

Ten Journeys to the Venusberg: Morris' Drafts for "The Hill of Venus"

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One of the strongest characteristics of that . . . assertion of the liberty of the heart, in the middle age, which I have termed a medieval Renaissance, was its antinomianism, its spirit of rebellion and revolt against the moral and religious ideas of the time. In their search after the pleasures of the senses and the imagination, in their care for beauty, in their worship of the body, people were impelled beyond the bounds of the Christian ideal; and their love became sometimes a strange idolatry, a strange rival religion. It was the return of that ancient Venus, not dead, but only hidden for a time in the caves of the Venusberg, of those old pagan gods still going to and fro on the earth, under all sorts of disguises.

—Walter Pater¹

WILLIAM MORRIS REVISED NOTHING ELSE AS MANY TIMES AS HE DID "THE Hill of Venus," the last of *The Earthly Paradise's* twenty-five tales.² May Morris alluded to four manuscript versions (in addition to the fair copy and printed tale³) in her introductions to the *Collected Works*, and my reconstruction suggests that Morris may in fact have written as many as ten drafts in all (listed in the appendix). Their wide variations indicate that Morris began *de novo* again and again, unable for once either to close the book, or throw it away.⁴

One might argue that Morris's indecision was an emblem of several of the narrative's principal *topoi*: the ambivalence of thwarted *eros* and *agape*; the elusiveness and deferral of earthly happiness; and the incompleteness and suspensive nature of all achievement. The plot of "The Hill of Venus" also resonated in sympathy with Morris' still unresolved unhappiness about aspects of his private life; exemplified his sense of intense but suspended energies; and witnessed his aesthetic preoccupations with

cyclical returns, “existential historicism,”⁵ and the inward life of the past. He did, of course, finally negotiate the Venusberg’s exit as well as its entrance, finishing his great poetic cycle, and integrating its reflections and conclusions into his life and work.

Contemporary Analogues

In 1861 and 1862, Morris began to draft “The Watching of the Falcon,” “The Ring Given to Venus,” and “The Hill of Venus,” a series of praiseful and monitory medieval tales loosely associated with the figure of Venus.⁶ “The Watching of the Falcon” eventually appeared as *The Earthly Paradise’s* medieval tale for July, and a later version of “The Ring Given to Venus” became the work’s penultimate medieval tale.

Psychological perils of proscribed love also appeared in contemporary poetic and visual motifs of Dante Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, and Algernon Swinburne. Both Swinburne and Burne-Jones, for example, began work on the legend of Tannhäuser in the early 1860s, and Burne-Jones finished the watercolor *Laus Veneris* in 1861 (though he did not paint the better-known painting of the same title until 1875-78).⁷ Swinburne’s “Laus Veneris,” written in a style similar to the *Defence of Guenevere* narratives, later appeared as one of his more provocative *Poems and Ballads* in 1866.⁸

All three artists found a great imaginative beauty and cause for celebration in the “sin” their source decried, although Swinburne was least directly concerned with ethical or religious aspects of the original legend. He was heavily indebted to Morris’ Malorian style for his rhetoric and detailed portrayal of the knight’s inward state, but his abstractly self-conscious “love” remained a curiously sterile if persistent form of libidinal attachment. “Laus”’s speaker, for example, invokes those who died for her love “in the old time,”

Who, sleeping with her lips upon their eyes,
Heard sudden serpents hiss across her hair.

Their blood runs round the roots of time like rain:
She casts them forth and gathers them again;
 With nerve and bone she weaves and multiplies
Exceeding pleasure out of extreme pain.

Another parallel occurs in the final affirmation of Swinburne’s speaker, addressed to Venus:

Ah, love, there is no better life than this;
To have known love, how bitter a thing it is,

And afterward be cast out of God's sight;
 Yea, these that know not, shall they have such bliss

High up in barren heaven before his face
 As we twain in the heavy-hearted place,
 Remembering love and all the dead delight,
 And all that time was sweet with for a space?

Swinburne's knight was more certain than Morris' Walter of the existence of eternity, however, and also more confident that Venus would reciprocate his obsessive attachment.

Morris' treatment of the Venusberg legend, by contrast, evolved gradually into a critique of moral proscription, a celebration of realism and psychological endurance, and a quasi-mythical account of secular humanist redemption. He had long since rebelled against the "rich establishment Puritanism" of his family,⁹ but several early *Earthly Paradise* period tales, such as "The Proud King," "The Writing on the Image," and the rejected "Story of Dorothea," unearthed further tensions between his revisionist impulses and the orthodox sentiments of his medieval sources. In the strata of his many revisions of the Venusberg tale, he developed over time his mature view that "love" is attachment-under-stress, a tempered but still heroic ideal which he hoped would grace the new ethical order, and the "earthly paradise" he continued to seek.

Recent and Contemporary Sources

Only a few names and general incidents of Morris' tale followed the prototype May Morris identified as its source—Ludwig Tieck's version of the Tannhäuser legend in "Der Getreue Eckart und der Tannenhäuser," which Thomas Carlyle brought to the awareness of nineteenth-century English readers in his 1827 translation of Tieck's novellas in *German Romance*.¹⁰ More recently, Julian Fane and Robert Lytton had published another redaction of Tieck's story in *Tannhäuser: or, the Battle of the Bards* in 1861,¹¹ about the time Morris began to draft early versions of his tale.

The original "tanhusere" was an otherwise unidentified thirteenth-century poet and composer, whose cheerful and ironic songs about a knight's encounter with his lover and expressions of sympathy for the Hohenstaufen princes of his region (then engaged in conflicts with the papacy) interested his contemporaries and successors. The more particular origin of the Venusberg legend, however, was probably "Das Lied von dem Tannhäuser," a 104-line ballad thought to have been composed between 1264 and 1274, and set at the time of Tannhäuser's visit to the obdurate pope Urban IV (who died in 1264), in contrast with the pre-

millennial setting of Morris' tale.¹²

Nineteenth-century romantic redactions and popularizations of the legend included Ludwig Tieck's "Der Getreue Eckhart und der Tannenhäuser" (1799); and prose versions by E. T. A. Hoffmann, Jacob Grimm, and Joseph von Eichendorff; poems by Friedrich von Sallet and Heinrich Heine; and operas or opera-librettos by Franz Grillparzer (*Melusina*, 1823), Richard Wagner (*Tannhäuser*, 1845), and Eduard Duller and Karl Mangolt (*Tannhäuser*, 1846); as well as a verse-novel and assorted imitations and parodies of Wagner's work. It is therefore quite possible that Morris may have been directly or indirectly aware of other versions than Carlyle's translation, and drawn on some of them for his interpretation of a legend fraught with recurrent and newly emergent tensions between material and spiritual, as well as secular and transcendent modes of experience.¹³

In a fusion of narrative frames that anticipated counterparts in Morris' *Earthly Paradise* tale "The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon" as well as "The Hill of Venus," Tieck divided his version of the legend into two parts. In the first, the knight Eckart hears a wandering musician sing of another Eckart who bravely met his death in Venus' hill. In the second, set some four centuries later, the aged and weary Tannenhäuser tells his long-suffering friend Friedrich von Wolfsburg that he had murdered his childhood love Emma many years before, then retreated for a timeless period into Venus' cave, and plans now to undertake a pilgrimage to Rome and beg the pope for absolution. Friedrich assures the seemingly deranged Tannenhäuser that Emma is now his own wife and quite alive, but the distracted Tannenhäuser nonetheless travels to Rome, suffers papal rejection, returns north, and bizarrely commits at length the crime for which he had so long sought redemption.

Morris took little from Tieck's barely coherent plot, but may have drawn some atmospheric effects from his descriptions of Tannenhäuser's erotic experiences ("insatiable was my heart, and endless my enjoyment . . . what my thought coveted was mine; one delirium of rapture was followed by another"), and wistful disenchantment ("a longing for the old innocent Earth, with her scanty joys, took hold of me here, as keenly as of old the impulse which had driven me hither"). Unlike Morris' Walter, Tieck's quasi-Spasmodic hero never attends to the promptings of an inner *daimon*, and his "pilgrimage" has no larger social or ethical significance. In particular, Tieck does not relativize the Pope's reactions, or interpret the supernatural blossoms as a token of heavenly acceptance of earthly love.

By the time Morris wrote the last drafts for "The Hill of Venus," he might have found a more congenial source of recent inspiration in Sabine Baring-Gould's widely circulated *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* (1866),¹⁴

a text May Morris did not mention. Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924), a High Anglican clergyman who questioned the literal veracity of Christian doctrine, was a more consequent thinker and writer than his reputation as the author of "Onward Christian Soldiers" and "Now the Day is Over" might suggest. He strove to reconcile Christianity, Darwinian science, and Hegelian philosophy in *The Origin and Development of Religious Belief* (1869-70), and Max Sutton once described him as "the only popular novelist of his era who was also a theologian and the only theologian who wrote a book on werewolves."¹⁵

Born in the same year as Morris, Baring-Gould also wrote more than a hundred books of fiction, short stories, travel-accounts, and compendia of folk-songs, folklore, saints' lives, and other legends. He shared several of Morris' historical and literary interests, and published his own journal of travels to Iceland (*Iceland: Its Scenes and Sagas*, in 1863); translated or retold Norse sagas and other folktales (*Grettir the Outlaw*, for example, in 1890); and irritated his own hierarchy with irreverent criticisms and consistent advocacy of democratic changes and social reforms he hoped would improve the lives of the poor.

In this context, Baring-Gould's secular and proto-anthropological approach to medieval legends—reflected in his title *Curious Myths*—also anticipated and may have influenced comparative strains in Morris' mature thought. In his chapter "The Mountain of Venus," Baring-Gould recounted the more poetic aspects of several versions, glossed the tale as "the sad yet beautiful story of Tanhäuser . . . a very ancient myth Christianized, a wide-spread tradition localized" (1881 edition, p. 212), interpreted it appreciatively as a pan-European narrative template, and compared it with other cognate tales of visits to underground chambers inhabited by fairies and other supernatural beings. He also omitted the violent and inexplicable elements of earlier versions, and effectively identified many of the motifs of Morris' tale.

Baring-Gould's "Tanhäuser" is a "famous minnesinger, and all his lays were of love and of women, for his heart was full of passion, and that not of the noblest description" (1881 edition, p. 209). After seven years of revelry in Venus' subterranean palace, he entreats Venus to let him depart, but when she finally relents and he finds his way to Rome, the Pope (Urban IV) curtly responds that "Guilt such as thine can never, never be remitted. Sooner shall this staff in my hand grow green and blossom, than that God should pardon thee!" (1881 edition, p. 212). The staff blooms three days later, but when they arrive the Pope's messengers find that the despairing man has just disappeared into the cave.

Such narratives have already evolved some distance away from the tale's original "story root," as Baring-Gould called it, in which under-

ground folk sexually entice a man into their cave, from which he later escapes for a time to revisit his former home, before returning at length to his exile below (1881 edition, pp. 212, 214). Morris' text deepened Baring-Gould's nuanced secularism and dramatic descriptions of the enchanted "mountain," intensified the recurrent *Angst* and struggle of Walter's passionate attachment, and heightened the literary continuity between secular *eros* and Christian *agape*.

Narrative of Morris' "The Hill of Venus"

Since "The Hill of Venus" is not exactly a staple of anthologies, it might be helpful to provide a brief review of the tale in its final published form.

In a dense northern forest, the restless and melancholy thirty-year-old Walter approaches the Venusberg, hurls away his sword, and prepares to enter its cave, despite well-founded fears for his life. Inside, he swoons and awakes in a meadow where he hears a hymn to Venus, observes a pageant of lovers from classical and medieval tales, and finally encounters "naked, alone, unsmiling"—the goddess herself. Passionate lovemaking at first slakes his unfocused sense of longing, but Venus' impersonal responses eventually begin to trouble him, and she ominously evades pertinent questions about their relationship:

Am I the only one
Whose eyes thy glorious kisses have made dim?
And what then with the others hast thou done?
(*Collected Works*, st. 89)

Fearful now that his life in the cave might be a "vile dream" (st. 90) and prompted also by the hope that he might yet find some "love amid earth's sorrowing folk" (st. 92), he finally leaves the cave in confusion and despair.

When he emerges, he is an alienated and disoriented inner *émigré* in the outer world. Old friends shy away, strangers flee him, and he wanders in solitude until he meets a company of pilgrims and accompanies them to Rome. The Pope grants him an audience, but as he enters the papal palace he sees an unexpected vision of a "woman white and lovely drawing near" (st. 179)—Venus—whose face in this context "[m]ocked the faint images of saints of old" (st. 179). Aware suddenly of Venus' vulnerability to a censorious Christian order, Walter feels a wave of protective anxiety, and when the rather kindly Pope urges him to confess "the inmost of his heart," he declaims a stubborn vindication of his "licentious" experience to the aged priest whose absolution he had sought:

Yet before thee, an old man small and weak,
 I quail indeed: not because thou art great,
 Nor because God through thy thin pipe doth speak,
 As all folk trow: but, rather, that man's hate,
 Man's fear, God's scorn, shall fall in all their weight
 Upon my love when I have spoken out:

.....
 Man hates it and God scorns, and I, e'en I,
 How shall I hate my love and scorn my love?

.....
 More hate than man's hate in my soul doth move;
 Greater my scorn than scorn of God above—
 And yet I love on. (sts. 187-188)

This earnest tirade modulates into a “defence” of the loveliness of nature and non-Christian religion:

Hast thou not heard about the Gods, who erst
 Held rule here where thou dwellest? dost thou think
 That people 'neath their rule were so accurst
 That they forgot in joy to eat and drink. (st. 203)

The genuinely astonished Pope writes off his stubborn supplicant as a spiritual loss (“just so much hope I have of thee / As on this dry staff fruit and flowers to see!” [st. 108]), and Walter flees Rome to return to the mysterious disquiet of Venus’ cavern, where he finds “sleepless nights, of horrors passing hell, / Of joys by which our joys are misery; / But hopeless both, if such a thing may be” (st. 212). After his departure, however, the Pope’s staff duly blossoms (“on its barrenness / . . . the ripe fruit of heaven’s unmeasured hours” [st. 222]), and Morris’ frail old man has the wit and grace to see this miracle as the *evangelium* of a new faith. He bestows a private blessing and dies soon thereafter, with an expression of ecstasy on his face. Walter, by contrast, never learns that his testimony has shaken Europe’s major religion, and remains suspended in his exile between vindication and despair—the first secular martyr, as it were, of a religion of mutual respect and eclectic tolerance for the life and visionary beauty of the earth.

From time to time in Morris’ tale, a wry authorial voice also intervenes to mock conventional narrative expectations. The voice glosses Walter’s first embrace of Venus, for example, as follows:

What, is the tale not ended then? Woe’s me!
 How many tales on earth have such an end:

I longed, I found, I lived long happily.

The voice expresses a certain trepidation that Walter's final condition "passeth all understanding":

And what more would ye hear of him? Meseems
 It passes mind of man to picture well
 His second sojourn in that land; yet gleams
 There might be thence, if one had heart to tell." (st. 212).

These modest metanarrative intrusions effectively deflect attention from Walter to the "tale of Walter," and remind Morris' audience (and himself) of the multiple reverberations of Walter's dilemma. They also reflect the larger poetic cycle's preoccupation with the heroism of lost causes and the limited redemptive capacities of artistic memory, and remind the reader that true redemptive heroism may find no external vindication—small consolation for the rest of us, who may envision no wider narrative for the solitary trajectories of our lives.

Early Drafts

As I have tried to illustrate in the accompanying "List of Drafts," the extant manuscripts of "The Hill of Venus" fall into two rough categories. The first consists of early drafts from the early 1860s, which include the relatively polished versions found in Fitzwilliam Library MS EP25 and the slightly corrected version in Huntington Library MS 6423 (appendix, nos. 1-3). The second consists of extensively rewritten later redactions, probably from 1868-69, and found now in B.L. Add. MS 45,299 and elsewhere (appendix, nos. 4-8). The third and fourth early drafts and fifth and sixth later ones show most clearly the aspects of the poem's development I wish to highlight.

Morris' autograph Fitzwilliam MS EP 25 seems to have provided a basic text from which a copyist prepared the quite similar Huntington Library MS 6423, and Morris annotated this draft with a few corrections, additions, and running notes. The minimality of these changes in a relatively fair copy suggests that it formed a near-"final" text for the tale's early version, prepared perhaps with the same copyist who transcribed penultimate and final drafts of "The Story of Cupid and Psyche" and "Pygmalion and the Image." These drafts also included early versions of several interspersed songs.

Like other early medieval *Earthly Paradise* tales ("The Writing on the Image," for example), these earlier drafts of "The Hill of Venus" had a rather self-consciously artificial frame, and gave more attention to tournaments and chivalric combats, in the manner of "The Defence of

Guenevere" and "Scenes from the Fall of Troy." In these drafts Venus also resembles more closely her kindlier and more straightforward incarnations in "The Watching of the Falcon" and other early tales. She sadly warns her lover "Amyot" that he may be exiled from the cave, and responds to him much more warmly than her counterpart in the published tale.

Like that of its companion "The Ring Given to Venus," the plot of the early "Hill of Venus" also focused heavily on sorcery's stereotypical evils. In the opening narrative-frame for the Fitzwilliam version (appendix, no. 2), for example, a friendly old man tells the unnamed narrator that Venus' sorcery has destroyed all who have come before him, and he himself had once seen "the God of Heaven mocked most horribly / By things that coming out from yonder hill / In uncouth guise danced on the herbage green."

Finally, in these early drafts Walter's predecessor Amyot is a rather shallow character, drawn to the "hollow hill" by racy descriptions of women who dance and bathe there unclothed. Like his more dignified counterpart in "Pygmalion and the Image," he is dissatisfied with women's "hard light hearts, so ready to forget," but he basically enters the cave to try his luck. Once inside, he makes his way to a luxurious city, and finds there a band of beautiful women, on their way to join Venus' company, who sing that "[O]ur Queen is at the door / Gold clad, yet her hair is wet / With the washing of the sea / O Sweet Queen we kneel to thee."

Led to Venus' retreat by one of her servants, Amyot falls asleep, but Venus enters, undresses, and remains with him and a servant until "the middle of next day." Venus's most attractive attendant remains with him afterward, and accompanies him the next morning to the lists, where Venus is scheduled to officiate. En route they hear her attendants sing a version of "Before our Lady came on earth / Little there was of joy and mirth," a lovely song which Morris retained in the published tale (st. 42). After Amyot makes dutiful sacrifice at Venus' altar and wins the tournament against an assortment of generic opponents, he begins a bit belatedly to sense that "all those things he saw were but shadows / Set round him but to keep his heart aflame." Venus cheers him up, however, by inviting him to a walled garden near an isolated temple, where "[her] body fair / Naked within his arms did Amyot hold / [until] Therewith they vanished through the gates of gold."

Amyot remains with Venus in a state of erotic bliss for about five months. She finally leaves him to return to the sea and the fisher-folk of her native Cyprus, and her attendant and apparent stand-in reappears to offer him love and prolonged youth ("[f]or I have charms to hold grim eld at bay"). He rejects this distracting offer in order to return to the outer

world, and joins there a band of pilgrims in search of a papal audience. Arrived with the others in Rome, he tells his tale sincerely enough to the pontiff, but the latter's rebuke ("Go hence, thou hast no grain of hope") causes him to faint away in despair. When the gruff prelate belatedly notices the budding rod, he seeks Amyot until his own death overtakes him, but neither he nor the narrator ever learns whether

Dams Venus took him for her knight
Again . . . , or what else befell
Unto him as he journeyed on to Hell.

All the narrator can offer in conclusion is a brief homiletic meditation on "sin, charity, and the paradoxical faith—recurrent throughout *The Earthly Paradise*—that "Men's miseries . . . make their fellows glad":

Therewith the old Knight ceased and I sat still
Thinking of all the story I had heard;
And pondering on that unmatched dreadful hill
I deemed that verily the old Swineherd
Had spoken unto me a timely word.
Yet in my heart there lingered none the less
Regretful longing for that loveliness.

And thinking of the joy that I had had
To hear that tale I said, "Mens miseries
May sometimes chance to make their fellows glad
Now the shadow of them in likewise
Will bring the happy tears into our eyes
Like too sweet music too soon passed away.
Therewith the minster chimes sung out midday.

The relatively uncomplicated erotic allegory of this draft had counterparts in other early *Earthly Paradise* narratives, among them "Atalanta's Race" and "The Lady of the Land," and its imbricated frame-structures paralleled those of "The Land East of the Sun." It might have formed a brief but plausible conclusion for the first volume, in the place later occupied by the much longer and more searching tale of "Ogier the Dane."

Later Drafts

Morris remained fond of his tale's states of "regretful longing," but seems to have seen that he might modulate them into less simplistic reflections on moral self-knowledge and physical love. He continued at any rate to polish and revise the tale as the sequence evolved, until only

one place remained for it at the end of the work's second cycle.

Along the way, he prepared several incomplete intermediate drafts that came to rest in B.L. Add. MS 45,299, and two of these are of special significance. The first, eighty-seven stanzas long, was probably the version May Morris identified as draft B (CW, 6:xxi-xxiii; appendix, no. 5, ff. 66-105), and it included a four-page episode, later omitted, in which the hero ("Amyot" in all but the final tale) lies sick and despairing in a hospital in Rome, and an attendant monk urges him to seek his audience with the Pope.

In this intermediate draft Morris also elaborated Amyot's emotional responses, his visions of the dancing maidens, and more importantly, Venus' attempts to answer some of his many questions. When she admits her fundamental indifference, for example, and acknowledges that she cannot assuage his desire, Amyot angrily denounces

his love made manifest in the flesh, grown base
 And hateful, and
 . . . with despair and hate and longing mazed
 Into the depths of her grey eyes he gazed,
 That looked not on him. (f. 81)

Cognate passages appeared in Morris' "Near but Far Away" and other poems of the period, and Orpheus condemned similar patterns of "divine" indifference in "The Story of Orpheus and Eurydice." Motives obvious to his friends may have influenced Morris' decision to omit these stanzas, and withhold "Orpheus" and several shorter lyrics from publication (cf. Boos, *Design*, pp. 354-357). In the published version of *The Hill of Venus*, a procession of literary lovers eventually replaced these bleak reflections and detailed descriptions of Venetian love.

In the second substantial intermediate draft (appendix, no. 6, B.L. Add. MS 45,299, ff. 49-65), Morris included two sections of 186 stanzas, several of which roughly paralleled counterparts in the final version.¹⁶ This sequence began at stanza 33 of the printed tale, retained its predecessor's somber and unsatisfied reflections, and ended abruptly when Amyot returned to the cave.

May Morris described this manuscript as "a complete but shortened form of the poem as it stands in the printed text," and several sections—in which Amyot confesses his love for Venus to the Pope, Venus reappears in a vision, and Amyot returns in disillusion to the cave—closely anticipated their final counterparts. The scene of the Pope's blossoming staff is conspicuously absent, however, so its opening and concluding segments may have been lost.

A certain eloquence hovered over other omitted passages, in which

Amyot brooded upon his fate:

And yet so lone I am, so utterly
 Unholpen—and when many days are gone
 If thou diest not yet shall thy love all die
 Yea I shall die and dying be alone
 Nor have a memory of we twain grown one
 To help me in my lonely hell when dim
 Far off is God no change or love in him.

.....
 He rose and watched the long slow light clouds glide
 Over the moon—he said a little while
 To think of hell ere I can meet thy smile. (f. 53)

The Published Version

I have already remarked on Morris' superposition of an internal chorus or disillusioned metanarrator in his final text. Other nuances and improvements at this stage included the addition of detailed reactions on the part of a forester and local peasants to the newly emerged Walter, fond descriptions of the countryside and dwellings Walter passes en route to Rome (his own ancestral castle among them), and allusions to contemporary millenarian fears.

Cumulatively, these quasi-historicist changes undercut rather effectively the earlier draft's allegorical and chivalric trappings, in ways which paralleled similarly extended representations of everyday medieval activities and laboring people in "The Lovers of Gudrun," "Bellerophon in Lycia," and other late *Earthly Paradise* tales. Morris' other major innovation—his displacement of the narrative into "this thousandth year / Since Christ was born"—may also have hearkened back to the views of his old friend R. W. Dixon, who argued in an 1858 Oxford prize essay that the tenth century had been dominated by dread of the millennium and its attendant apocalypse.¹⁷

In other sections that were apparently new, Morris finally developed the unprecedented blossoming of the papal staff, and the gentle pope's conversion-experience, final blessing and ecstatic death—the most definitive aspects of the tale's witness to the *novus ordo saeculorum*. He also added fifteen-odd new stanzas (ll. 567-671) in which he characterized Venus' attractiveness, Walter's doubts, and the motivations of his initial flight from the cave.

Interestingly enough, Walter also acquired at this stage a "great longing" for a prototype of the quality Morris later called "fellowship":

Dreams never dreamed before would gather dim
 About his eyes, and trembling would he cry
 To tell him how it was he should not die;
 To tell him how it was that he alone
 Should have a love all perfect and his own.

.....

... Changeless love, O say
 Why, since love's grief on earth doth so abound,
 No heart my heart that loveth so ere found
 That needed me? —for wilt thou say indeed
 That thou, O perfect one, of me hast need? (st. 82-85)

Venus' responses were not cold but "divine," in the sense of being bereft of fellow-feeling and the spiritual depth of human loss.¹⁸

The final drafts' more clearly delineated provisional ideals of tolerance and "negative capability" also provided a fitting dialectical response to the classical Bellerophon tales which preceded it in the larger work's final seasonal cycle. "Bellerophon at Argos"'s *exempla* of isolation and introspection and "Bellerophon in Lycia"'s emblems of worthy but unillusioned life-in-the-world found dramatic resolution in "The Hill of Venus"' suspensive contrasts of evanescent attachment and infinite yearning.

Conclusion

"The Hill of Venus" complex evolutionary history suggests that Morris ultimately decided, like his contemporary Sabine Baring-Gould, to reject more decisively Tieck's repressive Christian dogma, and affirm the tale's latent syntheses of *agape*, forgiveness, and earthly love. Along the way, he also made a provisional peace with the rejected Christianity of his youth, viewed now as a limited historical scheme, whose best elements might belatedly be transformed to respect the legitimacy of human needs.

Prefigured in the Sermon on the Mount and understood by visionary figures such as Morris' John Ball, Walter's ambivalent faith also anticipated the more radical "religion of humanity" Morris later advocated in *Commonweal* and "Socialism from the Root Up."¹⁹ Morris modulated "The Hill of Venus" sexuality in successive drafts, but he never repudiated it, as he sought ways to say more clearly that sensuous aspirations are aspects of humane fellowship true "herocs" must defend.

In its temporal *strata*, the tale therefore evolved into the *Earthly Paradise*'s most clear-cut allegory of conflicts between erotic and agapic ideals and their imperfect human realizations. Walter/Amyot wills his love for Venus in the end, as a projection of (some of) the qualities he

values most, and his commitment to these qualities will survive with them, despite the apparent ostracism he suffers. His "Venus" is a sensually proximal but ethically distant ideal—desire itself, a counterpart, in a sense, of Socrates' "divine mania" in the *Symposium*—and his devotion to its power and innocence sustains his solitary resolve. In such commitments, and not in "heaven and hell" (of which we "have no power to sing"²⁰), can be found provisional forms of an active happiness, *eudaimonia*, the only "earthly paradise" we will ever have.

Contemporary readers might well have expected a more conventional resolution in the cycle's final tale—comparable to Tennyson's in "The Holy Grail," say, or Browning's in "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came." Morris' hero, by contrast, finds a more significant counterpart to the "grail," but remains forever unaware of its significance.

Such unresolved conclusions were deeply atypical in Victorian poetry in 1870. They repudiated for one thing, however gently, contemporary myths of the leader-ruler-hero, but they also forced their readers, and us, to consider that we might never understand the meanings of our own tales. Finally, they suggested that irresolution and struggle might be ends in themselves, comparable to the Wanderers' unfulfilled search for an *Earthly Paradise*—realms to be sought, but never found, in the unwritten histories of sentient life and human emotion. Temporally isolated readers and narrators may have fleeting access to fragments of those histories and sustain something of what they relate, but "the universe"—as Pascal wryly observed—"knows nothing."

In its final form, then, "The Hill of Venus" offered a miniature emblem of Morris' larger work. As he composed *The Earthly Paradise*, Morris gradually learned to displace his sense of alienation and search for "fellowship" from narrower erotic and mythological venues into much wider projections, and his final tale's blend of generous *eros* and idealized *praxis* offered an aesthetic frame for the cycle's imbricated patterns of desire, renunciation, anonymity, and remembrance.

Morris' brooding sense of the sublation of individual identities in historical and narrative cycles reappeared later in the implicit ethic of *Love Is Enough*, and more deeply in his commitment to socialism, and in the infinitely echeloned temporal structures of *A Dream of John Ball*, *News from Nowhere*, and *Pilgrims of Hope*. Less obviously, perhaps, it may have prefigured suspensive and open-ended qualities in certain certifiably "modernist" works, such as T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Edith Sitwell's "Facade," and H. D.'s *Helen in Egypt*.

Morris' final medieval tale thus blended its tentative ending into a sense of eternal incompleteness, and became a small cadaster of his belief in the processive qualities of consciousness and "heroic" love. And the

Earthly Paradise's "idle singer" was therefore right to assert, in his final "Envoi," that "little is there left behind."

Notes

- 1 Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, The 1893 Text*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980), "Two Early French Stories," pp. 18-19.
- 2 Morris' *The Earthly Paradise* has been the subject of several books, including Blue Calhoun, *The Pastoral Vision of William Morris* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1975); Roderick Marshall, *William Morris and His Earthly Paradises* (Tisbury, Wiltshire: Compton Press, 1979); Jeffrey Skoblow, *Paradise Dislocated: Morris, Politics, Art* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1993); and Florence Boos, *The Design of William Morris's 'The Earthly Paradise'* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1991); and of chapters in broader studies by Charlotte Oberg, *A Pagan Prophet: William Morris* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1978); Carole Silver, *The Romance of William Morris* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1982); and Amanda Hodgson, *The Romances of William Morris* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), among others. Earlier studies of the topic of Morris' sources for this tale include Clyde K. Hyder, "Swinburne's 'Laus Veneris' and the Tannhäuser Legend," *PMLA* 15 (1930): 1202-13; Ralph Bellas, "William Morris' Treatment of Sources in 'The Earthly Paradise,'" Diss. Univ. of Kansas, 1960; and Florence Boos, ed., introduction to "The Hill of Venus," in William Morris' *The Earthly Paradise*, vol. 2 (New York: Routledge, 2001).
- 3 May Morris, ed. and intro., *The Collected Works of William Morris*, 24 vols. (London: Longmans, 1910-1915), vols. 3-6. The drafts are described in 6:xvi-xxvi.
- 4 May Morris recorded her father's advice on the use of source material: "Read it through, then shut the book and write in your own way" (CW, 3:xxii).
- 5 See Frederic Jameson, "Marxism and Historicism," *NLH* 11 (1979): 41-73.
- 6 At the end of *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867), Morris announced the preparation of a new poem, *The Earthly Paradise*, with twenty-five tales, of which *The Hill of Venus* was to be the sixteenth. In the introduction to *Collected Works*, May Morris recorded that an early draft of "The Watching of the Falcon" was composed in an account book dated June 1861 (6:xxvii), and that in preparing notes she used "the first form of the 'Hill of Venus,' written in the early 'sixties" (6:xvi).
- 7 Stephen Wildman and John Christian, *Edward Burne-Jones, Victorian Artist-Dreamer* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), p. 168.
- 8 For recent surveys of the relation between Burne-Jones, Swinburne, and Morris, see Nicholas Salmon, "A Friendship from Heaven: Burne-Jones and William Morris," *JWMS* 13, no. 1 (1998): 3-13; and John Christian, "Speaking of Kisses in Paradise: Burne-Jones's Friendship with Swinburne," *JWMS* 13, no. 1 (1998): 14-24.
- 9 From autobiographical statement enclosed in a letter to Andreas Scheu, September 15, 1883 (*The Collected Letters of William Morris*, ed. Norman Kelvin [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1987], 2:227, no. 911).
- 10 *German Romance: Specimens of its Chief Authors*, with biographical and critical

- notices. By the translator of "Wilhelm Meister" [T. Carlyle], 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1827). "Der Getreue Eckart" appears in vol. 2. See also Bellas, pp. 330-353.
- 11 Published under the pseudonyms Neville Temple and Edward Trevor, London, 1861. An anonymous translation also appeared in *Once a Week* 5 (August 17, 1861), pp. 210-212.
 - 12 See J. W. Thomas, *Tannhäuser: Poet and Legend with Texts and Translations of His Works* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1974), p. 61 and passim, and Edwin Zeydel, *Ludwig Tieck and England* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1931).
 - 13 Thomas, pp. 79-87. Thomas notes that literary versions of the legend became less frequent in the twentieth century, but that the ballad itself became popular as a folksong and has been collected in many nineteenth- and twentieth-century variants: "If it is surprising that a medieval ballad about a heathen goddess, a penitent, and a blooming staff should have a significant impact on modern literature, it is no less so that the ballad itself should become an authentic modern folksong" (p. 90).
 - 14 Sabine Baring-Gould, *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* (Rivington: London, Oxford and Cambridge, 1866; 2nd edition, revised and enlarged, London: Rivington, 1868; second series, Rivington: 1868; new edition, London: Rivington, 1881).
 - 15 "Sabine Baring-Gould," *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 156: British Short-Fiction Writers, 1880-1914: The Romantic Tradition*, ed. William Naufftus (Chicago: Gale Publishing Group, 1996), pp. 3-13. For other biographical accounts of Baring-Gould, see Max Keith Sutton, "Sabine Baring-Gould," *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 190: British Reform Writers, 1832-1914*, ed. Gary Kelly (Chicago: Gale Publishing Group, 1998), pp. 18-31; Bickford H. C. Dickinson, *Sabine Baring-Gould, Squarson, Writer and Folklorist, 1834-1924* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1970); and William Ernest Purcell, *Onward Christian Soldier; A Life of Sabine Baring-Gould, Parson, Squire, Novelist, Antiquary, 1834-1924* (London: Longmans, Green, 1957).
 - 16 Ff. 49-55 contains stanzas numbered 1-68, and ff. 56-65 stanzas numbered 102-220. Stanzas 1-24 in the manuscript correspond to stanzas 33-56 in the final version, and stanzas 102-112 in the manuscript to stanzas 107-117 in the final version.
 - 17 For a discussion of mid-Victorian writings on the apocalypse and millenium, see Alison Sulloway, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Temper* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 164-166.
 - 18 Compare Orpheus' accusation, in "The Story of Orpheus and Eurydice," that the gods are heedless of human emotion: "But how shall song move that which hath no ears, / Or love the thing that nought of longing bears" (CW, 24:260).
 - 19 "Socialism from the Root Up," co-authored with Ernest Belfort Bax. This was reprinted in expanded form as *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome* (London, 1893).
 - 20 From the "Apology" to *The Earthly Paradise*, st. 1.

Appendix: List of Drafts for “The Hill of Venus”

Morris included this title before *Jason* in his earliest list of proposed *Earthly Paradise* tales (c. 1861). In the notice for the projected second volume at the end of vol. 1, he listed it second, after the never-written “Story of Theseus.”

1. Autograph draft 1, Fitzwilliam Library MS EP25, ff. 11-13 (each manuscript in MS EP25 is numbered separately) (probably c. 1861-62):

Three loose manuscript pages ripped from a small notebook, placed inside autograph draft 2, below.

F. 11 is in pencil, f. 12, in pen and pencil, and f. 13 in pen; 7 stanzas. F. 11 begins “But therewithal was all thought swallowed up / By longings that he had no power to stay.” F. 13 ends with “That turned to royal state her wretchedness.”

The whole seems to be an early draft for the second part of draft 2, below.

2. Autograph draft 2, Fitzwilliam Library MS EP25, ff. 1-67 (each manuscript in MS EP25 is numbered separately) (probably c. 1861-62):

Preceded by “Argument” in hand of Charles Fairfax Murray.

Relatively finished early draft.

This begins, “I saw a forest once, in Germany / Set in a lordship called Turingia.”

In her introduction to the *Collected Works*, vol. 6, May Morris quoted from this draft and described it as “the first form of ‘The Hill of Venus.’”

Accompanied by copyist’s list of illustrations which correlates with Morris’ notations on facing pages.

3. Copyist’s draft 3, Huntington Library MS 6423:

A copyist’s draft of the above with a few corrections in Morris’ hand.

4. Autograph draft 4, Fitzwilliam Library MS EP25, ff. 14-15 (each manuscript in MS EP25 is numbered separately):

Two loose manuscript pages ripped from a small notebook and placed inside autograph draft 2, above.

There are small drawings of flowers at the top, and f. 14 begins, “The burning kisses of a thousand years.” This appears to be an early draft for st. 39 of draft 5, below.

5. Autograph draft 5 (?), British Library MS 45,299, ff. 66-83 (probably 1869-70):

77 stanzas (71 stanzas plus 6 stanzas of an interspersed song [ff. 72-73] of an intermediate version of the tale. May Morris called this draft "version B," and dated it from late 1869 or 1870. It is described in the *British Museum Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts*, 1939, 143, as "a fair copy with corrections. According to notes by May Morris (ff. 66, 76), sections of it were removed wholesale to the printer's copy. What remains is totally different from the printed text, and deals at length with the hero's sojourn in the land of Venus." It is reprinted in Florence Boos, *The Design of William Morris's 'The Earthly Paradise,'* pp. 449-476.

The autograph is written in a relatively neat hand, and is divided into three sections with gaps between. F. 66 begins, "Across him: 'Too much like the world it is,' / He muttered, and yet as he spake did flame" and f. 83 ends, "Into a night whereof no tongue may tell," which corresponds to stanza 107 in the printed version.

6. Autograph draft 6(?), British Library MS 45,299, ff. 49-65b (probably c. 1869-70):

A rough draft of 186 stanzas in 2 sections, numbered by Morris 1-68 and 102-220, of which several roughly parallel the final version. This seems to be May Morris' "version A," which she described as "a complete but shortened form of the poem as it stands in the printed text." The *British Museum Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts*, 143, notes that "this draft approximates more closely to the printed text than (B) and (C), but is shorter than it. The song 'Before our lady came on earth' is missing, but its place is indicated (f. 49b). The hero is called Amyot here and in (C), but is unnamed in (B)." It begins with stanza 33 of the printed version, "He looked behind him a vague memory / Of time late passed, of craving restless pain," and ends with Amyot's return to the cave, "As now at last its story echoing dearth, / And dull dark closed betwixt him and the earth," which corresponds to stanza 210 in the published version.

7. Autograph draft 7(?), British Library MS 45,299, ff. 84-105 (probably c. 1869-70):

May Morris identifies a "fragment C," which "works on B and selects passages and single stanzas from it, but it, too, is almost completely rejected." It is possible that draft 4 above was taken from it. It is described in the *British Museum Catalogue of Additions to the Manu-*

scripts, 144, as “a collection of ideas rather than a coherent narrative. Parts of (A) and (B) were used, but the greater part was rejected for the final text.”

I think it is rather a collection of three partial drafts, but it is unclear whether they are parts of a larger whole.

7a (ff. 84-100) contains 69 stanzas and begins with the final line of a stanza: “Unto the threshold of that mighty Rome.” It ends on f. 100 with “Into a night whereof no man may tell” (cf. draft 5, f. 83).

7b (f. 101) contains the 2 concluding lines of a stanza, “And soft and dear were kisses & the sight / Of tremulous red lips and bosom white,” followed by 4 completed stanzas, and ends “Should have a love all perfect and his own,” which corresponds to stanza 81 in the published version.

7c (f. 102-105) begins with the last three lines of a stanza: “How many times that sweetness oer him came. . .” and after 19 more stanzas ends once again with the hero’s return to the cave, “Into a night whereof no man may tell” (cf. drafts 5, 7a).

8. [Autograph draft 8], (c. 1869 or 1870):

This may be a missing first draft of the final version.

9. Autograph fair copy 9, Huntington Library MS 418 (1870).

10. Printed version 1870

