

THE FIRST VERSION OF "THE WANDERERS"

The first draft of the Prologue to William Morris's The Earthly Paradise is inconspicuously preserved in the twenty-fourth volume of his collected works. May Morris, in her introduction to that volume, "Scenes from the Fall of Troy and Other Poems," comments:

In turning over the leaves of the First Prologue to The Earthly Paradise, one might wonder why the poet put aside so vivid and picturesque a piece of work. It is a complete story, full of movement and incident, full of strangeness and of almost Eastern imagination -- once more, the narrative of a man who saw what he recounted. . . .

And immediately theorizes

that, by the time this Prologue was completed, my father had outworn his impulse to use the much-beloved ballad-quatrain, and was turning to something fresher; also that he saw that what he had written was not so much an introduction as a complete piece in itself: a book of the length he had in contemplation from the first could not be written in a metre of this kind, and for many reasons an introduction should strike the prevailing note of the whole work. . . .For the story had run away with him, and in it we have a whole lifetime of voyage and adventure instead of the two or three vivid pictures which now live for ever in the mind of the reader. (1*)

Although this is interesting, it intensifies rather than answers the question of why Morris, after expending so much labor and imagination on a poem more than eighty pages in length, put it aside? Certainly, the issue of meter is important, but hardly seems a sufficient reason. Nor can excessive variety of incident serve as an adequate explanation why Morris set aside the first draft; the revision is no less varied, containing the same number of episodes as the original, usually with the same subject matter as those in the first draft.

In the following pages I shall analyse the poem both in terms of its episodic structure and in terms of its morphological functions, hoping to demonstrate that the narrative logic of the text itself was crucial to Morris's decision to re-write the poem. Indeed, "the story had run away with him." It contained two quite distinct ideas: that of the hero who frees a maiden from bondage and receives in return marriage and power, a story of action told