

Some Patterns in Morris's Romantic Reformation: A Study of His Late Romances¹

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Although it has been stressed that they inspired C. S. Lewis's "The Chronicles of Narnia" and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of Rings*, Morris's late romances have not taken academic interests as much as Morris himself regarded them with deep interest and enthusiasm.² This paper attempts to reevaluate them by elucidating their characteristics in relation to their tendency towards Romantic idealism in reformation. In Romantic narrative poetry, politico-social reformation is often closely associated with individualism, heroism and utopianism as, for example, Shelley's *Revolt of Islam* and *Prometheus Unbound* show. My argument especially rests on how Morris modified Romantic idea of reformation by analyzing common patterns in the plots and themes of the late romances, especially organically interactive relations between adventure, love and reformation, and by examining Morris's paradoxical belief in individualism and collectivism. For this purpose, the following romances are chosen, which narrate imaginary adventures towards realization of his ideal society: *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, *The Well at the World's End*, *Child Christopher*, *The Wood beyond the World*, *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* and *The Sundering Flood*. (Therefore, his Icelandic fictional writings and the romances with historical backgrounds, *The Roots of the Mountains* and *The House of Wolfings*, are excluded from my argument.)

¹ All quotations of Morris's romance are from *The Collected Works of William Morris*, 22 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, & Company, 1910-15) and are indicated by volume and page numbers in parentheses.

² Morris started writing romances for *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* at the beginning of his literary career (1850s), and, after an interval of concentration on poetic composition (*The Earthly Paradise* and *The Life and Death of Jason*), he composed eight romances in the 1880s and 90s.

I

In Morris's late romances, the protagonists' adventures are always exploratory for new knowledge, perspective and value which should make their development significant and valid in their returning to their communities, and their journeys seem to follow two clear patterns: the linear and the circular. As for their development itself, their exploration is linear. But, in order for their development to be enlightening and beneficial, they have to return to their communities. In this sense, their journey routes are destined to be circular. The two patterns are to be examined in detail.

The linear aspect of the protagonists' quests represents the protagonists' aspiration: their physical and mental growth. Their ambition for self-realization, which motivates them to commence adventures towards love and honour, is often connected with their uneasiness or restlessness about youth, and naturally seeks for its fulfillment or remedy. In *The Well at the World's End*, Ralph, who is left behind at home by the three other brothers, is uneasy about his own desire to search for "new things his youth and his might and his high hope and his good hap might accomplish" (XVIII: 25).³ To fulfill and cure it, he decides to travel to the Well, which, according to Katherine, solves his problem of desire: "I hear say that it saveth from weariness and wounding and sickness; and it winneth love from all, and maybe life everlasting" (XVIII: 11). To some degree, Morris uses the image of Romantic yearning for esoteric revelation and mysteries as in Shelley's *Alastor* or Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, in which the protagonists transcendently crave for the answer to their existential question in vain. In echoing universal, aspiring Romantic psychology of quest and adventure, Morris perhaps aims to evoke such tendency in readers and their empathy with the heroes, as Bolus-Reichert suggests that "a pang of longing hangs about the reader of romance" (Bolus-Reichert 87).⁴ But Morris carefully distinguishes the ideal from the feasible,

³ Discussing the Chamber of Love in the Wilderness introduced by the Lady of Abundance, Blue Calhoun argues that places of contentment discourage rather than encourage the heroes' accomplishments: "Morris makes the sacred precinct a place that does not compose the mind but *paralyzes* it instead" (Calhoun 59). Although Calhoun describes a garden of lovers' hermitage, the same negative complacency is applicable to the heroes' situation in their homelands where they are supposed to be satisfied as long as they do not aspire for the better.

⁴ Christine Bolus-Reichert extensively comments on the heroes' inherent aspiration as the source of their moral strength, and argues that it is their ethical aspect that potentially motivates social reformation: "The quest is the pursuit of difficulty for its own sake. The knight resists the ease and

and Ralph learns appropriate gratification in his search for his truths unlike the Romantic visionary characters who can never be satisfied with the sublunary and try to move towards the infinite. This can be seen, for example, in Morris's symbolization of water.

In Romantic poetry, a typical image of water like the nectar of Kubla Khan or Keats's "transparent juice" (*The Fall of Hyperion*, Canto I, line 42), promises the initiation to the transcendental, poetic world, just as the fountains of Aganippe and Hippocrene traditionally symbolize poetic inspiration.⁵ It is not just exclusive but also magical and esoteric, which naturally creates elitism for the chosen and able, separated from the public. In *The Well at the World's End*, the Well, which is symbolic of idealism, also has inspirational function, but it never transports Ralph and Ursula to the transcendental world. Instead, they are induced to use their ability given by the water of the Well for society. The water is meant to be practical and beneficial for society. As Charlotte Oberg says, Morris's protagonists are far from the Romantic visionaries in this sense: "whereas the Romantic poets tend to present the individual as distinct or even alienated from society, suspended, as it were, in a purposeless cosmos (though there is much disagreement about the validity of this view of the Romantics), Morris's primary concern is to show the essential relationship of the individual to the plan of destiny as it is manifested in terms of human society" (Oberg, *Pagan* 178).⁶

comfort of life in order to realize his true potential. This means that he must become active, must seek adventure. What happens to the reader who pursues the tale instead of adventures? Instead of one ceasing to identify with the hero at tale's end, an aura of strangeness and a pang of longing hangs about the reader of romance, who, feeling unfulfilled, must be transformed by its ethical ideal" (Bols-Reichert 87). This argument seems to be convincing; however, the nature of the heroes' aspiration must be analyzed in terms of the impact in order to clarify the nature of Morris's sense of social reformation.

⁵ Even the supernatural power of Ralph, given by the water of the Well, does not promise him an exclusive, transcendental secret but enables him to vanquish the enemy without violence: "every man who looked on Ralph crouched and cowered before him, casting down his weapons and throwing up his hands" (XIX: 233). All the power of the protagonists contributes to the betterment of the earthly world.

⁶ Dinah Birch comments similarly that Morris's "primary interest . . . was associated with a concern with companies of men, communities or groups, like the Wanderers of *The Earthly Paradise*, rather than the solitary questers that haunt the poetry of earlier Romantics" (Birch 9). According to Oberg, Morris's heroes are also different from "chosen" Christian heroes; they never renounce the earthly world. Oberg distinguishes the heroes in the romances from typical Christian ones for their consciousness of social duties: "This is no Christian quest for a heavenly vision which is granted only to those who have risen above and renounced the world" (Oberg, "Motif" 39).

It can be said that Morris's protagonists are Romantic in curiosity and Victorian in obligation.⁷ Morris thinks that self-exploration towards new horizon can be only significant when it is finally put into practical application towards social good. Thus, the protagonists' linear development already suggests its beneficial circular dynamics to the secular.

Unlike the cases in the eighteenth-century travel novels like *Gulliver's Travels*, *Candide* and *The History of Rasselas*, the new knowledge Morris's protagonists obtained is never disappointing. While the eighteenth-century novels sceptically question accumulating knowledge, Morris's romances discuss it as directly associable with self-evaluation. While in the eighteenth-century novels, the mechanical sociopolitical structures of the traditional and of the new world are contrasted and described as destining human existence, Morris focuses on the inner conditions of man as the very dynamics for creating such structures. Through newly gained knowledge, the protagonists are instructed to grow self-confident and morally wiser, far from baffled by the outer world, believing that their individual betterment is to be reflected on the betterment of their communities. In *The Well at the World's End*, for example, Ralph succeeds to the throne after King Peter not because of his lineage but because of his moral quality suitable for a ruler: ". . . it is not for this cause that I have set him in my throne this even; but because I see and perceive that of all the kindred he is meetest to sit therein so long as he liveth" (XIX: 241). Since the protagonists' development depends on their self-realization, their inquiry towards the external ultimately identifies with that towards the internal. In their adventures, their desire is naturally solved by their spiritual development. Morris especially sets their beloved as the indispensable device to reflect the progress of their inner change, and their personal love nourishes altruistic one towards society, and eventually its betterment. Love is the dynamism which eventually transforms their journeys from the linear to the circular one.

All the romances treated here except *The Wood beyond the World* start and terminate at their home communities; their journey routes are physically circular. *The Well at the World's End* follows Ralph's development from Upmeads to the Well and the way back, until he finally becomes the new king. Birdalone in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, who is kidnapped from Utterhay and is enthralled by the witch, goes back to live in Utterhay, together with her lover, Arthur. In *Child Christopher*, Christopher, after spending his childhood in the woods cast out by Rolf the Marshal, fights him

back with Goldilind to retrieve Oakenrealm, his father's kingdom, as legitimate and claimable, and regains Meadham, her father's kingdom, too. In *The Sundering Flood*, Osberne never hesitates returning to Wethermel, his home hamlet, after his reunion with Elfhild, happily giving up fame and reputation.

The protagonists' quests almost always terminate in reformation and revitalization of their communities; the heroes' linear spiritual development in contact with new knowledge has to be fed back to their societies. While maintaining drastic change in individual thought, Morris regards preservation of traditional structure as crucial. The traditional life has to be examined with fresh knowledge to be recreated and consolidated, and in this process, the heroes have to be spiritual leaders. In Morris's romances, the individual always affects the course of the society; their self-integrity, compassion, altruism and amicability are reflected in the mood of their peaceful and friendly communities. This interaction between the microcosmic and the macrocosmic follows a Romantic idea of disseminating individual idea to society or Plato's idea of the philosopher king. Without aid from any system, the hero's accomplished morality gradually infiltrates into people's mood.⁸ For example, the Sage in *The Well at the World's End* predicts a philosopher king in Ralph when he explains the effects of the Well, even including the possible danger of despotism: "those few that sought and drank should be stronger and wiser than the others, and should make themselves earthly gods" (XIX: 66). This again seems to imply a different kind of elitism, but it is not actually so. Morris's heroes are powerful only in good social relationships, as their social interaction is to be examined.

II

The protagonists' development contributes to improving their communities in the following aspects: remedy, revival and reconstruction. As already seen, their

⁷ As Silver points out, it is also understood as the fine balance between rights and duties: ". . . Morris found in barbarian society a world in which human rights were not separated from human duties, a world without class exploitation in which the individual and his community were not automatically at odds" (Silver, *Romance* 129).

⁸ This emphasis on individual decision seems to distinguish Morris's romances from *News from Nowhere*, in which various institutional systems are described in detail as necessary conditions for the ideal medieval society.

personal motivation for adventures is more or less related to their dissatisfaction with the present circumstances. Ralph was sick with yearning for leaving the boringly cozy homeland; Walter wanted to dissipate his depression from his wife's betrayal; Birdalone, who was severely bullied by the Witch, craved for love, which was unknown to her. It is expected, therefore, that the denouement of their quests promises cure of their personal pain or uneasiness. To add to this, it is suggestive that it also becomes a remedy in social dimensions. Individual causes lead to collective solution.

In *The Water of Wondrous Isles*, Birdalone unconsciously plays the harbinger of peace and becomes a spiritual leader among communities around the water after her reunion with Arthur, who was tormented by Atra's jealousy. For example, the Isle of Nothing, which was barren and uninhabited, is filled with people who live happily and who remember Birdalone's first visit as providence: ". . . they yet had a memory of Birdalone as their own very lady and goddess, who had come from the fertile and wise lands to bless them, when first they began to engender on that isle, and had broken bread with them, and slept under their roof, and then departed in a wonderful fashion, as might be looked for of a goddess" (XX: 296-97). Birdalone unintentionally made them realize the true worth of the land as cultivable and productive. As Carole Silver points out, this shows an origin of a myth, which promises better prospects of the communities and which provides a genius loci prevailing their atmosphere: "a mortal becomes a maker and giver of myth and thereby is made immortal" (Silver, "Myth" 136). This mystification of an individual basically follows that in Romantic poetry, especially when the remedy for the communities is synchronized with that of Birdalone's suffering heart. Morris uses the term "remedy" to describe love when Arthur promises Birdalone to come back and consummate their love: "I shall come back . . . and bear my love with me, and then belike we shall seek some remedy" (XX: 247). Similarly, the Maid in *The Wood beyond the World* can instruct the primitive Bears towards civilization, which is a kind of remedy for them when she finally escapes from the tyrannical witch by the power of Walter's love: ". . . she told them of the art of tillage, and bade them learn it; and when they asked her how they should do so, she told them of the men who were abiding them in the mountain dale" (XVII: 129). In these cases, the pattern that individual remedy leads social reformation is emphasized.

In *The Well at the World's End*, the Well as a remedy is not only the destination of Ralph and Ursula but also the symbolic embodiment of their love, as Ursula's comment on the taste of the water confirms: "It tasteth good, and as if thy love were

blended with it" (XIX: 83). The fact that the Well just reassures their love already proven before their reaching it implies that the consummation of their love is not the end but the means of remedy in a larger scale. The remedy of the Well is anticipated in the protagonists' conduct after their initiation with the water. Ralph's quest is not the purpose but a beginning for social contribution, as Richard Matthews comments: "... the Well is not an end but a means; Ralph and Ursula drink not for themselves but for the sake of the world and of life, and their quest is finally complete and meaningful only if it increases happiness and beauty beyond themselves" (Mathews 52). Indeed, the Well heals personal sorrows, but it also sharpens perception, providing the drinker with the truths and miseries of the world concealed under the illusion of familiarity: "... for in the Well at the World's End is no evil, but only the Quenching of Sorrow, and Clearing of the Eyes that they may behold" (XVIII: 168). Ralph and Ursula are destined to defeat tyranny as one of the wrong illusions, and this promises a remedy for the tormented Wheat-wearers. In other romances too, bonds of mutual love become the condition towards destruction of tyrannical pride (in *The Story of the Glittering Plain*), force (in *The Sundering Flood*) or rule (in *Child Christopher*). This defeat of tyranny also happens in personal dimensions like Birdalone's escape from the Witch or Walter's trail with sexual wiles of the Lady. Sociopolitical corruption of the body politic is often compared to illnesses of a human body,⁹ and Morris's remedy through love is ingenious in romantically emphasizing that even an arbitrary individual choice affects the collective principle when it is morally tested about egoism and refined in altruism.

Although the protagonists' aim remains in reformation, their radicalism does not deny orthodox institutions like marriage, patriarchy and tribal systems. As the base of a society, for instance, marital tie is strictly kept in every romance; the heroines are

⁹ See, for example, the case in *Macbeth*. Macbeth depicts the country as diseased and asks for remedy to the doctor, unconsciously connecting it with his own guilt in the use of the medical metaphor:

If thou couldst, doctor, cast
The water of my land, find her disease,
And purge it to a sound and pristine health,
I would applaud thee to the very echo
That should applaud again. – Pull't off I say. –
What rhubarb, senna, or what purgative drug
Would scour these English hence? (Act V, Scene III)

not just beloveds but have to be legitimate spouses.¹⁰ Since Morris's reformation re-evaluates individualism and the traditional value and order of the communities, it can be understood as directed towards both past and future. It is progressive in claiming new sensibility, morality and perception as its indispensable drive. It is, however, retrospective because it idealizes simple, feudal society based on kinship. Different from the ideal society in far future described in Romantic poetry, Morris's picture is more concrete and feasible.

Morris insists on the importance of the past, especially in *The Story of the Glittering Plain*. Hallblithe chooses to go back home to unite the House of the Raven and the House of the Rose in the traditional patriarchy rather than to live a timeless life of oblivion and idleness in the Glittering Plain. He believes that history is worthwhile in reflecting the process of individual efforts onto society, while in a timeless, immortal life, the present life cannot appear as justifiable because the future is completely disconnected from the present; no procedure, development or achievement becomes significant. In timeless context, human existence appears barren and meaningless. Hallblithe's insistence on the past and the history suggests his deep compassion with nature too; the natural process of life and death coordinates the significance of human life; it is not just with moral but with aesthetic evaluation as Mann points out: "To accept temporal process, including death, is then to identify oneself both with the beauty of nature (including sex) and with the beauty of art" (Mann 312). In the hedonistic world of the Glittering plain, human existence is totally separated from nature, history and even memory, and it is left unheeded in perpetual recurrence of pleasures. This is why Hallblithe warns the Sea-eagle, who is going to rejuvenate and receive the life mode of the Glittering plain: "So is it, shipmate, that whereas thou sayest that the days flit, for thee they shall flit no more; and the day may come for thee when thou shalt be weary, and know it, and long for the lost which thou hast forgotten" (XIV: 257-58). Hallblithe is not interested in the eternal but petrified existence; in a sense, the people of the Glittering plain are in the beauty of their lives as horrible and unnatural as the Struldbruggs in *Gulliver's Travels*. Regarding tradition and history highly, he can clearly imagine "the end of dreams" (XIV: 273) of his ancestors rather than in self-indulgent dreamy visions.

¹⁰ This seems to adjust radical Romantic liberalism, which can sometimes disregard even marriage, with Victorian practicality. On the contrary, marital institution becomes less rigid in *News from Nowhere*.

The reformation in the romances, however, should not be simple inheritance of traditional order. *Child Christopher*, for example, describes the hero who is forced to live in the woods because of the usurpation of Rolf, the Marshal and who is finally restored to the throne through self-development. The story's pattern is based on the episode of Jason, an Argonaut, who takes revenge on his treacherous uncle, the usurper king Pelias, which Morris made into a poetic composition, *The Life and Death of Jason*. Different from Jason whose plan is supported by the gods' will, Christopher justifies his cause as altruistic and philanthropic by himself; that is, he is making his own dramatic story of rebellion: "now he was seeking to his kingdom, not for lust of power and gain, but that he might be the friend of good men and true, and uphold them and be by them upholden" (XVII: 223). Christopher's cause is based on his individual belief in deepening and maturing love with Goldlind, who is forced to get married to him without title, after similarly exiled from her royal palace. The determinism of the Argonaut story is replaced by the individualism of voluntary choice and action.

The story of Christopher and Goldlind emphasizes classless love and partnership as conditions for the ruling spirit. (Although Medea magically helps Jason, their love based on enchantment tragically aggravates into animosity when his reign starts.) Goldlind's granted idea about royal lineage and social class is drastically redressed by Christopher's devotion: "But I must tell you that when she took me for her beloved, she knew not, nor did I, that I was a King's son, but she took me as a woodman and an outcast, and as a woodman and outcast I wooed her, trusting in the might that was in my body, and the love that was in my heart" (XVII: 219). By presenting the love story beyond social classes as true, Morris proposes a new interpretation of medieval, feudal relationships as suggestive of a society which is truly equal in gender and class and which is cultivated by individual will. About kingship and monarchy too, he gives priority on moral excellence nurtured by compassion and love rather than pedigree. In *The Well at the World's End*, perceiving his son's matured moral quality as suitable for the throne, King Peter shows great respect to Ursula, divining that it is endowed not only by his own development but also by Ursula's partnership and assistance: "he knelt to Ursula also, and bade her all thanks for what she had done in the helping of his son" (XIX: 242). This implies Morris's idea of monarchy as a family, and in the romance, the heroes and heroines rule their monarchs together. A fortunate love relationship helps to form a married couple which is the basis of a family, and if they are a hero and a heroine, they form the basis of a monarchy or a

society. This structure is ironically proved by the contrary cases of tragic love, which endanger sociopolitical peace, in *The Earthly Paradise* and *The Life and Death of Jason*. His romances attempt to examine the process of love as the cohesive force of society, and its practicality distinguishes Morris's romances from Romantic narrative poems of Shelley and Keats with fantastic, ideal love. Since it forms the minimum unit for society, Morris considers the love relationship of morally qualified heroes and heroines crucially important for reformation because it will make a model to which people in the communities can refer. In this sense, Silver is right in observing that "personal romantic love is not opposed to but a necessary step in human progress toward a love for all one's fellows" (Silver, *Romance* 189).

In *The Sundering Flood*, Osberne senses that personal love is the decisive factor for better social relationship and, therefore, for reformation. He never hesitates to wander around in search for his beloved, Elfhild, disregarding the promising position in East Cheaping, and declares her importance which is guaranteed by his memory of her: "I may wander about the world and find her not till I am exceeding old; but even then shall I come back with her, or the memory of her" (XXI: 142). Even the memory of the partner avails for him to enliven the mood of the community because this symbolically means to have a spiritual tie over the dividing stream and to conceive the emergence of a new, wider world in the future. As Steelhead advises, Osberne's journey is supposed to connect the two separate communities, just as Hallblithe unites the two houses in *The Story of the Glittering Plain*: "Call to mind what thou thyself saidst unto Elfhild, that the only way to bridge the Sundering Flood is for one of you, or both, to wander wide the world" (XXI: 133). Elfhild is similarly counseled by the carline: "never had ye come together hadst thou abided in thine old home and he in his" (XXI: 201). By stressing personal love as the developing force of society, Morris closely examines how the nature of pure love relationship goes through obstacles and beyond boundaries when it is endangered, in comparison with Victorian marital code.

When Morris describes the love crisis of the protagonists, he deliberately criticizes some dangerous elements of idealistic love as misleading. Love for love's sake is denied apparently in *The Story of the Glittering Plain* when Hallblithe declines the King's offer to marry his daughter who loves him as a fictional character in her book: "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). The princess's love typically represents a fantastically poetic vision

of love sustained only by unattainable image; for her, life is considered as if it were a picture in the book. This curiously re-emphasizes Morris's intention in representing principles of love and life in his romances. Since love is directly linked with social structure, it should not be disregarded as fanciful pleasure like the King does.

The King's offer really becomes a lesson for Hallblithe to reconsider the social function and the moral nature of love. Based on mutual understanding and balanced on individual will and its social duty, love must be the force of realizing self-identification together with social welfare. The princess's false love is grounded on false moral principles which turn love from a goal into a method of pleasure, reducing it to a private property. For the King, people are collection of bodies to obey rather than fellows, and love relationship never affects his hedonistic reign, even when it involves his own daughter: "I bade bring thee to the woman that loved thee, and whom thou shouldst love; and that is my daughter. And look thou! Even as I may not bring thee to thine earthly love, so couldst thou not make thyself manifest before my daughter, and become her deathless love. Is it not enough?" (XIV: 269). The immorality of idealistic love, Morris seems to allude, lies in the fact that it perpetually suspends and petrifies one's mind in vain yearning for the unattainable. On the other hand, the love Hallblithe believes in has potentiality to harmonize the private and public spheres with the help of institution and tradition as he himself proves in his return to the home community and his marriage with the fiancée, the Hostage.

In *The Well at the World's End*, Morris cautiously distinguishes between the real and the fantastic loves again when Ralph loses his beloved, the Lady of Abundance, who is the embodiment of his sexual desire and platonic love and who guides him towards the Well. Endowed with magical powers and enchanting personality, she easily handles difficult matters as a master of various kinds of knowledge, and naturally appears both a goddess and a witch. Ralph's helplessness and laziness in his relationship with the Lady derives from her superb ability on which he is completely dependent. Newman's point about inverse sexual roles in the romances applies here: "Many Victorian heroines fall into physical or mental decline when they reach an emotional impasse in their lives; in his late prose romances Morris turns this upside down, for this is the fate of his heroes" (Newman 46). If there are moral dangers for heroes, one of them is self-indulgence in love relationship. Morris denies Ralph's total dependence on the partner because it promises little in his development. The Lady of the Abundance has not only satisfied his desire but also nullified his aspiration. Certainly the Lady inspires him

immensely just as Jane Burden inspired the Pre-Raphaelites, but each of them failed to make a wonderful partner. In the end, the Lady of Abundance is only able to give forms (the Well and Ursula) to Ralph's desire and aspiration. Ursula as the true partner assists him without overbalancing their relationship.

About true love relationship, Morris challengingly reevaluates the significance of female body as inspiring and sacred, criticizing the ironically genteel Victorian attitude to sexual affairs and appreciating the function of sexuality in love. In the romances, there are many descriptions of the naked female figures, who question about the value of their own bodies. In *The Water of Wondrous Isles*, Birdalone becomes the object of men's sexual desire; while her lover Arthur is away, her guards, Robert and Giles, succinctly compete for her and she is nearly under sexual assaults from the Black Knight, the Red Knight and Antony. Although her sexual appeal is unintentional, this problem is proposed as the trial for her to attain her self-realization. Birdalone correctly distinguishes desire and love when she reprimands Sir Leonard: "Thy love for me is the desire of a man toward a woman" (XX: 156). Her understanding of desire is also different from the vain idea of Atra, who regards herself just as men's target of pleasure: "love overcometh them and causeth them to long to be of one flesh with us; and their longing is beyond measure, and they desire our bodies, which they deem far fairer than belike they be" (XX: 66). Birdalone's reconsideration of her own body and of sexuality is indispensable for attaining her solid love relationship, which eventually brings peace to the communities around the lake. Separated from Arthur, she realizes the importance of her body, wishing that she would be loved both spiritually and physically: "she stood up and looked on the fairness of her body, and a great desire took hold of her heart that it might be loved as it deserved by him whom she desired" (XX: 277). She now appreciates her body as an indispensable medium for their true love relationship, and senses its fertility as connective of individual and collective happiness. This is contrary to the licentious witch of the Isle of Increase Unsought who tries to enthrall Baudoin, Hugh and Arthur for her own desire. The witch's sexual drive is destructive venom, eventually bringing desertion and death among the isles of the water, and it is to be detoxicated by Birdalone's love as a remedy. It is a discovery for Birdalone that sexual attraction can eventually function for better, harmonious relationships when it is rightly developed, as Oberg argues, making society lively by its healthy manifestation: "But this sexual attraction is an outward sign of the inner generative force working through the lives of these characters, overcoming unnatural

restraints and privations in order to bless the earth and bring forth the abundant fruit of love and brotherhood" (Oberg, "Motif" 47).¹¹

The same problem occurs in *The Wood beyond the World*, in which Walter has to go through a sexual trial of the Lady in order to preserve his love for the Maid. Sagaciously understanding the essence of love, the Maid regards Walter's ordeal in the Lady's sexual wiles as a mental battle instead of duels found in classic epics: "it must be patience and wisdom to bring us through, and not the fallow blade of one man" (XVII: 78). Walter is entitled to rule the Stark-wall as the king not just because he has chosen "the war-gear" at the test, but because he is rewarded for his victory over temptation by his moral fortitude, aided by the Maid who taught him how to fight wisely. Contrasted with the Lady's false sexuality, the Maid realizes the potentiality of her physical attraction as fertile and fruitful both for Walter and the Stark-wall, bringing individual happiness and social order: "I knew not before that I was so sore desired, or that thou hadst taken such note of my body, and found it so dear" (XVII: 113). For the people of the Stark-wall, her body embodies the power of innocence, peacefulness, beauty and holiness as the ultimate cure: "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). It is remarkable that her earthly body represents her pure heart and seems to hallow things around her as if she were a goddess to their eyes: "it seemed to me as she went past as though paradise had come a night to our city, and that all the air breathed of it" (XVII: 126). This neoplatonic identification of mind and body in quality seems to echo Romantic tradition in describing ideal women, but, for Morris, heroines' body is valuable only when in spousal sexual relationship with their partners. In this sense, it is far from Romantic yearning for the ideal woman who only briefly reveals her shadow to mortal eye. The body is never a burden as it is in transcendental Romanticism like that of *Epipsychidion*. Against Victorian social code, Morris repetitiously argues for the importance of sexuality as an essence of love, unrestricted by social and economic conditions. Morris shifts the focus on the body from its purely aesthetic to its socially symbolic significance.

¹¹ The water of the Well in *The Well at the World's End* has also symbolic antidote function, and it is related to sexual power as Norman Kelvin points out: ". . . in Well it [the power of the erotic] is the shaping force itself" (Kelvin 106). Mann also points out the paradoxical influence of sexual attraction: "sex, symbolized as the beautiful woman, is both the greatest threat to human community and, in the long run, its only preserver" (Mann 322).

Conclusion

Morris's radical traditionalism in his late romances looks archaic and backward, but it seems to contain an antithesis as a remedy to the late nineteenth-century situation, in which augmented desires in industrialization and commercialism destroy humanistic relationships and communities. In his vision of social reformation, Romantic individualism in self-exploration is adjusted to be beneficial to collective welfare. By describing the dimension of love developing from the personal to the public, he modifies the negative determinism and the exaggerated idealism of Romantic poetry. Morris's fictional reformation is meant to be inspirational for the actual society, and, therefore, his attitude is naturally idealistic as Bolus-Reichert points out; "Morris adopts the romance form not in order to escape from the world, but rather to reform it from within an ethos of absolute idealism (Bolus-Reichert 74).

Under the influence of Ruskin, Morris's social reformation aimed mainly at enlightening "the working-classes, the real organic part of society" (XXIII: 26) under the control of the rich, self-important middle class, who were indifferent to the moral aspect of art.¹² In his romances, this picture of social opposition is metaphorically represented as liberation of people from tyrants. In particular, the analogy is most apparent when he describes the revolt of the "good fellows of the Lesser Crafts" (XXI: 146) in *The Sundering Flood* as considerable force to support Sir Godrick in his battle against the King of the Porte.¹³ Whether he was ready to accept a revolution by violence or not, it was certain that he believed in the enlightening function of art, which is represented in the plot patterns of quest and love of his romances. In "How I became a Socialist?," criticizing the industrial civilization in terms of dehumanization, Morris expects reviving power of art:

¹² When discussing pollution and landscape, Morris concludes that "their love of art is a mere pretence: how can you care about the image of a landscape when you show by your deeds that you don't care for the landscape itself? or what right have you to shut yourself up with beautiful form and colour when you make it impossible for other people to have any share of these things?" (XXII: 70-71) The egotism of middle-class industrialists must also be disillusioned by education.

¹³ Similarly, Morris commemorates Bloody Sunday as an inevitable but important incident for realizing the idealistic semi-medieval society in *News from Nowhere*, and the revolt of peasants is supported as righteous in *A Dream of John Ball*.

Yet it must be remembered that civilization has reduced the workman to such a skinny and pitiful existence, that he scarcely knows how to frame a desire for any life much better than that which he now endures perforce. It is the province of art to set the true ideal of a full and reasonable life before him, a life to which the perception and creation of beauty, the enjoyment of real pleasure that is, shall be felt to be as necessary to man as his daily bread. (XXIII: 281)

Here it is implied not only that his advocacy for "Lesser Arts" or hand-made artifacts is supposed to practically enhance manual workers' self-recognition, but also that art in general can spiritually nourish their minds. His romances are considered to inspire the working class towards reformative views. In Morris's romance, the protagonists are rendered flat in characterization to represent not others' personalities but archetypes who can "envision their shared future happiness" (Plotz 940-41). Setting the protagonists as spiritual leaders for people, Morris hopes a similar situation in reality in future, perhaps imaginatively substituting them with liberal intellectuals and sages in Victorian society. Poetry or stories of the select few are invaluable in inspiring further variations; Romanticism and folk art are rendered compatible just as heroism and democracy exist harmoniously in the romances.¹⁴

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¹⁴ Therefore, Bevir's opinion seems to be rather over-simplifying the dichotomy between the two kinds of art: "Morris' emphasis on the place of art within our everyday world, in contrast, implied a rejection of the High Romantic beliefs in the individual genius of the poet and the autonomy of art. Morris insisted that everyone had the capacity to create art and that art should have an integral place within all our daily activities" (Bevir 179).

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