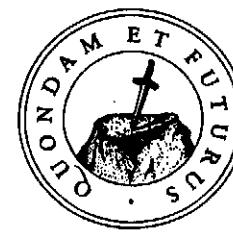


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Plate 5. Jessie M. King, 'She Threw Her Wet Hair Backward From Her Brow,' from *'The Defence of Guenevere' and Other Poems* by William Morris. London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1904. Courtesy of The Newberry Library, Chicago.

## William Morris, Robert Bulwer-Lytton, and the Arthurian Poetry of the 1850s

FLORENCE S. BOOS

This essay examines parallels between William Morris's 1858 *The Defence of Guenevere* and Robert Edward Bulwer Lytton's 1855 *Clytemnestra, The Earl's Return...and Other Poems* and explores reasons for Morris's turn from Arthurian to other medieval romances in his later poetry. (FSB)

Nearly a century and half after their first appearance, most readers find something arresting in the poems of William Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858), especially the Arthurian poems of the 'Malorian group.' Indeed, many twentieth-century critics so value their dramatic settings and psychologically charged language that they find in these qualities an unmet standard for Morris's later work.<sup>1</sup> In this context, most critics also see these poems as the first in a line of non-Tennysonian Arthurian works, such as Algernon Charles Swinburne's 1880 *Tristram of Lyonesse*, which celebrated the transgression of social norms for idealized romantic ends.

In this essay, I will suggest that Robert Bulwer-Lytton's 1855 volume, *Clytemnestra, The Earl's Return, The Artist, and Other Poems*, which includes three poems on Arthurian themes, provided a little-noticed antecedent for Morris's Malorian interests, and reinforced Morris's tendency to dramatize the anxieties and repressions latent in the Arthurian cycle.<sup>2</sup> I will also argue that Robert Bulwer-Lytton's now-obscure work may have provided a partial model for Morris's more striking evocation of an accused woman's self-defense and a prototype (in Bulwer-Lytton's 'Parting of Launcelot and Guenevere') for the two lovers' anguish and misery in Morris's 'King Arthur's Tomb.' Morris shared Bulwer-Lytton's tendencies toward introspective, sensuous, and non-judgmental treatment of medieval legend, and these tendencies remained evident in his later 'Ogier the Dane,' 'The Hill of Venus,' and several other *Earthly Paradise* tales.

## MORRIS AND THE ARTHURIAN LEGENDS

Among the bolder and more original poems of their age, the thirty poems of *The Defence of Guenevere* employed a wide range of linguistic devices, narrative techniques, and shifting points of view to portray a decaying, war-torn world in which handsome suffering women and lonely men observe love from an embattled distance. These poems brought into sharp relief sexual polarities and stylized modes of behavior which exacerbated the desolation suffered by its women and men alike, but they also presented intensely beautiful and heightened visions of this society's solaces: Guenevere and Launcelot's respective memories of their garden encounter and shared nighttime vigil; John of Newcastle's recreation of the love between an ambushed knight and lady; and the quiet fervor of the speaker who waits for his love's voice or presence in 'Summer Dawn.'

This complex dialectic of desire and frustration also offered Morris an opportunity to develop an internal ethic of integrity-under-siege. Despite treachery, violence, imprisonment, rejections, and mysterious and debilitating magic charms, Morris's heroes and heroines in *The Defence* remain steadfast in the belief that 'love' mirrors life's deepest inner value(s). As in Morris's early prose romances, then, *The Defence* imposed on its male characters certain stringent, even agonistic moral imperatives: in the face of erotic frustration, inexplicable failure and violent death, they are to preserve and defend a vision of beauty at the risk of life. Morris rejected sexual repression and distrusted didactic literature, but his poems' tests of imagined identities made an austere moral point: in some situations, no options or compromises are possible, and there is no durable palace of art.

Many wefts of association also made the legends of Launcelot, Guenevere, and the quest for the Holy Grail interesting to the young Morris and his circle, but only six of the *Defence*'s thirty poems made allusion to figures or places in Malory's text.<sup>3</sup> The 'Malorian Group's' four poems are among the volume's best-known, however, and their arresting qualities derived from Morris's ability to decant new wine in old bottles. In effect, he found a setting in the 'elevated' ambiance of Malory's intricately plotted legends for the intensity, strong metaphoric effects, flexible lyric forms, and elegiac eroticism of contemporary Victorian romantic and 'spasmodic' poets (among them Alfred Tennyson, Sydney Dobell, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Robert Browning). At twenty-four, he also saw that Malory's gyres of interpenetrating narratives were erotic, idealized, and varied enough to provide a framework for his youthful aims and desires to evoke emotional intensity *in extremis*.

Morris's formal debts to Tennyson's early Malorian lyrics are well-known.<sup>4</sup> In his 1832 and 1842 volumes, Tennyson celebrated several members of the usual Arthurian ensemble in *Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere*, *Sir Galahad*, *Morte d'Arthur*, and the haunting *Lady of Shalott*—based on Malory's ill-fated Elaine of Astolat—and echoes of the 'Morte d' Arthur' suffuse the dream of his friend's burial in the 103rd lyric of 'In Memoriam' (1850). Tennyson, like Morris after him, extracted only a few incidents from Malory's elaborately imbricated accounts for use in these early poems: Launcelot and Guinevere riding together in the spring; Galahad's noble pursuit of the Holy Grail; the familiar account of Arthur's death; and Elaine's hopeless passion for Launcelot (echoing the deserted maiden theme of his 'Mariana' poems). He conspicuously avoided the political conflicts of the cycle, Malory's extended accounts of specific battles, jousts, and romantic episodes unrelated to Arthur's deeds, and the more dramatic aspects of Launcelot's adventures on behalf of the Queen.

Morris had also conceived an 'Arthurian' cycle before he published *The Defence of Guenevere*, but his plans for it largely excluded Arthur, so his cycle might be called 'the fellowship of the Round Table.' He was disinclined to retrace ground already claimed by Tennyson, and this no doubt influenced his decision to publish only the four 'Malorian' poems mentioned above in *The Defence* itself. But he also may have observed that the descriptions of the Hundred Year's War in Jean Froissart's *Chronicles of England, France, Spain, and the Adjoining Countries...* provided more historically concrete and plausible material for poems about the psychological toll of heroic struggle and unfulfilled love. Common to both sections of *The Defence of Guenevere* volume were Morris's empathy with admirable lost causes; his projected interest in the inner mind-states of women; and his condemnation of physical or sexual victimization of women by more prestigious or powerful men.

May Morris printed two alternate openings for a Guenevere poem in her introduction to the *Collected Works*, and both emphasized the raw hostility of Guenevere's enemies.<sup>5</sup> She also included two fragments intended for *The Defence* poems in the final volume of her *Collected Works*. In the first, the eponymous hero of 'Palomydes' Quest' dutifully seeks the 'beast Glatysaunt,' but he also asks a prescient question: 'When all this noble fame has been compassed / Shall Iseult's love be nearer to me brought?' (CW 24.71). In the second fragment, 'St. Agnes' Convent,' the aged Iseult ponders her own regrets in moments when remorse, 'like a thief / Comes creeping through a dark house in the night, / My woe comes on me when I think I might / Be merely wretched with the wind and rain, / But not for any moment will my pain / Grow softer even' (CW 24.69).

Morris may have declined to publish these elegiac meditations because he recognized that added plot-details would dilute their emotional force, but he also realized that unmediated dramatic monologues seldom make a good dramatic cycle. In the published Malorian poems, he carefully contrasted personal monologues against the reactions of other narrators and observers, though he maintained an underlying narrative and ideological bias toward the principal speaker's point of view.

In obvious ways, then, Morris was indebted to Tennyson's choices of Malorian material. But he also sought to undermine Tennyson's essentially establishmentarian view of history. Morris's poems resonated with the conviction that *historians* will inevitably record the self-congratulations of random winners, but *poets* should celebrate and reclaim the integral merits of unrewarded devotion, and failed struggles toward social justice. Morris found knightly 'courage' and romantic 'love' uninteresting unless his heroes and heroines faced real and irreversible loss, but he also believed that descriptions of such doomed confrontations gave voice to the deepest expressions of human experience. In this spirit, Morris's Galahad ruminated sadly in 'Sir Galahad: A Christmas Mystery' on the deprivations of his life in search of the Grail: 'But me, who ride alone, some carle will find, / Dead in my arms in the half-melted snow...' (CW 1.49–50).

Other, more explicit contrasts emerged in Morris's modifications of Malorian legend. In none of his poetry, for example, early or late, did he ever make any use of the the Elaine story. Perhaps he felt 'The Lady of Shalott' represented the tale as it should be represented, or recognized that the pathos of Elaine's devotion to Launcelot undercut the moral claims of Launcelot and Guenevere. (Morris often represented the motif of two men who love the same woman, but seldom developed the theme of two women who love the same man). Morris also showed little interest in Arthur, either as ruler or as husband. Perhaps the young Morris, occupied in courting Jane Burden, wished to explore in his poetry the tensions of passionate reciprocal love, and found Launcelot's struggles more sympathetic than the ruminations of a heedless husband and powerful reigning monarch.

In any case, Morris also shared some of the preferences of his then-close friend and mentor Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Rossetti had organized the Oxford Union murals project, which brought together Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Morris, Swinburne, Val Prinsep, Arthur Hughes, Spenser Stanhope, and others in 1856 to paint scenes from *Le Morte Darthur*. Rossetti had already begun 'God's Graal,' a poem on Launcelot which he never finished, and he completed a watercolor of *King Arthur's Tomb* in 1855, whose details closely paralleled the

incident described in Morris's *Defence* poem of the same name.<sup>6</sup> Rossetti's five woodcut illustrations to the 1856 Moxon Tennyson also included three drawings from Arthurian themes: *Launcelot looking on the dead Lady of Shalott*; *Sir Galahad*; and *Arthur's wound tended by the Queens in the Vale of Avallon* (for 'The Palace of Art'). In or around 1857, moreover (the year in which Morris composed much of *The Defence*), Rossetti began or completed no fewer than eight drawings or pictures based on Malorian settings or scenes. Several of these—*Launcelot Escaping from Guenevere's Chamber*, for example—illustrated specific incidents Morris included in the Malorian sequence of *The Defence of Guenevere*. Rossetti's comradeship doubtless encouraged Morris's sympathetic attention to the Launcelot–Guenevere liaison, but it also forced him to articulate his different attitudes towards achievement and love.

Morris's attempts to find a meaning to history beyond success thus led him to portray idealized male heroes who confronted near-certain failure. His temperamental egalitarianism and search for humanitarian meanings within erotic love also led him to explore some of the complementary emotional losses suffered by women deprived of autonomy in a repressive and unjust society. Seen in the light of these efforts to find deeper patterns in the transient frustrations of human desire, Morris's composition of *The Defence* may have been a kind of vigil, in which he took stock of his inner resources, and prepared to undertake the tasks of personal 'fellowship,' artistic work, and social reform.

In a sense, also, Morris's willingness to contemplate a life of endeavor without expectation of immediate reward expressed an interesting form of Keats's 'negative capability': the holding of (moral) opposites in suspension 'without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.' This unusual blend of skepticism and stoic ethics seems to have been inherent in him, for it underlay the displaced poetic resolutions that appear in *The Defence*, *The Earthly Paradise*, and *Love Is Enough*, and it informed *A Dream of John Ball*, *The Roots of the Mountains*, and other prose romances. In its most mature form, it also expressed his growing conviction that popular history must be founded, not on the decrees and conquests of political rulers, but on study and appreciation of the art and craftwork of the past.

#### ROBERT BULWER-LYTTON'S 1855 *Clytemnestra* AND MORRIS'S *The Defence of Guenevere*

Rossetti, Morris, and Morris's circle of college friends also admired the recently-published work of Robert Bulwer-Lytton (1831–91), son of the novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Lytton shared the Pre-Raphaelites' admiration for Tennyson, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and other contemporary poets

and later found a substantial readership for his long verse novels *Lucille* (1860) and *Glenaveril* (1885),<sup>8</sup> before critics began to dismiss him as an imitative or derivative writer: 'the best of mirrors,' as one put it (Darling 108).

A principled but dutiful son of bitterly quarrelsome and neglectful parents, Robert Bulwer-Lytton was raised by a nurse and sought fatherly advice and affection from his mentor, the literary critic John Forster. When he wrote his father that he wished to become a writer, Edward Bulwer-Lytton replied in 1854 that 'I don't think...the world would allow two of the same name to have both a permanent reputation in literature' (Balfour 1.60).

In the event, Robert found a post as an unpaid attaché to the British legion in Florence, and gained there the friendship of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who offered sympathetic praise and writerly advice. Edward was a Tory, but Robert Bulwer-Lytton's convictions were reformist, and two of his children—Lady Constance Lytton and Victor, Earl of Lytton—became activists in the cause of women's suffrage.

Robert Bulwer-Lytton's tastes in literature were also mildly rebellious. At one point, for example, Edward enjoined his young son to ignore Keats and Shelley and seek 'simplicity of style.' Robert answered that:

You say I have fallen foul of Tennyson, Keats, Shelley, &c.... But my notion is that...one *must* follow one's sympathies.... Better run knee-deep into a quagmire after a will-o'-the-wisp, if one feels the desire to do so, and finds pleasure in the doing of it.... If now there be in my talk too much of other men's language, it is because I have a strong sympathy with these certain men (Balfour 1.56–57).

He concluded with a spirited defense of poetic complexity Browning and the Pre-Raphaelites would surely have endorsed:

'What matter if you read the page over six times in vain, if at the seventh a light, like the soul of it, flashes out[,] which has salvation in it?'<sup>9</sup>

In response to these appeals, the distant patriarch finally permitted Robert to publish his poems—under the pseudonym 'Owen Meredith'—on condition that he turn his energies to other matters for at least two years.

*Clytemnestra, The Earl's Return, The Artist, and Other Poems* thus appeared with Chapman and Hall in 1855, when its author was 24, Morris's age when he published *The Defence of Guenevere*. R. W. Dixon later recalled that in that year Morris and his Oxford friends admired—after Tennyson's *Maud*, of course—two works of verse: Alexander Smith's *A Life Drama* and Robert Lytton's *Clytemnestra*. In his next volume of poetry, *The Wanderer* (1859), Robert Bulwer-Lytton included several verses on Scandinavian and Near Eastern topics, but Morris seems never to have mentioned him in his later correspondence and probably came to view him as a minor talent.

In 1855, however, things looked a bit different. The melancholy pessimism of Lytton's early poems, reflecting in part the frustrations of his quiet attachment to a married woman in Italy, also manifested the 'sympathy' he characterized in letters to his father as a desire to present several sides of an issue without gratuitous censure or pre-judgment. This temperamental choice predictably diminished the dramatic force of his work, but its realism and ethical insight also anticipated Morris's ardent pessimism in *The Defence*, as well as the latter's lifelong determination to 'think bigly and kindly' about moral and political dilemmas.

With some exceptions, the young friend of Elizabeth Barrett Browning also found it natural to present eloquent and sympathetic female speakers, including women who deserted their families and resisted potential lovers. Lytton's 'Clytemnestra' is not exactly a feminist rewriting of Aeschylus, but it recalibrates the scales of judgment to balance the guilt of an arrogant child-murderer against that of his vengeful wife. In short, Lytton's willingness to give women a significant voice in complex emotional verse—narratives resonated with his reformist sympathies in ways that may later have encouraged his activist children. They may also have provided models of assertive and expressive women for Morris and other poets of kindred views.

#### THE RHETORIC OF FEMALE SELF-DEFENSE

Rather surprisingly, Morris based none of the four 'Malorian' poems of *The Defence of Guenevere* on an actual scene in Malory, but in each case embedded scenes of his own device in the larger tale. Especially striking are Guenevere's eloquent self-revelations in 'The Defence of Guenevere' and 'King Arthur's Tomb'; highly rhetorical and sometimes inconsistent, they reflect the great presence and force of her character.

In Malory, by contrast, Guenevere never defends herself in public against the false charge of treason, but seeks to persuade Sir Bors or Sir Launcelot to speak in her defense. In particular, Malory's Guenevere offers no narrative account of her life or 'defence' of her choices, as she does in Morris's *Defence*, and to a lesser degree in Lytton's 'The Parting of Launcelot and Guenevere.' It seems plausible that the title-figure of Lytton's poem 'Clytemnestra' may also have influenced Morris's characterization of Guenevere, especially Clytemnestra's opening soliloquy, in which Agamemnon's wife defends herself against a charge of treasonous disloyalty to her spouse.

Even the curmudgeonly Edward Bulwer-Lytton acknowledged the originality of 'Clytemnestra,' as did others.<sup>10</sup> Lytton renamed Aeschylus's grim drama of inexplicable malice to bring Clytemnestra's actions into sharp

relief and provided a psychologically plausible account of the motives that drove an unbalanced woman to murder her estranged and brutal husband. He did not palliate her murders, but diminished the roles of the hostile chorus and Cassandra, and highlighted—among other things—Agamemnon's display of contempt for his wife on his return and his use of captives as personal concubines.

Clytemnestra also eloquently denounces the emptiness of her marriage to an arrogant tyrant, who has killed his daughter and depleted his country in service to a destructive and interminable war, and mourns the weakness of her long-time consort, the once-respected and still-loved Aegisthus. Lytton's Clytemnestra, in short, is forthright and consistent, and her willingness to confide her intentions to the audience elicits a measure of sympathy. The (allegedly) 'unnatural' 'manliness' of Clytemnestra in Aeschylus's play becomes a conventionally Victorian alliance of harsh 'masculine' determination with acceptable 'womanly' desires for love.

Another original turn in the work is Lytton's treatment of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra's children; Electra and the little Orestes enter at several points before Electra arranges for Orestes to be smuggled away and protected from Aegisthus's rage. Lytton's account of the sacrifice of Iphigenia is perhaps the poem's finest scene, one which moved the elderly Leigh Hunt to tears.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the Agamemnon plot may have held a personal resonance for Robert Lytton. His own childhood was overshadowed by the bitter quarrels of his parents, and he had dearly loved his only sister Emily, who died in adolescence when away from home. In any event, Lytton's work provides a kind of evenhanded balance to the dread workings of Aeschylus's fate: Clytemnestra is aggrieved and disgraced, Agamemnon is dead, but all their children and citizens have been wronged in complicated internecine ways.

Like Morris's Guenevere, Clytemnestra faces death on charges of treason and adultery, and she opens her soliloquy with a claim that she is essentially 'innocent':

Am I not innocent—or more than these?  
There is no blot of murder on my brow,  
Nor any taint of blood upon my robe.  
—It is the thought! it is the thought!... and men  
Judge us by acts! (4)

In roughly similar terms ('Judge us by acts!'), Morris's Guenevere defends her love for Launcelot: 'Nevertheless you, O Sir Gauwaine, lie, / Whatever happened on through all those years, / God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie' (CW 1.142–145).

In a passage that strongly anticipates obvious aspects of Guenevere's 'Defence,' Clytemnestra evokes the deep emotional void that has justified her love for someone other than her husband:

My soul was blind, and all my life was dark,  
And all my heart pined with some ignorant want.  
I moved about, a shadow in the house,  
And felt unwedded though I was a wife;  
And all the men and women which I saw  
Were but as pictures painted on a wall: ... (46–47)

Likewise Morris's Guenevere has sickened under the weight of 'Arthur's great name and his little love' and the obligation imposed on her to be 'stone-cold forever' (CW 1.83; 88). Similarly, Clytemnestra remembers Aegisthus's love, which brought her the first warmth of her life:

O what a strength was hidden in this heart!  
As, all unvalued, in its cold dark cave  
Under snow hills, some rare and priceless gem  
May sparkle and burn, so in this life of mine  
Love lay shut up. (46)

Her sense of emotional desolation is rendered more credible by Agamemnon's sole response to his wife's ardent speech of welcome on his return after a ten-year absence: 'Women ever err by over-talk. Silence to women, as the beard to men, / Brings honor' (CW 1.74).

Like Lady Alice in Morris's poem 'Sir Peter Harpdon's End,' Clytemnestra bitterly laments powerlessness:

O fate, to be a woman! To be led  
Dumb, like a poor mule, at a master's will,  
And be a slave, tho' bred in palaces,  
And be a fool, tho' seated with the wise— (51).<sup>12</sup>

Another of Lytton's proto-feminist motifs is Clytemnestra's memorialization of Helen (a favorite heroine of Morris) and the fates of 'all whose lives I learn'd,' in lines that anticipated—and may have influenced—Amy Levy's 'Xantippe' (1881):<sup>13</sup>

And though I saw  
All women sad—not only those I knew,  
As Helen . . .  
Not only her, but all whose lives I learn'd,  
Medea, Deianira, Aradne,  
And many others—all weak, wrong'd, oppress'd,  
Or sick and sorrowful, as I am now—

Yet in their fate I would not see my own....(36–37)

While some of these complaints are spoken more sparingly by the heroine of Aeschylus's play, Robert Bulwer-Lytton addresses them more sharply to a liberal Victorian audience conscious of marital abuses in the period before the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857.

In the end, Clytemnestra's actions can be made understandable but not attractive, and it is obvious why Morris turned instead to the more sympathetic triangle he found in Malory. Several elements of Clytemnestra's defense also become more plausible when the lover is the selflessly devoted Launcelot, not the self-serving egotist Aegisthus, and the 'crime' in question is love, not murder. Morris also added Guenevere's fond memories of Launcelot's past devotion, her appeals to her judges' limitations in knowledge and judgment, and her impassioned claims that her physical beauty expresses a natural life-force, and that 'love' is an essential part of the cycle of life.

#### MORRIS, 'THE EARL'S RETURN' AND ROBERT BULWER-LYTTON'S MALORIAN POEMS

'The Earl's Return,' a ballad of revenge and frustrated love, evinces more formal unity than other, more derivative short poems in the *Clytemnestra* volume.<sup>14</sup> The poem also owes something of its onomatopaeic shifting rhythms and pointed psychological imagery to the example of Tennyson's *Maud*, and its expressive lyricism effectively complements its harsh folk tale frame.

It is also recorded—quite explicitly, in this case—that 'The Earl's Return's highly pictorial symbolism and the artful variety of its rhythms strongly appealed to Morris. R. W. Dixon recalled that Morris was delighted by 'The Earl's Return,' 'especially with the incident of the Earl draining a flagon of wine, and then flinging it at the head of him that brought it' (Mackail 1.45), perhaps a distant cousin of an incident in Morris's early poem 'Gertha's Lovers,' in which a vicious King kills his own artilleryman.

Other passages of 'The Earl's Return,' in which a woman awaits her husband, are reminiscent of scenes in *The Defence* in which Peter's Lady Alice, Rapunzel, and Jehane of 'Golden Wings' await their lovers in their castles and towers. More specifically, however, one brief section in 'The Earl's Return' may anticipate both the situation and the rhythms of Morris's poem 'The Blue Closet.' In the latter

Alice the Queen, and Louise the Queen,  
Two damozels wearing purple and green,  
Four lone ladies dwelling here  
From day to day and year to year;

And there is none to let us go;  
To break the locks of the doors below,  
Or shovel away the heaped-up snow;  
And when we die no man will know  
That we are dead....(CW 1.16–24)

In 'The Earl's Return,' similarly, the Earl's wife

...lived alone, and from year to year  
She saw the black belt of the ocean appear  
At her casement each morn as she rose; and each morn  
Her eye fell first on the bare black thorn.  
This was all: nothing more: or sometimes on the shore  
The fishermen sang when the fishing was o'er;  
Or the lowing of oxen fell dreamily,  
Close on the shut of the glimmering eves,  
Thro' some gusty pause in the moaning sea,  
When the pools were splash'd pink by the thirsty beeves. (146–47)

A sense of dread gradually intensifies, and when the Earl finally returns, mounts the stair and embraces her, she expires in his arms.

A deadly embrace by a male lover also appears in *The Defence* poem 'The Wind,' and the macabre conclusion of 'The Earl's Return' anticipates not only 'The Blue Closet,' but also 'The Raven and the King's Daughter' (1872), in which Morris's princess, imprisoned in a tower, dies when her lover nears.

In any event, 'The Earl's Return' ends with a spectacular twilight-of-the-courtiers. The wife's erstwhile admirer, a minstrel, carefully torches the castle and its outbuildings, then sings to the Earl and his retainers as the flames consume castle, retainers and Earl. Lytton depicts this final conflagration with the metrical equivalent of cinematic special effects, and the result evokes something of the *innbrenna*-scene Morris later admired in the *Njállssaga* and Morris's own account of the horrendous fires which conclude *Sigurd the Volsung*.

Lytton's *Clytemnestra* volume also included 'Queen Guenevere,' 'Elayne Le Blanc,' and 'The Parting of Launcelot and Guenevere,' three blank verse poems on Malorian subjects. Of these, the first two resemble Tennyson's early Arthurian poems in tone and imagery. The apparent fragment 'Queen Guenevere' describes the queen's beauty in the mode of Enobarbus's descriptions of Cleopatra, and a minstrel sings the refrain '*Si douche, si douche est la Margarete!*' (compare '*Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite*' from *The Defence's* 'The Eve of Crecy'). The heroine of 'Elayne Le Blanc'—a more finished poem which seems to be based on 'The Lady of Shalott'—sings of love in lyrics which recall Tennyson's 'Mariana' and 'The Lotus Eaters,' and suggest parts of 'The Blue Closet.'

'The Parting of Launcelot and Guenevere' is a more accomplished and arresting work, and a strong argument can be made that Morris's 'King Arthur's Tomb' recasts nuances and incidents which Lytton presented in simpler and more conventional form. Most striking are Lytton's original invention of a private farewell between Launcelot and Guenevere, his preoccupation with the psychology of two deeply devoted lovers whose attachment is frayed by great external stress, and his evenhanded consideration of both lovers' complex dissatisfactions and points of view.

The only important plot-element in Morris's poem which has no antecedent in Lytton's work is the setting of the scene at Arthur's tomb, a symbolic detail which might have been suggested by Rossetti's watercolor, mentioned above. The most memorable passages of 'The Parting of Launcelot and Guenevere' are its evocations of anxiety—when the Queen, for example, recounts to Launcelot her sleepless night before his arrival at Glastonbury.

'And oft, indeed, to me  
Lying whole hours awake in the dead nights  
The end seems near, as tho' the darkness knew  
The angel waiting there to call my soul  
Perchance before the house awakes; and oft  
When faint, and all at once, from far away,  
The mournful midnight bells begin to sound  
Across the river, all the days that were  
(Brief, evil days!) return upon my heart,  
And, where the sweetness seem'd, I see the sin.  
For, waking lone, long hours before the dawn,  
Beyond the borders of the dark I seem  
To see the twilight of another world  
That grows and grows and glimmers on my gaze.... (249–50)

Guenevere's language recalls the dying bishop's speech in Browning's 'The Bishop Orders His Tomb' (which also appeared in 1855), and the angel who 'calls' her 'soul' anticipates the appeal of *The Defence*:

'Listen, suppose your time were come to die,  
And you were quite alone and very weak;  
Yea, laid a dying while very mightily  
  
'The wind was ruffling up the narrow streak  
Of river through your broad lands running well;  
Suppose a hush should come, then some one speak:....

'A great God's angel standing, with such dyes  
Not known on earth....(CW 1.16–28)

'King Arthur's Tomb' opens similarly, with an account of Launcelot's sleepless night as he rides to Glastonbury, and Morris's Guenevere also spends the night before Launcelot's arrival in sleepless agitation:

... as she lay last night on her purple bed,  
Wishing for morning, grudging every pause  
Of the palace clocks, until that Launcelot's head  
Should lie on her breast, with all her golden hair  
Each side—when suddenly the thing grew drear  
In morning twilight, when the grey downs bare  
Grew into lumps of sin to Guenevere. (CW 1.133–40)

The frustrations of Lytton's Queen sometimes dissolve into distracted exasperation:

Half in tears  
She ceased abrupt. Given up to a proud grief,  
Vex'd to be vext. With love and anger moved.  
Love toucht with scorn, and anger pierced with love.  
About her, all unheeded, her long hair  
Loos'd its warm, yellow, waving loveliness....(250–51)

Morris's Guenevere regrets that her griefs had made her seem 'cold and shallow without any cloud' (l. 79), and apologizes in 'King Arthur's Tomb' for her distraction and heedlessness of everyone around her:

'Alas, my maids, you loved not overmuch  
Queen Guenevere, uncertain as sunshine  
In March; forgive me! for my sin being such,  
About my whole life, all my deeds did twine,  
'Made me quite wicked....(CW 1.297–301)

In both poems, Launcelot's desire and affection are inured to such 'wickedness.' In 'The Parting,' for example, he responds:

'Tho' thou be variable as the waves,  
More sharp than winds among the Hebrides  
That shut the frozen Spring in stormy clouds,  
As wayward as a child, and all unjust,  
Yet must I love thee in despite of pain,  
Thou peerless Queen of perfect love!....  
Thou goddess far above  
My heart's weak worship! so adored thou art....(256–57)

In 'King Arthur's Tomb,' Morris's Guenevere gives a parallel account of herself from within:

'Oh, but your lips say, "Yea, but she was cold  
Sometimes, always uncertain as the spring;  
When I was sad she would be overbold,  
Longing for kisses; when war-bells did ring,  
The back-toll'd bells of noisy Camelot—'" (CW 1.365-69)

In response, Launcelot tries to comfort her, but he does not contradict what she has said.

The language of Lytton's poem is more stilted, but the emotional parallels and similarities of setting are quite marked. In both versions, Guenevere and Launcelot veer painfully between recrimination and reaffirmation, and stagger or fall from the intensity of their grief. In both poems, a final scene presents a solitary lover prostrate and nearly unconscious, trying in vain to pray. In 'The Parting of Launcelot and Guenevere,' Lytton's Queen faints after Launcelot departs:

suddenly all  
The frozen heights of grief fell loosed, fast, fast,  
In cataract over cataract, on her soul.  
Then at the last she rose, a reeling shape  
That like a shadow sway'd against the wall,  
Her slight hand held upon her bosom, and fell  
Before the Virgin Mother on her knees. (259)

The end is comfortless, as 'all was still.' In Morris's poem, it is Launcelot, not Guenevere, who stretches out his arms, falls, then awakens to the sound of Guenevere's death knell:

I stretch'd my hands towards her and fell down,  
How long I lay in swoon I cannot tell:  
My head and hands were bleeding from the stone,  
When I rose up, also I heard a bell. (CW 1.393-96)

Both poems, finally, are long—Lytton's thirteen pages, Morris's twelve. And both convey the sadness of tangled loyalties without outlet or resolution.

Significant contrasts, of course, remain. Morris, for example, rejects several soothing or consoling aspects of Bulwer-Lytton's drama. Lytton's Guenevere affirms her love. Morris's Guenevere, however implausibly, denies it, and accuses Launcelot of treachery and malice against Arthur, a thought that is equally painful to them both. Lytton's lovers part after a farewell kiss, a consolation which Malory and Morris both deny them.

Morris's lyrics, finally, are both lovelier and starker. His direct appeal to the inner life tears away the veil of Lytton's self-conscious literariness, and arrests the lovers' grief in frozen frames of vivid, almost eccentrically particularized memories. In 'King Arthur's Tomb,' for example,

... she would let me wind

'Her hair around my neck, so that it fell  
Upon my red robe, strange in the twilight  
With many unnamed colours, till the bell  
Of her mouth on my cheek sent a delight

'Through all my ways of being; like the stroke  
Wherewith God threw all men upon the face  
When he took Enoch, and when Enoch woke  
With a changed body in the happy place. (CW 1.44-49)

The religious ambiance, emblematic colors and unexpected free-assocations—the comparison of a kiss to a bell, or the translation of Enoch—are small verbal epiphanies. They enable us, for a moment, to see something through a glass, brightly.

Here and elsewhere in *The Defence*, Morris conveys more effectively the small whirring blades of anguish: when Guenevere, for example, attacks both Launcelot and herself:

The ladies' names bite verily like steel.  
'They bite—bite me, Lord God!—I shall go mad,  
Or else die kissing him, he is so pale;  
He thinks me mad already, O bad! bad!  
Let me lie down a little while and wail.' ...

'Alas, alas! I know not what to do,  
If I run fast it is perchance that I  
May fall and stun myself, much better so,  
Never, never again! not even when I die. (CW 1.361-64, 389-92)

In summary, Robert Bulwer-Lytton's portrayals of women as 'relative creatures,' preoccupied almost solely with love, make it difficult to reclaim him as a feminist reformer, but his poetic sympathy for the constrictions marriage placed on unhappily married women and his relative tolerance of unconventionality in both sexes made him interesting to the young Morris. Lytton's poetic representations of eloquently assertive women who resisted the constraints imposed on them were strikingly unusual for the 1850s, and may well have encouraged his fellow youthful poet to venture farther along similar paths.

Moreover, Morris's early encounter with Lytton's work *Clytemnestra* reinforced several other poetic predilections which he continued to develop in his later work: a love of legendary tales and balladic rhythms, a fondness for the overtly passionate aspects of such tales, and an interest in psychologically-charged, introspective presentations of romantic loss. Finally,

both poets blended a romantic view of eroticism with a faith in the validity of psychological insights and a distaste for censorious social judgments, and their representations of the legend of Launcelot and Guenevere clearly reflected these common beliefs. Morris was a great poet and Robert Bulwer-Lytton a thoughtful but more conventional one, but their brief moment of shared preoccupation with Malorian tales inspired in them both an ethic of 'love is (or should be) enough.'

#### MORRIS'S MEDIEVALISM AFTER *The Defence of Guenevere*

Morris continued to write poetry on medieval themes until the end of his life, but Malorian and Arthurian subjects disappeared abruptly from his work. At his death, Morris did leave an unpublished dramatic fragment, 'In Arthur's House,' a transitional effort in which he sought to provide a Scandinavian temporal background for Arthurian legends, but he probably set this aside as he turned from drama to narrative for his eclectic cultural epic, *The Earthly Paradise*.<sup>15</sup> Even the names of Malorian characters seldom recurred, although he did use the name 'Arthur' three times in his later published work: in an unpublished contemporary prose romance he drafted in the 1870s, in *The Pilgrims of Hope*, and for Birdalone's lover in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*.

Even more striking is the decisiveness of Morris's turn to other aspects of medieval literature for his sources. Within fifteen years of *The Defence of Guenevere*, Morris published *The Life and Death of Jason* (1868)—a free-standing verse-narrative—and *The Earthly Paradise* (1870), a vast compendium of extended and interconnected verse-tales with a frame set in the fourteenth century. Of the twenty-four tales narrated within *The Earthly Paradise*'s frame, twelve are drawn from classical sources and twelve from medieval ones, but none of the medieval tales is Malorian. A few are set in England, and most of the rest are based on German or Scandinavian folktales or saga-narratives. To a large extent, then, Morris effectively shifted his principal focus from historized quasi-English romance to German-Scandinavian myth.

What motivated this shift? The reasons were complex and personal as well as artistic. In certain obvious respects, the tale of Launcelot and Guenevere was a young man's story, suffused typically with identificatory hero-worship of Launcelot, and sympathy for him in his latent rivalry with the older, more established Arthur. Morris's friends Rossetti and Burne-Jones may have liked this story, but critics of the late 1850s treated Morris's Malorian and Froissartian poems with almost frenzied hostility and used them as vehicles for preconceived attacks on Tennyson, Browning, and the Pre-Raphaelites.



#### HE DID NOT HEAR HER COMING AS HE LAY.

Plate 6. Jessie M. King, 'He Did Not Hear Her Coming as He Lay,' from '*The Defence of Guenevere* and Other Poems by William Morris. London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1904. Courtesy of The Newberry Library, Chicago.

Seven reviews of *The Defence* appeared in 'major' journals between 1858 and 1860, and, of these, six criticized it for its resemblances to the poetry of Tennyson and Browning, and/or the alleged excesses of Pre-Raphaelite art (Faulkner 31–49). The following samples reveal the degree to which critics chose to attack more established targets by savaging the young and vulnerable author of *The Defence*:

[Mr. Morris] combines the mawkish simplicity of the Cockney school with the prosaic baldness of the worst passages of Tennyson, and the occasional obscurity and affectation of plainness that characterize Browning and his followers. (*Spectator*, February 1858, in Faulkner 31)

Mr. Morris is the pre-Raffaelite poet.... Pre-Raffaelitism is the product of the principle which was first preached by Wordsworth, and has culminated in Tennyson through Keats.... This extravagance is, we think, what Mr. Morris delights in. He works in the patient spirit of the illuminators, but then his is grotesque as well as minute and patient. (*Saturday Review*, November 1858, in Faulkner 39)

Few of the real attributes of Morris's poetry can be discerned from these criticisms: his psychological originality, his preoccupation with the potential frustrations and gains of romantic attachment, his penchant for applying the projective historicist methods of Carlyle and Browning, or his deeply empathetic attention to the imagined problems of unrecorded struggles and unrequited loss. In attacking the 'aesthetic' and 'spasmodic' aspects of Morris's work, his middle-aged critics effectively attacked the young romantic for the latent anti-establishmentarian tone of his poems and his interest in inward states of consciousness, but they couched their denunciations as critiques of 'mannerism,' 'imitation,' and 'affectation.'

Robert Bulwer-Lytton's stylistically more derivative early work suffered a similar fate, and similar criticisms later resurfaced in other contexts. He was accused, for example, of reusing in *Lucille* a plot by George Sand, and suppressing his alleged indebtedness to a Serbian editor for the poems he translated in *Serbski Pesme; or, National Songs of Serbia*, and consistently attacked for his 'Tennysonian' mannerisms and locutions. In Lytton's case, such criticisms identified the negative features of a genuine natural bent, toward the respectful assimilation of the accomplishments of certain writers in the generation that preceded his own.

Morris's situation was quite different. He never responded publicly to reviews, but the ideal of unpretentious clarity was deeply important to him. The accusations that he had tried to be 'Rossetti plus Browning,' as one critic

charged,<sup>16</sup> were misplaced as well as injurious. They affronted his strong sense of independence, and he quietly decided to develop a new style. Psychological clarity demanded complex images and associations, and he had found them. Other sorts of clarity might demand other images, or other techniques (new prosodic skills, historical settings, and narrative plots, for example), and he would find them too.

Morris therefore decided, in effect, to forego certain modes of poetic composition he had observed in his contemporaries, and set aside their fondness for Arthurian neo-medievalism. He retained, however the poetic directness and immediacy and love of medieval contexts that had been distinctive features of his mental and artistic life from his earliest college efforts.

Other major Victorian poets shared Morris's interest in medieval subjects to varying degrees—Tennyson, of course, but also Rossetti, Swinburne, Arnold, and even Hopkins—but none was as consistently and exclusively attracted to medieval themes as Morris.<sup>17</sup> Most of these contemporaries found in such subjects ornamentation; Morris found an entire design.

As a consequence, Morris also sought ways to render his medieval poetry more authentic, and he did so in part by turning away from contemporary models for historical poetry, and more directly to medieval poets and storytellers—Chaucer, Boccaccio, William of Malmesbury, and Scandinavian and German storytellers, among others. In the early and mid-60s, Morris began to draft poetic versions of German and Scandinavian legends, among them a tale of Scandinavian mariners he called 'The Wanderers.'<sup>18</sup>

A number of Tennysonian traces and signs of indebtedness to Coleridge's 'Rime' appear in 'The Wanderers,' and Keatsian descriptions emerge from time to time in the German and Scandinavian tales. In general, however, Morris set aside the contemporary as well as medieval works which provided sources of inspiration for *The Defence*, and replaced them with a more direct reliance on medieval texts. The work of Rossetti, Browning, Swinburne, and other old friends and acquaintances had little influence on his later writing, and in his polite rejection of a Poetry Chair at Oxford in 1877, he expressed reservations about the very purpose of such a chair, apart from study of poetry's historical origins.

As I mentioned above, only a few tangentially Arthurian references appear in all of Morris's later poetry. In 'The Story of Ogier the Dane,' for example, one of *The Earthly Paradise*'s medieval tales, Morgan le Fey bears none of her Malorian onus as Arthur's often-malicious sister. Instead, she is the hero's guardian spirit and ethereal lover, who aids him in his difficult transitions from one century to another.

'The Story of Ogier' is based on an old French romance of Ogier le Danois, included in Tressan's *Corps d'Extraits de Romans de Chevalerie*, which tells of Ogier's heroic battles in defence of Charlemagne. Morris ignored most of the military and political exploits ascribed to his legendary Danish hero (he is 'Holger Dansker' in Denmark), and extracts from his sources only their references to Ogier's love for a supernatural being. In Morris's account, after a long and honorable first life, Ogier dies and is transported by Morgan to her land of Avallon. Duty forces him to earth for a second heroic life (this time in France) before he can return to his place of Arthurian comfort, light and peace (subject to possible recall). Lovely passages of the poem evoke the psychological dislocations of Ogier's shifts between successive lives and obligations, and Morgan's care for her earthly hero in his periods of rest.

'The Story of Ogier the Dane' also embodies a rare nineteenth-century exploration of the psychological complexities of multiple 'identities,' and Morris may have preserved what he most valued in Arthurian legend: its capacity to suggest a timeless realm of love and creativity, beyond the social and political turmoil of this world, but solicitous of it.

The idealized historicism of Morris's early Malorian poems also survives in other forms: in the *Earthly Paradise* tale 'The Lovers of Gudrun,' for example, Morris's psychological reinterpretation of the *Laxdaela Saga*; in *Sigurd the Volsung*; and in the lyrical and elegiac meliorism of *A Dream of John Ball*. Morris's final prose romances also form a kind of imaginary Scandinavian cycle, set in an alternative universe freed from the great tragic impasses of the Norse legend, in which Morris celebrates the counterfactual forms of happiness that might be possible for those fortunate enough to live in harmony with each other and the earth.

A kind of fatalism about our dual yearnings for love and justice runs through Morris's later writings, but also an empathetic and non-censorious authorial view of our failures' causes and consequences. This empathy hovers over the tragic erotic plots of 'The Lovers of Gudrun' and *Sigurd the Volsung*, as well as *News from Nowhere*'s later appeals for socialist mutuality, and openness and liberality in matters of sexual loyalty, attachment, and marriage.

In particular, Morris preserved and developed the limited forms of respect for women's independence which he shared with Robert Bulwer-Lytton in the 1850s. His more expressive later heroines include the title-figure in 'The Lovers of Gudrun,' Brynhild in *Sigurd the Volsung*, Ellen in *News from Nowhere*, and Birdalone in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*.

Only the young unmarried Morris, perhaps, could identify completely with the role of successful lover in an adulterous triangle. But he never abandoned—in his writings or his life—the underlying ideal of *The Defence*: fidelity to

love, even in the face of all arguments that would abrogate or override it. In *The Defence of Guenevere*, the young Morris embodied his attachments and beliefs within the relatively narrow *volet* of Malorian legend. As he aged, he found other meanings for the word 'love,' but he continued to the end to seek wider frames in which to express more nuanced modulations of his original ideal.

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#### NOTES

1. A full list of articles on Morris written before 1980 appears in Aho. Articles devoted to the Malorian poems which have appeared since 1980 include: Florence Boos, 'Sexual Polarization in William Morris's *Defence of Guenevere*', *Browning Institute Studies* 13 (1985): 181–200, and 'Justice and Vindication in *The Defence of Guenevere*', in *King Arthur Through the Ages*, vol. 2, ed. Valerie M. Lagorio and Mildred Leake Day (New York: Garland, 1990), 83–104; James P. Carley, 'Heaven's Colour, the Blue': Morris's Guenevere and the Choosing Cloths Reread,' *The Journal of the William Morris Society* 9.1 (1990): 20–22; Virginia S. Hale and Catherine Barnes Stevenson, 'Morris's Medieval Queen: A Paradox Resolved,' *Victorian Poetry* 30 (1992): 171–78; Constance W. Hassett, 'The Style of Evasion: William Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*', *Victorian Poetry* 29 (1991): 99–114; and David G. Riede, 'Morris, Modernism and Romance,' *ELH* 51 (1984): 85–106.
2. The parallels with Owen Meredith's Malorian poems have been noted in Chen, 316–20.
3. A spirit named 'Arthur' appears in *The Blue Closet*. In 'Near Avalon,' a four stanza lyric in ballad meter near the end of the volume, a boat decorated with shields and banners carries six maidens and six knights to an unspecified destination (compare the end of Tennyson's 'Morte d' Arthur').
4. Mackail I: 44–46. Mackail quotes R. W. Dixon's remark that:

'The attitude of Morris I should describe as defiant admiration.... He perceived Tennyson's limitations, as I think, in a remarkable manner for a man of twenty or so. He said once, "Tennyson's Sir Galahad is rather a mild youth." Of "Locksley Hall" he said, apostrophising the hero, "My dear fellow, if you are going to make that row, get out of the room, that's all." Thus he perceived a certain rowdy, or bullying, element that runs through much of Tennyson's work....' (Mackail I: 45–46).

5. In 'The Maying of Queen Guenevere,' Mellyagraunce broods on Guenevere's

- rejection of his advances, and plots to imprison her: 'If I could get her once,' he said, / 'Whatever men say, by God's head / But I would hold her' (CW 1.xix). A discarded opening for 'The Defence of Guenevere' emphasizes Gawaine's enmity: 'ever more and more / Grew Gawaine's nets round Guenevere the Queen' (CW 1.xx).
6. During this period Rossetti also made two drawings based on Morris's *Defence* poems, *The Tyme of the Seven Towers* and *The Blue Closet*.
  7. These were *The Damsel of the Sanc Grael* (1857); *Death of Breuse sans Pitié* (1857–65); *The Chapel Before the Lists* (1857–64); *A Knight Arming, from the Christmas Mystery of Sir Galahad* (oil, c. 1857); *Launcelot at the Shrine of the Sanc Grael* (tempera, 1857); *Sir Galahad, Sir Bors, and Sir Percival Receiving the Sanc Grael* (1857); and *Launcelot Escaping from Guenevere's Chamber* (1857) (Marillier, 238–39).
  8. For biographical accounts of Robert Bulwer-Lytton, see Balfour, Harlan, and Darling.
  9. In a 1853 letter to his father, he also defended the validity of poetic emotion: 'What Arnold wants is the sensuous element...poetry demands something more than naked thought....Poetry is of all the arts the most sensuous in its character, and it won't do for the poets to rise...and talk metaphysics, or tell stories in verse' (Balfour 1. 50).
  10. Balfour 1. 54. In 1853 Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote Isa Blagden that Lytton's poem was 'too ambitious because after Aeschylus,' but 'full of promise indeed' (quoted in Harlan, 72).
  11. Letter from Leigh Hunt to John Forster. Balfour 1. 63.
  12. Compare the language in which Lady Alice bemoans her fate in 'Sir Peter Harpton's End': 'then—alas! alas! when all is said, / What could I do but let you go again, [her lover's murderer] / Being pitiful woman? I get no revenge, / Whatever happens, and I get no comfort, / I am but weak, and cannot move my feet / But as men bid me' (CW 1.693–98).
  13. Clytemnestra recalls sadly the hopes of her youth:
- 'A girl's wild dream, perchance in twilit hours,  
Or under eve's first star (when we are young)  
Happiness seems so possible—so near!  
One says, "it must go hard, but I shall find it!"' (34)
- Lytton's Clytemnestra also decries the wrongs inflicted on Helen, a theme Morris elaborated in 'Scenes from the Fall of Troy,' a series of dramatic scenes he wrote shortly after *The Defence* appeared.
14. For evidence of such influence, compare Lytton's 'Changes' with Tennyson's 'Locksley Hall'; Lytton's 'Judicium Paridis' with Tennyson's 'The Palace of Art'; Lytton's 'The Artist' with Tennyson's 'The Poet'; Lytton's 'A Vision of Virgins' with Tennyson's 'A Vision of Sin' and 'The Dream of Fair Women'; and Lytton's 'The Swallow,' 'Sea-Side Song,' and 'A Bird at Sunset' with Tennyson's songs from 'The Princess.' Similarly, Lytton's 'An Evening in Tuscany' echoes Browning's 'Andrea del Sarto'; Lytton's 'Want,' Browning's 'In a Year,' and 'Meeting Again,' Browning's 'A Lost Mistress.' Lytton's 'The Mermaiden' is a variant of Arnold's 'The Merman,' and his 'The Wife's Tragedy' blends the plots of Browning's 'The Flight of the Duchess'

and Arnold's 'Tristram and Iseult.'

15. 'In Arthur's House,' thirteen pages long, blended Germanic, Scandinavian, and Arthurian legends in interesting ways. Deep in the forest, Launcelot, Gawaine, Guenevere, Arthur, and others encounter an aged man who tells them that Scandinavian kings once ruled at the site of Arthur's court. Duly impressed, the courtiers then listen as the old man narrates his *grandame's* tale of her ancestors' lives, in a time when 'Gods abide / On earth and shared ill times and good / And right and wrong with that same folk / Their hands had fashioned for the yoke.'
- In the aged narrator's internal fragment, a handsome young forest-dweller comes upon polished strangers in 'a fair pavilion, blue and white,' and one of them, 'with a mocking smile,' tells him that 'in our house there dwells awhile / A very Goddess of the north / But to you, take a thing of worth / For that thy quarry, and begone.' Morris evidently sought to ground Camelot in a 'nordic' frame, and develop an *ur*-romance between the young Briton, 'clad in a sheep's fell,' and the elusive Scandinavian 'Goddess.'
16. Richard Garnett in the *Literary Gazette* (March 1858): xlili; 226–27.
17. Among other discussions of Victorian poetic medievalism, see Cochran; for an account of its artistic expression, see Mancoff.
18. Vol. 24 of Morris; a revised version became 'Prologue: The Wanderers,' the initial poem of *The Earthly Paradise*.

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