

NUMBER 7

197



VICTORIANS
INSTITUTE
JOURNAL

education of working-class children was largely religious, and an aspect of her Tractarian philanthropy.

3. Information about Charlotte Yonge's early years is taken from an autobiographical essay which is included in Christabel Coleridge's *Charlotte Mary Yonge: Her Life and Letters* (London, Macmillan & Co., 1903). The autobiography records an alarming precocity of knowledge.
 4. Quoted by Georgina Battiscombe, in *Charlotte Mary Yonge: The Story of an Uneventful Life* (London, Constable & Co., 1943), p. 14.
 5. Battiscombe, p. 14.
 6. First printed in *The Monthly Packet*, 1889; reprinted in *More Bywords*, 1890, and again in *A Chaplet for Charlotte M. Yonge*, edited for the Charlotte Yonge Society by Georgina Battiscombe and Marghanita Laski (London, The Cresset Press, 1965), pp. 152-180. It is from the latter edition that I quote (p. 178).
 7. It is noticeable that Charlotte Yonge preferred Oxford to Cambridge. This was not merely because of the hallowed associations which Oxford must have held for the pupil of John Keble, but because Lady Margaret Hall and St. Hugh's College, and thus their fictional equivalents, Lady Catherine Hall and St. Robert's College, had a religious tone, whereas Girton gave a nonreligious education: see *The Monthly Packet*, 3rd Series 7 (1884), 337-47.
 8. Quoted without a date by Battiscombe, p. 146.
 9. From a letter to Mrs. Harcourt Mitchell, July 31, 1899, quoted by Coleridge, p. 330.
 10. Quoted, from an address given to a Social Science Congress in Bristol in 1865, by Elizabeth Raikes in *Dorothea Beale of Cheltenham*, 1 London, Constable & Co., 1908, p. 134.
-

MEDIEVALISM IN ALFRED TENNYSON AND WILLIAM MORRIS

Florence S. Boos
University of Iowa

From earliest boyhood poems through final works, Tennyson and Morris used medieval motifs, and under their influence wrote some of the best lyric and epic poetry of their century. Medieval settings gave Tennyson and Morris an opportunity to dramatize their political beliefs, discuss sexuality with more directness than Victorian norms would otherwise allow, decry changing mores, and amplify a Victorian sense of displacement in history ("Dreamer of Dreams, born out of my due time," the narrator of *The Earthly Paradise* calls himself in its preface). Too many critics have contented themselves with obvious comparisons of the Arthurian poems of Morris' *Defense of Guenevere* and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, early Morris and late Tennyson. The manner and emphases of each poet evolved over the years, and an accurate discussion of their medieval poetry must consider a much greater range of their work.

In 1823, at age 14, Tennyson composed his first original poem, "The Devil and the Lady," a humorous and medieval tale of wifely infidelity. His first published volume of poems, which appeared when he was 21, contained a non-allegorical version of "The Lady of Shallot" as well as the later-suppressed "Ballad of Oriana," an effusive lament by a lover who has shot his beloved in a vain attempt to rescue her from an enemy's castle; this poem, set "where Norland winds pipe down the sea," was much admired by the young Morris. In the 1842 *Poems*, five of seven medieval poems are Arthurian, but owe few details to Malory; "The Day-Dream," for example, revises the frame and plot of Scott's "The Bridal of Triermaine." Lushly emotive and gothic, Tennyson's Middle Ages are characterized by optimistic Christian themes ("Sir Galahad," "Godiva"), unpuritan delight in sexual motives ("Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere"), occasional use of contemporary frames around a medieval dream center ("The Epic"), and absence of conscious political interpretation ("The Lady of Shallot"). All but the

latter remain lifelong characteristics of his Arthurian poetry. In 1847, Tennyson's first long published poem appeared. *The Princess* was a medievalized mock-*idyll*, located in a nebulous past of kings, princes, ladies, knights, and tournaments which he used to romanticize his views on sexuality and marriage. More consciously a "condition of England" poem than its predecessors, it still stops short of the political implications of the *Idylls*: the Prince is more lover than future monarch. Although *The Princess* was not a popular success, it may have influenced Morris' "Rapunzel," another poem in which a prince overcomes psychological ambivalence to win a princess and begin his life's work.

Morris' earliest poems, probably composed at Oxford, already show an inclination to associate the Middle Ages with sexual love, human fellowship, ruined buildings, and a sense of loss. Written on an Oxford prize topic, "The Temple of Jerusalem" chronicles the temple's history through the end of the Crusades. A brave lover in "The Fen River" rescues his maiden from her castle. "The Abbey and the Palace" regrets the decay of those structures and the loss of the knights and monks who lie buried inside. The emphasis on buildings in these poems is consistent with Morris' interest in architecture and his establishment of the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings. They also reveal a careful historicism, a study of the details of medieval life, and a desire for a communal life with friends and coworkers. At Oxford Morris read both medieval literature—Malory, Froissart, Chaucer—and the works of various medievalizers—Scott, Carlyle, Ruskin, Tennyson, Owen Meredith, Meinhold's *Sidonia*, De La Motte-Fouque's *Sintram*. *The Defense of Guenevere and Other Poems*, published soon after he left Oxford, seemed to its reviewers bizarrely literalistic; its emphasis on political chicanery, sexual frustration, and military defeat subverted the customary use of medieval decor for purposes of glamorization. A few *Defense* poems rework those of Tennyson's 1842 volume: "The Defense of Guenevere" is a painful and ecstatic variant of the sexuality of "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenevere," and "Christmas Eve: A Mystery" a contrast to Tennyson's "Sir Galahad" in its emphasis on the frustration and loneliness which Galahad suffers before his final vision. Two rejected Morrisian fragments, "St. Agnes" and "Sir Palomydes," are also analogues of Tennyson poems, and it seems likely that Morris intended early in his career to provide an alternative reading of the Arthurian cycle. The

Froissartian *Defense* poems describe in unrelenting terms the defeat of noble purpose and estrangement of human love, and the quasi-medieval dream lyrics ("Golden Wings," "The Blue Closet," "Two Red Roses Across the Moon") apply Tennysonian color and ambiguity to ominous events.

In 1859, Tennyson brought out his first four *Idylls*, each of which describes a virtuous or evil woman, "Elaine," "Enid," "Vivien," and "Guinevere"; they collectively had been titled *The True and the False* until a contemporary novel preempted the phrase. The *Idylls* are, of course, Tennyson's most famous medievalization, in which its sources are Victorianized until only Malory's plot remains. As the *Idylls* develop, a political and sexual ethic is imposed; sexuality is a dangerous force allied with evil, and even the otherworldly Grail quest is destructive of the highest human order, Arthur's kingdom. Arthur himself, whom Morris' Malorian poems had barely mentioned, becomes Tennyson's hero and model of perfection, Vivien declines from the legendary presentation of Nimue, the good Elaine is a helpless pendant to Camelot's main activities, and Guenevere's wandering "sense" is set in allegorical contrast to Arthur's divinely faithful "soul."

Several critics have assumed that the *Idylls* discouraged Morris from continuing his cycle. There may be some truth to this, since the reviewers of the *Defense* had at least temporarily deflated Morris' ego, but open competition with parallel motifs was common throughout the period—Rossetti reacted to the *Idylls* by beginning prose drafts for an alternate Launcelot poem—and the *Idylls* might well have inspired Morris to compose an alternate Guenevere cycle. More likely, Morris' mind was already turning to other medieval materials than the triune Arthurian mixture of Celtic Christianity, primordial patriotism, and mystical sexuality. Dedicated to Chaucer, *The Earthly Paradise* narrates twenty-four tales from different sources, both frame and stories of which are consciously medieval. The Wanderers, refugees from the bubonic plague, are made to recount stories derived from diverse folk sources—*Gesta Romanorum*, Malmesbury's *De Gestis Regum Anglorum*, *Arabian Nights*, Benjamin Thorpe's *Yule-Tide Stories* and George Dasent's *Popular Tales from the Norse*—and in turn, their Mediterranean hosts offer other medievalized versions of classical tales. The Wanderers are grieved and haunted by a consciousness of impending death: not the fall of moral Camelot but loss of earthly pleasure sharpens regret. The *Idylls* and *The Earthly Paradise* both

respond to Victorian agnosticism, Tennyson by his affirmation of a symbolically Christian interpretation of historical cycles, Morris by fixed concentration on the imaginative possibilities of life. It is in this context that Pater praised Morris' tales as "pagan":

One characteristic of the pagan spirit these new poems have which is on their surface—the continual suggestion, pensive or passionate, of the shortness of life; this is contrasted with the bloom of the world and gives new seduction to it; the sense of death and the desire of beauty; the desire of beauty quickened by the sense of death. (*Westminster Review*, October 1868)

Though Morris consulted more versions of the legends than is usually realized, their themes are basic—sexuality, greed, renunciation, and the search for a proper motive for love and work. More than other *Defense* poems, the *Earthly Paradise* tales suggest the folktale atmosphere of "Rapunzel": men endure tests of courage and disinterestedness, and women wait for love. Morris' women, like Tennyson's, are stylized, even prettified, but he does not seem to feel the urge to moralize or degrade them as well. An important subtheme is the man's conflict between an ideal stasis of love and sexuality and an active life of struggle and honor—a tension earlier made implicit in the *Defense*. Several poems about Venus dramatize in concrete form this stereotypical opposition of sexual love to other human values.

The final and last-written tales of *The Earthly Paradise* (1870) achieve heightened seriousness and beauty by the introduction of Scandinavian material; "The Lovers of Gudrun," patterned on the *Laexdala Saga*, anticipates the intensity and fatalism of *Sigurd the Volsung*, and the more cheerful "Fostering of Aslaug," based on the *Saga of Ragnar Lodbrok*, is a prototype of *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*. The final Venus Tale deserves mention as an anti-Christian allegory. After hearing of his love for Venus, the Pope denies Walter forgiveness, and proclaims God's grace withheld until his papal staff shall burst into bloom, which it promptly does. Here is Morris' response to Tennyson's religious orthodoxy, and to the more qualified respect for great age and venerable institutions which underlay Browning's treatment of the Pope in *The Ring and the Book*, published the preceding year.

A more pointed contrast with Tennyson's *Idylls* is provided by *Sigurd the Volsung*, the poetic epic which Morris considered his best

work. Like Arthur, Sigurd may be partly descended from the gods, and is an idealized political figure who culminates one of history's recurrent cycles; unlike Arthur, he is essentially adventurer and lover rather than governing monarch. His defense of the oppressed and justice to the poor are emphasized: "he alone of men can turn the ring's gold/wealth towards productive ends." The poem is a tragedy of fate and inevitable sexual passion, since a love potion, not human treachery, caused Sigurd to forget his oath to Brynhild and marry Gudrun. Morris' narrative is less narrowly focused on one hero than is Tennyson's, because he is interested in the complete history of the Volsung people: of the epic's four books, the first recounts the saga of Sigurd's death. Not only does Morris' theogony reflect distaste for Victorian Christianity, his rendition moderates some of the brutalities of *Volsunga Saga* protagonists and diverges from the then-popular Wagnerian version of the ring cycle. Wagner's Siegfried is essentially a strongman, and his Gudrun a crafty and covetous woman who deceives him; Morris' Sigurd has a genuine social conscience, and both Gudrun and Brynhild are worthy and innocent victims. The effect is to discredit original sin as an explanation of events—if good people are destroyed through the consistency of their own passions, it is the gods' intentions which are thereby tainted.

The medievalism of Morris' later work is of course better known, especially that of *News from Nowhere*. *A Dream of John Ball* is the first and most strictly medieval of the prose romances, based on the historical rebellion of a fourteenth-century priest. *News from Nowhere* inaugurates the later prose romance pattern of imagining an existence which is simultaneously past, future, and dream. Dislocation of chronology almost suspends disbelief in a rural, nontechnological society in which all men support themselves through haymaking and the barter of art objects, women voluntarily choose domestic tasks, and the population remains sparse despite disinterest in contraception. The later prose romances are unspecifically northern in setting (Utterhay, Upmeads) and quasi-medieval in tone—a world of mountains, islands, lakes, navigators, ladies, knights, and artisans.

It seems likely that at several points in his career Morris consciously designed his poetry to express temperamental distance from Tennyson. Morris' historical interests evolved away from Tennyson's idealization of historical decor toward a stringent, if mildly antiquarian, socialism; and the geography of his utopia is more pan-national than Tennyson's;

the wondrous isles are both less charted and freer than Camelot. Tennyson and Morris, with other medievalizers, created a popular association with the Middle Ages of utopian hope for human perfection in an ideal realm. As Merlin, the protagonist of Tennyson's last medieval poem, "Merlin and the Gleam" (1889), exhorted his successors:

O young Mariner,
Down to the haven,
Call your companions,
Launch your vessel,
And crowd your canvas,
And, ere it vanishes
Over the margin,
After it, follow it,
Follow the Gleam.

THE REACTION OF BRITISH PROTESTANTISM TO THE CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION IN AMERICA

W. Harrison Daniel
University of Richmond

British observers of the American scene were keenly interested in the course of events in the United States during the 1860s. They were concerned about how Americans would cope with the slavery issue, about the imperial ambitions of an energetic people, and about the viability of American democracy. The purpose of this article is to examine the reaction of the Anglican Church and the dissenting denominations (Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, and Presbyterians) to the American Civil War and the problems of reconstruction.

In the autumn of 1860, churchmen in all denominations expressed the hope that the American union would be preserved. They did not feel that the election of Abraham Lincoln as president justified secession and expressed the belief that his administration would "steer a course wisely" and "not interfere" with the rights and institutions of any Southern state. Some Britons dismissed secession agitation as "bluster" which would "end in talk." Others surmised that when "matters [had] been carried as far as was safe, and the republic [had] been brought to the brink of disruption," the nationalistic sentiments of the Southern people would prevail, mediation talks would begin, a compromise would be reached, and the union would be preserved.¹

The secession of South Carolina, however, caused apprehension among churchmen. Spokesmen for the Congregational church termed the action of South Carolina treasonable, and other ecclesiastics asserted that secession was "constitutionally wrong" and would result in a civil war. Anglican spokesmen were usually more sympathetic to the Confederacy than dissenting churchmen, and some in this church maintained that the Southern states had "every right to secede" and declared, "we fail to see, how, on the principle on which the independence of the United States was originally founded, the right of the secessionist states to claim a separate independence of their own can be denied."²
