Proto-Modern Morris: Divine Possession, Inhuman Force, and Eternal Return in William Morris's Epic Poems

By

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DEDICATION

For my mother and father,

with love and thanks.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation reconstructs a neglected strand of nineteenth-century imagination—an atavistic but innovative challenge to humanism—in William Morris's prose and poetry, with a focus on the mythological epics of his middle years. I stress Morris's primary investments in premodern barbarism and inhuman nature, which I approach in terms of his self-avowed religion, paganism. My aim is to reconstruct this worldview at the levels of ethics, aesthetics, and historiography. In so doing, I distance Morris from a critical consensus which confines his work to a teleological progression from Romanticism to Marxism, and link him forward, in his seeming backwardness, to the aristocratic, traditionalist strain of Modernism. I center my readings on *The Earthly Paradise* (1868) and *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung* (1876), bringing them together with the poetry and criticism of Romantics including William Wordsworth and John Keats, Victorians such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Arthur Hallam, and High Modernist mainstays like W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot. This dissertation sketches an alternative intellectual history of the long-nineteenth century, in which certain thinkers start from a Romantic veneration of the passions, but gradually strip away its governing dialectical framework, revealing a "dynamist" world of interacting forces. In Chapter 1, I distinguish Morris's notion of paganism from that of the Romantics, building a genealogical through-line towards Modernist primitivism, which I use as a paradigm for explaining the metaphysical function of Hellenic and Norse gods in Morris's epics. In Chapter 2, I apply this framework to

Morris's aesthetic philosophy, revealing a new model of impassioned artistry with unexplored origins in Hallam's and Tennyson's "poetry of sensation." Carrying this method to its most radical conclusion, Morris paves the way for Yeats's and Pound's poetics of divine possession, and their conception of aesthetic form as objectified force. In Chapter 3, I build on critical discussions of Morris's willful anachronism to read *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung* as an anti-historicist model of cyclical recurrence and dynamic tradition, paving the way for the Modernist motif of the return.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

If you ask the educated layperson about Romanticism, the answer you receive will likely touch on a few of the following tendencies: an affirmation of wild passion, beyond the limits of reason; a fascination with sex, death, and violence; a sense of deep connection to the ancient past, and a longing to revive it; and of course, underlying these, a profound reverence for nature, bordering on paganism. The scholar of Romanticism knows that all these tendencies are there, but always with a "yes, but." Each one of these wild, untrammeled aspects of Romanticism is carefully bracketed by a procedure of creative reason, the dialectical imagination, which turns passion to the service of reflection, transgression to the service of moral freedom, the premodern past to the service of historical progress, and in all of these, turns nature to the service of humanity, on an individual and universal level.[1]

The critical tradition treats William Morris as a Victorian scion of the British Romantic poets, and this is unquestionably true. But what the consensus glosses over is that for Morris, there was no "yes, but." In the epic poems of his middle years, regarded in

[1] Here I refer especially to the British Romantics. Things were somewhat different on the Continent, with Goethe in *Faust* suggesting a kind of willfully irrational, amoral heroism that would resurface again in Nietzsche. However, the formal dialectical method also originated in Germany, conceived in response to Kant by Goethe's collaborator Schiller, then passed through Coleridge to Britain. And one can certainly find precedent for this in *Faust*, in those relatively rare moments when its protagonist yearns for Heaven, even as he makes a beeline for Hell.

Morris's day and our own as his greatest literary works, Morris wholeheartedly embraced those unruly impulses that his Romantic forebears cautiously explored. In my view, Morris had less in common with Romanticism proper, than with the layperson's Romanticism, and in this, embodied a distinctly Victorian innovation. By affirming Romanticism's excesses unfiltered, Morris paved the way for Modernism. In this respect, my project builds on formative works like Isobel Armstrong's *Victorian Poetry* (1993) and recent works like Lucy Hartley's *Democratising Beauty in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2017), which reconstruct distinctly Victorian apparatus and concerns, as well as Vincent Sherry's genealogies of Modernism, which work against the pervasive assimilation of poets like Pound, Eliot, and Lewis to Romantic ideology.[2]

In this dissertation, I gather all those "lay Romantic" tendencies together into the final term of my list. Where the Romantics looked to nature for symbols of the divine human Spirit, William Morris simply worshipped nature. Where the Romantics used pagan language to express Christian-humanist sentiments, William Morris simply *was* a pagan. My argument is intellectual-historical in character, and works by disambiguation and connection. On the one hand, I distinguish Morris from "Miltonist" Romantics, Keats and Wordsworth, as well as from the first Romantic dialectician, Schiller, and from nineteenth-and-twentieth century versions of historicism. On the other hand, I link Morris forward to radically pagan Modernists, Yeats and Pound, and backwards to Victorian predecessors,

[2] The layperson's Romanticism, as I sketch it here, strongly overlaps with Romanticism's younger sibling, the Gothic. One could productively investigate a loss of this distinction over the course of the nineteenth century, with Morris's early lyric collection, *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858), as a central exhibit.

Hallam and Tennyson.[3] My chapters center on readings of Morris's major epics, *The Earthly Paradise* (1868) and *The Story of Sigurd The Volsung* (1876), which enframe his turbulent, intellectually generative middle years. While these are generally read as part of a teleological sequence, progressing towards Morris's discovery of Marxism, I read them as complementary parts of a pagan testament.

At the turning point of Book II of *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the House of the* Niblungs (1876), Sigurd kills his foster-father, the dwarven artisan Regin. Stepping into his dead father Sigmund's role as "the hired of Odin," Sigurd denounces Regin as the "Foe of the Gods on high," and subjects this rabble-rouser to a pitiless summary execution:

> Then his second stroke struck Sigurd, for the Wrath flashed thin and white,
> And 'twixt head and trunk of Regin fierce ran the fateful light;
> And there lay brother by brother a faded thing and wan. (II 149-50)

Sigurd deals Regin the death of a lowly villain. In this respect, Morris follows the succinct brutality of his source material, but gives it a didactic gloss, so that Sigurd's slaughter of Regin appears as an act of divine judgment by heroic proxy: When the Wrath cuts through Regin's neck, it does so as a "fateful light" that not only separates head from trunk, but "sunder[s]" the "good" from the "ill," revealing the boundaries of things.

There is something strange about Morris' choice to cast Regin in this emphatically negative light: Regin is an uncanny double of William Morris himself. The Regin of the *Volsunga Saga* is a learned dwarven smith, who "[knows] how to work iron as well as silver

[3] I borrow the term from Vincent Sherry's *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism* (1993). But this intersection of Modernist aesthetics and right-wing politics is the subject of a substantial body of criticism, typified by Michael North's *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound* (1991) and Maud Ellmann's *The Poetics of Impersonality* (1988).

and gold, and from everything . . . make something useful." Prior to the events of the saga, Regin has lost his brother, Otr, to the random malice of the trickster-god Loki, and been repaid with stolen, cursed gold by Loki and his blood-brother, Odin (Byock 57-59). Morris fixes on these aspects of Regin's character and builds them out, transforming the dwarven smith into an anachronistic figure of Romantic utopianism (Spatt 359).[4] As "Master of Masters," learned in all arts from bardic song to blacksmithing to the magical manipulation of weather, Regin embodies the ideal of integrated craft that Morris exemplified in his own career as poet, designer, and manufacturer, and expounded in lectures such as "The Lesser Arts" (1882) and "Gothic Architecture" (1893). And where the Regin of the saga holds a grudge against Odin and Loki, Morris extrapolates this into a revolutionary political project. Regin wants to "free" men and dwarves from the aristocratic "yoke" of the Aesir, transforming the earth into an Earthly Paradise where "there shall be no more dying," and which shall "for ever and ever shall be young beneath [his] hand" (113).

Moreover, Regin follows the same trajectory from "Romantic" artistry to "Revolutionary" action that E.P. Thompson attributes to Morris in his highly influential biography. Just as Thompson's Morris finds "the consummation of his . . . romantic aspirations in the Socialist cause," Regin sees his revolutionary project as an extension of his artisanal labor: the literal remaking of the world (725). He hopes to be known as "he who wrought," reigning benevolently as "the new world's fashioning-lord" (113, 149). In this way, Regin embodies an ideology of aesthetic redemption, of liberation through

[4] Spatt notes that "Regin can hold out only the vain hope of all failing Romantics: the non-time when 'there shall be no more dying'" (359).

creative work, that Thompson and many others attribute to Morris. This ideology renders Morris' poetry commensurable with his politics, enables the dialectical transformation of individual, imaginative world-creation into collective, labor-praxical world-production.[5]

One might therefore expect Morris to sympathize with Regin's utopian ends, if not with his treacherous means.[6] But in *Sigurd*, Morris merges his narratorial voice with the grim and martial ethos of the Viking source material, such that Regin's longing for a blissful Earthly Paradise is, in itself, the ultimate evil. As the blissfully ignorant Sigurd sits and roasts the heart of the dragon Fafnir, the circling eagles warn him of Regin's plot to betray him and overthrow the gods, and of the disastrous consequences for the universe, should Regin succeed:

> Arise! lest the world run backward and the blind heart have its will,
> And once again be tangled the sundered good and ill;
> Lest love and hatred perish, lest the world forget its tale,
> And the Gods sit deedless, dreaming, in the high-walled heavenly vale. (149)

The eagle's condemnation of Regin rests on three interrelated ethical principles, all at odds with the received idea of Morris as a left-Romantic well on his way to becoming a Marxist. First of these is fidelity to the unfolding "tale" of the world. This refers not just to history, the subjective account of events, but also to *fate*, the objective procession of events, bound under the law of immanent necessity. On these terms, the future is the "tale-to-be." Second is the imperative to do "deeds." In *Sigurd*, I will argue, the "deed" is neither action in the

[5] E.g., in Charlotte Oberg: "Morris' political activism, far from being a schizoid departure from an escapist poetic philosophy, was a practical application of the world view informing his poetry" (93).
[6] To be sure, Regin's means are also at issue. If Regin makes war on the gods, he "shall . . . scatter wrack o'er the world," so that "the father [shall] be slain by the son, and the brother 'gainst brother be hurled." And Regin plans to betray Sigurd personally: He "hath reared up a King [Sigurd] for the slaying, that he alone might live" (II 148).

generic sense, nor aesthetic-economic practice, but an act of heroic overcoming, always involving hazard to self and almost always involving the physical destruction of the enemy. To do great deeds is to carve out a place in the world's tale. Thus, the tale is "made out of" deeds. These two principles converge in a third—loyalty to the gods, who rule the nine worlds of Norse mythology as kings and nobles rule the world of men. The gods are the principle agents of the world-story, and if the gods "sit deedless," then the great tale grinds to a halt.[7] Taken together, these principles comprise a faithful distillation of the hierarchical, militaristic, and fame-obsessed ethos of the Norse myths and sagas. Morris sets up a confrontation between this archaic Viking spirit and the highly modern, Romantic ideal of Regin, and frames it in such a way that the former appears noble and virtuous, while the latter appears cowardly and wicked. Contemporary readers of *Sigurd* understood Morris as seriously espousing an "obsolete code of ethics," and some took him to task for it.[8]

Why, then, would Morris, bard-to-be of the English socialist cause, write a scene in which his own shining epic hero scorns and executes an effigy of the poet himself, all in the name of outmoded ideals of fealty and valor? I propose a simple and direct explanation, albeit one that requires a major revision of the critical conversation around Morris: There is no neat continuity between the Morris who becomes a Marxist, on the one hand, and the

[7] Sigurd dismisses Regin's plan as a "tangled web of nothing," unreal in comparison to the great tale of fate, and without substantive value to anyone of noble spirit. After the deed is done, he vaunts over Regin's corpse, underscoring the link between fealty to the gods and fidelity to the world-tale: "Dead are the foes of God-home that would blend the good and the ill;/And the World shall yet be famous, and the Gods shall have their will" (149-50).

[8] "A poem, therefore, which, like *Sigurd*, reflects, with hard, uncompromising realism, an obsolete code of ethics, and a barbarous condition of society, finds itself irreconcilably at discord with the key of nineteenth-century feeling" (Hewlett 262).

Morris who writes *Sigurd* and *The Earthly Paradise*, on the other. This other Morris makes his presence felt as a warp in the smooth fabric of the critical narrative, in the irregularities and deviations that are, at best, acknowledged and set to one side. In recent years, however, a more adventurous approach to William Morris has targeted these anomalies, bringing the other Morris into view without quite recognizing him as a single, consistent, and coherent persona. My project integrates and extends these separate insights, attempting to account for them in a systematic way.

Simon Dentith comes close to recognizing this other Morris when he reads *Sigurd* as an "implicit critique of the paltriness of modernity," and concedes that "the cultural politics of such a gesture . . . are perhaps ambiguous." But he draws back from this insight, reassuring his reader that Morris would "shortly" become a socialist (79). Richard Frith says outright what Dentith can only intimate: "In spite of his socialist allegiances and revolutionary aspirations . . . . Morris can be situated relatively easily in a basically conservative medievalist tradition" (118). While much has been made of Morris' influence by Ruskin, whose theory of work as pleasurable creative practice blends smoothly into the left-Romantic/Marxist constellation, considerably less has been made of Morris' influence by Carlyle, whose hostility to the modern world goes far beyond that of mainstream conservatism, both nineteenth and twenty-first century.[9] By the time Morris wrote *Sigurd*,

[9] Thompson, for instance, acknowledges the formative role of Carlyle, but writes him off as "essentially a negative critic," consigning him to the bucket of "feudal socialism" as defined by Marx and Engels in the "Manifesto of the Communist Party" (29-32). Thus, he can isolate Carlyle's "negative" postures, such as his "disgust at the reduction by capitalism of all human values to cash values," as the salient influences on Morris, while overlooking the ways in which Carlyle's *positive* positions, e.g. his valorization of the feudal system, his theory of culture-heroism, and his account of pagan Norse religion, may also have influenced Morris. For the latter two, see *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, esp. "The Hero as Divinity: Odin."

however, the conservative attitudes manifest in the chivalric themes of *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858) had taken on a rougher and more militant aspect.

To call this posture "reactionary" would be misleading. It would also be putting it rather lightly. Dentith shows that Morris' hostility to the modern world found its focal point in an ethos of "barbarism," inspired by Morris' love of the myths and sagas of the Vikings, and consolidated in his mid-career translations and rewritings of ancient epic poetry, leading up to the great task of *Sigurd*. He stresses that Morris' investment in epic and related forms corresponds to his "opposition to modernity," such that Morris actively affirms the "atavistic meanings from the pre-modern world" that epic carries "as a genre" (239). Chief among these atavistic meanings, and particularly central to *Sigurd*, is Morris' "celebration of violence, especially heroic male violence." Dentith poses the crucial question: "What could be the value of this invocation of the barbaric past . . . to any kind of progressive politics, above all of the revolutionary socialist kind that Morris was to embrace from the early 1880s onwards?" (248, 244).

In *William Morris and the Uses of Violence* (2013), Ingrid Hanson takes up Dentith's line of inquiry, arguing that Morris' warlike impulses inflected almost every aspect of his work, and attained their clearest expression in his engagement with the barbaric past of Northern Europe. She fleshes out this anti-civilizational tendency in Morris' thought by linking it to broader developments in Victorian thinking on violence, masculinity, and the cultures of the "savage" peoples newly brought into the networks of the British Empire. Throughout, Hanson responds to Dentith's question by redescribing Morris' sanguine representations of medieval savagery in terms of morally-loaded concepts like "creation"

and ”transformation,” which more amenable to socialist politics. One can see how there might be limits to this approach, especially when it results in the characterization of the “violent grasp of hands on weapons or flesh” as akin to “the creative touch of hands on things,” in that “both fashion something new”; or, when it results in the characterization of a merciless war of extermination between Goths and Romans as an “antiwar” (25, 98).[10]

I will argue that the circle cannot be squared. Taken together, these accounts build up a portrait of Morris as a man laboring under considerable cognitive dissonance, caught between two opposed and irreconcilable ideals. As Herbert Tucker memorably puts it, Morris was “surely the least progressivist Marxist on record” (513). Where Tucker presents this as an interesting paradox, there is good reason to give it a decisive weight. Ingrid Hanson suggests that Morris’ “hatred of modern civilization” ran much deeper than anyone has really reckoned with. For Morris, “the idea of the complete destruction of current civilization and all its trappings [was] appealing . . . emotionally if not pragmatically . . .” (102-03). The notion of destroying a decadent society and, in effect, restarting the historical cycle is, of course, the precise opposite of the Marxist project. Marxist socialism opposes bourgeois progressivism with the dream of revolutionary progress; opposes bourgeouis civilization in the name of a more authentically civilized world-to-come, in which the best ideas and innovations of the bourgeois world will be preserved and transcended. Morris seems to have been torn between this hypercivilizing mission of

[10] For a thorough account of Morris’ fondness for barbarism, see Chapter 4, “Crossing The River of Violence.” For the dialectical refiguration of destruction as creation, see also 44, 82.

socialism, on the one hand, and his instinctive antipathy toward the Enlightenment values underpinning this mission, on the other.

What we have, then, is a solid and recognizable object—Marxism—juxtaposed with a hazily defined yet strongly countervailing ideological remainder. Dentith, Hanson, and Tucker each reveal aspects of this resistant "something," without ever pinpointing *what* that something is. The problem is that the barbaric or anti-civilizational side of Morris' thought never rises to the level of express political commitment (and quite probably could not have, absent a major theoretical innovation on Morris' part). Thus, it "shows up" for these critics only as an inchoate bundle of unruly impulses, related to Morris' retrograde interests and influences. As a merely-subjective tendency, Morris' barbarism should be easy enough to recontain within the dominant narrative, but Dentith and Hanson reluctantly concede their attempts can only go so far.[11]

My intervention is to shift the frame of reference from politics to religion—specifically, the pagan religions of the barbaric Germans and Homeric Greeks. This approach allows me to synthesize the recent, widely recognized contributions of Dentith, Hanson, and Tucker with the older, unfairly neglected work of Charlotte Oberg, who argues that William Morris is best understood as a philosophically pagan thinker. Perhaps the central reason that Oberg's *A Pagan Prophet: William Morris* (1978) has not been widely influential is that she strips her provocative conclusions of their explanatory power. "What is ironic about Morris' paganism," she concludes, "is that it does not differ in practical

[11] When Dentith concludes that *Sigurd*'s "barbarity and alienness place it outside the habitual recuperation of epic-as-national-origin pointing to the world-as-we-have-it," he tacitly admits that the poem is equally "outside" the more radical progress narratives of Marxist socialism (252).

application from the Christianity more-or-less subscribed to by such 'establishment' poets as Tennyson and Browning" (171).[12] If Oberg is right in this judgment, it is hard to tell why it matters that Morris was a pagan. It is harder still to tell how her pagan Morris differs in any real way from the Morris of her colleagues, who readily acknowledge Morris' *interest* in pagan cultures, while situating Morris himself in a Romantic humanist tradition with Christian roots. So, why would a scholar undercut herself in this way? The answer, I think, is that Oberg feels compelled to defend Morris from the implications of her own findings. This results in some very fine hair-splitting: "Though Morris's outlook was consistently primitivistic, his particular form of paganism is highly civilized, far indeed from a truly primitive way of thinking" (169). While one can imagine a "highly civilized" paganism, along the lines of the urban culture of late-Classical antiquity, this is difficult to square with a "consistently primitivistic" outlook. Nevertheless, Oberg argues the point at some length, effacing any meaningful distinction between her "civilized paganism" and Christian-flavored Romanticism.[13]

The recent discussion of Morris' anti-civilizational streak renders Oberg's notion of Morris as a "highly civilized pagan" insupportable. However, this body of work also makes it possible to restore the explanatory power of Oberg's thesis, by carrying it to the radical

[12] Though Oberg is cited regularly in work on *The Earthly Paradise*, this is always for her helpful close readings, and never for her substantive conclusions.

[13] Oberg's argument is that Morris demonstrates the "four basic characteristics of 'civilized faiths' as opposed to primitive religion" identified by Edwin A. Burtt in *Man Seeks the Divine* (169-71). These purportedly universal principles amount to an abstract synthesis of Christian and, more specifically, Protestant morality, more or less identical with the basic principles of Kant or Schiller: the universal moral community of particular individuals; the universality of the moral law, in accordance with the universality of metaphysical law; the soul as a principle of rational self-governance in accordance with universal law; the refusal of base hedonism in favor of a rationally-mediated, morally lawful desire working toward an ideal of human cultivation. In Oberg's judgment, for Morris' paganism to count as "civilized," it must be identical with the post-Christian humanism of his contemporaries.

conclusions she takes pains to foreclose. Morris' investment in the martial-heroic values of the Vikings, Saxons, and Bronze Age Greeks, his flat-out rejection of historical progress, and his profound ambivalence toward utopian ideals, can be explained as expressions of a barbaric religious outlook—the "uncivilized" or "primitive" paganism that Morris found in the myth-poems and sagas of the Icelanders, as well as in the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and other traces of the pre-Classical past of Greece and Rome. Morris absorbed this religion through his unparalleled level of immersion in these texts, as well as his direct contact with the culture and landscape of Iceland. While many readings of *Sigurd* draw on Morris' 1876 summary of the spirit of Norse mythology (which he set down while composing the poem), they pointedly omit Mackail's contextualizing commentary.[14] These include a lengthy and gently apologetic consideration of the "savage or inhuman element" that Morris, in his rewriting, largely preserves. He then prefaces Morris' summary with the following: "To Morris's mind, at any rate, the philosophy or religion that lived under these half-humanized legends was something quite real and vital: and it substantially represented his own guiding belief." In this light, Morris' oft-quoted closing remarks, that "this seems to me pretty much the religion of the Northmen," and that "one would be a happy man if one could hold it, despite the wild dreams and dreadful imaginings that hung about it here and there," appear not as idle musings, but as a serious statement of belief. (Mackail 343-44) At the close of his biographical talk at Kelmscott House, Morris gives this succinct *credo*: "I went twice to Iceland, in 1871 and 1873, and have always been deeply stirred by the Northern Sagas, as was Swinburne too. In religion I am a pagan." (*Collected Works* XXII,

[14] See e.g. Thompson and Hanson.

xxxi-ii). It is surely significant that Morris leads up to this proclamation by invoking the spirit of the Viking North, and linking himself to his friend Swinburne, notorious in his day as a "pagan."

In my opening chapter, I develop an account of Morris' paganism as a coherent moral-metaphysical system. Morris develops this response in the two original epic poems bookending his middle years, *The Earthly Paradise* (1868) and *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs* (1876). I group Morris with his critical champion Pater in a loose constellation of Victorian thinkers fascinated by the darker, more barbaric undercurrents of ancient Greek paganism, a tendency that becomes more explicit in the primitivist dynamism of Pound (in the subsequent chapters, I expand this theme to Yeats). For Morris, as for the other members of this current, the answer lies not in redemption from life's suffering, but in what Margot Louis, invoking Nietzsche, characterizes as "the celebration of life" (20-21).[15]

Each of Morris's epics centers on an "external passion," a metaphysical drive or life-force that Morris identifies as a pagan god. These two texts work through the ceaseless concatenation of successive narrative cycles, each with their own protagonists who, in the course of the telling-over, tend to blend into one another. Viewed from the perspective of the work as a whole, however, the disparate human subjects of each poem appear as so many objects for the action of uniform divine subjects. Overall, the anti-dialectical,

[15] For more on this basic objective of Nietzsche's project, see Bernard Reginster's *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (2008). Stefano Evangelista stresses that this celebration of life includes "those 'dark' possibilities of the erotic which include violence, self-destruction, and death" (41). See also Margot Louis, *Swinburne and His Gods: The Roots and Growth of an Agnostic Poetry* (1990); Yisrael Levin, *Swinburne's Apollo: Myth, Faith, and Victorian Spirituality* (2013); Sara Lyons, *Algernon Swinburne and Walter Pater: Victorian Aestheticism, Doubt, and Secularisation* (2015).

dynamist framework used to explain Morris transfers well to the esoteric paganism of Pound and Yeats, a theme that is critical to all three chapters.[16]

In my second chapter, I carry this argument into a critical reexamination of Morris's aesthetic ideology. The entrenched assumption is that Morris belongs to the "Natural Supernaturalist" school of Romanticism, founded on the secularization of Protestant religious thought via Idealist philosophy.[17] However, Morris loathed Milton and Wordsworth, the mainstays of this school.[18] In contrast, I position Morris's poetry as part of an anti-Miltonist current. This begins with the "poetry of sensation" pioneered by Arthur Hallam and the young Tennyson, which was constituted via critique of Wordsworth's intellectualism, and works through a one-sidedly sensuous reading of German Idealism and Romanticism.[19] The same anti-Miltonist impulse resurfaces in Yeats and Pound, and I position Morris as the critical midpoint of this long-century process. I use these Modernists's dynamist theory of form, along with their theory of artistic creation as divine possession, as paradigms for understanding Morris's aesthetics. Returning to Regin the dwarf, I contrast him with another of Morris's art-heroes, Pygmalion, from *The Earthly*

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[16] Here, I engage with a small but provocative literature on the legacy of Neoplatonic philosophy and occultism in the work of Pound, in particular: Peter Liebregts's *Ezra Pound and Neoplatonism* (2004), Demetres P. Tryphonopoulo *The Celestial Tradition: A Study of Ezra Pound's* The Cantos (1992), and Leon Surette, *A Light from Eleusis: A Study of Ezra Pound's* Cantos (1979). Liebregts, however, roots his reading of Pound's early work in a helpful discussion of his relationship to Yeats (see, e.g., Chapter 2, "Yeatsian Moods and Plotinian Ecstasy: The Question of the Self in *A Lume Spento*.").

[17] M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (1971). For Natural Supernaturalism as a theodicy based on the creative, and thus redemptive, power of the human mind, see 21-30, 95-121. For the radical Protestant roots thereof, see 51–65.

[18] In the reading list included in May Morris' introduction to the *Collected Works of William Morris*, v. XXII, Morris omits Milton from his very short of list of "Modern Poets," explaining: "I hope I shall escape Boycotting at the hands of my countrymen for leaving out Milton; but the union in his works of cold classicalism with Puritanism (the two things which I hate most in the world) repels me so that I *cannot* read him" (xv). Morris' objections to Wordsworth were similar to his objections to Milton. George Bernard Shaw recalls that Morris "hated [Wordsworth] for his piety" (Thompson 660).

[19] See Armstrong (29-32, 59-61).

Paradise. While Regin's work fits neatly into the paradigm of aesthetic redemption developed by the Miltonists, Pygmalion's artistry is at the opposite, irrational extreme—he is at his generative apex when wholly unselfed by the goddess Venus.

In my third chapter, I will consider how Morris understands his connection to the distant pagan past, following up on Herbert Tucker's suggestion that Morris is simply not a historicist thinker. Morris' rejection of historicism for the cyclical temporality of myth and epic anticipates one of Yeats's and Pound's common motifs, the return, or, the repeat in history. My argument tracks the cyclical reproduction of "deed" and "tale," historical event and its narration, that *Sigurd* models on a "macropoetic" scale (Tucker's phrase). From here, I build to an account of the relationship between *Sigurd*, Morris' earlier "literal" translation of the *Saga of the Volsungs*, the Old Norse saga itself, and the Old Norse poem-fragments that serve as its basis. In my view, Morris presents his own poem as the cyclical return of immemorial oral tradition, accomplishing this through a pagan mode of figuration with the immediacy of Pound's own ideogrammic method.

This visual immediacy is central to Morris's intervention in nineteenth-century culture. In *The Earthly Paradise* and *Sigurd*, Morris triggers a gestalt shift in how the world "shows up," repainting the cosmological picture within which things take on their shapes and meanings. The latter phrasing I borrow from Morris himself: "Rossetti's poems, and mine also, are rather of the nature of a series of pictures, and it is difficult to say whether he was greater as a poet or painter" (*CW* XXII, xxxij). To describe poetry as a pictorial practice is to use "picture" not just in the visual sense, but in the complete sense of the Modernist Image. This connection between pre-Raphaelite and Modernist abstraction is easy to

miss—where the latter abstracts through condensation and distillation, the former abstracts through profusion, which, in its own way, forces a non-discursive mode of pattern recognition.[20] In the following chapters, I approach Morris's re-Imaging of the world from metaphysical, aesthetic, and historical angles, respectively, attending throughout to his radical revision of the moral picture. What emerges is a new (yet ancient) order of values, in which the measure of ethical worth is no longer the human subject's free determination of self and world, but its coordination with the inhuman dimension of reality—nature, that is, the gods.

[20] Inevitably, the abstraction of profusion returns in Modernist epics such as the *Cantos*, *Ulysses*, and *Trilogy*.

CHAPTER II

Morris the Barbarian: De-Classicizing Paganism from Romanticism to Modernism

Introduction

In 1892, towards the end of his life, William Morris concluded an autobiographical talk at Kelmscott house with a religious credo as cryptic as it was emphatic: "I went twice to Iceland, in 1871 and 1873, and have always been deeply stirred by the Northern Sagas, as was Swinburne too. In religion I am a pagan" (*CW* XXII, xxxi-ii). Radical in his own day, and still eccentric in ours, Morris's willfully anachronistic religion seems ripe for study from all sorts of angles. What exactly did he mean by this? How did it manifest in his poetry and art? How did it relate to other aspects of his worldview (Medievalism, craft production, socialism, etc.)? Strangely, however, discussion of Morris's paganism disappears from the record after the 1970s. We do, of course, acknowledge Morris's passion for the culture of Viking Age Scandinavia, and recognize it as part of a broader fascination with the epics, myths, legends, and folktales of ancient Europe. But we never name the ideological charge that holds this ring of reference points together—paganism. It is high time to reengage with Morris's declared religion, not just for its intrinsic interest, but because the critical terrain has shifted, and cracks have begun to appear in what was once a smoother surface.

The few midcentury critics who did acknowledge Morris's paganism, were all too ready to assimilate it to more familiar categories. In the last and only work dedicated to the

subject, 1978's *Pagan Prophet*, Charlotte Oberg demonstrates the centrality of paganism to Morris's midlife poems, his later prose romances, and his worldview as a whole. However, even as Oberg opens the case, she closes it, insisting Morris was a "highly civilized" pagan (169). The upshot is that his paganism "does not differ in practical application from the Christianity more or less subscribed to by such 'establishment' poets as Tennyson and Browning" (171). If this is true, then Morris is also "more or less" a Christian, and the difference between these famously antagonistic religions disappears. Likewise, E.P. Thompson refers to Morris in passing as a "pagan and Communist" as if these strangely juxtaposed terms were natural corollaries (10).

Here, the claim can only be true if Morris's paganism and Communism both express some other, underlying ideology. Paul Meier puts his finger on that common denominator when he claims that Morris' religious views evolved toward an "ever more pagan naturalism," synonymous with "earthly humanism" (13). Pieced together, these accounts yield a single picture of Morris's religion—a humanist philosophy which figures itself through pagan myth but does not conflict with the more freethinking strains of Christianity, and finds a natural outlet in Marxist politics. This is M.H. Abrams's "Natural Supernaturalism," the translation of Protestant redemption narratives into the more secular language of British Romantic poetry and German Idealist philosophy.[1] In other words, for all these critics, Morris's paganism appeared as Romantic humanism, and thus, as a dialectical evolution of Christianity. This hasty conflation had the unfortunate

[1] More specifically, it is the left wing of the Natural Supernaturalist tradition, whose genealogy Terry Eagleton traces in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990).

consequence of forestalling further inquiry, by rendering the entire notion of "Morris as pagan" superfluous.

However, recent research opens up the possibility that Morris's paganism was more substantial, and less civilized, than previously thought. Ingrid Hanson has shown conclusively that, throughout his corpus, from his early Arthurian mythos to his late Teutonic prose romances, Morris portrays war as noble and aggression as ethically valuable. She sees this as inseparable from his love of "barbarism," giving us reason to take his oft-quoted hatred of modern "civilization" far more seriously than has been the rule (see esp. 65-77, 97-111). This martial-heroic ethos crystallizes in the ferocious battles of The Story of Sigurd The Volsung (1876), where, as Simon Dentith puts it, Morris embraces the "atavistic meanings from the pre-modern world" that "inevitably mark . . . . epic as a genre" (239). What I want to do, then, is link this new awareness of Morris's atavistic tendencies, back to the old awareness of Morris's paganism. In my view, the latter supplies the religious context and metaphysical basis for the former.

In this chapter, I outline the overall change in religious picture, the shift from a human to an inhuman frame of reference, that is, from a world where humanity makes the gods, to a world where the gods (i.e., nature) makes humanity. Rather than aligning Morris with his Romantic predecessors, I situate him in a distinctly Victorian movement toward the de-Classicization of paganism, as outlined by Stefano Evangelista.[2] This process began with Walter Pater's critical response to the legacy of Johann Winckelmann, whose

[2] For another treatment of this movement, with a special focus on feminine fertility cults, see Margot Louis's *Persephone Rises* (2009).

philosophical interpretation of Greek art formed the bedrock for a specifically Romantic Classicism (Evangelista 26). Over the course of the 1870s, Pater developed a theory of paganism that "accommodated primitive, chthonic, and irrational elements and which superseded Winckelmann's idealism," culminating in his 1876 essays on Greek fertility deities (19). In my view, this de-Classicization of paganism owed just as much to Morris (along with Swinburne), and culminated in the Modernist poetry of W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound, whose overt devotion to pagan gods challenged the humanist legacy of the nineteenth century.[3]

In the first part of this chapter, I distinguish the Romantic Classicism of Keats and Wordsworth, from the Modernist primitivism of Pound, linking the latter back to Pater, and then Morris. Morris can serve as the starting point for an alternate intellectual history of the long century, one that fleshes out our knowledge of Modernism's willfully concealed Victorian origins. In the second part, I argue that Morris's great epics, *The Earthly Paradise* (1868) and *Story of Sigurd The Volsung* (1876), are structured by the continuous influence of pagan gods Venus and Odin, respectively. Morris's gods, like Pound's, are *dynamist* gods, gods of power, arising from "inhuman" nature but expressing themselves in the cyclical, immanent playing-out of human action.[4] On these terms, Morris's gods have a plausible metaphysical reality, and Morris's paganism, despite its modern, abstract articulation,

[3] Swinburne's paganism is more firmly established, e.g., by Louis in *Swinburne and His Gods*, and this corroborates my treatment of Morris. However, Swinburne's religion suffers the same kind of minimization as Morris's. Yisrael Levin sees Swinburne moving toward an increasingly symbolic, Ideal notion of Apollo, identifying him with human *logos*, and eventually abandoning his paganism altogether. Sara Lyons acknowledges Swinburne's and Pater's apparent paganism, but reads it as an allegorical tool in their struggle for a self-sufficiently secular, materialistic world.

[4] See Sharon Cameron's focus on "impersonality," but with these intersubjective structures rooted firmly in the nonhuman, nonrational world; in forces rather than any mind/matter relation. To this end, I borrow the term "inhumanism" from American poet Robinson Jeffers.

bears a surprising resemblance to its ancient inspirations.[5] Overall, my aim is to complicate the intellectual biography of Morris, prize a major Victorian poet out from under the legacy of Romanticism, and trace the anti-humanist turn in Modernism back to Victorian, pagan roots.[6]

Romantic Conceptions of the Gods—from Wordsworth to Keats

We tend to think of the anthropomorphism of pagan gods as expressing an anthropocentric worldview, a conception we have inherited from Romanticism itself, and its Classicist antecedents. For instance, almost two hundred years later, Northrop Frye's account of the pagan gods as "ecstatic metaphor" reads like a gloss on Wordsworth's lyric, "The World is Too Much with Us" (1807), and exemplifies its humanism. However, this forecloses currents of thought that consolidated around figures like Morris and found their full expression in Modernism.

To distinguish Morris's barbaric paganism from the Classicist model of the Romantics, I bring in two contrastive reference points—Keats, whom Morris acknowledged as a central influence, and Wordsworth, whom Morris despised. Famously, Wordsworth dismissed Keats's early "Ode to Pan" as "A very pretty piece of Paganism" (Thorpe 1010).

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[5] In taking Morris' paganism as seriously as possible, I loosely follow the "literalist" tradition of Branka Arsic et. al. However, I want to stress the fit of critical apparatus to the object at hand. Jerome McGann classifies Morris, along with Yeats and Pound, as an "imaginative literalist" (building on Marianne Moore's designation for Yeats and Blake).

[6] My notion of Morris as *opposed* to humanism, and favoring an *inhuman* frame of reference, marks my difference from Jed Mayer, who reads Morris as flirting with a "post-humanism" of the kind described by Cary Wolfe. Wolfe defines post-humanism as a critical extension of the Enlightenment project, which eschews formal dialectics but nevertheless centers on the autopoiesis of systems through logical difference, starting from the "difference between system and environment" (14). In my view, this is no escape from humanism, but its twenty-first century reification: a highly contextual mind/matter dialectic projected into the structure of complex systems. Post-humanism is essentially Romantic, and Wolfe recognizes this affinity (19).

At one stroke, he damned the poem for its sensuous, un-Christian spirit, *and* for its facile treatment of this heathen subject matter. Nevertheless, Suzanne Barnett suggests that Keats really did see himself as a pagan, in keeping with public perception of himself and other members of the Shelley circle (12). Indeed, the misrecognition of Morris's paganism likely stems from overidentifying him with Keats. Wordsworth, for his part, thought of paganism as "merely an initial step on mankind's path to Christian enlightenment," but nevertheless showed interest in ancient religion, treating it with marked "ambivalence" (Barnett 89) (Hutton 204).

Where Wordsworth appreciated paganism as a "flawed, superstitious attempt . . . . to recognize divinity in the natural world," Keats and the Shelley circle wholeheartedly embraced it as "beautiful nature worship" (Barnett 88, 87). Ultimately, however, both Keats and Wordsworth understood the pagan gods as imaginative syntheses of human capacities with natural powers, and thus as primordial expressions of our freedom to create the world in our own image. (The important exception to this rule is Keats's conception of the titans as alien, barbaric gods, which I address in the next section.) Likewise, for both poets, paganism typified an emotional receptivity to nature, and an acceptance of natural laws and limitations, that was central to Romanticism, and distinguished it from hubristic Enlightenment rationalism. However, this openness to suffering and passion was simply the negative moment in a subtler, more viable triumphalism, the dialectical transcendence of nature from *within*.

My examples are Wordsworth's "The World Is Too Much with Us," and Keats's *Hyperion: A Fragment* (1820). Keats clearly distinguishes his Greek pantheon, in which

Apollo emerges from a struggle with alienation, from Wordsworth's, where the gods express an unalienated harmony of man and nature. Still, there is a clear continuity in concepts and concerns.[7] This is because Keats derives his poem's philosophical structure from the Protestant-humanist redemption narratives of Wordsworth and Milton (Abrams 124-29). Keats makes a bid to legitimize paganism *on Wordsworth's own terms*, presenting Apollo as a paradigm of redemptive humanism. Paradoxically, this actually makes Keats's Greek gods *more* Christian than Wordsworth's.

However, this process leaves a strange remainder in Keats's dethroned Titans, archaic gods of natural force who have less in common with Wordsworth's Classicized Proteus, than with the sinister gods of Wordsworth's representative "bad pagans," the druids. In this way, I account for the common perception of a link between Keats's and Morris's paganism: in his ambivalent portrayal of the titans, Keats paves the way for Morris's more seriously naturalistic vision of the gods.

In "The World is Too Much with Us," Wordsworth entertains a carefully bracketed nostalgia for the Hellenic pagan's immediate perception of divinity in nature. Distracted by the "getting and spending" of the marketplace, the modern urban subject sees "little in nature that is [his]"—that is, he is alienated or estranged from nonhuman nature, set over against it as subject to object, spirit to substance (lines 2-3). As Marjorie Levinson notes,

[7] Both poets situate paganism in religious/aesthetic teleologies, which work on roughly the same principles as Hegel's *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (1835). However, there are significant differences in periodization. Wordsworth takes a broad view of Greek paganism, and thus, though his treatment is steeped in Classicism, it has just as much to do with what Hegel understood as pre-Classical "Symbolic" religion. Keats's Titans clearly belong to this barbarous, Symbolic mode of imagination, and his ascendant Olympian Gods epitomize Hegel's Classical Ideal. However, Keats's central Olympian, Apollo, attains his vast wisdom and creative power through anguished inwardness, and thus belongs not to the Classical, but to the Romantic mode of imagination, which Hegel identifies with Christianity.

Wordsworth inadvertently reifies the very bourgeois-commercialist ideal he criticizes, by substituting one form of "getting" for another. The operative norm here is that nature *should* belong to humanity, a higher mode of "possession" that goes beyond coarse industrial exploitation. Wordsworth's modern subject suffers this dispossession as a kind of existential bondage, on several levels: 1) dependence on material goods and social recognition; 2) impotence, as he "lays waste his powers," where these are specifically human powers that flourish only through relation to nature; 3) disorientation, the feeling of being "out of tune" with fundamental reality, surrounded by people yet "forlorn."

When Wordsworth cries out that he'd "rather be / A pagan suckled in a creed outworn," what he longs for is the pagan's immediate imaginative power, his intuitive ability to see himself in the world (9-10). When Wordsworth's Greek looks out from the shore, he effortlessly "has sight of Proteus rising from the sea" (13). Simply by gazing on the waters, this instinctively artistic Hellene gives beautiful human form to a domain of nature that, for the modern poet, seems distant and resistant. In this way, the pagan takes imaginative possession of the sea, "sees that in nature which is his." As Levinson points out, Wordsworth's oddly stilted phrasings, "have sight of" and, in the previous line, "have glimpses," make this visionary seeing into the *having* of images, the imaginative appropriation of nature. On these terms, the Greek's deification of the sea is not so much worship of nature, as self-alienated worship of himself, expressed in the medium of nature. For Wordsworth, the pagan worshiper of Proteus foolishly venerates the sea, but, through his humanization of the sea, has an alienated apprehension of his own imaginative power.

Despite its relative immediacy, the pagan's imaginative act has a discursively mediated, dialectical structure, in which sensuous receptivity enables conscious activity (also seen in "Resolution and Independence" (1802)). Unlike the modern subject, the pagan is in "tune" with the world, Wordsworth's musical image underscoring that this is not just a mental, but a corporeal harmonization. Thus, where sublime natural phenomena "move us not," the pagan looks on the sea and is moved (9). His openness to sensuous experience moves him to awe, delight, and fear. But rather than being swept away in a torrent of passion, and thus, being reduced to an unfree body, the pagan sublates that passion into his imaginative image of the god. By giving conscious structure to perception, human form to nature, he asserts a radical autonomy, unifying himself with nonhuman forces that otherwise might overwhelm him, and thus, transcending them.[8]

Now, I want to return to the highly qualified nature of Wordsworth's appreciation for Greek paganism. "The World is Too Much With Us" is a poem within a poem, built on a framing conceit. It gives us "glimpses" of Proteus and Triton through the medium of the modern poet's retrospective reflection. In this way, Wordsworth draws a normative distinction between the pagan's childlike, Edenic identification with nature, and his own mature, deliberate recreation of this primordial act. On Frye's terms, the god-as-metaphor "arises in a state of society in which a split between a perceiving subject and a perceived object is not yet habitual" (111). In Hegelian terms, the pagan enjoys a naive unity of Spirit with substance, immediately apprehending his essential self-determination by making his

[8] In his opium writings, Thomas De Quincey shows the failure of this vision, becoming totally subsumed by fantasies of ancient terrors.

own gods. But the immediacy of this perception renders it inadequate: It is an involuntary expression of freedom, an unconscious consciousness of self.[9] This externality of the gods corresponds to a further externality: The pagan apprehends his freedom only as *outer* freedom, in the external shape and actions of his gods, and thus, remains ignorant of the spiritual ground of that freedom, which he can only know by turning his thought inward.[10] Thus, even here, there are seeds of alienation. It is only through further alienation from nature, which occurs through the progress of civilization, that humanity gains self-consciousness. While those who are mired in "getting and spending" passively suffer this alienation, the Romantic poet takes his suffering as occasion for a higher mode of creativity—a truly conscious, and thus truly free, reunification with nature.

Thus, the aesthetic Eden of pagan Greece foreshadows Wordsworth's own secular-Protestant redemption, a "paradise which would be a simple produce of the common day"

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[9] Here I use a generically Hegelian phrasing. In the *Aesthetics*, however, this is the contradiction specific to "Unconscious Symbolism," e.g. early Indian religion. Human worshipers instinctively generate symbolic forms, such as gods, and attribute reality to these symbols—not just *as* symbols (relationships inherent to the structure of the universe, ways of apprehending the divine, etc.), but as the shapes of real entities, existing in nature, set outside of and over themselves. This confusion of humanity and nature, self and other, inner and outer life expresses itself in gods with strange, hybrid bodies—part human and part animal, many-limbed or mutilated, etc. For Hegel, these sensuous forms are severely inadequate to expressing the Idea of Beauty. Where the Idea implies an achieved totality, the full expression of the universal Idea in particular parts, and the harmonization of clearly differentiated parts through their relation to the whole, the gods of the Unconsciously Symbolic mind are comprised of heterogenous, irrationally agglomerated parts. Where the Idea implies the full expression of human freedom, these domineering alien deities appear to contradict that freedom. For Hegel, the only form adequate to the embodiment of the Idea is the human body itself, the characteristic form of the Classical. Interestingly, Wordsworth chooses deities familiar from ornamental Classicism, yet equally suited to this pre-Classical paradigm. Proteus, the aquatic shapeshifter, and Triton, half man and half sea-beast, are chimerical survivals of Greece's old gods, the Titans, formed through the "animal symbolism" for which Hegel criticizes Indian and Egyptian religion. However, Wordsworth sets them within a Classicist ideological frame, and establishes a clearly Classical mood of harmonious composure.

[10] This is the contradiction specific to the Classical Ideal. Though the grand, beautiful bodies of the Olympian deities manifest a perfect, seemingly effortless unity of spiritual Idea and sensuous form, and stand out from one another as individuals, i.e., distinct totalities, this is possible only on an external level. To fully compass the autonomy of spirit, religious imagination must comprehend its *difference* from the particular body and the sensuous world, its negative relation to itself, and this is possible only through a more complex play of form against content, which Hegel identifies as the essence of Romantic art and Christian religion.

(Abrams 65). By situating paganism in this eschatological framework, Wordsworth gives it a Christian meaning, incorporates Proteus and Triton into the higher truth of what Frye would call a "more serious religion" (119). This theological historicization is built into the sonnet's volta. When the poet cries out his nostalgic longing, he says "Great God! I'd rather be / A Pagan . . . . " Here, Wordsworth makes sure to access his paganism in the subjunctive mode, routing it through the Christian God. The basic triangle of ecstatic metaphor—Pagan, Proteus, sea—is subjected to a further triangulation—poet, God, Pagan. In this second-order mediating turn, Wordsworth dialectically preserves and negates his subject matter, setting himself above the pagan's primordial imaginative act, even as he retrospectively appropriates it.

Where Wordsworth's Proteus is the artifact of a naïve art, sentimentally rekindled by the Romantic poet, Keats's Apollo simply *is* a Romantic poet, or rather, he must become one. In Book III of *Hyperion*, the Titan mother of the muses, Mnemosyne, visits the young god and bestows her gift of memory (i.e., prophetic knowledge of all time). At this point, Apollo has already mastered the lyre, his "new blissful golden melody" drowning out the primitive music of the Titan Clymene (Book II line 280). However, he has not yet come into his constitutive natural domain—has not yet displaced Hyperion as god of the sun. If anything, Keats's Apollo seems more like the human speaker of Wordsworth's sonnet—denatured, disoriented, and "forlorn":

> I strive to search wherefore I am so sad,
> Until a melancholy numbs my limbs;
> And then upon the grass I sit, and moan,
> Like one who once had wings. O why should I
> Feel cursed and thwarted, when the liegeless air
> Yields to my step aspirant? Why should I

Spurn the green turf as hateful to my feet? (III 88-94)

While *we* know that Apollo becomes a god of solar light, *he* does not. Thus, he endures classic Romantic "melancholy," desire for an absent, unknown object. Though this is often a nostalgic attitude, here it is futural—Apollo longs for something he does not yet have, yet cannot conceive. Temporally, Apollo suffers the difference between his current state, and his yet-unrealized developmental telos, dominion of the sun. This latent essence shows itself, when Apollo's imagination flickers to "the sun, the sun! / And the most patient brilliance of the moon! / And stars by thousands!" (97-99). Metaphysically, Apollo experiences estrangement from nature on two levels: first, in its particularity, i.e., his separation from the sun, his own "particular beauteous star" (100); second, in its universality, as his longing for the stars leads him to "spurn the green turf." This is a significant departure from Wordsworth's Proteus assertively rising from the sea, or Triton exuberantly sounding his great horn. Apollo suffers all the same woe as this modern subject, without the consoling retrospective vision. In this way, Keats's pagan deity is not only *more human* and less natural than Wordsworth's, but also, glaringly anachronistic.

As with Wordsworth's lyric "I," Apollo's apparent estrangement from nature symptomatizes a deeper alienation—estrangement from the free creative power, i.e., imagination, that is his true essence. The godlet's obfuscated separation from the sun restricts his music to mere prettiness, rather than true beauty. "Where is power?" he laments to Mnemosyne (101-03). Were he only shown the way to his "particular beauteous star," Apollo would "flit into it with his lyre, / And make its silvery splendour pant with bliss" (101-02). Corporeally unifying himself with the star, he would take it as the object of

his art, and in so doing, make its power his. In unifying himself with this natural force, Apollo appropriates it, makes it a medium for music that is truly beautiful. Rather than simply pleasing the senses, Apollo's music will express his world-forming freedom.

The necessary condition for this freedom is moral self-consciousness, which the young god can only gain through Christlike suffering. In answer to Apollo's plea, Mnemosyne does not speak, but lets the young god "read / a wondrous lesson in her silent face" (111-12). Mnemosyne prophetically reveals all of history, the universe's distant past, and its far future, in a manner that echoes both Michael's prophecy to Adam in *Paradise Lost*, and that scene's Classical basis, Anchises's prophecy to the protagonist in *The Aeneid*. At first, he vaunts that "Knowledge enormous makes a God of me," but soon, the knowledge takes its toll. Where first, he suffered his ignorance, now he suffers his enlightenment with "wild commotions":

> Most like the struggle at the gate of death;
> Or liker still to one who should take leave
> Of pale immortal death, and with a pang
> As hot as death's is chill, with fierce convulse,
> Die into life: so young Apollo anguished. (126-30)

Keats's paradox, "die into life," conveys the movement of determinate negation. Apollo's vision of historical suffering is itself a higher, second-order suffering, his anguish at a story that he knows, and would alter if he could, but cannot. This alienation from historical necessity is, ultimately, a further alienation from the powers of the cosmos, manifest in the grind of cause and effect, which he feels as an external imposition on 1) himself and 2), through his own pain, on humanity. Apollo's experience of limitation by and estrangement from nature, however, occasions his waxing mastery of nature: even as he "shrieks,"

something (perhaps a solar light?) begins to emanate "from all his limbs Celestial" (134-35). Only with this uniquely *human* moral wisdom, born through suffering of suffering, can he attain divine unity with nature, displacing the Titan, Hyperion, from dominion over the sun.

Titans, Druids, and "Bad Paganism"—Romantic Images of the Inhuman

In a sense, Apollo is the chief god of Keats's pantheon, embodying the principle that constitutes the others, and morally ratifies their reign—the beauty of the Ideal human form. Apollo's alienation from nature, his consciousness of it as an object over and against him, allows him to freely, actively bring its unruly energies into harmonious, unified form. It is beauty, in its historical development, that raises the Olympians over the more ancient deities they defeated, the Titans. Keats places this progress narrative in the mouth of a Titan, Oceanus, who gains historical awareness through his displacement by the new sea-god, Poseidon:

> Mark well!
> As Heaven and Earth are fairer, fairer far
> Than Chaos and blank Darkness, though once chiefs;
> And as we show beyond that Heaven and Earth
> In form and shape compact and beautiful,
> In will, in action free, companionship,
> And thousand other signs of purer life;
> So on our heels a fresh perfection treads,
> A power more strong in beauty, born of us
> And fated to excel us, as we pass
> In glory that old Darkness: nor are we
> Thereby more conquered, than by us the rule
> Of shapeless Chaos. (II 205-17)

Here for Keats, beauty appears as the ultimate concretion of the moral law, harmonizing spirit and sense and in so doing, balancing freedoms of thought and action, manifest in a principle of love. This regularity and control manifests in the more economic and elegant bodies of the new divinities, that is, their less titanic, more distinctly *human* appearance. With this humanized beauty, comes a new and paradoxical power. Though as Saturn laments, the Olympians are of comparatively "untremendous might," they have prevailed through "the eternal law / That first in beauty should be first in might" (I 157) (II 228-29).

One could construe Keats as shifting Wordsworth's progressive timeline back a notch, to make the Titans a benignly naïve unity (Classicism, Schiller's "naïve" poetry), and the Olympians a morally self-conscious, mature divinity (Romanticism, Schiller's "sentimental" poetry). However, this doesn't account for Keats' polemical purpose—to show the serene beauty of the Olympian deities, in all its apparent naiveté, as emergent from historical suffering and aesthetic labor. On the one hand, this is the suffering of the Titans, as victims of progress. On the other, it is the burden shouldered retroactively by the young Apollo who, though he embodies the essence of all gods, is last to rise to full divinity. If Keats is to show Classical paganism as a product rather than a given, he has to keep the Ideal human form of the Olympians. To solve this problem, Keats must begin to imagine a non-Classical, non-humanist paganism, inadvertently contributing to the tradition picked up by Morris.

While the Titans, too, are anthropomorphic, they are strangely inhuman, acquiring a degree of moral self-consciousness only through their fall (and only then in certain cases, e.g. Oceanus and Clymene—as opposed to the dazed incomprehension of Saturn, or the

defiant fury of Enceladus). As Keats imagines them, the Titans are emphatically non-Classical in form. There is no clearly marked distinction between their bodies and their elemental domains. For example, Oceanus begins to speak "In murmurs which his first-endeavouring tongue / Caught infant-like from the far-foamed sands" (II 171-72). In one of the poem's most striking images, Keats shows us the god *as* the ocean, gathering itself into speech. Here, Frye's paradigm of "Neptune is the sea" obtains with potent literalism, and thus, with a less clearly humanist valence. Oceanus is emergent from, or a condensation of, the movement of the water, his power actually embodied. Oceanus is in two places at once, visibly consolidated in the mountains, yet also lapping at the sands, and his philosophical oratory arises from his constant rhythmic movement.

By contrast, the self-contained Classical beauty of Poseidon raises him up out of, and sets him over and against, the sea, expressing a closural autonomy:

> Have ye beheld the young God of the Seas,
> My dispossessor? Have ye seen his face?
> Have ye beheld his chariot, foamed along
> By noble winged creatures he hath made?
> I saw him on the calmed waters scud,
> With such a glow of beauty in his eyes,
> That it enforced me to bid sad farewell
> To all my empire. (232-39)

The shift from Oceanus to Poseidon is a shift from a god who truly *is* the sea, in all its unassimilable might, to a god who traverses and *rules* the sea; from an abstract, megalithic statue of Archaic type, to a temperately expressive Classical marble or, more proximate for Keats, the centerpiece of an 18th century fountain. Poseidon's identity with the sea means something very different from Oceanus's. In the Ideal human form of the new god, we see

humanity taking symbolic ownership of nature, through the ecstatic identification described by Frye. We see a subject (Poseidon) and an object (the sea) to link in a metaphorical proposition. And if anything, Keats sets these terms apart more clearly, than Wordsworth does with his Proteus "rising from the sea."

Keats's Titans are barbarian gods—gods of unfettered natural force. Hyperion is "first of the Sun Gods and thus . . . . a decidedly prehistorical figure," falling far outside the boundaries of the Classical. Keats captures this immemorial antiquity by "strongly associating" Hyperion with ancient Egypt (Levinson 196). In opposing Hyperion to Apollo, "Keats opposes Egypt to Greece, barbarism to classicism, repressive to progressive culture, abstract to organic principles, force to intellect, power to beauty, religion to art, slavery to freedom" (197).[11] In other words, Hyperion is not an Ideal hypostasis of human creativity (Apollo), but an anthropomorphic image of the sun in all its radiant inhumanity, a natural power imposing itself on the human world, and making itself felt through hierarchy and violence.[12] Where Apollo asks only that his worshippers be free, Hyperion gives orders; where Apollo embodies *existential* sacrifice leading to moral knowledge, a Christlike suffering of suffering, Hyperion demands *literal* sacrifice, a toll in blood or toil. Morris's

[11] T.E. Hulme, a friend of and major influence on Pound and T.S. Eliot, develops a theory of inhuman art via the sculpture of Egypt, and the geometric mosaics of the Byzantines. He sees this expressing supernatural order that is "anti-vital" and utterly separate from the "vital" world of nature (425-28). Morris, not long before him, sees this kind of stratification within nature, though going beyond the bounds of organic life and, in some cases, raising the inorganic over the organic.

[12] Hyperion and his kin are also *temporally* inhuman. Where Poseidon and Zeus bring about a cosmic revolution, and Apollo suffers this historical process as a personal *bildungsroman*, the Titans stand beyond human conceptions of development and time, monumental ruins of another, unfathomable era. In this way, they are twinned with geological deep time, referents to contemporaneous developments in geology and paleontology and to the increasingly unfathomable past of the nineteenth century.

gods, too, are barbarian gods, his Odin and even his Venus modeled not on Apollo, but on Hyperion.

Keats's vision of Titans as barbaric nature-gods corresponds to Wordsworth's vision of the Druids as barbaric mortal worshipers. Where for Wordsworth, the Greeks were more or less "good pagans"—blessed by lively imagination to the point of delusion—the Druids and their Celtic followers were "bad pagans"—fanatics making murderous offerings to idols:

> [The] savage nations bowed the head
> To gods delighting in remorseless deeds;
> Gods which themselves had fashioned, to promote
> Ill purposes, and flatter foul desires.
> Therein the bosom of yon mountain cove,
> To those inventions of corrupted man
> Mysterious rites were solemnized; and there,
> Amid impending rocks and gloomy woods,
> Of those terrific idols, some received
> Such dismal service, that the loudest voice
> Of the swollen cataracts (which now are heard
> Soft murmuring) was too weak to overcome,
> Though aided by wild winds, the groans and shrieks
> Of human victims, offered up to appease
> Or to propitiate. (*The Excursion* 684-98)

Wordsworth's polemical angle is revealing. Where Keats identifies the Titans with primordial, essential nature, Wordsworth casts the Celtic gods as self-mirroring "inventions of corrupted man," working to "promote / Ill purposes, and flatter foul desires." Here, he deploys Romanticism's interpretation of gods as imaginatively-constructed syntheses of humanity and nature, as a means to delegitimize modern Europe's ancient internal other, rather than to recontain it, as before. Moreover, he strongly privileges the human side of this synthesis, so that the gods become images *not* of "swollen cataracts" or "wild winds," that is, authentic, spiritually permeated Nature, but of the debased, merely-sensuous nature *within* the human subject. Wordsworth's more famous depiction of the "Gipsies," a modern internal other, works along similar lines.[13]

Modernist Barbarism

The young Ezra Pound and his fellow Radical Modernists conceived their own paganism in opposition to the anthropocentric, Classicized pseudo-paganism of the Romantics. In a polemical review called "The New Sculpture," published in a 1914 issue of *The Egoist*, Pound laments that "the artist has been for so long a humanist!" (68). He draws a sharp distinction between this Romantic-humanist tradition, and his own vision of terrible beauty, gleefully activating every trope of Bad Paganism:

[13] Simpson and Garrett richly characterize this otherness, and their accounts can be extended to my own religious frame of reference. The Gipsies are suspiciously distant from established Christianity, and folk-etymologically tied to barbarous, pagan, Egypt (Eliot plays on this linkage in *The Waste Land*). Wordsworth describes their encampment as a dense knot of impassioned bodies, rather like his frenzied mobs of Druidic worshipers. Though the poet is fascinated by the Gipsies's primordial vitality, he sees it as stagnated or perverse. Ever stirring but never changing, divorced from virtuous labor and progressive history, the Gipsies lack the creative impulse that would anchor them in Nature, i.e., the world of embodied, self-expressive mind.

> You could believe that man was the perfect creature, or creator, or lord of the universe or what you will, and that there was no beauty to surpass the beauty of man . . . . or . . . . on the contrary you could believe in something beyond man, something important enough to be fed with the blood of hecatombs. (67)

A "hecatomb" is a unit of Greek or Roman sacrifice, 100 oxen to be exact. The superhuman, even inhuman "something" fed by this sacrifice is the multitude of "violent gods," which could equally be those of Homer's Achaean warriors, or "the Tahiytian savage" revealed by modern anthropology (68). In this way, Pound posits a metaphysical hierarchy of gods over mortals. Mortals affirm their place in this hierarchy through an ethos of sacrifice, implemented through bodily and/or spiritual violence. Furthermore, this metaphysical hierarchy expresses itself politically, in a new social order with artists at the apex:

> We turn back, we artists, to the powers of the air, to the djinns who were our allies aforetime, to the spirits of our ancestors. It is by them that we have ruled and shall rule, and by their connivance that we shall mount again into our hierarchy. The aristocracy of entail and of title has decayed, the aristocracy of commerce is decaying, the aristocracy of the arts is ready again for its service. (68)

Pound sketches something like Plato's *Republic*, if the poets had exiled the philosophers, and stood atop looming step pyramids in triumph. He and his avant-garde fellows are modern sorcerers or shamans, "heirs of the witch-doctor and the voodoo," calling "the powers of the air" down into the world through their works. In other words, they are Wordsworth's druids, conducting frenzied, bloody sacrifices to strange, inhuman gods, that is, to Keats's Titans. These new/old artists carve out abstract, megalithic forms, like Stonehenge, the Sphinx, or even the *Iliad*, and in these majestically indifferent bodies, gods appear.

Pound's image of gods as real, tumultuous "spirits," is precisely the opposite of Keats's or Wordsworth's Classical pantheon, where the gods are individual expressions of a universal, rational human Spirit. These Modernist gods are nonrational, external forces—"powers of the air." What sets apart the new generation of artists, Pound says, is their ability to "take pleasure in forces," and this disposition leads them to the gods.[14] The artist-druids coordinate themselves with divine forces, sacrifice to them, and in so doing, channel currents of energy into inhuman art. This coordination with primordial forces depends on the fact that those forces are not *only* external, not just flying around in "the air" and striking the human subject like billiard balls. Rather, they traverse us, constitute, and animate us, as nonrational, bodily impulses.

Pound's collaborator, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, addresses this side of the metaphysical picture in a subsequent issue of *The Egoist,* savaging a reader's Romantic-Classicist critique of "The New Sculpture." "The modern sculptor" simply cannot be judged against "the superficial qualities of the late Greeks," because he "is a man who works with instinct as his inspiring force. His work is emotional." There is a striking difference with Wordsworth's understanding of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquility," mediated by conscious processes of representation and reflection. What interests Gaudier-Brzeska is not the rational, self-consciousness superstratum of the subject, but the irrational, involuntary instinct-core—"inspiring force." This is the internal outlet of "the powers of the

[14] This dynamist language runs throughout: "We do not believe in Eutopias, we accept all that the realist has said. We do not think his statement complete, for he has often dissected the dead and taken no count of forces" (68).

air," the way in which the gods act through the artist. Art, then, is a circuit running from external power (god) through internal force (instinct) to external, objective form.

Throughout, Gaudier-Brzeska pitches his and Pound's primitivist theory against Romantic Classicism, which, despite its focus on sensuous embodiment and rich emotion, he associates with sterile rationalism:

> The archaic works discovered at Gnossos are the expressions of what is termed a 'barbaric' people—i.e. a people to whom reason is secondary to instinct. The pretty works of the great Hellenes are the productions of a civilised—i.e. a people to whom instinct is secondary to reason. (117-18)

For Gaudier-Brzeska, and Pound as well, this reactivation of Europe's ancient, pagan past goes hand in hand with a rejection of Eurocentrism—a questioning of progressive universalism at home *and* abroad. They see themselves not just as following in the footsteps of archaic or Homeric Greeks, but, in so doing, as "continuing the tradition of the barbaric peoples of the earth (for whom we have sympathy and admiration)" (117-18). Ingrid Hanson captures this incipient tendency in late-Victorian culture, and shows Morris concertedly deploying it in his epics and prose romances, where imperial accounts of Maori or Zulu "savagery" inform his treatment of Viking "barbarism" (104-07). For Morris and his Modernist successors, the barbaric elevation of instinct over reason is a *good* thing—and at the very least, no worse than the opposite tendency in civilization.

At a theoretical level, this revaluation of nonrational impulse owes much to Walter Pater. His review, "Poems by William Morris" (1868), effectively set the parameters for subsequent readings of *The Earthly Paradise*, perhaps more than is commonly acknowledged. Specifically, we have inherited the notion that the *Paradise* is, for better or

worse, a work of delicately mediated "aesthetic historicism."[15] However, this privileges the first part of the review, rather than the latter, more metaphysical section, which Pater took as the basis for his famous conclusion to *The Renaissance* (1873) and the essay, "Aesthetic Poetry" (1889). Here, Pater turns from historical dialectics to somatic dynamism, asking, "How can we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?" (311). Almost fifty years later, Pound uses the same phrasing: "pleasure in forces." Of course, there is a different context. When Pater sketches this journey from one nexus of energies to the next, he is thinking in terms of hedonic calculus (Bentham's term), with the goal of "getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time" (312). When Pound takes "pleasure in forces," it is an index of contact with the divine: on the one hand, the affect of worship, on the other hand, the affect of potency, as the artist channels "something beyond man" into his work.

Yet despite his more secular, consumption-sided approach, Pater does seek to coordinate himself with inhuman power, and does radically decenter the human subject, without lamenting this fact. Rather, Pater conceives of the self as a dynamic process, the "concurrence renewed from moment to moment of forces" (310). Where the general tendency is to read Morris through Pater's historicism, I think we can understand something new about Morris, via his *influence* on Pater's dynamism. Pater developed his

[15] I borrow the phrase from Carolyn Williams. In her annotated edition of the *Paradise*, Florence Boos describes it as striving toward a modest retrospective freedom, so that "the effort to recreate past emotions is the only cyclical 'paradise' which has ever endured" (7). For the same reasons, Herbert Tucker dismisses it as historicist "comfort poetry," encouraging a "liberal optionalism" on the part of the reader ("Tale" 388) (*Epic* 514).

ideas in dialogue with Morris's *Paradise*, recognizing and participating in its "pagan spirit," characterized by the "sense of death and the desire of beauty; the desire of beauty quickened by the sense of death" (309). This is not the moralized Romantic Classicism of Keats and Wordsworth, but Bad Paganism, attuned to those "dark possibilities" of the erotic which include violence, self-destruction, and death (Evangelista 40-41). By placing Morris alongside, or even prior to, Pater, we can more easily situate him in Pater's de-Classicizing turn, and recognize him as an unwitting fellow-traveler of Nietzsche, whom Evangelista notes as a German analog of this British pagan tradition (and intersecting with it, in the work of Michael Field) (122-24).

Morris's Gods—Venus and Odin

The founding testaments of Morris's paganism are the two great mythological epics bookending his middle years—*The Earthly Paradise* (1868) and *Sigurd* (1876). It is widely acknowledged that *The Earthly Paradise* and *Sigurd* show a certain symmetry, and struggle with the same set of fundamental, existential questions. For instance, Herbert Tucker has shown how each engages "macropoetic" form to generate a deep-historical sense of time. Tucker and many others, however, interpret these midlife works under the sign of Morris's late-life politics, as two successive steps towards the *telos* of Marxism. Contrary to this tradition, I approach these epic poems as sites for genuine ideological experimentation, where Morris developed an original system of thought, and entertained the possibility of a radical break with modernity.

In my view, the affinity between *The Earthly Paradise* and *Sigurd* arises from a common religious basis—each pays tribute to a single pagan god, identified with a form of natural power that arises from "outside" humanity, but works "within" the human breast. Here, there is precedent in Richard Frith's observation that "Morris's divinities remain resolutely alien." However, where Frith takes this as evidence that Morris "does [not] really attempt to give . . . metaphysical significance" to his gods, I take it as evidence to the contrary (126). The inhumanity of the gods is what makes them gods, not humans. When Frith observes that Odin intervenes without "reason or plan," he is holding an ancient god accountable to modern, humanist notions of character, motivation, and conscious intent. What he notices, in other words, is that Morris's Odin intervenes more or less like the Odin of the original *Volsunga Saga*. His actions have a specifically pagan metaphysical significance, and a specifically pagan moral meaning.

Charlotte Oberg identifies Venus as "a major force in the tales of *The Earthly Paradise*," whose appearances and interventions constitute "the basis of the unity of the entire work" (65-66). Likewise, Florence Boos notes that "Odin's advent at moments of stress" is a "recurring quasi-religious motif" in *Sigurd*, and that these appearances are "too numerous to trace" ("Banners" 29). Placing these insights side by side, I propose a gestalt shift in perception: The main subjects of these narratives are not so much Morris' individual human protagonists, who barely qualify as characters by the standards of their day, but the pagan gods themselves, as the metaphysical forces that drive the heroic deeds of mortals. I see this mode of organization as very roughly paralleling Nietzsche's conception of the Apolline and Dionysiac drives as "artistic powers which erupt from

nature itself, *without the mediation of any human artist*," shaping humanity rather than being created by it (19).

Where Venus is a generative power of nature, expressing herself in painful longing, Odin is a destructive power of nature, expressing himself in berserker frenzy. Together, they make the world. This distinction works along a different axis from Nietzsche's Apollo / Dionysus pairing, and also, crucially, from Freud's Eros / Thanatos opposition. To illustrate the structural significance of Venus and Odin, and their complementary roles in Morris's epics, I want to leap ahead to their final manifestations.

Both poems culminate in strange spasms of human sacrifice. At the end of "The Hill of Venus," the final tale of *The Earthly Paradise*, the knightly hero Walter wrenches himself away from the arms of Venus herself and goes before the Pope himself to confess his mortal sin. As he begins, however, the goddess appears to him alone, and his confession swerves into an impassioned defense of "the Gods, who erst / held rule here where thou dwellest." Though Walter, born into the Medieval church, cannot but believe in the reality of the Christian God, he ventures a heretical question: "What if these [old gods] held sway / Even now in some wise, father?" Though he believes himself damned, he vaunts that he need not fear the wrath of God, "Because my body and soul I gave her there" (322). He then makes good on his "gift," racing out of the Vatican and returning to the goddess' barrow-mound. Despite his love for the goddess, the reigning mood is not triumphant ecstasy, but heroic fatalism. The fallen knight descends into the earth with "No ignorance, no wonder, and no hope," taking "the dark door / Unto the fate now his for evermore" (323). All the narrator knows of Walter's fate is that he finds "horrors passing hell" alongside "joys by which our

joys are misery . . . But hopeless both, if such a thing may be" (323). Here, Walter literally sacrifices himself *to* the goddess Venus, who appears not just as a benevolent granter of erotic bliss, but a fear-inspiring chthonic deity. He gives his life not in the sense of giving *up* life, but in the sense of giving his *life*, trapped in endless oscillation between pleasure and pain, to the goddess herself.

At first, Walter's defiance seems a futile Quixotism, a purely symbolic gesture. But after he goes beneath the hill, the Pope's staff bears fruit. The blossoming of the staff is no indulgence from God, but a sign that powers older than God are at work in the world – that even in the Vatican, Venus still "holds sway." Green leaves, "wondrous flowers, / that earth knew not," and "the ripe fruit of heaven's unmeasured hours" all tie the matter of sexual love back to the more basic and encompassing sphere of fertility, the ceaseless regeneration of life (325).[16] The Pope bears witness to the blossoming staff, and dies with a smile on his face – converted?

At the end of "Gudrun," Book IV of *Sigurd*, the brothers Gunnar and Hogni deliberately lead their men into an ambush in the hall of Atli (Attila the Hun), cutting down droves of foes but ultimately succumbing to weight of numbers. When Atli's lackeys approach the captured Hogni, ready to carve out his heart, he cries out, "Speed ye the

[16] In this respect my reading follows Oberg's account of the blossoming of the staff as "a token of renewal and rebirth . . . symbolic of the regenerative effect of physical love triumphant over ascetic systems," as well as her overall assessment of "The Hill of Venus" as a victory for "the here and now of paganism" over "the hereafter of Christianity" (61-62). Regarding the traces of Christian imagery here, e.g. "That might have been the bright archangel's wand," Jeffrey Skoblow helpfully notes that "the Pope immediately figures the event in terms he can understand . . . He has of course . . . got it wrong. 'That might have been' is not That is" (180). Strangely, Skoblow attributes the blossoming of the staff to a figure called "Habundia," whom he imports from Morris' much later *The Waters of the Wondrous Isles* (1897) to serve as the Jamesonian "absent cause" of *The Earthly Paradise* (180). It is not clear why he favors a goddess *absent* from the text itself over one whose presence pervades it.

work!" (*CW* XII, 292). When Atli has Gunnar cast into a snakepit, his response is to "rise at once to his feet, and smite the harp with his hand," recounting the Norse cosmogony and telling-over his own deeds until the greatest serpent strikes him dead (CW XII, 296-9). At last, their sister Gudrun burns down the hall of the Hun, stabs Atli himself, and hurls herself into the ocean. Thus, she "cut off her tide of returning; for the sea-waves over her swept" (*CW* XII, 304-6). The Niblungs sacrifice themselves to vanquish their enemy, at the ultimate cost of "cutting off" their own family line.[17]

The dark shadow of Odin—lord of war, sorcery, and death—hangs over this frantic fight, and the final deaths of the Niblung kindred. Though Odin never makes a personal appearance in Book IV, he gets the last words in the book, and in the entire poem: "Now ye know of the Need of the Niblungs and the end of broken troth, / All the death of kings and of kindreds and the Sorrow of Odin the Goth." (*CW* XII, 306) Morris invokes Odin here in his role as ancestral deity of the Germanic peoples, and the ancestor of the Volsungs in particular.

Morris's Gods—Nature Without

In the case of Wordsworth's Proteus and Keats's Apollo, we saw how anthropomorphic identification of the god with an aspect of nature establishes an anthropocentric hierarchy

[17] Here, Morris modifies his saga material to ensure that the Niblungs utterly extinguish themselves in one final, self-inflicted blow. Where the Gudrun of the *Volsunga Saga* "worked the deed" of her vengeance with a mysterious son of Hogni, named Niflung ("Niblung") Morris makes no mention of this son, and Gudrun does the deed on her own (Byock 104). Thus, there is no heir left to carry on the Niblung name. Where Morris' Gudrun hurls herself full-force from the cliff, the Gudrun of the saga washes up on foreign shores and lives to a heart-sick end, (106). In a final speech of withering pathos, she goes to her chamber and calls her old love to bring her death: "Better if Sigurd would come to meet me and I would go with him." Her last words conjure him by his promise on their wedding-night to "visit me from Hel and then wait there for me" (108).

of value: humanity actualizing itself through self-reflexive mixing with the natural world. In the case of Morris' Odin and Venus, however, this anthropomorphism works the other way around, establishing the claims of nature *on* humanity. In *Sigurd*, Odin first visits the Volsungs as a storm bursting into the bounded world of mortals:

> But e'en as men's hearts were hearkening some heard the thunder pass
> O'er the cloudless noontide heaven; and some men turned about
> And deemed that in the doorway they heard a man laugh out.
> Then into the Volsung dwelling a mighty man there strode,
> One-eyed and seeming ancient, yet bright his visage glowed:
> Cloud-blue was the hood upon him, and his kirtle gleaming-grey
> As the latter morning sundog when the storm is on its way . . . . (*CW* XII 4-5)

Odin *is* the power of the storming sky, coalescing into human form as it flows into the world of mortals. The sheer motif of descent from a higher to lower realm (or descent of the sky from the sky) conveys a definite metaphysical hierarchy. Here, Odin's grim cloaked figure is no mere metaphorical appropriation of the sky's power for humanity, but a paradigm for human *subordination to*, and *attunement to*, that power—in this case, by the mortal Volsung heroes whom he summons to great deeds.[18] Though the basis for this relationship is naturalistic, it has the structure of genuine, premodern worship, rather than the modern cult of self-expression. Morris' Odin is what Pound would call a "power beyond man," insofar as it determines the social-historical world of humanity.

We see a similar dynamic in "Atalanta's Race," the Greek story that begins the monthly tale-telling ritual of *The Earthly Paradise*. When the male protagonist Milanion finally affirms his overpowering love for Atalanta, and commits himself to the quite-likely

[18] Perhaps Morris was thinking of Odin in an 1873 letter describing City weather to Mrs. Alfred Baldwin, not long after visiting Iceland: "it is wet and wild weather here now, but somehow I don't dislike it, and there is something touching about the real world bursting into London with these gales" (*CW* XXII xxxiii).

fatal race, he invokes the help of Queen Venus. Here too, we have the pattern of a god entering into a mortal enclosure from the exterior wellspring of its power. Venus' temple at Argolis embodies Morris' pagan metaphysic, in that it is not fully enclosed, but allows the ocean—Venus' birthplace—into the building itself, at its central shrine. The pious hero does his best to keep vigil:

> But when the waves had touched the marble base,
> And steps the fish swim over twice a-day,
> The dawn beheld him sunken in his place
> Upon the floor; and sleeping there he lay,
> Not heeding aught the little jets of spray
> The roughened sea brought nigh, across him cast,
> For as one dead all thought from him had passed. (*CW* III 98)

Milanion nods off and loses consciousness, his mortal body washed over by the goddess' own sea, as if drowned in it. It is only in this state of ritual death, that the goddess approaches in "a bright cloud . . . . Lighting the dull waves that beneath it lay," redolent with "delicious unnamed odors" (99). Just as with the approach of Odin, we have a definite relation of hierarchy, the hero adopting a posture of receptivity to higher power emergent from nature. And in the same way that Odin is no mere personification of "the sky" in general, but a sudden raging stormwind, Venus is no mere personification of "the ocean," but manifests in a particular oceanic complex of water, light, and wind—one explored extensively by Ezra Pound in *The Cantos*.

Where the Romantics, then, understood pagan gods as expressions of distinctly human creative power in the field of nature, Morris' pagan gods are *powers of nature* expressing themselves creatively in the field of humanity. What they "make" is human history. The preceding examples already suggest this, insofar as Odin's intervention in the

Volsung world sets the chain of deeds and counter-deeds in motion, and Venus' intervention enables Milanion to complete his quest. But to draw out any metaphysical implications from these scenes, we need a causal mechanism: How is it possible for impersonal powers of nature to initiate human activity, in anything other than a mechanical way? In other words, how can natural force be more than an extrinsic, limiting condition on human activity—and instead be an enabling condition for human action, the basis for an ethos?

Morris's Gods—Nature Within

The key is that Morris' gods are not *just* personified forces of nature "outside" Morris' heroes, but corresponding forces of nature "within" them: passions, or in more contemporary parlance, affects. Ingrid Hanson has already shown that *Sigurd* gives pride of place to heroic deeds "where the will . . . is brought under the control of instinct, rather than the other way around" (74). If we shift from the human to divine frame of reference, Hanson's phenomenology of "instinct" reappears as a phenomenology of divine possession.

On these terms, Odin is at once the storm in the sky, *and* the storm that fills the hearts of mortal heroes—wrath. After descending from the midday storm, Odin thrusts a sword called Wrath into the mighty tree at the center of the Volsung hall, and challenges the assembled Volsung and Niblung warriors to pull it out, with the winner taking it as a gift. When he draws it forth, Morris' Sigmund knows himself to be "the hired of Odin, his workday will to speed" (8). As the "hired of Odin," Sigmund will reap his own enemies as a sacrificial "harvest" for the god of war, until he himself is "laid by the last of the sheaves

with [his] wages earned at the last" (8). Here, Sigmund presents himself as both harvester and the final sheaf of the harvest. Through this sacrificial self-dedication, Sigmund becomes a conduit for divine power, an outlet for its work in human history. The hero's dealing-out of death, and his own eventual demise, are joined in a circuit of sacrifice to Odin, such that the hero's final gift to the god is *himself*. It is in this spirit that the god at last descends to *oppose* Sigmund, honoring his hired hand by personally "reaping" him (53-55). And it is in this spirit that Gunnar the Niblung, dying, "hearkens the voice of Odin" (299). Morris invokes the familiar Christian tropes of "harvester" and "sheaf" to paint a diametrically opposing moral picture: Where Christ reaps the bounty of the field of souls, redeeming the faithful from bondage to the flesh, Odin enjoins Sigmund to conduct a holy war in which each one of his foes is an actual human sacrifice.

This sacrificial ethic is redoubled in Sigmund's relationship to Sinfjotli, his son by incestuous union. As they prepare to wreak their vengeance on the wicked Siggeir, Sinfjotli pledges to his father, "I am the sword of the Gods: and thine hand shall hold the hilt" (35). In battle, Sinfiotli becomes the classic berserker, exhibiting the phenomenology of Odinic wrath raised to an animal intensity—where Sigmund stands firm and resolute, "Sinfiotli gnaws on his shield-rim, and his face is haggard and white" (35). As a term, "passion" becomes clarified in this passage. It is not a reflective, subjective state, but a compelling, non-rational impulse that comes as if from "outside" the subject and runs straight through him to an object (in this case, the foe) like electricity, a lightning bolt passing through a grounded object.

Sinfjotli is utterly unselfed by this passion, and thus fulfills the terms of his strange metaphor. Where his father wields Odin's wrath, Sinfiotli *becomes* it. But this difference in kind rests on a difference in degree. Both Sigmund and his wrathful son achieve their greatest glory not by transcendentally transforming nature, but by opening themselves to a tide of raw passion that works in the very heart of life, and the stormwind works in the sky. Thus, Morris takes one aspect of the Romantic tradition—its emphasis on impassioned receptivity to nature—and carries it to such an extreme that he passes beyond Romantic worship of humanity, pointing a way toward the colder, more impersonal perspective of Modernists like Pound.

In thrusting the sword into the Branstock, the great tree that serves as the central supporting beam of the hall, Odin wounds the Volsungs' microcosmic instantiation of Yggdrasil, the world-tree. The life of this tree correlates to the life of the house itself, such that in wounding the tree, Odin marks Sigmund and his line for death, even as he passes them divine power. When Sigurd has the sword reforged, the dwarf-smith Regin recognizes it as "the Wrath" (93), such that Odin makes the Volsungs a conduit for, and object for, his wrath. Thinking of Odin's power as "wrath" closely tallies with Carlyle's notion of Odin as forceful movement, and his creed as the worship of "wild, bloody valour" (29). But it also captures a dark depth to Odinic motion that Carlyle leaves largely unexplored – Odin as god of "all the material and moral forms of frenetic agitation… possessor of the multiform odhr, of that night-favoring Wut that also animates, on the continent, those wild rides in the supernatural hunt…" (Dumézil 123-24).

However, Odin's world-convulsing wrath is not without a "strange astringent joy" (Yeats in Bohlmann xi). As the god transmits his Wrath to the Volsung heroes, "the wild hawks overhead" cry out in "laughter." In Middle English, a hawk that is hungry or ready to hunt is "eager," and Morris uses this keyword a full twenty-six times in Sigurd (once in ten pages). He uses this almost always to denote a heroic will surging into action, a spirit "hungry" for deeds, not in the sense of the painful desire-signature of Venus, but in the sense of overbrimming predatory excitement. It resonates with the "aggr-" in aggression, and carries this subtext. Chaucer, to whom Morris addresses the "Envoi" of The Earthly Paradise, uses the word as Morris does, to indicate not just readiness or expectancy, but aggression, fierceness, and keen edge. In Middle and Early Modern English, a cold wind can be "eager" – "piercing, biting, raw." In other words, "eager" is another Odin-word, a subtler sign that his wrath is on the move. Morris' first use of the term attaches to Sinfjotli, "the huge-limbed son of Signy with the fierce and eager eyes," just after he has passed Sigmund's test of courage by kneading a serpent into dough (32). And when the young Sigurd first meets Odin, he says, "thy face is shining like the battle-eager men / My master Regin tells of," and when he dismounts on the plain before the fortress-prison of Brynhild, it is "the eager Sigurd" who "gleams" with fateful Odinic light (71, 122).

Though completed some eight years earlier, nearer the influence of Romantic sentiment and Pre-Raphaelite aestheticism, *The Earthly Paradise* likewise depends on the deification of a passion. Where Odin is wrath, Venus is, of course, earthly or sensuous love. Like Odin's wrath, Venus' fleshly love compels the will, but where Odinic passion impels or "pushes" heroes toward their destinies, Venusian passion attracts or "pulls." Thus the

goddess' champions feel her influence as, on the one hand, a vision of the beloved, wreathed in soft light and balmy breeze and, on the other hand, an urgent and overwhelming desire for this Paradise. Where possession by Odin manifests as a surplus of wrath, possession by Venus manifests as the lovers' sense of lack or want—the burning wound that can be closed only through union with the beloved. This means that, despite her alluring appearance and occasional benevolence, the goddess of Love makes the same kind of grim sacrificial demands that Odin does, with the same authentically pagan indifference to human ends.

While *The Earthly Paradise* begins with Milanion's vision of Venus as beckoning Earthly Paradise, it ends by revealing the goddess as the cruelly impersonal drive beneath desire. In the Medieval tale that closes the whole cycle, "The Hill of Venus," the knightly protagonist becomes the lover of the goddess herself, but finds that instead of permanent, ecstatic closure, he has won "a great longing . . . . that all those kisses might not satisfy" (*CW* VI 297), which returns after every moment of satisfaction. When the knight asks the goddess if she shares this need, she answers only with a "marvellous smile" that "tells of all things for [her] sake overthrown" (298). If the goddess simply *is* the force of "changeless love" that binds the will of human lovers, she is utterly beyond its effects (298). Here, Morris gives us the sublime inhumanity of one of Aeschylus or Homer's gods, devoid of Classicizing humanist veneer.

If we return to the naive wish-fulfilment of "Atalanta's Race," we will find the same tragic wisdom *already* at work beneath the surface. Before he is granted his vision of Venus, Milanion is overcome by a lover's madness which is almost as fierce as the berserk

Sinfjotli's battle-rage, and is expressed in a similar manner. After seeing Atalanta outrace one of her hapless suitors, he is struck by unbearable but frustrated desire, and takes to the woods on a berserk hunting-spree:

> There to the hart's flank seemed his shaft to grow,
> As panting down the broad green glades he flew,
> There by his horn the Dryads well might know
> His thrust against the bear's heart had been true,
> And there Adonis' bane his javelin slew,
> But still in vain through rough and smooth he went,
> For none the more his restlessness was spent. (*CW* III 91)

At this point, Milanion is merely an *object* for the power of Venus, which he experiences as agonizing passion taking hold from without, spanning the distance of desire between himself and his beloved. To become the heroic bearer of this passion, rather than its resistant victim, he must subordinate himself to it, and thus to the goddess herself. He achieves this in the self-sacrificial rite we have already seen, when he keeps his nightlong vigil and is granted a glimpse of the goddess. Invoking Venus, Milanion makes himself a willing focus or channel for her power, placing his life in her hands. It is only then that he ceases to experience his love as lack and begins to experience it as abundance: He stands with composure at the starting line, "flushed with happiness" like "a God well-pleased," eager to run his dangerous race with Atalanta (101). It is as if Milanion is now "charged" with a more-than-human energy.

Though Milanion's statuesque composure in this scene is a far cry from the wild valor of the Volsung heroes, the same basic paradigm obtains. Sigmund affirms his role as "hired of Odin," and so becomes a bearer of the god's destructive Wrath. Milanion affirms his role as an agent of Venus, and so becomes a bearer of the goddess' generative Love.

Milanion aligns himself with his ruling passion, brings his whole will under it, and so renders himself effective in the world. This is a kind of apotheosis—he becomes godlike—and it is also a kind of freedom. Rather than becoming free *to* determine his own path in life, Milanion becomes free *for* the higher power of the goddess, and in pursuing his own desire, serves *her* higher end—the growth and renewal of the living world. Morris' pagan vision of freedom, in these epics of his middle years, is the precise *opposite* of the Wordsworthian or Keatsian vision of freedom, in which the conscious work of the human artist redeems and elevates the fleshly passions. It is much closer in kind to Pound's vision of artists as "heirs of the witch doctor," drawing down their powers from "spirits of the air" and sacrificing to that "something beyond man" (68).

Conclusion

Finally, I'd like to return to the broader frame of biography, and the notion of Morris as simultaneously "pagan and Communist." I understand his intellectual life as a dynamic process driven by conflict between these two opposing currents. During his early years, Morris drew influence from both Romantic progressivism and anticapitalist conservatism, two ways of being "against the age," converging in the Pre-Raphaelite dream of a world made beautiful. In his middle years, Morris' Romantic tendencies found outlet in politics, his Radicalism moving swiftly toward socialism. His poetry, on the other hand, allowed him to build a primitivist, pagan mode of thought, and thus explore the possibility of a clean break with Romanticism. In his final years, Morris' Romantic side predominated, triggering his self-described "conversion" to Marxist socialism (*CW* XXIII 277).

Victorian reviewers similarly deployed this language of conversion, bringing him into the big tent of secular Christianity. Trinity Don Edward Dowden cast Morris as a "singer of hope in the streets of London," anchoring him in an Evangelical, Protestant mode of humanism (*CH* 310-11).[19] Subsequently, Morris consolidated his thinking around this newfound center, reinvesting his dreams of Ragnarok in the Communist revolution.

That may well be the major tendency of Morris' later years. But as Eugene Lemire once observed, whatever Morris held as his "last conviction" does not retroactively cancel out his "earlier opinions" (54). Nor, I think, did Morris ever entirely shake these "earlier opinions," which came pressing in upon the margins of his later work in romances like *The House of The Wolfings*, in lectures like "The Early Literature of The North," and in his private speculations on the future. Paul Meier notes that "the solution of a return to barbarism continued to cast an intermittent spell over [Morris'] mind, even after its dialectical absorption" into the Marxist theory of history (276). This dream of a rough, primordial world, reborn upon the ashes of the old, springs not from Morris the Romantic, but from Morris the barbarian, pagan seer of *The Earthly Paradise* and *Sigurd*, whom Theodore Watts sketched thus:

> The poet is quite soaked in Odinism . . . . His body is in Queen Square, but his soul is in Ultima Thule, --far away in that mysterious 'Island of Darkness,' where everything is magical, where, according to Tacitus, the very sun himself utters a cry when he gets up, and on whose shores, washed by the billows of an infinite ocean, 'many shapes of gods' stand clustering—gods who are nothing more than heroes—fraternizing with heroes who are nothing less than gods. (*CH* 230-31)

It is this Morris who, four years before his death, declared himself to be "a pagan."

[19] In Morris's pre-Marxist work, however, Dowden finds no signs of such aspirations to human redemption, and the lack of this aspiration leads him decry it as morally meaningless.

CHAPTER III

"God-sent Madness": William Morris's Proto-Modernist Dynamism

Introduction

William Morris is famous for rejecting the cult of the inspired poet: "That talk of inspiration is sheer nonsense, I may tell you that flat. There is no such thing: it is a mere matter of craftsmanship" (Mackail I 186). E.P. Thompson takes this to mean that Morris rejected the very category of inspiration, as part of his development from Romanticism to Marxism. However, he sees Morris retaining the apparatus of Romantic aesthetics, as the common language for his poetry and politics. This has the unfortunate consequence of setting Morris's midlife poems up to fail, bereft of the ideological content necessary to deliver on their form (189, 658). In this chapter, I aim to show that what Morris dismisses is not inspiration as such, but specifically *Romantic* inspiration, inspiration as understood by his contemporaries and, much later, by Thompson.[1] Furthermore, I argue that Morris's break with this paradigm is just one aspect of a more fundamental opposition to the Romantic theory of imagination—specifically, to its emphasis on rational self-consciousness. In his

[1] To say that one does not believe in "inspiration," nevertheless implies a contrary theory of inspiration, insofar as any artistic work must arise from some origin, some cause, some motive impulse. This effacement of positive position behind critique is common in philosophy. For instance, when Heidegger or Wittgenstein or Derrida dismiss the entire domain of "metaphysics," they replace it with their own answers to the traditional questions of metaphysics. Each energetically rejects the term as defined in a widely-accepted "strong" or "thick" sense, and supplants it with a view which is nevertheless metaphysical, even if only in a broader, "weak" or "thin" sense of the term.

epics (written, perhaps, while weaving tapestry), Morris maps out his own, opposing theory of inspiration by raw passion, expressing itself in frenzied or hypnagogic work, and impressing itself on the world in dynamic, passion-stirring form. Focusing on Morris's pictures of artistic process, I flesh out a nascent counter-Romantic worldview that clashes with his later politics.

Thompson singles out Morris's two greatest epics, *The Earthly Paradise* (1868) and *The Story of Sigurd The Volsung and The Fall of The Niblungs* (1876), as showing "little of that imaginative and intellectual contest with reality which marks the greatest creative achievement" (658). In other words, these epics lack the dialectical "conflict between the ideal and the real," the "struggle . . . . to reconcile" these opposing terms, that Morris inherited from Romantic poets like Keats, and that drives his development toward Marxism (15, 132). Successive readings are more favorable, but aim to show that these works do, in fact, meet Thompson's criteria. Anthony Skoblow seeks to restore the reputation of *The Earthly Paradise* by arguing that the very qualities Thompson criticizes—gaudy otherworlds, excessive delights, thwarted desires, inevitable losses—are "negative-dialectical" strategies for "negation of the negation . . . transcendence of the transcendental, construction of paradox, embodiment of contradiction" (31). Herbert Tucker shares Thompson's low opinion of the *Paradise*, but argues that *Sigurd* self-reflexively embodies "imaginative contest with reality" through its heroes' self-sacrificial commitment to the "bliss of the one tale," a demand it also makes of its readers ("Tale" 382).[2]

[2] In a more recent adaptation of this article, Tucker maintains the same basic framework. He explains *Sigurd*'s ethos of heroic commitment in terms of characters' "reflex reference to the plot" of the work itself, casting their prophetic awareness of fate as dialectical self-reflexivity, a reflexivity we take up in our relation to the tale of *Sigurd*, and to its ancient source material (*Epic* 516).

Whether these readings cast Morris's midlife epics as failures, successes, or something in between, all slot them into a single master narrative: the poet begins with Romanticism's dialectical model of artistic creation, and follows that logic through the melancholy alienation of the *Paradise* to the heroic affirmation of *Sigurd*, all the way to the Marxist theory of labor.[3] In this teleologically closed *bildungsroman*, "What is implicit in the poetry becomes explicit in Morris's writings and lectures on art and socialism," so that Morris finds "the consummation of his . . . romantic aspirations in the Socialist cause" (Oberg 171) (Thompson 725).[4] In this way, Morris gradually converges with Marx's own response to Hegel and Feuerbach, until he joins the Socialist League and first reads *Capital* in 1883.

This narrative has a compelling internal logic, but it rests on a questionable assumption—that Morris passively inherited the dialectical aesthetic of his Romantic predecessors,[5] innovating on it only in familiar ways. There has long been reason to question this assumption,[6] and now more so now than ever. Lucy Hartley situates Morris alongside specifically Victorian thinkers such as Ruskin and Pater, whose arguments for the

[3] For instance, Florence Boos tracks a "dialectical conflict" between reconciliation and tragedy in Morris' work after *The Earthly Paradise* ("Banners" 15-16).
[4] See also Macdonald, *William Morris and the Aesthetic Constitution of Politics*.
[5] For the passage of dialectical thought from German Idealism to British Romanticism, see foundational work such as Abrams's *Natural Supernaturalism*. For the aesthetic origins and political implications of dialectics, see Eagleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. My own understanding of dialectical form in Romantic poetry is strongly influenced by Marjorie Levinson's readings of Wordsworth (*Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*) and Keats (*Keats's Life of Allegory*), as well as her intellectual-historical account in "The New Historicism: Back to the Future."
[6] As far back as 1972, Paul Meier wrote that Morris "assimilated certain elements of dialectical thought," but only after reading *Capital* (28). This process of assimilation was not complete until 1888 (when Morris read the "Theses on Feuerbach"), after which point Morris remained ambivalent toward the Marxist theory of history as a whole (247, 276). That does not, in itself, preclude Morris's inheriting subtly dialectical habits of mind from the poetry of Keats and others, but it stands as a reminder not to back-read Marxist-Hegelian apparatus into Morris's pre-Marxist poetic output.

social value of art are "un-Kantian in that evidence is marshalled to explain why beauty matters by determining the kind of reward it produces and for whom" (6). Albert Hirschman famously defines interest as "the passion of self-love upgraded and contained by reason," that is, as a primitive kind of dialectical synthesis (43).[7] From a Kantian standpoint, however, this is neither morally nor aesthetically adequate. Schiller, who serves as my representative post-Kantian philosopher, sees the self-interested rationalization of passion as a tragicomic mistake of undeveloped "Reason" which, in seeking absolute happiness, makes humanity's "sensuous dependence unlimited" (115-16). This hostility to interest rests on a deeper, older suspicion of the passions themselves. Schiller understands passion as a nonrational and overwhelming movement/impulse of the flesh, which compromises conscious freedom. This is not so far off from the view held by Medieval Christians, who called the passions "vices"—causes of sin, associated with demons or pagan gods (Hirschman 21). So, even by embracing a public art-politics of interest, Morris deviates significantly from the Romantic tradition, bending to the passions and flirting with sin.

But in his poetry, as I read it, Morris's un-Kantian thinking goes even further. He associates the production and consumption of art with receptivity to the passions *in themselves*, unmediated by Romantic reflection *or* the utilitarian calculus of interest. For instance, Jayne R. Hildebrand notices "a link between physical habituation and aesthetic production" in the utopian fiction of *News From Nowhere*, so that creative labor unfolds

[7] And, conversely, "reason given direction and force by that passion" (43). Hirschman also defines interest as "reasonable, deliberate 'self-love'" (44).

with the "unreflectiveness of instinct and ritual" (16, 10).[8] Here, there is precedent in Thompson: He criticizes *The Earthly Paradise* and *Sigurd* for the "unconcentrating manner" of their composition, reflective of the poet's assumption that "all worth-while art had an easy and almost spontaneous birth" (189, 658). But immersion need not imply lassitude. Ingrid Hanson notes that in *Sigurd*, Morris places a premium on heroic deeds "where the will . . . is brought under the control of instinct, rather than the other way around" (74).

In this chapter, my project is one of recontextualization and disambiguation: linking Morris to Victorian precursors and Modernist successors, and, in this way, challenging the overidentification of Morris with more distant (though nonetheless formative) influences. Specifically, I place Morris's midlife epics at the midpoint of a counter-Romantic tradition running from the "poetry of sensation" of Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Arthur Hallam, [9] to the "radical Modernism" of W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound. These poets are united by their hostility to what Pound called "Miltonism:" a rationalistic tendency built into the Romantic theory of imagination, inherited from Milton's theology on the one hand, and post-Kantian dialectics, on the other. In contrast, these "anti-Miltonists" ground creative activity and imaginative form in the artist's receptivity to nonrational forces, a vision of metaphysical hierarchy that conflicts with the Romantic ethos of human freedom. Tennyson and Hallam understand this receptivity as an openness to sensation, and especially to overwhelming, heightened sensation: passion. Yeats and Pound understand it as an attunement to objectively-existing

[8] While Hildebrand sometimes characterizes this process as a "dialectical interplay," this runs counter to the tendency of her argument, which shows Morris rejecting the primacy of reflective self-consciousness at the root of post-Kantian and Romantic dialectics (16)

[9] I owe my knowledge of this tendency to Isobel Armstrong's *Victorian Poetry*, her sections on Tennyson, Hallam, and the Cambridge Apostles and on Tennyson's *Poems, 1830*.

moods, through which the artist registers the presence of pagan gods. In this I flesh out Jerome McGann's notion of "Morris and Yeats and Pound" as, per Marianne Moore, "imaginative literalists" (xii). Subtending their interest in material text (the focus of McGann's study), their "literalism" conveys an aesthetic of immediacy, contra the Miltonists' dialectical mediations, as well as a commitment to the objective reality of things generally regarded as imaginary, e.g., the gods. My account of this genealogy owes much to Josephine Miles's study of the pathetic fallacy, which gives Tennyson and Morris prominent roles in the movement toward Modernist objectivity, through their colder, less humanized view of nature.[10]

The close readings at the heart of my argument work by extending Hanson's notion of instinctive heroism to cases of *artistic* heroism, i.e., genius, in the production of exceptional works.[11] I read *The Earthly Paradise* and *Sigurd* "alongside" one another, as complementary halves of a single project—the use of Greek and Germanic pagan myth to develop an original view of life and art. From this vantage point, it becomes possible to see Morris staging an *agon* between two modes of genius, two paradigms of exceptional creative work: in *The Earthly Paradise*, the pious master sculptor Pygmalion; in *Sigurd*, the Promethean ur-craftsman, Regin. Regin longs to overthrow the gods that he might recreate the world as a utopia, and thus embodies Thompson's "imaginative and intellectual contest

[10] More broadly, my chapter draws precedent from *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence*, where Vincent Sherry defines "decadence" as a critical reaction to Romanticism beginning with Victorians such as Morris's friend Swinburne and continuing through Modernists such as Ezra Pound. Though I am not focused on decadence per se, Sherry's account centers on a rejection of the Coleridgean symbol, and thus dovetails with my emphasis on the turn away from Coleridge's dialectical conception of form.
[11] Hartley demonstrates that even after Morris's joining the Socialist League in 1884, Morris showed a "reluctance to completely let go of genius" (172).

with reality." Indeed, his revolutionary politicization of aesthetics parallels the dominant critical narrative of Morris' own life. Pygmalion, on the other hand, invokes the goddess Venus to aid him in his work on an unnaturally beautiful female Image. The goddess's influence raises his work into a frenzied trance state, embodying Hildebrand's "unreflectiveness of instinct and ritual." Regin strives through art for unconditioned freedom, yet this redemptive mission is the seed of his villainy, and his ignominious end.[12] Pygmalion, by contrast, thrives on determination by corporeal desire, and finds his reward in that desire's immediate satisfaction—Venus turns the Image into a flesh-and-blood woman. Pygmalion contravenes every law of the Romantic tradition usually attributed to Morris, yet emerges as one of *The Earthly Paradise*'s only triumphant heroes.

Morris and The Anti-Miltonist Tradition

The teleologically unified narrative of Morris' intellectual growth silently passes over a central fact of his views on poetry: Morris despised the co-founder of British Romanticism, Wordsworth, as he despised Wordsworth's master, Milton. In a note to his very short reading list of "modern" (that is, post-Medieval) poetry, Morris apologizes that he "cannot read Milton," because "the union in his works of cold classicalism with Puritanism (the two things which I hate most in the world) repels me so" (Pall Mall Gazette 1885; CW XXII xv). Milton's "cold classicalism" is the same barren rigidity that Morris detested in Greek and Neoclassical architecture, the "natural result of . . . . a demand for pedantic perfection in all the parts and details of a building; so that the inferior parts of the ornament are so slavishly

[12] See the Introduction to this dissertation.

subordinated to the superior, that no invention or individuality is possible in them" ("Gothic Architecture" 14-15). The geometric Neoclassical rationalism that Morris finds in Milton is not, to be sure, the dialectical reason-in-motion of the Romantics, but there is reason to think he saw the former hidden in the latter. George Bernard Shaw remembers Morris, late in his life, as "hating Wordsworth for his piety" (Thompson 660).
Morris would have recognized this piety as a secularization of radical Protestant millenarianism, a close cousin of his parents' "rich establishment Puritanism," which he rejected early on. Morris's aversion to Wordsworth was formed at firsthand: In his 1892 autobiographical talk at Kelmscott, Morris wryly acknowledges that in his student days, he had "pretended to read Wordsworth" (*CW* XXII xxxj). While Wordsworth didn't stick, this attempt at appreciation was significant enough to mention some forty years later, in contradistinction to his own aesthetic values. On the reading list where Morris apologizes for the absence of Milton, he includes all the major Romantics save one, Wordsworth, his complete absence speaking louder than any apologia.

Morris' hostility to Milton and Wordsworth distances him from Romantic secular-Protestantism, and aligns him with the anti-modern pagan aesthetic of Yeats and Pound. In a cover note to Harriet Monroe, Ezra Pound explained his reference to the Neoplatonic *fantastikon* as "what Imagination really meant before the term was debased—presumably by the Miltonists, tho' probably before them. It has to do with the seeing of visions" (Ruthven 56). Pound's implicit charge against the "Miltonist" Romantics is that they have *rationalized* the imagination, replacing immediate "vision" with conscious reflection on experience. In *Axiomata*, Pound understands imagination in the literal sense, as a kind of

second sight that allows the poet to access a hallucinatory "mirage of the senses" (*Selected Prose* 50). For Wordsworth, on the other hand, imagination is "but another name for . . . . reason in her most exalted mood" (1805 *Prelude* XIII 168-70). The distinction between these two modes of imagination arises from differing ontologies of aesthetic form, specifically the form of the poetic image. For Pound it is not reason, but "emotional force" that "gives the image," in the same way that "energy creates pattern" throughout nature ("As for Imagisme" 374). For Coleridge, on the other hand, the characteristic unit of form is the "Idea," which he defines as "the Form in which the Absolute distinctity [sic] yet entirety is realized and revealed" (ms. HM 17299, f.35). In this view, the image is a "logical projection" of sense data, and form is essentially logical form, relation through difference, rather than mere "shape or visual image" (Reid 15, 13). Pound's aversion to this rationalistic kernel at the heart of Romanticism resonates with Morris's aversion to the Neoclassical "coldness" of Milton.

Rather than simply reacting against the crypto-rationalism of the Miltonists, Pound and Yeats developed a systematic response. They grasped this tradition at its root —the dialectical conception of form—and rejected it. In "Prolegomena," Pound praises Yeats for "once and for all stripping English poetry of its perdamnable rhetoric . . . . boiling away all that is not poetic—and a good deal that is," and so "making our poetic idiom a thing pliable, a speech without inversions." Pound's attack on a poetry of rhetorical "inversions" directly targets the concatenated reflective turns of Wordsworthian verse, and thus also the negatively-constituted "distinctity yet entirety" of Coleridgean imagination. In *A Vision*, Yeats himself is more explicit, even savage, in his dismissal of the dialectic:

> I had never read Hegel, but my mind had been full of Blake from boyhood up and I saw the world as a conflict—Spectre and Emanation—and could distinguish between a contrary and a negation. 'Contraries are positive,' wrote Blake, 'a negation is not a contrary,' 'How great the gulph between simplicity and insipidity,' and again, 'There is a place at the bottom of the grave where contraries are equally true.'. . . . I had never put the conflict in logical form, never thought with Hegel that the two ends of the see-saw are one another's negation, nor that the spring vegetables were refuted when over." (72-73)

By "contraries," Yeats means real conflicting forces, which he and Blake can see organizing the visible bodies of the world, and imaginatively "see" as bodies in motion, shapes in alignment, and sounds in consonance or dissonance. For instance, when Blake says that "reason is the outer circumference of energy," this is not a metaphor—though reason self-describes as a logical system, it is in essence an abstract bounding line. In a footnote, Yeats diagnoses the dialectical metaphysics of Romanticism as the hypostasis of debate *within* the floating unworld of Reason, as philosophers recognize hidden premises and reconcile internal contradictions in the work of their forebears: "Though reality is not logical it becomes so in our minds if we discover logical refutations of the writer or movement that is going out of fashion. There is always error, which has nothing to do with 'the conflict' which creates all life. Croce in his study of Hegel identifies error with "negation" (72). Just as apparent contradiction results from the recognition of "error" in logic, it results from the sheer act of attempting to schematize life in terms of universal reason, from the sheer fact that "reality is not logical:"

> I found myself upon the third antinomy of Immanuel Kant, thesis: freedom; antithesis: necessity; but I restate it. Every action of man declares the soul's ultimate, particular freedom, and the soul's disappearance in God; declares that reality is a congeries of beings and a single being; nor is this antinomy an appearance imposed upon us by the form of thought but life itself which turns, now here, now there, a whirling and a bitterness. (52)

In his insistence that the contradiction between free will and necessity is not "an appearance imposed upon us by the form of thought," Yeats rejects Kant's own view, as well as the Hegelian attempt to reconcile it through absolute reason. For Yeats, Kant's antinomies are not a means of placing reason on a firmer footing, but a way of demonstrating that life exceeds the grasp of reason, only "showing up" for reason as irreducible contradiction. From the standpoint of reason, the conflict that makes life can only be "an irrational bitterness . . . . a whirlpool, a gyre" (*A Vision* 40).

Around the same time as his letter to Monroe, Pound praised John Butler Yeats and, by extension, his son for "handling or man-handling Wordsworth and the Victorians" ("A Few Don'ts"). Pound took the elder Yeats's criticism so seriously that he compiled *Passages from The Letters of John Butler Yeats* (1917), closely following a thread of correspondence where Yeats inveighs against Wordsworth and Coleridge as "Puritan" moralists, longing to "save [man's] soul" (25-26). This salvation consists in "joy in widest commonalty spread," a rationalized pursuit of "happiness . . . . the least heroic of doctrines" (31). J.B. Yeats's invective resonates with Morris's opposition to the "Puritanism" of Milton and the Miltonian "piety" of Wordsworth.

But where would Morris be *getting* such an aversion to Romantic dialectics, especially given his obvious debt to Keats? Or, to put the question differently, how could Morris have derived a counter-Romantic aesthetic *from* Keats, despite Keats's profound debt to Wordsworth and Milton?[13] In the same biographical talk where he dismisses

[13] From 1818-19, Keats composed first *Hyperion*, and then *The Fall of Hyperion*, in direct response to Wordsworth and Milton's narratives of fall and redemption (Abrams 124-29).

Wordsworth, the first influence he names, after Keats, is Tennyson—and not the Tennyson of *In Memoriam*, a reflective elegy in the Wordsworthian tradition, but the Tennyson of *Maud*, a wild fever dream that met with "doubtful reception by the reviewers" (*CW* XXII xxxj). *Maud* recalls the "poetry of sensation" practiced by the young Tennyson and theorized by Arthur Hallam, which they in turn derived from a creative misprision of Keats, among others.[14] In his review of Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830), Hallam criticizes Wordsworth as a "poet of reflection," whose "reveries take a reasoning turn" whenever he steps back from immediate poetic vision to meditate on it (90-91). This meditation is a procedure of dialectical mediation, in which Tennyson self-consciously differentiates himself from the scene before him, asserting poetic autonomy vis-à-vis nature and the flesh. Contra Wordsworth, Hallam praises Shelley and Keats as "poets of sensation," whose sensitive natures render them "Susceptible of the slightest impulse from external nature, their fine organs trembling into emotion at colours, and sounds, and movements" (93-94). For Hallam, Wordsworth's continual reflection is so much restless reactivity, the need to transcend those "impulses from external nature" by giving them a "reasoning turn." Shelley and Keats, on the other hand, find strength in receptivity to those impulses, to the point that the stream of sensation "becomes mingled more and more with their trains of active thought, and tends to absorb their whole being into the energy of sense" (93-94).

From today's vantage point, Hallam's reception of Keats seems one-sided to the point of inaccuracy. We know Keats as a consummately dialectical poet, manifesting

[14] See Armstrong: "*Maud* . . . . returns to the poetry of sensation, to an attack on ideological formations, to Hallam's belief that consciousness is constituted by discontinuous fragments of sensation connected by the 'ligature' of thought, to his belief that sexuality and libido are at the centre of existence. . ." (253).

autonomy vis-à-vis sensuous impulses either by bringing them into airtight formal unity, or indefinitely deferring this closural move.[15] But what matters for our purposes is that Hallam's poetry of sensation had legs. At the end of his life, we find Morris using Hallam's own concepts to make a discrimination *between* Hallam's representative poets of sensation: "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" (*CW* XXII xxxj). Keats has "eyes" to see the world firsthand, and he does so with acute ("critical") observation, each poetic "semblance" tailored to the thing seen. Shelley "has no eyes," relying on conventionalized beauty over acute ("critical") observation. So, what is it that Shelley does have, if not "eyes?" By implication, words—fanciful landscapes outstripping the eye's capacity to "see," and high-flung moral and political rhetoric. Morris's praise for Keats's "eyes," versus Shelley's lack thereof, strikes the same note as Pound's defense of imagination as "the seeing of visions," verses the rational-discursive model of the Miltonists.

We can apply Hallam's concept of the "reasoning turn" to Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1805), where self-conscious reflection works to bring the raw power of nature under the sign of human creativity. Wordsworth's method is to recall a "mirage of the senses" that once challenged the differentiating power of his mind, and, through a series of negations, convert it into an *exemplum* that "the mind / Is lord and master / And that outward sense / Is but the obedient servant of her will (XI 257-72). As the young Wordsworth

[15] For the former, a traditional formalist approach, see Helen Vendler's *The Odes of John Keats*. For the latter, a negative-dialectical approach grounded in social history, see Marjorie Levinson's *Keats' Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style*. For an account of Keats's links to the dialectics of Schiller and Hegel, see Tilottama Rajan's "Keats, Poetry, and 'the Absence of the Work.'"

surreptitiously borrows a rowboat for a nocturnal cruise, "a huge cliff, / As if with voluntary power instinct / Uprears its head" and "like a living thing / Strides after him." For days after, his dreams are "troubled" by "huge and mighty forms that do not live / Like living men" (I 406-26). He recognizes the mountain's power in a pagan way, instinctively endowing it with will—but a will profoundly alien from his own.[16] From the standpoint of dialectical reason, this is an existentially troubling moment of mere receptivity, in which "outer sense" usurps the mind. Two stanzas later, however, the adult poet retrospectively recodes this experience by presenting a mirroring episode from the same period of his life. Racing down the river on skates with the village boys (once more at night), young Wordsworth "gives his body to the wind," absorbed in the movement of nature, only to self-consciously "stop short," so that "still the solitary cliffs / Wheel by me, even as if the earth had rolled / With visible motion her diurnal round" (479-86).

In this second scene, there is the same "mirage" of relative motion, with the difference that now Wordsworth triggers it through voluntary cessation-of-action. Now, he knows the movement of the cliffs as an effect of his own mind, sees them set in motion by his mind, so that he feels himself the axis of the world. The poet shows us this episode as a case of primitive artistic creativity, in which his younger self begins to recognize his mind as "lord and master," converting a source of terror into a source of "tranquility" (489). From the vantage of this second scene, it becomes possible to see the first not only as its foil, but its prefiguration. The poet has prepared the ground for us, bracketing his youthful vision of the cliff's "uprearing" with an "as if," and tempering the image of it "striding after

[16] See Hartman on the young Wordsworth's "fostering" by fear, as well as beauty (42, 75).

him" by reminding us it was only "*like* a living thing" [emphasis mine]. Here, Wordsworth uses the difference-making apparatus of simile to raise naïve transport to the level of truly rational imagination. At stake, fundamentally, is the self-determination of the Romantic subject, for whom sensuous receptivity acquires value only as a "moment" in the process of conscious creativity.

In his early nature poetry, informed by Hallam's poetry of sensation, Tennyson takes a different approach. Josephine Miles sees the young Tennyson as largely responsible for a turn in the use of the pathetic fallacy, from Romantic humanization of the landscape to animation of the landscape. Whereas Wordsworth's ascription of "breath" to nature casts "living motion" as a "motion of spirit," that is, of world-creating Mind, Tennyson's attribution of "pulse" emphasizes the rhythm and contour of the motion itself, tracking more closely with physical reality, and "setting nature more strongly apart as its own organism intrinsic to its own spirit" (42). Wordsworth's fallacies foreground the role of poet-subject in dialectical relation to nature-object. The poet receives the influence of nature through sense and passion, so as to reflectively "bestow" it with human consciousness. Tennyson's fallacies foreground their natural objects, given a basis in "sensed qualities" that are "immediately felt" (33). This shift in the pathetic fallacy "points to a nature more and more withdrawn from man and independent, not as personified, but as a feeling organism" (43).

In "The Dying Swan," a sort of anti-lyric from the *Poems* of 1830, Tennyson uses muted but pervasive pathetic fallacy to trace a web of natural forces across a seemingly desolate floodplain, as they clash, combine, and create. The goal here is to turn

anthropomorphism *against* anthropocentrism, in worshipful recognition of the "independent . . . . feeling organism" beyond the human mind. Miles notes in passing that Tennyson dedicates the "entire poem" to "the senses of a combination of natural objects in their feeling moods," and this is worth exploring further (Miles 35). For Tennyson, these are *their* moods, moods intrinsic to the objects themselves, moods expressing their specific paths and dispositions, rather than the poet's rational-moral investment in them. His conceit is the deliberate use of cliché, activating the personifying metaphor latent in everyday speech, so as to blur the line between metaphorical attribution of feeling, and the literal, immediate recognition of vital or organismal movement. The clearest clue to the poetic game being played is Tennyson's jarringly "bad" image of a lone willow-tree "weeping" over the river (line 14). The borderline redundancy of this image, its being built into the definition of a willow, shows how our ascription of pathos captures the moving shape of the tree, over and above any emotion we might be investing in it. Ironically, by making the tree seem to "weep," Tennyson reveals that "weeping" is just something willows do, independently of us. Thus, where normally we might speak of snow shining from mountaintops, a shining that occurs in relation to us as perceiving subject, here mountains "shine out their crowning snows," and they do this not *for* the poet, but "*against* the cold-white sky" [emphasis added] (12-13). Down on the plain, the "weary wind" simply "goes on," uninterested in man, and "taking the reed-tops as it goes" (9-10). Here, Tennyson calls our attention to the basal role of verbs like "went," which seem to cut across the nature/humanity distinction. We can see the wind as a wanderer with little if any conscious intent, a "mindless drifter on the road" collecting cans, or, equally, as an herbivore, deerlike,

foraging (Neil Young "Fuckin' Up"). We could also just see it as the wind—"going" with a clear direction rather than "blowing" aimlessly, impressing its power on organic life by tearing off reed-tops and carrying them along. Suspended in this wind but not subject to its power, the swallow "chases itself," but it does so "at its own wild will," without a hint of human consciousness.

Tennyson structures the poem as a whole along these lines, striking a worshipful attitude toward the sheer dynamism of the barren place, and making the swan of the title into an artist-heroine in her own right. "The Dying Swan" is notable for the complete removal of the lyric "I," in favor of the landscape itself. In this respect, it strongly anticipates the objectivity of Pound's Imagist and Vorticist lyrics, which seem to simply "happen" on the page. The only place that Tennyson shows his poetic hand is in an extended epic simile, where the swan's final song "flows forth . . . . / As when a mighty people rejoice / With shawms, and with cymbals, and harps of gold" (30-32). If this were a Wordsworth poem, this Biblical *topos*, with its invocation of human voice, would work as a decisive "reasoning turn." Blending the swan's wordless song with his own discursive song, Wordsworth would realize the merely-natural music as an emblem of human creative power, concluding the poem in a moment of moral reflection. For Tennyson, however, the grandiose epic simile works exactly like his muted personifications, to capture the majesty of the swan song itself. This arcing-up of the poem into human sentiment exists only to be bent back into nature, the majestic music blending not with poetic thought, but the river itself. It "floods over" the marshy landscape, transferring power as movement, so that everything now "creeps" and "clambers" and "swells" and "echoes" and "throngs" in the

current of "eddying song" (36-42). The primary locus of creative power, here, is not the mediating, authorizing Romantic imagination, but the wild music of the swan itself. Tennyson's humanizing simile works to capture A) a causal relationship *within* nature, as the dying animal takes hold of and transforms the landscape, and B) a causal relationship *between* nature and poet, in which the former has primacy. Tennyson's imaginative action works not to supersede but to channel the originating song, so that the swan's domain ripples outward over and off the written page.

Where Wordsworth engages with nature to reveal it as an outlet of consciousness, Tennyson engages with nature for its own sake, as having value precisely because it is *not* human, having a claim on us because it is *beyond* thought, a domain of action and passion. Many of Tennyson's early lyrics and dramatic monologues are occasions to receive the influence of nature via sensuous passion (per Hallam), and to learn how nature works by adopting an objective standpoint, watching forces interact. Only insofar as humanity, too, is part of nature, does this knowledge reflect back on the moral and psychological spheres.

To place Morris in this turn away from Romanticism, I want to leap ahead to a crucial moment in "Pygmalion and The Image." Here, Morris draws on Tennysonian objectivity to conjure an animate nature strikingly close to that of "The Dying Swan" but with a key difference: namely, for Pygmalion at this moment, the world of natural forces is mute. At the peak of his obsessive work on the Image, Pygmalion begins to feel his work as an oppressive imposition, precisely in that it "absorbs [his] whole being into the energy of sense" (Hallam 94). In this moment of reflective distance, he laments that, though he used to wander freely in nature, he now has "no other bliss / But in vain smoothing of this

marble maid, / Whose chips this month a drachma had outweighed" (192). In this image, Pygmalion renders his "bliss" in labor as bondage not only to the task, but to the "marble maid herself," consciousness-annihilating fealty to the aesthetic object. Like Wordsworth, Pygmalion vows to "get him to the woods," seeking to overcome this heteronomous bliss through practice of his "woodcraft" (192). But instead of a Wordsworthian epiphany, raising him up to consciousness of his work as the practice of freedom, he finds that:

> All things were moving; as his hurried feet
> Passed by, within the flowery swathe he heard
> The sweeping of the scythe, the swallow fleet
> Rose over him, the sitting partridge stirred
> On the field's edge; the brown bee by him whirred,
> Or murmured in the clover flowers below.
> But he with bowed-down head failed not to go. (192)

This movement of all things is so pervasive that even the scythe "sweeps" of its own accord, as if leading the laborer's hand. What Pygmalion sees, from the corner of his lowered eyes, is a nature of "pulse" rather than "breath," a self-sufficient "place" rather than a subjectively-constituted "scene."[17] Here is no allegory of Imagination, no foothold for the world-creating Mind. Pygmalion reflects in sterile separation from the object, lamenting that he has found "No rest," repeating, "No rest—what do I midst this stir and noise? / What part have I in these unthinking joys?" (192). Here, Morris turns dramatic irony against Romantic irony. Pygmalion's situation echoes that of Morris's master, Keats, for whom "the [natural] world feels apart from man" (Miles 29).[18] And yet, in staging this

[17] Miles: "A notable contrast may be that between Scott's scene and Keats's-Tennyson's-Morris's *place*; either may be sad or happy, and the latter seems to be a substitute for the former, but its implications are very different. *Scene* suggested hills, vales, fields, trees; *place* suggests detail of leaves and flowers. A stream can run through both place and scene, a wind can sigh through place and scene, and seasons can emote on place and scene" (41).
[18] Miles gives the example of "Keats's shore—*Full of calm joy it was, as I of grief*. . . ." (29).

moment of late-Romantic alienation, Morris objectifies and diagnoses it. *He* has already shown *us* "what part" Pygmalion has in all this. In looking out on the fields, Pygmalion sees—but fails to recognize—the essence of the all-pervasive vital "movement" that binds him to his wearying labor, and that he vainly presumed to transcend. In the following section, I make the case that Morris places this consciousness-eliding movement at the root of creativity, breaking from the veiled rationalism of Romantic dialectics, and coming into conflict with its morality of rational self-determination.

To understand Morris's original contribution to the poetry of sensation, his advancement of this outward turn, it helps to understand the limitation of the poetry of sensation, its residual influence by Romantic dialectics. Isobel Armstrong reveals that Hallam and Tennyson were strongly influenced by Schiller. With his investment of moral value in concrete aesthetic "play," and his disdain of any programmatic moral "seriousness" that might distract from this, Schiller would have presented an appealing alternative to Wordsworth's ostentatious reflection and disquisition. Hallam, Tennyson, and their intellectual circle at Cambridge, "the Apostles," identified "the true moral life" with "free play emancipated from the demands of the practical" (Armstrong 33). But Schiller was himself quite faithful to Kant's privileging of reason over sense, and his notion of art as bringing the unruly "sense-impulse" under the governance of a rational "form-impulse" stands at the root of dialectical thought—in both Germany and Britain.[19] Though Hallam is

[19] By tracing British counter-Romanticism to Schiller's formative Romanticism, I build on Eli Lichtenstein's argument that Schiller, despite his profoundly Kantian framework, was also a major influence on Nietzsche, whose hostility to "Old Kant" is legendary. In other words, there are two paths forward from Schiller—the orthodox, dialectical path of Hegel, Marx, Coleridge, Wordsworth, etc., and the unorthodox, dynamist path of Nietzsche, Yeats, Pound, and before them, the "poets of sensation."

far more interested in the sense-impulse than the form-impulse, he is unable to conceive of an alternative to the latter:

> For since the emotions of the poet, during composition, follow a regular law of association, it follows that to accompany their progress up to the harmonious prospect of the whole, and to perceive the proper dependence of every step on that which preceded, it is absolutely necessary to start from the same point, i.e. clearly to apprehend that leading sentiment in the poet's mind, by their conformity to which the host of suggestions is arranged. (Hallam 99)

Here, Hallam employees Schiller's Kantian conception of aesthetic experience as the rational unification or synthesis of sense-particulars, in this case, "emotions." But rather than following Schiller in prioritizing rational-formative activity, he treats it as the handmaiden to sense, such that what is "absolutely necessary" is immediate receptivity to the "leading sentiment" of the poem, which elsewhere he refers to as a "ruling passion" (95). Likewise, Hallam gestures toward a nonrational conception of form by distinguishing the poet of reflection, who "measures his ideas by their logical relations," from the poet of sensation, who measures them by "the congruity of the sentiments to which they refer" (90-91). The former identifies form with dialectical difference, the latter, with the "fit" of different sensuous "shapes." Armstrong captures this ambivalence as it manifested in Hallam's account of subjectivity. Although he ultimately believed in a "Kantian a priori act" of synthesis as the ground of "the continuity of identity through time," he saw this as a fragile synthesis, "continually trembling back into a condition of sensation," so that in practice, "the self is discontinuous" (Armstrong 33-34). We are left with a strange situation

of willfully one-sided, even wrong-sided, dialectics, where Hallam and Tennyson favor the sensuous content over the rational form.[20]

This has political implications, in that it challenges the Romantic morality of self-determination, especially as expressed in the reciprocal rational syntheses of aesthetic production and consumption.[21] Openness to nonrational passion implies impassioned, potentially amoral action. The contest of vital forces, and the impact of vital forces on humanity, implies at least a *metaphysical* hierarchy. Hallam, Tennyson, and The Apostles translated this into a vision of restored political hierarchy, an aestheticized neo-feudalism—critical of modernity, skeptical of capitalism, nostalgic for Catholicism, and obsessed with crypto-pagan folklore. Armstrong refers to this politics as "subversive conservatism," a seeming-oxymoron anticipating the better-known "radical Modernism" of Yeats and Pound. It is precisely this Tennysonian strain of conservatism that influenced William Morris during his university years, dovetailing with his reading of Ruskin and Carlyle, coloring the hard-bitten Arthurian lore of *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858), and structuring the core political-aesthetic of his pre-Marxist poetry.[22]

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[20] Along with the theoretical considerations in this paragraph, I should acknowledge the possibility of reading even Tennyson's most de-romanticized lyrics, such as "The Dying Swan," as dialectical "double poems," per Armstrong: "The unself-conscious, simple and unreflective feeling of the naïve poet [Tennyson] discovered in Schiller is being contrived by the highly self-conscious reflective poet of a sophisticated modern culture. The poetry of sensation is being created by the poetry of reflection by a ruse which returns the poem to a dramatic status" (37-38). Where Armstrong takes this doubleness as a testament to Tennyson and Hallam's intense self-reflexivity, I see it more as testament to their ambivalence, their standing at a juncture between Romantic self-consciousness and proto-Modernist objectivity.

[21] See, for instance, Armstrong: "The mass of primal sensation which Herder thought to be constitutive of consciousness seems to Hallam a richer intuitional and imaginative experience than reflection and paradoxically nearer to the moral life because it has a content, whereas thought is abstract" (34).

[22] The through-line from the subversive conservatives, to Morris, to the radical Modernists, registers in the revisionist guild socialism of A.R. Orage and *The New Age*. Wallace Martin explains *The New Age*'s turn away from Marxist and Fabian collectivism, and, correspondingly, toward a more conservative ethic, as a revival of "the nineteenth-century reaction against industrialism, with its emphasis on human as opposed to monetary values . . . . This tradition went back to Carlyle's bitter attack on industrialists who considered the payment of

"Absorbed into The Energy of Sense"—Morris's Pygmalion as Artist of Sensation

In Morris's retelling of the Pygmalion myth, he pays meticulous attention to Pygmalion's making of the Image, expanding a mere eight lines from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* into some twenty-four stanzas. Taken with the fact that Pygmalion is one of the only protagonists who attains his "earthly paradise" in a complete and lasting way, this strongly suggests we approach the tale as a paradigm of artistic process, with implications for how we understand what motivates this activity—the power that expresses itself in the form of the Image. Here, I see Morris radicalizing Hallam and Tennyson's poetry of sensation, overcoming their residual investment in Romantic dialectics by fully embracing "the primordial flood of sensation" (Armstrong 35).

Morris's Pygmalion stands completely beyond the Miltonic model of creation as reflecting on and synthesizing sense-experience. Where Ovid's Pygmalion finishes his statue and then "promptly conceives a passion for his own creation," Pygmalion is driven by desire from the outset—a half-conscious, obsessive desire that finds an outlet in his art. As this passion grows into a feverish trance, Pygmalion gradually loses any trace of the conscious self-determination that Wordsworth and Coleridge associate with artistry, so that his desire *to* work seamlessly blends into desire *for* his work. Throughout this process, Pygmalion flagrantly violates the central rule of post-Kantian aesthetics, disinterested

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wages their only obligation to employees; to Ruskin's emphasis on social as opposed to material wealth; to William Morris and the Mediaevalist reaction, with its opposition to industrialism and insistence on the importance of art to life" (205-6; see also 14-15). Martin suggests that *New Age* contributors such as Pound's close collaborator T.E. Hulme were more "neo-medieaval" than "neo-classical," despite Hulme's strong identification with Classicism (Note [1], 197-98). For Pound's influence by Orage and his circle, with Orage as "a follower of Carlyle, Ruskin, and William Morris," see Baumann pp. 369-70.

comportment to the work of art.[23] To capture this deviation from Romantic orthodoxy, and to demonstrate how Morris carries it further than Hallam and Tennyson, I read "Pygmalion and The Image" in sustained, contrastive dialogue with Schiller.

In the post-Kantian Romantic tradition, the doctrine of disinterest works to test for conformity with an underlying norm: the rational autonomy of the human subject. This presupposes a certain moral-metaphysical "scene," the constitution of subjectivity through the dialectical interplay of what Schiller calls the "form impulse" and "sense impulse." The form impulse "proceeds from Man's absolute existence or from his rational nature, and strives to set him at liberty" (66). It gives rational form to sensuous content, judges particular "cases" under universal "laws" in both contemplative and moral domains (60). By stressing the formative action of reason, Schiller identifies conscious self-constitution and moral self-determination with creativity, so that "Man proves his freedom by his very forming of the formless" (120).

The sense impulse, on the other hand, "proceeds from the physical existence of Man," and encompasses a range of subjective responses to determination by external causes. The basic object of the impulse is raw sensation, but Schiller stipulates that any "perception" of sufficient intensity and duration "becomes a passion," a nonrational reflex-movement of the mind that vies with the form-impulse to determine the will. If this passion is strong enough to "dominate" the form-impulse, it causes a person "*to be beside oneself*—that is, to be outside one's ego" (*FN1* 65). Schiller figures this heteronomy of the will in two

[23] Yet it is also not an interested comportment to art, in the strict sense: Where an interested artist would rationally pursue the satisfaction of their desire for beauty, Pygmalion's overwhelming, utterly irrational passion is the root and essence of his creativity.

ways. First, as propulsion by external force: "So long as sense perception governs" a man, "his personality is extinguished," and "time whirls him along with itself" (65). Second, as the uncreation of experience: Released from the self- and world-forming power of reason, "substance holds its ponderous and shapeless sway, and the dim outlines fluctuate between uncertain boundaries" (121).

The core of this view, then, is a moral picture in which "the unity of human nature" is riven by the "primitive and radical opposition" (67) between an essentially "determining" / "active" reason, and an essentially "receptive" / "passive" sense (69). The whole of that drama is revealed in a single characterization of the form-impulse as "a force which sets itself in motion of its own accord, independently of any outward material, and possesses sufficient energy to repel the pressure of matter" (125). What is at stake here, is the imperative that consciousness transcend determination by the "blind force of nature," by "giving form to" it and "turning it into his object" (47, 121). [24] The individual receives and reflexively responds to the blind force of nature through the sense impulse. Thus, one could say that the sense impulse is the specifically human outlet of this "blind force," physical necessity imposing itself through involuntary perception and passion.[25] Schiller sets himself the task of explaining how humanity might reliably bring this inner wilderness under rational governance, without denying its legitimate claims on us as embodied beings.

Schiller's alienation-problematic leads him to a dialectical solution—the aesthetic play impulse. This third impulse arises through the complete engagement of form impulse

[24] See also "She who had formerly ruled him only as *force*, now stands as *object* before the judgment of his glance" (120)
[25] See also "The object of the sense impulse . . . . may be called life in the widest sense of the word, a concept which expresses all material being and all that is immediately present in the senses" (76).

and sense impulse at the same time, so that "Man . . . . combines the greatest fullness of existence with the utmost self-dependence and freedom, and instead of abandoning himself to the world he . . . . rather draws it into himself with the whole infinity of its phenomena, and subjects it to the unity of his reason" ("13th Letter" 69). What is at stake here is the embodiment of rational-freedom in sensuous matter, by the artist, and the experience of rational-freedom in sensuous matter, by the spectator. This becomes possible through "the disinterested free appreciation of pure appearance," in which the subject regards the object not as a means "to serve his ends," but as a site for the sensuous embodiment of rational form (132). The artist creates things for their own sakes, while the spectator admires things for their own sake. In each case, the posture of disinterest disconnects the sense-impulse from the possibility of immediate satisfaction, insulating artist and spectator alike from determination of the will by passion—that is, by the inner outlet of natural force. Thus, disinterest works as the limit-condition for the concrete expression of freedom through art.

Pygmalion's work begins as an outlet for frustrated passion. In a city where Venus has punished the women by turning them into prostitutes, the sculptor longs for something more. "Made glad" by no beloved, he "walks abroad with downcast brooding face" (189). In this condition of thwarted, objectless desire, his mind turns back on itself, meditating on what it lacks. Schiller would diagnose Pygmalion's woe as an alienation of form impulse from sense impulse, and prescribe disinterested creativity as a means of transcending this alienation: The sculptor could bring desire under the governance of thought by *making* an idealized, non-consumable object for that desire, that is, a female statue which, as Schiller

says of the Juno Ludovisi, leaves us "Irresistibly seized and attracted" by her womanly "charm," and "held at a distance" by her divine "dignity," so that "we find ourselves at the same time in the condition of utter rest and extreme movement" (81). If Morris shared this understanding of art, one would expect Pygmalion's work to progressively liberate him from determination by desire, increasingly granting him "distance" from it and the work. This process would be carried out by a spontaneous consciousness that "annihilates the material by means of the form" and, in so doing, demonstrates "true aesthetic freedom," which comes "only from the form" (*AE* 106). But Pygmalion's work has the opposite effect: As the form of the Image becomes clearer, it stokes his desire to greater and greater intensities. Gradually, Pygmalion's passion displaces his consciousness, until, in his moment of peak creativity, he is wholly unselfed. In deviating from the Romantic disinterest doctrine in such a dramatic way, Morris breaks with the norm it is meant to preserve, that is, the rational self-determination of the human subject.

Morris charts this process in a series of four stanzas that cycle from Pygmalion's sharpening perception of form to his heightening passion, with a corresponding diminution in rational freedom. In the first two stanzas, that process might appear to fit the Romantic disinterest-model. As Pygmalion begins work on the Image, his task seems "easy to his hand," failing to absorb his full energy, so that he is "stirred with many a troubling thought / And many a doubt perplexes him" (190). It is only when Pygmalion sees the stone grown "smoother and more shapely" that he "puts all thought away / But that which touches on his craftsmanship alone" (191). This might seem like a case of "freedom coming from the form": Pygmalion sees his own rational-freedom expressed in the aesthetic unity he has

imposed on the marble, and this allows him to fully harmonize thought with hand, investing all his consciousness in the creative act. If that were the case, one would expect him to be raised partly or fully above the influence of desire.

Instead, the next phase of the process shows the form exercising "a restrictive action upon the spirit," raising Pygmalion's inchoate longing into urgent passion. At this point, the Image is already a masterpiece, "whose equal far and wide / In no town of the world a man could see" (191). But rather than giving Pygmalion the equipoise of moral freedom, the sight of his own handiwork awakens his "pride" in "mastery," which passes over from pleasure into "burning longing that the work should be / E'en better still" (191). Though this pride is not the sensuous yearning that first moved Pygmalion to take up the chisel, it is a passion all the same, capable of expressing itself in a structure of object-lack. Indeed, it goes hand in hand with "a strange and strong desire he could not name" (191). This is Pygmalion's original, objectless desire, now become an overwhelming urge and affixed to an object, the Image herself.

Over the next two stanzas, Morris shows us the apex of Pygmalion's productivity as a frenzy or trance in which "nought to him seems dear / But to his well-loved work to be anear" (191). From Schiller's perspective, Pygmalion should at this point have fully transcended determination by passion, so that the work "goes forth from the magic circle of the artist as perfect as from the Creator's hands" (*AE* 106), His work should embody the balance and composure of disinterested free play. Instead, Pygmalion suffers his desire as a need, an absolute dependence. Sleep should grant relief from this need, but "The night seems long" and even then, "still of his work he dreams" (*CW* IV 191). A stroll through his

garden should provide diversionary pleasure but, "though his smooth-stemmed trees" are "so" nigh to the Image that he "can behold the marble hair; / "Nought is enough" (191). In this state, Pygmalion bears less resemblance to Schiller's artist of the ideal, "proving his freedom by his forming of the formless," than to Schiller's notion of "Man in his *physical* condition" (*AE* 113), who "hurls himself at objects and wants to snatch them into himself in desire" (114). At this point, Pygmalion's artistic pride and erotic love are intertwined to the point of being indistinguishable, and both are dependent on what Schiller calls "immediate contact" with "the sensible world" (114). Pygmalion longs "to be anear" the Image not just in the sense that he desires physical proximity to the Image, but in the further, more important sense that as he liberates the Image from her marble enclosure, she grows "nearer." Thus, rather than raising him above desire, the emergence of aesthetic form ensures that Pygmalion is, like Schiller's merely-physical man, "for ever harassed by [desire's] pressure, restlessly tormented by imperious need," so that he "finds rest nowhere but in exhaustion, and limits nowhere but in spent desire" (114). In Schiller's terms, Pygmalion is less an artist than a savage—yet Morris sees this savage intensity as the wellspring of the sculptor's artistic "mastery."

As he works, Pygmalion blurs into his own obsessive movement, mind completely overthrown by desire. In this extreme flow state, the artist loses all executive function, unable to redirect his attention, or even respond when hailed:

> No song could charm him, and no histories
> Of men's misdoings could avail him now,
> Nay, scarcely seaward had he turned his eyes,
> If men had said: 'The fierce Tyrrhenians row
> Up through the bay; rise up and strike a blow
> For life and goods . . . . (191)

In this passage and the surrounding stanzas, Morris clearly ties peak creativity to impassioned absorption in work, culminating in annihilation of selfhood (desubjectification). For Schiller, however, this is a consummately anti-aesthetic state, the phenomenological trace of absolute bondage to "the pressure of matter." In Schiller's terms, Pygmalion's sense-impulse "acts exclusively," without the mediation of the rational form-impulse, so that "there is necessarily present the highest degree of limitation." Pygmalion "in this condition is nothing but a unity of magnitude, an occupied moment of time—or rather, he is not, for his personality is extinguished so long as sense perception governs him and time whirls him along with itself" (65). Whatever value Morris ascribes to Pygmalion's artistic unselfing, it cannot be expressed in terms of the post-Kantian ideal of the rationally self- and world-creating subject.

Relative to Schiller's investment in universality, Pygmalion's unselfing appears as the culmination of a gradual narrowing of the self. Schiller maintains that "in a truly beautiful work of art the content should do nothing, the form everything; for the wholeness of Man is affected by the form alone, and only individual powers by the content" (106). Working on the Image, then, should require Pygmalion to unify his "individual powers," placing them at the service of the form impulse. His creative activity should also be a self-creative activity, broadening his nature and elevating him to the standpoint of humanity itself. Instead, Pygmalion's existence is focused down to a single urge, the "individual power" he feels as sensuous passion, and expresses in the form of the Image. Morris portrays this as a kind of sacrifice, Pygmalion's commitment to his work devaluing the rest of life, so that "nought to him seems dear" but the Image and the process of making it. At

last he grows "vexed" and, throwing down his chisel, laments that "now [he] has no other bliss / But in vain smoothing of this marble maid, / Whose chips this month a drachma had outweighed" (192). In this light, it becomes possible to see Pygmalion's original moment of focus, when he "puts away" all thought save the thought of his craftsmanship, not as the harmonization of thought and sense, but as a diminuendo—thought narrows to a single point, then disappears.

It is at this point that Pygmalion "gets him to the woods," yet, assuming that he has "no part" in the moving world, returns to the city. This moment of reflective alienation is the final pivot-point for renewed, deliberate surrender of consciousness to impassioned work. He "turns, and toward the city-gate /. . . . goes swifter than he came" (193). In this journey back to the Image that he loves, he is every bit as "moved" as the swallow to its prey, the bee to its flower, and the scythe to the wheat, and with a greater urgency. As he goes, his Romantic despair hardens into pagan *amor fati*:

> [He] cast his heart into the hands of Fate;
> Nor strove with it, when higher 'gan to flame
> That strange and strong desire without a name . . . . (193)

Scourged back to his demanding mistress, the Image, by that strange and strong desire, he takes up his chisel once more, "And drawing near and sighing, tenderly / Upon the marvel of the face he wrought, / E'en as he used to pass the long days by" (193). This final effort leads to a final collapse, and the epiphanic moment when Pygmalion realizes that his desire for beauty passes the bounds of art itself.

This brings us to the key moment of the Pygmalion legend, and the focus of Ovid's attention—the shift in position from sculptor to spectator, producer to consumer, where

the artist literally falls in love with his work. Rather than setting up an ironic reversal, where consciously creative labor gives way to excessively passionate experience of art, Morris gives us a seamless transition, where Pygmalion's urgent need *to* work spills over into urgent need *for* his work, amorous desire for the product of his labor. Just before Pygmalion is stirred by "god-sent madness" to bring the Image inside, he lingers by it "With nothing in his heart but vain desire, / The ever-burning unconsuming fire" (194). Pygmalion is, as Schiller would say, beside himself, his consciousness dominated by desire until, just after placing the Image in his bedchamber, he collapses at its feet "Worn out with passion" (195). This passion is the same, brooding, objectless desire that first pushed our hero to take up his chisel, now raised to a searing, mythical intensity.

In this light, I want to contrast Pygmalion's attitude toward the finished work with one of Schiller's paradigms of aesthetic experience, the contemplation of the Juno Ludovisi, a monumental marble head of the Greco-Roman goddess. While Schiller sees all the arts as aesthetic capture of sensuous force by rational form, he sees some as more or less weighted towards either impulse. Music, for instance, and even more so dance, tend toward the sensuous, with dance the aestheticization of less structured physical play. Sculpture, on the other hand, tends toward the rational:

> We leave . . . a beautiful statue or building with awakened understanding; but anyone who sought . . . to inflame our imagination or to surprise our feelings immediately after a contemplation of beautiful paintings and sculpture, would not be choosing his moment well. The reason is . . . that even the most admirable piece of sculpture—and this perhaps most of all—borders on severe science by reason of the positiveness of its conception. (*AE* 105)

His account of the Juno Ludovisi attests to the power of sculpture to simultaneously awaken and suspend the passions, sublating mere sensation into embodied thought:

> While the womanly god demands our veneration, the godlike woman kindles our love; but while we allow ourselves to melt in the celestial loveliness, the *celestial self-sufficiency holds us back in awe*. The whole form reposes and dwells within itself, a completely closed creation, and —as though it were beyond space —without yielding, without resistance; there is no force to contend with force, no unprotected part where temporality might break in. (*AE* 81)

The Juno is seemingly open to the libidinal "force" projected by the viewer, yet protected by something *beyond* force: that is, her rationally harmonious composition. This formal unity raises the work beyond the status of object-of-desire, simultaneously liberating the work from its matter, and the spectator from sensuous determination of his "individual [i.e. particular] powers" (106). "Irresistibly seized and attracted by" the Juno's sensuous, womanly "charm," "and held at a distance by" her divine "dignity," the spectator is raised into "the condition of utter rest and extreme movement" (*AE* 81).

It should be clear how Pygmalion's comportment toward his work breaks with Schiller's paradigm, embodying "extreme movement" without the possibility of rest. His is an art of intensity, demanding self-sacrificial commitment from the viewer as well as the creator. But the distinction becomes clearer if we consider the form of these images. Pygmalion's Image stands "with one hand / Reached out, as to a lover" (194), kindling sensuous passion by exhibiting it herself, bringing the viewer into the play of forces. Indeed, she is conspicuously moved:

> The other held *a fair rose over-blown*;
> No smile was on the parted lips, the eyes
> Seemed as if even now great love had shown
> Unto them, something of *its sweet surprise.* (195, emphasis mine)

She stands as if caught in supernatural wind, suddenly struck by a "great love" beyond herself, just as Pygmalion himself is. It speaks volumes that where Morris chooses this full-

bodied, frankly sensual form as a paradigm of sculpture, Schiller chooses a beautiful but disembodied head.

By this point, I hope I have shown that Morris's model of artistic process prioritizes passion over reason, almost to the exclusion of the latter, and thus swerves from Schiller's identification of creativity with the self-determination of consciousness, toward an identification of creativity with receptivity to natural force, via passion. One facet of this view is that passion, rather than reason, expresses itself in aesthetic form, and, conversely, that aesthetic form stimulates impassioned activity rather than the free play of mind over matter. Within the dialectical schema established by Schiller and the Romantics, and persisting in attenuated form through Hallam and Tennyson, this simply doesn't make sense—nonrational form is no form at all.

And yet Morris has not simply chosen "movement" over "stillness," naively opposed "force" to "form." Indeed, he invokes something like the Neoplatonic concept of form. Where Schiller's Juno passes passion through the medium of reason, Morris's Image achieves a different equilibrium: "Still midst passion maiden-like . . . . seemed / As though of love unchanged for aye she dreamed" (194). Here, the Image's being like a maiden points not to transcendence of passion, but its superabundance of potential. Caught in a moment of transport, she reveals the subjective ebb and flow of desire as the effect of an objective, enduring power, serves as a conduit from temporal to eternal versions of the same affect. In creating a beloved who elicits yet stands beyond the reach of overwhelming desire, Pygmalion honors the "love of that which cannot die, / The heavenly beauty that can ne'er pass by" (196). So we are left with a puzzle—Morris emphasizes the role of raw passion in

art, sidelining dialectical reason, yet *also* speaks of everlasting love in a way that evokes eternal forms. This puzzle points ahead to Yeats and Pound, who resolve it into a theory of dynamic (rather than rational) form, tethered to an account of imagination grounded in the moods. These moods are the affective signatures by which they recognize pagan gods. In the next section, I consider "Pygmalion" from the vantage point of mood.

From Passion to Mood

Despite Morris's relentless focus on Pygmalion's passion, contemporary readers of *The Earthly Paradise* saw Morris as interested in "moods" rather than "passions." This is because Morris approaches passion outwardly, objectively, through an aesthetic of surfaces in motion. He treats the corporeal, instinctual domain of Pygmalion's psychology, the "nature within," with the same detached distance that Josephine Miles finds in his and Tennyson's treatment of the "nature without." In tracking the ebb and flow of Pygmalion's passion over successive days of work, Morris calls attention to the underlying force that makes itself felt through these fluctuating modes. Pygmalion's shifting quantities and qualities of longing appear as so many variations on a stable structure of feeling, a mood. Morris's Victorian critics find this puzzling. Usually, a mood follows from the actions and words of characters. Here, it is as if the mood exists *in itself*, in the world, outside of and prior to these conscious subjects. I synthesize these Victorian accounts and extrapolate from them, building to the following view: In each of Morris's epics, passions are subjective apprehensions of an objective mood, transitory expressions of an enduring form, modulations of a single power.

Victorian readers of *The Earthly Paradise* saw Morris as unusually, even disturbingly indifferent to the passions. For instance, Sidney Colvin (borrowing from Abrams) casts *The Earthly Paradise* as a deliberately abstracted "heterocosm," into which "had passed at most a far-off echo of human passions" (*CH* 102-3). Given Morris's close attention to Pygmalion's escalating obsession, manifest in ritualistic repetition of terms like "desire," "passion," and "longing," this is puzzling. Colvin's meaning becomes clearer when he argues that "the dramatic interest is the weakest interest in the early tales of the Earthly Paradise—so far as dramatic interest signifies not the interest of the incidents in a tale but that of the passions that occasion or attend such incidents" (102-3). Here his sense of "drama" is strongly inflected by the Victorian dramatic monologue, emphasizing the externalization of feeling in speeches and dialogues over the outward action of the players. In this way Colvin preserves the basic Romantic framework, familiar from Wordsworth, where passion becomes the sensuous object for subjective reflection and self-expression—the substance of a fully rounded character. In the *Paradise*, however, Morris rarely if ever gives us this kind of dramatic monologue. Indeed, he deliberately flattens his characters, so that "it is not their souls but their bodies that we care for; not their inward goings on that we sympathize with, but their outward shows that we delight in" (102-3). This goes hand in hand with his mobilization of premodern forms such as epic and folktale, where flat characters have the simplicity of monument.

Other reviewers notice the same phenomenon. Arthur Simcox sees Morris treating his monologic moments with "a curious abstractness and remoteness; for all the figures that move through the day-dream seem not so much to feel as to sympathise; they see

themselves with other eyes, and feel for themselves as for strangers" (*CH* 108).[26] For the Reverend G.W. Cox, "the music of this Earthly Paradise is mournful because it is so earthly" (*CH* 128). In his view, Morris is entirely concerned with the physical dimension of life, "never caring to lift his eyes from the earth, except to the visible heaven in which we may see the glories of dawn and sunset" (*CH* 129).

Given this cold approach to hot feeling, Simcox identifies Morris as a poet of "moods rather than of passions, of adventures rather than of actions" (Simcox *CH* 108). The normal expectation is that mood follow on characters' actions, as the externalization and spatialization of their subjective passions. In *The Earthly Paradise*, it is the other way around: "In more than one example the succession of moods is as important as the succession of incidents; in 'Cupid and Psyche,' and the 'Watching of the Falcon,' the incidents may be said to be governed by the moods" (108.) Simcox calls this a "subjective tendency," because the "governing moods" are not derived from the inward passions of Morris's characters, but are coequal or prior to them. Thus, he feels he must attribute these moods to the "contemplative emotions" of the poet himself, interpreting the individual tales as allegories working toward the same self-expressive end as the "framework" of seasonally timed lyrics that leads from month to month (108). Here, Simcox misses Morris's apparatus of impersonality, in several respects. First, Morris's frame narrative, the ritual exchange of stories between ancient Greeks and Norse "Wanderers," works to insulate the tales from the seeming self-expression of the lyric frame. Second, all of these

[26] Morris pioneers this practice in his formally innovative "The Defence of Guenevere" (1858), and continues it in *Sigurd*, where characters reflect on their situations like modern subjects, only to then consciously double down on the instinctive fatalism of the original.

lyrics must be understood as following on the initial "Apology" of the "idle singer." Third, tethering these lyrics to the procession of the seasons, an immutable order of the natural world, further distances them from Morris.

Some of Morris' readers note his interest in a single mood, sexual love, which he privileges over others. Where Simcox cautiously notes a pair of tales where "the incidents may be said to be governed by the moods," Colvin takes this idea much further:

> There was one moving principle, the principle of love, which led these gracious figures hither and thither in search of each other through the delicate region in which they moved: but it was a love thwarted or prospered by outward hindrances and outward succours only; by gods hostile or auspicious, but human-hearted at the worst. (102-3)

Here, we see "outward" love as a metaphysical principle, the "one moving principle" at the heart of *The Earthly Paradise*'s story-world. Rather than a shadow thrown off by characters' movements, this mood is what "leads" them through the world, what supplies the motive force beneath their actions. The Reverend G.W. Cox sees this as a violent and immoral power, a merely "physical" force that he figures as a pagan god, "the armed Eros who pierces his victim, and holds him as the captive of his bow and spear" (132). Here, Cox's emphasis is on the phenomenon we saw in Pygmalion's creative trance—the way that this erotic mood, manifesting as visceral passion, overrides the subject's capacity for rational-moral autonomy.

But in coining the metaphorical image of Eros, Cox is merely retracing Morris's footsteps. Morris has already given this mood a body, in the form of the goddess Venus. Charlotte Oberg identifies Venus as "a major force in the tales of The Earthly Paradise," embodying the "identification of paradisiacal bliss with sexual love" that "forms the basis of

the unity of the entire work" (65-66). Florence Boos, too, recognizes that Venus's interventions play a decisive role, so that "in six of the eight tales in which Venus appears, the mortal protagonists successfully find love" (*Design* 187). But these accounts both focus on the *end* or *object* of heroic action—union with the beloved as a kind of "earthly paradise." Likewise, they pass over what Cox misattributes to Eros, the way that Venus acts on these characters as an extrinsic, almost hostile power, overriding their conscious volition. So, if we integrate Boos and Oberg's attention to Venus with the Victorians' attention to mood, we can see Venus rather as a "moving principle," the mood that makes itself felt in the modulating tide of passion, *impelling* Morris's heroines and heroes toward their paradisal goals. In this light, Venus is central to Morris's departure from Miltonist aesthetics, especially as he models it in "Pygmalion and The Image." Now, I want to return to "Pygmalion" and, shifting frame of reference from Pygmalion to Venus, show how Morris paves the way for the pagan impersonality of Yeats and Pound.

Pygmalion via Yeats and Pound

Where in Section III, I focused on Pygmalion's determination by passion, here I revisit the same phenomenon from the vantage point of mood. Where the former is inward, subjective response to stimulation, the latter is itself the stimulus, a "moving principle" that Yeats and Pound identify with the presence of a god. Applying the Modernist model of divinely inspired creativity to "Pygmalion and The Image," it becomes possible to see Pygmalion's passion as the symptom of determination by the goddess Venus.

In *Religio*, Pound defines a god as "an eternal state of mind" that "manifests" to the poet when it "takes form," a form that the poet apprehends through "the sense of vision" and knows as divine in virtue of its beauty (*SP* 47-48). The artist's vision of beautiful form is not necessarily a vision of the god embodied. Rather, it is an imagistic expression of whichever "eternal state of mind" (that is, a god) is working through the artist. Peter Liebregts glosses "eternal state of mind" as a Neoplatonic "Mood," or affect of the *theos* (51). He traces it back to the early work of Yeats, who praises the Moods as "the labourers and messengers of the Ruler of All, the gods of ancient days still dwelling on their secret Olympus, the angels of more modern days ascending and descending upon their shining ladder" (*Ideas of Good and Evil* 106). For Yeats, as for Pound, the moods are fundamental to all "imaginative art," which is "wrought about a mood, or a community of moods, as the body is wrought about an invisible soul" (106).

So, for these pagan Modernists, when an artist has a vision of divine form, what he *sees* is first and foremost a symptom or trace of his own determination by a god, that is, by an eternal mood. Pound captures this relationship via the conceit of a god acting on the artist's mind "from behind," so as to produce a vision of the god's characteristic form(s) "in front" of the artist. The clearest example of this paradigm comes in Pound's preliminary attempt at Canto I, where an initial vision of Lago di Garda as a "place full of spirits . . . . / the ancient living, wood-white, / Smooth as the inner bark, and firm of aspect," spirits who might be "Etruscan gods" (*EW* 146), eventually gives way to a question about the true "location" of divine power.

> And shall I claim;
> Confuse my own phantastikon,

Or say the filmy shell that circumscribes me
Contains the actual sun;
confuse the thing I see
With actual gods behind me? (*EW* 150)

Here, Pound casts his vision of gods "in front of him" as the symptomatic effect of his determination by "gods behind," registered by his image-perceiving faculty or *phantastikon* (what in "Axiomata" he calls the "Sense of Vision").[27] Here, the spatial positioning of the god—behind the artist, acting upon him—indicates a metaphysical priority, accenting the externality and impersonality of the gods to the human. What is at stake here is the distinction between a superstitious or naïve paganism, which might mistake the gods for mere anthropomorphic entities, from a modern, philosophical paganism, which understands them as "divine energies" structuring "the vital universe," manifesting to human vision in human form.[28]

Pygmalion's work begins not from a moment of dialectical reflection on sensuous impact, building towards a structure of his own making, but from immediate apprehension

[27] See Liebregts, 42-47.

[28] We also see the paradigm of "god before" / "god behind" at work in "Surgit Fama," where the poet feels himself poised between two or more divine influences. In the first stanza, a goddess appears "in front" of his visionary eye: "Korè is seen in the North / Skirting the blue-gray sea / In gilded and russet mantle." At the same time, however:

The tricksome Hermes is here;
He moves behind me
Eager to catch my words,
Eager to spread them with rumor;
To set upon them his change
Crafty and subtle;

In this second stanza, Pound feels determination by mood not as a vision before him but an external influence surging up from "behind" his own mind. He is at loggerheads with Hermes, striving in agonistic relation to the god, and yet this conflict is only possible because the god impresses himself on the poet's mind in the first place. We might say that Hermes aims to manifest in a kind of external form, though nothing so definite as Kore, insofar as he has a (de)formative effect on the poet's words, seeking to "set upon them his change."

of form. In this "mirage of the senses," it is as if the Image were already there, outside him, in the marble:

> The lessening marble that he worked upon
> A woman's form now imaged doubtfully,
> And in such guise the work had he begun,
> Because when he the untouched block did see
> In wandering veins that form there seemed to be . . . . (190)

Her form is emergent from potentials in the material, waiting to be discerned by the keen eye. This places us in the classic "scene" of Neoplatonic aesthetics, typified by Michelangelo's story of seeing his "Slaves" imprisoned in stone, and capturing their forms in the struggle to escape. But whereas this has an otherworldly, Christian resonance, Pygmalion's moment of heightened perception is closer to Pound's famous "stone knowing the form which the carver imparts it" (Canto 74 188-89). Here, Morris anticipates Pound in reversing the humanist polarity of Miltonism. Where we normally might think of the sculptor "actively shaping a stone," here "he is merely the tool in actualizing its potential" (Liebregts 234). The question is, a tool for what? A god or goddess. Insisting that "the stone knows the form," Pound immediately links it to "Cythera," (the earthly Venus) and "Ixotta," the beloved of Sigismundo Malatesta, through whom he worshiped Venus, as well as to sculptures of alluring sirens secreted into the church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli (190).

So too, Pygmalion coordinates "beautiful form" with the "god behind," matching the form to the appropriate goddess. As soon as he sees the "woman's form" emerging from the marble, he "cries out in a careless mood: 'O lady Venus, make this presage good!'" (190). He feels the goddess's influence as a "careless mood," that is, a mood of lifted heart and eager hand, without the "care" (that is, pain, suffering) of vexed desire that had just afflicted him.

He knows the nascent Image as the imprint of divine force, feels this mood as a hand on his shoulder, and turns to hail the god(dess) behind. Pygmalion follows his prayer to Venus for aid, by dedicating the Image to the goddess herself:

> 'And then this block of stone shall be thy maid,
> And, not without rich golden ornament,
> Shall bide within thy quivering myrtle-shade.' (*CW* IV 190)

This consecration of the Image to Venus is the strongest direct evidence for understanding its marbled form as trace-image of her power. Although the Image is not a representation of the goddess herself, the form of the Image derives from and has its essence in the form of the goddess, insofar as it is an imprint of her characteristic mood. It is a familiar enough concept in comparative mythology—the Image stands in an aspectual relationship to Venus, as secondary to primary image, a relationship that Morris confirms when he later casts the Image as Venus' daughter and erotic protegee.

But the most important part of Pygmalion's prayer is its transactional nature. Here, Florence Boos' notion of Pygmalion's "almost religious devotion to his work" converges with her notion of "the agency of Venus," in a way that she does not anticipate (*EP* I 606). You could read "make this presage good" as a casual piety, and his dedication of the statue to Venus, as a conventional gesture, expressing nothing more than Pygmalion's unsatisfied desire. But for Morris, this prayer has its full pagan significance, as a sacrificial compact with the deity. Pygmalion offers his gift, and the goddess gives hers in return:

> So spoke he, but the Goddess, well content,
> Unto his hand such godlike mastery sent,
> That like the first artificer he wrought
> Who made the gift that woe to all men brought. (*CW* IV 190)

With this divine gift of superhuman mastery, Pygmalion begins his artistic *aristeia*. All that follows this moment follows *from* it, becomes possible *through* it, such that his gradually intensifying artistic process is the diachronic playing-out of the goddess' power in his "godlike mastery." Thus, she specifically answers his plea to "make the presage good." Through her aid, the initial "presage" of form is revealed as a true fate, binding with force of necessity.

Approaching Pygmalion's work through the Modernist lens, it becomes possible to see its significant departures from the Romantic tradition. The generation of the Image attests not to Pygmalion's human freedom, but to a divine power, and his attunement to it. The beautiful form of the Image arises from origins behind and beyond the artist, as an image "set" in the stone by Venus, captivating his eye and stirring his hand to act. Pygmalion senses the onset of a divine Mood. His genius consists in seizing the fortuitous moment. Recognizing the goddess Venus, he allows her "nudge" from behind to determine the course of his work. There is no attempt to dialectically mediate the power of the goddess when it takes hold, no effort to redirect or supersede the mood, no attempt to "give it a meaning." Rather, Pygmalion harmonizes or aligns himself with it, and, in dedicating the Image, commits himself to channeling the "godlike mastery" (note: this is power-language, not thought-language) the goddess gives in return. Pygmalion's mastery stems from a kind of receptivity—not the passive receptivity of the vessel or victim, but the receptivity of a trireme turning sail to catch the wind. In the origin of the Image, he unlocks a supernatural surfeit of power, "surfing" its current through completion of the work.

This model of artistry stemming from self-subordination to suprahuman, nonrational force finds its clearest expression in Yeats. Yeats's gods are actually-existing facets of "an objective, transcendental order" that precedes and constitutes humanity and which operates on principles quite distinct from Milton's rationalized Protestant theology (Liebregts 42).[29] In "Rosa Alchemica," the occultist Michael Robartes takes up the Romantic idea of literary characters attaining a kind of enduring reality, but reverses the terms:

> And yet, there is no one who commutes with only one god, and the more a man lives in imagination and in a refined understanding, the more gods does he meet with and talk with, and the more does he come under the power of [Roland, Hamlet, and Faust], and under the power of all those countless divinities who have taken upon themselves spiritual bodies in the minds of the modern poets and romance-writers, and under the power of the old divinities, who since the Renaissance have won everything of their ancient worship except the sacrifice of birds and fishes, the fragrance of garlands and the smoke of incense. The many think humanity made these divinities, and that it can unmake them again; but we who have seen them pass in rattling harness, and in soft robes, and heard them speak with articulate voices while we lay in deathlike trance, know that they are always making and unmaking humanity, which is indeed but the trembling of their lips. (274-75)

Where for the Romantic artist, literary characters attain divinity as cultural self-representations, for Yeats, these characters are causes rather than effects of the cultural process that purports to construct them, eternal images like the gods themselves. In this sense, the character creates the artist. This parallels the way that the divine form of the Image is *already* in the stone and, as a presage, instantaneously fixes Pygmalion's path.

Morris carries the poetry of sensation towards Modernism by grounding it in a pagan metaphysic, tracing the passions back to the gods. But what is it that he believes in? If his Venus is a "mood," what is the ontological basis of that mood? Morris's solid, worldly,

[29] Liebregts is not using this term in the Kantian sense, to describe the a priori assumptions that form the limit-conditions of experience. On Kant's terms, Yeats's metaphysical order is "transcendent," in that it posits the existence of metaphysical entities beyond the scope of possible experience.

small-m "materialist" outlook excludes any belief in an "objective, transcendental order" of the Yeatsian variety, in which conscious supernatural entities impose their will on the world. It is easier to conceive of him approaching something like Pound's "universe of fluid forces, his vital universe of cosmic potencies, and his 'gods' as expressions of states of mind, all of which can be known or experienced through the higher self" (Liebregts 28). But Morris's paganism would have to be without the mystic Idealism that colors Pound and suffuses Yeats, their Neoplatonic tendency to associate force and form with "mind," however distinct from the dialectical consciousness of Romanticism.

I see Morris as arriving at his pagan aesthetic by integrating Tennyson and Hallam's reverence for a nonrationalized, dynamic nature, with his own instinctive reverence for the gods of pagan myth and the spirits of Medieval legend. To characterize this process, I return to Josephine Miles's account of the Victorian turn towards Modernist outwardness. Miles traces this turn primarily through increasingly disciplined, closely descriptive use of the pathetic fallacy, the metaphorical ascription of human feeling to the nonhuman natural world. But she also sees it working through a complementary trend, "the objectification of feelings." This is the tendency of poets to delineate inward states outwardly, via sustained comparison to natural entities, so that "all the structures of human feeling, are dealt with in terms of the color, form, and motion of the outer world" (44). Morris's Venus cannot be reduced to either of these practices, or even a combination thereof, but partakes of both, and works toward the same end. On the one hand, Venus is an extreme pathetic fallacy—the attribution of human form to a facet of nature, specifically, a generative impulse that expresses itself in "all things moving" toward procreation, growth, and fruition. On the

other hand, the figure of Venus "objectifies" the passion of sensuous love, by giving it a metaphorically "external" source. Thus, Morris' Venus links these phenomena as two sides of the same coin—a generative impulse acting on Pygmalion, expressing itself subjectively as his suffering of desire, and "moving" him through his escalating process of heroic artistry.

In this light, Morris's Venus is not so much a Neoplatonic mood of divine mind, as a *mood of nature*. Morris gives us an image for this coincidence of interior and exterior when Pygmalion visits the temple of Venus, praying to the goddess for a second time—this time before a statue that he, himself, had made. Where first he asked for aid in his work, now he asks her to give the Image life. Here, again, he offers himself as a kind of sacrifice, staking his life on the outcome: "O help me or I die! / Or slay me, and in slaying take from me / Even a dead man's feeble memory" (199). His sacrifice accepted, this prayer, too, is granted:

> Like a live thing, the thin flame 'gan to throb
> And gather force, and then shot up on high
> A steady spike of light, that drew anigh
> The sunbeam in the dome, then sank once more
> Into a feeble flicker as before. (200)

Rather than appearing directly, the goddess in the statue makes her presence felt in the flickering of the altar flame. Here, Morris achieves two figurative ends. First, he repeats Pygmalion's moment of inspiration, with the "goddess behind" making herself known through the "beautiful form" of her handmaiden, emergent from the stone. Second, he brings Pygmalion before the *exterior* image of the "ever-burning unconsuming fire" that has moved him throughout the tale.

Regin as Miltonist—Morris' Polemic against Romantic Rationalism

Whereas in "Pygmalion and The Image," Morris outlines a counter-Romantic, anti-Miltonist theory of instinctive imagination, in Book II of *Sigurd The Volsung*, "Regin," Morris develops a polemic against Miltonism. He aims squarely at the Miltonist theory of dialectical imagination, in which human (or dwarven) consciousness realizes its absolute freedom by giving rational form to the material world. The polemical thrust of this book depends on irony. On the one hand, Regin voices the Miltonic theory of imagination as "reason in its highest mood," redeeming the world from brute necessity. On the other hand, Regin's Romantic utopia is amorphous, incoherent, and static. Thus, Morris presents dialectical formation as a kind of de-formation, distorting the real shape of nature and history. Through Regin, Morris brings out the rationalist core of Romantic imagination, and casts its dialectical rationalization of the world as appropriative, grasping, and controlling. In this light, Romantic self-expression appears as solipsism, whether the solipsism of the individual mind reshaping perception, or of universal human Mind remaking the world in its own image.

Though "Regin" narrates the formative deed of Morris's chief hero, Sigurd, the book is titled for the dwarven ur-artisan who urges him on to that deed. Regin convinces Sigurd to do his dirty work—to wreak vengeance on his estranged brother, Fafnir, a dwarven shapeshifter frozen in dragon form. In the saga, Regin's animus against Fafnir is driven by the honor-bound imperatives of blood feud**.** In Morris's retelling, however, Regin sees his vendetta as the first phase in a struggle to overthrow the reign of Odin and the Aesir, and

remake the world itself (75-76, 80, 89). Regin sees this remaking as an aesthetic undertaking, his ultimate masterwork, with himself as a solitary artisan god, "the new world's fashioning-lord" (116). Despite these ambitions, he expects to be welcomed as a liberator, "freeing" dwarves and mortals alike from the "yoke" of the gods whose reign is bound by fate and marred by death (89).

Hartley Spatt recognizes Regin as a "failing Romantic," struggling towards "self-determination" for dwarves and humans "at the cost of the world as [he] knows it" (Spatt 358). That is, Regin embodies the very "imaginative contest with reality" that Thompson finds lacking in Sigurd, yet identifies with Morris's career as a whole. If we were to follow the standard account of Morris's ideological development, we might see Regin as a bearer for the poet's own "mission . . . . to redeem the world" (Oberg 181), with the dwarven smith's vision of universal liberation through creative work prefiguring the moment when Morris finds "the consummation of his . . . romantic aspirations in the Socialist cause," (Thompson 725). But this is difficult to square with Morris's emphatic characterization of Regin as a villain; recall that Sigurd decisively rejects Regin's bid for his allegiance, and that this is a rejection of his Romantic ideology. Through Regin, Morris brings out the rationalist underpinnings of Romantic imagination, and links these to Milton, subjecting them to a mythopoeic *reductio ad absurdum*. His criticism recalls Hallam's hostility to the Wordsworthian "reasoning turn," and anticipates Yeats's and Pound's attacks on the "cocked hat" of dialectical form. Though Regin sees his great deed of art as emancipatory, Morris casts it as grasping and myopic, the appropriation of nature and the control of human history. Though Regin sees his planned utopia as beautiful, and amenable to the

endless proliferation of beauty, Morris casts it as anodyne, homogenized, and devoid of true form.

The figure of Regin serves Morris as a sharply etched caricature of Wordsworth's self-deifying artist. Rather than recapitulating Milton's Creation through individual perception, Regin aims to raise himself *into* a Miltonic creator-God. As he attempts to recruit Sigurd to his war against the gods, Regin gives an apocalyptic prophecy in the Miltonic tradition:

> And some day I shall have it all, his gold and his craft and his heart,
> And the gathered and garnered wisdom he guards in the mountains apart.
> And then when my hand is upon it, my hand shall be as the spring
> To thaw his winter away and the fruitful tide to bring.
> It shall grow, it shall grow into summer, and I shall be he that wrought,
> And my deeds shall be remembered, and my name that once was nought.
> Yea I shall be Frey, and Thor, and Freyia, and Bragi in one:
> Yea the God of all that is, and no deed in the wide world done,
> But the deed that my heart would fashion: and the songs of the freed from the yoke
> Shall bear to my house in the heavens the love and the longing of folk.
> And there shall be no more dying, and the sea shall be as the land
> And the world for ever and ever shall be young beneath my hand. (88-89)

Here, Morris carries Romantic rationalism to its logical conclusion, casting it as a solipsistic fantasy of control. When Wordsworth vaunts that "the mind / Is lord and master, and . . . Outward sense / is but the obedient servant of her will", he means that the mind transforms the sensuous "matter" of perception, continually creating and recreating the world of experience (XI lines 270-72). Regin likewise "dreams himself the Master and the new world's fashioning-lord", but in a literal or material sense: he longs to transform the matter of nature and history, remaking the world as his ultimate masterpiece (116). Thus, the sensuous world itself becomes "obedient servant of his will." Where for Wordsworth, it is imagination that brings "outward sense" under the "mastery" of mind, for Regin, it is

Fafnir's magic—the "craft" imbued in his artifacts, and the "gathered and garnered wisdom" locked away in his heart. When Regin's "hand is upon" these tools, he will have the power he needs to realize his dream. This emphasis on tactile craftsmanship sets the governing metaphor for the whole of the stanza, where Regin figures the world as so much sculptural plastic: it shall be "for ever and ever. . . . young," but only "beneath his hand," as the object of his continual, conscious molding.

With the image of Regin taking up Fafnir's power as his tool, magically "sculpting" an earthly paradise, Morris echoes Milton's famous image of Christ tracing out the world with golden compasses (and in turn, Blake's famous image of Urizen as Milton's God, *The Ancient of Days*). By having God delegate the task to his Son, always-already God *and* man, Milton gives humanity a part in making its own world, recalling God's creative Ideation of the universe and prefiguring the creative labor of Adam and Eve. As "the powerful Word / And Spirit," Christ "creates new worlds" simply by speaking them into existence (VII lines 208-09). But he supplements this divine ideation with the tool of a human astronomer or architect, "the golden compasses prepared / In God's eternal store to circumscribe / This universe and all created things" (225-27). These compasses are instruments of reason in its creative mode. In constructing the earth and its heavenly spheres from perfect circles, Christ gives bounds to chaotic matter, bringing it under uniform law. The circumference of Earth's sphere extends upward in a cone to Christ who, as all-in-one, becomes its apex. One might envision Regin's future paradise along the same lines, as a cone encircling a sphere, with Regin at the apex as guarantor of its unity, transcending and thus constituting the world.

Through Regin's megalomaniacal prophecy, Morris burlesques the Romantic trope of a world permeated by creative reason, especially as it appears in Wordsworth. For instance, consider the parallel to Wordsworth's meditation on Mt. Snowdon, one of the key sites for fleshing out his theory of imagination. Here, we watch the poet gradually assemble a rational totality, enacting and reflecting on the essence of imaginative mind. Though Wordsworth is far subtler than Regin, working through a sequence of dialectical mediations, we see the same logical categories at play, the same logocentric conception of inspiration and aesthetic form. The poet describes a varied prospect, the view from the mountaintop, over the mists, to the ocean, but then reflects on that which makes it whole:

> The universal spectacle throughout
> Was shaped for admiration and delight,
> Grand in itself alone, but in that breach
> Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,
> That dark deep thoroughfare, had Nature lodged
> The soul, the imagination of the whole. (XIII 60-65)

Through a chasm in the cloud, Wordsworth sees only darkness, but hears "the homeless voice of waters" rising and rippling into the air, invisibly linking every facet of the scene. Like "the soul" or "the imagination," the voice of the waters takes a "universal spectacle" of sense-particular "delights," and knits them into an aesthetic "whole." "Homeless" and unseen, it is irreducible to that whole, or to any of its parts—the "hole" that constitutes the "whole." In all this, it is the sensuous counterpart of that "unfathered Vapour" the poet glimpsed above the Alps (VI 525-27). The implied analogy here is "voice of waters" : "spectacle" :: "Imagination of poet" : "spectacle." That is, as he constructs the scene, Wordsworth's own imagination performs the synthesis that he symbolically invests in the

"voice of the waters." Thus when, in the next stanza, he describes this scene as "the perfect image of a mighty mind," it is not just Mind in general, but his *own* mind.

Rather than allowing himself to be absorbed into the awe-inspiring scene, Wordsworth retrospectively reflects on it, shifting from metaphor to simile, seeing to seeming. The scene "*appeared* to him / The perfect image of a mighty mind" (XIII 68-9). There, Nature worked in the way imagination works, breaking down the given and fusing it anew, transfiguring the object-world:

> One function of such mind had Nature there
> Exhibited . . . .
> That domination which she oftentimes
> Exerts upon the outward face of things,
> So moulds them, and endues, abstracts, combines,
> Or by abrupt and unhabitual influence
> Doth make one object so impress itself
> Upon all others, and pervades them so,
> That even the grossest minds must see and hear,
> And cannot chuse but feel. (XIII 78-86)

This "enduing," "abstracting," and "combining" recall the analytic and synthetic work of creative reason, as does the "impression" of "one object . . . . Upon others" (which seems to refer back to the "homeless voice" spreading over the landscape). Indeed, Wordsworth hails this "power" of Nature as "the express / Resemblance—a genuine counterpart / And brother of the glorious faculty / Which higher minds bear with them as their own" (86-90). That glorious faculty—implicitly, imagination—provides "endless occupation for the soul, / Whether discursive or intuitive" (119-20). Here, Wordsworth implicitly grounds human imagination in "reason . . . . / Discursive or intuitive," which Milton posits as the "being" of the soul, an essence shared with angels (V 486-90).

Though Regin never speaks of "reason," or even "thought," he dreams of giving rational form to the world, expressing himself in its aesthetic unity. As "God of all that is," he will gather the many into the one, bring the world of clashing forces under the jurisdiction of a single law. In his twelve-line speech, Regin sees himself acting ("I") or possessing ("my") no fewer than ten times, so that what holds his utopia together is himself. He will flatten and domesticate the elements, so that the "sea shall be as the land," suspend natural time, so that it "grows into summer" but not into fall, and benevolently supervise history, so that there shall be "no deed in the wide world done, / But the deed that his heart would fashion." Through all these miraculous deeds of art, his new subjects will be "freed from the yoke" of natural and historical necessity. In aesthetic terms, we might think of Regin looking down at his tranquil creation, in the same way that Wordsworth looks down from Snowdon, "moulding," "enduing," "abstracting" and "combining," his "abrupt and unhabitual influence" permeating the world as "the imagination of the whole." But Regin's supernatural artistry goes a good bit further than Wordsworth's poetic vision. We could say of Regin individually what Marx says of humanity writ large, that his "universality . . . . is in practice manifested precisely in the universality which makes all nature his inorganic body" (*EPM 1844* 175). Regin claims the material world itself as expression and extension of his mind.

It is precisely because of this omnipresent control that Regin styles himself as a liberator. We could think of Regin as self-appointed steward of a General Will, *à la* Rousseau, or guarantor of something like Kant's categorical imperative. With the universe an extension of his mind, the deeds of its inhabitants become so many particular maxims of

his *own* will to be censored or authorized, reconciled and unified as moments of a totality. Where the brutal reign of the gods is marred by the clash of conflicting wills, dominating one another and inexorably surging toward their fate (Ragnarok), the gentle reign of Regin will harmonize them. The result is a world of endless artistry, where Regin savors "the songs of the freed from the yoke" as they waft up to his hall (89). He longs for this worship as an artist longs to be credited, aiming to be known far and wide as "he that wrought" (88). In this way, Regin envisions his own divine creation as the ground of self-determination not just for himself, but for his mortal subjects, whose freedom manifests in reciprocal creation. This reconciliation of freedom and necessity through an act of divine Mind is one of the pillars of Miltonic and Romantic thought, but by placing it in the mouth of a megalomaniacal scoundrel, Morris presents it as a manifest absurdity.

Regin's dream is a fantasy of total plasticity—of a state in which all the world is transparent medium for creative Mind. This is drawn from the same wellspring as Wordsworth—radical-Protestant accounts of Apocalypse. In fact, the only way to explain Regin's cryptic declaration that "the sea shall be as the land" is by reference to this tradition (89). For the Millenarians, those features of nature that conspicuously oppose, threaten, or overawe man, that constrain his freedom, defy his reason, and confound his system of means and ends, had something sinister about them: "A perfect, wise God had originally created a perfectly smooth, orderly, useful, and beautiful world. Mountains and other wild, waste places were the product not of divine benevolence but of human depravity, for they had been wreaked by the wrath of a just God at the original fall of man in Eden" (Abrams 99). Either the alien, unruly sea will become so tame it is navigable, homely, and fertile, in

the manner of land, or it will literally *become* land. The first of these images, nature as so much "standing-reserve" for dwarven/human demands, already shows the world as plastic—artistic *materiel*—for Regin's shaping consciousness. The second image, however, drives this home: the world reduced to one homogeneous medium to be shaped and reshaped at will, no longer even a negative limit on creative mind, the whole become the visible body of that mind. In this vein, we can assume that the land, too, shall be as the sea. This would entail bringing the savage spines of the mountains down to sea level, restoring the original beauty of the world as a smoothly navigable surface, an achieved totality in which none of the elements defy the logic of the whole.

If this seems like reading too much into a single line, consider Regin's account of the lost dwarven Eden, an unalienated state: "Ah might the world run backward to the days of the Dwarfs of old, / When I hewed out the pillars of crystal, and smoothed the walls of gold!'" (103). Before time flowed only forward, and the world pushed back against the shaping hand, even the rarest substances, least suitable for architecture, were supple media for dwarven craft. This presupposes the same kind of ontological leveling that we see with the sea becoming land—the same flattening of distinct entities into so much "matter," existing only *for* mind. In this prehistoric state, even time was simply an index of creative act, as Regin and his kin "did and undid at pleasure, and repented nought thereof," canceling out their deeds as if they had never been (75). For Regin, history itself curtails the total self-expression of the dwarven mind. Thus he hopes, in his apocalyptic masterpiece, to render time once more pliant to his touch: "it shall grow into summer" forevermore, so that "there shall be no more dying . . . . And the world for ever and ever shall be young beneath

my hand." In his dream of an art-world where time is become matter, the dawn of the dwarves is recapitulated at a higher level, just as in Milton's "world without end" Eden is recapitulated at a higher level, and in Marx's, primitive socialism is recapitulated in the communist utopia.

Though Regin's aesthetic utopia is a static, ahistorical state, he conceives it as the end of a "circuitous journey" from bondage to redemption, the mode of grand narrative that M.H. Abrams traces from radical Protestant theology to German Idealism and British Romanticism. Accordingly, this narrative has the form of a rudimentary dialectic, centering on the alienation of dwarven labor and Regin's efforts to transcend this contradiction. The dwarves, as supernatural artisans, express their freedom through their world-shaping power. At the dawn of time, they enjoyed a naïve autonomy, "doing and undoing at pleasure," even to the extent that they had "no fixed semblance"—endless self-determining sans final determinacy (75). But when "the gods were waxen busy," setting cosmic history in motion, the dwarves were confined to definite bodies, their limitless magical shaping restricted to definite modes of "gathering and making" (76). It is then that they "fell to the working of metal, and the deeps of the earth would know," and "dealt with venom and leechcraft," and "fashioned spear and bow," so that "the world began to be such-like as the Gods would have it to be" (75). The implication is that, directly or indirectly, the gods determined the form and direction of dwarven labor, and (if the theft of Andvari's gold is any precedent) appropriated its products. Once upon a time, the dwarves were the world's creators. Now, they live in a world of the gods' creation, bound by historical necessity and political hierarchy.

Since Regin is "Master of Masters," the ultimate craftsman, his particular experience instantiates this universal alienation. Regin is proud of his artistry, yet feels it a curse, binding him to "the hammer and fashioning-iron, and the living coal of fire; / And the craft that createth a semblance, and fails of the heart's desire; / And the toil that each dawning quickens and the task that is never done" (76). He has the world-creating power of his people, yet where this should be the ground of his freedom, it is the locus of his subjugation. Thus, even when he works on behalf of mortal men, his works are not his own. Instead, they are literally mystified, fetishistically attributed to the gods themselves. Though Regin "taught them to reap and to sow," as the years passed "they said that Frey had taught them, and a God my name did hide." Though he "taught them the tales of old, and fair songs fashioned and true, / And their speech grew into music of measured time and due," they credited bardic poetry to Bragi. Though he "taught them the craft of metals" and "the building up of houses," they ascribed these deeds to Thor, making Regin out to be nothing but a "smithying-carle," a servant (87). To overcome this estrangement of his creative power, Regin must in turn "hide the names" of the gods behind his own, raising himself up to the station of supreme artist. On Morris's terms, this is blasphemy, and he leaves its punishment to his hero. Just before severing Regin's head, Sigurd condemns the would-be utopian Creator as "Foe of the Gods" (149).

Conclusion:

Morris's counter-Romantic vision of aesthetic practice is just one aspect of his broader revision to the moral and religious picture of the nineteenth century, his substitution of a

pagan and inhuman frame of reference for the Protestant-humanist framing of the Miltonists. With this chapter's account of Morris's views on creativity and form, I furnish the aesthetic apparatus for that broader, revisionary maneuver. To this end, I want to return to Pygmalion's first vision of the Image in the stone. Just as the spatial positioning of the goddess behind the artist indicates her metaphysical priority, the instantaneous nature of this vision indicates an epistemological and aesthetic immediacy. Pygmalion recognizes rather than cognizes, apprehends rather than conceives, because what he sees is dynamic, rather than dialectical in form. This is the same mode of gestalt perception that Vincent Sherry sees as central to Pound's dynamism, the "numinous," "irreducible," and "unquestioned" perception of morphology—the way that we see shape in a landscape, an animal, a human (63). Here, Pound's intense theoretical work on basic aesthetics converges with Morris's preference for thinking through his poems: Their nondiscursive models of form are much closer to a "naïve" notion of form, as the outline and intensity of objects, albeit abstracted to essential expressions of force, such as movement, position, and color. This method scales up. In *The Earthly Paradise* and *Sigurd*, crafting modern epic allows Morris to work directly on mythic subjects and religious structures. By substituting passion for spirit, reversing the polarity between humanity and nature, and replacing the progressive timeline with a temporal spiral, Morris triggers a gestalt shift in nineteenth-century thought.

CHAPTER IV

Translating The Wrath of *Sigurd*: William Morris's Antimodern Modernism

Introduction

Nobody knows quite what to do with William Morris's greatest poetic work, *The Story of Sigurd The Volsung and The Fall of The Niblungs* (1876). In *Epic* (2008), Herbert Tucker calls *Sigurd* a "solitary monument raised in reaction against the age," which "plunges through" ascendant Victorian ideology to "strike bass chords out of the old cultural bedrock beneath" (469, 533). These are forceful characterizations, and if we take them seriously, they imply that *Sigurd* judges and condemns the later nineteenth century by the standards of the Germanic Iron Age. To wit, Tucker reads *Sigurd* and Morris's other heroic epics as refusing "progressivist indulgence towards a past that the present has improved on," challenging its readers "to become worthy of the tale by living up to an original greatness" (515). If Tucker is right, then *Sigurd* is difficult to square with the conventional understanding of William Morris's intellectual biography as a continuous leftward progression. Simon Dentith is more explicit:

> In seeking to make this massive fragment of the old world speak to the socially-transformed modernity of the nineteenth century, Morris's poem poses some difficult ethical and political questions, centering above all on warfare and violence. The values of an ancient heroic ethos, reanimated in *Sigurd the Volsung*, are evidently ambivalent for those who embrace progressive and explicitly socialist politics, as Morris was to do shortly after the publication of the poem. (239)

Dentith's "ethical and political questions" go hand in hand with historical questions. If in *Sigurd* Morris really does "reanimate the values of an ancient heroic ethos," then he rejects, or simply bypasses, the foundational assumption of historicism, which Richard Terdiman calls "the pastness of the past" (57).[1] Tucker says as much when he characterizes *Sigurd* as working to "efface" the "historicist distinction" between present and past (514). If this is true, then *Sigurd* clashes not just with historicism as a critical method, but with historicism as a deep-structural ideology of time, the specific temporality of Modernity.[2] And if this is true, then *Sigurd*'s inbuilt politics are right wing, and radically so.

However, neither Tucker nor Dentith fully explores this big-picture conflict, perhaps from an understandable reluctance to open an ideological fault line in Morris's body of work. For instance, after powerfully demonstrating *Sigurd*'s antihistoricism, Tucker nevertheless treats it as a precursor to Morris's Marxist-utopian period, in which he became "surely the least progressivist Marxist on record" (513). This strikes me as an oxymoron. After all, as Marjorie Levinson makes clear, Marx *was* a historicist, synthesizing the one-sidedly subjective and objective branches of the practice, and thus "producing a strong vision of the old historicism," carried further by the most rigorous, Marxian wing of the New Historicism (34). Marx could make this intervention in the first place, because he and the bourgeois historicists were speaking the same language, centered on the dialectical

[1] While nineteenth-century historicism aspired to "reanimate" the past, in a certain sense, this was past *consciousness* as an object of understanding for the modern subject. That is quite distinct from Morris's reanimation of past *values*, where these are supposed to "speak to," and thus have a *claim* on, modern readers.

[2] My understanding of Modernity in this sense is strongly informed by Terdiman's *Present Past*, as well as Mircea Eliade's distinction between traditional and historicist views of time, explored in *Cosmos and History* as well as *The Sacred and the Profane* (68-113).

model of temporal form, which they jointly inherited from Hegel, Schiller, etc., and shared with the British Romantics (25, 30-31). So if Morris, in *Sigurd,* challenges the most basic assumptions of historicism, he must also be at odds with Marx, and he must be thinking about temporal form in some less familiar, nondialectical mode.

To bring out this antimodern side of Morris, then, I must dislodge a deeply engrained assumption, first established by E.P. Thompson. Namely, that a "dialectical understanding of change, growth and decay, was ever-present in [Morris's] writing," to such an extent that "already in 1880, three years before reading Capital, he sensed the dialectical movement of history" (663-64). The thrust of Thompson's argument is that Morris inherits this frame of mind from left-Romanticism, especially that of Keats, and carries it through to its necessary conclusion, in Marxism. Approaching Morris in this way keeps his historical thinking confined to our most familiar way of thinking about temporal form. Thus, when careful readers register Morris doing something historically "off," there is always a ready dialectical technique for recontaining it. For instance, though Dentith rightly registers Sigurd's conflict with Morris's politics, he cautiously approves this as a critical alienation-effect, so that the poem's "value in modernity springs from its capacity to reanimate historical possibilities that have been superseded, but still have the capacity to rebuke modernity, and to suggest other possibilities" (252). This is a common way of handling inconvenient dimensions of Morris's medievalism, such as his frank endorsement of the Viking ethos.[3] The other mode of recontainment is to read Morris as aesthetic-

[3] Bradley J. Macdonald treats Morris' Medievalism as a negative frame of reference for "political critique and political action" (76). Dentith, in *Epic and Empire*, calls Sigurd an "implicit critique of the paltriness of modernity" (79). Tucker, in an earlier article which informs his later reading, characterizes *Sigurd* as "exiling" its reader "from a tale whose ancient strangeness exposes modernity to itself" ("Tale" 388). Thompson

historicizing his source material. For instance, Ingrid Hanson gives an excellent overview of barbaric violence in *Sigurd* and many other aspects of Morris's work, but treats it as the negative moment in a dialectic of creation, and thus as an expression of moral freedom. Tucker takes a similar approach in an earlier article, and this aestheticizing tendency persists into *Sigurd*, hampering his greatest insight—that *Sigurd* challenges historicism through a grand-scale performativity, interpellating readers into its transhistorical project ("All for the Tale"). The problem is, Tucker frames this in terms of reflexivity, cultural self-creation, etc., which is the dialectical logic of historicism itself. This makes some sense, if we assume that by historicism, Tucker means simply Romantic and/or bourgeois historicism. What I want to do is "exaggerate" Tucker's claims, taking them at face value, to indicate that Morris opposed historicism writ large.[4] This sets me the task of accounting for *Sigurd*'s opposition to historicism within a totally distinct framework.

In my view, Morris's seeming backwardness points *forward*, to the notorious antimodern Modernism of W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound.[5] While *Sigurd* scrambles the historicist schema of pastness and progress, if we approach it through these poets' paradigm of cyclical continuity, it suddenly snaps into focus. We can easily place Yeats and Pound in Mircea Eliade's cluster of modern "traditionalists," who sidestepped the various

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describes Morris's "reconstructed" Medieval world as "a place, not to which he could retreat, but in which he could stand and look upon his own age with the eyes of a stranger or visitor" (28).

[4] I borrow this method from the nineteenth-century Americanist Ross Martin in "Fossil Thoughts."

[5] My chief intellectual-historical sources for these two poets, and their "radical Modernist" circles, are Michael North's *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound*, Vincent Sherry's *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism*, and Maud Ellmann's *The Poetics of Impersonality: T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound*. Where North and Ellmann employ the categories of dialectical critique (struggle for totality/individuality, contradiction, etc.), Sherry approaches Pound via the sense-dimensions of vision and music, reconstructing a paradigm of aesthetic and political form that stands outside those dialectical categories, instead installing Pound in the conservative tradition of Remy de Gourmont and Ortega y Gasset, to name a few. In this chapter, I build on Sherry's methodology and insights, and tend to push back against the paradigm of North and Ellmann.

crises of historicism by reviving the cyclical temporality of ancient paganism. This group includes their common influence Nietzsche, known for his "eternal return," as well as their Nietzschean interlocutor Oswald Spengler, and their friend and collaborator T.S. Eliot, despite his Christianity. [6,7] Yeats is famous for his oscillating, clashing gyres, unveiled in "The Second Coming" (1919) and elaborately systematized in *A Vision* (1922). Pound is known for his "repeat in history," which furnishes—in part or whole—the diachronic structure of the *Cantos* (1917-1969). For both, however, these were relatively late formulations of a basic temporal picture that had been with them since the beginning, a motif I call "the return," after Pound's 1912 poem of the same name. In this picture, an active, living past continuously cycles into the present, and thus, generates the future. But

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[6] Karl Löwith distills what is at stake in this maneuver: With his "gospel of Eternal Recurrence," Nietzsche "revives the controversy between Christianity and paganism," and thus challenges "the modern gospel of progress, which is a secularized form of Christian eschatology" (274). Yeats's influence by Nietzsche is well-established, for instance by Otto Bohlmann, who quotes Yeats linking Nietzsche *to* Morris, as superbly "exciting" writers whose works exude "the same curious astringent joy" (xi). Pound's inheritance from Nietzsche is less well-understood, perhaps because of dismissive references to "neo-Nietzschean clatter" ("Hugh Selwyn Mauberley"), "pseudo-Nietzscheans," etc. To me, this sounds like Pound positioning himself against them as the truer, less demonstrative heir, refusing to be a mere disciple. See the Dionysiac exultation of "Anima Sola" St. 1 and 2 (*A Lume Spento* 31), the stern, antimodern life-affirmation of "Revolt" (*Early Writings* 15-16) and the teenage lamentations of "Und Drang" (*EW* 26) for undisputable signs of formative influence.

[7] See *Cosmos and History* on Nietzsche and Spengler, with Toynbee; and Eliot, with Joyce (146, 153). It should be noted that in one place, Eliade does characterize Nietzsche as a historicist, in virtue of his ethos of *amor fati*, and generally immanent metaphysics (152). If all that one needs to be a "historicist" in Eliade's eyes is to take a disenchanted or atheistic view of history, then Nietzsche may fit this very minimal definition. Re. Eliot: In my view, he belongs to this group because of his specifically Medievalist Anglo-Catholicism, informed by deep knowledge of, and appreciation for, its pagan substratum (manifest in *The Waste Land*). Thus, works like *Four Quartets* (1943) retain the cyclical temporality of paganism, but set within a Christian eschatological frame. This makes Eliot more amenable to certain aspects of historicism. For instance, in "Tradition and The Individual Talent," he concedes the "pastness of the past" (1949)—though he may mean this in a very minimal sense, i.e. the irreversibility and specificity of history—and emphasizes the way each new great work of poetry retroactively alters the whole tradition, where what he means is the tradition *as an object of consciousness*, after the historicist fashion. The black sheep of Eliade's grouping is James Joyce, whom I would locate only partly in this group. Though Eliot's "*Ulysses*, Order and Myth" locates a real traditionalist core in Joyce's masterwork, it fails to capture his ludic embrace of modern cultural anomie, his anarchic politics of illegibility, and his deep suspicion of sedimented and/or returning pasts.

what does that mean on a practical level, in terms of poetic method? Eliot sketches the process of return in "Tradition and The Individual Talent" (1920), where he argues that "not only the best, but the most individual parts of [the poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously" (48). In this sense, the tradition writes *through* the poet, a radical receptivity to history that is alien to historicism, which privileges the rationally reflective subject of the present/future. Of course, for Yeats, Pound, and Eliot the poet is far from passive—the real work is to channel and coordinate these self-assertive influences, bringing them to bear on a definite poetic end.

The applicability to *Sigurd* should be clear. If Morris thought of time as continuously cycling up into the present, and worked by tapping into this process, we can explain how *Sigurd* recklessly breaches the doctrine of the pastness of the past, yet manifestly stands as something new—not just a sterile recreation of the past, but a generative challenge to the present, working beyond the usual dichotomy of progress and regress. My warrant for this connection is threefold. First, we *know* that Morris worked with a cyclical model of history, rooted in the procession of the seasons, especially before his absorption of Marxist-historicist apparatus. Decades ago, Charlotte Oberg identified the "cyclical ontology that lies at the root of [Morris's] philosophy" (168). This leads me to the second point. Oberg demonstrates that Morris's cyclical sense of time is central to his *religious* outlook, paganism. In this, she rightly calls attention to Morris's own forthright, considered

declaration, "In religion, I am a pagan" (*CW* XXII, xxxi-ii).[8] However, I give Oberg's findings more weight than she does, in that I see Morris as a *serious* pagan, and thus, as the ancestor of Yeats and Pound, whose cyclical models of time arose from overt, theistic paganism.[9] Third and last, I take precedent from Jerome McGann, who provides an apparatus for distilling Morris's, Yeats's, and Pound's shared aesthetic: "imaginative literalism," expressed via iconicity and performativity, for instance, via investment in the physicality of the printed word. McGann takes this connection seriously enough to build a book around it, in which Morris becomes "a point of departure for a study of Modernism" (xii-iii). Indeed, he traces the genesis of the *Cantos* back to 1903-4, when Pound and H.D. were immersed in the study of Morris (76-77).[10] For Yeats and Pound, "imaginative literalism" meant not just re-presenting, but immediately *presencing* the ancient forces, gods, and heroes they

[8] Oberg sees Morris's paganism as "not differing in practical application from the Christianity more or less subscribed to by . . . . Tennyson and Browning," which allows her to reconcile it with Morris's Marxist period (171).

[9] This characterization should not be too controversial, but I discuss Pound's and Yeats's ideas of the gods in depth in Chapters 1 and 2 of this dissertation, as well as Morris's. For skeptical readers, here are two key examples. Early in his career, Yeats's occultist alter ego, Michael Robartes, proclaims that "there is no one who commutes with only one god, and the more a man lives in imagination and in a refined understanding, the more gods does he meet with and talk with" (*Mythologies* 274). Well into his own career, Pound gives this formal "Credo," written in response to an inquiry from Eliot: "Given the material means I would replace the statue of Venus on the cliffs of Terracina. I would erect a temple to Artemis in Park Lane. I believe that a light from Eleusis persisted throughout the middle ages and set beauty in the song of Provence and of Italy" (*Front* 11). Note that Pound espouses his paganism via the temporality *of* that paganism, commits himself to bringing about its cyclical return.

[10] McGann makes more of the Morris-to-Pound connection than anyone else, but he is not the first to make it. In a highly critical (some might say, bitter) 1929 review, John Fletcher Gould claims that a very early Pound poem, "The Tree" (1908), could easily have been written by William Morris, and that "the careful reader of the poems here culled from Mr. Pound's two first volumes (*Personae* and *Exultations*) will find many an echo, not alone of Morris but of Rossetti, and of the entire 'aesthetic school' of the close of the nineteenth century" (Homberger 231). Over and above the stylistic affinity that Gould stresses, the affinity with Morris is atmospheric and ideological— this is a conspicuously pagan poem, recounting a mystic experience in which Pound "stood still and was a tree amid the wood, / Knowing the truth of things unseen before; / Of Daphne and the laurel bow . . . " (*Personae* 3). It is also worth noting that Pound would have received considerable indirect influence from Morris and his Pre-Raphaelite brothers via Yeats himself.

invoked, and so bringing about their historical return. Of course, many readers will find this notion absurd. The question is, simply, whether it helps explain unusual features of Morris's poetry and worldview. If we step into the paradigm of pagan imaginative literalism, we can reframe *Sigurd*'s performative poetics in terms of return, immediacy, etc., unlocking the real basis for its conflict with historicism.

My handle for the overall historical ideology/method I find in Pound, Yeats, and Morris is "dynamic traditionalism," as opposed to the historicism generally ascribed to Morris. This handle integrates Eliot's notion of a tradition that writes through the poet, with Hugh Kenner's account of Poundian form as "dynamic," i.e., embodying a metaphysics of force rather than a mind/matter dialectic (159).[11] What Yeats and Pound drew from Nietzsche, and what Morris discovered *in parallel to* Nietzsche, is that the loop or spiral is the long-term temporal expression of nature conceived as "a plurality of forces acting and being affected at distance" (Deleuze 6-7).[12] For historicism, with its dialectical, i.e., logical model of historical form, time looks like an endless network of negations, lines at angles branching off and linking up and doubling back. It is virtually impossible to visualize.[13] For Yeats, Pound, and Morris, with their dynamist conception of temporal form, time can truly

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[11] Thus, I depart from readings that link Morris to Pound and/or Yeats *as* dialectical thinkers, e.g. that of Mary Ellis Gibson, who sees them as co-inheriting the "powerful utopianism" and "critique of alienation" that typify Terry Eagleton's "left-aesthetic tradition," with Pound also "deploying . . . . these notions in the name of authoritarian order" (212). In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I argue that pre-Marxist Morris, like Yeats and Pound, rejected this tradition.

[12] Deleuze stresses the axiomatic distinction between dynamic and dialectical form: "Anti-Hegelianism runs through Nietzsche's work as its cutting edge. We can already feel it in the theory of forces" (8). This corresponds to a religious polemic against "the fundamentally Christian character of the dialectic and of German philosophy" (11) —hence, Löwith's recognition of eternal return as a pagan vision of history (5n6).

[13] Some historicist thinkers do, strangely, describe history as a spiral, but this is due to a crucial category-error —the conflation of their own *relative* periodicity, which is a progressive expression of reason, with paganism/dynamism's *absolute* periodicity, which is an atelic expression of power.

be *seen* in the abstract shape of the spiral, and in paradigm-images such as the procession of the seasons, which was central and sacred to Morris, especially.[14] In *BLAST* (1914), Pound distilled this down to a single Image: the vortex, a self-structuring pattern of force. That brings me to the other, colloquial sense of "dynamic." As Pound's chosen image implies, these poets thought of tradition as mutable and mobile, as opposed to the Burkean sacralization of habit, or the properly Reactionary notion that we can and should spontaneously return *to* the past (usually a recent one). Against the former, Eliot stresses that "if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, 'tradition' should positively be discouraged" (48). Against the latter, Pound might say there is a world of difference between a return *to* the past, and the return *of* the past. The health of a given tradition is measured by its fertility and its ability to generate a future. Thus, to truly activate an ancient cultural form or image is to "make it new."

With this chapter, I make several interventions in the field of Victorian studies, and its Morris-centric subfield. First, I reveal Morris as an artist torn between two conflicting modes of historical thought—traditionalism dominating the epics of his middle years, and historicism gaining the upper hand through his discovery of Marx, but never fully vanquishing its foe. Often, we see the same basic impulse express itself in both domains, or ideas from one domain expressed in terms of the other. Second, in complicating our sense of Morris's ideological trajectory, I work toward an alternate intellectual history of the later

[14] *The Earthly Paradise* is built around this cycle, with two tales per month, each tailored to the beginning or end of the month, and these monthly sections introduced by seasonally appropriate lyric poems, which anchor the speaker's inner states in the outer movement of the world.

nineteenth century, building on Vincent Sherry's exploration of Victorian-Modernist continuity.[15] Third, in not identifying Morris exclusively with progressive politics, I remedy the still-too-common perception of his poetry as formally conservative, revealing him as a true innovator. Over the course of the chapter, I hope to show that *Sigurd* is a Modernist epic in all but the most superficial facet of its form—its line-by-line style (and even in this, it points ahead). This requires extending Tucker's "macropoetic" method to many micropoetic contexts, revealing a density of meaning that only appears if you approach *Sigurd* as thoroughly, seriously pagan, with the upshot that you *can* close-read Morris's epics. In this ambition, my project roughly parallels Anthony Skoblow's *Paradise Dislocated* (1993), but where Skoblow argues that *The Earthly Paradise* anticipates the negative-dialectical method of early 20th century critical theory and left-Modernism, I do the opposite for *Sigurd*, aligning it with pagan, dynamist right-Modernism (a maneuver that could, I think, be fruitfully repeated for the *Paradise*, and perhaps even *The Defence of Guenevere*). Ultimately, I hope to show that in Pound's frequently referenced dismissal of "The Wm. Morris tapestry treatment of the Middle Ages" he was, witting or unwitting, covering his own tracks (*Letters* 246).[16]

In large part, however, this chapter opens out beyond its immediate field, making two interlinked contributions at the level of theory and method. First, it speaks to

[15] Though not with the same temporal picture or figural mode, i.e., radical pastness registered in allegory. Sherry's concern is with the temporality of Decadence, quite distinct from the dynamic-traditionalist temporality that interests me here (though with common roots in at least one place: Swinburne).

[16] For instance, where Mary Ellis Gibson takes this passage as primarily a criticism of Morris for failing to "extend the subject" of Provence (18), I read this as a *response* to Morris, as much as a criticism—an indication that Pound had carefully studied Morris's Medievalism, and aimed to surpass it, just as he did with other major influences, such as Swinburne.

Annemarie Drury's observation that "foreignizing" and "domesticating" translation are "not the only alternatives" (190). She draws this conclusion from "reading parody as a form of translation," and, in that vein, I approach Morris's free bardic retelling of the *Volsunga Saga*, a prose work, as a form of translation. I make my case via *Sigurd*'s textual history, running back through Morris's earlier, more conventional prose translation, as *The Story of The Volsungs and Niblungs* (1870), to the saga itself, and thence to immemorial oral tradition. This open sense of what it means to "translate" corresponds to Morris's affinity with Yeats and, even moreso, Pound, whom Kenner sees practicing translation as a compositional method (150-3). Paradoxically, and to Drury's point, even though *Sigurd* has no direct connection to the sentence-by-sentence wording of *The Volsunga Saga*, it is also a kind of *literal* translation, insofar as Morris numbers among McGann's imaginative literalists with Yeats and Pound.

This brings me to the second intervention. In my reading of *Sigurd*, I delineate a new, imaginative-literalist mode of figuration, which stands outside the usual symbol/allegory binary. My paradigm is the Norse kenning, which works as *Sigurd*'s master-trope, fastening the fate of the Volsung sword to that of the Volsungs' tale, so that in transmitting the latter, Morris also transmits the former. Where symbol and allegory presuppose a representational epistemology, working through the logical categories of the dialectic (subject/object, universal particular, freedom/necessity, etc.), kenning presupposes a dynamist metaphysic, a pagan world of interacting forces, or as a young

Pound put it, "shapes of power" ("Revolt," in *EW* 15).[17] As the forward link suggests, we are already familiar with Pound's work in this mode —we know it as his ideogrammic method.[18] What my account shows, however, is Morris's own distinct, earlier iteration of this method, working not so much through Modernist simultaneity, as a distinctly Victorian diachronicity. In this way, Morris shows us both sides of the kenning, sword and tale, as the same *thing* at two different stages of a historical process, a view that is completely supported by the pagan metaphysical framing of *Sigurd*. The point of connection here is Pound's own early translation of an Anglo-Saxon standard, "The Seafarer" (1912), where he works through pagan kennings of his own. By placing him and Yeats in a pagan-dynamist genealogy, traceable back to Morris, I hope to reveal the centrality of paganism to their worldviews—whereas until now, it has been regularly noted, but rarely treated as the major object of interest, especially in the case of Pound.[19] Finally, in exploring this cross-century current of antimodern Modernism, I sketch a surprising prehistory for some of the main concerns and concepts of New Materialist method, e.g., thinking beyond dialectical models of form.

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[17] I owe my knowledge of this phrase to Bruce Fogelman's book of the same title (1988). Fogelman insists that we should take this very early coinage seriously as a career-orienting statement of intent, Pound's call for a poetics of power-shapes rather than "rational modes of organization." For Pound, "poetic structure depends not on narrative or other logical modes of development but on the succession of emotive qualities, their variations in intensity, and the relationships established among them" (4). Fogelman argues that the rhythmic sequencing of these "emotive pattern-units" is the real structural basis for the sprawling diachronic process of *The Cantos* (5).

[18] Sherry clarifies the dynamic basis of this method, and its aesthetic of immediacy: "That the ideogram resists reductive analysis—it is holistic, intuitive, creative rather than referential or duplicative—suggests the correspondence between its cluster of radicals and the Gestalt phenomenon described in 1933 by Karl Mannheim . . . . Numinous, irreducible, the ideogrammic unit transmits the same kind of unquestioned power that Mannheim describes here; that Pound finds as the desirable property of signs" (63).

[19] For instance, Peter Liebregts regularly touches on Pound's gods as expressions of his Neoplatonism, and Yeats's as expressions of Neoplatonic occultism, but does not explore the possibility that they use this philosophical vocabulary to express a more basic, *pagan* worldview (28, 38-39, 40-42, 51).

The Historicist Picture—The Pastness of the Past

Historicism starts from, and works through, the pastness of the past. In our field, this principle goes without saying, setting the horizons for any serious historical thought, whether or not it is specifically historicist in method. For precisely this reason, it is worth stepping back and defining it, in the most basic sense, so that we can understand what is at stake when Morris rejects it. We think of the pastness of the past as a rule, and it certainly functions as such, but on a deeper level, it gives us a kind of temporal picture, a way of seeing the shape of time and our place in it. Terdiman sketches it here:

> It would be satisfying simply to reoccupy the past as familiar territory. But that's the problem. The project of reproducing the consciousness of a period runs into just the methodological impossibility that frames and determines the memory crisis itself. *The past is never present*. It can never be brought back intact. Historicism was born out of this very problematic and foundered on it. Yet it would be naïve and self-disabling to imagine that because we cannot reoccupy the site of a past reality we are thereby prohibited from knowledge about it. (21-22)

Here, we see the modern subject "looking back" at a place to which it cannot return, a broken thing that it cannot remake, or a lost thing that it cannot go back and get. To look back, in this picture, is to rationally reflect on an absent object of representation.[20] Through this process of reflection, the present subject "constructs" the vanished past (7). So, when we say that the past is vanished/gone/dead/lost, i.e., past, what we actually mean is that it does not exist. Or rather, that it is ontologically dependent on us, as present subjects. The past exists only *for* us, as the object of consciousness, the absent referent of re-

[20] Terdiman defines memory, function on which historical reflection depends, as "pretty much coincident with representation—with the function by which symbols, or simulacra, or surrogates, come to stand for some absent referent" (8).

presentation, the product of our re-construction. The past, in its absence, is passive; we, in our thinking it, are active. In the most rigorous Marxian historicisms, the past is also an "absent cause" of present consciousness: not just the object *of* reflection, but also a determinant *of* that reflection, existing *in* or *via* its deferred "effect" (Levinson 51).[21] Even here, though, the past exists only through the retrospective act of consciousness, which "produces . . . . the past as past" and so makes "history's meaning" (52), in a process whose closure is indefinitely deferred to the future. Thus, the pastness of the past clears space for the basic moral project of historicism and Modernity write large, i.e., the "purposeful production" our material and cultural world as the dialectical expression of essential "human freedom" (Terdiman 56), whether what one produces is the future (through labor, art, politics, etc.) or the past (through historical reflection).

In this historical picture, time is progressive and segmented in shape. By "segmented," I mean that it is divided into past, present, and future, from the epoch down to the instant, by the difference-making apparatus of consciousness, a process rendered concrete by labor and social praxis (Terdiman 57). This is a way of perceiving the pastness of the past as an effect running down the timeline behind us, as a series of negatively-related pasts, as well as apprehending the otherness of the future. By "progressive," I mean that history is *morally* oriented towards a present or future state of universal human autonomy, a norm relative to which history may "progress" or "regress," or simply fail to do much of either. With this very broad, minimal definition, I follow the general procedure of

[21] In outlining this differential causal circuit, Levinson is getting at the same phenomenon that interests me—returning pasts / cyclicality—but from within the dialectical framework of historicism. It should be noted that Levinson has shifted from this position to an interest in "post-dialectical materialism," consonant with the New Materialist current of criticism, and closer to the dynamism that I find in Pound, Yeats, and Morris.

Hayden White, who is less interested in narrative closure, per se, than in histories that work relative to the *criterion* or *possibility* of that closure.[22] So, this category groups the robust progress narratives of Herder, Hegel, Marx, etc., where history dialectically develops toward an immanent telos, with those later narratives that reduce this telos to a regulative ideal of utopia (Adorno and Horkheimer, Jameson), and those that simply suffer the inconceivability of any such goal (White's own meta-historical position). Working with this progressive and segmented model of time, historicism presents itself as the only coherent option —one can either accept the pastness of the past, relating oneself to it through dialectical reflection, or succumb to the illusion of temporal "reversibility" (56), Quixotically attempting to "reoccupy" the past" in historiography, culture, and/or politics. By rejecting the temporal picture in which this choice shows up, William Morris chose neither.

Historicism inherits its progressive and segmented model of history from Christian eschatology, in which "a straight line traces the course of humanity from initial Fall to final Redemption," so that human history and individual life "play out once, once for all, in a concrete and irreplaceable time . . . ." (Henri-Charles Puech qtd. in Eliade 143). This timeline goes hand in hand with the pastness of the past. According to Paul Ricoeur, it is St. Augustine who converts the past into an absent referent of consciousness, a merely ideal object. Augustine starts from the assumption that the future and past do not exist, but

[22] Hayden White reveals historical end-directedness as more widespread than it may appear. Histories structured as tragedies point toward a specific resolution by failing to attain it. And histories structured as satires, despairing the possibility of any such resolution, presuppose the validity of narrative closure as a standard for historical meaning. M.H. Abrams tracks the philosophical basis of historicism's varied progress narratives, the dialectical progression from alienation to transcendent synthesis (for Abrams, the "circuitous journey"), as it passes from radical-Protestant theology and German Idealism into British Romantic poetry.

argues that in a sense they do exist "as adjectives: *futura* and *praeterita*" (Ricoeur 10). By resituating past and present "'within' the soul," as qualities of experience, Augustine can conclude that "'wherever they are and whatever they are, it is only by being present [for the mind] that they are'" (10). This subjectivization of the past, and of time itself, gives the subject of the present a qualified insulation from determination by history, going hand in hand with Augustine's moral picture of free will struggling with impinging matter, and, much later, the Romantic / historicist dialectic of human self-determination and necessity. Moreover, in Augustine's day, it had a powerful, immediate ideological function, as ascendant Christianity made its claim to supersede the pagan past.[23]

The Dynamic-Traditionalist Picture—The Return

Though Yeats and Pound had their different personal idioms and points of emphasis, they collaboratively developed a single, pagan method of thinking about history, in a conversation that spanned decades and cycled back on itself.[24] This model of history is built around the temporal picture of returning pasts. Pound's "The Return," with its fractured Image of attenuated pagan resurgence, is an extreme condensation of Yeats's early *The Wanderings of Oisin* (1889), where the ancient Fenian hero returns from fairyland

[23] This struggle to neutralize, reckon with, and/or retrospectively digest paganism is as old and as enduring as Christianity itself, and persists into its secular offshoots (Romanticism, historicism, etc.). For an account of this process in Britain, see Marion Gibson's *Imagining the Pagan Past*, esp. 48-51 on the ambivalence of Milton (chief theological reference point for the Lake Poets and Keats), 66-70 on the range of Romantic responses, and Chapter 4 on the long history of British responses to the Germanic gods of the Saxons and Danes (especially relevant to Morris).

[24] Of course, this conversation also included Eliot, T.E. Hulme, and Wyndham Lewis, as well as the primitivist sculptors Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and Jacob Epstein. I would also mention H.D., whose early work is just as much a Hellenic pagan "return" as Pound's and who, even in the much later *Trilogy*, is keenly invested in the presence of the ancient past and its gods, discernable only to an occult-aesthetic elite.

to Ireland, only to find it ruled by Christ and St. Patrick, and himself an old man. Surely recognizing this homage, Yeats returns the favor. Concluding the "Packet to Ezra Pound" that begins *A Vision*, Yeats apologizes, "you will hate these generalities, Ezra" but, "you have written 'The Return," and "in book and picture it gives me better words than my own" (29-30). Then, he prints the whole poem.

But the first voice in this circuit of influence was Morris himself. Just after the publication of *Oisin*, Yeats sent a copy of his new epic to May Morris, "hoping of course that it might meet [her father's] eyes," and was honored when, in a chance meeting, Morris "praised" him, exclaiming, "You write my sort of poetry" (*Autobiographies* 180).[25] This must have been a generous understatement. *Oisin* reads like a Celticized composite of Morris's two great epics, *The Earthly Paradise* (1868) and *Sigurd*. In structure and mood, Yeats's poem closely resembles "Ogier The Dane," a tale from the *Paradise* in which a knight of Charlemagne passes out of time into fairyland, dwelling in bliss with Morgan le Fay, until fate calls him back to do battle, twice.[26] In its politics of religion, *Oisin* also echoes the *Paradise*'s final tale, "The Hill of Venus," where Morris uses a knight's return from under the Hill to tilt paganism against Christianity, strongly favoring the former. But where Morris relegates his heroes' knightly exploits to the distant background, *Oisin* hardens its

[25] E.P. Thompson briefly discusses this meeting as part of Morris's and Yeats's personal and political relationship, in *Romantic to Revolutionary* (554-55). Earlier in the book, he makes a daring and plausible claim: that, in the hard Medievalism *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858), "It is not difficult to find . . . . the master of W.B. Yeats" (85).

[26] It is possible Yeats had never read "Ogier" in particular, or *Sigurd* for that matter. He does, however, recall that as a boy, he had read "the third volume of *The Earthly Paradise*, and *The Defence of Guenevere* , which pleased me less, but had not opened either for a long time" (*Autobiographies* 174). In the same passage, Yeats references a tale from that third volume*:* "'The Man Who Never Laughed Again' [fr. the *Paradise*] had seemed the most wonderful of tales till my father had accused me of preferring Morris to Keats, got angry about it, and put me altogether out of countenance". This tale also deals with a man stranded in fairyland, in an even moodier key than "Ogier."

melancholy in martial flame, culminating in Oisin's final diatribe against St. Patrick. Here, *Oisin* follows in the wake of *Sigurd*, known in Yeats's time and ours for its atavistic faithfulness to the Viking ethos of its source material—chiefly the *Volsunga Saga* and the mythological *Eddas*. In making the link to *Sigurd*, I take precedent from Tucker, who reads *Oisin* as concluding with an "unregenerate pagan resolve," a "register of triumph" even in apparent defeat, that "sums up the ferocity of *Sigurd*'s fourth book" (542). And I tend to agree with his suggestion that Morris was a major influence on Yeats's aversion to progress.[27]

In *Oisin*, Yeats superposes the pastness of the past on a more basic substratum of temporal return, and shows us his hero caught in this tragic dissonance. In a turn reminiscent of *The Earthly Paradise*, Yeats delivers his epic via a frame narrative, as the Fenian warrior tells St. Patrick of his blissful journey to, and arduous return from, the Blessed Isles. There, he dwelt in bliss with a fairy maiden, until the suffering of memory drove him back to Ireland, where hundreds of years have passed. As soon as his feet touch earth, Oisin finds himself an old man and a stranger in his own land, disoriented and obsolete. At last, he asks St. Patrick, "What place have Caoilte and Conan, and Bran, Sceolan, Lomair" [his old warrior companions] in this newly Christian epoch? In answer, the saint vaunts that the Fenians are "Where the demons whip them with wires on the burning stones of wide Hell," locked safely away behind "a gateway of brass." Nevertheless, Oisin retorts that he will "go to the Fenians, O cleric, to chaunt / The war-songs that roused them

[27] That Tucker, too, links *Oisin* back to *Sigurd*, suggests that even if Yeats had not read it, there is something objectively Morrisian about *Oisin*. If one takes *The Earthly Paradise* and adds a serious investment in *The Volsunga Saga* and *The Eddas*, one gets *Sigurd*. If one takes *The Earthly Paradise* and adds a serious investment in the Ulster Cycle and *The Iliad*, one gets *Oisin*.

of old; they will rise . . . .” to “batter the gateway of brass” and take Heaven by force (385-86).

Patrick is right that Oisin’s time has passed, proved right by everything around them. But by the time Oisin levels his threat, he knows this, too. When he promises the return of his pagan warband up and out of the underworld, this is also a prophecy, flung out hundreds or thousands of years ahead—the promise to return up and out of the past, breaching the brass gates of cultural-historical damnation. Is this just the futile gesture of a hero without his world? The context suggests otherwise. The mere fact that Oisin *did* return, aged though he is, shows that such a return is possible. Moreover, the hero points to Patrick’s own impermanence: “You too are old with your memories, an old man surrounded with dreams” (385), suggesting that the Christian epoch is limited by the same principle that limited his. Where Oisin’s cyclical temporality can account for Christianity’s triumph *and* its eventual displacement, Patrick’s doctrine of progress accounts for the former, but forecloses even the possibility of the latter.[28] Furthermore, it cannot account for Oisin’s reappearance from the Blessed Isles. All told, the strong suggestion is that this

[28] Here, Yeats gives us a more radical, decided version of what may be the *first* image of pagan return, Swinburne’s “Hymn to Proserpine,” where a sorrowful pagan in newly Christianized Rome (perhaps Julian The Apostate) condemns the new God to the same fate as the old: “Yet thy kingdom shall pass, Galilean, thy dead shall go down to thee dead” (78). This may seem like a very radical, atelic historicism, but instead, the speaker takes the persistence of death and historical ending as proof that the pagan goddess of death survives: Other gods “give labour and slumber; but thou, Proserpina, death” (80). In this enduring metaphysical substrate is the promise of return: “For there is no God found stronger than death; and death is a sleep” (81). If we enter into the poem’s pagan framing, this is no wishful thinking or quiescence: We know “Proserpine” better as Persephone who, when she is not the wife of Hades, returns to the world as goddess of spring growth. The “Hymn” was part of *Poems and Ballads* (1866), published two years before Morris’s *Earthly Paradise*. Florence Boos reveals that both these works came out of a running conversation centered on the Tannhauser myth, which yielded both Morris’s “The Hill of Venus” and Swinburne’s gleefully transgressive “Laus Veneris” (“Ten Journeys to the Venusberg,” 598-99). One might surmise that the central interest here was not just Venus, but paganism and the possibility of its subterranean survival, occasioning eventual return.

will not be the last the world sees of Ireland's pagan, barbarian past. The poem ends on a note of affirmation, Oisin insisting he will go to his friends "be they in flames or at feast" (386).

Through the dialogue of Oisin and Patrick, Yeats stages a twofold confrontation. The contest of paganism against Christianity is also a contest between their models of time, cyclical/continuous against progressive/segmented, respectively. In this way, Yeats produces a chiastic effect, tracing modern, secular historicism back to its Christian origins, and, at the same time, extrapolating his own, dynamic-traditionalist sense of time from ancient paganism (i.e., showing us how pagan time works, and the implications for modernity). I take Yeats's foisting *Oisin* on his elder, and Morris's recognizing his own hand in it, as circumstantial evidence of a common understanding: For Morris, as for Yeats, *The Earthly Paradise*, *Sigurd*, and *Oisin* were serial responses to a shared problematic, which Yeats rendered explicit: The struggle to "batter the gateway of brass" that keeps the pagan past passed.

Over subsequent decades, Yeats developed the historical picture that "Oisin" opened up, and finalized it in the system of *A Vision*, where Oisin's prophesied return is not just possible, but necessary. Here, Yeats maps out time as a spiral path of rhythmically expanding and contracting diameter. This path is generated by the periodic interaction of two interpenetrating "gyres," one "primary" and the other "antithetical," each holding religious and existential sway for roughly two thousand years, and pushing the other into the margins, as "the secular." Yeats identifies the primary phase with Christianity

/democracy / civilization, the antithetical phase with paganism /aristocracy / barbarism, and sees himself at the end of the former, working to usher in the latter:

> Before the birth of Christ religion and vitality were polytheistic, antithetical, and to this the philosophers opposed their primary, secular thought. Plato thinks all things into Unity and is the 'First Christian.' At the birth of Christ religious life become primary, secular life antithetical—man gives to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. A primary dispensation looking beyond itself towards a transcendent power is dogmatic, levelling, unifying, feminine, humane, peace its means and end; an antithetical dispensation obeys imminent [sic] power, is expressive, hierarchical, multiple, masculine, harsh, surgical. (262-63) [29]

Yeats's disambiguation is clear enough, but certain interesting features bear note.[30] First, in his identification of Plato and philosophical rationalism with Christianity, Yeats follows Nietzsche, and anticipates Eliade's historicist/traditionalist distinction. Second, on Yeats's terms, modern philosophical humanism, "levelling," "unifying," "humane," and pacific, must be a *primary* current of thought, the re-secularization of declining Christianity as its world-cycle ends. Only from this vantage point can we make sense of the following: "*antithetical* revelation is an intellectual influx neither from beyond mankind nor born of a virgin, but

[29] Yeats certainly grants a place to Christianity, and sees a value to the primary "tincture" of reality, conceding to Pound that, insofar as his system works through "generalities," it is "of . . . . the abstract sky." But even in this apparent compromise, where Christ and Oedipus are "the two scales of a balance, the two butt-ends of a seesaw," paganism wins—to relegate Christ to one pole of the cosmic process is to relativize him, to syncretize him, to deny his claim of transcendence and exclusivity (29). Yeats grants a very real value to the "humane," to "peace," and even to "leveling," but by putting those values in the balance with the "harsh," "hierarchical," and "surgical," rejects the totalizing moral claims of Christianity and post-Enlightenment humanism.

[30] Many will note Yeats's stark female / male dichotomy, coupled with his considerably higher valuation of the antithetical, i.e., male tendency. However, even if we take for granted that Yeats was a man of his times, and enter into the terms of his framework, this is a pretty mysterious distinction, and I am not sure it follows from his premises. The best I can do, to motivate it, is to suggest that Yeats sees this in Blakean terms, as a distinction between extreme maternal and paternal impulses—the former, at its worst, domineering and sheltering; the latter, at its worst, tyrannical and selfish. What that cannot account for is Yeats's unilateral alignment of the maternal tendency with rationalism. Surely primary types such as Socrates, Plato, and Robespierre embody a kind of stereotypically masculine thought—arid, abstruse, and world-enclosing? However, it must be noted that Yeats certainly does *not* follow the typical Socratic/Platonic path, in identifying women with irrationality.

begotten from our spirit and history" (262). Harsh, hierarchical, pagan, violent, the antithetical ethos clashes with Christianity and humanism alike, yet is quintessentially human. So it must be that human*ism*, proper, is the dialectical immanentization of a transcendent rational and moral ideal, descending from "beyond mankind," and at odds with real human life. In this way, Yeats dissociates the historicist outlook from its monopoly on historical change, artistic advancement, etc. The antithetical influx will be a "return to barbarism" as prophesied by *The Wanderings of Oisin*, but not "as ordinarily understood," precisely because it *returns* from the past, from latent human history, and thus cannot but respond to the intervening millenia. This is transformation through repetition, in the mode of Deleuze and Bergson, rather than the reinstantiation of a static transcendent ideal.

The definitions above depend, to some degree, on dialectical categories like transcendent/immanent, universal/particular. However, these are primary "generalities" or "abstractions," used to reveal a specifically antithetical truth. The gyres are a way of apprehending the motion of divine mind, but this mind is neither *rational* nor *human* (e.g., neither Milton's God nor Hegel's self-understanding Spirit), nor does it express itself in a logic of historical contradiction (Marx), nor is that history even *answerable*, in principle, to the criteria of reason (Adorno and Horkheimer). Early in *A Vision*, Yeats's occultist alter ego Michael Robartes distinguishes the continuous, dynamic structure of the gyre from the segmented, rational structure of the dialectic: "Life is no series of emanations from divine reason such as the Cabalists imagine, but an irrational bitterness, no orderly descent from

level to level, no waterfall but a whirlpool, a gyre" (40).[31] A gyre, of course, is a vortex, an image Yeats derived in large part from Pound.

Pound approached cyclical recurrence in a more open, improvisatory manner, building his *Cantos* around the "repeat in history," achieved through "subject-rhymes" between temporally distant literary and historical events. This repetition is triggered when "Live man" (in Canto I, Odysseus), "goes down into world of Dead," consulting the spirits (in Canto I, Tiresias) and receiving a vision of patterned history—the "repeat." Picking up on subject-rhyme in the rhythmic repetition of events, he also sees their structural homology, apprehending the conjunction of forms that appears again and again in each. This, in turn, triggers immediate apprehension of those forms as Images, in "'the magic moment' or moment of metamorphosis," where the hero "busts thru from quotidien into 'divine or permanent world'. Gods, etc" (*Letters* 284-85). Of course, for Pound, the "Live man" who goes down to the dead is also, and always, the poet himself (an attitude manifest in Yeats, too). When Pound sends Odysseus to consult the dead, Odysseus is his messenger, and the multiplicitous voices of the *Cantos* are the dead themselves, rhythmically brought forth to speak.

In this, the *Cantos* iterate the basic formal strategy of "The Return." Like *Oisin*, "The Return" shows us the conflict of pagan/traditionalist and Christian/historicist temporalities. But where Yeats superpositions them in narrative, Pound shows us their

[31] Though here, Robartes speaks of Cabalists, this comes as the end of his gloss on Kant's first antinomy. Yeats takes these antinomies neither as delimiting the jurisdiction of reason, nor setting up the alienation-problematic of Hegelian/Marxist dialect, but as symptoms of the world's essential irrationality. This becomes clearer in Robartes's response to the third antinomy: "Nor is this antinomy an appearance imposed upon us by the form of thought but life itself which turns, now here, now there, a whirling and a bitterness'" (52).

interaction in the fractured body of the poem, which suffers this dissonance as Oisin does. Rather than adopting the reflective posture of the lyric "I," Pound directly addresses us:

> See, they return; ah, see the tentative
> Movements, and the slow feet,
> The trouble in the pace and the uncertain
> Wavering! (*Personae* 74)

The "they" is the gods of Greek and Roman antiquity, and they return with "silver hounds / sniffing the trace of air," as if returning from an unsuccessful hunt in a fairyland of their own, during which almost two Christian millenia have passed. Pound's free-verse indentations make us see the enjambment of "tentative / Movements" and "uncertain / Wavering" as real spaces on the page, through which we see these once-majestic beings trip and stagger, enfeebled like Oisin. In this way, Pound visually *segments* the temporal process of the poem, chops it up, and the body of the poem shows up as a broken statue. Nevertheless, there is a counterforce against this segmentation, here:

> See, they return, one, and by one,
> With fear, as half-awakened;
> As if the snow should hesitate
> And murmur in the wind,
> and half turn back;
> These were the "Wing'd-with-Awe,"
> inviolable. (74)

The first two lines are brutally segmented by commas, but without indentation or enjambment, they *aspire* to a more continuous motion, the second suggesting iambic meter until the broken foot (read: "slow feet") and semicolon break it off. But this motion wraps around into the next two lines, where "hesitate" hovers over its enjambment, then flows onward into the next line, and leaps the indentation. The overall feel is a fast iambic run slowed into majesty by breath-marks. Here, the staggering gait gives way to the hesitation

of snow in wind, i.e., a slowness of power. In the bending and updrafting of snow, we see the gods as part of active, continuous time, cycling up into the present, across the ostensible barrier of the pastness of the past. This barrier can break their motion, but not halt it, can drain the gods of strength until they're "pallid," but not strip them of solemn grace.

This corresponds to a crucial change of argument. Where Yeats's poem only gestures to the possibility of pagan return, Pound's enacts it on the page and so, on his own terms, allows the gods to make themselves present. Whatever one may make of the validity of this claim, Pound insists that "The Return" "is an objective reality . . . . like Mr. Epstein's 'Sun God'" (Ruthven 204). What he means is that, like his friend's modern pagan megalith, "The Return" is a literal body for the gods, raised out of the page with the chisel of free verse. Yet this is also a body-in-motion, a process of returning played out diachronically. By invoking the gods, naming them, Pound ritually *evokes* them, calls them up out of history's spinning well. And the pallor, weakness, etc. of the gods is grounded in pagan myth—they've gone hungry for centuries. Their hounds, who were "the souls of blood," are still "sniffing the trace of air," i.e., seeking blood, that is, the blood of new sacrifices.

In my view, *Sigurd* is just such a performative poem, working to enact the return of the ancient, pagan past on a much more ambitious, epic scale. Consider the parallels between Yeats's mobilization of early Greek tragedy (Aeschylus, primarily), and Morris's mobilization of epic. In each case, the poet weaponizes archaic genres against the present by *respecting* their historical specificity—treating them as inherently value-laden forms, originary worldview structurally built into them. According to Michael Valdez Moses, Yeats

followed Nietzsche in simply "refusing to accept the historicist premises underlying the modern view" of Attic tragedy," i.e., that it "may inspire modern thinkers and artists, but [its] forms, themes, and contexts cannot be revived except as an exercise in antiquarianism" (561). In other words, Yeats refused the doctrine of the pastness of the past, and the concomitant notion of historical progress. Rather, Yeats saw himself contributing to "a genuine rebirth of the spirit of classical tragedy," and thus, bringing in "a revolutionary antimodern turn in the cultural history of modern Europe" (561-62). Yeats recognized, in Greek tragedy, what Dentith recognizes in "epic as a genre," that is, that it "carries atavistic meanings from the pre-modern world which inevitably mark its telling of the national story" (239).[32] While most nineteenth-and-twentieth century epicists worked to recode these embedded values, Morris, like Yeats, worked to activate them. Hence, *Sigurd*'s manifest conflict with historicism, and with Modernity writ large.[33] Dentith's term "atavism" is apt in the historical scenario it implies. For Morris, as for Yeats, the goal was not some quixotic return *to* past forms, but the reemergence *of* past forms, into the present historical moment, out from a past that had always continued existing, as latent potential.

Morris's weaponization of genre works on a historiographic as well as an ethical level. Hayden White suggests that historicism argues by emplotment, and relies on four

[32] See also Dentith's introduction to *Epic and Empire* on Vico's proto-historicist discovery of the *Iliad*'s Bronze Age barbarism (4-8). Dentith suggests that our very sense of the past as somehow radically other, that is, of its pastness, owes much to this encounter with raw, non-Classicized epic.

[33] Dentith allows for the possibility that this atavism was inadvertent, but acknowledges it as part of a concerted project. "The strangeness of the idiom here is an index of the radical alterity of the world that Morris is seeking to evoke . . . But the problematic of epic primitivism in turn provokes its own questions, as much ethical and political as aesthetic: what are the implications of seeking to reanimate this archaic material, to rewrite this profoundly pre-modern story, issuing from a radically alien social organization and mentality?" (243).

basic narrative genres—romance, comedy, tragedy (in Hegel's sense, not Nietzsche's), and satire. This set arises from the constitutive exclusion of epic.[34] So, if *Sigurd* models history as ancient epic, it is modeling history outside of, and against, the historicist paradigm. One notable defender of this exclusion was Karl Marx, who fought a brief but savage rearguard action against Greek art, including epic, focused specifically on its paganism:

> It is well known that Greek mythology is not only the arsenal of Greek art but also its foundation. Is the view of nature and of social relations on which the Greek imagination and hence Greek [mythology] is based possible with self-acting mule spindles and railways and locomotives and electrical telegraphs? What chance has Vulcan against Roberts & Co., Jupiter against the lightning-rod and Hermes against the Credit Mobilier? All mythology overcomes and dominates and shapes the forces of nature in the imagination and by the imagination; it therefore vanishes with the advent of real mastery over them.
>
> From another side, is Achilles possible with powder and lead? Or the *Iliad* with the printing press, not to mention the printing machine? Do not the song and the saga and the muse necessarily come to an end with the printer's bar, hence do not the necessary conditions of epic poetry vanish? . . . .
>
> A man cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. But does he not find joy in the child's naivete, and must he himself not strive to reproduce its truth at a higher stage? . . . . There are unruly children and precocious children . . . . The Greeks were normal children. The charm of their art for us is not in contradiction to the undeveloped stage of society on which it grew. [It] is its result, rather, and is inextricably bound up, rather, with the fact that the unripe social conditions under which it arose, and could alone arise, can never return. (245-46)

One notable, radically presentist assumption here is that pagan myth has the same function as industrial-capitalist technology, to "overcome and dominate and shape the forces of nature."[35] And mark that last sentence, which underlines the pastness of the past with "can

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[34] In White's rather limited view, epic reduces history to endless and ultimately meaningless alternation between two poles, which is probably accurate for the Enlightenment epic-histories that interest him. But this rationalized good-and-evil framework is alien to ancient heroic epic, which invests ethical value precisely in the endless conflict and collaboration of multiplicitous groups and individuals, and where this process unfolds neither as oscillation nor as progressive development, but in continually accumulating seasonal cycles.

[35] Of course, the common denominator is Marx's metaphysics of human creative activity, but for Marx the aim is *always* to "dominate . . . . the forces of nature." In this way, Marx's humanism bears the stamp of *its* mode of

never return." This passage in *The Grundrisse* would not become available until 1939, but one wonders what Morris would have made of it, especially given his notoriously fiery temper.

Morris as Queen Square "Odinist"

If we look around Morris's immediate context, there are few viable reference points for direct, sophisticated opposition to historicism.[36] Richard Frith reminds us that "In spite of his socialist allegiances and revolutionary aspirations," Morris "can be situated . . . . in a basically conservative medievalist tradition," referring especially to Ruskin and Carlyle (118). After all, even in his Marxist period, Morris credited these conservative critics of capitalist modernity as the chief forerunners of his political "movement," albeit with a pithy qualification regarding Carlyle.[37] But even Carlyle, a strident critic of the age, worked within Victorian historicism's small-p progressive logic, confidently asserting that the past is "the possession of the Present; the Past had always something *true* and is a precious possession" (41). In so doing, he exemplifies the one-sidedly presentist, appropriative posture that Levinson identifies in much of nineteenth-century historicism (and which I see

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production, just as much as Greek paganism does. See Chapter 2 of this dissertation, 56-58, for Marx's view of nature as the "inorganic body" of humanity, waiting to be claimed as such by labor.

[36] Tucker names Swinburne as a fellow opponent of Modernity, especially in *The Tale of Balen*, and I agree, but Swinburne would require the same disambiguation as Morris. See my previous note on "Hymn to Proserpine," 133.

[37] When a young W.B. Yeats asked Morris "what led up to his movement, he replied: 'Oh, Ruskin and Carlyle, but somebody should have been beside Carlyle and punched his head every five minutes'" (*Autobiographies* 180). While no doubt informed by Morris's left-wing commitments at the time, this two-sided perception of Carlyle, as a capable thinker bent out of shape by bitterness, was by no means exclusive to the left. Nietzsche takes Carlyle seriously enough to criticize him regularly for, among other things, his "heroical-moralistical interpretation of dyspepsia," a phrasing later borrowed by E.P. Thompson (*Twilight of The Idols* 85; *Romantic to Revolutionary* 29-32).

as persisting, even in the most nuanced, two-sided dialectics). In breaking with Carlyle's impulse to "possess" the past, presaged on the notion that it is irrevocably behind us, Morris is after something less *conservative* of Victorian bourgeois values, more open-ended, and, from a historicist standpoint, impossible.

Carlyle's remark comes at the very end of his lecture on Norse religion, following on an invocation of the pastness of the past: "Thor is vanished, the whole Norse world has vanished; and will not return ever again. In like fashion to that pass away the highest things" (41). Morris's contemporaries were familiar with perspectives such as Carlyle's and would've expected him to treat the distant North with a similarly remote fondness—to take "possession" of its specific truths. Instead, they read *Sigurd* as a nakedly pagan poem, bizarrely out of joint with its historical surroundings.

Here, I take a diagnostic approach to two opposing perspectives: the searing moral criticism of Henry Hewlett, and the bemused enthusiasm of Theodore Watts. Despite their differing opinions on the moral value of the poem, they are clearly trying to get a handle on the same phenomenon: a new way of engaging with the ancient past that is strangely, radically faithful to that past, and yet, through this fidelity, directly speaks to, and against, the modern world. Both succeed in *describing* the archaic newness of *Sigurd*, but, as a function of their historical situation, they have no technical vocabulary for *explaining* it. Instead, they resort to concepts ready to hand, accounting for Morris's anomaly in very similar terms as a kind of rogue historicism.

Hewlett's concern is that Morris fails or simply refuses to place any critical distance between his own retelling of the Volsung story, and the brutal, pagan worldview of his

source material. Though he praises certain passages with "a faint *soupçon* of modernness," even in these, "the traces . . . . of any anachronism in thought or feeling are so minute as to be well-nigh indistinguishable, the whole texture of the poem being steeped to saturation in the atmosphere of Odinism" (*CH* 261). In other words, though *Sigurd* is a very free rewriting of its source material, Hewlett feels as though he is reading the translation of a Norse original. This is not *supposed* to be possible. All Hewlett can offer, by way of explanation, is that "No artist can possibly identify himself more closely with the spirit of the age and the temper of the actors he undertakes to depict" (261). This makes Morris out to be a "subjective" historicist in the vein of Dilthey, striving to transcend the pastness of the past through sympathetic identification with its cultural consciousness. [38] But where normally, historicist reflection situates the past in the *bildungsroman* of the present, as a stage in the formation of higher modern culture, Morris's poem makes no such concessions. Hewlett sees Morris's stark "truth of . . . . representation," impressive though it is, as the condition of this failure (261). This is because

> A poem . . . . which, like Sigurd, reflects, with hard, uncompromising realism, an obsolete code of ethics, and a barbarous condition of society, finds itself irreconcilably at discord with the key of nineteenth-century feeling. Deprived of its strongest claim to interest, a sympathetic response in the moral and religious sentiment of its readers, it can only appeal to the intellect as a work of art, or as a more or less successful attempt at antiquarian restoration. (262-63)

This is a puzzling passage. If *Sigurd* is truly just an exercise in artful antiquarianism, the fascinating, learned recreation of an ancient lifeworld, it should be as much of a textual artifact as the *Volsunga Saga* itself, irrelevant and harmless. In that case, there should be no

[38] For a helpful distillation of the famous "dilemma" between subjective and objective modes of historicism, see Levinson (30-31).

discord between its values and Hewlett's own, no need for such severe damnation of its "fierce and repulsive . . . .story" (261). But, perhaps because *Sigurd* puts itself forward as an original work, in the politically charged genre of epic, Hewlett reads it as making a real bid for "the nation's heart" and failing in that bid (263).[39] For Hewlett, there is something ideologically threatening about this. The objection works on two levels, ethical content and diachronic form: In earnestly putting forward "barbarous" values, apparently for the edification of a modern audience, *Sigurd* recognizes the historical specificity of the past, but not its pastness. Morris's poem challenges the notion that "public and private morality has undergone a complete and, it may be believed, a lasting change" through "the supersession of Odinism by a religious creed and moral code of which love and forgiveness are fundamental principles" (261-62). In other words, the problem is paganism. Though Hewlett stops short of calling *Sigurd* a pagan poem, or Morris a pagan poet, the implication is plain.

Theodore Watts, a good friend of Swinburne and, by extension, Morris, hails *Sigurd* as a great achievement, and praises it for precisely those qualities that trouble Hewlett. He sees the same pagan sensibility in *Sigurd*, gives it even more prominent place, and sees it as the wellspring of the poem's virtues. However, Watts resembles Hewlett in the notion of Morris as a sympathetic historicist who somehow "breaks through" into the past itself, cheerfully quipping that Morris "consents to breathe the smoke with us, but it is in the atmosphere of the Golden Past that he lives." Where Hewlett represents this in the usual

[39] In their respective monographs, Tucker and Dentith both detail nineteenth-century views of epic as essentially political, and often national or imperial.

terms, as a retrospective identification, Watts gives us something rather different. He sketches Morris as a gloriously preposterous reality, a temporally stranded Viking skald whose "body is in Queen Square," but whose "soul is in Ultima Thule." Morris is "the very Frunsmidr Bragar—the Poetry-smith of the Northern Olympus. There is no affectation in such antiquarianism as we get here. The poet is quite soaked in Odinism" (*CH* 230-31). The notion of an "unaffected" antiquarianism is consistent with Hewlett's account, but as Watts phrases it here, a deliberate oxymoron —Morris has not meticulously imitated an archaic manner, nor has he shown us the otherness of a past world with learned accuracy. By implication, Morris has done something more than, or other than, antiquarian poetry. It is also worth noting a direct resonance with one of Hewlett's phrasings. Where for Hewlett, it is "the poem" that is "steeped to saturation in the atmosphere of Odinism," for Watts, it is Morris himself who is "soaked" in it, every bit as soaked as the pagan Vikings themselves. In praising Morris as "Frunsmidr Bragar," Watts places him in the *same* bardic tradition as the ancient "poetry-smiths," a line running back to the deified poet, Bragi. It appears this is how Morris himself saw his poetic task, manifest in a "participatory" mode of translation.

If Watts left it there, perhaps we could dismiss this as whimsical enthusiasm for (and loving caricature of) a member of his own artistic circle—more commentary on Morris's persona than on *Sigurd*. But he follows through on his own image, drawing a powerful inference. Morris's atavistic temperament is the *basis* for Sigurd's newness and uniqueness, so that "the spontaneity—real, and not apparent merely—of this reproduction of the temper of a bygone age is as marvelous as the spontaneity of the form in which it is embodied; while, for purity of English, for freedom from euphuism and every kind of

'poetic diction' (so called), it is far ahead of anything of equal length that has appeared in this century (230-31). What Watts notices is a kind of modernity: the way that, in bringing about the cyclical return of ancient modes of seeing and feeling, *Sigurd* produces a future.

Morris and The Norse Cult of The Deed

Tucker's great contribution to reading *Sigurd*, and one of this chapter's foundations, is his argument that *Sigurd* breaks with Victorian historicism through a kind of radical performativity, making us as present-day readers in some sense accountable to its ancient Norse origins. However, Tucker dialectically brackets his findings in a way that precludes their most interesting, most challenging implications. In his view, what we are supposed to commit ourselves to is not the pagan-aristocratic worldview of the *Volsunga Saga* or the *Eddas*, but rather, the *tales* that this culture produced, and the spirit of sacrifice *for* the tale that legendary figures like the Volsungs embodied. In other words, he sees *Sigurd*'s ethical core as an especially militant project of transhistorical *bildung*, articulating that project in terms of dialectical self-consciousness or reflexivity: characters who know themselves to be part of future tales, and thus, part of an enduring culture-creative process, modeling that self-awareness for us. Through this aestheticizing approach, he folds *Sigurd* back into the basic categories and values of historicism. By engaging Tucker's readings in detail, I bring out Morris's serious investment in the pagan worldview of his Viking Age sources, registered in his emphasis on "the deed" and its circulatory linkage to "the tale," as well as an understated but pervasive interest in subtleties of Norse magic and religion.

This becomes clear if we trace Tucker's argument back to an earlier version, the article "All for The Tale." Here, he gets traction by distinguishing Sigurd from *The Earthly Paradise* (1868), which he reads as steeped in a "consumerist historicism" that grants the modern subject "nostalgic yet recuperative access to a narrative ancestry remarkable for its benevolence" (388). This sounds a like a rather uncharitable precis of Walter Pater's famous review, where Pater explains the *Paradise* as poetry that "takes possession" of the already-transfigured "worlds" of its Greek and Germanic source materials, and "sublimates beyond [them] another [world] still fainter and more spectral" (300).[40] Tucker rightly calls our attention to this appropriative facet of historicism, identifying it with liberal negative liberty and choice-discourse, and presents *Sigurd* as an illiberal alternative, which demands our fidelity to a single, transhistorical epos, simultaneously thematizing and enacting this posture. Tucker reveals that *Sigurd*'s Volsung and Niblung protagonists situate themselves in history through narrative, continually recounting tales of the past, and continually looking ahead to the tale that will be told, in turn, about their deeds. Indeed, they give their lives for the sake of a place in future stories, "the destiny that is their legend" (*Epic* 515).

But crucially, the tale that *Sigurd*'s characters speak of, is the tale that they are in—ie., the "story of Sigurd the Volsung and the fall of the Niblungs," first compiled in the Volsunga Saga, and now retold by Morris. The poem presents itself as evidence that its heroes' sacrifices (and like sacrifices throughout history) have not been in vain. Rather, they bore fruit in a culture-forming narrative, "The Great Story of The North." This

[40] Pater's view is far less one-sidedly presentist, as he stresses the way in which past forms *enable* and *persist through* their secondary transfigurations.

performance of theme immediately installs Sigurd in a very long textual history, as one instantiation of a story that is continually remade. Moreover, it installs the reader in this history, as an engaged participant, interpellating us, as readers, critics, and artists, into the same paradigm of culture-heroism. The hero "dies into narrative" so that we, later, may "become worthy of the tale by living up to an original greatness" (516). This last formulation strongly suggests that Morris took a traditionalist comportment toward *The Volsunga Saga*, transmitting its archaic worldview to a modern audience. But that is not where Tucker takes it.

When the Niblung hero Hogni has finally been overwhelmed by weight of numbers, his captor, Atli (a fictionalized Attila the Hun), sends henchmen to give him an excruciating death. Entering Hogni's cell, they declare their intent: to "carve the heart from thy body, and thou living yet, O King." His scornful retort is part boast, part admonishment:

> Then Hogni laughed, for they feared him; and he said: "Speed ye the work!
> For fain would I look on the storehouse where such marvels used to lurk,
> And the forge of fond desires, and the nurse of life that fails.
> Take heed now! deeds are doing for the fashioners of tales." (*CW* XII 292)

He bids them watch closely, for he will face his torment with such courage it becomes worthy of the bards. Their cowardice will win them only nameless ignominy; his valor will win him eternal glory, transmitted by the bards. Here, Hogni coordinates the two keywords that govern *Sigurd*'s theory of history: "the deed," that is, objective, acted history; and "the tale," that is, subjective, narrated history. But how do they connect to one another? And what is their relative importance? Tucker privileges the tale over the deed, to such an extent that he sees Hogni "relishing" the "narrative possibilities" of his own death" (376).

As his title indicates, he stresses the "for" in Hogni's declaration, teleologically orienting it towards the tale—it is what deeds are *for*.

Morris, however, gave an intrinsic value to the "deed," in the martial-heroic sense of the word. Richard Frith makes it clear that, "By the mid-1870s . . . . the focus of Morris's admiration for Icelandic literature" had become "the Norse heroic code, the essence of which lay for Morris in striving to perform deeds that will live forever in story and then accepting death unflinchingly" (122). Here Frith places the deed before the tale, rendering them at the very least coequal in importance. Morris himself does the same, in his distillation of the Norse religious worldview, which is primarily a synopsis of its core prophetic text, the *Vǫluspá*. Morris saw the final battle of Ragnarok not as a moment of Christlike sacrifice, but as the ultimate heroic victory in death, in which the gods "one by one . . . . Extinguish for ever some dread and misery that all this time has brooded over life, and one by one, their work accomplished, they die" (Mackail 344). This "great destruction" brings about the generation of "a new heavens and earth," a new beginning for the cosmos. As Morris's biblical phrasing indicates, he does give the Norse myth a modestly utopian spin, but what really interests him here is not so much the new world, which remains an unknown promise, as the valiant spirit required to bring it about: "Well, sometimes we must needs think that we shall live again: yet if that were not, would it not be enough that we helped to make this unnameable glory, and lived not altogether deedless?" (344). We

have "joy . . . . In praising great men," as we "turn their stories over and over," only because we take joy in their great deeds (344).[41]

Tucker sees Hogni's invocation of the tale as a case of Romantic "self-consciousness," one of many moments where Morris's Volsung and Niblung protagonists make "reflex reference to the plot" of *Sigurd* itself (375-76). As he reads it, this "reflex reference" acts as the structuring principle *of* that plot:

> . . . in *Sigurd* awareness of the tale is *the* normative habit of the mind. It forms the horizon delineating consciousness itself . . . [Characters'] consistent rule for judgment is how the tale they inhabit is to be retarded or advanced, their rationale what part in its unfolding they will have played. (375-76)

Heroes like Hogni live in the future perfect tense, all their struggles and sacrifices oriented towards the glorious stories that will rise from their funeral pyres, towards the making of the tale-to-be.[42] In this way, Tucker sees *Sigurd* as primarily a story about stories. This might be news to Hogni, who declares that he will do a deed, not just stoically undergo cruelty. What Hogni *does* is a feat of valor familiar from ancient Viking sagas: laughing in the face of death, encouraging his captors to do their worst, and keeping his composure throughout.[43]

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[41] What is crucial is that this vision does not depend on Morris's gestures toward redemption. If this ethos of deed and tale is his alternative to the promise of heavenly immortality, then it also works as an alternative to the promise of an Earthly Paradise. Simply restarting the cosmic cycle, in all its glory of action and narration, destruction and creation, is enough to justify life.

[42] For Tucker here, and in *Epic*, that which "will have been," complementing that which "once was" (517). I am indebted to him for this memorable formulation, echoed in several of my own (e.g. the "tale-to-be"), and for my broader understanding of this macropoetic structure.

[43] For instance, in a famous incident from the *Jómsvíkinga saga*, as one of its berserker heroes is about to be executed, he requests that someone hold back his long hair, so that the axe will cut cleanly. In itself, the request is a jocular display of gallantry, one that his captors cannot refuse without losing honor. But, when the axe falls, he jerks back his head at the last minute, so swiftly that the hair-holder's arms are severed at the elbow. While one of the enemy kings is incensed, the other thinks this a fine practical joke, sparing the young Jomsviking's life and granting him a place in his service.

By aestheticizing Hogni's grim feat, Tucker folds it into modern morality, reducing this deed to mere "pain," meaningless were it not for the future storytellers who retrospectively "shape" it "into meaning" ("Tale" 375). The "meaning" in question is a Romantic ideal of freedom, construed in historicist terms as self-determination through transhistorical cultural production. Tucker makes this most explicit in his reading of the death-song of Hogni's brother, Gunnar: "Gunnar redeems himself into the fabric of heroic loss, ... when he chants the making of humanity not as victims but as creatures of speech and power, hope and joy . . . . 'I, I, I': a rare rhetorical insistence on subjectivity installs Gunnar at last, and in his own clarified mind, where he always was: in the tale of the tribe" (377). Through Gunnar's retrospective reflection, Tucker argues, what would simply be his "victimhood" becomes the negative moment in a dialectic of transhistorical self-making passing from the particular (Gunnar) to the general ("the tribe") to the universal (humanity). This is all expressed in strangely Christological language. Gunnar "redeems himself," liberates himself from bondage to a sinful world, and in so doing, makes possible our own self-liberation. Such secular-Christian tropes are an infelicitous choice for a pagan epic which, as Tucker himself notes, is structured around recurring "strategic interventions" from Odin (390). Nevertheless, this scene sets up a hagiographic conclusion, where Tucker links the committed, self-sacrificial, but one-sidedly cultural *bildung* of *Sigurd* to its fulfillment in Marxist "dialectical materialism," giving Morris access to "a historicist vision that, far from neutralizing commitment, required it" (389). So, ultimately, Tucker gives us *Sigurd* as an illiberal variant of Pater's "aesthetic-historicism,"[44]

[44] I borrow this term from Carolyn Williams's *Transfigured World*.

teleologically tending toward the Marxist ethic of "commitment" (as against negative liberty, consumerism, etc.).

The way out of this aestheticist impasse is not through the tale, but the deed. Victorian readers like Watts and Hewlett recognized this as central to *Sigurd*, and as the basis of its conflict with Modernity. But what counts as a deed, and how do deeds "work?" The paradigmatic deed is the act of heroic violence, destruction in combat of a formidable foe. Thus, when Sigmund has led Sinfiotli through his warrior's initiation, he recruits him to avenge the Volsung line in a raid on King Siggeir's hall: "This is the deed of thy mastery;—we twain shall slay my foe—/ And how if the foe were thy father?"(*CW* XII 34). The deed that will raise Sinfiotli from journeyman to master is an especially gruesome one, difficult to understand outside the context of Norse blood feud. Together, the Volsungs subject Siggeir to a hall-burning, slaughtering the craven king along with his warriors—but only after Sinfiotli has cut off the royal line by killing Siggeir's young sons (and Sinfiotli's own half-brothers, by Signy) with his bare hands. Similarly, in Book II, Sigmund seeks his hero's mastery by asking Regin, "What deed is the deed I shall do?" (73). Regin replies that, "The deed is the righting of wrong, / and the quelling a bale and a sorrow that the world hath endured o'erlong, / And the winning a treasure untold, that shall make thee more than the kings," and goes on to describe Fafnir's magical panoply (74).

Appealing to Sigurd's big-hearted nature, Regin gives the deed an altruistic inflection, and as far as it goes, this is all true.[45] However, this deed is essentially a Viking

[45] For instance, the description of Fafnir as a "bale" on the world evokes Morris's mildly moralized account of Ragnarok. However, one need not subscribe to a Christian system of good and evil, or a secular system of rational freedom/equality, to perceive Fafnir as *an* evil to all he crushes and immiserates—harmful, dangerous, corrupting. Specifically, the dragon's baleful legacy consists in a certain *kind* of war, one that cuts

raid: without any immediate provocation, Sigurd will seek out Fafnir, kill him, seize his magical panoply, and steal his gold. By conquering this foe and taking this loot, Sigurd will increase his own power, becoming "more than the kings." Moreover, like Sigmund and Sinfiotli's hall-burning, it is a matter of revenge, the reckoning of blood feud. As Regin shortly tells us, Fafnir is his own brother, whose first "wrong" was the murder of their father and the theft of their shared inheritance (86-89). When Sigurd strikes down Fafnir, Morris is unequivocally faithful to the grim warrior spirit common to Norse, Celtic, and Homeric epic. "Fulfilled with the joy of the War-God," the battle-joy, he stands "with red sword high uplifted, with wrathful glittering eyes," the wolfish rage or *lyssa* that goes hand in hand with joy, and he "laughs at the heavens above him" and "shines in the new-born light," his own "glittering" aligned with the rising sun to form the same battle-light that shines over other pagan heroes, e.g. Cuchulainn and Achilles (110).

The value system of *Sigurd* does recognize deeds other than hall-burning and dragonslaying, but most are imaged in terms of heroic violence, and all are bound up with it, either directly or indirectly. In this, as in everything else, Morris shows remarkable insight into the basic forms of Viking culture as we understand it today, with physical combat was part of a broader web of magical and ritual aggression, and aggression was a pervasive measure of social value.[46] For instance, even as Sigurd dismisses Regin's utopian ambitions, he magnanimously includes him in the slaying of Fafnir ("this deed shall be mine and thine") (106). One might expect Morris, who places such importance on creative work,

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off the movement of life itself—not just in utterly crushing foes, but in hoarding gold and building nothing with it.

[46] For an encyclopedic, world-opening study of this nexus of magic and warfare, see Neil Price's dissertation, *The Viking Way*, esp. "The Supernatural Empowerment of Aggression" (329-85).

to treat Regin's godlike feats of artistic "mastery" as deeds, but he expressly rules that out. Prior to the raid on Fafnir, Sigurd scorns Regin as "deedless," and Regin himself laments that, with his gift of supernatural craft, came only "the heart that longeth ever, nor will look to the deed that is won (73, 76). Morris excludes these precisely because they are *not* part of the weave of history-driving aggression.[47] Regin's spurring-on of Sigurd is what immediately involves Regin in this process, and his reforging of the Wrath counts, in this special case, as heroic aggression.

So, how to define this more capacious sense of the deed? Morris gives us an answer via a cleverly inserted etymology for the name of his protagonist. When the son of Sigmund and Hiordis is born, his stepfather King Elf piously asks "O mighty Sigmund, wherewith shall we name thy son?" (65). This question to the dead seems like a rhetorical gesture, "But there rises up a man most ancient," who prophecies "thy [Sigurd's] deeds that men shall sing of!, O thy deeds that the Gods shall see!" and names him "SIGURD, Son of the Volsungs, O Victory yet to be!" (66).[48] He heralds these deeds in a set of rising and falling half-lines, divided by the midline caesura in the manner of Norse alliterative verse (e.g., "How many things shalt thou quicken, how many shalt thou slay!" and "how thy love shall cherish, how thine hate shall wither and burn!"). Here, the old man links Sigurd's superabundant creation and destruction under the sign of "Victory," built into the hero's name via the Germanic root "sig." The deed is a "victory," an overcoming, the prolific

[47] As shown in chapter 2, Regin's artistry is bound up with his Romantic project of universal redemption.

[48] The "But" that begins the old man's prophecy is one of Morris's signature gestures, the turn of irony against Romantic irony (see Chapter 2, 18). At face value, it signals an *expected* reversal—we know Sigmund can't answer from Valhalla, so an old man answers instead. But if we take the religious worldview of *Sigurd* seriously, this becomes an *unexpected* reversal and Odin appears from Valhalla with a message from Sigmund.

transfer of power, whether it be altruistic or militaristic, friendly or fearsome, or, as is often the case for Sigurd, both at once. Thus, Morris often assimilates Sigurd's deeds of generosity and love to the Norse tropology of aggression. When Sigurd offers to ride the Wavering Flame and court Brynhild in Gunnar's place, he says, "I give thee a gift, O Niblung, that shall overload the Fates" (187). Yet, Sigurd's honor-bound gift-giving takes the form of a cavalry charge: He "leapeth on Greyfell, and the sword in his hand is bare, / And the gold spurs flame on his feels, and the fire-blast lifteth his hair" (189). This deed is not so much a conquest *of* Brynhild, however, as a proof of worth *for* her. When Grimhild, Gunnar's mother first urges him on to seek Brynhild, she says, "That no son of the Kings will she wed save the mightiest master of fame, / And the man who knoweth not fear" (183). As a Valkyrie, "Odin's Chooser," Brynhild "sitteth and waiteth" only for the man capable of this deed (ie., in truth, Sigurd).

The deed, as a mighty overcoming, always requires some manner of self-sacrifice. Where Tucker sees sacrificial suffering as the essence of the deed, undergone *for* the tale, I see it, rather, as an aspect of the deed, a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of its possibility. Rather than suffering for the tale, the hero suffers *to* do the deed, or *in* doing the deed, or *from* doing the deed. Here, I will quickly run through the sacrificial aspect of the examples above. In the gruesome "deed of his mastery," Sinfiotli breaks several dread taboos: First, the young sons of Siggeir and Signy (whom he slays) are his own half-brothers, believed by all to be his full-brothers; Second, Siggeir (whom he slays) is the husband of his mother, believed by all to be his father. Though Sinfiotli survives this deed to triumph, he eventually pays his debt of shame, honoring his father and toasting the gods

as he knowingly drinks poison (47-48). Though Sigurd, in slaying Fafnir, wins the Helm of Glory and the wisdom of the dragon's blood, the dying wyrm warns him, and at the same curses him, that "thee shall the rattling Gold and the red rings bring to the bane."[49] Sigurd's rejoinder is instructive: "Yet mine hand shall cast them abroad, and the earth shall gather again" (111).[50] Here, Sigurd affirms his seizure of the cursed hoard, knowingly sacrificing future happiness, and life itself, as the price of future generosity: not just kingly gifts to warriors, but an equally kingly redistribution of wealth to the common farmers. In its prolific and self-sacrificial nature, this altruism is *also* a kind of deed. Finally, when Sigurd pledges to ride the Wavering Flame for Gunnar, he knowingly courts his great beloved on behalf of another, sacrificing love and tangling the lines of his future, all to fulfill an oath of friendship, well knowing it will cost him (and Brynhild) a life of happiness.

The Cycle of Tale and Deed—Morris's Pagan Model of History, part 1

Now, with this clearer understanding of the deed, I want to reevaluate the role of the tale. Tucker is right on several points: that the tale provides a kind of immortality; that, through the telling of tales, we build our cultural world; and that, "dying into narrative," the hero indirectly contributes to this work of culture-making. What is missing from this aestheticizing account is its ethical foundation, the intrinsic value of the deed. A culture

[49] This despite Sigurd's admonition to Regin, to "take the curse on thy head" (89). Regin certainly succumbs to the curse but so, at last, does Sigurd.

[50] This exchange is so important that Morris repeats it, with a difference, on the next page, and ritual pacing charging it with momentum (112). Here, Sigurd speaks of heedlessly "scattering" the rings, faithful to the trope of skaldic poetry where a bard might praise a generous king as ring-breaker or enemy of rings, for his "victory" over the inertia of gathered gold. Often, this would consist in the literal breaking and distribution of precious arm-rings.

immortalizes, only because it valorizes.[51] In *Sigurd*, as in its ancient source material, the tale is a social recognition of that value, marking the deed as valuable, and thus as fit for emulation. One deed, through its narrativization, begets subsequent deeds, reproducing itself through time. In this cycle of deed and tale, heroic action and poetic creation recursively reinforce one another, so that though the deed is, in the last instance, fundamental, each causes the other. Just as the deed expresses itself in the tale (it compels the bards to recount it), the tale expresses itself in the deed (it instills young listeners with valor).

In the honor economy of *Sigurd*, commemoration in the tale is cultural payment for the martial-heroic deed.[52] This exchange is so important that Morris takes pains to explain it at every opportunity.[53] When Sigmund lies dying, claimed for Valhalla by Odin himself, his wife Hiordis promises to heal him, but he dissuades her, proudly telling her his work is done: "When the gods for one deed asked me I ever gave them twain / Spendthrift of glory I was, and great my life-days' gain" (55). Sigmund's knotted kenning conceals its own basis. What he profligately "spends" is not glory, but *himself*, his own power and well-being, in the course of doing deeds, and through these deeds, he wins the "gain" of glory. In this frankly transactional phrasing, Morris gives us the cyclical return of *Sigurd*'s founding scene, where

[51] For this valorization and its religious and magical expression, see Price.

[52] The deed and tale are joined in a network of exchange, a central part of the Icelandic honor economy that William Ian Miller describes in *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking* (see esp. "Feud, Vengeance, and the Disputing Process," 179-220). Though Miller's account focuses specifically on the intricacies of Icelandic custom and law, as manifest in the sagas, the value system can be generalized to mainland Scandinavia.

[53] Morris uses "deed" and "tale" as keywords in a systematic effort to *bring out* the saga's pagan core, a stratagem also registered by Frith: "Morris takes pains to explain the heroic ethos to the reader, with frequent references to the necessity of doing deeds to win everlasting fame." Frith comes up with a good term for this method, "amplification," but sees the content being amplified as too alien for most modern readers.

Sigmund withdraws a god-given sword from the roof-tree of the Volsung hall, and knows himself as "the hired of Odin" (8). Shortly thereafter, when Sigmund's sister, Signy, warns their father Volsung that her husband, King Siggeir, has laid a trap for them, he instructs her (and Morris instructs us) in the ideology of victorious death and eternal glory: "And if the Norns will have it that the Volsung kin shall fail, / Yet I know of the deed that dies not, and the name that shall ever avail" (14). What matters here is not just *that*, but *why* their name will be hallowed with glory: Because, despite insurmountable odds, they outfought and overcame the foe. Likewise, what matters here is not *just* that the Volsung name will live eternally in their tale, but that the tale "shall ever avail" in the same way that a great deed avails. Just as the deed begets the tale, the tale will beget new deeds, continuing the Volsung legacy in objective history (action, process, the sequence of deeds) as well as subjective history (retrospective narration, culture, the tradition of tales).

As this last example suggests, the commensurability of deed and tale is not *just* the cultural incentive structure underlying the warrior ethos. Rather, through this basic, value-transmitting function, it works as the driver for historical process, which unfolds as a cycle of deed and tale, aggressive action and retrospective narrativization, each causing and expressing itself in the other. Since the deed and tale are just two positions in a single, spiraling, motion, each can be seen under the sign of the other, even acting *as* the other. To demonstrate the cycling of deed into tale, tale into deed, and their underlying continuity, I want to return to Gunnar's last stand. Where Tucker casts him as a Christlike martyr for the future work of culture, and thus, a proto-Marxist Romantic, I treat Morris's Gunnar simply

as what he is, a death-driven pagan warrior, wielding bardic song as a magic spell.[54] By fixing his focus on Gunnar's death-song, Tucker misses the history that makes it what it is: it is the fifth and final iteration of Gunnar's battle-song, which works like a spell to shape mood and drive bodies.

Here, as throughout *Sigurd*, Morris argues by modeling process. Gunnar's tapestry of tales spurs his men to great deeds, unfolds as *part* of those deeds, and is, in *itself*, a great deed, its telling an overcoming of the foe. After routing off the Huns for the first time, the outnumbered and surrounded Niblungs "droop . . . . and their wounds are waxen chill," but,

> Then *doth* Giuki's first-begotten *a deed most fair to be told* [emphasis mine],
> For his fair harp Gunnar taketh, and the warp of silver and gold;
> With the hand of a cunning harper he dealeth with the strings,
> And this voice in their midst goeth upward, as of ancient days he sings,
> Of the days before the Niblungs, and the days that shall be yet;
> Till the hour of toil and smiting the warrior hearts forget,
> Nor hear the gathering foemen, nor the sound of swords aloof. . . . (283)

We could approach this passage in the familiar manner, in which retrospective narrative serves as pleasurable compensation for suffering, converting temporal bondage into free creation ("take your sorrows and turn them into pleasures," etc). So far as it goes, that is true. The question is, what meaning and priority we give to these. Unlike Tucker's

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[54] Price outlines a category of magic songs called *galdr*, which cut across our modern distinction between "spells" and poetic/musical speech: "The saga descriptions of *galdr-songs* note that they were pleasing to the ear, and there is a suggestion of a special rhythm in view of the incantation metre called *galdralag*, as described by Snorri in *Háttatal* and used occasionally in Eddic poems such as *Hávamál* and *Sigrdrífomál*" (65). These attestations are all to texts that Morris read carefully. The first is part of the *Prose Edda*, the second is one of the major poems of the *Poetic Edda*, a collection of Odinic proverbs, and the third is an Eddic fragment of the Sigurd story. This last, Morris split between the body and appendix of his 1870 prose translation, *The Story of The Volsungs and The Niblungs* (*CW VII* 405-7). So, Morris was well aware of the interpenetration of magic and song, via poetry, in the Norse pagan worldview. See also Hanson's excellent reading of the "Defence of Guenevere," where she shows Morris's preoccupation with, and mastery of, the incantatory, aggressive, and arational power of poetry as performative utterance magical paradigm seems to have informed his poetic project throughout *Sigurd*.

discursive-reflective "making of humanity," Gunnar's song is anti-thought.[55] It makes his men "forget" their sufferings, and it does so because it effaces the present, presencing the past and through it, the foredoomed future. The goal here is not moral emancipation through striving with a "history that hurts," but actual healing and fortifying, through immersion in the well of time.[56] And of course, the ultimate function of that healing is not to presage utopian escape, but to *win the battle*, as Gunnar's song restores calm and raises morale. It is not just a salve, but a spear, a kingly deed of gift-giving, *and* a strike against the foe. Thus, Morris keeps faith with the pagan worldview of his source material, treating Gunnar's song as magic that "quickens" the wounded and, pre-emptively, wakens the dead. In this battle-benevolence, this fell fertility, Gunnar acts as both farmer and warrior, channeling the necromantic power of Odin and Freyja alike.[57] Through this immediate performative power, Gunnar's song is both tale of "ancient days," *and* "a deed most fair to be told" (283).

After this scene of weary respite, Gunnar's song returns to overtly aggressive incantation. As battle is joined once more, "Still the song goeth up from Gunnar, though his harp to earth be laid" (283). In this way, the song becomes *part* of the combat, a song-deed amidst sword-deeds. Still, the tale plays its basic role, as martial motivation, now with temporal distance removed. Where once these warriors lived toward the promise of glory

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[55] See Chapter 2 on Morris's pagan, counter-Romantic aesthetic, which privileges immersion over reflection, eternal mood and raw passion over dialectical reason.

[56] As per Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (102).

[57] See Price (62). Here I am riffing on Price's paradigm, showing Morris picking up on a real Norse way of thinking. Battlefield necromancy per se was conducted only through *seithr*, a highly ritualized form that was performed only by specialized Odinic shamans, most of them women. I see Gunnar's song as closer to the *galdr* paradigm, and its invigorating function as plausible one for this sort of magic.

in the tale-to-be, now, they dance to the telling-over of deeds past, carrying those deeds forward into the future. And at the same time, the tale reminds them that *their* glory is at hand. And by taking up the tale along with the blade, Gunnar magically changes himself. Up until this point, Morris emphasized Gunnar's bold fecklessness, in contrast with the wise and severe Hogni. Now, "he fighteth exceeding wisely, and is many a warrior's aid, / And he shieldeth and delivereth, and his eyes search through the hall" (283). Gunnar's song allows him to act on the battle as if from above it, clearly positioned in the fray. Now more than a charismatic fighter, he is a tactician and leader. This is not only because the song calms and composes him, but also because it installs him in tradition at its most dynamic, makes him a battlefield conduit for the craft of ancient kings. In the *Iliad*, famously, it is Athena who gives this clear-eyed vision of battle, and the tactical insight to exploit it. In the Norse tradition, this is one side of the power of Odin, counterpart of berserker rage.[58] We see the other side of that power via Hogni, who ultimately goes berserk, so that "Red . . . . was the world to his eyen," shrugging off a head wound to rise up "as the ancient Giant" (281).[59]

Gunnar, by contrast, maintains his composure, and he does so through the power of song. In the next respite, he sings his sorely wounded men the cosmogonic prophecy recorded in *Vǫluspá*, allowing them to see their deeds as a warmup for Ragnarok, "the fight of the uttermost day" (284). Even in the last, desperate stand of the Niblungs, Gunnar stays steady, without a frown on his face, "nor his song-speech overworn" (285). Here, just as the

[58] For a quick introduction to these aspects, see Price's list of the names of Odin, esp. "War- and aggression-names" and "Frenzy-, trance-, and anger names" (102-04).

[59] See Georges Dumézil on the metaphysical identification of Odin with wild, forceful movement (123-24). As I argue in Chapter 1, and return to in the next section, Morris is obsessed with Odin's role as god of wrath or frenzy, and indeed, as Hogni makes "a river of death," "the wrath of the Gods arises" from it.

song brought steadiness, the steadiness lets him keep the song, tale and deed cycling back on one another so rapidly the loop becomes a knot. Until he is finally captured, Gunnar *never stops singing*. Thus, Morris shows us Gunnar's famous death-song as the return of his battle-song, with its performance as his final deed. Cast into Atli's snake-pit, surrounded and fatally bitten, Gunnar sings the world's story until his hand falls from the harp.

Now, I return to Gunnar to sketch the trope that binds together all of *Sigurd*: the sword as figure for the tale, and the tale as figure for the sword, the sword as privileged locus of the cycle of deed and tale, and the site where they converge. Though he eventually takes up the harp, his song truly begins amidst the fray, breaks out suddenly as a battle-cry: "Now fell the sword of Gunnar and rose up red in the air / And hearkened the song of the Niblung, as his voice rang glad and clear" (282). The subject of this sentence is the sword, as it *listens* to Gunnar's song, "And rejoices and leaps at the Eastmen, and cries as it meets the rings / Of a giant of King Atli, and a murder-wolf of kings" (282). Here tale begets deed in an instant, Gunnar's sword receiving and transmitting a musically directed force. As it strikes home, it answers his song with its own: tale to deed to tale.

With all these elements in place, I want to return to the case of Hogni and his comportment to history. Contra the notion that what Hogni does is "all for the tale," I see Hogni as epitomizing an authentically pagan attitude of heroic fatalism that runs throughout *Sigurd*. Likewise, in his final hour, Hogni's laughter is itself an act of aggression, an insult to his executioners' honor and a challenge to reassert it, which they fail. So shaken are they by this, that they attempt to bring Atli another man's heart instead. What this demonstrates is simply that Hogni is strong and they are weak, that Hogni, even in chains,

still fights, scattering his enemy with a few strong words. Indeed, when they return to finish the job, "Hogni laughs before them," and bids them "haste,/ Lest more lives" will they waste (293). Then, as they close in, Morris shows us the spiritual *agon* as a corporeal fight:

> About him throng the sword-men, and they shout as the war-fain cry
> In the heart of the bitter battle when their hour is come to die,
> And they cast themselves upon him, as on some wide-shielded man
> That fierce in the storm of Odin upreareth edges wan. (293)

In this way, Morris gives Hogni his glorious death in battle, the cyclical repetition of the battle he just fought and, even in defeat, won.

The Weave of Fate—Morris's Pagan Model of History, part 2.

In *Sigurd*, the deed and the tale are commensurable because they are ultimately two aspects of the same process: the immanent combination and conflict of forces, whose directionality is apprehended as fate. This interplay of forces expresses itself in the unfolding chain of objective history (deed) and subjective history (tale) alike. Characters apprehend it through two reciprocally related narrative modes, storytelling and prophecy, which are simply retrospective and prospective variants of "the tale." Tucker draws attention to this phenomenon, noting that when the characters of *Sigurd* enter into prophecy, their "present awareness of the past's forward thrust enables extrapolation into the future" ("Tale" 380). He sees this prefiguring the "historicist vision" with "power like fate's" that Morris would find in Marx's dialectic (389). But what Tucker notices here is something quite distinct from the notion of necessary development toward a *telos*, with each epoch knowing and doing better than the last. Rather, *Sigurd*'s heroic fatalism works

according to the traditionalist notion that history starts from the beginning, and that rather than knowledge *of* the beginning, what one requires is knowledge *from* the beginning.

In the world of *Sigurd*, as in its source material, the concatenated deeds of heroes and gods alike are strands of living time, lines of fate woven by the Norns, rough equivalents of the Greek *moirai*. To know the future one must step outside the present and its expediencies, and trace the lines of fate emerging from the deep past. The classic example of this, from outside *Sigurd*, is the "*Vǫluspá*," or "Seeress' Prophecy," in which Odin descends to Hel—the land of the passed, and therefore, the past—to ask a dead witch for insight into Ragnarok. Her answer is not a revelatory "prediction" of the future in the diminished modern sense, but a complete tale, a sweeping narrative that begins in the deep past of the world's creation, and follows the pure immanence of fate-bound activity onwards to the world's ending. We can understand prophecy as knowledge of the deed-to-be that depends on knowledge of the tale-past. In turn, we can understand the tale as fulfilled or consolidated prophecy, the telling-over of deeds passed.

In the course of the poem, Morris invokes the Norns themselves fifty-six times; their domain, "fate," seventy times; and fated ending, "doom," fifty-four times, for a total of 180 namings (or 0.59 times/page). And, though Morris mentions the deed and the tale almost twice as much, fate is at stake any time Morris invokes either of these things, and especially when he coordinates one with the other. Where Morris could easily relegate fate to the status of so much cultural-historical scenery, he takes every opportunity to elaborate on its workings. For instance, as Sigurd stands over the dying Fafnir, he demands that the wise dragon "tell of the Norns ere thy life thou layest adown!" In the *Volsunga Saga*, Fafnir's

terse reply raises more questions than it answers.[60] Morris, by contrast, builds it out into eight long lines, making it clear that there are Norns for each of the races of the nine worlds, the highest being those of the gods, who shape the journey of the cosmos as a whole. Then, he includes three lines of original metaphysical exegesis on the gods' Norns:

> They love and withhold their helping, they hate and refrain the blow;
> They curse and they may not sunder, they bless and they shall not blend;
> They have fashioned the good and the evil; they abide the change and the end. (*CW XII* 111)

What Morris stresses here, via Fafnir, is the objectivity of Fate. Though it works through the three goddesses, they keep an impersonal distance from their charges and the course of history, refraining from the partisan interventions so frequently made by the gods. This is quite distinct from the Protestant notion of Providential oversight, and even more distant from its secularized, historicist incarnation, in which humanity, acting as its own god, progressively creates, and thus redeems, itself. May Morris recognizes this, albeit from an exterior, humanistic perspective, she explains that the first book "introduces the very motive of the epic, the Wrath and Sorrow of Odin. It enforces the sense of Doom that hangs over the story: the God himself who moves the puppets, sets going machinery that he cannot stop—the Fate beyond himself, the Fate that as in mockery of humanity puts on the semblance of human will and human action" (xxiii-xxiv). In *Sigurd*, there is no dialectic of necessity and freedom. There is instead only necessity, the weave of the Norns.[61] What the

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[60] From Byock: "Sigurd said: 'Tell me, Fafnir, if you are so wise, who are the Norns, who separate sons from their mothers?' Fafnir replied: 'They are many and sundry. Some are of the race of Aesir, some are of the race of elves, and some are the daughters of Dvalin'" (64). In the saga, that is the end of the matter!

[61] This seriousness about Fate proper is at the root of a more general pagan fatalism that runs throughout *The Earthly Paradise* and *Sigurd*. At least in these works, at this stage in his career, Morris neither believed in nor aspired to the notion of a distinctly human moral freedom—not Christian free will, not Romantic or post-Kantian world-creation, and not the uptake of the latter in historicist *bildung*. I argue this point at length in

younger Morris misses, I think, is that there is no abstract "humanity" to be mocked, no consciousness to be disabled. Rather, in a world where to know a thing is "with emphatic literalness, to know the story," mortal heroines and heroes *are* lines of fate, histories in motion that gain their glory by affirming fate (Tucker 379). Morris's villains, too, are lines of fate, but they resist this truth, attempting to transcend their norn-appointed dooms.[62]

Though Morris himself does not directly describe the Norns as weaving, it is a well-attested aspect of Norse mythology, traceable back to sources such as St. 2-4 of *Helgakvida Hundingsbana I* ("The First Lay of Helgi the Hunding-Slayer").[63] In the original:

> At night in hall the norns did come,
> to the lord they allotted his life and fate
> to him awarded under welkin most fame,
> under heaven to be among heroes first.
>
> His fate-thread span they to o'erspread the world . . . .
> they gathered together the golden threads,
> and in moon-hall's middle they made them fast.
>
> In East and West the ends they hid:
> The liege's lands lay there between;
> On the Northern side, Neri's sister
> Did hang one end to hold forever. (Hollander 180-1)

Chapter 1, which focuses on Morris's heroes' self-subordination to the gods, and in Chapter 2, where I zero in on how this plays out in the field of aesthetics.

[62] This pattern is already well-established in *The Earthly Paradise*. For instance, the first of the Medieval tales, "The Man Born to Be King," centers on a king who attempts to stave off the prophesied end of his line, and in so doing, brings it about. This relatively sympathetic antagonist casts off his villainy only when he finally bows to fate, finding a happier ending than anticipated.

[63] See Price (56). Morris was clearly familiar with this passage, as he had already translated the *Volsunga Saga*'s very brief account of the Norns' visit in *The Story of the Volsungs and the Niblungs* (1870), and included the end of *Helgakvida Hundingsbana II* in that volume's appendix of Eddic source poems. In *Sigurd*, he freely rewrites and slightly expands the Norns' visit, so that where in the saga, it is Helgi's father, Sigmund, who gives his infant child two territories and a sword as naming-gifts (Byock 47). In *Sigurd*, these are the heroic epithets "Sunlit Hill, Sharp Sword, and Land of Rings" given him by the Norns, as tokens of his destiny, a "life full bright" (42). Here, Morris condenses the entire Helgi/Sinfiotli sequence of the saga into two stanzas, but of those two, the Norns get three lines, a relatively prominent place. The visitation of the Norns in *Helgakvida I* is also a likely source for "Ogier The Dane" in The Earthly Paradise, which I suggest as a source for Yeats's *Wanderings of Oisin* at the outset of this chapter.

What is key, here, is that the weaving of the Norns is no mere metaphor or abstraction, as it has become in our understanding of Greek mythology, and our colloquial speech.[64] Rather, the poet of the lay takes this image as seriously as possible, with Helgi's future deeds, his tale-to-be, fixed in "fate-threads" hanging over the world. These temporal threads are anchored in physical space. Descending from above the mortal world (the moon), the eastern and western strands compass the domain Helgi would conquer, while the northern strand, unmirrored by a southern strand, and "holding forever," suggests a metaphysical destination: a place in Valhalla, won through "the deed that dies not, and the name that shall ever avail" (14). In life, the hero will travel these strands of potentiality, realizing them through great deeds, and receiving his wages in the form of the tale (the *Helgakvida* poems themselves, and beyond, the *Volsunga Saga*, and again, Morris's rewriting in *Sigurd*).

In *Sigurd*, Morris completely internalizes the vision of the *Helgakvida*. Though Tucker rightly identifies historical prophecy as central to *Sigurd*, this is just one aspect of a tactile, dynamic interaction with fate that runs throughout. For instance, Morris brings out the Norse understanding of feminine magic as immediate contact with fate, deliberate action on and in the weave of the norns.[65] In his treatment of the scheming Niblung matriarch, Grimhild, and her heroic daughter, Gudrun, Morris draws an ethically-valenced distinction between two modes of fate-magic. Grimhild strives to transcend fate, to liberate herself from necessity, yet this makes her the villain. She uses her magic to divert Sigurd's love from Brynhild, attaching him instead to her daughter Gudrun, so that her son, Gunnar

[64] Hollander: "The fate-thread spinning of the Norns is here taken literally" (180n3).

[65] Price notes that the term for this magic, *seithr*, is etymologically and ritually a kind of "binding," that is, a violent knotting or weaving (64, 66). This magic was central to "weaving war" (384).

can wed Brynhild for himself. When Gunnar fails to leap the Wavering Flame to win Brynhild, Sigurd agrees to take his place. Then, Grimhild begins acting at a distance, giving Sigurd the appearance of Gunnar, and the wise hero senses her influence. After promising Gunnar "a gift . . . . that shall overload the Fates," she warns, "forbear with the dark to strive; / For thy mother spinneth and worketh, and her craft is awake and alive" (187). What Grimhild spins is Fate itself, reworking the weave of the Norns in her self-interest without realizing that her working, too, is part of their weave.

Where her mother uses fate-magic to manipulate, Gudrun uses it to navigate. Gudrun is the saga's final hero, the last of the Niblungs left alive to carry through the tale. In luring her brothers, Gunnar and Hogni, to her hated husband Atli's hall, she ensures their destruction, avenging their betrayal of Sigurd. Then, in a double deed, she avenges her brothers against Atli, and herself. She burns Atli's hall, runs the old king through "with all the might of the Niblungs," and flings herself into the sea. As she flees the burning hall to the ocean cliffs, "There was none to hinder Gudrun, and the fire-blast scathed her nought, / For the ways of the Norns she wended, and her feet from the wrack they brought" (306). Here, Morris shows us Gudrun literally perceiving and running the lines of fate, like a mystic web of tightropes strung under burning rafters, over tables, past Atli's smoke-blind warriors, and out the gate. In this more pious mode of fate-magic, Gudrun exercises her gift of prophecy in real-time, clear-sightedly seeing the shape of her tale-to-be, even as she hurtles towards its end. Here, there is a strong resonance with Gunnar's retrospective spell-singing, where telling over the tale of ancient deeds gives him supernatural acumen in

battle, vision of the deed-to-come working on the timeframe of instants, from one blow to the next.

There is also the case of Sigmund's sister, Signy, who integrates these two tendencies. Like Grimhild, she uses fate-warping, shape-changing magic at its most transgressive, disguising herself as a wandering witch and sleeping with her brother Sigmund in order to produce a supernaturally powerful son, Sinfiotli. But she conceives this plan in a flash of prophetic insight (27), glimpsing the infamous path before her and affirming it as the price of Volsung glory.

To sum up: For Morris, as for the pagan Norse, fate is not an abstract providential plan, but 1) the immanent necessity of historical process (as in, this or that is fated), and 2) the power expressed in that necessary unfolding (as in, all things are lines of fate, all persons and objects snapshots of diachronic process). The cycle of deed and tale is *not* the dialectical interplay of substance and spirit, base and superstructure, because it is not a function of alienated consciousness or labor. These terms are not related-through-difference, not joined by antithesis of action and thought. Rather, they double one another, as parallel and intertwining strands of the same power, fate. The cycle of deed and tale is the immediate transmission of that power from heroic action to poetic image, back to an imitative, but non-identical, heroic action—and vice versa. It is the same power looping, like *horror vacuii* knotwork, between two seemingly separate domains. The tale does not simply reflect on the deed, it is involved in it, and carries its force into the future.

Interlocking Rings—From Poetic to Political Cyclicality

The fated, i.e., force-necessitated processes of *Sigurd* play out as the cycle of tale and deed, and thus, in a continuous and cyclical shape. Oberg elegantly integrates all these dimensions of the text in her reading of *The Life and Death of Jason* (1868), where she argues that the real bearer of Morris's heroic ideal is the witch Medea, because, unlike Jason, she is "in tune with Necessity, the unseen but finally omnipotent motive force of the cosmos," which manifests in the "circular" and "intertwining" structure of Morris's plot: in other words, in the cyclical shape of history (85, 78). And though Tucker strongly criticizes *The Earthly Paradise* for what he sees as its bourgeois-historicist "commodity collusion," he approvingly concedes that, "Even [here] the clock and calendar went around, not ahead" (51).

Morris's pagan epics all worked as dynamic-traditionalist models of history, but they were no *mere* thought-experiments. Rather, they seem to have informed and expressed Morris's considered political / world-historical perspective, in ways that seriously clash with his Marxist commitments. Recently, Ingrid Hanson and Jed Mayer have drawn our attention to Morris's love for an early work of post-apocalyptic fiction, Richard Jefferies's *After London* (1885). Hanson shows that for Morris, Jefferies's vision of modern Britain reduced to scattered tribes, hunting and gathering and fighting, was no dystopia, but a world revitalized by war: "The idea of the complete destruction of current civilization and all its trappings was appealing to him, emotionally if not pragmatically" (102-03). In the wake of reading Jefferies, says Mayer, Morris "celebrated the future death of the myth of human progress," along with its underpinnings in Enlightenment thought (82). This

strong formulation shows how Morris's cyclical vision of history, his sense of the continued vitality of the past, coexisted with, and *grounded*, his acute awareness of historical specificity—at the next turn of the wheel, the ideal of progress will pass.

Even the great midcentury Marxist studies parenthetically concede that Morris was torn between the left-Romantic / Marxist program of progress toward utopia, on the one hand, and traditionalist visions of decadence, collapse, and renewal, on the other. Thompson laments that Morris "denied . . . . that bourgeois individualism made any addition to man's consciousness," placing the "degeneration" of art and craft alike as far back as the Renaissance (658-59). To frame the modern plight in terms of "degeneration" or "decadence," rather than, say, "contradiction" or "oppression," implies a cyclical temporality. Thompson saw Morris's rightward inclinations as restricted to *cultural* history, in contradiction with his more fundamental political-economic leftism. But this hostility to the modern world often crept beyond the safe confines of the "superstructure." Paul Meier sees the increasingly left-wing Morris of the 1880s *still* torn between socialism and barbarism as solutions to the decadence of modern civilization: "Contradictory ideas were inextricably muddled in his mind and continued to be until dialectical clarity showed their simultaneous opposition and unity" (247). After his 1883 reading of *Capital*, Morris came to see socialism as the *aufhebung* of the barbarism / civilization antithesis. Nevertheless, this was only a partial containment of his atavistic tendencies, so that "the solution of a return to barbarism continued to cast an intermittent spell over his mind, even after its dialectical absorption" into the Marxist project (276). As an example of these heretical temptations, Meier acknowledges Morris's passionate response to *After London*.

Oberg notes that *Sigurd* is especially concerned with cyclicality, working from "the perspective of vast aeons of time" to present "the mystical coincidence of past and present, the inseparability of what has gone before and what is to come" (87). This arcing structure of growth, flourishing, and degeneration is a macrocosmic principle that plays out on a microcosmic level throughout the poem, structuring every one of *Sigurd*'s diachronic processes, so that the world appears as cycles within cycles within cycles. This helps explain what J.W. Mackail mischaracterizes as *Sigurd*'s "lack of epic unity," its allegiance to the composite character of the saga, which links the epic of Sigmund, "earlier in the history" and "earlier in its structure," to the obviously later, slightly milder tragedy of Sigurd, to the still-later, quasi-historical tale of the Niblungs' losing war with Attila The Hun (340). What Mackail does not notice is that Morris treats this final phase with the same remorseless grimness as the first, so that *Sigurd*'s story moves from the energetic barbarism of the primordial Teutonic forests, to the proto-chivalric golden age of Sigurd, back to the bleak but glorious Ragnarok of the Migration Age. In so doing, Morris traces the rise, the apex, and the downfall of a people, microcosmically coordinated with the rise, the apex, and the downfall of the gods.

Enacting the Return—Translation as Transmission

In this section, I install *Sigurd* in a textual history that stretches back a millennium or more. In so doing, I start from the hypothesis that Morris's free rewriting of the *Volsunga Saga* should be viewed not as reinterpretation or recreation, but as a kind of translation. Of course, *Sigurd* is not an attempt to accurately reproduce the text of the *Volsunga Saga*, to

"capture" the meaning/feeling of a fetishized Original and make it serve the self-understanding of the present. Rather, Morris translates by *involving* himself in the tale of which the saga is just one instance, positioning his own rendering as another such instance in a line of transmission, and constructing it according to narrative practices drawn from within the tale. In other words, Morris refuses the subject/object dialectic of translation as it is commonly understood, refusing to be a modern, self-conscious subject looking at an absent object of representation. Just as the text of *Sigurd* models or distills the ideology of its Viking Age sources, its comportment toward those source texts is defined by that ideology (as I hope I have demonstrated in the preceding sections). Through the manifest success of this seemingly absurd gesture, Morris ruptures the historicist progress narrative of his era, and our own, binding himself into a storytelling tradition that stretches back to the preliterate paganism of the Viking world.

The very notion of "epic" as an integral form is alien to the *Volsunga Saga*, a prose work stitched together from fragments of a vanishing oral tradition. In *Sigurd*, Morris transposes this Norse genre into the structures of Homeric and Anglo-Saxon epic, which he recognizes as very different means of delivering the same narrative and ideological content, ie., pagan hero-myth. This project unfolds as a two-stage process of translation, yielding *Sigurd* as the translation of a translation, or the second stage in a process of translation. The first phase in that project was Morris' close, scholarly prose translation of the *Volsunga Saga*, which he completed with his Icelandic collaborator Eiríkr Magnússon, and published in 1870 as *The Story of The Volsungs and Niblungs, with Certain Songs from The Elder Edda*. The saga, the Morris / Magnússon translation, and *Sigurd* form a tradition in miniature,

three texts linked in a cyclical structure of anticipation and recurrence, prophecy and fulfillment, that is not just homologous with, but identical to, the world-weaving narrative of fate that governs each of these works. Untangling this tripartite relationship is a twofold task. First, I trace how Morris, in his 1870 translation, hearkens back to immemorial oral tradition and, in so doing, lays the groundwork for his epic poem yet to come. Second, we must trace how Morris, in *Sigurd*, models the pattern of transmission that structures his relationship to his source texts. The argument will cycle from Morris' prose translation to a reading of the more literal translation—i.e. "carrying-across," "bringing back," "return"—of the fated sword Wrath in *Sigurd*.

By reading *Sigurd* as a strange, slantwise translation, I distance it from the historicist posture of reflection on the absent past, and link it to the dynamic-traditionalist posture of openness to an actively returning past, enabling its transmission. For Pound, time is a vortex, a self-organizing spiral structure of force, and a specifically *propulsive* vortex, a "Turbine" in which the upward cycling of the past drives 1) historical process and 2) artistic work. The dynamic traditionalist feels this forward push, and rather than seeking to transcend its influence, affirms it:

> All experience rushes into this vortex. All the energized past, all the past that is living and worthy to live. All MOMENTUM, which is the past bearing upon us,
> RACE, RACE-MEMORY, instinct charging the PLACID,
> NON-ENERGIZED FUTURE. (*BLAST!* 153)

As Pound's notion of "all the past that is fit to live," implies, this receptivity to "the past bearing upon us," is not merely passive process. Rather, the poet stands in history's great vortex and through a process of selection and arrangement, builds poems, vortices in themselves. In so doing he builds his own configuration of style and subject, which we

could think of as his own aesthetic vortex, the "turbine" of his individual art, focalizing and directing time's main current. Thus, there is a Poundian and a Yeatsian and a Morrisian vortex, "charged" and "energized" by many of the same pagan and/or premodern returns.

This temporal picture informs Pound's deliberate and transparent activation of reference points, which Hugh Kenner calls "translation as a model for the poetic act: blood brought to ghosts" (150). Here, he references the *nekuia* of Canto I, where the poet sends Odysseus once more down to Hades, and Tiresias greets him, "A second time?" (4). When Tiresias and other ghosts come up to the trench, it is blood—a sacrifice from Odysseus, from Pound—that lets them speak. (On these terms, the gods of "The Return," gone centuries without due sacrifice, are diminished almost to hungry ghosts). Though Kenner dates this method to roughly 1911, the basic historical picture appears even earlier. In "Histrion" (1909), Pound ventures that "the souls of all men / great / At times pass through us, / And we are melted into them, and are not / Save reflexions of their souls." Thus, "'Tis as in midmost us there glows a sphere / Translucent, molten gold, that is the 'I,' / And into this some form projects itself" (*EW* 12).This implies a mutable conception of the poetic self as an arational process, perhaps not containing Whitman's "multitudes," but *open* to and ultimately *constituted by* a host of voices from the past.

Kenner explains Pound's poetics of translation as the transmission of dynamic forms, i.e., "patterned integrities," from past into present, language to language, and gives the visual example of sliding a knot from rope to rope (145-50). This image is remarkably apt for Morris. He, too, translates the tale of the Volsungs by sliding that ancient knot down the strand of fate, or, one could say, retying the knot at his own, later, conjunction,

inevitably gathering in new strands. Either way, the same "patterned integrity" cyclically returns into modernity. One could say of *Sigurd* what Kenner says of Pound's Homeric Canto I, that it gives new form to "a pattern persisting undeformable," and that "it is also *about* the fact that self-interfering patterns persist while new ways of shaping breath flow through them" (149). In both cases, however, this aboutness is secondary. It is demonstration of the principle via its enactment, rather than reflection on it. This is the difference between literalism and self-consciousness as modes of performativity.

In his 1912 translation of a major Anglo-Saxon poem, "The Seafarer," Pound honed his dynamist aesthetic via Morrisian dark-Medievalism. Pound brings out the hard, earthy Germanic substratum of English, while respecting the heavy downbeat and midline break of Norse and Saxon alliterative verse. In this, he finds *within* the British literary canon a means to quite literally "break the back of the pentameter," without crippling the poetic line. In this and many other respects, "The Seafarer" builds directly on Morris's achievements in *Sigurd*, even if it was simply drawing similar conclusions from the same well. Pound's overall project, according to Kenner, "was to untrammel the poem's energies, which he took (as for that do many scholars) to be pre-Christian . . . . Out of the wreck of structures the essential rises, unkillable" (151). In other words, he worked on "The Seafarer" to bring about a pagan return, to let ancient Saxon verse come forth from the confines of a Medieval Christian manuscript. (It is no wonder, then, that it came in the same volume as "The Return" itself, agonistically titled *Ripostes*.) Kenner sees this not as a matter of historicist reflection and recreation, but as the *transmission* of the poem's original

"patterned integrity," its constitutive structure of force. In this, he gives us a paradigm for dynamic traditionalism, engagement with the past through activation of originary power.

Long before Pound's translation, Morris worked along similar lines in *Sigurd*. Though Morris does much to bring out the pagan power of *The Volsunga Saga*, there is already plenty, thanks to a more circumspect, and likely sympathetic, scribe. But where Pound excises and revises what he takes to be Christian bowdlerizations, Morris transforms his source material on an even more fundamental level, that of genre, with the aim of releasing the surging heroic verses locked up in stark prose summary. His aim is the epic reconstitution of an oral poetic tradition.

Sigurd seems to face its Icelandic source material across an unbridgeable generic and formal chasm. Where the *Volsunga Saga* is a prose narrative that incorporates occasional fragments of eddic verse, Morris' *Sigurd* is an epic poem wrought throughout in rhyming hexameter couplets. But they are joined by the middle term of Morris' prose translation, which endeavors to release the saga's latent poetry and reveal it as having all the makings of an epic. In the first paragraph of the translator's preface to this volume, Morris disclaims any "special critical insight," and yet casts out a web of terms that seem to have highly idiosyncratic definitions:

> In offering to the reader this translation of the most complete and dramatic form of the great Epic of the North, we lay no claim to special critical insight, nor do we care to deal at all with vexed questions, but are content to abide by existing authorities, doing our utmost to make our rendering close and accurate, and, if it might be so, at the same time, not over prosaic: it is to the lover of poetry and nature, rather than to the student, that we appeal to enjoy and wonder at this great work, now for the first time, strange to say, translated into English . . . . (*CW VII* 283)

The strangest assertion here is that the *Volsunga Saga* constitutes "the great Epic of the North," because it is clearly *not* an epic by classical or nineteenth-century standards,[66] but a prose work whose poetic insertions only serve to render the form eclectic. In one sense, Morris is suggesting that the saga does the characteristic myth-carrying and nation-building work of epic, drawing an implicit parallel between its significance for the peoples of "the North" and the significance of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* for the peoples of "the South." But the claim is more emphatic than that. He strives for a prose translation that is "not over prosaic," and addresses this translation to "the lover of poetry and nature." Furthermore, at the end of the preface, he insists that the saga is an "unversified poem" (286).

But what *is* an "unversified poem?" This might seem a mere manner of speaking, a trope of literary praise, but Morris gives us a basis for taking it seriously. In one sense, the saga is poetry that has become un-versified, the prose concretion of past poems. Morris hints at this lineage when he refers to his source text as the "most complete and dramatic" form of the epic. There is no single, authoritative original, no definitive version on which to ground a translation, because the saga itself stands in a "secondary" relation to earlier sources, and could be reconstructed in a number of ways. The second paragraph of the preface explains this synthetic composition:

> The prose of the "Volsunga Saga" was composed probably some time in the twelfth century, from floating traditions no doubt; from songs which, now lost, were then known, at least in fragments, to the Sagaman; and finally from songs, which, written down about his time, are still existing: the greater part of these last the reader will find in this book, some inserted amongst the prose text by the original story-teller, and some by the present translators, and the remainder in the latter part of the

[66] This is more than just a prose/poetry distinction. For instance, Mackail judges that "For the purposes of an epic it is almost obvious that the story begins far too early, and has epic unity only from the point at which Sigurd's own conscious life begins" (340).

> book, put together as nearly as may be in the order of the story, and forming a metrical version of the greater portion of it. (283)

These, then, are fragments shored against the ruin of a world. The *Volsunga Saga* is a written prose work pulled together from an oral poetic tradition in the hour of its passing, a last-ditch attempt at cultural transmission.[67] Like Pound's *Cantos*, it works by quite literally including history, accreting every trace of narrative it can pick up, every scrap of poetry it can include.

In this light, Morris' translation of the *Volsunga Saga* is not just an accurate rendering of a foreign text in its foreignness, nor merely an attempt to familiarize it for English readers, but is above all an act of participation in the project of that saga, the telling-over of the tale.[68] To this end, he and Eiríkr Magnússon splice in a considerable number of verses of eddic poetry that were not included in the original, such as an extension of the prophecy of Odin (as "Hnikar") that considerably enhances the saga. In this, he is not so much doing violence to the artistic unity of an Original as continuing the work of the sagaman, practicing the same additive poetics through which this work came into existence. These are verses that *might* have made it into the saga, had its writer known them, and if not, what of it? As a new teller, Morris exercises his prerogative to embellish the work, literally adding to its body even as he imbues it with his own style, but always at

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[67] Mackail agrees with Morris that the saga reaches the aesthetic *level* of epic, but is obstructed from the full achievement by this composite form: "The Icelandic Saga is a chronicle which the genius of its tellers has almost against their will converted into an epic, but which retains much history that the limits of an epic reject. The whole of the life of Sigmund . . . . is a separate story, containing a strange and savagely magnificent epic of its own . . . . No art or skill can make this earlier epic either subordinate to, or coherent with, the epic of the Afterborn; of Sigurd" (340-41). For Morris, I argue, one of the *Volsunga Saga*'s key virtues is this seemingly "broken" form, which integrates tales spanning generations in subject and epochs in mood, and whose continuities Morris underlines in *Sigurd*.

[68] See Drury (190-91). Drury brings up these terms in dialogue with Lawrence Venuti.

the service of the tale. His other major "editorial" intervention comes in the form of a paratext, "the remainder" of verse fragments that he has translated and compiled "in the latter part of the book, put together as nearly as may be in the order of the story, and forming a metrical version of the greater portion of it." In following the saga with a kind of shadow-saga in verse, Morris is substantiating the strange claims of his introduction. For a Victorian freshly armed with the insights of Homeric source criticism, this surprisingly coherent sequence of verse fragments would look like one thing—an epic poem *in potentiam*. The style of Morris' translation, too, emphasizes the rootedness of the prose saga in a poetic tradition. He shifts the stark, rough-hewn prose of the original towards a prose-poetics steeped equally in Norse alliterative verse and the Victorian long line.[69] Together with the verse appendix and the insertions, there is a sense in which Morris is preparing the saga to *become* poetry, foreshadowing his completion of *Sigurd* six years later. If it already *is* poetry, it is as poetry-past and poetry-to-be.

The sagaman frankly discloses his method in the same way as Pound and Eliot, as well as H.D. (in *Trilogy*) and Joyce (in *Ulysses*), generating a text that registers its uptake of oral tradition at every turn, particularly at the beginning. Here, too, Morris' work repeats and intensifies the work of the sagaman's transparent mobilization of his ancient source material. In Morris' prose rendering, we have:

> Here begins the tale, and tells of a man who was named Sigi, and called of men the son of Odin; another man withal is told of in the tale, hight Skadi, a great man and

[69] Compare Morris's version**:** "So says the story that king Volsung let build a noble hall in such a wise, that a big oak-tree stood therein, and that the limbs of the tree blossomed fair out over the roof of the hall, while below stood the trunk within it, and the said trunk did men call Branstock" (294).
To Byock's 1990 translation: "It is said that King Volsung had an excellent palace built in this fashion: a huge tree stood with its trunk in the hall and its branches, with fair blossoms, stretched out through the roof. They called the tree Barnstock" (37).

> mighty of his hands; yet was Sigi the mightier and the higher of kin, according to the speech of men of that time.

With "Here begins the tale," the saga marks itself not as *the* tale, but as a telling of the tale, where that tale may never have cohered as a single "work" within the "floating traditions" of the broader culture. In one sense, like its oral source material, the saga places itself in a line of transmission. This too is the tale. In another, more melancholy and modern sense, it acknowledges its dependence on that oral source material, its coming-after and its difference in medium. There is something telling, too, about how the saga simply drops Skadi into the narrative alongside Sigi, as "another man" who is "told of in the tale."[70] Since it is cut off from the traditions within which these characters are situated, it must start "at the beginning." Nothing can happen until there is more than one character, and characters come into contact only through their accumulated histories, so the text must bring these two characters into relation by fiat. In this moment, as it strains to set in motion the chains of immanent activity that will power its plot, the saga foregrounds textual history most dramatically. And yet as it continues, it refers us always back to "the tale," through phrases like "so says the story" and "as the tale tells."

Kenning the Blade—Transmission of the Sword and Tale

My notion of Morris as "weaponizing" epic form is born from the poem's governing figure, which links the historical transmission of the tale of the Volsungs, to the intergenerational

[70] This move is even more explicit in Byock: "Another man, called Skadi, is introduced into the saga" (35). Skadi is called into presence through pure force of narrative necessity. This sentence means, simultaneously, "Skadi comes into this story because he is part of the original story," and "This story is now introducing Skadi into itself, so that it can get moving."

transmission of the Volsung sword. The reforging of the sword, from shards, figures Morris's remaking, from fragments, of the tale. Likewise, Morris's reassembly of the tale repeats the reassembly of *Sigurd*'s sword. Just as Morris's pagan transmission of ancient forms cuts across historicism's forced choice between "progressing" and "regressing," his mode of figuration cuts across Romanticism's forced choice between fallen allegory and redemptive symbol. This is because it does not belong to the Christian intellectual tradition, with its representational logic, within which this choice emerges. Rather, Morris draws on the pagan poetic figures of his Norse sources, and their near relatives in Anglo-Saxon poems such as *Beowulf*. The most famous of these tropes is the kenning. In my view, Morris's figural link between sword and tale is a kind of implicit kenning, working through the same imaginative literalism that structures Pound's "Return." On these terms, the sword *is* a tale unto itself, and the tale *is* a sword against the present. Morris grounds this identification in the pagan sense of fated, cyclically unfolding time, where sword and tale appear as different phases of a single very long force-process.

The driving conflict of *Sigurd* begins when Odin buries a sword (as yet without a name) in the trunk of the Branstock, the great tree that rises through the roof of the hall of Volsung, and consecrates it as gift to whomever of the gathered heroes can pull it out. Sigmund attempts the task half in jest, but when he draws the blade with ease, his mirth is gone, and he stands stock still in reverie. In an instant, he sees himself standing there once more, years later, as "the glory and sole avenger" of his house, and knows that he has drawn forth a dire fate. No sooner does he realize this than his pensive mood gives way to grim exultation: "Yea, I am the hired of Odin, his workday will to speed,/ And the harvest-

tide shall be heavy. What then, were it come and past/ And I laid by the last of the sheaves with my wages earned at the last?" (*CW* XII 8). In this momentary blaze of prophecy, Sigmund sees his course straight through to the end, without even a thought of sparing himself. Death for him is not a price to pay, but a path to Valhalla and eternal glory, the wage for his harvesting of foes. Sigmund's foresight comes in the future perfect, as hindsight from his final hour. In this snatch of prophetic knowledge, he sees his life as the tale it will have become. It would be an understatement to say that Odin's gift is a mere occasion for this knowledge. The passing of the sword to Sigmund does not simply occur *at* the beginning of the story, but *is* the beginning of the story. When Sigmund meets his end at last, it is Odin himself who breaks the sword, recalling his reaper from the fields. Sigmund, prepared for this moment all his life, passes the shards to his young wife Hjordis, with a final prophecy: "I have wrought for the Volsungs truly, and yet have I known full well/That a better one than I am shall bear the tale to tell: And for him shall these shards be smithied" (55). The shards of the blade are imbued with Sigmund's will. In a sense, they are already gathered under this intention, already marked as "for" the unborn Sigurd. In taking up the blade, the son of Sigmund will also take up the tale from his father. Even before his birth, Sigurd is already living towards his own tale, his life a short passage of great deeds that will be realized as narrative in the moment of his passing.

When Sigurd at last does take up the Wrath, its edge is already bloodied by history and sharpened by prophecy. But first, he must request the shards of his blade-to-be from his mother, who has faithfully kept them for him as the "hope of the earlier days." When he receives the broken sword, he hails it as a "hope of much fulfillment." His inversion of the

usual phrase marks the sword as at once the fulfillment of bygone hopes, and as a "hope," or portent, of great fulfillments to come. It is what was hoped for, but its return begets new hopes for the future. Sigurd blesses the shards, or imbues them with his will, in a way that fulfills and repeats Sigmund's initial intentionalization of them. The ritually repetitive language marks this as a self-binding prophecy, which draws forth the glorious future of the blade from its violent past:

> They have shone in the dusk and the night-tide, they shall shine in the dawn and the day;
> They have gathered the storm together, they shall chase the clouds away;
> They have sheared red gold asunder, they shall gleam o'er the garnered gold;
> They have ended many a story, they shall fashion a tale to be told :
> They have lived in the wrack of the people; they shall live in the glory of folk :
> They have stricken the Gods in battle, for the Gods shall they strike the stroke. (*CW* XII 92-93)

The "red gold" is a kenning for blood, while the "garnered gold" is the treasure of Fafnir, proleptically possessed by Sigurd as he casts out a line to the future. The blade's ending of stories evokes the passage of other warriors into their own tales at the hands of Sigmund. These acts of violent narrative closure are gathered into the history of the sword and Sigurd calls them into presence, pressing onward into the equally violent fashioning of his own tale. Every line moves us from death into renewed life, a recurrent rhythm that evokes not only the resurgence of the House of Volsung, but the seasonal patterns of growth, decay, and re-growth that mark the playing-out of fate towards Ragnarok. Sigurd's incantatory "they have…"/"they shall…" formulation hammers home the midline caesura of Morris's hexameter, which he has borrowed from Old Norse alliterative verse. This is a masterstroke of participatory translation. Sigurd's prophecy thematizes the cyclical, fated procession of rise and fall, fall and rise built into the very structure of Viking verse.

Even as the Wrath of Sigurd stands at the center of the process by which the tale-to-be comes to pass, it also figures that process. The sword, like the tale of which it is a part, undergoes a process of transmission. It passes from Odin to Sigmund, then in shards to Hjordis, and from her to Sigurd, who has the dwarf-smith Regin (who forged it for the first time) hammer the shards into a new blade as strong, or stronger, than the first. When Sigurd dies, he "transmits" the Wrath straight through the back of his killer, Gutthorm, and when Brynhild seeks her death as well, she instructs her servants to place the sword between them on the pyre, as it lay between them in her fortress before. The story of the blade is inextricable from that of the Volsung line, and passes with it out of the longer narrative of the epic. This line of transmission stands in parallel not only to the tale carried by the Volsungs as they bear the blade, but all the familial and cosmological story-lines woven into *Sigurd*, and the fated patterns of immanent change and cyclical recurrence that comprise the total structure of the epic poem itself.

One thing that separates my reading from the aestheticizing approach of Tucker and others, is that the transmission of the Wrath is not a figure *for* the transmission of the Volsungs' tale. The sword is not subordinated to, at the service of, its future narrativization. Rather, each can be seen in the image of the other, *as* the other. This falls outside Coleridge's famous, and still authoritative, distinction of symbol from allegory: It is neither the tenor-for-vehicle substitution of allegory, nor is it the part-for-whole "translucence" of symbol. Coleridge dismisses allegory as depending on a "mechanical" procedure of identity-across-difference, ie., X represents Y. The symbol, on the other hand, unites the earthly thing (X) and its transcendent referent (Y) through dialectical relations of identity-within-

difference-within-identity (here, the universal instantiated in a seemingly different particular).[71]

Morris exits this Romantic, secular-Christian paradigm by drawing on the pagan dynamism of Norse and Anglo-Saxon poetry, where there is no transcendent God or Heaven to symbolize, no unifying *logos* to reveal, and no hidden thing-in-itself to allegorize. Morris's linkage of sword and tale works on the same principles as the Old Norse poetic trope of "kenning," and in my view *is* a kenning, not confined to any one figure or motif, but unfolding diachronically, over the course of the whole poem. Here, too, Morris paves the way for Pound's "Seafarer", where the young poet builds his own pagan dynamist poetics by remaking classic Saxon kennings (*Personae* 64-66).[72] Kenner, remember, sees Pound as transmitting the poem's originary "patterned integrity," i.e., structure of forces, and we can see this working at the level of individual kennings, as well. A kenning *is* a patterned integrity. Let's look at how Pound kens the ocean, running it nimbly through a series of transformations that would be agonizing to explain in terms of symbol or allegory. When the seafarer is too long ashore, his "mood mid the mere-flood, / Over the whale's acre, would wander wide" (65). Here, "whale's acre" is a kenning for the sea. This is the closest we get to a tenor-vehicle connection, but this a literal truth, rather than an allegorical

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[71] *Lay Sermons*: "Now an allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language, which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principal being more worthless even than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot. On the other hand a symbol is characterised [sic] by a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general; above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative" (33).

[72] Yeats inherits technical terms like "symbol" from the Romantics, building *A Vision* itself around a symbol of the gyres (67-79). However, as I discuss above, the divine mind instanced in the Yeatsian symbol is not a rational one, not structured by the *logos*. For more on Yeats', Pound's, and Morris's dynamist theory of form, and their antirationalist polemic, see Chapter 2.

figure. By "whale's acre," Pound shows us whales at sea as horses at pasture, on their acre—the sea is where whales graze. Next, the seafarer tells how the cry of the seabirds "whets for the whale-path [his] heart irresistibly." Again, the kenning reveals a very precise, literal truth, rather than a general connection between the creatures and their environment. Just as horses and cattle tread paths in their acre, whales swim seasonal circuits, passing from "acre" to "acre," year after year, so that the sea really is crisscrossed by whale-paths, which any mariner would know. The goal is not just to "humanize" the sea by making it into a road for personified whales. These kennings show us something about whales, and something about the sea. But they also show us something about the seafarer, which becomes clearer in the next section.

As the seafarer longs for the whale-path, he dreams of traveling "O'er tracks of ocean." This is almost the same image, with a crucial difference. Before, we were looking at paths for whales. Now, these are tracks for him, specifically, for him on his ship. Just as the wasteland is crisscrossed by well-traveled footpaths, worn down by nothing but wayfarers' boots, the ocean is crisscrossed by shipping lanes. Here, we can be still more precise. The ship sails its sea-track, as the whale swims its path. And very often, these are the same path, traced over the same currents to the same destinations, sailors following the whales to hunt or fish or trade. The ur-kenning hiding here is ship as wooden whale. In Neil Price's account of Viking ship burials, he demonstrates that the ship and the hall are linked in a kenning—the ship as hall for the dead—and, indeed, built with the same basic form. The same can be said of ship and whale, each with its spine and ribbing, each with its fins. This leads to the strangest literal truth of all. Though our sailor may be a Saxon merchant, his

near ancestors and his Norse cousins took the whale-road on dragon ships, wooden beasts, carved prows imbuing them with spirit life.

So what, exactly, makes a kenning different from a metaphor or allegory? What makes it a dynamic form, rather than a representational structure? From a modern vantage point, Pound's kennings might seem like willfully "scrambled" analogies, but this is a logical, representational way of dissecting something arational and immediate, the instantaneous recognition of homologous forms. Here, Kenner's example of the knot is uncannily apt: Much as the *horror vacuii* spirals of Norse tapestry and metalwork knot together flowing, zoomorphic forms, a kenning knots together seemingly distinct things, revealing a common structure of force. The poet sees the same shape of activity in two places, recognizes rhyming knots on separate strands of fate, and joins them in a knot of his own making, a hybrid thing through which a single form stands forth. Let's take another classic example, more suited to *Sigurd*: for a warrior, "helm-stave." The conjunction reveals an underlying form, manifest in stave and man alike, through which the image has a novel, but literal truth, opening out on the wider world. We can read this like one of Homer's epic similes, linking war to agrarian life-activity: Just as a stave (hopefully) holds up the pasture gate, a warrior (hopefully) holds up his helm. And that is one dimension of the image. But in consummately Viking fashion, this kenning also just merges two domains of war. If warriors stand together in a shield-wall, and every one of them is a helm-stave, they form a staunch stockade.

But in binding together these human domains, the kenning installs them all in the more fundamental domain of nature, seamlessly bleeding into supernature. The "helm-

stave" image roots itself in a primary mytheme: Odin carving the first woman and man, Embla and Aske, out of Elm and Ash, respectively. And though the warrior is of course greater than a mere stave—building with it, breaking it—so too are the gods greater than *him*, their helm-stave. On these terms, the warrior truly *is* a stave, by extension a tree, and the army is a "wood of battle," wooden shields braced "Against the drift of the war-blast" (15). Crucially, the kenning is reversible. While it's hard to imagine kenning a stave as a man (perhaps, "the vessel's sail upheld by stout wood-thane?"), the tree-as-person kenning still has a hold on our imagination, e.g. the wind-dance of dryads or, more apropos, the march of Birnham Wood. In the kenning, wood and flesh are intertwined in a shield-wall of trees.

Returning to *Sigurd* with this model in mind, the sword exists in the domain of the deed and, if anything, is the ontological and ethical basis for the tale—the latter exists to valorize the former. However, in the cyclical structure of fate, the Volsungs' transmission of the sword is *also*, in a very literal sense, the Volsungs' tale-in-the-making, tracing the form of their tale-to-be.[73] This notion of deed as proleptic tale is captured in one of Morris's ur-kennings, an image on which the entire work depends. At a pivotal juncture of *Sigurd*, the eagles warn our hero against Regin's utopian plot to overthrow the gods:

> Arise! lest the world run backward and the blind heart have its will,
> And once again be tangled the sundered good and ill;
> Lest love and hatred perish, lest the world forget its tale,
> And the Gods sit deedless, dreaming, in the high-walled heavenly vale. (*CW XII* 116)

[73]And, for the same reason, the deed is prophecy enacted. It should be pretty clear that prophecy, even moreso than tale-telling, exists in service to the deed. The act of foresight depends, for its validity, on actions that have not yet come to pass and that exist only as event-potentials within the living past.

Here, the eagles' concern is not just that mortals will forget their tales of the past, but that the world will forget *its own tale* —that is, fate. Fate, as the necessary concatenation of deeds, *is* "the world's tale," insofar as it is the one great tale-in-the-making, the one great tale-to-be.[74] In this light, we can think of the transmission of the sword as the transmission of the tale, of the sword *as* a tale.

Conversely, given that the telling of tales is not the floating work of consciousness, but a worthy social-historical act, it is easy to see how this, too, counts as a deed. Moreover, the transmission of the Volsungs' tale *extends* and *continues* the Volsungs' originary deeds, set in motion and enabled by the intergenerational transmission of the Wrath. In this sense, we can think of the transmission of the Volsung tale as the transmission of the Volsung sword, of the tale itself *as* the sword. For instance, we could ken the sword as "Sigurd's bright death-tale." Likewise, however, we could ken the tale as sword, as "fame-hungry poet's harp-wrought edge," or even, "word-sword of Morris, Hammersmith Weland" (there, kenning Morris, also).

The transmission of the Volsung sword and the narrative transmission of the Volsung tale are the same pattern expressed in the seemingly separate domains of action and culture, the same pattern showing up at two points in a historical process—one knot at different positions on the same strand. Recognizing this in the *Volsunga Saga* and its legacy, Morris brings it out, deliberately kenning each as the other, and, in so doing, knotting them together.

[74] By the same token, the one great tale foreseen by the Fates, and, subsequently, by the seeress of the *Vǫluspá*, and the Volsung and Niblung witches of the *Volsunga Saga* / *Sigurd*.

If we think of the Wrath as a kenning for the tale, we can better understand the work it does at certain pivotal points in the narrative. When testing the two blades that precede the Wrath, Sigurd is the one who "smites," bringing them down on Regin's anvil, where they shatter. But when Regin gives Sigurd the newly (re)forged Wrath for testing, it the sword that seems to act: "White leapt the blade o'er his head, and he stood in the ring of its fire/ As hither and thither it played, till it fell on the anvil's strength" (95). It "leaps," "plays," and "falls" as if with a power of its own. In this, we see the agency of the fated blade. If the sword stands for the Tale, then Sigurd, in taking up the sword, takes up the Tale and is taken up in it, surging forward on currents of fate. At this instant, he "cries out aloud in his glory." But this cry recurs throughout Sigurd's story as the voice of the Wrath itself. When Sigurd receives the prophecy of Gripir, we hear that "the sheathed Wrath was hearkening and a song of war it sang" (98). The blade has listened well to the words of Gripir, and answers with its own song of affirmation. In this, we hear one line of fate resonating with another, the sword finding the "fit" of its story in the tale-to-come revealed by Gripir. On an even more literal level, we hear the sword *as* a song, a sword-song, a tale of war. And this tremendous condensation of images works because "singing" is one thing a sword really *does*, as it slices through air and rings off armor.[75]

The war-song of Wrath takes on an erotic tenor when it "cries out" in answer to the clanging shield of Brynhild (*CW XII* 122). This is not just a metaphorical "foreshadowing" of

[75] As Tucker observes in his consideration of epic similes, there are no extrinsic figures in *Sigurd* ("Tale" 382-83). Once this observation is installed in *Sigurd*'s pagan sense of time, this sense of intrinsic" figuration goes much further than he acknowledges, into the Modernist "literalism" that, per McGann, links Morris to Yeats and Pound. All seeming-similes link two instances of the same phenomenon, all seeming-metaphors show one thing revealing an aspect of itself in becoming another, and all apparent conceits, like the singing of swords, demand to be taken literally.

Sigurd's longing-to-come, but the establishment of a resonant frequency between Sigurd and Brynhild's narratives, and, for Sigurd, a portent in favor of advancing further into the mysterious fortress. When he stands over the sleeping Brynhild, confronting her magical chainmail straightjacket, he remembers the "voice of desire," and unsheathes Wrath to cut her free. In the strongly circular structure of this micro-prophecy and its fulfillment, we see Wrath once more as the sharp edge of the Tale, loosening divine bonds as it loosens limbs. When finally, Sigurd woos Brynhild in the guise of Gunnar, it is the sword that lies between them, at once joining and dividing them in a microcosmic instantiation of the joining and dividing that is their fate:

> And Brynhild wakened beside him, and she lay with folded hands
> By the edges forged of Regin and the wonder of the lands,
> The Light that had lain in the Branstock, the hope of the Volsung Tree,
> The Sunderer, the Deliverer, the torch of days to be. (193)

Here, the sundering line of the sword stretches from its past into its future. Simply to mention the sword, at a crucial juncture like this, is to presence its entire history, to reveal it under the sign of transmission. Yet it is through this history that it has its destiny, and as much as it is this history, it is its destiny too. It is still the "hope of the Volsung Tree," and it is already the "torch of days to be." This last image is no mere metaphor, but a foresighted glimpse of Wrath gleaming in the funeral pyre of Sigurd and Brynhild. Here it will sunder them once more, as it delivers them to the halls of the gods.

But even as Morris stresses the sundering role of the Wrath, he figuratively blends the blade into its bearer. After the first epithet ("the Light that had lain in the Branstock"), the subsequent iterations layer on images that accrue to Sigurd throughout his life, beginning with the prophecy at his birth (66). Later, scorning Regin, he proclaims that he

shall "utterly light the face of all good and ill" (106). And when, at last, Gudrun mourns Sigurd, she calls him "Thou striver, thou deliverer, thou hope of things to be" (236). By the end of the sequence, the outline of the sword survives only in "torch." This transformation culminates in a seemingly abrupt transition: "Then he strove to remember . . . ." (193). Though Brynhild was the grammatical subject of the last sentence, in this new sentence, it is (apparently) Sigurd. Morris never introduces him by name, but he has already been introduced, *as* his sword. Neither is tenor or vehicle, neither is part or whole. But Sigurd is to men what his sword is to swords, so each may take the other's name or image. This is the arationally knotted homology of kenning.

The Wrath connects to the narrative that accumulates around it as the microcosmic instantiation of a macrocosmic order. The foreordained transmission of the sword unfolds as one particularly important strand of the ur-narrative of the Norns, drawing other stories towards it or spinning them off from itself. In its bestowal, bequeathal, and reforging, the blade is a uniquely potent concentration or crystallization of unfolding fate, and thus, also, of narrative force.

With this sense of the Wrath's transmission, and its kenning-linkage to the transmission of the tale, it becomes easier to see something Morris is showing us, about the structure of the original saga in its religious context: The full originary power of the moment when Odin thrusts the Wrath into the Branstock. Where Wrath is a microcosmic instantiation of the great Tale of Fate, the Branstock is a microcosmic instantiation of Yggdrasil, the world-tree, identified with the flourishing of life and the macrocosmic order of the nine worlds. In wounding the tree, Odin ritually enacts the tragic structure at the

root of the Norse cosmology: the mortality of the tree of life is what makes it possible for the world to have a story, the Tale that stretches from the rise of the Aesir to their downfall at Ragnarok. Yggdrasil is doomed to wither and burn, and the movement and joy of the great Tale is in the passage of the world from birth to death. Fate works through this passage, so that all gods, men, dwarves, elves, and giants move toward the deaths spun out for them at birth.[76] When Sigmund draws out the blade from the tree, he is opening up the wound and setting the tale in motion. In this instant the fall of the House of Volsung, which is the condition of its glory, is ordained.

True to the vast scope of this initial appearance, the figurative power of Wrath extends beyond the bounds of the story-world. The transmission of the blade figures not just the Volsungs' apprehension of their tale-in-the-making, but the process of cultural-historical transmission that culminated in *Sigurd* itself. Just as the sword to be called Wrath shattered in battle, the oral poetic continuum that carried the tale of the Volsungs and Niblungs shattered with the old pagan world. The sagaman who set down the *Volsunga Saga* did for the fragments of the tale the loyal work that Hjordis did for the Wrath. In an age of Christianity, he could not revive the dying tradition, but he could preserve all the necessary parts of the tale through the very processes of textualization that were supplanting it. In his initial translation of the saga, Morris continued this work of narrative

[76] In identifying fate with world-forming conflict, and anchoring it in Yggdrasil, Morris follows the *Vǫluspá*. The arrival of the Norns at the foot of the world-tree, and their "marking" of fates immediately precipitates "the first war / in the world" between the Aesir and mysterious foes —perhaps the giants or the Vanir? (20-21) (Hollander 4). Snorri Sturlusson's *Prose Edda* (Byock trans.) places the first war, or at least the first killing, even earlier, when Odin, out of sheer Odin-ness, slays the frost giant Ymir and uses his corpse as raw material for the structured macrocosm (15-16). The opening of the *Volsunga Saga* shows us a microcosmic, human-historical reinstantiation of these events: Odin himself thrusting the sword into the world-tree, and setting the fates in motion. Morris's participatory translation shows us *both* mythemes at work here.

transmission, but intensified it, and began weighting the work towards poetry. In tracing its verse sources and arranging them as a shadow-saga, Morris suggested that the "floating traditions" of the pre-Christian North had their own internal coherence, an implicit arc that anticipated the work of the sagaman. But in so doing, he also set up the characteristic structure of prophetic knowledge, as it appears in the saga itself. Once readers knew the tale, they could look back to its verse ancestors and see in them the fragmentary outline of a long poem that never quite existed, but that might well come to be; an epic *in potentiam*, a sign of the future immanent in the past.

Knowingly or not, Morris prophesied the work he wrote six years later. When we look back from *Sigurd* on these fragments, they appear as a gathering of shards tending towards their future form. This is not, of course, to say that *Sigurd* bears any direct relationship to this Eddic verse. Rather, it emerges from the melting-down and reforging of these fragments. The Wrath of Sigurd exists on a cyclical continuum with the sword that Odin thrust into the tree for Sigmund. What remains is the metal of the blade, and what returns is the form of a sword, but a new shape, charged with Regin's magic power. Just so, we might say that what remains of the pre-Christian Norse traditions is the raw stuff of the tale, as it was preserved in the saga, and that what returns is its form as poetry. This form is quite distinct from that which it might have had in the Iron Age, but it nevertheless appears as the recurrence or fulfillment of that "original" form. Just as the hammering rhythms of Norse alliterative verse concentrated a visceral, even incantatory power in language, so the rigorous epic structure and concentrated literalism of *Sigurd* make *it* a kind of sword, cutting clear across the historical categories of modernity.

In the latter, as in the former, we see a thing literally coming into being from gathered fragments, and in so doing returning to an earlier form, but with a difference. It is marked (and sharpened) by the history it has accreted in the intervening years. *Sigurd* has the same translational or iterative existence as the Wrath of Sigurd. The epic, like the sword, is the leading edge of a history, of a series of transmissions. This tale is a process that is immanent in all its instantiations, so that to tell it is to participate in it.

The basis of this process is Morris's refusal to historicize, his willingness to involve himself in the worldview carried by the tale he relates, becomes its modern-day bearer. This is crucial: Morris' method of translation-as-transmission, and the prophetic structure through which it unfolds, is drawn forth from the fate-woven, deed-driven, and tale-tapestried worldview of the *Volsunga Saga* itself, foregrounded in the intense performativity of *Sigurd*, yet faithful to the highly modern project of the saga's compiler. This means that Morris translates from within the same model of history, and the same standards of ethical value, as the ancient tale he transmits, and he bears it out in the diachronic structure that his translation establishes.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

My aim has been to expand the religious and philosophical possibility-space of Victorian poetry, and open up new avenues for reading Morris. If one thing has dogged his reputation over the years, it is the sense that Morris was not an especially original or influential poet; that his greatest innovations were in craft-production, design, art-politics (as Hartley puts it), and the translation of these practical aesthetic projects into a revolutionary socialist program. Since Thompson's and Meier's configuration of the discursive field, which still holds sway today, Morris's imaginative literature has been valued chiefly as a document of the dialectical self-transformation of British Romantic ideology into a Marxist framework, and as a paradigm for preserving Marxism's Romantic-humanist core. This is not to say that critics have not championed Morris's poetry. Florence Boos, for instance, has dedicated her career to illuminating the many corners of Morris's voluminous epics and prose fictions. Anthony Skoblow argues for reading *The Earthly Paradise* as a proto-Modernist poem, and Herbert Tucker shows the radical originality of *Sigurd*'s engagement with history. (Indeed, Tucker's work ignited my interest in Morris). However, all these voices work within the same relatively limiting discursive field, which has the formidable teleological closure of a Christian conversion narrative.

This canonical narrative of Morris' poetic development takes the form of a Natural Supernaturalist "theodicy of the private life" in the vein of Wordsworth's *Prelude* or

Augustine's *Confessions*.[1] As such, it is propelled by the dialectical working-out of an immanent teleology, such that Morris passes through successive attempts at a theodicy of aesthetic redemption, working his way towards Marxism. At the same time, he performs the work of aesthetic redemption *on himself*, refining his understanding of the relation between art and world, and in the process lifting himself out of despair, into socialist action. Like the *Confessions,* it is a sort of "Whig history" of the individual, such that the outcome of a life is revealed as its inner seed of providential meaning.[2] This teleology stands forth clearly in Thompson's *Romantic to Revolutionary*. At the root of his narrative is an almost complete identification of the young Morris with the Idealist metaphysics and thwarted radical politics of his major poetic influence, Keats. Thompson installs Keats and, by extension, the young Morris in the last wave of what he calls "Romantic Revolt," the left wing of Natural Supernaturalism in England. "Racked by the conflict between the ideal and the real," Keats strategically displaces his longing for freedom into the creative work of art itself, such that "'The Beautiful' is posed as a 'Remedy' for the oppressions of the world," however "inadequate" it might be (15).[3] Thompson sees the Morris of *The Defence of*

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[1] "The Christian theodicy of the private life, in the long lineage of Augustine's *Confessions*, transfers the locus of the primary concern with evil from the providential history of mankind to the providential history of the individual self, and justifies the experience of wrongdoing, suffering, and loss as a necessary means toward the greater good of personal redemption. But Wordsworth's is a secular theodicy . . . which retains the form of the ancient reasoning, but translates controlling Providence into an immanent teleology . . . " (Abrams 96).

[2] See, e.g. "You saw, my God, because you were already my guardian…" (Augustine, *Confessions* xi.17); "You applied the pricks which made me tear myself away from Carthage…." (viii.14); and almost Romantic images of alienation, e.g. "When my mind attempted to return to the Catholic faith, it was rebuffed because the Catholic faith is not what I thought" (x.20).

[3] Abrams tracks the same process, albeit without Keats' singular focus on the aesthetic, in "Wordsworth, Blake, Southey, Coleridge, and later, after his own fashion, Shelley," early supporters of the French Revolution who "lost confidence in a millenium brought about by means of violent revolution," but "did not abandon the form of their earlier vision." This preserved their "apocalyptic thinking and imagination, though with varied changes in explicit content" (64-5).

Guenevere as "true inheritor of the mantle of Keats" (85), evaluating his work relative to the Natural Supernaturalist criterion of aesthetic redemption. He praises the volume's gritty "Romantic realism," which allows Morris to stage the "struggle… to reconcile his ideals and his everyday experience" (119-132). Although the *Defence* enacts its moral vision on the ideal plane of Medievalist art, within that plane it holds the ideal and real in dialectical tension, working through zigzag oscillation between them, in dynamic shifts between haunting dream-visions and unvarnished Medieval violence.[4]

This Keatsian tension between the "Ideal" and the "Real" gives Thompson's account an inexorable dialectical momentum, arcing through midlife crisis towards Marxist conversion. In this light, *The Earthly Paradise* and *Sigurd* appear as "transitional works," Morris' flawed or limited attempts to transcend his suffering, and the suffering he saw around him, through the redemptive power of poetry. Thompson reads *The Earthly Paradise* in much the same way as Morris' skeptical Victorian reviewers (even echoing Dowden's label, the "poetry of despair"), but rather than attributing its flaws to vulgar materialism, he diagnoses them as symptoms of a one-sided idealism, forsaking "the tensions between the ideal and the real, the rich aspirations of art and the ignoble and brutal fact" for a flight into nostalgic dreams (121), which inevitably collapses into its opposite, a "constant undertow" of despair (132).

Florence Boos and Anthony Skoblow have done much to revive appreciation for the subtleties of *The Earthly Paradise*, but the debate continues to unfold within terms that

[4] Also, "[Morris] responded to the feelings of loss, the musical languor of Tennyson, yet still his feelings rose in protest at the acceptance of defeat. He refused to relax passively in the currents of nostalgia, however much he felt their attractions" (80).

Thompson would have found familiar. Where Herbert Tucker damns the work on terms rather similar to Thompson's, Boos defends it as a self-aware and self-suspicious aesthetic theodicy.[5] It enacts a real plan of redemption, via its "identification of freedom with participation in communal and historical reality," but this redemption unfolds on very modest terms, such that "the effort to recreate past emotions is the only cyclical 'paradise' which has ever endured" (*Design* 390; *EP* I 7).[6] In this context, Boos' reading of "The Hill of Venus" (see above) is a final gesture of fraught affirmation, successful insofar as it points ahead to Morris' political implementation of his ideal.[7] Skoblow, on the other hand, makes ambitious claims for *The Earthly Paradise*. He reads it as a sophisticated negative-dialectical critique of capitalism, and thus, as a substantively Marxist work, well prior to Morris's Marxist conversion. Although Skoblow rejects the closural movement of Romantic and traditional Marxist thought, he continues to work within the logical and theological categories of Natural Supernaturalism, presenting aesthetics as a field for the self-fashioning of human subjects. His purported "End of Transcendence" simply shifts the locus of redemption from final synthesis to ceaseless negation, from triumphal transcendence to hovering transcendence-effect (30).

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[5] The poem "asks whether the psychological recognitions and linguistic delights of poetry can subserve something more than mere escape from unresolvable problems" (*EP* I 6).

[6] Hartley Spatt articulates a similar, but less nuanced, perspective on Morris' pre-*Paradise* poetry: "For thirty years Morris would play the role of teller of tales, recreating history in the subjective forms of art… The ultimate theme of Morris' early work is not the individual personalities of an anonymous mason or a fabulous queen, but the artistic perspective which can transcend the historic individual and achieve the greater community of art" ("Uses of the Past" 9).

[7] Thus, the tale "reflects reflect the larger poetic cycle's preoccupation with the heroism of lost causes and the limited redemptive capacities of artistic memory, and remind the reader that true redemptive heroism may find no external vindication—small consolation for the rest of us, who may envision no wider narrative for the solitary trajectories of our lives" (604).

In the crisis-biography of Morris, then, *The Earthly Paradise* is the crisis. An extreme displacement of "Romantic Revolt" into the realm of the Ideal, it stands or falls by virtue of its melancholy dissonance with the Real, depending on whether its alienation constitutes a redemptive alienation-effect. Peter Faulkner captures this dialectical potential energy, and gives a sense of its beckoning *telos*, when he writes, "The reviewers were right to sense in Morris's poetry at this time a poignant undercurrent of unhappiness; he was looking for a faith, though neither Christianity nor Pater's aestheticism could provide it. He still needed to find a way of bringing his feelings for the idyllic into a relationship with the realities of his age" (57).[8] What is striking about this passage is the mood of expectation, a certain tense that one could call "proleptic Marxism," a tense that also permeates the samples from Boos and Tucker that open this chapter. Here Faulkner approaches the middle of Morris' life in terms of where it *needs* to go, narratively, such that Morris "still" needs to find the secular religion he has always, implicitly, been looking for. This is not to say that Morris' midlife works had no role in motivating his subsequent commitment to Marxism – *The Earthly Paradise*, for one, is clearly driven by the concern with suffering, the impulse to theodicy, that motivated his later politics. What I am trying to suggest, though, is that reading it in light of what comes after it, forecloses the possibility of multiple potentials in the work, and forecloses the possibility that Morris' strategy of theodicy in *The Earthly Paradise* and *Sigurd* may have functioned on completely different terms, from that of Marx.

[8] Similarly, he attests to "Morris' "awareness of the gap between the real and the idyllic, which [was] to drive [him] onward to explore new areas of thought and action, and leave behind 'the idle singer of an empty day'" (Faulkner 59).

In the Morris *bildungsroman*, however, *The Earthly Paradise* serves as the apex of contradiction, pointing the way toward the beginning of a resolution in *Sigurd*. Although Thompson has relatively little to say about the poem itself, writing it off as epic pastiche, he praises "the significance given to action rather than to mood," and the "suggestion of heroic values" as "a complete break with *The Earthly Paradise*" (191).

Finally, for these critics, Morris' Keatsian struggle to reconcile the ideal and the real finds its resolution in the Marxist struggle to realize the ideal, to *make* the rational actual. Thompson hails this moment of synthesis: "The middle years of Morris's life were years of conflict: and only when 'hope' was reborn within him in the 1880s do the 'poet' and the 'designer' become one, with integrated aim and outlook. Only when Morris became a Communist did he become (as W.B. Yeats was to describe him) the 'Happiest of the Poets'" (111). It is worth noting that the happiness Yeats celebrates, here, has nothing to do with Communism, or any world-redeeming mission. Rather, this is Morris's thoroughgoing delight in the life of the earth and the senses, without any longing after otherworldly transcendence; it is Morris's sense that life does not need to be redeemed. This is a facet of Morris's pagan nature-worship, which Yeats sees as a roundabout way toward contact with higher reality.

Charlotte Oberg, despite arguing for Morris' paganism, also buys into this Augustinian narrative, in which Morris finds his way to his calling: "What is implicit in the poetry becomes explicit in Morris's writings and lectures on art and socialism (171); "[Morris'] mission was to redeem the world" (181). And despite his sensitivity to the

cyclical, pagan quality of Morris' "great history," Herbert Tucker sees *Sigurd* as heralding an evangelical moment:

> *Sigurd* is the more remarkable as the testament of a man who in 1876 was still addressing readers not as a committed comrade, but as a fellow victim of the occult system of privations that constituted modern life as he knew it. Marx was about to fall into Morris' lap, and he into that love of the socialist tale which would crown the career of one of the most appealing figures in literary history. Marxism would give back to Morris… the world he had long thought recoverable only as a fiction of loss. ("Tale" 389)

Here again is the tense of proleptic Marxism: the "still," the "about," the "would," the "soon" and the "yet." The enthusiasm for the soon-to-be "convert" is palpable, powerfully channeling the Christian impulses underlying the dialectics of redemption (389).

In challenging the notion of Morris as a habitual dialectical thinker, from his earliest work on, I challenge not just the content of this narrative, but its overarching form. To rethink Morris as a dynamist is also to decenter our sense of him as a unitary, self-conscious subject. Poets, like philosophers, do not necessarily arrive at a uniform, consistent view, even if they present their work as such. I see Morris not as exceptional, but as typical, in the way his corpus intermingles distinct, and often conflicting, strands of thought. In other words, I think of Morris's lifework as traversed by impersonal ideological processes, unfolding over the course of the long 19th century, even as Morris also does original work in these domains. In my view, Morris' originality as a poet resides primarily in the occluded, minor strain I have sought to bring forth in this work.

In "Gothic Architecture" (1893), an obscure lecture delivered very late in life, William Morris returns to this obsession he had inherited from John Ruskin, and which

motivated his historical-preservationist undertakings with the "Anti-Scrape" group. Here, he defines the architectural work as "a harmonious co-operative work of art, inclusive of all the serious arts." This is Morris's solid stone equivalent of Wagner's operatic *Gesamtkunstwerk*, at once a general paradigm of Art, and a key to the connection of its separate strands. One might think that this includes the art of poetry. However, poetry makes its appearance too, in 'The great epical works of sculpture and painting, which, except as decorations of the nobler form of such buildings, cannot be produced at all" (2). Here, Morris identifies certain kinds of sculpture and painting as *epic* in genre, implicitly grounded in narrative form, and thus, not just as space-arts, but as *time*-arts.

So, given Morris's readiness to view one medium under the sign of many others, I propose that the converse is also true: We can approach Morris's great epics, *The Earthly Paradise* and *Sigurd*, as architecture. In so doing, I draw general precedent from Jerome McGann, who sees Morris's printed volumes as massified, architectonic forms, directly paving the way for Yeats's and Pound's methods of textual embodiment. Furthermore, I draw specific precedent from Lawrence Rainey's reading of Pound's *Cantos* as a poetic "monument of culture," assembled in the same way as the Tempio Malatestiano—a Renaissance Italian nobleman's crypto-pagan tribute to his mistress. For Morris, the primordial work of architecture is the pagan temple, and its originary pattern is "the wooden god's-house or shrine" (12). The latter is distinctly barbarian architecture, and Morris clearly prefers the early Hellenic temples, where "some healthy barbarism yet clung to the sculpture," to the peak Classical temples where "increasing civilization demanded

from the sculptors more naturalism and less restraint," that is, a sculpture more oriented toward the human than inhuman (13).

In this dissertation, I have been thinking in terms of imaginative literalism, aesthetic and epistemological immediacy, and the immanent expression of divine powers in Morris's poetic model of the world. Drawing this line of inquiry to its most provocative conclusion, I want to suggest that these epics are not only generically architectural in form, they are literally god's-houses, each a poetic temple to its presiding deity. This is faithful to the terms I have established thus far, especially in Chapter 2, where I focus on aesthetics, and Chapter 3, where I focus on history.

First, Morris works in the same manner as his sculptor-hero, Pygmalion. Venus invisibly acts through Pygmalion as an incipient passion, impressing a characteristically Venusian form on the uncarved stone. In the same way, Venus and Odin act through Morris, impressing their images, force-patterns, and the full flood of their cultural histories on *The Earthly Paradise* and *Sigurd*. Each work presences its god like a sculptural image on its pedestal.

Second, what Morris does in *Sigurd* for the Volsung sword, he does throughout both poems for his gods. That is, he brings about their cyclical return, up and out of the supposedly-superseded pagan past, and into their new god's-houses. They accomplish, on an epic, macropoetic scale, what Pound begins in "The Return," and finishes in the fragmentary temple of the *Cantos*.

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