

Similar Minds: A Study on William Morris's Poetic Development under John Keats's Influence

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Considering John Keats as among the most perfect poets, William Morris insinuates his indebtedness to him about poetic composition in his letter to Charles Cowden-Clarke: "Keats, for whom I have such boundless admiration, and whom I venture to call one of my masters" (*Letters* I: 65). When he made a great decision to become an architect in his tour to Normandy in 1855 accompanying Burne-Jones and Fulford to see Gothic cathedrals, he took a volume of Keats's poems. This episode also suggests that Keats's poetry had been a great source of inspiration for Morris's aesthetic and professional prospects. Morris favourably evaluates Keats comparing him with some other Romantic poets like Shelley and Coleridge. While pointing out the lack of visual richness in Shelley's poetry, he appreciates Keats's clear representation of scenes and figures: "Our clique was much influenced by Keats, who was a poet who represented semblances, as opposed to Shelley who had no eyes, and whose admiration was not critical but conventional" ("Introduction" XII: xxvi).¹ This reminds us of Morris's tendency of creating poetic scenes with particular details as Keats did. Morris loved Coleridge too as he published his collected poems from Kelmscott Press as well as Keats's, but Morris's preference stays with Keats because of the more constant quality and integrity in all his works: "Keats was a great poet who sometimes nodded: we don't want to make a *selection* of his works. Coleridge was a muddle-brained metaphysician, who by some strange freak of fortune turned out a few real poems amongst the dreary flood of inanity which was his wont" (*Letters* IV: 119). Overall, Morris seems to evaluate Keats's poetry as illuminating, including its rich imagery and artistic standard, and to set Keats as an ideal model in establishing constant professionalism (unlike Coleridge) and in concentrating on figurative mode in poetry (unlike Shelley). It seems probable that Keats played an important role in Morris's mind for his poetic career.

Examining the two poets' developing thoughts, this paper attempts to prove Keats to be Morris's major inspiration in his career and to suggest the influence as extensive even to his late romances. Their poetry will be speculated in two stages (the aesthetic, in their early, and the social, in their later poems) focusing on the dramatic moments of revelation

in beauty and in enlightenment. Beauty in women as objet d'art is focused to show their early interest in its amoral nature in the following poems: *Lamia*, *The Defence of Guenevere*, "La Belle Dame sans Merci" and "The Haystack in the Flood." The dramatic moments of love as erotic, destructive and amoral are examined as those when their aesthetic concern is self-complete: art for art's sake. In describing Morris's shifting interest from the individual to the collective, the case of *The Life and Death of Jason*, which incorporates the eternal moment of love epiphany like that in Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," focuses on the social aftereffect of the aesthetic moments. It delineates the magical moments of love between Medea and Jason, and defines them as inevitably associated with social and even political dimensions. The pattern will be discussed in terms of poetry of consolation, together with *The Earthly Paradise*. Such Morris's artistic reconsideration is discussed as parallel with the similar change of consciousness in Keats's later poems: *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*. The poets' interests in crucial moments are transmuted and gradually elaborated into those in the overall human existence. They have rediscovered the purpose of poetry not just in aesthetic creation but also in its application in explicating human nature and engendering mutual sympathetic understanding. For Morris, this involves reconsideration of the beautiful in ethical dimensions, especially in his late romances. In their poetic development, Keats and Morris shift their focus from the aesthetic to the social, and this paper attempts to demonstrate that they have similar poetic minds and that Morris made Keats's development a model for himself.

Maybe the first most discursive study in comparing Keats and Morris is Clarice Short's "William Morris and Keats," pointing out many possible affinities between the two poets in diction, image and theme. After him, some critics have made research on the influence of Keats on Morris, especially about stylistic affinities.² However, there has not been enough argument about the similarities in the thematic development of their poetry: the patterns of their interests in topics reflecting their poetics and thoughts. In this paper, they are to be traced and argued in the two stages (the earlier amoral and the later social aestheticism) in order to clarify what the similarities imply in Morris's evaluation of Keats as a poetic pilot.

On the early thematic stage in the poetry of Keats and Morris, the combination of medievalism and attractive but dangerous female characters is apparent. In the magical settings with the charm of erotic love, they often reveal the moral nature of significant beauty. Keats's female characters embody his aesthetic principles, disregarding ethical consideration; their beautiful presence itself asserts its own meaning independent of its

context. As symbols of a detached aesthetic principle, they influenced not only Morris but also Pre-Raphaelites like John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt and John William Waterhouse, whose paintings portray Isabella, Lamia, Madeline and La Belle Dame sans Merci. Keats's poetry provided them a new mythical backdrop to vitalize their painting principle of dramatic portrayal with precise description. In a close relationship with Pre-Raphaelites, Morris was again induced to reproduce Keatsian mood in his literary works.

Short's overview on the affinities in the aesthetic poems of Keats and Morris seems to be appropriate: "Perhaps the most obvious likeness between the works of Morris and Keats occur in dramatic situations" (Short 519). In presenting beautiful women under predicaments, Morris concentrates on increasing dramatic effect by isolating the heroines in their own overwhelming emotions. He heightened the effect, creating the discrepancy between the appearance and the inner reality of the heroines. The more he tries to elaborate in minute description of their physical details as objects of beauty, the more he implies their suppressed emotions as being reflected onto their outer features. The discrepancy often implies moral dilemmas which enhances their attractiveness. Comparisons between *Lamia* and *The Defence of Guenevere*, and between "La Belle Dame sans Merci" and "The Haystack in the Flood" demonstrate Morris's inheritance of the technique to produce the maximum dramatic effect in his early aesthetic poetry.

Both in *Lamia* and *The Defence of Guenevere*, the heroines, evil or innocent, are accused of their faults in their love relationships. Keats objectively presents Lamia throughout the poem, and the point of view never turns to her subjective one even at the ending scene in which her final appearance is displayed as an objet d'art despite of her drooped figure as a culprit. Keats's narrative leaves the moral problem unquestioned by its very detached tone. Especially by stifling all her objections in tears, not in words, he concentrates her emotions into the powerful representation of her beauty.

The lady's cheek

Trembled; she nothing said, but, pale and meek,
Arose and knelt before him, wept a rain
Of sorrows at his words . . .³ (*Lamia* II: 64-67)

On the contrary, resorting to the style of dramatic monologue, Morris sets a subjective view to convey Guenevere's intense passion and self-importance in *The Defence of Guenevere*. Her defence tries not only to acquit herself but also to impress the audience by explaining the emotional aspect of her cause. Such soliloquy is used for dramatizing the moment, and she appears a kind of beauty, which defies, by the power of her animated words and expression, the moral coordination between appearance and reality.

“Yet also at my full heart’s strong command,
See through my long throat how the words go up
In ripples to my mouth; how in my hand

“The shadow lies like wine within a cup
Of marvellously colour’d gold; yea now
This little wind is rising, look you up,

“And wonder how the light is falling so
Within my moving tresses” (I: 8)

She describes how her words are produced from her own body (“through my long throat”), as if they were self-willed themselves (“in ripples”), suggesting that her rhetoric derives from her soul, her entire self. Also, she self-consciously demonstrates how her own physical beauty (“my moving tresses”) intertwines with the moment (“now / This little wind is rising”) and the space. When her presence and her eloquence are represented to harmonize with nature powerfully, moral judgement shrinks back. Morris uses a circumstance in which a beautiful woman is accused in order to scrutinize the nature of women’s passion as the amoral aesthetic force.

Guenevere, by her majestic posture, and Lamia, by her dejected figure, elude the reader’s moral judgement because their self-expression is based on the principle of love, which essentially disregards moral considerations. In other words, without love moral or immoral, their powerful presence cannot be aesthetically justified. Keats suggests the incompatibility between passion and ethics when the narrator reprimands Lycius’s having the wedding reception: “O senseless Lycius! Madman! wherefore flout / The silent-blessing fate, warm cloister’d hours, / And show to common eyes these secret bowers?” (*Lamia* II: 147-49) The narrator implies that the nature of Lamia’s beauty is conditioned by the exciting secrecy of their love, and therefore incongruent with public approbation. Her beauty exists for its own sake, and the lovers naturally cannot dispense with solipsistic private sphere. Since love is a form of desire, it dispenses with ethical consideration, and it can develop into self-love or even insatiable self-importance as “La Belle Dame sans Merci” and “The Haystack in the Field” show critical moments with eminence of beauty.

Recalling the image of Fortuna or Furies, “La Belle Dame sans Merci” and “The Haystack in the Flood” describe the women who voluntarily or involuntarily bring about predicaments for their lovers (the knight and Robert), depriving of their initiative in action and autonomy in thought. The male figures indulge in the women’s beauty even when being deserted or forsaken. The love relationships between the willful women and the submissive men create dramatic contrast, but Morris’s interest includes moral issues

here while Keats's remains aesthetic. In "La Belle Dame sans Merci," the knight is fatally captured by the artless art of the dame who takes advantage of men's desire, as the preceding victims testify: "'La belle dame sans merci / Thee hath in thrall'" (39-40). She is represented as "a faery's child" (14) or a kind of monster living for centuries, annihilating young men who are consumed with longing for love and desire.⁴ It is in her intentional, contrived miscommunication that she confesses her love to him, which in fact can mislead him about her feelings. Her language equivocally serves to conceal her real cause for having brought him to the middle of nowhere: "And sure in language strange she said / 'I love thee true' –" (27-28). Though her personality remains mysterious, he is contented only with her presence or her appearance.

A similar but slightly different situation is created in "The Haystack in the Flood." Instead of a supernatural fairy, Jehane is a woman with initiative. She brings Robert and herself to death, refusing to be a paramour of Godmar. Unconsciously taking advantage of chivalrous principles, she prefers her pride and chastity to safety. Her action indicates that she psychologically guards herself rather than worries about him, imagining that the damage is solely on her, even when Robert's life is threatened by Godmar:

She laid her hand upon her brow,
Then gazed upon the palm, as though
She thought her forehead bled, and – "No!"
She said, and turn'd her head away (I. 126)

In her imagination, she is already wounded and deflowered by Godmar's menace. Different from the dame of Keats's poem, she never victimizes her lover deliberately, but she becomes desperately adamant about her self-will even if that suggests forsaking Robert's destiny as inevitable. Under the shadow of Godmar's threat and violence, their love as elusive is provided as an ironic backdrop. In this situation, her beauty, which has partly caused the calamity, can be seen as sinister especially when it is matched with her stubborn determination. Setting a human heroine, the poem includes a moral question, which gives its aesthetic aspect profound significance. Jehane's sexual beauty portends deaths around her when it is combined with her insistent self-preserving principle. This can be seen as representing "terrible beauty" when the negative aspect of Romantic individualism is justified without ethical consideration.

When the dichotomy of sexual roles was socially and politically defined and granted, as Queen Victoria's self-contradictory comment on the submissive role of women in patriarchy shows,⁵ the presentation of women's autonomy as ambitious was controversial.⁶ (So, Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere* was hardly evaluated by critics when it was first published.) Tennyson, who inherited many of the poetic characteristics of Keats, is scrupulous in introducing such female characters except in moderately

highlighting wantonness as one of women's charms in his early lyrics.⁷ The implied radicalism of independent, willful women seemed to be deliberately ignored or concealed. Instead, Tennyson sets paragons of obedient and virtuous womanhood straightforward in *The Gardener's Daughter* or ironically in *The Princess* and other poems. He tacitly uses the image of female characters in Keats's poetry. For example, when Keats's *The Eve of St. Agnes* and his "St. Agnes' Eve" are compared, the exciting, dreamy elopement of the famous poem is replaced by the religious serenity of the latter as if to efface the sacrilegious image Keats connotes.⁸ In Tennyson's "St. Agnes' Eve," Porphylo is deliberately transformed into the holy husband, god, to suppress Madeline's voluptuous attraction and substitute it with the earnest faith for purification: "To make me pure of sin" (32).

A similar comparison is possible between Morris and Tennyson in their treatment of Guenevere. Tennyson's Guenevere, though committing a sin, retrieves her conscience and regrets her love with Lancelot as King Arthur "hath forgiven / My wickedness to him, and left me hope / That in mine own heart I can live down sin / And be his mate hereafter in the heavens / Before high God" (*Guinevere* 629-33). Stressing the Christian aspect of the Arthurian court as its fundamental sociopolitical structure, Tennyson dexterously lessens the question of autonomy in women, and reticently prefers to ratify the patriarchy in family/kingdom on earth and in heaven. Morris's poetry proposes almost the opposite to this kind of conservatism. An orthodox solution like Tennyson's through religious healing never exists in the defiance of Morris's Guenevere: "God knows I speak truth" (I: 5). Here, on the contrary, she resorts to the religious endorsement for her independent will and overflowing passion.⁹ As already discussed, her claim represents an extreme Romantic individualism, which might question the compatibility between morality and aestheticism. In this way, Keats's influence appears differently in these two poets, and it is possible to say that Morris extracted the powerfully subversive aspect of Keats's poetry, especially through love poems.¹⁰

2

In *The Queen of Air*, Ruskin notices a similar quality in Keats's and Morris's poetry on Greek themes, implying affinities between them: "So that you may obtain a more truthful idea of the nature of Greek religion and legend from the poems of Keats, and the nearly as beautiful, and, in general grasp of subject, far more powerful, recent work of Morris, than from frigid scholarship, however extensive" (XIX: 309).¹¹ In emphasizing a "truthful idea" and "general grasp" of the themes, he distinctively depicts the quality of their poems on Greek themes from "scholarship" and shows how versed the two poets are in Greek literature and its essence. Morris, who composed *The Life and Death of Jason* and *The Earthly Paradise* in verse and translated the *Odyssey*, knew Greek literature

himself in the original and yet came to feel its nature through Keats. Their affinities in philhellenism, however, promise their different aesthetic concerns. In other words, Morris actually inherited and developed Keats's Greek themes and images in his own way. In his poems on Greek settings, focusing on the climatic moments of love when female beauty cooperates with rather than beguiles men's desire, Morris seems to be affected by Keats's idea of art and love on Greek themes.

In "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Keats grasps the aesthetic moment when a man's love for a woman is permanently retained at its apex. He scrutinizes the moment when desire and aspiration are intermingled and crystallized. This picture symbolically summarizes the essence of Greek art, which exquisitely contrasts the brevity of life with the longevity of art.

Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
 Though winning near the goal – yet, do not grieve;
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! (17-20)

The desire of the imaginary lover is consecrated with the help of art; the impact of the dramatic moment is embellished and preserved through the observer's sensitivity and imagination. On one hand, it proves the triumph of art in eternizing the momentous expressions of human emotions; the love scene has become an everlasting icon, inspiring later generations. On the other hand, however, it is also a paradox that, when artistic expression is fixedly connected with a moment, it never promises to develop into other relationships. It suggests the dead end with its magical sphere of influence, never allowing any kind of imaginative associations; the picture on the urn has rendered art autotelic. Keats almost identified love with art in perfection, encapsulating powerful aspects of love in a single moment.

Morris develops the same motif in the narrative of *The Life and Death of Jason* and *The Earthly Paradise*. In these poems, Morris repeatedly emphasizes the critical moments of love, considering that, in Greek myths, even the emotional wavering of the protagonists is considered to be governed by gods. However, for him, love has become the motif not only of providential necessity but also of rebellious individual will against it. He describes the moment when Jason feels physical desire for Medea.

. . . by this unseen delight
 Of thy fair body, may I rather burn,
 Nor may the flame die ever if I turn
 Back to my hollow ship, and leave thee here,
 Who in one minute art become so dear,

Thy limbs so longed for, that at last I know
 Why men have been content to suffer woe
 Past telling, if the Gods but granted this,
 A little while such lips as thine to kiss,
 A little while to drink thy longing kind. (II: 110)

Medea's attraction momentarily strikes him ("in one minute art") and its effect lasts to augment his yearning for her. The psychological pattern here is homogeneous with that of the lover feeling longing ecstasy in "Ode on a Grecian Urn," but the narrative necessarily connects this aesthetic moment with his destiny hereafter. Although the whole story of the Argo including Medea's love is planned and executed by the hands of gods, Morris emphasizes individualism against providence through this crucial encounter for a lifetime promise; even if Jason's love for Medea turns out a failure, he is ready to be "content to suffer woe," half knowing that it is planned by gods: "if the Gods but granted this." In his deep interest in human relationships beginning from love, Morris's individualism gradually shifts its focus from the aesthetic to the social. Morris, therefore, ascribes the tragic end of Jason's love to his individual decision than to gods' providence. Jason's love towards Medea, which is described as purely personal, is represented as the more substantial, compared with that towards Glauce, Greon's daughter. Although Jason is enticed by Glauce's tender figure, it turns out that he does not actually look at her but perceives her image and words.

. . . for still that maid
 Did he behold before his waking eyes,
 And with the oft-recurring memories
 Of days and things a long time passed away
 Her image mixed, and words that she did say. (II: 269)

This is quite different from his intense imagination of Medea's physical beauty or from the imaginary lover's longing in Keats's poem. Glauce's figure is recollected from memories to form an ethereal entity through verbal reconstruction. In the sense of individual choice, Jason's love for Medea is real while his love for Glauce is fanciful. Glauce is a temptation for political power, veering him from the real life with Medea, just as in *The Story of the Glittering Plain* the King tries to make Hallblithe marry his daughter who loves him only as a picture in her book.¹² Jason reprimands himself: "O false betrayer of the love so tried!" (II: 270). Morris judges Jason's misfortune as the tragedy not of fate but of will: "the death of faith" (II: 278), and there is a good reason that he regrets his decision about Glauce and longs for Medea's love once more in the ending: "if I could but see / But once again her who delivered me / From death and many

troubles" (II: 294). His regret even highlights back their first encounter, and implies that the aesthetic moment ceaselessly abides in Jason's mind even to his death. His only fault is that he could not connect it with and develop it into solid social relationships; Morris's compassion is both on Jason and Medea. Morris continues to explore the two aspects of love: its supremacy as artistic epiphany on one hand and its fragility in the social context on the other hand.

This theme of individual love is also recurrent in *The Earthly Paradise*, and tragic ends are often ascribed to the protagonists' will circumvented by various predicaments. The decisive encounters occur to them, and it depends on their choice to fulfill their love, in spite of divine auguries or magical restrictions. For example, "The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon" ends happily because of John's long, perseverant search for his beloved, daring his limitations as a mortal, while "The Lady of the Land" has a tragic end because the man does not have strong enough will to believe in his beloved, who has been changed into a dragon by a spell. The tragic pattern reveals the agony that the protagonists could not successfully make efforts to incorporate their aesthetic encounters of love into the establishment of their social relationships. As the case of Jason represents, when Morris's poems on Greek themes treat the failure of a promising love, the sense of regret reinforces the dichotomy of the ideal and the reality. In this sense, Morris antithetically uses the image of the ultimate moment of love in Keats's "Ode on Grecian Urn" to present a failure of the aesthetic. "Apology" of *The Earthly Paradise* is therefore understood not as manifestation of aesthetic escapism but as his humble attempt of consolation for the discrepancy between art and life. In its very negative discourse, "Apology" discloses Morris's intention of healing the pain of people who are smothered under their own unfulfilled desires and wishes without vent.¹³

Of Heaven or Hell I have no power to sing,
 I cannot ease the burden of your fears,
 Or make quick-coming death a little thing,
 Or bring again the pleasure of past years . . . (III: 1)

It is significant that Morris developed the theme of pain and remedy through the poems with ancient Greek settings. Greek literature, which typifies human activities as mutable and fragile compared with the divine truths of gods, contrastively illuminates the problem of pain and desire. In Morris's narrative, a contention between artistic epiphanies and inevitable compromise with mortality is to be explained and justified. This comparison or shift from the artistic to the moral again seems to be related to Keats's poetic development. Conscious of the transition from aesthetic moments of self-assertion to social encounters of destiny, Keats composed his last epics in which he copes with the problem of worldly pain and its remedy using the structure of Greek myths. As J. Robert

Barth's study shows, Keats began to appreciate worldly pain and suffering as indispensable for the growth of human soul, and, therefore, for salvation. Accordingly, art is destined to deal with them; Keats's sense of "salvation" not from but by pain was partly established already in 1819 as seen in his letter to George and Georgiana Keats: "Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways!" (*Letters of John Keats* 250) In his last long poems, Keats argues in creating myths how his aestheticism is compatible with sympathy and compassion, and eventually realizes a richer, higher poetic world.

3

Keats's constant interest in Greek literature prompted him, like other Romantic poets, to attempt to compose epics in Miltonic blank verse: *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*. The latter drastically revises the former in changing its theme: from gods to human beings. From the beginning of *The Fall of Hyperion*, the theme of downfall of ancient gods is subtly decentred by the appearance of the poet figure whose subjective view controls the narrative, as it is subtitled as *A Dream*. Keats sympathetically represents gods in order to show their affinities to human beings. For example, he humanizes the legion of Hyperion in the poem:

His winged minions in close clusters stand
Amaz'd, and full of fear; like anxious men
Who on a wide plain gather in sad troops,
When earthquakes jar their battlements and towers. (II: 41-44)

The decline of the exiled gods is compared to the situation of human beings powerless before natural disasters, emphasizing the inevitable course of events. The vulnerability of human beings is stressed as universal when the gods' pain is attested to be homogeneous with human beings'. By presenting the problem of mutability and pain from an anthropocentric point of view, Keats explores the possibility of applying art to something other than inspiration. More precisely, having expressed the detached, aesthetic aspect of art in medievalism ("La Belle Dame sans Merci") and philhellenism ("Ode on a Grecian Urn"), he now seems to seek to redefine it as a remedy for human miseries. This is most apparent in the trial of the poet figure at his encounter with Moneta at the beginning of the poem.

Since the vision of the fallen gods is transcendental, the poet figure has to risk his own life and ascend the steps to prove himself to deserve it. The condition for a qualified person Moneta suggests appears paradoxical.

'None can usurp this height,' return'd that shade,
 'But those to whom the miseries of the world
 Are misery, and will not let them rest.' (I: 147-49)

To become an oracle and communicate with the transcendent, he has to surpass the secular dimension, and she allusively guarantees his imagination as transcendental. However, her condition paradoxically claims that he has to have sublunary sympathy with people suffering, insinuating that the myth of the fallen gods is analogous with the miserable world of human beings. If art is something to do with the transcendental world it is also to do with the secular and earthly. In order not to make the vision a wild dream, he has to understand it as an allegory and to transmit it to people through his poetic writing. In this way, artistic perception can become socially teleological. The poet figure, a representative of artists, has to be both transcendental and altruistic, and this social role of a poet unintentionally modifies Keats's aestheticism, which evaluates creation of art for its own sake.

The consoling function of poetic inspiration is emphasized when Moneta defines a poet as the doctor of the world: "sure a poet is a sage, / A humanist, Physician to all Men" (I: 189-90). A poet is entitled to receive transcendental visions, but, if he does not utilize them for social good, he becomes harmful to society, indulging in his own solipsism: "the dreamer venoms all his days, / Bearing more woe than all his Sins deserve" (I: 175-76). He has to be a mediator between this suffering world and the ideal beyond and has to contribute to lessening the sublunary pain by providing people with exquisite visions and by nourishing their perception and sensitivity. The patterns that the enlightened has the duty of obtaining deeper knowledge and vision to save people exist as religious archetypes all over the world. In this sense, as the quoted letter implies, Keats's epic approaches a similitude of religion more than any other of his works. His attitude here is totally different from the Nightingale's indifference in "Ode to a Nightingale" to the world of "the weariness, the fever, and the fret" (23) "Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes" (29). In *The Fall of Hyperion*, contemplation of beauty (the transcendent) drastically changes its significance from appreciation to opportunity of considering social responsibility.

The symbolic scene in which the poet figure receives his initiation to become a true poet involves his drinking of the nectar, which symbolizes poetic inspiration from the fountain of Aganippe or Hippocrene:

. . . for thereby
 Stood a cool vessel of transparent juice,
 And, pledging all the Mortals of the World,

And all the dead whose names are in our lips,
 Drank. That full draught is parent of my theme. (I: 41-46)

Different from the individual experience of an inspired artist, the poet figure here associates the new knowledge and vision brought by the nectar with the welfare of the suffering people in the present and the past. Since to narrate the transcendental world and history is to narrate a permanent model of human existence, infinite human lives are projected onto it. As a representative perceiver of the misery and happiness of human beings, the poet figure is predicted to become something totally different from the awe-inspiring and mysteriously majestic figure in Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" who "on honey-dew hath fed, / And drunk the milk of Paradise" (53-54), and who exclusively keeps the mystic secret as his own. Far from solipsistic satisfaction in transcendence, the poet figure feels great pain in the process of the initiation, which makes him ready to understand pain and suffering as an indispensable step to recognize the dimension of artistic perfection. The ideal state is only imaginable through imperfection and pain, and the process towards it engenders catharsis as a kind of remedy. When aspiring thought is imaginatively shared, it can assuage pain and troubles in its scrutinizing them by mutual compassion. It is through this combination of remedy and inspiration that a poet can become beneficial to society. Keats's poetic development moves clearly from personal, aesthetic, solipsistic to public, social, and philanthropic. Holstein describes such a poet as a "shaman": who can help people by contacting the transcendental for inspiring ideas: "Thus, the shaman combines the art of a primitive poet with the visions of the dreamer and the skills of the healer. Clearly in his own spontaneous adaptation of primitive shamanism, Keats has found an intelligible, satisfying response to the problem of pain" (Holstein 48). Keats prepared a poet model as a healer for Morris to develop his narrative further in his late romances.

4

Having started with aesthetic poetry of dramatic moments and initiated a poetic mode of consolation in his poetry of Greek themes, Morris finally reaches the stage in which beauty and art must become both the symbol of aspiration and the method of healing human miseries and desires. In his late romances, the heroes' adventures and love are represented both as their means and as their ends; the process of their journeys to the Well or magical lands is artistic exploration, and their love with the beautiful women/men they encounter in their journeys crystallizes their quest as enlightenment. Elements of beauty function more socially and beneficially. The heroines in the romances often heal not only the heroes but also people by their appearance, as the Maid in *The Wood beyond the World* looks sacred and precious to their eye, after becoming the queen of the Stark-wall:

“the flesh of her is so wholly pure and sweet that it maketh all her attire but a part of her body, and halloweth it, so that it hath the semblance of gems” (XVII: 125). Different from the female characters who intentionally or unintentionally use their beauty for self-importance, the Maid exhibits her body not only as an objet d’art (“the semblance of gems”) but also as the icon of completion in social relationships (including the marriage between Walter and her) and in peaceful regime. Her body is both aesthetically and politically approved and appreciated as the centre of influence.¹⁴

As Morris believes in the healing power of art in *News from Nowhere*, beauty prompts not only aspiration but also redress and reformation: “That remedy was, in short, the production of what used to be called art” (XVI: 133-34). Beauty combined with love is always described as potential for its social influence in the romances too. The heroines’ beauty evokes love in the heroes’ minds and motivates them towards adventures, wars and travels, and their love leads them even further to the collective beauty of peaceful monarchies or grand enterprises. In *The Roots of the Mountains*, beautiful Sun-beam enchants Face-of-God and makes him engage in a war with Duskey Men, which finally brings peace to her tribe and his community. In *The Well at the World’s End*, Ralph is encouraged to seek for the Well of magical power by his first beloved, Lady of Abundance, and his journey brings him the harmonious love with Ursula and the revival of his home, Upmeads in the end. The beauty of women must work for social good because they originally owe it to their race; the individual quality is hereditarily produced from and ascribable to the collective, and its function is inseparable from the latter. Ruskin, Morris’s master, explains the relation between physical beauty and morality in a community, exemplifying the beauty of voice in *The Queen of the Air*:

But also, remember, that the art-gift itself is only the result of the moral character of generations. A bad woman may have a sweet voice; but that sweetness of voice comes of the past morality of her race. That she can sing with it at all, she owes to the determination of laws of music by the morality of the past. Every act, every impulse, of virtue and vice, affects in any creature, face, voice, nervous power, and vigour and harmony of invention, at once. (XIX: 393)

Morris seems to follow this theory in his romances in which individual qualitative nature is conjoined with the native land, and it sometimes reveals propensity to seek for congenial appearances or expressions (in characters or in other lands) as the icons for its harmonious development in various social levels. In a sense, aesthetic and moral qualities are neo-platonically identified. Beautiful women can lead men to a better society because they have potentially beautiful souls; contact with art and beauty must contribute to correcting wrongs and alleviating miseries and pain. They sublimate individual desires

which are often causes of pain and suffering, not only through their enriched sensibility and ennobled morality but also by the sociopolitical system which entitles them to direct appropriate advices for people. Initiations for them to become healers involve the consummation of love with their lovers as seen in the nectar drinking in *The Well at the World's End*, and this condition exhibits the opposite case of the tragic loves in *The Life and Death of Jason* and *The Earthly Paradise*.

Morris's version of nectar drinking in *The Well at the World's End* is the most symbolic moment of remedy in his romances. Like the juice in *The Fall of Hyperion*, the water of the Well is destined to inspire the drinker with new perception: "Clearing of the Eyes that they may behold" (XVIII: 168). It also allows the selected few with aspiring souls like Ralph and Ursula to use its power for defeating tyranny and reforming society: "those few that sought and drank should be stronger and wiser than the others, and should make themselves earthly gods" (XIX: 66). The healing power of the water does not limit its scope to the individual but to the collective: "it saveth from weariness and wounding and sickness; and it winneth love from all, and maybe life everlasting" (XVIII: 11). If the acquisition of the magic water is compared to an encounter with supreme beauty, it embodies the moment of aesthetic and moral consummation, which is to prolong its effect for a long time. This initiation interweaves aesthetic and social drives to insinuate the efficiency of art for moral life, and the only condition required is the act of sharing it through love.

While Keats's initiation by the nectar indicates the solitary struggle of a poet with the permanent dichotomy between the infinite and the finite, Morris's case never implies such tension because all the process of gaining the water of the Well is shared between Ralph and Ursula. The trial of becoming a divine poet is replaced by an act of confirming love relationship. Since a couple is the minimum base of society, it represents a process of forming a society. In the strict sense, a remedy of society is symbolically promised both in the very act of attaining the water and in the process of establishing love relationship; Ralph sought for "the Well at the World's End not all alone" (XVIII: 220). This is why Ursula tastes the water as reminiscent of Ralph; it symbolically demonstrates their mutual spiritual state which is destined to infiltrate among people: "It tasteth good, and as if thy love were blended with it" (XIX: 83).

In other romances too, the pattern that consummation of enlightened love leads to total salvation is repeated. Birdalone in *The Water of Wondrous Isles* unknowingly reclaims the peace of the lake when she accomplishes her love with Arthur; Hallblithe in *The Story of the Glittering Plain* reconfirms his true love with the Hostage and connects the two families by marriage after the trial of the false love in the Glittering Plain; in *The Wood beyond the World*, Walter, having left his unfaithful wife and rejected the temptation of the lecherous witch, establishes a peaceful monarchy with the Maid; in *The Sundering Flood* the flood is bridged when peace and order is brought with the union of

Osborne and Elfhind; the order of the kingdom is restored when Christopher disperses the treacherous enemy with the mental support from Goldlind in *Child Christopher*. The moment of artistic consummation is thus substituted by that of personal union.

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Morris seems to be influenced by Keats not only in images and themes but also in the pattern of his development in poetic maturity. Morris started absorbing and adopting the dramatic effects in Keats's poetry, gradually noticed the significance in poetic consolation in narrative poems with Greek backgrounds, and finally appreciated Keats's sense of social contribution through art as a possible goal of aestheticism. In other words, it can be summarized that Morris's poetic development moves from aesthetic to socialistic, finally changing the genres from poetry to prose romance, reflecting Keats's transmuting poetics. Keats's social consciousness is combined with his ambition of re-creating myths; similarly, Morris creates his own myths in (Germanic) tribes, offering models of ideal communities. Like Keats, Morris persuades that pain can be a cause for fruitful and rewarding results through art and beauty. Through Morris's interpretation, Keats's idea of beauty and art gains new contexts and connotations. In this sense, it can be said that Morris follows Keats's doctrine faithfully: ". . . 'tis the eternal law / That first in beauty should be first in might" (*Hyperion* II: 228-29).

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¹ All references to Morris's works are to *The Collected Works of William Morris*, 24 vols. (London: Longman Green and Company, 1910-15) and quoted by volume and page numbers.

² See, for example, Ford, Marquess and Strode.

³ All references to Keats's works are to *John Keats*, ed. Elizabeth Cook (Oxford University Press, 1990) and quoted by titles and canto and line numbers.

⁴ This seems to influence on Pater's conceiving the idea of Leonardo's *La Gioconda* as a vampire in *The Renaissance* and as a symbol of wickedness in erotic experience: "Set it for a moment beside one of those white Greek goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity, and how would they be troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed! . . . She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has

been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants . . ." (Pater 80). It is significant that it was Pater who appreciated the aesthetic nature of Morris's poetry in his essay, "Aesthetic Poetry."

⁵ Lytton Strachey describes Queen Victoria's reaction against the suffrage in 1870: "In 1870, her eye having fallen upon the report of a meeting in favour of Women's Suffrage, she wrote to Mr. Martin in royal rage – 'The Queen is most anxious to enlist everyone who can speak or write to join in checking this mad, wicked folly of "Woman's Rights," with all its attendant horrors, on which her poor feeble sex is bent, forgetting every sense of womanly feeling and propriety. Lady — ought to get a good *whipping*'" (Strachey 409).

⁶ Presentation of women as self-important was potentially polemical, and it was possibly associated with feminist movement, which was developing through the Woman Question in 1840s and was to be manifested in various actions and writings, for example, like John Stuart Mill's "The Subjection of Women" (1869).

⁷ Like Madeline of "delicious spites and darling angers" ("Madeline" 6). All references to Tennyson's works are to *The Poems of Tennyson*, 3 vols., ed. Christopher Ricks (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) and quoted by titles and line numbers

⁸ It is significant that Keats mentions "La belle dame sans mercy" (292) in *The Eve of St. Agnes* though before his composing "La Belle Dame sans Merci." Also it is notable that Keats uses the same image of cornucopia of "Manna and dates" (268) and "honey wild and manna dew" ("La Belle Dame sans Merci" 26) in the both poems, forming a background for the magical moments of the female characters' speech. In confessing their love and unknowingly enchanting their lovers, Madeline uses "voluptuous accents" (317) while the dame speaks "in language strange" ("La Belle Dame sans Merci" 27). This suggests that the two poems, and Madeline and the dame, are classified in the same category as having subversive potentiality in gender and aesthetic questions.

⁹ Antony H. Harrison's argument on the poem also implies Guenevere's deliberate interpretation of Christianity in support of her own self-defence: "Here Christian values are supplanted by erotic ones, chivalry is a fraud, and Christian ideals of virtue are displaced by ideals of amoral beauty, sexual indulgence, and political subversiveness as these are displayed in the heroic person of Guenevere and in her adulterous relationship with Lancelot, who, predictably, comes to the rescue in the poem's final lines" (Harrison 26).

¹⁰ Similarly Rossetti presents the enigmatic aspect of women; in "The Blessed Damzel," the restless Damzel in the heaven haven wishes her reunion with her earthly lover, even through his death. Morris is different from Rossetti in the sense that Keats's influence does not limit its scope in medievalism but in philhellenism and finally exceeds aesthetic dimension.

¹¹ All references to Ruskin's works are to *The Works of John Ruskin*, eds. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903-12) and quoted by volume and page numbers.

¹² Hallblithe, the hero, declines the King's offer to marry his daughter who loves him as a fictional character in her book because her love is based on self-complacent fantasy: "Shame also took hold of me as the fair woman spoke to my painted image, and I lying well-nigh within touch of her hand; but she said; 'O my beloved, why dost thou delay to come to me?'" (XIV: 266) She loves his shadow in her dreams, and such love has no prospect of further social development. She even neglects identification of Hallblithe himself because he can be anybody as long as he matches her image, which suggests her moral flaw, turning love into a replaceable pleasure.

¹³ Plotz considers it as positive forgetting and as one of the characteristics in Morris's late romances: "Were we to remember we would be forced to internalize others' sadness. So it is better, in the face of a world of inequities, for art to help us forget" (Plotz 944).

¹⁴ So physical attraction does not symbolize anything mysterious or fantastical in Morris's late romances, but its practical function is objectively delineated as an indispensable element in social relationships. This attitude is quite different from the prevalent one in Victorian novels as Plotz comments: "Particular bodies do not disappear from the romances; if anything, the attention to carnal detail grows, so that the notably decorous insinuations of Victorian romance plots are replaced by an aesthetic at once undecorous and unobtrusive. Bodily beauty is frankly described and treasured, and yet from it follows none of the

breathless romance that it would be expected to provide in a Victorian novel” (Plotz 939).