "Goldilocks and Goldilocks"; some from Scandinavian sources as "Wooing of Hallbiorn" and "Hafbur and Signy"; and a group inspired by his interest in Socialism. The

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[125] Ibid., IX, 36.

only poem written especially for the volume was "Goldilocks and Goldilocks": the remainder of the pieces had been published before in periodicals, are fragments from longer poems, and are pieces from his Socialist romance of the Pilgrims of Hope.

The first poem, "From the Upland to the Sea," is a lovely song from "The Story of Orpheus," originally planned for The Earthly Paradise, but not published. The lyric paints a pretty picture of a spring landscape crowned by a temple to Phoebus.

"Of the Wooing of Hallbiorn the Strong" is subtitled "A story of the Land Settling Book of Iceland, Chapter XXX." It is written in four-stress iambic couplets that are split by a repeating couplet that forms a refrain in each stanza:

> "Sharp sword," she sang, "and death is sure,"
> So many times over comes summer again,
> "But love doth over all endure."
> What healing in summer if winter be vain?

Hallbiorn wooed the maid Hallgerd in vain, for she loved her cousin Snaebiorn. When Hallbiorn realized this, he killed her and was in turn killed in a fight with Snaebiorn, who read his own doom in the sail of a ship that was to take him into exile:

> I see in the sail a stripe of red:
> Murder, meseems, is the name of it,
> And ugly things about it flit.
> A stripe of blue in the sail I see:
> Cold death of men it seems to me.
> And next I see a stripe of black,
> For a life fulfilled of bitter lack.[126]

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126 Ibid., IX, 98.

There were other touches of color in the poem; Hallbiorn's "painted shield and gold-wrought spear," Hallgerd's golden hair is described so that when the sun's "slant beam lay upon her head" it "gilt her golden locks to red," and finally her grave is "green enow." Morris' imagery is clear and concise, particularly in the scene in which Hallgerd scorns Hallbiorn and finally sings part of Snaebiorn's song in defiance.

"Echoes of Love's House" is a short poem, but it is interesting in that it describes love in a series of paradoxes set in eight hexamter couplets, ending with the poet's cry" "And is my praise nought worth for all my life undone?"

"The Hall and the Wood" is a ballad of a knight, Sir Rafe, who turns outlaw when he finds his ancestral home burned out. He becomes a robber in the true Robin Hood tradition. The color is that of the old ballads:

> So came he to the long green lane
> That leadeth to the ford,
> And saw the sickle by the wain
> Shine bright as any sword. 127

And then when he calls his friends together and sees once again his former love:

> She stood before him face to face,
> With the sun-beam athwart her hand,
> As on the gold of the Holy Place
> The painted angels stand. 128

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127 Ibid., IX, 109.

128 Ibid., IX, 113.

Mackail says that the lines, "To the Muse of the North," were written before Morris went to Iceland, and show to what extent that land had captured his imagination. In the poem he longs to be part of its sorrows and happiness.

"Of the Three Seekers" contains a moral of the unchanging quality of universal love. The poem opens:

> There met three knights on the woodland way,
> And the first clad in silk array:
> The second was dight in iron and steel,
> But the third was rags from head to heel.[129]

Each tells what he has found during the year; the first has found a king, the second has found a knight, but the third has found only love. As they visit each of their discoveries, it is found that the king has new courtiers, the knight cares not for outsiders, but love takes them all in as she joyfully receives her ragged knight.

"The Raven and the King's Daughter" is a ballad of the North, and it, too, has the split couplet or refrain. The king's daughter is shut in a tower as she longs for news of her lover. There are flashes of color as she sews gold thread on green cloth, and the lover sings of his true love as he sails "Twixt ashen plank and dark blue sea." The lover returns from the wars dead and the king's daughter dies of grief.

"The King of Denmark's Sons" is another ballad of the North which has the same refrain between the lines of the verse. The

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[129] Ibid., IX, 117.

king ordained that one son, Knut, would be the next king rather than the other, Harald. It seals the doom of Knut, who watches the approach of his brother and his warriors:

> Tell me now, Shipmaster mine,
> What are yon torches there that shine?
> Lord, no torches may these be
> But golden prows across the sea.
> For over there the sun shines now
> And the gold worms gape from every prow.[130]

Harald gains his kingdom at the expense of his brother's life, but there is sadness in the hearts of the old rulers that Morris pictures in this way:

> And soft the feet of women fall
> From end to end of the King's great hall.
> These bear the gold-wrought cloths away,
> And in otherwise the hall array;
> Till all is black that hath been gold
> So heavy a tale there must be told. [131]

"A Garden by the Sea" is a slightly different version, written later, of the song of the water-nymph to Hercules' armor-bearer, Hylas, in the fourth book of _The Life and Death of Jason_. It is one of Morris' most haunting lyrics, and this version certainly deserves a place in this book of poems. The poem begins: "I know a little garden-close/Set thick with lily and red rose," and takes the reader through a quiet, shaded garden walk with purple hills and the unceasing murmur of the restless sea in the background.

"The God of the Poor" is a ballad with a Latin end-line,

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130 _Ibid._, IX, 141.

131 _Ibid._, IX, 144.

"_Deus est Deus pauperum_." It tells the story of a lord called Maltete who is destroyed by his own avarice. He has terrorized the countryside so long that none dare stand to him until a knight called Boncoeur tricks him into an ambush by the lure of a store of hidden gold. One quatrain gives a complete picture of Maltete's character:

> He knew that Maltete loved right well
> Red gold and heavy. If from hell
> The Devil cried, "Take this gold cup,"
> Down had he gone to fetch it up. 132

"Love's Reward" is another ballad: this time of adventure with sea-marauders and the rescue of a fair damsel by a bold knight. She was sea-borne with her sweetheart when the pirates struck:

> But fast, unseen the black oars fell
> That drave to shore the rover's ship.
>
> My love lay bloody on the strand
> Ere stars were waxen wan: 133

"The Folk-Mote by the River" is a song of freedom, a story of men who leave their fields to fight for their liberty. The style is the heroic couplet, not so disciplined as Dryden or Pope, but fairly close as the following lines indicate. In them, too, note the brave colors of the banners of the Freemen and the guilds:

> There then that highway of the scythe
> With many a hue was brave and blythe.
> And first below the silver chief
> Upon the green was the Golden Sheaf.

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[132] _Ibid_., IX, 157.

[133] _Ibid_., IX, 165.

> And on the next that went by it
> The White Hart in the Park did sit.
> Then on the red the White Wings flew,
> And on the White was the Cloud-fleck blue.
> Last went the Anchor of the Wrights
> Beside the Ship of the Faring Knights.
> Then thronged the folk the June-tide field
> With naked sword and painted shield, 134

The poem ends on the note that now there is no longer thrall or earl's man, but free men who live in the land they love.

Mackail calls the poem, "Pain and Time Strive Not," curious and remarkable as an example of poetry in which Morris distinctly imitated the style and versification of Rossetti long after the period of his first enthusiasm for the artist.[135] It is a short poem of yearning on one of Morris' favorite themes--the futility of life without love.

The following poems are Northern ballads and translations that Morris did in the 1870's. No other English stanza-form has been so widely and continuously popular as the four-line stanza. The ballad was the "poetry of the people" long before any of the more sophisticated forms came into being. Ballad-making and ballad-singing are not confined to any literary period, but the fifteenth century was the golden age of the ballad, and the most fertile field was the border country between England and Scotland.[136] Morris not only had the

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[134] Ibid., IX, 171.

[135] Mackail, II, 259.

[136] Homer A. Watt and William W. Watt, editors, A Dictionary of English Literature (New York, 1945), pp. 339-340.

English heritage of balladry to interest him, but also a great interest in the Northern lands and Iceland, both of which were rich in ballads handed down from the days of the scops and gleemen. Morris has captured the spirit of the ballad form in his own compositions, and in his translations by using, in a completely authentic manner, the ballad characteristics as stanza forms, incremental repetition, and above all, compression.

Each of the ballads has a subtitle stating from what country it was translated. The first of these, "The Lay of Christine," is from the Icelandic, and although it is colorful, it is a song of sorrow. It is in quatrains with an English end-line. "Hildebrand and Hellelil" is from the Danish and also has the chorus interspersed in the rhyme to form abab as a rhyme scheme. It is a sad story of love and pain. "The Son's Sorrow," from the Icelandic, is in couplets with an English end-line. It tells the story of a prince who finds a lady, marries her, but has only a short space of happiness as she dies with all of their children. As in all the ballads there are flashes of color rather than sustained passages. In this one are the lines: "Bright red she was as the flickering flame/When to my saddle-bow she came." "Agnes and the Hill-Man" is similar to a poem by Matthew Arnold, "The Foresaken Merman," but Morris has his troll place a spell on Agnes that eventually kills her. This ballad also has a refrain, in this case it is "Fowl are a-singing./Agnes, fair Agnes."

"Knight Aagen and Maiden Else" is the story of the return of

her dead knight, who admonished her against an excess of grieving. Wordsworth treated a similar theme in "Laodamia," when the husband, who has come back from the grave says:

> Be taught, O faithful Consort, to control
> Rebellious passion: for the Gods approve
> The depth, and not the tumult, of the soul;[137]

The shade of Morris' knight answers Else's question as to his well-being in this guise:

> O whenso thou art joyous,
> And the heart is glad in thee,
> Then fares it with my coffin
> That red roses are with me.
>
> But whenso thou art sorrowful
> And weary is thy mood,
> Then all within my coffin
> Is it dreadful with dark blood.[138]

The inspiration for Wordsworth's poem is said to have come from the passage in the sixth book of the Aeneid which speaks of the trees withering in sympathy for the dead. Morris' poem is subtitled "from the Danish," and is a translation. "Hafbur and Signy" is also from the Danish; a ballad of frustrated love. Hafbur was denied Signy's hand so he disguised as a maiden and went to her court. He is found out and bound with Signy's hair which he will not break asunder. As he is about to be hanged he asks Signy to burn down her tower; the double tragedy brings Signy's father to

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[137] James Stephens and others, English Romantic Poets (New York, 1952), p. 77.

[138] May Morris, Works, IX, 211.

his senses, but it is too late:

> But when they came to Signy's bower
> Low lay it in embers red;
> *   *   *   *
> They took him the King's son Hafbur
> Swathed him in linen white, 139

They were buried side by side.

May Morris tells a story about the last poem in the volume, "Goldilocks and Goldilocks." During the printing of Poems by the Way, Morris decided that the volume was too thin and decided to "fill out the book." That very evening Morris wrote out the 700 lines of the fairy tale and presented them to his printer.[140] The story is of Goldilocks the Swain, who leaves his home during harvest time dressed in "scarlet gear." In a distant forest he meets Goldilocks the Maid, "clad she was in a kirtle brown." After numerous weird adventures and tests he wins through with his dear only to find that he had been gone many a year.

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139 Ibid., IX, 224

140 Ibid., IX, xxxvii.

CHAPTER V

The metre of Sigurd the Volsung is rhymed hexameter couplets, mainly anapestic, with iambic substitution in places. There is an occasional amphibrach in the second or third foot--a foot of three syllables, a short, a long, and a short--which gives the verse a stately tread. The long lines with their busy feet make the metre admirably suited for telling a story, and the rhymes break up any tendency to monotony. The language Morris uses is no longer the pleasant archaic speech of his earlier poetry, but he still retains his simplicity of sentence and his preference for Germanic rather than Latin words. However, it has been said that The Earthly Paradise is read for the poetry; Sigurd is read for the story.

Sigurd does not contain the brilliant and beautiful colors which are so prevalent in Morris' other poetry, but there is colorful imagery in the landscape with its mountains and walled cities. There is no monotony of treatment in the pictorial and connective matter, nor is there any in the whole series of classic scenes: the waking

of Brynhild; her entrance among the Niblungs; her betraying dialogue in the water with Gudrun; her last refusal of Sigurd, her death, his death; the death of the Niblungs in Atli's hall, with Gudrun on the high seat; the slaying of Atli by Gudrun, and her slaying of herself. There is also color in Morris' love of dress, armour, trappings, and gay and colored handiwork. Although there is not the abundance of such matter as there is in The Earthly Paradise, a new fund of it can be found in Sigurd.

The poem is a verse rendering of the Volsunga Saga of Iceland which Morris had already done in prose with Eiríkr Magnússon. The Saga is the earliest written form of the Teutonic epic of Siegfried and the Niblungs. The hero of the version Morris used is Sigurd, the son of Sigmund and grandson of Volsung, and king of the Huns. Morris has told the story in four books, entitled Sigmund, Regin, Brynhild, and Gudrun.

The first of the four books contains the whole of the life of Sigmund, and is a separate story in itself. It tells of the early days before Sigurd, of the strange and savage figures of Sigmund and his sister, Signy, and their son Sinfiotli. Volsung, king of the Huns, gave his daughter Signy in marriage to the king of the Goths, who then slew all of the Volsung nobles except Sigmund. Signy assumed the form of another woman, went to Sigmund and became the mother of Sinfiotli, who grew to avenge the wrong. He was killed by Sigmund's first wife, Borghild. Sigmund later married Hiordis, but was soon after killed in battle. Sigurd was born after

his father's death, and so became known as After-born.

Morris' use of color is everywhere apparent in this poem as it is in most of his poetry, but not in the important way he had of using color to create an atmosphere. The colors he uses are the same bright, clear hues found in his other poetry. Gold predominates, but mainly as a precious metal, something of great worth. Odin appears from time to time in the saga, and he is described in the following colors:

> Cloud-blue was the hood upon him, and his kirtle gleaming-grey
> As the latter morning sundog when the storm is on the way:
> A bill he bore on his shoulder, whose mighty ashen beam
> Burnt bright with the flame of the sea and the blended silver's gleam.[141]

Odin's sword, which Sigmund drew from the tree bole, is gold and sparkling with jewels, and the ships of all the tribes are "golden dragons" which plow through the "glass-green" sea. There are a number of battle descriptions in Book I, the fight at the death of the Volsung nobles, the deeds of Sigmund and Sinfiotli, the grim deaths of Sigmund's brothers, but the death of Sigmund is the most excitingly described. As the battle neared, Sigmund broke the peace strings of his Odin-sword "and Death on the point abided, Fear sat on the edges pale." Sigmund gloried in the fight and fought like a youth for his bride, Hiordis, until Odin appeared to him in the battle and shattered the mighty sword. Morris' word pictures of the dramatic events are clear and exciting.

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141 Ibid., XII, 5.

Sigurd was reared and trained by Regin, the Master of Masters in smithying, who had fostered the kings of the land where Hiordis has found haven. He told Sigurd the stories of ancient wrongs and as Sigurd came to manhood, incited him to kill Fafnir in order to secure the great treasure which he guarded. Fafnir, the brother of Regin, had stolen the gold by killing his own father, even knowing that the possessor of the treasure was under a fatal curse.

Sigurd agreed with the condition that Regin forge an unbeatable sword out of the shards of Sigmund's Odin-sword. Armed with this weapon, called the Wrath of Sigurd, he slew both Fafnir, the dragon, and Fafnir's brother Regin, for Sigurd had tasted of the heart of Fafnir and learned of the evil plot on his life fostered by Regin the Dwarf. Sigurd rode away on Greyfell, his horse, until he came to the Hill of Hindfell, where he found the sleeping Brynhild. She was a Valkyrie who was being punished by Odin for disobedience. Her doom was to remain asleep until awakened by a hero with whom she was fated to fall in love. They plighted their troth as Sigurd gave her the cursed ring of Andvari.

Morris' description in the books of Sigurd is not such that it can be repeated here in small sections to indicate its beauty. There are, of course, flashes of gold or red or green, but they are incidental to the atmosphere created by Morris. They are the froth and frosting of the main drama--the drama of the world, and of the life of the world. More important than the color is the mood of dark futility that hovers over the people and their actions. Not a feeling of pessimism, but

rather of inevitability can be found in Gripir's speech to Sigurd, and Brynhild's wise words at the end of Book II, "as she told of the hidden matters whereby the world is moved." The whole poem is based to a large degree on the grim war of men against inevitable fate. It is this that colors the poetry in somber hues.

Brynhild tells of the deeds of Sigurd, of the time with the Niblungs, and how he met his death at their hands. In this, the third book, Sigurd made an alliance with the Niblung king, Giuki, whose wife then gave the hero a love potion which caused him to forget Brynhild and to fall in love with Gudrun. Gunnar, who succeeded Giuki as king, fell in love with Brynhild, but he could not pass through the flames which surrounded her. Sigurd assumed the form of Gunnar and brought the Valkyrie to the land of the Niblungs. He had slept with her, but he placed his sword between them during the long night. In an argument between Gudrun and Brynhild the truth about the disguise of Sigurd is laid bare, and Brynhild in her wrath induced the youngest brother of Gudrun to slay Sigurd in his sleep. Sigurd, who had been released from the power of the love-potion, swore his love for Brynhild, but she scorned him. After the death of Sigurd and Brynhild, Andvari's treasure passed to the hands of the Niblungs along with the curse.

Morris began the tale of Sigurd too long before Sigurd was born to make it a proper epic, but he felt that he needed to adhere closely to the original saga. He realized that Book I, which concerned the life of Sigurd's father, was not really part of the story of Sigurd,

but he tied it into the saga very skillfully so that it serves as a preliminary rendering of the greatness of the Volsungs, and introduces the motive of the saga. The other three books contain a certain epic grandeur and the tension of inevitable tragedy:

> The poet has so dealt with his material that the all-pervading sense of the inevitable, as in any true epic, transports the savage elements into a broad and simple atmosphere of primeval tragedy, making the violent things at least endurable. 142

The final book, called Gudrun, does not complete the saga as it is told in the Icelandic, but it brings to a close those fatal days which followed the death of Sigurd. The widowed Gudrun married the powerful King Atli and, with Andvari's treasure as bait, used him to avenge the death of Sigurd. Atli invited the Niblungs to visit him, and after they arrived he killed them all and captured the brothers Hogni and Gunnar. Hogni he put to death, but Gunnar he placed in a pit filled with deadly serpents. For a short time Gunnar charmed them with voice and harp, but he was bitten and died. To avenge her brothers, Gudrun killed Atli and burned his hall; then she leaped into the sea.

There are several episodes which should be mentioned because they serve to emphasize the universal treatment of human life. Morris recognized this quality in the original saga and evidently sought to emphasize it in the episode of the trapping of the gods by Regin's net in the hall of Reidmar. After the treasure of the

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142 Ibid., XII, xxiv.

Elf Andvari was stolen by Loki and used as ransom for Odin, the Allfather says as he departs:

> And I knew, and I wrought and fore-ordered; and evil sat by my side,
> And myself by myself hath been doomed, and I look for the fateful tide;
> And I deal with the generations, and them mine hand hath made,
> And myself by myself shall be grieved, lest the world and its
> fashioning fade. 143

Another passage is the death scene of Fafnir the dragon who is given speech so that there is wonderful dialogue between Sigurd and Fafnir. The last important passage is the song of Gunnar as he charms the deadly serpents and so delays the coming of Odin:

> There were twain, and they went upon earth, and were speechless
> unmighty and wan;
> They were hopeless, deathless, lifeless, and the Mighty named
> them man:
> Then they gave them speech and power, and they gave them colour
> and breath;
> And deeds and the hope they gave them, and they gave them Life
> and Death; 144

Sigurd the Volsung is Morris' high-water mark in verse. The story has been told with admirable spirit, though not without monotony, and it bears a stamp of reality such as marks hardly any of the tales of The Earthly Paradise. The importance of the poem to a study of Morris' poetry lies in its atmosphere of grim reality rather than in a brilliant use of color and imagery. The grim feeling of impending doom pervades the entire work and gives the book a unity of its own.

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143 Ibid., XII, 85.

144 Ibid., XII, 297-298.

CHAPTER VI

More than most authors Morris seems to have written for pure pleasure. He did not deem his handicraft labor that needed the relaxation of writing, but merely made the change from crafts to writing as a change from one pleasant occupation to another. He worked in various mediums but with a unity of purpose which remained with him throughout his life. He desired, and worked for, an ideal state of things founded on beauty, dignity, and pride of personal creation. Like Rossetti and Keats he loved beauty and sought for it in the past. He worked with even greater purpose than Ruskin to restore beauty to Victorian England; and because capitalism did not provide the beauty he sought, he looked elsewhere. He may have been "a dreamer of dreams," as he called himself, but he was not an idle dreamer.

In his earlier verse and prose there is a strangeness and a rare beauty which gradually disappeared from his work. In *The Defence of Guenevere* there are distinct characters, passionate,

real, and believable, set in a lovely dream-world of the imagination. Beautiful color and intricate designs are excitingly different in each of the poems. In this volume Morris' most exciting use of color is found. The medieval golds, greens, reds, and blues make up a great deal of the atmosphere in such tunes as "Rapunzel." The somber imagery and rough discords, on the other hand, bring home to the reader the harshness of bloodshed and violence without sordidness or melodrama. In "The Haystack in the Floods," for instance, every sentence has a hard edge, and the scene is etched upon the mind's eye not so much by the violence as by the central fixed image of the haystack to which every emotion is referred.

The transition between Guenevere and Jason can be found in Scenes From the Fall of Troy, which is printed in May Morris' Collected Works, Volume XX. But there is a change from the 1858 volume to Jason, in 1867, and The Earthly Paradise, in 1868-70, and this change is deplored by those who care for intensity in poetry. The use of color is less important to the narrative in these two volumes, but it serves to fix Morris' sharp imagery on our sense. Not only is his use of color different, but the melancholy in Jason and the bittersweet passing of life in The Earthly Paradise is a change from the 1858 volume. Morris has emerged from a half-seen medieval dream-world in which color and imagery predominate, into a world filled with poetry of pure language and fascinating narrative.

In 1873 came Love is Enough, which is derived from no literary source; although it might be one of the medieval tales told

by the Wanderers. However, with its quasi-dramatic construction it is unlike anything else that Morris wrote. The varied rhyme schemes and rhythms set forth the pageant with such delightful color and imagery, that at the conclusion the reader feels as if he has just awakened from a peculiarly vivid dream. It is probably Morris' most self-absorbed writing. It is the last of his delicate constructions, for he went from Love is Enough to the more heroic stories of Icelandic literature.

Sigurd the Volsung discards the languors of The Earthly Paradise and adopts a faster pace full of changing brilliance and tragic conflict. Instead of the dreamy, bittersweet outlook on life, it became a noble sort of fatalism; but he adds all the color and landscape not found in the curt phrases of the original saga. There is little color for its own sake; the general tenor of the work is the impending doom represented by the Twilight of the Gods, and the war which is destructive to both sides. The only hope is the nebulous "new world" which may arise after the complete destruction of this one.

His remaining original poetry is contained in Poems by the Way, published in 1891. It is composed of many ballads and near-ballads which include many colorful passages and are reminiscent of his first volume of poetry. Also included are many of his poems concerning his interest in socialism. His last long poem was The Pilgrims of Hope, a description of things the poet had seen and heard during his political activities.

Morris aimed at no particular style of poetry, and his early

verse down to Sigurd is seldom markedly archaic or filled with contrasting heights and depths. It is poetry of mood, of atmosphere, or of feeling; and it is difficult to quote, for the reader remembers the mood rather than the lines. Morris is at his best in his longer works because his poetry is not exhausting or startling, and it gives pleasure for a longer period of reading. His use of short words and archaic speech is not a trick. They are proper vehicles for his fluent rhythms and form a background of medievalism for the color and imagery of his decoration. In Sigurd, where the subject and the measure are more stirring, the poetic plane is higher, but the poetry is still even.

It is vital to keep in mind the fact that however varied Morris' writings are, they are the work of an artist, craftsman, and designer using a slightly different field for the moment. It mattered little whether he was employed in weaving tapestry, working stained-glass into beautiful windows, dyeing cloth, illuminating a book, or in writing poetry or prose; it was all art. To Morris art was all the joy and beauty and richness of life.

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APPENDIX A

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF WILLIAM MORRIS

VOLUME I.	The Defence of Guenevere The Hollow Land
II.	The Life and Death of Jason
III-VI.	The Earthly Paradise
VII.	The Story of Grettir the Strong The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs
VIII.	Journals of Travels in Iceland 1871, 1873
IX.	Love is Enough Poems by the Way
X.	Three Northern Love Stories The Tale of Beowulf
XI.	The Aeneids of Virgil
XII.	The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs
XIII.	The Odyssey of Homer Done Into English Verse
XIV.	The House of the Wolfings The Story of the Glittering Plain
XV.	The Roots of the Mountains
XVI.	News from Nowhere A Dream of John Ball A King's Lesson
XVII.	The Wood Beyond the World Child Christopher Old French Romances
XVIII-XIX.	The Well at the World's End
XX.	The Water of the Wondrous Isles

VOLUME XXI. The Sundering Flood
Unfinished Romances

XXII. Hopes and Fears for Art
Lectures on Art and Industry

XXIII. Signs of Change
Lectures on Socialism

XXIV. Scenes from the Fall of Troy and Other
Poems and Fragments

APPENDIX B

THE WILLOW AND THE RED CLIFF

About the river goes the wind
  And moans through the sad grey willow,
And calls up sadly to my mind
  The heave and the swell of the billow.

For the sea heaves up beneath the moon,
  And the River runs down to it:
It will meet the sea by the red cliff soon,
  Salt water running through it.

That cliff it rises steep from the sea
  On its top a thorn-tree stands,
With its branches blown away from the sea,
  As if praying with outstretched hands,

To be saved from the wind, from the merciless west
  That moaneth through it always
And very seldom giveth it rest
  When the dark is falling pallwise.

One day when the wind moaned through that tree
  As it moans now through the willow
On the cliff sat a woman clasping her knee
  O'er the rise and fall of the billow.

And as she sits there without a moan
  With her hand clasped round her knee,
The shadows go over her sitting alone,
  And the shadows go over the sea.

And the clouds go over the face of the moon
  That looketh down on the sea:
They will close around her very soon,
  That you cannot tell where she be.

And the woman sits with her head bent down,
  And thinketh of happy days;
Of the days when in the bright summer sun
  She lifted her fair, fair face.

And the woman thought, sitting over the sea,
  Of a glorious summer eve,

How--under the boughs of the willow tree--
  Ah! no tears fall for her grief.

The dark clouds now have closed over the moon,
  That you cannot tell where she be:
And, from the face of the bright moon thrown,
  Not a shadow goes over the sea.

And the woman sat while the night went on,
  And she never unclasped her hands:
And the woman sat till the clouds were gone,
  And the sun rose over the lands.

Then she sang in the light of the rising sun,
  While the waves looked green and white:
She sang in the sunlight this mournful song,
  While the red cliff turned from the light.

"Sun that lookest straight at me
As I turn me from the sea,
  Dost thou know my misery?
Dost thou know the willow tree
  Underneath whose branches he
Plighted well his troth to me?
O! the happy willow tree
With the river by it sighing,
And the swallow by it flying,
And the thrush singing to it from the thorn-bush.
O! the happy willow tree
For the river sigheth for it
And the swallow flyeth to it,
And the thrush sings of love from the thorn-bush,
In the spring the thrush singeth,
From the bough the leaf springeth,
To hear him sing of love from the thorn-bush.
In the summer he is still
From the river to the hill
No song of bird cometh to the thorn-bush.
But the happy willow tree
He is full as full can be
Of the song of love
That rang out from the thorn-bush.
When the autumn cometh round,
All the air is filled with soung
That cometh from the sick yellow thorn-bush.
And the yellow branches wave
O'er the fallen leaves that pave
The dull earth all about the thorn-bush
And the autumn passeth by,

And the dead leaves round it lie:
Red berries look out fairly from the thorn-bush.
And the willow swingeth heavily,
Thinking of the days gone by:
And he thinketh of the spring
And the song that shall outring
From the loving thrush a-sitting in the thorn-bush."

Then the woman turned round to the sea,
Which swung its waves up heavily:
And she let her hair from its band go free,
And the west wind blew it out wearily.

Then she turned roundagain to the sun,
And her hair was blown back on her:
And to close the sun in the clouds had begun:
Then the bitter song sprang from her.

"O! willow tree, O! willow tree,
Keepest thou the ring he gave to me
And which I on thy branches hung,
When all about the song-thrush sung?

"O! willow tree, O! willow tree,
Wilt thou keep all my misery?
Wilt hide it in the hollow dark,
Where the wave has sapped thy bark?
Shall the song-thrush know it?
The forget-me-not show it
To the river running by?

O fair earth, fair sky above it:
O fair autumn elms that love it;
Fair trees that fill the hollow there;
Yellow leaves that float in air;
See! his picture I have kept;
I have never o'er it wept.
How my hair floats round him now
How it blows against his brow.
I will give him to the sea,
The sea will keep him well for me
In his deep green waters."

Then over the face of the cliff she leant,
With the picture in her hand,
And as she lay with her head down bent,
Her long hair was blown on the land.
She stretched her hand adown the side
As far as her arm would reach:

And from her hand did the picture glide,
  Waves caught it on the beach.

And still she lay with her head down bent,
  And her hand stretched down to the sea,
And she said, as the sea wind over her went:
  "O! love dost call for me?
  O! love I will come to thee:
  O! love we will dwell in the sea
    And in the pearl-strewn cave
  Will gently move the billow
    As once above us did wave
  The green boughs of the willow."

The clouds are over the face of the sun,
  There is no wind below them:
But above the west-wind presses them on,
  Nor ever rest will give them.

No living thing on the cliff does stand;
  No face from the red cliff looks;
But the thorn-bush stretches out his hand
  To the leaves in the little nooks.

And from the thorn-bush far away
  Doth the thrush to the willow sing:
And on the willow branch always
  Glitters a golden ring.

May Morris, Works, XXI, xxx.

APPENDIX C

FRAGMENT OF THE OPENING OF THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE

That summer morning out in the green fields
Along the Itchen, sat King Arthur's knights
Long robed and solemn, their brave battle shields

Hung in the canopies, to see such sights
As might be seen that morning, and to hear
Such strange grim words fiercer than many fights,

That on that morn 'twixt anger and great fear
Brave lips and beautiful might writhe to say.
High up in wooden galleries anear

That solemn court of judgement dames sat--gay
With many coloured kirtles, yea, but some
Were sick and white with much fear that day;

For now take notice, Launcelot was not come;
The lordly minstrel Tristram, nigh to death
From King Mark's glaive, sat brooding at his home;

Gareth was riding fearful of men's breath
Since he was Gawaine's brother; through the trees
And over many a mountain and bare heath

The questing beast, wings spread out to the breeze,
Trailed Palomydes, wearied feet and sore,
And ever Lawaine was at Launcelot's knees,

So he was missed too; ever more and more
Grew Gawaine's nets round Guenevere the Queen.
Look round about what knights were there that wore

Sir Launcelot's colours, the great snake of green
That twisted on the quartered white and red--

May Morris, Works, I, xx.

APPENDIX D

THE PLACEMENT OF THE POEM "THE DEEDS OF JASON"

The following stanzas written on two fragile leaves of note-paper, are inscribed in my father's hand: "To come between 'March' and 'The Deeds of Jason'"; so this is the place assigned to "Jason" in the "Earthly Paradise" scheme; it was to be the first of the tales.

Now must we tell what life those old men had
While from the glass the last sands quickly ran
Of their loved lives; they dwelt there scarcely glad
And scarcely sorry, loved of every man
In such-like joyance as these elders can;
Feeble, and willing life should pass away
In peaceful ending to a story day.

And on a time when March was well begun
The rulers of the land in their great hall
Set forth a feast, and there bid every one
Of lords and strangers, and till eve did fall
They feasted, while the March rain beat the wall
Half-heard in pauses of the minstrelsy.

Then spices being brought in, and men being set
About the strangers, spoke the chiefest lord:
"No doubt, O guests, ye scarcely can forget
Of how awhile ago ye spoke a word
Of old tales telling wonders of the sword,
The changing ways of strange folk of all climes
And unforgotten men of ancient times.

"And now this eve there cometh unto me
The memory of a tale ye well may hear
Of the first men that sailed upon the sea
From our old land of Greece, that might they bear
That fleece unto their temple; without fear
They bore to suffer many a dreadful thing,
Therefore to-day their names are flourishing."

"Green is their memory truly," quoth Sir Rafe,
"And we perchance are clean forgotten now;
They, their great deed accomplished, came back safe,
But we shall never past the white cliffs row
Or see the nesses named by names we know.

Yettell your tale, although I weep again
Our wasted lives and fond desire and vain.

"And let us think ourselves a little while
But merchants, with no hope but gain of gold,
Willing an anxious hour to beguile
By hearing tell of fearless deed of old
Wrought spite of fire fierce, and water cold.
Fair Sir, we hearken." Then the kingly man
This story of the Argo thus began.

To come between "March" and
"The Deeds of Jason."

May Morris, Works, II, xxi-xxiv.

APPENDIX E

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JUNE
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EPILOGUE
L'ENVOI

VITA

The writer of this thesis was born in Buffalo, New York, in 1925, but moved shortly thereafter with his family to Western Pennsylvania. In Pittsburgh he attended John Morrow School for eight years and Langley High School for two years. His family moved then to Erie, Pennsylvania, where he graduated from Academy High School in 1943. He enlisted that same year in the Army Air Force and was honorably discharged after three years of service.

After his discharge, he worked as a salesman and later as division manager for a subsidiary of Reynolds Metals Company. At this time he entered Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, but stayed only two years and did not take a degree because the primary field of concentration of this school was science rather than liberal arts.

In 1949 he entered the Infantry as a second lieutenant, and served as an Education Officer and Platoon Leader in Japan and Korea until his return to the United States in 1951. During a two-year tour at Camp Pickett, Virginia, he married Miss Billie Sue Hamlet of Montross, Virginia. In 1953, two months after the birth of a baby daughter, he and his family went to La Rochelle, France, where he continued his duties as a Troop Information and Education officer on the general's staff.

Following his release from active duty, he entered Richmond College as a junior in 1954 and received the Bachelor of Arts degree in June 1956. He entered the Graduate School of the University of

Richmond that year and became a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in August 1957.