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Troubling the Heroic Ideal

Morris's Midlife Poetry

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In the six years between 1867 and 1873, William Morris composed an astounding quantity of his best poetry – *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867), a poetic epic; *The Earthly Paradise* (1868–70), a twenty-five-tale poetic narrative united by a meditative frame; and *Love Is Enough* (1872), an allegorical masque on the topic of love (despite repeated frustrations), as well as several additional long narratives and personal lyric poems largely unpublished in his lifetime. Still in his thirties, Morris repurposed the poetic forms and legends of prior European traditions for what he viewed as the urgent needs of his own age. ‘Of Heaven or Hell I have no power to sing’, *The Earthly Paradise’s* speaker proclaims at the outset of his epic as Morris’s poems of the period confront the question: In the absence of the orthodox religious and political ideals that suffused past literature, how can a modern poet best represent the struggles of his contemporaries toward meaningful lives? Is heroism still possible and, if so, what should be its qualities? Paradoxically, even as his answers celebrate myth and romance as models for present-day living, they proclaim the need for individuals to accept incompleteness and partial defeat in the service of ultimate aims. Rather than offering solutions, then, literature provides companionship: empathizing with others who have faced similar impasses in the past can embolden individuals to act, knowing that their lives form part of a communal, transhistorical pattern.

Though later admired for its originality and intensity, Morris’s first volume of poetry, the *Defence of Guenevere* (1858), had faced mixed reviews. Critics found its medievalism affected, its language abrupt, and its plots obscure – one reviewer even professed to be unable to make sense of ‘Rapunzel’, a poem based on the well-known fairy tale of that name.¹ In response, Morris stubbornly preserved the medievalism and historicism central to his ideals, but henceforth strove to make his plots more accessible by providing fuller contexts and frames. *The Life and Death of Jason* and *The Earthly Paradise* are remarkably lucid – as his friend Swinburne



Figure 6.1 London Stereoscopic & Photograph Company, *William Morris*, 14 March 1877, portrait photograph; copyright National Portrait Gallery, London

wrote, 'fresh as wind, bright as light, and full of the spring and the sun'²² – and even *Love Is Enough*, if relatively plotless, appeals directly to readers' emotions through its musicality and interpretive passages. In contrast to *The Defence*, the guiding metaphors of these longer works have shifted from battle and conflict to those of journey and search, emphasizing life's open-endedness and the need for persistence.

Morris's *Earthly Paradise* is also impressively ambitious in its tripartite structure. At the first level stands the figure of the 'idle singer', or narrator, who opens the epic with his 'Apology' and bids it farewell in 'L'Envoi'. As the cycle progresses, the singer introduces each monthly tale with a three-stanza, twenty-one-line poem expressive of his own emotions and, between the inset stories, a third-person narrator provides interconnective passages detailing the auditors' changing responses to the stories over time. The singer's personal lyrics tether the poem to an evolving present, as each successive interlude records his mounting sense of isolation within an unresponsive universe. His fears reach their apogee in November's 'changeless seal of change' (v.206): 'Bright sign of loneliness too great for me' (v.206, 210). The mood of the poem's elderly audience also shifts in contrapuntal response to the stories' darkening contents, as they experience the calming effects of shared emotions; at first restless and unhappy, they ultimately achieve a measure of acceptance through empathy:

And these folk—these poor tale-tellers, who strove
 In their wild way the heart of Death to move,
 E'en as we singers, and failed, e'en as we,—
 Surely on their side I at least will be,
 And deem that when at last, their fear worn out,
 They fell asleep, all that old shame and doubt,
 Shamed them not now, nor did they doubt it good,
 That they in arms against that Death had stood. (vi.329)

The third level of the poem consists of the stories themselves, a series of twenty-four paired narratives recounted by twelve Greek elders and twelve Norwegian refugees who, after a long voyage, have landed in Greece. The cycle is preceded by an introductory narrative, 'Prologue: The Wanderers', in which the Norse voyagers first explain their journey and intentions, as they have sought to escape the ravages of the Black Death and reach an ever-deferred 'Earthly Paradise'. The two groups then agree to meet monthly to recount stories from their respective cultures, sharing one classical and one medieval tale for each month.

These interwoven narrative voices are crucial to the poem's tone of alternating involvement and *estrangement*, providing simultaneous layers

of nostalgia, *déjà vu*, and *jetztzeit* intensity. The frames within frames create variety, but also suggest reflection: should one respond with regret, despair, or hopefulness to so fraught a human condition? For if a few of the cycle's protagonists are both heroic and externally successful, many are not, and the secondary characters in their stories often undercut the achievements and aims of their ostensible heroes. The tales themselves, then, become invitations to meditate on the variety of human passions, to empathize with their auditors' self-reflections and, by implication, to add one's own. Herbert F. Tucker has observed that the characters in Morris's *Sigurd the Volsung* (1876) perceive that their lives must be spent 'all for the tale';³ and one might similarly claim that the stories of all twenty-five *Earthly Paradise* narrators and their protagonists exist chiefly as aids to reflection for their imbricated audiences and listeners.

Although originally intended as part of *The Earthly Paradise*, Morris's first-completed narrative, 'The Life and Death of Jason', grew to such length that he issued it in 1867 as a separate work in seventeen 'books' (chapters), comprising 296 pages in the *Collected Works* edition. As a classical tale, its plot was familiar to its Victorian audience because Apollonius Rhodius's third-century BCE *Argonautica* was a standard school text and, thus, *Jason* avoided any potential problems caused by the retelling of lesser-known medieval tales. Reviewers were charmed. Joseph Knight paid tribute in the 9 June 1867 *Sunday Times*: 'Musical, clear, and flowing, strangely imaginative and suggestive, presenting pictures of almost incomparable beauty, it is a work of which an epoch may be proud.' In the October 1867 *North American Review*, Henry James exclaimed that: 'To the jaded intellects of the present moment, distracted with the strife of creeds and the conflict of theories, it opens a glimpse into a world where they will be called upon neither to choose, to criticise, nor to believe, but simply to feel, to look, and to listen.'⁴

The epic's overt storyline consists of a marvels-and-adventure plot in which Jason, a disinherited heir to the throne of Colchis in Thessaly, proves his valour by completing a series of mandated feats that include theft of a golden fleece from its temple abode. Afterwards, the resolute and self-promoting Jason seeks to ascend to the highest levels of Grecian power through marriage to Glauce, daughter of the king of Corinth. Morris does well by the heroic tale itself; his Jason is fearless, ingenious, and eager to work out the fate ordained for him, although also restless and fickle. Yet Morris shifts the focus of his epic inwards by giving prominence to two alternate voices. The first is that of Orpheus, the Argonauts' meditative singer, whose songs woo the Argonauts away from the Sirens' seductive

promises of a supra-terrestrial world free of toil and death. Instead, Orpheus resolutely proclaims the poem's metaphysical ground: our lives are earthly, of the earth:

Ah, verily
If it shall happen unto me
That I have thought of anything,
When o'er my bones the sea-fowl sing,
And I lie dead, how shall I pine
For those fresh joys that once were mine,
On this green fount of joy and mirth,
The ever young and glorious earth; ...
Yes, this our toil and victory,
The tyrannous and conquered sea.

(ii.203–204)

Only through effort and labour can we come to appreciate life's finite preciousness.

A contrasting alternative voice is that of Medea, Jason's first love and the repeated enabler of his crimes and adventures, whose rage at his desertion of her in favour of a Corinthian princess leads to his ignominious death. Morris softens his heroine from Apollonius's original to emphasize her passionate love for Jason, her courage in furthering his interests, and her grief at his casual disregard of previous vows.⁵ Whereas, in Apollonius, Medea savagely murders her children in front of Jason as an act of revenge, Morris's Medea kills her sons offstage, believing that they would otherwise become victims (presumably under the new Corinthian regime), and sincerely mourns their deaths. After Glauce's horrific incineration in the wedding dress Medea has provided, however, Jason can find no rest despite external honours and, as he sleeps on a nearby beach, he is ignominiously stabbed to death by the rotting prow of his old ship, Argo, 'Crushed, and all dead of him that here can die' (ii.296). Morris's alteration of the poem's original title in draft, 'The Deeds of Jason', to *The Life and Death of Jason*, emphasizes his nuanced judgement of his hero's achievements. In the end, the epic becomes less a triumphal account of successful machismo than a tragedy of failed ideals.

Remarkably, *Jason* was only one of several narratives originally written for *The Earthly Paradise* during the years 1866–70 that were excluded from the final twenty-four-tale sequence.⁶ Those that were ultimately retained vary in metre and stanza form, are arranged in a rough progression in tone, and increasingly recast their original sources. As Morris would later advise his daughter, May, 'When retelling an old story, shut the book, and tell it again in your own way' (iii.xxii). Arguably, by rendering his

characters more believable and less spectacular than their originals, they evoke greater reader identification; if Medea were merely a savagely plotting witch, for example, it would be difficult to respect the protagonists' initial love or to sympathize with her pain at Jason's desertion. The spring narratives include some relatively straightforward didactic tales (e.g., 'The Proud King', 'The Writing on the Image') that echo the perspectives of their source materials but, as the cycle progresses, the narratives offer more complex expressions of Morris's humanist ethic of sympathetic communion across time and cultures.

Many of the tales centre on the search for love, not fame, and the need for resolute action to overcome the obstacles posed by inherited tyrannies to the attainment of a successful mutual union. In the early tales, such as 'Atalanta's Race' and 'The Doom of King Acrisius', the protagonist defies a royal or parental decree to rescue a daughter condemned to celibacy or death. The figure of Venus also enters as an ironic troubling presence in several tales; she is a stern taskmaster in 'The Story of Cupid and Psyche', a fatal temptress in 'The Watching of the Falcon', a harmful obstruction in 'The Ring Given to Venus', and a heedless object of tormented desire in 'The Hill of Venus'. Morris pays special attention to the physical and emotional restrictions placed on women, who are often subject to abuse and confinement: even gentle heroines such as Psyche ('The Story of Cupid and Psyche') and Philonoë ('Bellerophon in Lycia') are nonetheless resolutely assertive in the pursuit of love; and his vengeful and tormented heroines (Oenone in 'The Death of Paris' and Stenoboea in 'Bellerophon at Argos') are granted a measure of empathy and understanding.

Several of these features appear in the classical tale for May, 'The Story of Cupid and Psyche', a revised version of its source text, Apuleius's *Metamorphoses, or the Golden Ass*. The gentle and lovely Psyche ('soul', 'mind') embodies the fullness of nature and 'innocent desire', and her story allegorizes the painful process of female maturation under familial and social constraints. At his people's bequest, a king accedes to their demand that he order the ritual sacrifice of his daughter to a supposed monster, but at the place of execution she is, instead, abducted by the unseen presence of Venus's son, 'Love', subject to the prohibition that she cannot gaze directly upon him. Spurred by her suspicious sisters to disobey this proscription, Psyche accidentally awakes her sleeping lover, at which Cupid departs, condemning her to punishment by the Fates. She then loyally begins a long and harsh journey through earth and Hades to regain her love by first obtaining a symbolic casket from Persephone, Queen of the Underworld. As she faints on her return from Hades, her lover

relents and beseeches Jove to promote her to divinity. The newly immortal Psyche experiences an inner transformation; her past life 'all seemed changed in weight and worth, / Small things becoming great, and great things small' and, although now freed from time, 'godlike pity touched her therewithal / For her old self, for sons of men that die' (ii.2475-8). Once again, Morris has transformed his source, in which Cupid himself is tauntingly capricious and sadistic, Venus an unhinged dominatrix and Psyche herself a vengeful and dishonest schemer. In Morris's version, by contrast, the heroine's courageous journey to the underworld and her eventual apotheosis represent a persistent theme of *The Earthly Paradise*: the struggle to transcend the limits of time and death through love.

Similar in celebrating the moral triumph of its unassuming heroine, the classical tale for June, 'The Love of Alcestis', is another narrative of misplaced royal power and contrasting female sacrifice. Admetus, king of Thessaly, entertains Apollo unawares and, in return, the latter helps him gain the hand of Alcestis and provides him with a sheaf of arrows to burn if his life is threatened, '[t]hat thou mayest gain thy uttermost desire' (i.877). When, after many years, Admetus contracts a fatal illness, he burns the arrows in the presence of his wife and receives the message that his life will be saved if another will die for him. Alcestis experiences a moment of bitterness: 'now I durst not look upon his face, / Lest in my heart that other thing have place, / That which I knew not, that which men call hate' (ii.1168-70). Accepting death, she then lies down beside her husband and, when the unsuspecting Admetus rises, cured from his illness, he grieves for her loss and continues his prosperous reign. Over time, however, his name is forgotten and that of Alcestis lives on 'in the hearts of far-off men enshrined' (i.1289). This tale of wifely devotion (and husbandly heedlessness?) might have been one of Morris's less remarkable tales were it not for the response of its audience. For the first time in the sequence, its listeners are roused to full identification, as 'scarce their own lives seemed to touch them more, / Than that dead Queen's beside Boebëis' shore' (ii.20-21). Paradoxically, these elderly male auditors seem able to empathize *more* across barriers of gender, age, time, and life circumstances than with the more active heroes of prior tales, a process embodying Morris's ideal of the healing power of art. Once again, Morris has altered his sources, Apollodorus's *Bibliotheca* and Euripides' *Alcestis*. He removes from Admetus's character its craven selfishness, heightens the couple's grief at impending separation, and omits a *deus-ex-machina* resurrection at the end that would have undermined the poem's focus on life's frailty and evanescence.

'The Lovers of Gudrun', *The Earthly Paradise's* medieval tale for November, was described by Morris to a friend as 'on the whole the most important thing I have written' (*CL*, i.82). A story of triangular desire and kinship destroyed by a revenge culture, the narrative reflects Morris's increased interest in Icelandic sagas, which he had begun to co-translate in 1869.⁷ Based on the *Laxdaela Saga*, its plot follows an interior frame in which the young Gudrun recounts to an elderly visitor to her home at Bathstead, Guest, that she has experienced a series of troubling dreams. Wise in dream-lore, he interprets these as foretelling four marriages with ominous outcomes (ii.331–32). In the central plot, close male friends are estranged as Gudrun goads her husband Bodli to kill her former lover Kiartan. Years later, when her now-grown son, Bodli, asks the elderly Gudrun which of her lovers/husbands she has loved most, she replies enigmatically, in words which directly translate the Saga original, 'I did the worst to him I loved the most' ('*Ég gerði Þeim verst, sem ég unni mest*'). Though, presumably, Gudrun refers to Kiartan, one might argue that the reluctant Bodli was equally wronged. In any case, Morris maintains sympathy for all of the narrative's central characters: the narrator specifically exempts Gudrun from blame, attributes no serious fault to Kiartan, and presents the final murder scene as a quasi-redemptive immolation-rite. With its compounding ironies and compulsions, Morris's medieval tale for November offers a painful concatenation of cross-purposes, self-inflicted destruction, and futile regrets, in which humans are fated to work out their restless passions in a realm beyond morality or redress.

'The Lovers of Gudrun' deviated strongly from the spirit of the original saga, transforming a series of inter-familial disputes over property and power into a story of betrayed friendship and unrequited love. Morris remarked in a lecture that 'the Lax-dalers' story contains a very touching and beautiful tale, but it is not done justice to by the details of the story' (*UL*, 197) and he used all his skills as a realist to provide plausible motivations for its characters. He omits many of Gudrun's vices; the saga-Gudrun is vain, greedy, duplicitous, and scheming – reflecting a recurring misogynist motif in which women goad their reluctant menfolk into heinous deeds. The saga-Kiartan is entirely unromantic: he leaves Gudrun for Norway without regret; plots to burn his Norwegian royal host and his retainers in their palace; and, in his final clash with Bolli (Morris's Bodli), is prompted by a petty property dispute. Bolli is, in fact, the more heroic, as he acts calmly and consistently to defend his family within the constraints of his shame- and honour-obsessed society. Morris has thus shifted the focus of the saga from its economic and cultural

underpinnings to emphasize the destructive effects of frustrated female passions and competitive male desires.

The sequence's final narrative is 'The Hill of Venus', the medieval story for February. The topic of an elusive erotic deity was fraught for Morris, for although he began on the poem relatively early in the composition of his epic, he composed nine prior drafts before finally inserting it as the sequence's final tale.⁸ Based on the legend of the thirteenth-century poet Tannhäuser and, more immediately, on 'The Mountain of Venus' in Sabine Baring-Gould's *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* (1868),⁹ the narrative follows Walter, a pilgrim who boldly enters the dangerous Venusberg cave and encounters the divinity herself. He is then frustrated when, despite passionate love-making, the immortal goddess seems impervious to his desire for reciprocity (ii.597–601). The disillusioned Walter then exits the Venusberg to join a troop of pilgrims en route to Rome, where he seeks absolution for his past sexual behaviour. As he faces the pontiff, however, a vision of the goddess reappears to him and, moved by love and compassion for her (his fellow pariah from the Christian order), he unexpectedly delivers to his astonished auditor an impassioned apology for his 'love, that never more shall bring / Delight to me or help me anything' (ii.1328–9). When the Pope exclaims that Walter can no more be redeemed than fruit and flowers can blossom from his dry staff, Walter departs in desperation to seek Venus again in her cave. Meanwhile, the staff blooms and, although the Pope repentantly sends messengers to search for Walter, the latter remains unfound, forever suspended between love, frustration, and despair. Morris thus ends his great cycle rather unexpectedly with an appeal to the open-endedness and ambiguity of moral issues, as well as a more modern definition of heroism as persistence in upholding one's inner values, in spite of hostile social conventions (or the absence of reciprocity). If *The Earthly Paradise's* classical narratives more often celebrate the attainment of a worthy external life, then, Morris's last medieval tale ponders the more difficult path of introspection and steadfastness in the face of emotional loss.

Although Morris is generally viewed as the author of narrative and dramatic poems, from 1868 or 1869 until the mid-1870s, he composed more than three dozen personal poems: lyrics and short meditations spoken in what seems a near-unmediated authorial voice. Several of these poems remained unpublished during his lifetime or were included only in *A Book of Verse* (July 1870), a hand-illuminated fifty-one-page volume containing poems of the period offered as a gift to Georgiana Burne-Jones on her thirtieth birthday. Psychologists have noted a phenomenon of the

'happiness curve' – whereby persons experience increasing dissatisfaction at a middle stage of life and career – and this arc is strongly reflected in Morris's poems of this period, during which he added to the burdens of job and family his unhappiness at his wife's detachment and her affair with his erstwhile friend and mentor, Dante G. Rossetti. By 1869–70, the period of the composition of the fall and winter tales of *The Earthly Paradise*, several protagonists express uncomfirmed, raw despair at the loss of love or hope for its renewal. Poems from *A Book of Verse* echo these sorrowful themes, but also suggest healing through acceptance, sublimation, and a celebration of love itself. In 'Hope Dieth, Love Liveth', the speaker affirms the power of love to survive rebuff and loss.

Several *Book of Verse* poems were later included as monthly lyrics within *The Earthly Paradise* and, as we have seen, these enact an experience of grief set against a backdrop of ceaseless change. Similarly, Morris's verses inscribed to his daughters at Christmas in 1870 (accompanying the first edition of *The Earthly Paradise*) meditate on the restorative nature of tales of struggle and loss. One of his later lyrics, 'O Fair Gold Goddess', possibly composed in 1873 before a trip to Iceland, describes his conscious search for kinship within the literature of another time and culture, in this case, the medieval sagas. It was not until *Love Is Enough* (1872), however, that Morris was able to channel his turbulent emotions more coherently into an ethical ideal of displaced and self-generating love.

Morris began the latter, his most personal long poem, in September 1871, directly after his return from Iceland, though he did not bring it to finished form until 1872. The many drafts now preserved in the Huntington Library indicate both the difficulties of its topic for Morris and his determination to present it in a form worthy of its significance.¹⁰ Originally intended as part of an illustrated edition with woodcuts designed by Burne-Jones, *Love Is Enough* is also Morris's most musical long narrative, with intricately elaborate metrics set within a carefully echeloned frame. As a masque, the poem is designed for oral, dramatic performance, with two mysterious masked figures, 'Love' and 'The Music', interpreting its inner allegorical plot. The poem's 'Argument' is deceptively simple: 'The story ... showeth of a king whom nothing but Love might satisfy, who left all to seek love, and having found it, found that he had enough, though he lacked all else' (ix.3). Like *The Earthly Paradise*, *Love Is Enough* is carefully framed with counterpointed inner and outer voices; the outer layer presents two newly married couples of differing social stations, an Emperor and Empress and the peasants, Giles and Joan, who together watch and react as local burghers and artists perform the pageant of Pharamond and Azalais in the

inner frame. The outer layer's three lyrics – two sung by 'The Music' and one by 'Love' – indicate more clearly what is to follow, a tale in which the lovers meet only briefly and are never thereafter physically reunited but remain faithful in spirit. The progression of the seasons suggests the hope that human emotions may also renew themselves, as 'earth threatened often / Shall live on for ever' (ix.10). The inner layer of *Love Is Enough* is structured in five scenes, each of which opens with one or more interludes by Love and closes with an interpretive melody sung by The Music. As we enter the masque's inner plot, King Pharamond's loyal follower, Oliver, serves as narrator, chorus, and mourner. In the opening scene, Oliver reports to the king's councillors that the latter has been overcome by dreams of love, and, consumed by loneliness, has become unable to perform his royal duties. Pharamond then departs with Oliver to seek the original of his vision, and the allegory moves forward as Love reveals his identity: 'I am the Life of all that dieth not; / Through me alone is sorrow unforget' (ix.22). Note that Love promises no literal resurrection, only recognition and memory; paradoxically it is the memory of sorrow, not happiness, that is most prized. Over time, the soliloquies by Love and The Music and the remarks of the pilgrims blend into one another until the voices of The Music, Love, Pharamond, and Azalais are harmonized into a single antiphon of celebrated, but postponed, desire displaced from time.

Meanwhile, Pharamond and Oliver undertake a more extended symbolic journey over land and sea until they reach the world's end, and Pharamond, still bereft of what he has sought, prepares to die: 'If I wake never more I shall dream and shall see her' (ix.45). Before reaching the 'land where Love is the light and the lord' (ix.47), however, he must confront the dark side of Love, as in a grim parody of crucifixion imagery the latter enters with bloody hands, holding a cup of bitter drink: 'What? – is there blood upon these hands of mine? / Is venom'd anguish mingled with my wine?' (ix.48). Here 'Love' articulates and embodies the problem of causation faced in every theodicy since Job: how can love-as-compassion become detached from love-as-ineluctable fate? He and Music then directly enter the plot at the approach of Azalais, herself, who as the incarnation of spiritual healing expresses herself less through words than melody. The arc of the lover's day together – the only one they will have – is traced in their shared songs of dawn, noon, evening, and night respectively (ix.58).

Allegory now overtakes plot, as Love demands the lovers' separation on the grounds that the king must return to his former duties, a rationale unconvincing on the literal level, since presumably Azalais could have accompanied him. Even Love cannot understand the workings of fate:

'Well, he [Pharamond] and you [the audience] and I have little skill / To know the secret of Fate's worldly will ...' (ix.65). In another irony, on returning to his kingdom, he finds it ruled by a certain Theobald, who is more corrupt, but also more popular, than his predecessor. Pharamond's return has thus served no practical purpose. At least he has remained true to his ideals in attempting to unite the twin poles of his life: action and love. The lovers continue to seek each other and remain united on a spiritual level and, in return for the deprivation he has imposed, Love permits their search to retain its initial freshness, as Pharamond anticipates 'Each long year of Love, and the first scarce beginneth' (ix.75).

At its best, the love retained is a process of devotion; a labour and a trust; a journey, not an arrival. The poem ends with Love's final speech, of which May Morris remarked that 'If love is enough, it is not the world's love and contentment, but that final absorption in eternal good, that something-beyond-all for which the speech of man can find no defining words' (*WMAWS*, i.441-42). Love is seen as a force of compassion-within-things, an intrinsic form of attachment that cannot allay its own pain but struggles to endure, refine itself, and express its uneven worth:

Lo, for such days I speak and say, believe
That from these hands reward ye shall receive.
—Reward of what?—Life springing fresh again—
Life of delight?—I say it not—Of pain?
It may be—Pain eternal?—Who may tell?
Yet pain of Heaven, beloved, and not of Hell. (ix.77)

The Earthly Paradise's most despairing heroes, such as Walter in 'The Hill of Venus', dread not the loss of a *particular* love, but of love itself – the possibility that love and fidelity *themselves* may not exist. The final consolation of *Love Is Enough* is that this is impossible – '[N]either died this love, / But through a dreadful world all changed must move' (ix.78).

Throughout his long epics and shorter verses of this important period, then, Morris refined his definition of the heroism appropriate for 'an empty day'¹¹ through poems that celebrate the essential incompleteness and uncontrollability at the core of life. His major poems offer his contemporaries not closure, but *understanding*, providing a form of psychological realism through myth and fantasy. In *Love Is Enough*, Morris re-enacted in symbolic form many of the ethical and philosophical conundra that underlay his previous narratives and, as it were, conquered his own dark angel to internalize an essentially regulative ideal. These preoccupations – the nature of love and the need for deferral – would

accompany him through later embodiments of his convictions. These include, among other things, his final tragic epic *Sigurd the Volsung*; the organic processes infused in his art; the dedication of his political work; the creation of new artifacts at the Kelmscott Press; and the visionary breadth of his utopian *News from Nowhere* (1890; 1891).

Notes

- 1 Richard Garnett, *Literary Gazette*, xlii (March 1858), 226-7.
- 2 A. C. Swinburne, *Fortnightly Review*, viii (July 1867), 19-28.
- 3 Herbert F. Tucker, "'All for the Tale": The Epic Macro-poetics of Morris's *Sigurd the Volsung*', *Victorian Poetry*, 34.3 (1996), 369-94.
- 4 Henry James, *North American Review*, cvi (October 1867), 688-92.
- 5 Florence S. Boos, 'Jason's "Wise" Women: Gender and Morris's First Romantic Epic', in David Latham (ed.), *Writing on the Image: Reading William Morris* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 41-58.
- 6 The excluded tales were 'The Wooing of Swanhild', 'The Story of Orpheus and Eurydice', 'The Story of Aristomenes' and 'The Story of Dorothea'. The titles of others are mentioned, but no texts have survived.
- 7 *The Story of Grettir the Strong*, trans. William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon (London: F. S. Ellis, 1869).
- 8 Florence S. Boos, 'Ten Journeys to the Venusberg: Morris's Drafts for "The Hill of Venus"', *Victorian Poetry* 39.4 (2002), 597-615.
- 9 Florence S. Boos (ed.), *The Earthly Paradise* (London: Routledge, 2002), ii, 714-15. See also Julian Fane and Robert Lytton, *Tannhauser: or, the Battle of the Bards* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1861).
- 10 Huntington Library, HM6422.
- 11 The speaker of the *Earthly Paradise's* opening 'Apology' regrets his limitations as 'the idle singer of an empty day' (iii.1), but by 'L'Envoi' he has gained a sense of pride: 'No little part it was for me to play – The idle singer of an empty day.'