"Making the Past Part of the Present:" The Recovery of Names in William Morris's Late Romances

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As Keith S. Donnellan points out, "[t]he history behind the use of a name may not be known to the individual using it . . . . Even a whole culture could lose this history" (1972, 373). Donnellan's claim is particularly appropriate when considered in the context of William Morris's approach to history and language. For Morris (1834-96), the degradation of architecture and language in his era was reducing the past and its history to "a book from which the pictures have been torn" (Kelvin 2:52); accordingly, his late medieval/fantastic romances, together with their associative naming strategies, may be read as his attempt to rectify this deficiency in the contemporary historical consciousness.

Morris incorporates connotative or historically commemorative names into his quest for the revival of Anglo-Saxon, Nordic, and Germanic linguistic roots as these were, in his words, prior to their contamination by invasive "monkish Latin" or "Frenchified" influences (1969, 175, 177). Morris's desire to recover the "root or organic growth" (1996, 396) of art, architecture, and language extends to each of his many artistic and political endeavors.[1] Whether in his visual designs of furniture, textiles, wallpaper, and typography, or in his verbal designs of poetry or fiction (including Socialist literature and epic translations), Morris sought to reacquaint his reader/audience with the original veracity of materials, structures, and linguistics. Within this context, nomenclature carries connotative inferences which awaken the latent memory of the social and cultural ethos of endangered traditions.

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The argument of Plato's *Cratylus* not only raises the issue of onomastic connotations—the name "Hermogenes" unavoidably evokes its prefigurative myth of Hermes—but also deliberates two archetypal naming theories which were the subject of debate in Morris's era and remain so today. In the nineteenth-century, the legacies of Lockean empiricism and Coleridgean idealism continued the controversy between those, like Hermogenes, who argue that the name arbitrarily classifies according to convention or assent and those, like Cratylus, who claim that the name partakes in essences. Morris's studies at Oxford (where he read Richard Chenevix Trench's *On the Study of Words*), together with his subsequent circle of acquaintances, brought him into contact with these naming issues as well as with the work of contemporary scholars involved in the interdisciplinary search for origins: the research of the folklorist and anthropologist Andrew Lang (who knew and admired Morris), the etymological and philological theory of solar mythology developed by Max Müller (whose ideas were challenged by Lang), the comparative studies in cultural anthropology by E.B. Tylor, and most significantly, Lewis H. Morgan's *Ancient Society*. Morris's late romances also reflect his familiarity with the ideas presented in James George Frazer's *Totemism* (1887) and the later *The Golden Bough* (1890). Also contributing to Morris's fascination with linguistic origins were the Grimms' folktale collections, works which Morris lists among the books which have "profoundly impressed" him (Kelvin 2:514).[2]

In all likelihood, the strongest incentive to Morris's almost intuitive attraction to the linguistic past was his loathing of nineteenth-century culture wherein the contemporary condition of language was just one reflection of what was to him an ubiquitous degradation of the arts: having lost touch with its roots, language had deteriorated into "daily jabber" (Kelvin 2:483) without beauty or authentic meaning. As Morris wrote in 1885, "poets have to make a new tongue each for himself" (Kelvin 2:483) if they are to express their

ideas clearly and with integrity as they did prior to the Norman Conquest (Kelvin 2:483, 518). Morris's late romances_each a fusion of history, fantasy, and Socialist politics—employ naming as an articulation of this "new tongue" suited to the recovery of the organic link between the individual and a natural and social environment wherein needs and desires are in accord with the well-being of the community and with the processes of nature.

In the alternative worlds of *A Dream of John Ball* (1886-87), *The House of the Wolfings* (1888), and *The Story of the Glittering Plain* (1891), names both reflect and create tradition as they did when, in the context of Friedrich Schiller's "naive" perception, things were called "by their right name" (1981, 30).[3] Alternatively, T.A. Shippey interprets this naming strategy as "an attempt by Morris to 'feel his way back' from words and names to descriptions of a country and a social condition" (1982, 60-61).

For Morris, as for the inhabitants of his fictive worlds, names are future history: initially, they "map" demographics and spatial territory together with the transcendental intimations evoked by these phenomena. Over time, they gain mythological significance and endow a people with traditions and history; hence, the veracity of names stems from their function as indices of a community's perception, genealogy, and codes of conduct. Diachronically, these metaphorical connotations acquire additional poetical and cultural value as incremental variations record changing circumstances and the evolution of moral and ethical sensibilities: "the name itself," argues Trench, "can never without serious loss be neglected by those who would truly understand the moral significance of the thing . . ." (1859, 115). When civilization does, indeed, neglect the essential and moral bond among the individual, the community, and the earth, ancient names and the narratives in which they are preserved become a repository for the type of perception which Morris believed could bring about the rebirth of a free, egalitarian society from the remains

of capitalism, the latter a "shoddy" civilization built on competitive commerce and commodity value.

As J. Fisher Solomon argues, "we constitute our world in the very act of naming it" (1985, 152); Morris constitutes his alternative worlds around names indicative of "the early days of language" when "everybody who could express himself at all did so beautifully, was a poet for that occasion . . ." (Kelvin 2:483). That is, when language was a manifestation of real life and when names pointed to the organic unity of existence. The connection between name and essence is not, as Morris understood it, a Cratylian or metaphysical connection, but a link to the *Zeitgeist* of a society wherein the word, or name, was intrinsic to life, thought, and action. With the dawn of capitalism (which Morris locates at the close of the fifteenth century), the name, along with its speaker and referent, began to separate from its origins as individualism and commodification replaced communalism and co-operative labor. Hence, an aversion to names which reflect the class-based, elitist appreciation of art leads Morris to urge gallery visitors to develop their own, even if unconventional, opinion by not admiring pieces merely because they happen to be the work of an individual artist with "a great name" (1966a, 310). Conversely, as Morris points out, a magnificent Gothic structure such as Westminster Abbey has "no individual architect's name connected with it" and was ornamented by handicrafters who "have left no names behind them" (Kelvin 4:134; 1994b, 7). Even so, these anonymous, co-operative artisans deserve the admiration and recognition usually reserved for those artists with "great names."

In his 1885 lecture, "The Hopes of Civilization," Morris imagines himself as a time traveler transported back to fourteenth-century England and concludes that the cultural differences would be so great that "the name is left, scarce a thing else"; then, with hope, he visualized great changes for the future when subsequent generations who "bear our name, will wonder how we lived in the nineteenth century" (1994a,

62). Analogous issues of historical and onomastic continuity or change structure the overtly political romance, *John Ball*, wherein familiar names of places and historical characters, distanced by their fourteenth-century setting, estrange the reader from his/her conventional perception of both history and the present: onomastics defamiliarize the familiar. As in each of Morris's romances, naming functions subversively by disorienting our synchronic, "time-bound" perspective of past or present reality in order to suggest the possibility of alternative worlds or, by extension, of alternative and critical ways to appraise our own world. Contemporary civilization is neither inevitable nor immutable, but in order to realize (in both senses of this word) this arbitrariness, conditioned perception requires readjustment; however, as Morris points out, no one can predict, or name, the form that any future society will take.

The dream vision structure of *John Ball* relocates the narrator/dreamer in the medieval world of the Peasants' Revolt (1381) led by the rebel priest John Ball. This movement back into history becomes a prophetic movement into the future for John Ball when the narrator explains to the priest how the historical process will occur—for the reader, how it has occurred—between the fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries. The dialectic among past, present, and future (different concepts for each of the priest, the narrator, and the reader) foregrounds the function of naming as being inherent to cultural and socio-economic development. Together, John Ball and the reader encounter the semantic discrepancies incurred by historical variations in nomenclature: just as Morris cannot name the society of his future, so John Ball cannot grasp the change in naming strategies which will accompany the end of feudalism. The narrator reflects upon this historical contingency of names: when the struggle for social reform appears to be lost, the change may yet occur, but will take a form not intended by its advocates, and then "other men have to fight for what they meant under another *name*"

(emphasis added, 53). That is, over time, names are subject to misreading, or lose their referents and relevance, thereby degenerating into anachronisms without any essential root in lived or remembered experience.

Naming marks the narrator's immediate sensation of familiarity within his oneiric world. As the generically traditional guide and wisdom figure, he not only understands the diction of the "full and round and bold" (39) medieval dialect, but also intuitively adopts some of their naming forms ("leet," "poll-groat bailiffs," "trencher" [38, 42, 44]), including their password. The historically accurate motto written on the rebels' banner, "When Adam delved and Eve span/Who was then the gentleman?" (49) is, as the narrator explains, "a symbol of the early world and man's first contest with nature" (49). This motto suggests hopes for a new earthly Eden wherein the egalitarian origins of names, together with the taming ("contest," not conquest) of nature, will be recreated. Renaming directs other intangible hermeneutic concepts toward a tangible, temporal fraternity: the narrator tells the priest, "I never saw a soul, save in the body," John Ball renames heaven as earthly fellowship ("fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell"), the rebels' battle cry is not in the name of God, but "in the name of Fellowship," and the purpose of life on earth is not primarily to win Heaven, but to act heroically for the cause by doing "great deeds" (51, 78, 87). Morris's use of Jean Froissart's *Chronicle* as source material for John Ball's speeches contributes yet another layer of historical authenticity and renaming to the ongoing transmission of the tale. Also, as Morris's persona and a poet or "gatherer of tales" (44), the narrator performs the Adamic role of name-giver, particularly so if considered in the context of Thomas Carlyle's definition of poetry as "a right Naming" (1937, 88)—Carlyle was a seminal influence on Morris.

John Ball accentuates onomastic evolution by presenting familiar placenames such as Essex, Kent, and Canterbury in their historical context. The close connection

between the people and the land, indicated by the metaphorical implications of Anglo-Saxon functional names, is made more specific by correspondences between the personal name and natural or domestic details. For example, the names *Will Green, Gregory Tailor, John the Miller* (whose name is in the password verse), *Hob Wright, Rob Pargetter* (an ornamental plasterer), and *Antony Webber* all find their "eponyms" in landscape or handicraft objects. Floral imagery initiates this naming pattern: rose motifs decorate the interior of the Rose inn where the serving girl wears a "rose wreath" (42). Similarly, the emblematic straw worn by Jack Straw (another historically accurate rebel leader) indicates both his occupation (thatcher) and the origins of names in the interconnection between human activity and the land.

In the opening frame section of the dream vision, an onomastic sequence of historical names prepares the reader conceptually for a movement back in time: Norman, Elizabethan, Queen Anne, Silly Billy (a nickname for William IV), and Victoria. The narrator's reference to William Cobbett introduces the name of an advocate for popular rights; subsequently, the Robin Hood ballad sung as a verbal talisman to speed John Ball's arrival, together with the introduction of Wat Tyler's name, traces an onomastic timeline mapping the history of the populist struggle for freedom and equality. Nomenclature also complements secular with sacred mythology: food and drink are blessed "in the name of the Trinity" (82, 84) in order to depict the rootedness of religious faith in the common people despite their alienation from an increasingly corrupt Church administration.[4] *John Ball*, then, reconnects names with their material or mystical origins, a connection which, by the nineteenth-century, was gradually disappearing from the collective historical memory.

Morris's attempt to liberate his readers from a conventional, myopic perception of the inevitability of present civilization includes liberation from the belief that contemporary onomastics convey unalterable truth. John

Ball's imprisonment dramatizes this misconception. When jailed, he momentarily loses faith in his cause, as well as in the connotative or noumenal significance of names; like those who live in the nineteenth-century, he is isolated from "all the life of earth" (53). As a result, names appear to him as empty signifiers separated from their domestic, communal, and natural origins: "I longed for all these things yet I saw them not, nor knew them but as names" (53-54).

Because the narrator comes from a *chronotope* wherein language is ubiquitously superficial, he feels that he will require "a new set of words" (80) if he is to explain future history to John Ball in terms that the priest will understand: the nominal surface of words inadequately conveys the associative connotations of names which although history to the narrator, must be prophecy to John Ball. The priest does identify this unfamiliar diction, but remains puzzled by his inability to "name" (91) his intuitive awareness that the narrator has, indeed, experienced the "future." Hence, each is confronted with the limitations posed by historically determined naming practices.

When John Ball learns that feudalism will be replaced by capitalism, a system in which "freedom" involves not only alienation from the land and any means or production, but also slavery to market demand and industrial employers, he is convinced that he hears "riddles" because, as he argues from his fourteenth-century perspective, there is not "any fool so great a fool as willingly to take the *name* of freeman and the life of a thrall as payment for the very life of a freeman" (emphasis added, 97). Here, naming hinders comprehension: freedom and Fellowship—the latter occasionally a proper noun as a reminder that it designates a consensual, material reality—are historically contingent. As Gareth Evans argues, changes in a community tend to eliminate or alter a name's referent (1999, 259). John Ball's assessment of the "riddles" of capitalism as concepts so irrational that they can be neither

grasped nor named is the perceptual standpoint which Morris challenges the reader to assume.

When the dreamer awakens back in nineteenth-century London, a catalogue of contemporary names—"Thames Conservancy," "Richmond Park," and "Great Wen"—together with the sound of factory "hooters," re-establishes the actuality and cacophony of modern society (113). In the work's concluding sentence, a reference to John Ruskin, the name of a contemporary crusader for social change, "updates" the presentation, in the dream vision, of the historical and linguistic roots of the class struggle: for Morris, as for Ruskin, "work" and "play" are relative concepts (113). As a result, the narrator's allusion to this semantic and subjective distinction calls attention to the culturally specific implications of all language.

In *The House of the Wolfings*, names assume the function ascribed by Theodor Adorno to a foreign word inserted in a domestic text: the alien word performs as a "token" which exposes the reification of familiar vocabulary by jolting the reader into the awareness that "something could be otherwise" (1991, 189-90).[5] Only precise naming, Adorno continues, "has an opportunity to champion the cause of human beings" (1991, 191). Taken together, Adorno's remarks apply to Morris's onomastic mapping of the demographics and landscape of his medieval world, an "otherwise" reality which sheds new light on the reader's known world by demonstrating how the connotative properties of names contribute to the "Cause," or the historical struggle for equality and for freedom from tyranny. As a political romance or heroic fantasy, *The House* is, as Morris explains, "a story of the life of the Gothic tribes on their way through middle Europe, and their first meeting with the Romans in war. It is meant to illustrate the melting of the individual into the society of the tribes . . ." (Kelvin 2:835-36).[6] In the context of nomenclature, *The House* dramatizes the original assignation of

place and personal names, each of which functions as a token of existence, destiny, and topographical or mythical space.

Moreover, names convey the "arresting strangeness" which J.R.R. Tolkien (who acknowledges his debt to Morris) identifies as the primary characteristic of fantasy (1988, 45). Totemism, the basis of the Wolfing clan's spiritual and social system, organizes their selection of names and, as J.G. Frazer explains in his *Totemism* (likely familiar to Morris), depends on a symbiotic relationship between society and nature: the totem protects, and is protected by, its people (1910, 3). Like totemism, the kenning tradition gives Morris a metaphorical technique wherein names participate in, rather than describe, their referents. Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon's translation of Snorri Sturluson's definition of a kenning suggests this rootedness of the device in its origins: "How shall a man be 'kenned' . . . ? He shall be 'kenned' to his works, to what he yields, or accepts, or does . . . to the kindred he sprang from, and the kindred that came from him" (1895, 492-93). Similarly, the names of kenned objects connote their properties, function, and mythological or historical significance.

For the Wolfings, nomenclature records the evolution of the recent past into the historical past, and eventually into myth while, at the same time, it reflects the magical/mystical elemental energy connecting the individual and the kindred with the natural forces. As part goddess—her mother is Wood-Sun, a Valkyrie, and her father is Thiodolf ("Folk-wolf"), the leader of the Wolfing clan—Hall-Sun embodies the union of the kindred's Roof or House with the natural and spiritual worlds. She is the kindred's anima and solar visionary signifying both natural light, the source of vegetative growth, and the spiritual light of fellowship. Beneath the Roof's material and spiritual warmth, Hall-Sun's lamp or "namesake" (74) creates a temenos within the domestic shelter which in turn is within the Mirkwood clearing. Beyond this clearing lies the as yet unnamed forest

wilderness. The eponym linking the lamp with its keeper "names" the continuity between past and future (or memory and prophecy), between the historical and mythical origins of the kindred, and between the domestic and natural worlds. Because she articulates and names the memories and hopes of her people, Hall-Sun is their linguistic and onomastic centre. The tale introduces us to this new world by charting the historical and topographical movement of the ancestral Folk and their onomastics from their initial encounter with the nameless "great wood" (1), to the creation and naming of settlements, landmarks, rituals and, finally, to the central, totemic "image of the Wolf" (3) on the breast of each Wolfing warrior. Framing references to the Wolfing hall as "the House of the Name" (24, 191) enclose the romance as a whole within reminders of this affinity between settlement and nomenclature.

The river is the source of life for the Wolfings and the other Houses or clans, each identified by its ancestral totemic animal name. The Folk alter the river's name over historical time according to its characteristics and function. The river "became their friend, and they loved it, and gave it a name, and called it the Dusky, and the Glassy, and the Mirkwood-water; for the names of it changed with the generations of man" (2); here, nomenclature reflects the reciprocal evolution of landscape and habitation. A contemporary reference—the Mirkwood-water is "about as wide as the Thames at Sheene" (1)—provides a "picture" of the river and links the past with the reader's present, or the unfamiliar with the familiar.

Prior to the battle with the Romans, the narrator reflects upon the onomastic disruptions that the conflict might cause: defeat will mean moving from Mid-mark to a new location where the Wolfings will "call new places by old names and worship new Gods with the ancient worship" (27). As Norman Talbot explains, names in Morris's late romances are crucial to the community's sense of its identity because they "reveal family, totemic inheritance, and spiritual

priorities" (1999b, 95). Given this reverence for names and their traditions, the Romans' insignia of the wolf (from their founding myth of Romulus and Remus) suggests that their imperialist, class-structured, and individualist society appropriates not only the Gothic territories, but also the Wolfings' totemic emblem. Then, too, names of natural phenomena frequently signify connotative duality: the "Wildwood" is a "friend" to the Wolfings but a "net" to the Romans (63), and the honor and valor associated with the Wolfing totem also carries the meaning of *"wearg"* or *"varg,"* an assassin. This malign connotation reflects the kindred's perception of the Roman invaders. A member of the Elking clan describes the full extent of Roman degradation: "they have forgotten kindred, and have none" (42); accordingly, Roman civilization violates the essential Gothic belief in the sanctity of lineage and the names which record it. Linguistic, cultural, and territorial appropriation finds its sanction in the Romans' password, their decadent version of totemic naming: "No limit" (60-1).

When Thiodolf wears "the Dward-wrought Hauberk" (given to him by Wood-Sun) to protect his life during the battle, he places self-interest ahead of the community's survival and, like the Romans, disregards the mystical connotations signified by all names. After rejecting the hauberk and the disloyalties it embodies, Thiodolf dies heroically; the kindred's tale then endows his name with iconic and commemorative significance because, as Talbot points out, "to die for one's kin gave immortality through the kin, who would treasure the individual name . . ." (1999b, 98). Material existence transmutes into an onomastic legacy which will inspire and guide future generations: the "Gods of the name" receive Thiodolf as the "Crown of the Name" (195). Like the virgin Hall-Sun, Thiodolf sacrifices individual desire (his love for Wood-Sun) for the well-being of the gens and for the honorable inclusion of his name in their history.

In a second attempt to protect Thiodolf, Wood-Sun tells him that he is not a Wolfing by birth and therefore owes no loyalty to the kindred: "as a painted image of a dream is thy dreaded name./Of an alien folk thou comest . . ." (17). After "swooning" when he wears the magical hauberk during battle, Thiodolf reaches the understanding that his name means more than lineage; his heroic and domestic deeds within the community have made him a Wolfing. The connotations carried by the name Wolfing—courage, loyalty, fellowship, shared labor, communal memory and hope—give it relevance. The activities which shape and define the kindred's existence simultaneously shape its name into a metaphor for the values of a communal and heroic society, values which Morris found lacking in his contemporary society. Just as the imprisoned John Ball momentarily loses faith in the constitutive power of the name "Fellowship," so Thiodolf, while wearing the hauberk, experiences an egoistic trance which isolates him from all that the Wolfings' totemic name represents: "I loved them not, and was not of them, and outside myself there was nothing" (161).

May Morris attributes her father's rather haphazard invention of proper nouns to his "more or less unconscious idea of emphasis or of avoiding emphasis" (1973, 402). Tolkien, however, may offer a more precise explanation for Morris's propensity for the conversion of common into proper nouns: each reader of fantasy, suggests Tolkien, forms his/her own "picture" of common nouns, but the most concrete and particular image will be from "The Hill, the River, the Valley which were for him the first embodiment of the word" (1988, 70). This endorsement of the particularity of the proper name not only recalls Morris's assertion (quoted above) that "pictures" have been removed from history, but also reflects his strategy of using names as a means to establish the reality of his alternative worlds.[7] Furthermore, *The House* demonstrates the origin of names in their human or natural referents as well as their role as an indication of history in

progress. "House," "Roof," and "Hall" are among the names which convey the crucial need for spiritual and domestic shelter in the heart of the settlement. "War-Horn," "War-babe" (a battle axe), and "Throng-plough" (Thiodolf's sword) indicate the equally crucial need for material protection against human and natural enemies—although the wood is a friend, its fringes continue to harbor "wild things" (2).

Whereas *The House* begins by mapping topographical names, it concludes with a preview of how names will appear as history in future versions of the kindred's tale: the Roman dead are buried in a mound which "had a name which endured for long, to wit, the Battle-toft," the mound of the Markmen is named "Thiodolf's Howe," and the place of Thiodolf's hauberk-induced trance "was called the Swooning Knowe; and it kept that name long after men had forgotten wherefore it was so called" (198). *John Ball* and *The House* propose that alternative, and therefore subversive, structures of perception and naming are not only possible and credible, but operate through history as the collective memory of original freedom when names connoted essences and functions without the interference of ideology or mechanical usage.

The extended title of the third medieval fantasy to be considered here reflects the novel's theme, the quest to distinguish between lies and truth, or between false and authentic names: *The Story of the Glittering Plain Which has Been Also Called the Land of Living Men or the Acre of the Undying.*[8] Apart from the onomastic slipperiness of multiple naming, the Plain's "glitter" is, like its name, superficial; moreover, the euphemistic semantics of the subtitle question the definition of "life." Hallblithe, the hero, encounters a maze of lies and misnomers during his quest for his beloved. His journey takes him to the Isle of Ransom, then to the Glittering Plain, back to the Isle of Ransom, and finally, home to Cleveland by the Sea. Cleveland is truthfully named ("cleve" in its etymological sense of shoreline cliff, or aurally, as the homonym "cleave,"

to cling to) because, as Carole Silver points out, it "is a natural land where things are as they seem" (1982, 164). As in *The House*, names in Cleveland reflect alliances with ancestry or nature: Hallblithe (a trustworthy and accurate attributive name) is of the House of the Raven, and his betrothed, the Hostage, is of the House of the Rose. Prophetically, the Hostage is so named before her abduction; as a result, she is not only "fulfilling her name" (Talbot 1999b, 95), but also symbolically redeeming the veracity of nomenclature in general. Hallblithe's rescue of the Hostage is, therefore, a symbolic recovery of authentic naming.

Hallblithe's initiation into the world of lies and false names begins when he meets his equivocatory guide, Puny Fox. During the voyage to the Island of Ransom, Puny Fox mockingly asks Hallblithe, "Little Carrion-biter, why dost thou not ask me of my name?" (17). When he learns his guide's name, Hallblithe reveals the innate trust in totemic naming which will sustain him throughout his quest: "Art thou a Fox? It may well be that thou shalt beguile me as such beasts will . . ." (17). The nominal adjective in Puny Fox's name initiates the theme of deception because he is not "puny" but, as the narrator emphasizes, extremely large.

Hallblithe, now abandoned by Puny Fox, finds the Isle of Ransom to be a maze of "lies" and "mumming" (23, 48)—the latter generically characterized by disguised names and identities. Once Hallblithe passes on the euphemistic "token" name ("THE HOUSE OF THE UNDYING") given to him by an elder, none of the Ransomers speaks to him (34, 36). This reification of language into silence anticipates the reification of personal relationships and of nature which Hallblithe encounters in his next destination, the Glittering Plain, an earthly paradise of eternal youth and perpetual summer. Once on the Plain, Grandfather, the elder who voyaged with Hallblithe, reverts in name and appearance to his youthful, warrior self, Sea-eagle. Names no longer reflect essential and organic being, but a timeless world of surfaces.

In exchange for immortality, the inhabitants forfeit their legacy of fellowship, kindred, and memory. Heroic action, as recorded for perpetuity in the tale and defined by Hallblithe as "the doing of deeds that shall not die," degenerates into eternal idleness and sensual pleasure (3). Accordingly, when the inhabitants of the Plain rename Hallblithe as "Spearman," they are naively unaware that because Hallblithe's foe is their own apathy, the name is a misnomer which mocks his heroic and toremic ancestry; once more, appellation contradicts appearance.

Two onomastic taboos characterize the Plain's linguistic guile: knowledge of the King's personal name is forbidden, and while the Plain may be referred to as "The Land of the Living," its third name, the "Acre of the Undying," may not be spoken. Likely, Morris was familiar with the first taboo through the work of Müller, Lang, or Frazer, but his application of this ancient tradition indicates again his interest in the etymological and anthropological roots of language. The second taboo reflects the King's awareness of the subversive power of naming (despite its prefix, "Undying" retains the forbidden name of death); as a result, controlled language and impersonal or generic naming eradicate the "real and substantial bond" (Frazer 1922, 284) between a name and the essence of its bearer. As Richard Mathews argues, in the Plain, falsehood and illusion "reduce human life to indistinguishable mediocrity; any single individual there can be substituted for any other" (1978, 36). Then, too, the King's prohibitions sever his people from their memory of the connotative properties of names: analogous to the Romans in *The House*, "they have forgotten kindred, and have none . . ." (*The House*, 42). Like John Ball imprisoned in Canterbury and Thiodolf imprisoned in the hauberk's magic, the people of the Plain, imprisoned in their land of eternal plenty, regard names as signifiers devoid of any connotations of social responsibility.

Ruth Kinna points out that Morris's heroes "know paradise to be the realm of deception" (2000, 194). On the Glittering Plain, the absence of a nomenclature to order, articulate, or record a people's identity results in a reified present; likewise, Morris regarded his own era as a time when language had degenerated into a commodity and names were alienated both from their referents and from their historically layered connotations or "pictures." For instance, in his 1886 lecture, "Early England," Morris regrets that many Anglo-Saxon names have been emptied of their mythological content: "Wotan and Woden are but names to us" (1969, 167).

When Hallblithe discovers that he has been directed to the King's daughter instead of to the Hostage, his lament echoes John Ball's incomprehension of the naming practices or "riddles" of nineteenth-century capitalism: "has the earth become so full of lies, that there is no room amidst them for a true man to stand upon his feet . . . ?" (82). Because the King's daughter (who, like her father, has a generic title, but no personal name) lives in solitude and has fallen in love with an unnamed picture of Hallblithe, she is isolated from the "real" world as well as from those who inhabit the Plain. The "moveless unending ring of the years that change not" (84) imprisons her within an absence of the nomenclature required to name personal affiliations with time, place, or community.

Hallblithe's quest leads him through the mountains to a coastal woodland where he builds a ship for his escape from the Glittering Plain. The people who watch him at work give him the soubriquet of "Wood-lover," an onomastic indication of his return to a life of action and purpose. After he sails back to the Isle of Ransom, Hallblithe is reunited with a reformed Puny Fox who has a new-found allegiance to the wisdom and traditions of his kindred, and who admits that his lies were told in obedience to the King of the Glittering Plain. After he finds the Hostage, Hallblithe pledges fellowship with Puny Fox and Erne, the Ravager chieftain; their oaths of brotherhood are exchanged under the ancestral "earth-yoke,"

a symbol of their return to the roots of lineage, tradition, and naming (165). Pertinently, now that Hallblithe has successfully completed his quest, Puny Fox no longer calls him by the nicknames which insult and mock his House ("Crag-nester," "Carrion-biter" [17]). This return to legitimate naming indicates that Hallblithe (like Thiodolf in *The House*), has earned his identity by his courage and his loyalty to his clan.

Puny Fox accompanies Hallblithe and the Hostage back to Cleveland by the Sea where he renounces linguistic deceit and admits that his attempts to instruct Hallblithe in the "lore of lies" (149) have failed. As an "adopted" member of the Raven House, Puny Fox achieves not only fame and honor, but also a place in the kindred's tale. Trust in the tale and in the names it records is, in fact, the reason for the Ravens' acceptance of Puny Fox into their fellowship: they believe in Hallblithe's "word," in his fellowship with Puny Fox, and "in the tale which he told them of the Glittering Plain and the Acre of the Undying" (172). Significantly, the very existence of the tale is due to Hallblithe's totem: ravens guide Hallblithe out of the mountainous wasteland, thereby demonstrating the literal, as well as metaphorical, power of the totemic name to protect its bearer. The raven has the dual connotations typical of many totems: as Odin's war emblem, the raven signifies heroic deeds (such as Hallblithe's successful quest), and as a harbinger of death, it anticipates Hallblithe's rejection of immortality.

For Morris, the particularity of the individual represented by the name contributes to the general well-being of the community. This contribution is recorded and commemorated by the word-hoard and its vehicle, the narrative; similarly, individual memories combine to form the indigenous historical consciousness. The transmission of the onomastic tokens which convey connotation and allusion is the responsibility of all succeeding generations. Names of heroes, personified objects or kennings, events, and

topography modulate over historical time, but retain their original etymological and cultural associations. As Marc Silverstein explains, through retelling or reinscription, "narrative bridges the gap between the name and the thing" as well as between a community's past and future (1992, 138). The three romances by Morris discussed here depict a moment in historical or fantastic time when this "bridging" threatens to be lost.

As an emblematic model of this diachronic retelling, *John Ball* reads its present—and by implication, all futures—from the perspective of the past. This fourteenth-century point of view regards the casuistical naming practices of the future capitalist era with incredulity and incomprehension. *The House* moves further back in history in order to dramatize the inception of naming traditions which guide behaviors and decisions when the community is threatened. For Morris, the rearticulation of names in order to revive their original connotations is necessary because, as he explains in "The Present Outlook of Socialism in England" (1896), he regards the art and literature of his era as "something without root or organic growth." Morris continues with an expression of, at least, some hope: "I believe that they will flourish again, rising maybe from the scanty tradition left us, or maybe from a new birth . . ." (Kelvin 4:396). In *The Glittering Plain*, the reunion of Hallblithe and the Hostage, together with the linguistic redemption of Puny Fox—the latter a symbolic endorsement of the integrity of naming—suggests just such a "new birth" within the continuity of tradition.

In *Socialism:Its Growth and Outcome* (1893), Morris and E. Belfort Bax criticize several nineteenth-century naming customs: the secrecy which cloaks the "change of name" in adoption procedures, the disguise of self-interested competitive commerce under the "name" of Christian morality, and the application of the name "democracy" to an oligarchical government wherein political parties themselves

have "become almost less than mere names, the very shadows of shadows" (1893, 5, 10, 13). For Morris and Bax, then, all sections of society demonstrate that nomenclature has progressively degenerated into hypocrisy and deceit until signifiers empty into "mere sets of names and formulas" (1893, 8). Not only have names separated from legitimate meaning, but their manipulation deliberately misrepresents society's fundamental structures. Morris considers this corruption to be an inevitable consequence of the contradiction between individual and social interests. In turn, this conflict is tied to capitalist commerce wherein names, as commodities, function as property. This latter tendency appeared in its most blatant form in the developing market of commercial advertising. John Ball's exposure to future industrialism, the Romans' acquisitive materialism, and the self-centered egoism of the Glittering Plain's inhabitants display a similar disregard for the historical or ethical connotations of names and their traditions. Romance with its alternative worlds of myth, history, or fantasy is, from Morris's point of view, a means to liberate names from reification, or, at least, to expose the reality of this reification.

Throughout his saga translations, lectures, and poetry, Morris returns repeatedly to the relevance of names. For instance, in "The Voice of Toil" (1885), he refers to the social activists of the past who leave "[t]heir names amidst the nameless dead" (1994c, 177), and in his rewriting of *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung* (1876), multiple allusions to the name as the measure of a hero's legacy and fame are integral to the movement of the saga narrative. After death, the name functions emblematically as a signature ensuring that the eternal presence of its bearer is woven into the cyclical patterns embodied in tales of the people; accordingly, in the Socialist perm "All for the Cause" (1885), Morris writes "Named and nameless all live in us; one and all they lead us yet" (1994c, 185).

Since the 1980s, much critical attention has been focussed on the naming of "new worlds" colonized or appropriated by imperialist powers. Paul Carter, for example, asks "Before the name: what was the place like before it was named?" (1987, xiii). Morris's "new worlds" are, indeed, created, defined, and made tangible by naming; however, unlike conventional travel writers, Morris, as cartographer, assigns names to his imaginary landscapes as *deliberate and conscious* enticements to appropriation. Morris's intent is that his reader's encounter with the roots of nomenclature and the social sensibilities which these reflect will serve as a means to review contemporary conditions with a renewed and critical perception. By observing the present through the memory of the traditional, connotative implications of names (such as those discussed in *Cratylus*), the reader "remembers" the original sources of all names in natural phenomena and communal interaction. Not that Morris idealizes either the inhabitants or their landscapes: heroes have weaknesses and the wild has to be tamed into an environment congenial to habitation. Nevertheless, underlying John Ball's disillusionment with the future, Thiodolf's struggle to put egoism aside, and Hallblithe's route through duplicitous naming runs the theme of the constitutive function of naming in politics, culture, and social networks.

Pierre Bourdieu suggests that in order to challenge the power of the name systems of official, authorized discourse, it is necessary "to *name the unnameable*, to break the censorships, institutionalized or internalized . . ." (1991, 129). We negotiate the previously "unnameable" worlds of Morris's late fiction as if we are reading a map, proceeding from name to name and interpreting topographical and cultural signs until the unfamiliar becomes familiar; at the same time, this assimilation estranges us from our familiar world and its superficial approaches to the assigning of names. This alienation reveals the contemporary reduction of names to labels arbitrarily attached to the surfaces of things. Morris's

romances challenge "institutionalized" naming not only by their selection of character and placenames with roots in social or geographical "realities," but also by their thematic focus on the origins and transmission of names.

In "The Folk of the Mountain Door," Morris's unfinished late romance with its opening scene set during the "Name Day" celebration of a royal birth, the ominous prophecy for the child's future includes the mysterious origin of the name "the Dale of the Tower": because there is no tower at the site, the people wonder "Whence cometh the name/And what tale lies thereunder/For honour or shame" (1966c, 308). This dramatization of the disappearance of architecture and onomastic origins fictively mirrors Morris's outrage at the loss of these traditions in his own era. In an attempt to remedy this loss, Morris turns to romance because, in his words, the genre not only presents a "true conception of history," but also has the subversive "power of making the past part of the present" by its revival of forgotten nomenclature and the alternative worlds of its onomastic cartography (1966b, 148).

Notes

[1]As Deborah Webster Rogers and Ivor A. Rogers explain, Morris "was a diversely gifted man: he could write a book, design a typeface for it, print it, and sit down to read it in a reclining chair of his own design under wallpaper also his" (1980, 34).

[2]In an August 4, 1880, letter, Morris records that he had corresponded with Max Müller about the committee formed to protest the proposed renovations to St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice—Morris was one of the founders of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (Kelvin 1:576). At the annual Meeting of the S.P.A.B. on July 1, 1884, Morris expresses his deep interest in the contemporary studies of etymology,

comparative mythology, and archaeology (1966d, 126). As several critics point out, in all likelihood Morris discussed J.G. Frazer's work with Andrew Lang. In his 1905 *Adventures Among Books*, Lang includes a chapter on Morris.

See Kelvin 3:162-63 for Morris's explanation of his own ancestry and family names; for his interest in the origins of local surnames, see Kelvin 3:77 where he refers to a resident whose "family had been there for hundreds of years . . . his name is Gerring (Geiring)." Geiring is probably derived from the Old Norse "Geir" or spear.

[3]Subsequent references to *A Dream of John Ball, The House of the Wolfings*, and *The Story of the Glittering Plain* appear in the text as *John Ball, The House*, and *The Glittering Plain* and are cited by page number.

[4]For through and perceptive studies of the politics, religion, and history in *John Bell*, see Holzman and Salmon.

[5]In his study of language in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, another of Morris's late romances, Normal Talbot points out that, initially, the reader/listener "is still conscious of being a foreign audience" in the unfamiliar world of the tale (1989, 17). I am greatly indebted to Talbot for his many studies of Morris's prose romances; see "References" for Talbot's articles cited or consulted.

[6]*The House* has been defined by various generic "names"; for example, Florence Boos considers the tale (and *John Ball*) a "medieval socialist romance" (1992, 15), John Goode terms it a "Germanic romance" (1971, 265), Amanda Hodgson includes it in her chapter entitled "Political Romances" (1987, 120-56), and Richard Mathews includes all of the romances in his study of Morris's "fantasy" fiction (1978, 22).

[7]Capitalized common nouns appear frequently in Morris's lectures as well as in his late fiction; in "Some Thoughts on the Ornamented Manuscripts of the Middle Ages," for example, Morris names the most important and

desirable art forms as a "beautiful House" and a "beautiful Book" (1982, 1).

[8]The title or "name" of *A Dream of John Ball* is also enigmatic: the dream may be John Ball's illusory hopes for equality and fellowship or the narrator's dream *about* John Ball. See Goode 1971, 251 for further discussion of this ambiguity.

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