

FLORENCE S. BOOS

Narrative Design in *The Pilgrims of Hope*

The Pilgrims of Hope (1885) was Morris's last poetic narrative, his first major socialist work, and the only one of his romances with a contemporary setting. Was he well-advised to abandon an art form he had practiced for thirty years? Did he later conclude that narrative verse was ill-suited to his evolving social and literary purposes, or that his romances required more remote historical or utopian settings? There is no doubt that Morris's imagination sought more congenial environments in the remote past and projected future. Two years before his death, in the 1894 essay, "How I Became A Socialist," he bluntly remarked that "Apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization,"¹ and *Pilgrims* clearly resonates with this "hatred." Does this mean that the work is somehow transitional, a forced and unstable attempt to honor failed revolution in archaic verse?

I will argue that it does not—that Morris's "modern" communist poem holds up well. Its superposition of style and content reflects (among other things) his refusal to write a tidily didactic work, and its unusual mixture of wry humor and impassioned advocacy, pastoral romance and urban realism, effectively heighten the sense that an immensely desirable expression of the human spirit has been crushed. Even the poem's subdominant and conflicted love plot obliquely witnesses the hero's dedication to other lives besides his own. *Pilgrims* is also more amenable to feminist readings than many of Morris's earlier works, and the development of the character of Richard, his self-conscious hero, is one of Morris's fullest analyses of the sources of creativity and revolutionary commitment.

Unfortunately, he is also Morris's only working-class hero. Later Morrisian heroes tend to be leaders of one sort or another (the gifted priest John Ball, the various tribal figures of the German romances); intellectuals or "scholars" (the transmutations of Morris in *Ball* and *Nowhere*); or children of the long-achieved

1. William Morris, *The Collected Works of William Morris*, ed. May Morris, 24 vols. (London: Longmans, 1910–1915), 23:279; hereafter cited as *CW*.

revolution (in *Nowhere*). Even one exception to the pattern is worth noting, for no other major Victorian poetic hero belongs to the urban poor. Tennyson's Enoch Arden, for example, is a fisherman; Rossetti managed one protagonist who was an Italian revolutionary (though also a murderer); Browning's fondness for monks, artists, and literati is well known; and Swinburne's theoretically revolutionary sentiments in *Songs before Sunrise* are most often addressed to fellow writers. It is even hard to find a contemporary *socialist* poem of any length with a working-class hero.

Morris's choice of the topic itself was thoroughly natural, for many emigré revolutionaries were drawn to the newly formed Socialist League, and Morris's London joiner and Paris Communard was a hero with whom most readers of *Commonweal* would wish to identify. Other unassuming examples of rank-and-file heroism in the poem also provided clear socialist models. The protagonist's wife, for example, is also a devoted Communard who dies on the ramparts, the first of Morris's tributes to an active if still-secondary role for women in "the Social-Revolution."

Morris lectured on the Commune several times, and the joint work *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome* devotes more pages to it than to any other event of the century.² Morris's personal response was complex, and tinged with a kind of revolutionary stoicism. In his March 1887 *Commonweal* article, "Why We Celebrate the Commune of Paris," he notes warily that socialists may "take both warning and encouragement from its events," but responds to an assertion that we should not celebrate our defeats with the argument that

this means looking not at this event only, but at all history in too narrow a way. . . . For I say solemnly and deliberately that if it happens to those of us now living to take part in such another tragedy it will be rather well for them than ill for them. Truly it is harder to live for a cause than to die for it. . . . It is for boldly seizing the opportunity offered for thus elevating the mass of the workers into heroism that we now celebrate the men of the Commune of Paris. . . . This was why the fall of the Commune was celebrated by such hecatombs sacrificed to the bourgeois god, Mammon; by such a riot of blood and cruelty on the part of the conquerors as quite literally has no parallel in modern times [an observation long since sadly superseded]. And it is by that same token that we honour them as the foundation-stone of the new world that is to be.³

In *The Pilgrims of Hope*, Morris undertook to examine poetically the tragic as well as heroic implications of such "exemplary" actions. The result blends

2. Ernest Belfort Bax and William Morris, *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1893), ch. 16.

3. *Commonweal*, 19 March 1887, p. 89.

romantic pastoralism and aggrieved realism in ways that create the internal energy and emergent meaning of his work.

The poem's prefatory lyric, "The Message of the March Wind," provides a frame and vantage point for much of what follows. "The Message" may have been conceived originally as a separate poem, for Morris often designed parallel poetic structures in large and miniature, the latter inset in the former; "The Message" appeared alone in the March 1885 *Commonweal*, and the first installment of the main text the next month announced its author's intention to follow the fortunes of the lovers who in "The Message of the March Wind" were already touched by sympathy with the cause of the people.

Like the prefatory Singer of *The Earthly Paradise*, the "Message"'s speaker evokes a scene of apparent tranquility and natural beauty, but his carefully counterpointed images and quietly alternating rhythms subtly suggest tension, incompleteness, and anticipation.

Love mingles with love, and no evil is weighing
 On thy heart or mine, where all sorrow is healed. . . .
 There is wind in the twilight; in the white road before us
 The straw from the ox-road is blowing about;
 The moon's rim is rising, a star glitters o'er us,
 And the vane on the spire-top is swinging in doubt.
 Down there dips the highway toward the bridge crossing over
 The brook that runs on to the Thames and the sea.
 Draw closer, my sweet, we are lover and lover;
 This eve art thou given to gladness and me.

The March wind has been an emblem of hope since Shelley's great ode, but the poem's allusions to "healed" sorrow here are implicitly elegiac: the poem's unnamed lovers are secure for the moment ("this eve"), but they "draw closer," as the twilight, rising wind, blowing straw, doubtful vane, and darkened river create a sudden chill. Like Ecclesiastes' rivers (and the Thames near Kelmscott), the brook also "runs on to . . . the sea," and "the wind in the elm boughs" blows in fact from London, where

. . . the March wind again of a people is telling;
 Of the life that they live there, so haggard and grim,
 That if we and our love amidst them had been dwelling
 My fondness had faltered, thy beauty grown dim.
 This land we have loved in our love and our leisure
 For them hangs in heaven, high out of their reach;

 The singers have sung and the builders have builded,
 The painters have fashioned their tales of delight;

For what and for whom hath the world's book been gilded,
When all is for these but the blackness of night?

An image of Kelmscott manor may hover here, as an exemplar of what "the builders have builded," and comfortable refuge in which "[t]he painters have fashioned their tales of delight." Morris was well aware of his privileges. His impoverished protagonist Richard later remarks with bitter accuracy that

. . . he who is rebel and rich may live safe for many a year,
While he warms his heart with pictures of all the glory
to come.
There's the storm of the press and the critics maybe, but
sweet is his home, . . .
All is fair and orderly there as the rising and setting
sun.

In "The Society of the Future" (1887), a contemporary essay, Morris remarked in his own voice that

I have always belonged to the well-to-do classes, and was born into luxury, so that necessarily I ask much more of the future than many of you do; and the first of all my visions, and that which colours all my others, is of a day when the words poor and rich . . . will have lost their old meaning.⁴

"The March Wind" here concludes with the wind's exhortations:

It biddeth us learn all the wisdom it knoweth;
It hath found us and held us, and biddeth us hear:
For it beareth the message: "Rise up on the morrow
And go on your ways toward the doubt and the strife;
Join hope to our hope and blend sorrow with sorrow,
And seek for men's love in the short days of life."

Section 2, "The Bridge and the Street," describes the removal of the hero and his wife to London, and refracts Morris's personal anger and alienation through a darkened glass of romantic imagery.

In the midst of the bridge there we stopped and we wondered
In London at last, and the moon going down,
All sullied and red where the mast-wood was sundered
By the void of the night-mist, the breath of the town.

4. May Morris, *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936), 2:445-56.

On each side lay the City, and Thames ran between it
 Dark, struggling, unheard 'neath the wheels and the feet.
 A strange dream it was that we ever had seen it,
 And strange was the hope we had wandered to meet.

Compare Engels's description of London in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844):

Hundreds of thousands of men and women drawn from all classes and ranks of society pack the streets of London. Are they not all human beings with the same innate characteristics and potentialities? . . . Yet they rush past each other as if they had nothing in common. . . . We know well enough that this isolation of the individual—this narrow-minded egotism—is everywhere the fundamental principle of modern society. . . . The disintegration of society into individuals, each guided by his private principles and each pursuing his own aims, has been pushed to its furthest limits in London. Here indeed human society has been split into its component atoms.⁵

Richard's only consolations are his "grey-eyed" companion, and the rebellious hopes which she shares.

From us from henceforth no fair words shall be hiding
 The nights of the wretched, the days of the poor.
 . . . Let us grieve then—and help every soul in our sorrow;
 Let us fear—and press forward where few dare to go;
 Let us falter in hope—and plan deeds for the morrow,
 The world crowned with freedom, the fall of the foe.

In section 3, "Sending to the War," the two of them watch a dreary mock-heroic spectacle: a military parade in the streets of London ("the flag of an ancient people to the little breeze unfurled").

We two stood in the street in the midst of a mighty
 crowd, . . .
 While all about and around them the street flood ebbed and
 flowed,
 Worn feet, grey anxious faces, grey backs bowed 'neath the
 load.
 Lo the sons of an ancient people!
 . . . Who shall bear our name triumphant o'er every land and
 sea,

5. Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 30–31.

Read ye their souls in their faces, and what shall help you
 there?
 Joyless, hopeless, shameless, angerless, set is their stare.

Once again, only solidarity and shared “dream[s] of . . . deliverance” give consolation:

Sick unto death was my hope, and I turned and looked on my
 dear,
 And beheld her frightened wonder, and her grief without a
 tear,
 And knew how her thought was mine—when . . . somehow, I knew
 not why,
 A dream came into my heart of deliverance drawing anigh.
 . . . my dream was become a picture of the deeds of another
 day. . . .
 Far and far was I borne, away o’er the years to come,
 . . . Where then in my dream were the poor and the wall of
 faces wan?
 Here and here by my side, shoulder to shoulder of man,
 Hope in the simple folk, hope in the hearts of the wise,
 For the happy life to follow, or death and the ending of lies.

Morris’s hope for a “people’s war” and “new peace” contrasts pointedly with the sentiments of Tennyson’s *Maud* (1855), an early favorite of Morris’s youth, whose superpatriotic speaker is an enthusiast for exactly the sort of imperial adventure that made the older Morris “sick unto death.” Chauvinism was alien to the adult Morris, and it is impossible to imagine his writing the jingoist doggerel (say) of Tennyson’s “Riflemen, form!”

The dramatic monologues of the poem’s next two sections are spoken by the narrator’s wife, and give expression to the poem’s central exhortation that political action end as well as begin in love. Morris’s two chief protagonists are pointedly egalitarian (“My wife is my servant, and I am the servant of my wife/ And we make no work for each other”), and they are also almost allegorical in their anonymity: the wife is a “country maiden” who is never named, and the husband is not actually identified as “Richard” until section 6. In section 4 (“Mother and Son”), the wife, who will later die in Paris when her child is six, addresses her young infant son. Often in Victorian poetry the birth of a male infant forecasts social change (“A Drama of Exile,” “In Memoriam”): here, the mother’s tone is more intimate and elegiac:

. . . while yet thou art little and hast no thought of thine
 own,
 I will tell thee a word of the world, of the hope whence thou
 has grown,

Of the love that once begat thee, of the sorrow that hath made
 Thy little heart of hunger, and thy hands on my bosom laid.
 Then mayst thou remember hereafter . . . this tale of thy
 mother's voice,
 As oft in the calm of dawning I have heard the birds rejoice,
 As oft I have heard the storm-wind go moaning through the
 wood,
 And I knew that earth was speaking, and the mother's voice was
 good.

She is proud of her integrity ("I am true") and acuity ("All things I saw at a glance"), and comments with unabashed pleasure on the physical presence which her "firstling" will never really know:

. . . to thee alone will I tell it that thy mother's body is
 fair,
 In the guise of the country maidens who play with the sun and
 the air,
 Yea, I am fair, my firstling, if thou couldst but remember
 me? . . .
 I am true, but my face is a snare; soft and deep are my eyes,
 And they seem for men's beguiling fulfilled with the dreams of
 the wise.
 Kind are my lips, and they look as though my soul had learned
 Deep things I have never heard of. My face and my hands are
 burned
 By the lovely sun of the acres. . . .

She also remembers fondly her husband's youthful gaze, full of hope and an inchoate "wisdom" of its own:

. . . fair and fierce is thy father, and soft and strange are
 his eyes
 That look on the days that shall be with the hope of the brave
 and the wise.
 It was many a day that we longed, and we lingered late at eve
 Ere speech from speech was sundered, and my hand his hand
 could leave.

In a reciprocal tribute which appears in the following section, the husband later expresses gratitude for her admiration, and acknowledges indirectly that his eyes, also "soft," may also have suggested "deep things . . . [he] never heard of:"

. . . I met the woman I love, and she asked, as folk ask of
 the wise,
 Of the root and meaning of things that she saw in the world of
 lies.
 I told her all I knew, and the tale told lifted the load
 That made me less than a man; and she set my feet on the road.

The wife's lonely monologue to her uncomprehending son manifests the tenderness and beauty of language which Morris infused into his most interesting poetic women (Aslaug, Guenevere, Psyche, and to some extent Gudrun), but also the separate emotional sphere in which they were supposed to dwell. Like Guenevere, the wife of *Pilgrims* is proud of her beauty, but the beauty is a sturdy rural comeliness ("My face and my hands are burned"), her pride in it is wryer and more muted, and she dissociates herself from the male projections her beauty evokes. Guenevere's impassioned "defence" sometimes achieves a kind of heroic stature, but the "defence" of the "country maiden" is a different sort, more appropriate to a woman who dies on the barricades:

Such is thy mother, O firstling, yet strong as the maidens of
 old,
 Whose spears and whose swords were the warders of homestead,
 of field and of fold.⁶

Also included in her soliloquy to the child is a proud socialist's denunciation of "petit-bourgeois" marriage, and its pathetic proletarian imitations:

Many a child of woman tonight is born in the town, . . .
 Many and many an one of want and use is born; . . .
 Prudence begets her thousands: "Good is a housekeeper's life,
 So shall I sell my body that I may be matron and wife."
 . . . But thou, O son, O son, of very love wert born.

Ultimately, though, her monologue is overshadowed by the sadness and lonely apprehension of someone whose deepest thoughts and hopes remain unfulfilled.

Now waneth the night and the moon—ah, son, it is piteous
 That never again in my life shall I dare to speak to thee
 thus.
 But sure from the wise and the simple shall the mighty come to
 birth;

6. For the historical origins in Tacitus and Gibbon of Morris's view of Germanic women, see my "Morris' German Romances as Socialist History," *Victorian Studies* 27, no. 3 (Spring 1984): 321-42.

And fair were my fate, beloved, if I be yet on the earth
When the world is awakened at last. . . .

It is perhaps fitting that, like many of Morris's more significant male heroes, the wife herself was parentless ("No mother of me, the foundling"), and her deepest sense of personal and social identity mingles memories of "the lovely sun of the eyes" with a projective hope that her son will somehow fulfill his parents' aspirations, in ways that she will not know:

When . . . [o]n the eve of the toil and the battle all sorrow
and grief we weighed,
We hoped and we were not ashamed, we knew and we were not
afraid.

Sections 5 and 6 retrace the protagonists' early efforts to survive in London, and the events and decisions which lead to their thoroughgoing conversion to "communism." It is already clear that both derive much of their Morrisian strength of character from early communion with nature. Richard is illegitimate; his father, a "rich man . . . who skulked," gave his "mother money, but left her life to scorn; . . . we dwelt alone in our village: I knew not my mother's 'shame.'" The original class-marginality of *Pilgrim's* hero gives some plausibility to his tendency to see what he encounters through middle-class eyes (compare Jack London's *The Abyss*, and Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*); he has not always been inured to the poverty he suffers as an adult, and he reacts with the sensitivity and stubborn idealism of someone who knows there are alternatives. Again, one should probably compare this situation with Morris's own, as the legitimate firstborn son and heir of a real "rich man," who may nevertheless have seemed to Morris almost as distant as Richard's absent father in the poem. Natural comparisons also arise between some aspects of Morris's upbringing (his father's early death, the idyllically pastoral life at Walthamstow, remembered for the rest of his life with great fondness, and his boyhood rambles near Marlborough College) and *Pilgrim's* semi-idyllic descriptions of Richard's rural childhood.

Then a lawyer paid me money, and I lived awhile at a school,
And learned the lore of the ancients, and how the knave and
the fool
Have been mostly the masters of earth: yet the earth seemed
fair and good
With the wealth of field and homestead, and garden and river
and wood;
And I was glad amidst it, and little of evil I knew. . . .

At the time of the Paris Commune Morris was only thirty-six, and the descriptions and life-history of Richard and his wife sometimes suggest idealized, counterfactual projections of a fringe-proletarian life Morris might have led, but did not, and a companion ("sturdy as the maidens of old") he might have had, but did not. Richard is also granted one experience Morris *seems* not to have had: friendship with "our Frenchman," also unnamed, who proudly narrates to him his part in the failed revolution of 1848 ("telling me chapters of the tale that never ends"). From London, despair at the condition of their fellow workers prompts Richard and his wife to write the Frenchman for advice ("to ask if he would be our master, and set the learners their task"), but the letter is returned marked "dead," and they know that "all that we saw henceforward with our own eyes must we see." Richard sets to work with his only physical skill, that of a joiner, and "worked as other men worked. . . . The life of the poor we learned, and to me there was nothing new/ In their day of little deeds that ever deathward drew." Quick to resist, he also has little patience with the half-measures of the more pious sorts of reformers, who "wrought me-seems as those who should make a bargain with hell,/ That it grow a little cooler, and thus forever to dwell"; so that when a workmate inevitably invites him to join him at "our Radical spouting-place" to hear "one of those Communist chaps," he readily comes. Richard is now about twenty-five, elsewhere in Morris's writings a symbolic age of maturity, and is stirred by the deepest experience of his life when a "grizzled man" rises, and speaks "as though a message he bore, . . . / Bitter to many." Unlike Richard, but like Morris himself, and rather like his descriptions of John Ball and Guest in *News from Nowhere*, the unnamed speaker is "partly shy" and physically unimpressive ("thickset and short," and "dressed in shabby blue"); but his message quickly moves Richard to "follow . . . end to end . . . the tale of the new-told gospel" (no reluctance to acknowledge that Marxism is an "alternate religion" here), and inspires intense spiritual kinship with someone whose "words were my very thoughts," who "spoke like a friend long known." Richard is disappointed only when the audience tepidly applauds, and fails afterward to "rise up with one cry/ And bid him straight enroll them":

. . . *my* hope full well he answered . . .
 In fear lest he should escape me, I rose ere the meeting was
 done,
 And gave him my name and my faith—and *I was the only one*.
 (Emphases mine)

Richard's intense joy is again expressed in religious language ("now the streets seem gay and the high stars glittering bright/ And for me, I sing amongst them . . . I was born once long ago: I am born again tonight"), and should be compared to Morris's less poetic memories of the decision to join the Democratic

Federation in 1884: "I can only say that I did not measure my hope, nor the joy that it brought me at the time."⁷ The millenarian hopes, and the sense that "even as he began it seemed as though I knew/ The thing he was going to say, though I never heard it before," were very likely Morris's own.

The section that follows (number 4, "The New Proletarian") beautifully invokes the equally intense hope and frustration of visionary hopes that remain unfulfilled. The question is put in plain but suggestive terms: "How near to the goal are we now, and what shall we have to behold" (cf., "How long, oh Lord, how long . . . ?" and "What is to be done?"). Similar biblical cadences underlie the wind's question in section 1:

How long and for what is their patience abiding?
 How oft and how oft shall their story be told,
 While the hope that none seeketh in darkness is hiding
 And in grief and in sorrow the world groweth old?

Again in the language of Hebrew prophets, Richard evokes

. . . loving kindness seared by love from our anguish torn
 Till our hope grow a wrathful fire, and the light of the
 second birth
 Be a flame to burn up the weeds from the lean impoverished
 earth.

His newfound "faith" is quickly tested when a corrupt lawyer defrauds the couple of a small patrimony that provided one "middle-class" pleasure, a tiny rented house near the outskirts of the city. His employer gleefully drives home the point: "Well, sir, you have got your wish. . . . And are now no thief of labour, but an honest working man," and orders him to "make an end of your [rebellious] talk/ At once and for ever henceforth, or out of my shop you walk." At this point Richard makes the remark quoted earlier that he and his wife are each other's servants, and adds that

. . . country folk we were
 And she sickened sore for the grass and the breath of the
 fragrant air
 That had made her lovely and strong.

For both their sakes, then, he enjoins himself to silence at least at work, but of course he has

7. Morris, *CW*, 23:277.

. . . read day after day
 Whatever books I could handle, and heard about and about
 What talk was going amongst them; and I burned up doubt after
 doubt,
 Until it befell at last that to others I needs must
 speak. . . .

Soon afterwards, a shopmate reports his “next night’s speech on the street,” and his few days of forced silence come to an end.

In section 7 (“In Prison—And at Home”), the still-unnamed wife narrates subsequent events which have since led to Richard’s two-month prison sentence: a “well-dressed reptile” has “screeched . . . infamies” at Richard as he spoke, and caned his wife when she angrily protested; Richard then attacked him, and was dragged away by the police. Like Richard (and Morris), she is deeply depressed by the apathy of (most of) the people socialists struggled to convince:

. . . dull they most of them stood
 As though they heeded nothing, nor thought of bad or of good,
 While some (O the hearts of slaves!) although they might
 understand,
 When they heard their masters and feeders called thieves of
 wealth and of land,
 Were as angry as though *they* were cursed. Withal there were
 some that heard. . . .

Compare Morris’s sad lines of 1883:

But the loss of the people; how are we to measure that?
 That they should have great men living and working amongst
 them, and be ignorant of the very existence of their work,
 and incapable of knowing what it means if they could see it!⁸

The wife’s description of the trial resembles *Commonweal* accounts: the police swear to a false testimony, whereupon a patronizing “white-haired fool” at the bench sentences Richard to two months, and advises him to become the “good” petit-bourgeois his education would permit:

What have you got to do to preach such perilous stuff? . . .
 If you needs must preach or lecture, then hire a chapel or
 hall;

8. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

Though indeed . . . you seem clever; who knows but you might
 rise.
 And become a little builder should you condescend to be wise?

The wife broods over her husband's imprisonment, and again echoes Revelations, this time verbatim: "How long, O Lord! how long?" At section's end, the two lovers are united against a hostile world, the consolation promised by "The Message of the March Wind."

An abrupt chronological shift occurs in section 8, "The Half of Life Gone." Richard has now survived the Commune's fall with a now-motherless son, and watches in a field as "men and maids, . . . wives and gaffers grey" work to make hay:

. . . little changed are they
 Since I was . . . amongst them. . . .
 Strange are they grown unto me; yea, I to myself am strange.

At length, he struggles to submerge his lonely resignation in one of the poem's longer lyrical celebrations of natural beauty:

. . . though high over [the clouds], are the wings of the
 wandering herne;
 In measureless depths about him doth the fair sky quiver and
 burn;
 The dear sun floods the land as the morning falls toward noon,
 And a little wind is awake in the best of the latter June.

As he watches "the woman that stoops and kisses the face of the lad," he yields for a moment to illusion, and evokes his wife's lost presence, in a lingering fantasy that she has returned to the fields:

Whose is the voice that laughs in the old familiar place?
 Whose should it be but my love's, if my love were yet on the
 earth? . . .
 . . . let me look and believe that all these will vanish away,
 At least when the night has fallen, and that she will be there
 mid the hay,
 Happy and weary with work, waiting and longing for love.
 There will she be, as of old. . . .
 . . . thus, only thus shall I see her, in dreams of the day
 or the night,
 She was and she is not; there is no such thing on the earth.

His mourning is made even more painful by an estrangement that is obliquely described in the sections that follow.

In the retrospective section 9 (“A New Friend”), a middle-class socialist named Arthur (whose name, like Richard’s, suggests a heroic British past) comes

. . . to our workmen meetings some knowledge of men to learn.
He kindled afresh at my words, although to try him I spake
For what it was really worth. . . .

He becomes Richard’s closest male comrade, in both senses of the word, encourages Richard to write, finds him commissions for political articles, and helps the couple in every way he can. Unfortunately, to everyone’s mutual dismay, he falls in love with Richard’s wife, and she is also drawn to him in turn, before both die on the barricades. Throughout all of this, Richard struggles to preserve his original idealistic respect for his friend, who remains for him in some senses “like a perfect knight of old time as the poets would have them to be”:

He loved me; he grieved my soul: now the love and the grief
are past;
He is gone with his eager learning, his sadness and his mirth,
His hope and his fond desire. There is no such thing on the
earth. . . .

The cadence of the last sentence repeats Richard’s earlier, twice-repeated lament for his wife, and the section ends with a quiet valediction:

He died not unbefriended—nor unbeloved maybe.
Betwixt my life and his longing there rolls a boundless sea.
And what are those memories now to all that I have to do.
The deeds to be done so many, the days of my life so few?

Section 10, “Ready to Depart,” describes the sober preparations of Richard, his wife, and Arthur to join the last Paris Commune defenses against the armies of the bourgeoisie. Just before departure, they sit together in the “fire-lit room,” and talk of “Traitors and betrayed in . . . France”:

As I spoke the word “betrayed,” my eyes met his in a glance,
And swiftly he turned away; then back with a steady gaze . . .
I knew though he looked on me, he saw not me, but my wife:
And he reddened up to the brow. . . .

The wife's response—affectionate pity, unmixed with contrition—confirms his fears:

“O Richard, Richard!” she said, and her arms about me came,
 And her tears and the lips that I loved were on my face once
 more.
 A while I clung to her body . . . then we sundered and sore she
 wept, . . . we sat apart again,
 Not speaking, while between us was the sharp and bitter
 pain. . . .

This obvious estrangement is tempered by a paradoxical solidarity: they face this alienation together, as a *common* problem:

We were gentle and kind together, and if any had seen us so,
 They had said, “These two are one in the face of all trouble
 and woe.”
 But indeed as a wedded couple we shrank from the eyes of men,
 As we dwelt together and pondered on the days that come not
 again.

The scene's psychological awkwardness is oddly plausible, and Richard's responses may reflect Morris's to Jane Morris's liaison with Rossetti in the early 1870s, conveyed in letters and veiled autobiographical descriptions at the time. Richard compares himself to those whose lives have been

. . . so empty and bare
 That they have no words of complaining; nor so happy have they
 been,
 That they may measure sorrow or tell what grief may mean . . .

In a letter of 25 November 1872, Morris wrote:

One thing wanting ought not to go for so much. . . . to have real friends and some sort of an aim in life is so much, that I might still think myself lucky: and often in my better moods I wonder what it is in me that throws me into rage and despair at other times.⁹

In the same letter, he remarks that Jane is “very good and kind to me,” notes “her company is always pleasant,” and regrets her absence.

9. Norman Kelvin, ed., *The Letters of William Morris*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), I:172.

When Arthur brings the news that the siege of Paris is reaching its climax, the couple listen keenly, and Richard suggests that it might be appropriate to go

“ . . . we three together, and there to die like men.”
 “Nay,” [Arthur] said, “to live and be happy like men.” Then
 he flushed up red
 And she no less. . . .
 I reached out my hand unto him, and I kissed her once on the
 brow,
 But no word craving forgiveness, and no word of pardon e’en
 now.

The triangle in *Pilgrims of Hope* is an unresolved narrative complication, but it also provides Morris with a model instance of sublimation for the larger political cause. A less oblique account of the estrangement might have seemed more realistic (compare the wife’s memory of the doomed deputy’s affairs in *Z*), but it would also have diminished the tone of political empathy with which Morris wished to end the poem.

Michael Holzman has argued that the triangular subplot is especially prominent in *The Pilgrims of Hope* because the dates of the Paris Commune corresponded to the period of Morris’s own greatest marital stress;¹⁰ but such configurations appear also in Morris’s work as early as the juvenilia of the 1850s—the early poem “Fame,” for example, and the 1856 prose romance “Gertha’s Lovers”—as well as in *The Defence* and—most strikingly—in one of the best *Earthly Paradise* tales, “The Lovers of Gudrun,” written in June 1869. Here, the configuration recapitulates not only (some poetic counterpart of) Morris’s response to Jane Morris’s rejection, but also a time-lapsed version of his more gradual progression (*after* the period of the Commune) toward socialism, in a series of related motifs: disappointment, loneliness, and renunciation of sexual rivalry; inward struggle to retain and deepen an ethic of generosity; and transference of private hopes to strenuous public activity and revolutionary socialism (“my soul was cleared of confusion, as nigher the deed-time drew,” section 10).

Broader ethical imperatives are also present in Morris’s earlier uses of the triangular love motif: the rejected suitor in “Gertha’s Lovers” serves his successful rival, King Olaf, and the unloved Bodli of “The Lovers of Gudrun” struggles (and fails) to balance his deepest loyalties, to his lifelong friend and his wife; similar imperatives reappear later in *The Roots of the Mountains*, *News from Nowhere*, and *Water of the Wondrous Isles*. Rossetti caricatured Morris

10. Michael Holzman, “Propaganda, Passion, and Literary Art in William Morris’s *The Pilgrims of Hope*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 24, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 377.

several times, verbally as well as visually, but Morris never complained directly in any extant correspondence about Rossetti's behavior, or that of his wife.

In sections 11, 12, and 13—"A Glimpse of the Coming Day," "Meeting the War Machine," and "The Story's Ending," appear some of Morris's finest lyrical invocations of the beauty of earth and hope for its betterment. The three English revolutionaries arrive in Paris, and witness the people's joyful celebrations of liberation by the Communards. The youthful Wordsworth's earlier exultation at the French Revolution, "Good was it in that day to be alive/ But to be young was very heaven"¹¹ echoes not only in Richard's more plain-spoken certainty that "that day at last of all days I knew what life was worth,/ I say that I saw [the coming day] now, real, solid and at hand," but also in the pain of pastoral remembrance and kindred hopes for his beloved land which follow.

All three characters work to exhaustion: Richard's wife "wears the brancard of the ambulance-women," and Arthur "as in all he did,/ Showed a cheerful ready talent that nowise might be hid; And . . . hurt the pride of no man." Inevitably, however, the narration approaches the Commune's final fall:

. . . many a thing we learned, but we learned not how to
prevail
O'er the brutal war-machine, the ruthless grinder of
bale; . . .
It drew on nearer and nearer, and we 'gan to look to the end—
We three, at least—and our lives began with death to blend;
Though we were long a-dying. . . .

In one characteristic skirmish, his wife suddenly turns to him with an unexpectedly deep, intimate look:

. . . straight she looked upon me with such lovely, friendly
eyes
Of the days gone by and remembered, that up from my heart 'gan
rise
The choking sobbing passion. . . .

It is her last gaze, for she suddenly turns with him in shocked horror to see "a man who was running and crouching, stagger and fall." As they both run to the dying Arthur, Richard is wounded and his wife is killed.

. . . thereafter as [Arthur and Richard's wife] lay
Both dead on the litter together, . . . folk who knew not us,

11. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1954), 392.

But were moved by seeing the twain so fair and so piteous,
 Took them for husband and wife who were fated there to die,
 Or, it may be lover and lover indeed—but what know I?

Richard thus preserves his empathy and respect into death, a pattern reminiscent of earlier Morris narratives such as the 1856 “Story of the Unknown Church” and the 1858 “Concerning Geoffray Teste Noire.” The deaths of Arthur and Richard’s wife here are part of a general hecatomb, of course, and the wounded Richard is extraordinarily fortunate that he later survives the Commune’s fall. Well aware of this, Richard pleads with a nurturant Earth to remember these unrecognized heroes “of the latter days,” as he returns to England to raise his son, whom he will try to infuse with his own ideals, and prepare for the new revolution to come. Like the “old Frenchman” of his youth, he will now preserve the Communards’ memory, and that of his friends—“Their life was thy deliverance, O Earth, and for thee they fought— . . . and we were a part of it all, the beginning of the end.” In the poem’s final section, “The Story’s Ending,” Morris pleads with the poem’s *Commonweal* audience to revere the memory of the Communards in their turn, and reenact their deeds:

Amid them shall spring up the story. . . .
 Year after year shall men meet with the red flag over head,
 And shall call on the help of the vanquished and the kindness
 of the dead.

The Pilgrims of Hope thus provides a stoic as well as millenarian response to obvious questions of catastrophic failure and loss. Morris was well aware that socialism could not survive many moral “victories” such as the crushing of the Paris Commune, and he disdained palliation. In “L’Envoi” to *The Earthly Paradise* he had defended the poem’s confessional honesty as a faithful rendition of his own weaknesses, and in the early 1870s, he turned away from an enormous potential audience for his narratives when he no longer felt himself able to express his deepest preoccupations honestly in his poetry.¹² His answer to the question “How long?” mixed fatalism about our personal and collective inadequacies with belief in communal ideals that make it possible, for a time at least, to transcend them. Recurrent estrangements between men and women, in particular, seemed to Morris part of the natural order: in a familiar passage in *News from Nowhere*, Hammond notes that in the new society “We do not deceive ourselves, indeed, or believe that we can get rid of all the trouble that besets the dealings between the sexes.”¹³ In a 1886 letter to Burne-Jones, the fifty-two-

12. See my *The Design of ‘The Earthly Paradise’* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 383–84.

13. *CW*, 16:57.

year-old Morris expressed briefly a desire to be “twenty years younger,” so that he could serve more vigorously the cause of socialism, but added that then “there would be the Female complication somewhere. Best as it is after all.”¹⁴

Morris thus blended personal and psychological acceptance of loss with his utopian communism: our private lives are troubled by inevitable forms of personal alienation, but we are all the more urgently advised therefore to seek new social orders to mitigate them. Salvation may recede before us, but our deepest glimpses of it are communal. To Freud’s claim that “civilization” (“Kultur”) is founded on repression of pleasurable instincts, Morris would have countered that what needs sublimation are not “instincts,” especially sexual ones, but the possessiveness of destructive self-pity. In the language of *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome*: “socialistic religion would be that higher form of conscience that would impel us to actions on behalf of a future of the race, such as no man [*sic*] could command in his ordinary moods.”¹⁵

Another familiar tenet of the “socialistic religion” that Morris tried sincerely to live was the injunction, expressed in *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome*, that marriage be based on “mutual inclination and affection, an association terminable at the will of either party. It is easy to see how great the gain would be to morality and sentiment in this change. . . . There would be no vestige of reprobation weighing on the dissolution of one tie and the forming of another.”¹⁶ Richard, the narrator of *Pilgrims*, did not “own” his wife’s attachment, and could not blame her therefore for its loss. Threats of death had not been easy for either of them to face—“no hatred of life, thou knowest, O Earth mid the bullets I bore—” but adherence to this sexual ethic may have been for Richard an even more difficult test. He passed both, and survived with his integrity and idealism intact.

Richard’s personal struggles thus recapitulate the poem’s basic theme—that revolutionary commitment is deepened by tragic loss. A more psychologically detailed examination of the hero’s struggle for emotional equilibrium would be desirable, but might have seemed inappropriate for a poem designed to illustrate political themes for a *Commonweal* audience. As it is, Richard’s clear-sighted response to marital loss reinforces his stature as a poetic hero who achieves that tenuous equilibrium in his personal as well as political life, despite his personal inadequacies, (relative) poverty, and vulnerability to political oppression.

In an essay on “The Lesser Arts,” Morris advised artists to seek instruction in both “Nature and History,” and *Pilgrims of Hope*, like his other socialist writings, conveys an equal sense of both these poles of human experience.

14. Philip Henderson, ed., *The Letters of William Morris to His Family and Friends* (London: Longmans, 1950), 248.

15. Bax and Morris, *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome*, 298–99.

16. *Ibid.*, 299–300.

Morris's socialist writings are not simplistically didactic, and they seldom employ the detailed characterization of realistic fiction, but they do explore recurrent psychological and historical cycles of utopian and tragic experience. Their primary aim is usually not detailed analysis of an unjust system or advocacy of revolutionary doctrine, but re-creation of the underlying *motives* of communist belief and endeavor. Again and again, *Pilgrims* contrasts lyrical evocations of benign nature and unpossessive love with sharp, ironic accounts of mundane corruption and viciousness, and the alternations deny facile retreats into private tranquility. The sympathetic reader of *Pilgrims of Hope* and Morris's other socialist romances is caught again and again in renewed cycles of communal effort, and suspension or failure of each cycle suggests the need once again to redeem past experience within another. In *Pilgrims of Hope*, as in all of Morris's most serious art, this balance of interior vision and historical reality provides evidence that struggle and resistance within these cycles may yet achieve some of our deepest human purposes.