



**The**  
**Crystal Ship**  
**Eleventh Issue**

HERE BEGINNETH THE GILES OF CANTER-  
BURY AND FIRST THE PROLOGUE THEREOF



**William Morris:**  
**Dreamer of**  
**Dreams**  
**by**  
**Ian Covell**

## Prologue

The book is very old, its hard red cover scuffed by the years, the edges of the pages unevenly cut, almost ragged. Idly, ignoring the spine, you turn to the title page.

THE SUNDERING FLOOD by William Morris.

Its date of publication is at the bottom of the page in Roman numerals. Painstakingly you work it out. 1898. Very old, a first edition perhaps? Almost you replace it on its shelf, you haven't heard the author's name before. You relent, flick onward to the opening page of the story and read its first line. You frown, read the line again, then the next line, and the next. Breaking off you realise that you have read almost half a page. The shopkeeper is at your side, he asks if you want the book. You turn and ask its price. It seems reasonable -- the book is old, you may never see it again.

At home you crack the book open and begin to read again. Some of the words are unfamiliar, archaic -- has English changed so much in a hundred years? -- but you can place their meaning from their context. The story beguiles you, draws you in. Inside yourself, as you heard it in the bookshop, the prose sings...

Hours later, as you lay the book down and begin your search for the rest of his work, the questions begin -- who was William Morris? Why did he write such works? Are there themes in his work? Did his work alter as he grew older?

One central truth is already obvious to you.

William Morris was an artist.

These essays will show some aspects of the man and his work, his beliefs and what may have shaped them, but everything will be pervaded by that one fact: William Morris was an artist.

### Who Was William Morris?

Morris was born one hundred and fifty years ago on the 24th of March 1834, and he died just before the twentieth century began. In his prime, he was a stocky and robust man with a neat black beard and a loud voice.

The eldest son of a wealthy London stockbroker, he lived until the age of thirteen with his parents and his brothers and sisters in a large country house set in its own grounds close to Epping Forest. When his father died in 1847, the family moved house. Morris then attended a school in Marlborough, among the Wiltshire Downs. When he was eighteen he went to Oxford University.

Early in 1856, he became acquainted with the painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who was a member of the then-fading Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of artists and writers.

Rossetti's life was complex and tragic, and that tragedy extended to his friends. He had been born on the 12th of May 1828 and christened Charles Dante, a name he later changed. He founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848. In the 1850s he met and painted two principal models: Jane Burden and Elizabeth Siddal. Rossetti married Elizabeth Siddal in 1860. Two years later, she died of an overdose of laudanum. Into her coffin Rossetti placed the exquisite poems he had written for her. In 1869 the poems were retrieved and were published in 1870. These dates are somewhat echoed in his relationship with Morris and, perhaps more tragically, with Jane Burden, the model he did not marry but whom Morris did.

In 1856 Morris began to submit stories and poems to THE OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE MAGAZINE. Most of the stories had a fantastic element or perspective (eg, narration by the dead), and contained some of his prolific verse (\*1).

His poetry was to bring him great public acclaim in later years, and he would be offered the post of Poet Laureate after Tennyson died in 1892.

1858 brought his long poem, THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE, which was dedicated to Rossetti. This poem, strangely foreshadowing personal events, shows Guenevere's passion as a revolt against the strictures of society -- her affair is colourful and vivid where licensed marriage is dull and grey.

On 24th April 1859 Morris married Jane Burden, the daughter of an Oxford groom. Jane had been the model for many Pre-Raphaelite paintings, meeting Rossetti when she was seventeen, and being painted by him ten days later. Her languid, withdrawn beauty was perfectly suited to the Pre-Raphaelites' subject matter -- or vice versa. Jane and Elizabeth's influences on the PRB may have shaped their subject matter. Jane's personality is an enigma unresolved in any biography of William Morris: letters between herself and Rossetti are due to be unsealed in 1989, and may reveal more about her, and her relationships.

For his marriage, Morris designed and constructed the famous Red House -- so named because it was built of red brick, against the fashion of the time. It was sited in an orchard. With friends he began to fill the Red House with specially designed furniture, tapestries, and so on. They later expanded this enterprise and began to produce many items for the public: furniture (for example the Morris Chair), jewelry, stained glass windows and wallpaper. Many of the hand-printed wallpapers are still being made today precisely to the designs of Morris. The work of



the Morris Company was a deliberate revolt against what they saw as the 'shoddy' work on the market. The Company's products, then as now, were admired and much sought after, becoming a matter of regret to Morris in his socialist years.

By the late 1860s public acclaim had come to Morris, but his private life was a failure. Despite the birth of their daughters, Jane and May in 1861 and 1862, the relationship between Morris and Jane Burden had failed. The reason why is questionable. It could be that Jane came to believe too much in the PRB adoration of her as one of their indolent, gorgeous, unattainable women. Some have speculated that her marriage cut her off from her working class roots and the PRB's adulation isolated her further from the class which she had reached. More prosaically, could it be that Morris had learned that the woman beneath the ideal image was not to his liking.

Poems and letters of the time confirm estrangement and disappointment within the marriage, which reached bitter depths in later years. Morris' stories and poems of the time include several about two men in love with the same woman. Contrary to the social (Victorian) teachings of his time, the husband in each case showed acceptance, and little anguish (\*2).

From the late 1860s onward, a few years after Rossetti's wife died, Jane was often seen with Rossetti at parties and receptions and other places. They made a gorgeous and lauded couple.

After an epic poem, "The Life And Death Of Jason", in 1867, Morris began to publish the work that brought him popular acclaim. THE EARTHLY PARADISE (1868-70), a collection of stories in verse -- based on classical and medieval sources -- established him as a major poet. Many of his later books would carry the legend "by the author of THE EARTHLY PARADISE", and though few today have read it, the poem's preface is often quoted.

With Eiríkr Magnússon, he published the first of his translated Icelandic sagas, GRETTIR'S SAGA (1869). It was deliberately written in romantic rather than realistic language: already Morris was dissatisfied with the limitations of contemporary English. (In the same year, Rossetti retrieved his poems.)

Having accepted whatever personal situation there was, Morris and Rossetti together took a lease on Kelmscott Manor in 1871. In that year, too, Morris left England to voyage to Iceland. Rossetti and Jane were left with the children at Kelmscott.

Morris loved Iceland, more for what it had been than what it was now. The contrast was absolute, between the colourful ancient sagas and the greyness of the modern landscape. Morris' own major tales are set in the vivid and colourful past; the present was cold and austere; a grey future seemed probable.

Morris and Rossetti grew estranged over the next few years, a breach deepened by Rossetti's addiction to laudanum. Rossetti stayed at the Manor much longer than was planned, and even after he left in 1874, Jane visited him until his death on the ninth of April 1882.

Morris' second visit to Iceland in 1873 may have been prompted by a need to escape from an increasingly painful and embarrassing predicament.

Throughout the 1870s he produced a string of translations and poems. At the same time he became interested in the cause of Socialism. He helped to form the Socialist League, and was at one point arrested and

committed for trial after a demonstration. Morris used his public popularity in court in defence of himself and his colleagues. He wrote essays, pamphlets and speeches as well as songs and verse. The Socialist League would disintegrate for various reasons in 1891, and simultaneously Morris' hitherto robust health would collapse. He would never again be fully healthy and would die of a diabetic condition five years later.

His political beliefs were bound up with his art: under the Victorian system, colour and individuality were leeched from life. Now a committed socialist, it bothered Morris that only the well-off could afford the work he produced.

In 1878 he had moved his family to Kelmscott House. As many have said, the book he later wrote, *NEWS FROM NOWHERE*, essentially travels from one Kelmscott to the other.

In 1886 a spurt of fiction writing began that would be slowed, but not stopped, by his illness, and which would occupy the remainder of his life. Some of his more politically committed novels are still acclaimed today by critics: others -- the main subject of this essay -- originated a new genre in fiction: the prose fantasy romance.

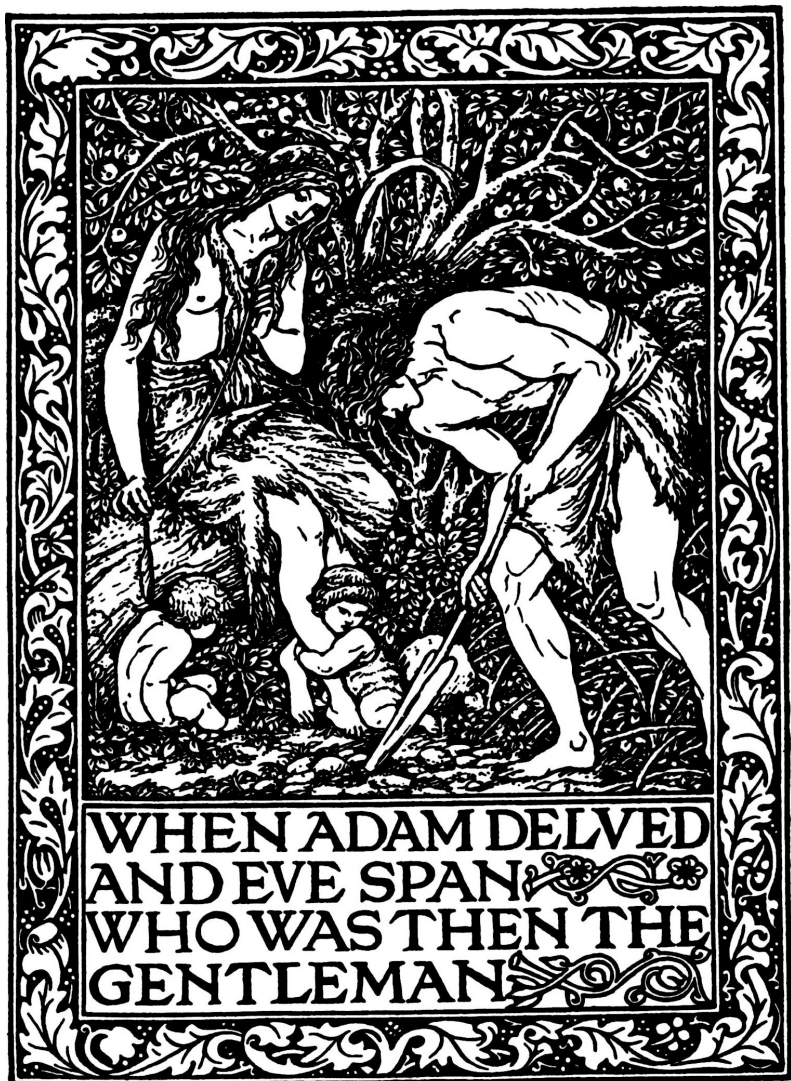
Serialized between November 1886 and January 1887, *A DREAM OF JOHN BALL* was a tale of England's past, the past as Morris imagined it: vibrant, individual, heroic, romantic. Morris knew that feudal times were not like this, but he was an artist, and his tale of the progenitive socialist John Ball is intended to affect as well as to inform the reader.

In the same year as the book of John Ball, Morris published the short story "An Old Story Retold/The King's Lesson", which draws a sharp comparison between nobles and the peasants to whom they feel superior. At the end of this tale, the King and his nobles recognise themselves as the thieves of honest men's labour, with the King the greatest thief of all. If the peasants banded together and swept the nobility away, their lives would be made perfect. Writing as he was during the reign of Queen Victoria, such a judgement of royalty could probably only have been published as fiction. Morris' view of life and people was to grow even more contrary to the prevailing beliefs of his time.

There followed two connected novels, *THE HOUSE OF THE WOLFLINGS* (1888) and *THE ROOTS OF THE MOUNTAINS* (1889), which are basically historical works that gradually admit the existence of a reality beyond the real, presaging the works to come.

Morris' next long work, as Brian Ash (\*3) and others have pointed out, was a direct rebuttal of the famous work *LOOKING BACKWARD 2000-1887* by Edward Bellamy. Morris had been asked to lecture on the book some years before. His subsequent rebuttal, a utopian science fiction dream of the possible future was serialised in 1890, and achieved book form in the same year. The book was *NEWS FROM NOWHERE*. Narrated by 'William Morris', this acclaimed, if didactic, novel is a dream in which the narrator wakes to find himself transported to a communist/communal future in which happiness and sharing abound. The idyllic situation descends to melancholy when 'Morris' learns he cannot fit into the society and is expelled back to his own time.

In the spring of 1890 he wrote a directly fantastic romance: *THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN*. Serialized initially in four parts, it would be the first book printed by another famous Morris creation: The Kelmscott



WHEN ADAM DELVED  
AND EVE SPAN,  
WHO WAS THEN THE  
GENTLEMAN.

Press. Books published by the Kelmscott Press (there were to be 53 titles in 66 volumes in the years 1891 to 1898) have been called the most beautiful books ever printed, and the Kelmscott Chaucer is justly famous.

It was 1891, the Socialist League and Morris' health collapsed. As he was recovering, he wrote, 'in odd moments', his prose romances, as well as translating and printing other romances and works.

William Morris was asked to become Poet Laureate in 1892. He declined; perhaps because, as some have suggested, he knew how little time he had left and preferred to devote the time to his own thoughts and creations. Perhaps ethical or political considerations stopped him.

His health was poor, Jane did not like the friends he had amassed. His daughters, especially May (who in some ways was as artistic as Morris) were supportive, but his life had few comforts in it. In such an atmosphere, the prose fantasy romances were written in the last five years of his life.

A question mark hangs over the exact order of their writing. It is certain he began to write his longest novel in 1892 but whether it was completed by the following year, or whether it took him until 1896 is unclear. Robert Mathews suggests (\*4) that the critical reaction to THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN convinced Morris to delay publication of the longer and more complex work, and publish instead the seemingly simple novel, THE WOOD BEYOND THE WORLD. WOOD was published on 11th May 1895, and in September OF CHILD CHRISTOPHER AND FAIR GOLDILIND was published in two volumes.

In the summer of 1896 Morris undertook a sea voyage to Norway.

On the 3rd of October 1896 William Morris died at the age of 63.

From his deathbed he had been dictating the final, and most directly symbolic, of his prose romances: (THE STORY OF) THE SUNDERING FLOOD. He finished it only days before his death.

His massive epic, THE WELL AT THE WORLD'S END, begun in 1892, finally appeared in 1896. In 1897, the eerie THE WATERS OF THE WONDEROUS ISLES was published, and in 1898 came THE SUNDERING FLOOD.

Years after his death, his daughter May edited and published THE COLLECTED WORKS OF WILLIAM MORRIS. They took five years (1910-1915) to publish and ran to 24 volumes.

William Morris, entering the last years of his life, began to produce a series of original novels at an astounding rate. Although constantly ill and finally dying, he attempted with his remaining strength to get just one more of those novels written before his death. The novels were important to him. The question is why?

### **Why Did Morris Write Fantasy?**

The major part of Morris' fiction is fantasy. From the first short stories until almost the day he died, Morris deliberately avoided realistic dramas. The prose romances of his final years are the culmination of his interest in the strange, the more than real.

E.P.Thompson asked bluntly (\*5) what many admirers of Morris asked about the seemingly lightweight fantasies: had Morris gone soft in the head? The answer, Thompson replies, is "no", and he endeavoured to explain why.

For Richard Mathews, Morris' reasons for writing fantasy could be encapsulated in one sentence: Morris used the form to avoid merely repeating or imitating real scenes, determined to use his verbal talent to create a new form of fiction (\*6) .

This point had been made clear by Morris himself in several places:

"...I suppose, indeed, that nobody will be inclined to deny that the end proposed by a work of art is always to please the person whose senses are to be made conscious of it. It was done for someone who was to be made happier by it; his idle or restful mood was to be amused by it, so that the vacancy which is the besetting evil of that mood might give place to pleasant contemplation, dreaming, or what you will; and by this means he would not so soon be driven into his workful or energetic mood; he would have more enjoyment, and better."  
- from an article (\*7)

E.P.Thompson would say (\*8) that the motive behind the later romances was "pure self-indulgence in pleasurable reverie or dream"... "in which neither Morris' intellect nor his deeper feelings are engaged" -- which seems to be a misinterpretation of Morris' own words. The important phrase, to my mind, is not 'pleasant contemplation' but 'a work of art'.

In a lecture, Morris said:

"...if anyone is really moved by the spirit to treat modern subjects, let him do so...but...I don't think he has a right...to lay any blame on his brother artist who turns back again to the life of past times; or who, shall we rather say, since his imagination must have some garb or another, naturally takes the raiment of some period in which the surroundings of life were not ugly but beautiful..." (\*9)

Other voices would argue this point, inside his fiction:

"It is true that in the nineteenth century, when there was so little art and so much talk about it, there was a theory that art and imaginative literature ought to deal with contemporary life; but they never did so; for, if there was any pretence of it, the author always took care...to disguise, or exaggerate, or idealise, and in some way or another may make it strange...It is the childlike part of us that produces works of imagination." (\*10)

Morris intended that his writings, fiction and non-fiction, should affect his readers. He used the unreal, the more than real, to show other ways of living -- exemplifying more colourful landscapes and possibilities to that general reader in the middle-class Victorian home, amidst the dark satanic mills grinding out mass-produced goods along with conformist behaviour.

Morris also believed that modern English was a debasement of the language in past centuries when, it seemed, everyone was capable of poetry. The romances are the reinstatement, the restatement, of that artistic language.

Thus, there are various explanations as to why he wrote fantasy: they may be artistry, or a revolt against Victorian literature and its style.

Perhaps, some say, they were written as a personal catharsis; certainly the opening chapter of THE WOOD BEYOND THE WORLD and various other pieces seem directly analogous to his tragic personal life. In short, they may have been written as a form of escape. Still other critics have suggested that the romances are dramatised attacks on Victorian politics, or Victorian morality.

I think that G.D.H.Cole came closest to Morris' real purpose when he wrote the introduction to a collection of Morris' writings (\*11). To lead into this explanation, I shall quote Morris. In the 'Apology', the preface to his melancholic long poem THE EARTHLY PARADISE, Morris had written the famous lines:

"Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time,  
Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?  
Let it suffice me that my murmuring rhyme,  
Beats with light wing against the ivory gate,  
Telling a tale not too importunate  
To those who in the sleepy region stay,  
Lulled by the singer of an empty day."

In his lecture, "How we live and how we might live" (reprinted in his book, SIGNS OF CHANGE), he said:

"...I will now let my claims for decent life stand as I have made them. To sum them up in brief, they are: first, a healthy body; second, an active mind in sympathy with the past, the present and the future; thirdly, occupation fit enough for a healthy body and an active mind; and fourthly, a beautiful world to live in."

Dreamlike tales underlaid with his claims for a decent life -- these are his fantasies, his prose romances.

His entire writing is designed to arouse the reader in different ways. In the essays he showed what was happening now, how it arose, how it might be changed for the better. In his fiction, these changes are complete, and he writes about the resultant worlds.

Although the content of the stories would change down the years, from the sad and bloody short stories to the final romances where opposites are resolved and combined, the intent never faltered.

They are the dreams of an artist, works of art.

**They are attempts by an artist to create works of art, relying only on his own abilities and dreams, ignoring the detailed research of history or even of myth, to create a wholly credible new world based upon romantic ideas.**

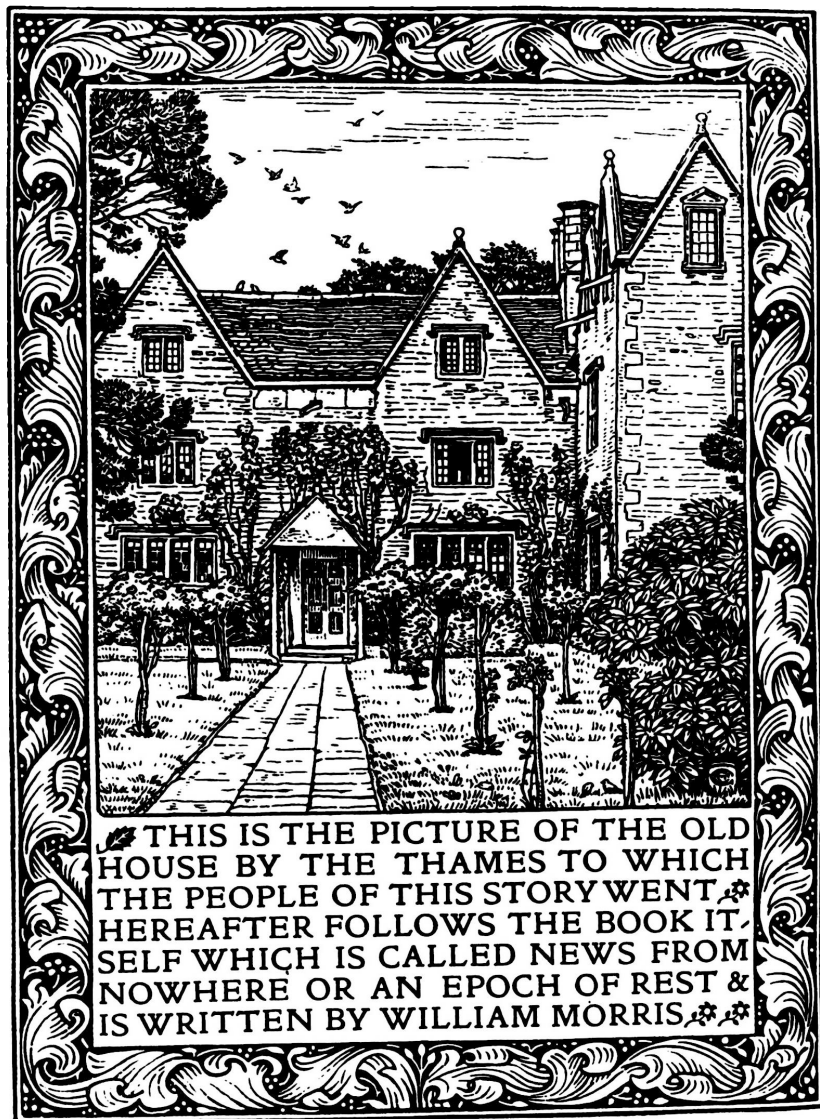
This interpretation illuminates the strangeness of stories such as his short nightmare "The Hollow Land", but in addition, it gives the clearest explanation of his driving need to write those last romances.

In his introduction to WILLIAM MORRIS -- SELECTED WRITINGS (1934), G.D.H.Cole said that Morris needed to transfer the pictures in his mind into objects that other people could see and experience.

Just as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had created bright, detailed paintings which burst with incipient life, so Morris' novels are a series of marvelously drawn paintings.

At any point in his novels, should the action be stopped for a second, the frame seen by the reader contains life ready to fling itself forward





again when the arrested moment is released: the characters, their backgrounds, and their motives are clear to the reader, awaiting only the moving eye.

### **What Was He Really Writing?**

Morris' fiction has been interpreted in several ways.

To some people, there is no doubt they are political lessons. This is obviously true about *A DREAM OF JOHN BALL* and *NEWS FROM NOWHERE*, for example. This belief in an underlying political or social message may be due to a generalised certainty, common until quite recently, that fiction has no purpose unless it imparts a message. With the availability of his more overtly political works and the general scarcity of the prose romances, this interpretation seems to have gained a good deal of credence down the years: Morris' "major" work was political, therefore all of Morris' work must bear traces of polemical thought.

Mathews can affirm (\*12) that they are not directly political allegories (\*13) but he also says that readers should not see them as mere ornamental art, no reader should neglect the political aspects that undoubtedly exist. He cited May Morris' comment that "from now until his strength failed, Art and Socialism cannot be spoken of apart".

It isn't strange to detect elements of political and social thought in the novels: every author writes from what he believes he knows about life. Yet it is significant that E.P. Thompson should chide Morris for **not** concentrating on the possible social themes of *THE ROOTS OF THE MOUNTAINS* while also noting that it is here (in Thompson's opinion) at which Morris' fiction begins to devolve into "wish fulfillment" (\*14).

Should the political aspects of the works be taken as the most important part of the fantasies? Mathews and Thompson have, I would suggest, looked too deep and missed the primary effect the books achieve: Memorable Beauty.

Others say Morris' work bears psychological interpretation. Mathews mentions Max Wickert's assertion that Morris cannot be fully understood without using modern psychological techniques (\*15). Mathews, agreeing with Wickert, makes some astounding analyses of the fantasy works, codifying elements of each book so it can be read almost as a map of Morris' psyche. There are points where Mathews seems to go a little too far (as when he views three characters as forming the secular trinity of the Christian church (\*16)) but for the most part the analyses ring true.

However, such analysis bypasses the issue. It is not enough that the works can be codified to reveal Morris' "real" meaning, because it is already admitted that our theories of psychology were not formulated in Morris' day.

William Morris drew naturally upon his capacity for dream -- his sub-conscious -- so the psychological probing fits the facts but doesn't explain Morris' impetus or intention.

Morris' psyche seems evident in the themes he chose: the reconciliation of sexual opposites, the way in which the divided fantasy world seems to reconcile in parallel with the harmony that grows between hero and heroine. The worlds are substantially altered between the quest's beginning and its end, or perhaps it is only the major characters and our perception of them that changes. Inside the books, few reasons are

advanced for the great changes: perhaps Morris believed that once the central sexual conflict was resolved, the world would and should mirror that resolution.

It seems that when Morris became too ill to rely solely on his creative talent he turned to direct myth-making, and the result, THE SUNDERING FLOOD, is an interesting failure. Though meaningful and culminating some aspects of Morris' work, it is static, almost without life. Morris would probably have revised it if he had lived.

To a lesser extent, this is true of the novel OF CHILD CHRISTOPHER AND FAIR GOLDILIND, which is based on a thirteenth century romance, HAVELOK THE DANE (also part of the inspiration for Shakespear's HAMLET). Though it is an interesting work, and beautifully written, there is little of the colour or singing prose that make his other works incomparable. It is clear that though other works could inspire Morris, he was at his best when he allowed his mind free rein in plot as well as language.

Mathews sees CHILD CHRISTOPHER as a Christianity-based allegory, a conclusion which leads him to interpret perhaps more than the book warrants: for example, he investigates each syllable of the title and the original title page and motifs (\*17).

The people in Morris' fiction are recognisably human, they have faults and virtues, they make mistakes or they have insights that lead towards truth. They argue and reconcile, use words or communicate with silence.

Morris intended to create a feeling of dreamy unreality, but only in setting, not in character.

The language of the characters fits the land they inhabit (this is why it is almost impossible to directly translate his prose into contemporary English -- the conversations, the descriptions, flow into and out of each other seamlessly; they are aspects of the same thing: the scene Morris was painting with words), but their motives and reactions, their difficulties and lessons are real and human.

This solidity of character applied increasingly to women. In the first short stories, women were adornment, something to which his protagonists aspired just before fate cut them down. Important women appear in THE HOUSE OF THE WOLFLINGS, and become central in THE ROOTS OF THE MOUNTAINS, where they give impetus to the plot and shape it by direct action.

Morris had once admired the ethic of the Pre-Raphaelites, in which women were seen as passive and indolently gorgeous. This description is not applicable to the women of the later fantasies who are intelligent (often scheming ruthlessly), determined and physically capable. They are also highly passionate.

With THE WATER OF THE WONDROUS ISLES, the process was complete. Birdalone's book is the life story of a woman from birth: growth, maturation, and acceptance of being a woman, becoming a person.

(It is interesting to wonder how many other writers of Morris' time portrayed women in such a way -- or in how many the favoured term of endearment between a man and woman in love should be 'Friend' or 'Speech Friend'.)

As Richard Mathews demonstrates, the underpinning of the novels is the reconciliation between the sexes, in which each gains or attains some characteristic of the other and thus is made whole.

The prose romances are love stories between equals.

## About The Tales

To some extent, Morris' romances follow a certain pattern: hero and heroine start from home, go through various adventures and experiences, and then return home.

This schematic applies to much fiction because the pattern allows the exploration of character and relationships -- good fantasy is better than most fiction because it concentrates on character stripped of social conventions.

Long before Morris, mystical tales and chansons de geste had used quests, discoveries, strange lands, and strange peoples. The originality brought by Morris was to strip away all reference to 'real' history and all notion of ordained fate: his plots are moved solely by the acts and will of his characters.

E.P.Thompson would misunderstand this in his comment that though THE HOUSE OF THE WOLFLINGS and THE ROOTS OF THE MOUNTAINS are motivated by such actions, the final romances are motivated by "tricks" of magic or sorcerous creatures (\*18). This comment ignores the fact that Morris' characters are part of their landscape, they are not simply people transported from our world to a world of magic, they were born there, they belong. The magic, sorcery and beauty is intrinsic to the landscape and characters. Given this, the narrative flows naturally through characters endowed with, or affected by, magic. Human characters, but not of our world. Morris is perfectly consistent with the possibilities of those other worlds -- the craftsman creating with the artist's eye.

Morris turned from the real world, in which machinery and convention were overtaking sensibility and life, to portray worlds of clear air and water, which are drenched with bursting colourful life. He peopled these worlds with leaders and warlords, robbers and farmers, witches and thralls, heroes and heroines.

The water-coloured worlds are based on the experiences of his lifetime: he knew -- having studied politics, history and craftsmanship, as well as spending his formative years in the countryside of the mid-nineteenth century -- what changes the absence of technology would make.

With each succeeding tale his sureness in character and incident would grow.

The early stories, in THE OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE MAGAZINE, differ in tone and content to the last novels. Their theme is death, and love in death. Several are narrated by the dead -- "The Story Of The Unknown Church" is told by an artist whose self-avowed task is to construct a beautiful tomb for dead lovers, and "Golden Wings" concerns a warrior whose motive-less murders culminate in the most gruesome and graphic murder of all: his own.

Again and again in the stories, lovers are separated by circumstance, finally to meet just as death enters; death as church bells ringing in "A Dream", death as the cessation of movement in "Svend And His Brethren".

Of the other stories collected in GOLDEN WINGS, "Gerda's Lovers" is about two men in love with the same woman, and at its end the loved join the dead. "The Hollow Land" is extraordinarily violent, without motive, and seems to be a dream of love in death and after it. Even the non-fantastic tale, "Frank's Sealed Letter", is about disappointment and betrayal in love which can have only one resolution: death.

These are adolescent daydreams of attraction, love and sacrifice. Morris

And loveth him, the which that right for love  
Upon a crog, our soules for to beye,  
first starf, and roos, and sit in hevne above;  
for he nil falsen no wight, dar I seye,  
That wol his herte al hoolly on him leye.  
And sin he best to love is, and most meke,  
What nedeth feyned loves for to seke?

Lo here, of Payens corsed olde rytes,  
Lo here, what alle hir goddes may availle;  
Lo here, these wrecched worldes appetytes;  
Lo here, the fyn and guerdon for travaille  
Of Jove, Appollo, of Mars of swich rascaille!  
Lo here, the forme of olde clerkes speche  
In poetrye, if ye hir bokes seche.

O moral Gower, this book I directe

To thee, and to the philosophical Strode,  
To vouchen sauf, ther nede is, to corecte,  
Of your benignitees and zeles gode.  
And to that sothfast Crist, that starf on rode,  
With al myn herte of mercy ever I preye;  
And to the Lord right thus I speke and seye:

Thou oon, and two, and three, eterne on lyve,  
That regnest ay in three and two and oon,  
Uncircumscrip, and al mayst circumscryve,  
Us from visible and invisible foon  
Defende; and to thy mercy, everichoon,  
So make us, Jesus, for thy grace digne,  
for love of mayde and moder thyn benigne!  
Amen.  
Explicit Liber Troili et Criseydis.



KELMSCOTT

was probably influenced by the romances he had read (Malory, etc) in which passion must always be repaid with death.

The stories are written in ordinary prose with embellishments of poetry and turns of phrase.

THE HOUSE OF THE WOLFLINGS and THE ROOTS OF THE MOUNTAINS are concerned more with communities than with individuals. Morris said HOUSE was "meant to illustrate the melting of the individual into the society of the tribes". In ROOTS, the blending of two opposed tribes is paralleled by the marriages of individuals from each tribe; originally the plot was designed to kill the Bride character, but Morris altered this and she is united in marriage. E.P.Thompson saw Morris' reasoning as a 'rationalisation' which, along with other compromises, reduces this book and later ones to the level of wishful fantasy. I would suggest it is a natural progression in Morris' thinking. All societies are based on people, and it is the action of individuals which can shape society or history.

(These books show, I think, one way in which Morris could have advanced fantasy even further but did not: the naming of names. Morris used names compounded from the names of objects -- 'Hall-Sun', 'Wood-Sun', 'Face-of-God', 'Sun-Beam', 'Bow-May'. Perhaps the readers of his time would not have accepted the creation of totally original names, or Morris may not have considered it (especially if the names are meant as symbolically as Mathews detects). In the final novels, for the most part, these invented names would yield to prosaic ones; thus, a Ralph and Ursula would seek THE WELL AT THE WORLD'S END, and Arthur would meet Birdalone in THE WATERS OF THE WONDROUS ISLES.)

Morris' next book, NEWS FROM NOWHERE, is inventive and fantastic but not really part of his prose fantasy works. A lesson in social engineering, an admitted dream of both the author and the book's narrator.

THE GLITTERING PLAIN is a rambling, discursive and tricky book. It is set in a land of confederated tribes, without a king, where nothing is what it seems. Activated by dreams, it is sustained by lies. Its central theme is of immortality offered but denied because of love. The book appeals more to emotion than to logic, though its dreamy plot does make sense. The heroine is kidnapped because the Undying King desires her. People lie to the pursuing hero because they fear the King's power. (There seems to be a vein of humour at the basis of the book. The heroine is called The Hostage, and she is imprisoned on the Isle Of Ransom, so the solution to her disappearance is always before the hero's eyes yet he ignores it.)

THE WELL AT THE WORLD'S END. Morris' longest and most complex book, took at least two years, and perhaps four years, to write.

Once more the central concept is the search for immortality -- or an unguessably long life, which amounts to the same thing. Seemingly a selfish motive, Richard Mathews points out that the searchers, having to educate and prove themselves in many ways before they can find the well, will contribute to society because of their long life (\*19).

The narrative focuses on Ralph, one of four sons of a king. The story begins with Ralph's deceit. He draws lots with his brothers on who should stay behind in the kingdom. Though Ralph loses, he steals away in the night. There now begins a journey of redemption that will reach one



climax at the Well, fulfillment in the wilderness, and at the end, a return. It is Ralph's quest for love and maturity, acceptance and understanding.

Elements of the book are probably symbolic -- the Lady and the House of Abundance; the deadly and false pool which in its poisonous stillness recalls Morris' early short story "Lindenberg Pool"; the Innocent Folk -- but Ralph's quest, growth and relationships are realistically depicted. He makes mistakes, loses those he loves, overcomes the barriers set against him, finally to emerge, confirmed in his love, as a whole human being.

This wholeness is in partnership with the heroine, Ursula. Her own tale is also one of growth, though the reader is told little beyond what she imparts to Ralph. She is, at the beginning, more committed to the quest than Ralph (and they part for that reason) she and Ralph have to discover a new way of responding to people before they can return.

The next novel, THE WOOD BEYOND THE WORLD, begins with a sordid and painful marriage depicted in such beautiful language that its agony only becomes clear when the hero takes action. In earlier romances and myths, such pained marriages had been seen as high drama or just ignored; this marriage is simply bitter and real, a disquieting opening for the tale that follows.

Again the plot moves by dreams, by deceit and by compromise. Loyalty is a matter of faith (though the loyallest of all is the most hideous of killers), and morality is a matter of circumstance. Although the book is slim, and perhaps also contains Morris' brightest vision, it is steeped in dark betrayal.

The key to the book is faithlessness, and one lesson the hero learns is that there are times when powerful evil can only be overcome by immoral methods, the illusion of faith.

This time, the hero and heroine do not return to their homes, not ever.

OF CHILD CHRISTOPHER AND FAIR GOLDILIND follows the plot of its thirteenth century original, though Morris ties his characters more closely to the landscape.

These landscapes of Morris, the woods and wells, mountains and shores that recur through his work, are important keys to the man. Cities exist, but it is only outside cities that a man or woman comes to know theirselves. In direct contact with nature and subject to nature's, rather than man's, laws the inner self becomes clear.

Richard Mathews sees the quest for water as the hero's search for the feminine aspects of his psyche. Since water is equivalent to femininity, the drinking of the water becomes the completion of the process: androgynous or even hermaphroditic, a whole person results. For Morris' women, this reconciliation of sexual polarities in the psyche is achieved by donning male clothing and behaviour; several of the heroines are mistaken for men as they pursue their destiny.

His next book, the densest he wrote, combines these elements. Even the title is evocative: THE WATERS OF THE WONDEROUS ISLES. The central character in this 150,000 word novel is a woman, Birdalone. Kidnapped and enslaved by a witch in her childhood, her subsequent escape and travails in the outside world can be seen as the maturing of a woman.

To Richard Mathews, her escape is overtly symbolically: the boat that can transport her from her prison island is controlled only by the passenger 'giving blood': that is, by symbolically becoming a woman.

That blood is important as a symbol is shown by the book's strange ending.

Birdalone is determined, capable, self-willed, passionate and forgiving.

Mathews says the novel is obviously about women's liberation (\*20). In Morris' time such a view of women was atypical; Morris had not only transcended the Pre-Raphaelite view of women, he had also gone outside his own society's view.

The novel abounds with directly symbolic places -- the Isle of the Young and the Isle of the Old, the Isles of Kings and Queens (sterile sexuality) -- but they are almost incidental. The novel is complex and unpredictable in plot and relationships, packed with a tension that is sustained until the final resolution (this time, not complete for everyone).

I have never been able to finish THE WATERS OF THE WONDRIOUS ISLES without a strange sense of absolute inner peace, yet the ending is more equivocal than any other work: perfect harmony does not exist, though perfect acceptance does.

Morris dictated a great deal of the final novel on his death bed, completing the draft only a few days before his death. Richard Mathews says that THE SUNDERING FLOOD in the crystallisation of the thematic conclusions of his major fiction (\*21). Yet for me, it is perhaps too crystal clear, too conclusive; it seems too carefully planned, as if Morris was engaged in deliberately creating a new myth by neglecting a full exploration of character.

The schism at the book's centre -- the Sundering Flood -- is echoed and paralleled in the separation of peoples, of individuals, of the sexes. For Morris, that schism had to be breached, yet in FLOOD's case this drive towards harmony doesn't convince, the book is too simplistic.

Where **would** Morris have gone next? The twentieth century was almost upon his world, industrialisation had never slowed, the countryside was vanishing beneath infernal mills and roads and increasingly ugly housing estates. There was no great social revolution until war decimated the population. His last few years had been embittered by his wife's attitude to his friends, and the collapse of the League and his health.

What **would** he have done next?

I think that THE WATERS OF THE WONDRIOUS ISLES hints at what he was beginning to attempt, but perhaps he would have left even fiction behind within another book or two.

I have not quoted directly from the tales. It is as difficult to example them by one passage as it is to choose one detail from a painting and from that detail give an impression of the whole work. The detail I chose would probably not be the detail you chose, because, like paintings, the book affects you and I in different ways.

His stories range from gorgeous descriptions of landscape and the changing seasons, to the intimacy of conversation and inner thought. He flowed from point to point, creating a total reality by using language in a way few people have managed.

A passage taken from THE WOOD BEYOND THE WORLD:

"He spake not, and she was a little while before she came to herself again; then she opened her eyes, and looked upon Walter and smiled kindly on him, as though to ask his pardon for having scared him.

THE Hous of fAME & LIBER TERCIVS.



Incipit Liber Tercius. Invocation.



**G**OD OF SCIENCE AND OF LIGHT,  
Apollo, through thy grete might,  
This litel laste book thou gye!  
Nat that I wille, for maistrye,  
Here art poetical be shewed;  
But, for the rym is light and lewed,  
Yit make hit sumwhat agreable,  
Though som vera faile in a sillable:

And that I do no diligence  
To shewe craft, but o sentence.  
And if, divyne vertu, thou  
Wilt helpe me to shewe now  
That in myn hede ymarked is,  
Lo, that is for to menen this,  
The hous of fame to descryve,  
Thou shalt see me go, as blyve,  
Unto the nexte laure I see,  
And kisse hit, for hit is thy tree;  
Now entreth in my breste anon!...  
The Dream.

**W**HAN I was fro this egre goon,  
I gan beholde upon this place.  
And certein, or I ferther pacc,  
I wol yow al the shap devyse  
Of hous and site; and at the  
wyse

How I gan to this place aproche  
That stood upon so high a roche,  
Hyer stant ther noon in Spaine.  
But up I clomb with alle paine,  
And though to climbe hit greved me,  
Yit I ententif was to see,  
And for to pouren wonder lowe,  
If I coude any weyes knowe  
What maner stoon this roche was:

Then she rose up in her place, and stood before him; and they were nigh together, for the stream betwixt them was little..."

This is the smallest of incidents, a brief moment in the meeting between Walter and the Maid. There is no mention of the season or circumstance or the relationship between them: it is an example of style but not an example of content.

How much is one author influenced by another?

C.S.Lewis said how much he adored the works of William Morris (in his memoir *SURPRISED BY JOY*) and later wrote *THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA* set in a landscape of magic, symbolism and religious thought. These works are not directly comparable to Morris, though elements are held in common.

J.R.R.Tolkien acknowledged his debt to William Morris, even claiming that *THE HOUSE OF THE WOLFLINGS* greatly influenced his trilogy *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*. It seems more probable that the influence was from *THE WELL AT THE WORLD'S END*, but this does show the problem of determining influence.

Some people -- most especially Lin Carter in his fine studies of the fantasy field -- have shown how influence proliferates. One author may be inspired by another, yet never know that author is emulating the work of a third author. Or an author can admire another's work but any resultant influence is almost undetectable until it is acknowledged.

One question is, was Morris himself influenced in his fantasies? He had read the sagas and the romances such as *MORTE D'ARTHUR*, and probably others in the well-stocked libraries of Oxford or his own home. He knew the writer Ruskin, he was acquainted with George MacDonald who wrote a series of juvenile fantasies as well as stranger books such as *LILITH* and *PHANTASTES*. At the time, translated fairy tales were common, Perrault, the Brothers Grimm and others.

After Morris, fantasy began to cascade down the years. Dunsany, Eddison, Tolkien, Lewis, etc. It is certain that nobody ever copied Morris, though many seem to have abstracted elements to their own work -- Tolkien and Eddison with language, for example. Some created worlds that exemplified political or social or religious beliefs they held or were exploring, others emphasised character above such details. Few writers have managed to combine poetry with insight, or to leaven concern with humour.

Are all tales set in a medieval landscape attributable to a reading of Morris? Until quite recently, Morris' fantasies were hard to acquire even when their existence was known. Probably the influence on authors down the decades has become less and less easy to unravel or quantify.

Morris wrote of people in fantastic worldsapes where magic was possible, though not always sought.

The cumulative effect of his books is to make the reader retain pleasure in the nostalgic memory of a world they never inhabited -- a world which only existed in another man's mind, yet which he was artist enough to make real for them. This memory of a vanished beauty and peace exists in the works of Jack Finney and Richard Wilson. His reverence for the land and bucolic life is part of the work of Clifford D. Simak. His expansive worldsapes lead to Tolkien and McKillip and Moorcock.

At the fount of true fantasy, the well beyond the world from which our modern genre flows, stands William Morris. From him the genre flows down

different streams, and authors dip water from the streams to nurture another book or series of books.

E.P.Thompson knew, if only for a moment, what the fantasies were about:

"Where, in THE EARTHLY PARADISE, pleasure had always seemed an uneasy dream on the edge of a bitter reality, we are (in the prose romances) always on the edge of awakening to the freshness and fulfillment of life... This freshness, this sense of growth in the June English countryside, of the continuity of life, is the reality beneath the romance. This is the Morris whom Yeats knew and described as 'the Happiest of Poets' ..." (\*22)

Freshness, growth, awakening, fulfilment.

"Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time,  
Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?  
Let it suffice me..."

\*\*\*    \*\*\*    \*\*\*    \*\*\*    \*\*\*    \*\*\*    \*\*\*    \*\*\*    \*\*\*    \*\*\*    \*\*\*

## Notes and References

\*1: Morris found writing poetry was so easy he 'on occasion (wrote) upward of 700 lines in a night'. (E.P.Thompson's WILLIAM MORRIS: ROMANTIC TO REVOLUTIONARY, 1955). \*2: James Redmond, in the notes to NEWS FROM NOWHERE (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970) points out that the contrast between the 'respectable commercial marriage bed' and 'natural and healthy love' is part of the charter of the Socialist League, a charter Morris proposed for adoption in 1855, which is dependent upon sexual freedom. A letter to Charles Faulkner in 1886 (quoted in E.P.Thompson, page 819) advocated open marriage where friendship is coupled with desire but where partners should be free to look elsewhere if the marriage became distasteful. \*3: Brian Ash, FACES OF THE FUTURE, 1975, page 100. \*4: Richard Mathews, WORLDS BEYOND THE WORLD: THE FANTASTIC VISION OF WILLIAM MORRIS, 1978, page 43. \*5: E.P.Thompson, page 787. \*6: R. Mathews, page 61. \*7: 'The Aims of Art', included in SIGNS OF CHANGE. \*8: E.P.Thompson, page 785. \*9: Quoted in E.P.Thompson, from a lecture defending the Pre-Raphaelites. \*10: NEWS FROM NOWHERE. \*11: WILLIAM MORRIS: SELECTED WRITINGS, edited by G.D.H.Cole, 1934. \*12: R.Mathews, page 22. \*13: When one critic detected a socialist allegory in THE WOOD BEYOND THE WORLD, Morris replied "it is meant for a tale pure and simple, with nothing didactic about it". \*14: E.P.Thompson, page 785. \*15: R.Mathews, page 33. \*16: R.Mathews, page 38. \*17: R.Mathews, page 50. \*18: E.P.Thompson, page 785. \*19: R.Mathews, page 42. \*20: R.Mathews, page 51. \*21: R.Mathews, page 57. \*22: E.P.Thompson, page 788.

## Illustrations

All illustrations in CS11 emanate in some form from the mind of William Morris. Cover, pages 2,3,15 and 19 are from the Kelmscott Chaucer, with borders by Morris, and illustrations by E.Burne-Jones, all being cut onto woodblocks by Walter Hooper. Page 7 is the frontispiece to A DREAM OF JOHN BALL, borders by Morris, illustration by Burne-Jones. Page 11 is the frontispiece to NEWS FROM NOWHERE, by the Morris and Burne-Jones partnership again.

For the completists, cover title and headings this time are in American Uncial, courtesy of Mecanorma, while Margarita's typeface is Bookman Academic in the Morris article, and Prestige Pica in the Loccol.

# Ripples

Well, Christmas is past, and I'm in the last knockings of 1985, so it's about time I got down to the loccol. Lot's to get in, so I'll plunge straight in with:

**Mark Greener** ...I must admit to being rather concerned that the amalgamation of RASTUS and CS would be to the detriment of both. However, if you can maintain the standard set by CS10, CS will go from strength to strength. ...You have struck the right balance between the informality of RASTUS and the dignity of CS. However, I hope the quality of CS will not falter due to the increased frequency ...I'm sure your editorial discretion will prevail.

Skel's article was illuminating, to say the least. My basic fannish currency has always been the LoC -- I've not (until recently) had the time or money to 'publish my ish'. However, this will soon change...it really deflates your ego to realise a large number of your LoCs are awful (as judged by the number of WAHFs!). ...Skel's article was very well written. I've not come across much by him in the past, but on the evidence of "LoC On Tommy", it confirms your view that he's one of the best fanwriters.

I know how you feel about speaking in public. Even when I have to present a talk at work (I work in research) my fear is augmented by the fact that someone might have come across an obscure paper which undermines my work and completely disproves my conclusions, and weeks of work come falling down like a house of cards.

...Jan 54's article was perhaps the best thing you've ever published and it deserves a much wider audience. Perhaps even professional

publication. It hit me with the force of a sledgehammer. Excellent. What is often forgotten is that all that separates the disturbed from the 'normal' is the degree of control that the conscious exerts. Neuroleptics flatten emotions by generally depressing the brain. This leads to horrific side effects. The problem with emotional disturbances is one of perception. They perceive the emotional stimulus of an event differently, and this gives rise to uncontrolled emotions. What separates the disturbed from the normal is merely a question of degree underlined by a chemical imbalance. Any one of us can fall prey to those imbalances.

Much of literature can be interpreted by almost anyone according to his prejudices. The censorship of Pooh Bear, Biggles, Just William et al has been carried out with varying degrees of justification. However, I'm sure it's possible to find examples of prejudice in any writer. An example would be Orwell's preoccupation with the smell of the poor, in spite of his championing of the 'working class'. This has, of course, been pounced on by various critics. The most important factor in determining the intention of the writer is to examine his underlying prejudices. However, I suspect the NF is too myopic to see this. Wagner is the perfect example of someone whose prejudices were all wrong. Mind you, he produced some excellent music... You can read into literature what ever you like, and it can, if you ignore the philosophical underpinnings, be used to justify almost any political system.

\*\*\*

I had some other strong comments on the NF piece, notably from:

**Mary Gentle** ...'NF intellectual' is a contradiction in terms (old joke): I liked the piece on the appropriation of Tolkien. ...Was a little worried that you said anyone reading Tolkien's **letters** would know he wasn't a racist -- most of



the people who read LOTR won't read the letters, we have to judge by what's on the page of that book, not any other. But you later account for the inherent racism in the novel itself, so okay. I think you **can** blame Tolkien for being lazy and incorporating all the racist (and sexist) features of the West into Middle Earth. You can always blame people for being lazy. ((I have long wished to do the story of certain parts of LOTR from the point of view of the **Orcs**, they had a pretty rough deal...)) And thinking of Orcs brings me back to the National Front, and why -- apart from their natural instinct for colonisation -- are they trying to colonise LORD OF THE RINGS? Like you say, it's a legitimate device. LOTR is part of the popular culture, so... And who says they **have** stopped there? You can't tell how people are reading SF and fantasy 'dreamworlds', most of which are conscious or unconscious power fantasies; the unconscious ones being the more dangerous. The only other point is, is it wise to take for granted the stereotype about National Front members being illiterate thugs? I'm not able to say whether they are or aren't, I don't know any. But I do note that, historically, leaders of fascists have not been noticeably illiterate, have been pretty smart at grabbing whatever they need for their propaganda -- and whoever controls the content of propaganda stands a good chance of control, plain and simple. And I **refuse**, positively, to remark 'today Middle Earth, tomorrow the world'.

The piece on the Samaritans -- I have an odd urge to ask whether this is fiction. I don't quite know why I think it should be. It sounds very like what people I know who have been Samaritans have told me, BUT... The piece does get across the draining effect of trying to help other people's problems; a lot of whom will be people who can't be helped (if only because prevention **is** better than cure; what use, after all, is bandage to people who need major surgery?). But it seems

a bit too much like a plea for sympathy. I think long exposure to other people's troubles doesn't bring on attacks of guilt, what it does is make you hard -- obviously a subjective judgement, but that's the way it is with me. You go **into** that sort of work out of guilt or your own personal problems; and maybe for that reason come out of it with the conviction that the first person you have to help, since the world is the way it is, is you. In the end, of course, the reasons of the helper don't matter -- they don't matter to the person being helped. In a strange way, that's reassuring.

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

Jan 54's piece provoked quite a strong and sympathetic reaction from many readers, like:

**Mic Rogers** I have often wondered what it would be like to be a part of the Samaritans: "Jan 54" answered a part of that. Indeed, that aspect is partly what has stopped me from offering my services. I don't think I could cope with the "failures" -- or with the smelly dossers. I work at a psychiatric hospital in a therapy department of the rehabilitation centre, so I tend to meet only the more able patients. I could **not** work on the Wards (assuming I had the training). I could not achieve the objectivity needed to stay reasonably sane oneself. In the same way I could never train as a nurse. I'm just not made that way. Much as I like the human race as a whole (accepting the aberrations that occur -- as they do in any family) I could not cope with the individual suffering I would encounter.

I therefore have enormous admiration for the writer of "Jan 54", and can appreciate his/her suffering. I hope s/he feels better for having written about it, and made it an easier load to bear. But I doubt it. There are some things you have to live with, however much you wish you could forget them. I

would say: "concentrate on the successes you **did** have; the people you **did** help" but I'm not sure it would be of much assistance. It's so easy to say afterwards "If I'd done this..." or "if I'd said that..." You didn't; you just did the best you could in that particular situation. All life has its moments of error. You just **have** to learn to live with it. You'll never forget or cease to regret: accept that. That is probably what made you a good Samaritan. I'm sorry I can't really help you, but I **do** understand and sympathise.

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

**Alan Sullivan** ...'Can Anyone Help Me?' This issue you seem to be touching on a lot of things I've experience of: in this case from the distressed depressive's end, way back, when I was out of work and well down -- before I discovered fandom, even. It's a wonderful and terrible job the Samaritans do -- at the risk of sounding flip-pant, it's enough to drive them to suicide. Like you say, you need to be able to detach, or you've had it. Perhaps that ability is what keeps them from suicide. It even reminds me of the way a conversation goes with a Samaritan. Short sentences. Long, drawn-out bursts. A flow that's almost free-associative... Moving stuff indeed -- sent a shiver or two along my spine.

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

**Terry Broome** 'Can Anyone Help Me?' -- Oh dear God, someone who gets as depressed as I do!! I can only say the obvious -- that writing about it helps, that even though I understand, I haven't yet found any answers -- at least, any answers that would also be applicable to him. I can think of a few obvious exceptions. He has a wife, and he has a small group of friends (fandom and otherwise) that he can talk to and gain comfort from. He could try to see if he can trace the causes of his depression, as I do -- I find it helps, but whether

he will is another matter. There are social groups he could attend where personal problems are batted about, or he could create some self-motivation, like setting up, or joining an SF group or an APA. Conventions I found .. well, I found that NOVACON re-asserted what life really meant to me, it was very warm and friendly, and I went away feeling as if I'd lived for the first time in my entire life, really **lived**, and that really boosted me up! But these are obvious and they may not work. This is what's helped **me** and they may not help the author of this piece. No one can fill this great big hole he has, but they can help him to fill it himself. This all sounds ridiculous -- and I apologise for it -- but I don't know the words, only the feeling.

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

**Ian Covell** ...There is no answer to JAN 54 that he/she hasn't heard a thousand times in a thousand ways: you can't feel for everybody on the planet, though you can try; self-destruction is a decades-long process, and mere hours don't suffice, I wish they could. I could never never help out at the Samaritans; it was bad enough just running a Community Centre. This world is full of trivial horror that kills.

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

**Dorothy Davies** ...I helped form a Samaritans branch, and did my share of duties. The empathy was such that I ended up being a client and not a Samaritan. The sheer weight of human misery was overwhelming. Can I help you? No, not really. It is something we all have to work through, those who have been in contact with the base line of human suffering. It isn't easy, Jan. It isn't easy.

...And I wonder, as a passing thought, looking at your 'Strange Days' item, if the NF isn't out to attract some more intellectuals to offset the bully boy image they

present at the moment. Presentation is everything right now, the new buzz word for the politicians from all corners of the world to throw about. The NF are suffering serious presentation problems, but as the idea of recruiting a well known writer to put your case has already been used, they are jumping on the bandwagon of a famous but deceased writer instead. A mere thought, for who can understand the workings of an NF mind?

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

**Judith Buffery** "Jan 54"'s piece was most moving and poignant, but I felt sorry that he/she considered themselves a failure. People who really want to commit suicide will always do so, but it's still a difficult step to take and I am certain that "Jan 54"'s council helped many of them to leave this world in a more peaceful frame of mind. In my own personal opinion people have a prerogative to take their own life if they wish. And they should be allowed to do so with dignity. After all, we have no say in being brought into this world; it seems only right that we should be allowed to leave when we wish. More primitive peoples (and animals) sometimes have the knack of giving up life when things finally become too much for them. We have apparently lost this skill, so a little help is needed. I have, a long time ago, had a very small taste of geriatric nursing, and it left me with a very firm conviction that this pathetic prolonging of useless and infirm life was not the way human beings should end their days.

I too am a Tolkien fan, but I have also been struck by his apparent racism, although, like you, I put this down to the normal climate of opinion at the time when he was working. Also I think it may have something to do with his research material. In many old stories demons and the devil are often described as "black".

Two other aspects of his work I found even more disturbing. One was

the rather Luddite attitude towards machinery and the industrial revolution. He spent his most formative years in this area where I now live, and in those days it was still largely rural. But the City of Birmingham was at the height of its wealth and was expanding rapidly. The old water mill was converted to steam (this was to become the model for Ted Sandeman's mill) and new houses were being built on the farm land. The Professor would, I am sure, have been delighted to know that twenty years ago the Council decided to restore the old mill, which had become derelict, and they restored it as a water mill, in working order. The ducks were back on the old mill pond as soon as it had been dug out again and the place is now a museum.

The other disturbing aspect of Tolkien's work was his attitude to class. I have always had a sneaking sympathy for the Orcs who speak invariably with working-class accents and generally have a pretty rotten time. The Elves, on the other hand, are the most frightfully stuck-up snobs. Perhaps Tolkien is not so much racist as orcist!

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

**Pamela Boal** ... "Can Anyone Help Me?" may have been a first draft but if it was any lack of polish did not show; it is a powerful and moving piece of writing. The writer's problem so entered my heart that I felt quite desperate at being unable to offer any helpful suggestions... The human psyche can only tolerate so much pain, be it of self or others; a person either collapses under it or withdraws. The withdrawal is some times involuntary and exhibited as a mental illness. There also comes a time when giving in one area involves too much taking from another; the writer realised he was taking too much from his wife and friends as well as having to withdraw for the sake of his own mental and physical health. I have observed that those most able to

accept without judgement. The frailties of others are often unable to accept their own weaknesses, and judge themselves harshly. I do hope the writer has learned to forgive himself for being human, and has accepted that he too has a breaking point that he was wise to withdraw from. I do believe that of anyone called out to him when he was not there, if the caller was capable of accepting help they would have turned elsewhere and found it; if the caller had gone beyond help, the writer's being there would not have affected his or her actions.

Skel provides an excellent appraisal of the function of a LoC. While I found the introduction (especially the labour/barter system) smile worthy, it was perhaps a little superfluous and made the article somewhat overlengthy. As ever, I'm disappointed that Skel has been unable to come up with a wider range of adjectives, and that so few of his analogies are other than sexual/scatological. Without that tendency the likening of writing to taking his trousers down in public would have been far more telling. While Skel covers virtually every aspect of a LoC and his guide to the criteria we LoCcers should aspire to fulfill, he forgets one problem: fashion and type casting. I suspect in one person's case concise praise is ignored by Editors where as every bit of verbose adverse criticism is published. I am at times obliged to write a thank you letter explaining that I am unable to LoC, but when I do LoC I do try to comment on all the contents, but having been type cast I can expect my comments on, for example, amateur dramatics, to be ignored but social comment, especially pertaining to disability, to be printed. While the latter may be my main area of work it is far from being my only interest, knowledge and experience.

As for commenting on the literary style of a contributor rather than the contents of his or her article, no matter how constructive one

might try to be, such efforts are usually met with a storm of protest of the nature "I write as I feel", "it is only a hobby" and "if you have any pretensions of being a literary critic, why don't you turn professional?"

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

Seeing as how Pam has changed the topic to Skel's epic piece on LoCs, we'll stay with the subject.

**Iain Byers** ...I have to say that printing Skel's "LoC on Tommy", and at the beginning of the zine at that, may turn out to be somewhat counter-productive. I have never felt quite so self-conscious writing a LoC. If I fail to mention somebody's contribution then I'm responsible for that person questioning his/her own reality, but if I mention everything then I can only make comments that consist of positive or negative egoboo. What I have to do is mention everything and everybody, including the artists, but makes my comments content-full. I should respond to the previous locs as well, them being the currency of fandom. If I do it right I end up with a loc full of deep, pertinent, meaningful and, ideally, positive comment, approximately as long as the zine itself, but in any case so long that it will, of necessity, be WAHFed. Having said all that, now I have to supply Skel with comments pregnant with content and followed by the breaking of the waters with positive egoboo.

Despite all that, I actually found Skel's article quite interesting, though I would have thought that it was a very unfannish thing to do, writing about something in fandom in such a serious way, for while the thing itself was laced with humour to sweeten and preceded by a humorous account of 'Eofandom', it was still essentially serious. I was struck by the image in the opening of a fanzine race, surely deliberate. Fanzines are like Multiple Independently targetable Re-entry Vehicles, I suppose. (Skel

take note, that was a comment on the 'how'). Couple that idea with his analogy of locs as currency and one gets the metaphor of the military-industry complex, the frittering away of vast sums of locs on fanzines that will never be read. Really, Skel, this is quite brilliant. This isn't an article about fandom or locs at all, it's about the arms race, a cunningly described CND article, to get it past Michael J. King.

But has Skel said anything unknown about loccing, anything new? I doubt it. Why else would I end up making ridiculous analogies to the arms race? And if loccing gets you the next issue, and, if the ed is friendly, the one after that, then why didn't I get any further SMALL FRIENDLY DOGS after he sent me one with a note asking me how come I was on his mailing list? I locced the first one, which I thought was great, but the one after only mildly interested me. The earth didn't move, and I refuse to fake it. No loc, no more SMALL FRIENDLY DOGS. I know I'm a little wary of dogs -- small, friendly or otherwise -- but I ain't phobic about it.

...Never having read Tolkien, and with no inclination to ever do so, I can't really comment on the 'facts' of the case. But then the great thing about literature, and art in general, is that it is something open to interpretation, with the emphasis on the 'in-'. I think it is often a mistake (to think) that meaning is something that rests within, and that a work of creation therefore has a meaning when the truth is that meaning exists only within individuals. All things, it seems to me, are intrinsically meaningless, unless one regards the intrinsicness as referring to the human being (or other intelligent lifeform) that is perceiving the thing in question. Life does not have a meaning, except for that which is imposed, projected or attributed to it by the individual, therefore it has an infinitude of meanings and at the same time none. If the NF see

Tolkien's writings, or those of anybody else for that matter, as supporting an ethnocentric view, then provided they do so sincerely it is in a certain sense true. In the limited sense that truth is what someone believes.

...Possibly one of the most interesting thoughts about the NF latching onto Tolkien is that this is an author whose books have sold by the millions and, I suspect, to the very people who would no doubt be horrified at the merest suggestion of racism; lefties, liberals, Greenpeace people, Friends of the Earth, CND supporters, social workers, hippies, young, socially aware people. In fact all kinds of people who probably consider themselves progressive. People who believe in conservation, oppose atomic power, et cetera. Though I have not read any Tolkien I can count myself as having some sympathy of view with not a few of the above groups. I reckon that the same people who oppose golliwogs on jam jars, and Enid Blyton, and sexist toys, and all that kind of thing, also read Tolkien, and I can't help wondering just how they would feel about being revealed as subconsciously racist. Indeed, it's mind-boggling to think that the NF would actually want to lay claim to an author who is surely beloved by the very people the NF despise. I can't help wondering about the idea that someone in the NF actually reads Tolkien, or reads at all come to that. It just goes to prove that people don't read books so much as they read into them. Reading, it seems, is as creative as writing.

Skel's urgings aside, I find that I can't finish without commenting on 'Jan 54', even though my comments will be little more than positive egoboo. I was quite fascinated by this piece, yet I wasn't sure if it was fact or fiction, and there is no mention of who had written it. The existence of the Samaritans intrigues me, an organisation which seems to have very genuine and all-encompassing aims which I can't entirely reconcile with the world as I see it, and yet they are aims

which seem to me doomed to failure, just as the article suggests. The people who need it really require something intensely personal and a stranger is surely by definition incapable of supplying what they need, which is Love and Security, basically. Having made that call, even when the courage to speak is summoned up, the phone has still to be hung up, and the person has still to leave that phone box and confront his/her aloneness. I especially liked the part about the author hoping to meet his younger self but knowing that his younger self would never have demeaned himself by so admitting his weakness. The knowledge of his own self-weakness would not permit him to commit the ultimate act of weakness. Enjoyment is hardly a word I could apply to the article, but I felt it, which is not something that can be said for a helluva lot of writing, in fanzines or anywhere else. The anonymity of the piece serves only to make it all the more poignant, refuting Skel's contributor's need for public egoboo, which would, anyway, only be inappropriate.

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

**Sue Thomason** ...Skel's article on LoCs was very worrying. I know damn well that I mostly write LoCs to stay on editors' mailing lists, and I'm sure I can't write the kind of LoC that Skel is really looking for. To start with, despite being a writer myself, I find it very hard to notice style except when it gets adversely in the way of content -- I wouldn't notice a short, punchy sentence if it walked up and hit me in the face, unless I was very bored by what I was reading. And actually I **do** think that the "real" response to a piece of writing (or other art) is (and should usually remain) private. I am very embarrassed when people I don't know very well tell me how much they like/don't like my work, and on the whole, mostly, I would rather they didn't. Also, at least when fiction-writing, I am an "intuitive" writer, and can't look

logically and rationally at the mechanics of writing while writing or reading -- it's like thinking about which finger goes where in what order when playing an intricate passage of music -- the result is total disaster, chaos, and a complete breakdown of my ability to communicate, such as it is.

I think the idea of changing ones' LOC style from editor to editor is a bit suspicious -- although my speech patterns and topics of conversation change when I talk to different people, I wouldn't want to take it so far as to feel I was simply telling people what they wanted to hear.

And I'm worried by the idea that a LoC that says no more than "gosh, I enjoyed this, but I'm too knackered to write a detailed critique, please send me the next issue" is no good. It would be enough of a show of interest to persuade me to retain someone on my mailing list...

NF rules Middle Earth OK? Well, the only comment I have on that is my longstanding worry about Strider's jackboots. You know, in the pub in Bree, where he first appears, he's described as wearing long boots. These shouldn't be riding boots, and I have trouble in visualising walking boots other than the types I'm familiar with, which certainly aren't 'long'...

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

Skel's article set off a number of long letters, not least of which was that from:

**Eric Mayer** ...I have, like you, been realizing that there is only so much one can do in Fandom if it is to remain a hobby. The temptation is to do too much, try to connect with too many people and, generally, the more you overwork yourself the less fun it all becomes. I know I've cut down fanwriting somewhat. I've told myself "look, you want to try and write some fiction but if you write



an article for A and C and B you're not going to have time so you'll have to decline some requests"... So I would think your decision to put all your effort into CRYSTAL SHIP, and a lot of yourself into it, is excellent.

Yeah, our fanzines are meant to serve **our** purposes. Maybe that's not an approach that'll endear one to the critics, but let them pay for the fanzines then -- let them put in the time. Do exactly what **you** want to do and then find the readers who like it. There'll always be enough in fandom, I'd bet. (Not the movers and shakers of course.) One loccer mentions somewhere that CRYSTAL SHIP and its contributors don't seem to show up in the right polls and with awards etc. But look how many locs you got. I would guess more than most of the award-winning types. But those who appreciate CS are -- big surprise -- rather like you in their approach to Fandom, and maybe they're not as likely to vote the awards, do the politicking etc, that the FIAWOLers do.

A couple of years ago I ran a poll in GROGGY. I was curious to see how my readers' opinion compared with the opinions of Fandom at large. Taral warned me this wouldn't happen -- that the same people would vote in my poll as voted in the other polls, because polls fit their conception of Fandom. He was right. A lot of the regular loccers whose opinions I was curious about wrote that they didn't approve such an approach to fandom, didn't like polls. A few voted to please me. But mostly I got votes from those that always make such selections -- people who hardly locced at all -- and the results were what they always were (with the expected bias towards the zine giving the poll).

...I note in the loccol D.West's telling Mal Ashworth that he only reads articles with his name in them. That excited me since in my last column for HOLIER THAN THOU I mentioned D.West! What a thrill to know that after all these years, all the articles I've written,

D.West is finally going to read one. (Hahn't thought to mention him before.) I did wonder though...how will he know his name is in it, without reading it? (And if he reads articles to discover his name...well, at least a few won't mention him so he's made a liar of himself.) Maybe so exalted a personage as D.West (without time to waste on useless stuff that doesn't mention him) has a reader, someone to waste time poring over fanzines for him. "Here's your reading list for the week, Mr West, Sir." It really is hard to believe that anyone would only read articles that mention his name...and even harder to believe that anyone would consider it smart, or funny (or whatever he considers it) to make such an inane statement.

...Brilliant article by Skel (lucky he mentioned my name or...just kidding -- too bad D.West won't read it though...). It is true that as important as LoCs are they're hardly ever written about. Skel's piece could almost serve as a text book on LoCs. It seems to me that everything he says about the purposes they serve for the various parties involved is absolutely accurate, which is odd, really, since any number of different purposes could be imagined. It was rather as if he were simply summing up an accepted body of knowledge when, in reality, he was setting down something I've never seen explained before.

I do have one point of disagreement ...well, semi-disagreement... I know that I'm not always interested in having my writing analyzed, as opposed to gleaning "that reminds me" type comments. It depends largely on the context in which the article appears. I'm perfectly happy to get the more personal type comments for articles printed in my own fanzine -- which is printed mainly for communication purposes. Let's face it, regular readers of your fanzine are going to get tired doling out compliments and favourable reviews issue after

issue. If they didn't like the stuff they wouldn't be loccking regularly all that time.

I can think of only one point I would add, under the topic of what loccers want, and that is that loccers want to be treated fairly. The editor is in a position of considerable power over those who write to him. He prints who he wants, which parts he wants, in the order he wants, and he has the last word. I never saw an editor lose an argument in his own loccol. I have seen a few editors misrepresent loccers, make jokes at their expense, etc. A few years back there was a genzine which I locced a few times - and only a few - no matter what I put in my loc, the editors would select for publication some negative comment, and nothing else. Now, it might have been because they considered the negative comments much more interesting and the positive comments bland. Nevertheless I stopped loccking because I felt they were purposely slewing my image in their loccol. It is a fact that at times, to be fair to the loccers, you have to select material that is not always fascinating, or best written. (And I know, unfortunately, that I have from time to time fallen short in my treatment of those who've locced my zine...that I must add in all honesty.) As Skel suggests, it is quite a balancing act, trying to see all the needs involved, yet maintain an interesting loccol. And I pity you, having to prepare the loccol for CS11 in light of it... When I came to write my article on what I perceived to be the current social currents driving Fandom [since appeared in HOLIER THAN THOU 22-JDO] I ultimately had to refer back to Skel, who in SONGS OF FANDOM had done the seminal work. Anyone else who feels like addressing the subject of locs will have to do the same.

p.s. About locs...I forgot to mention one of the best things locs do for a reader...mainly (and conversely to the instance

mentioned where they can be used to make the reader look bad) they can make him look good. The editor can make a reader look good in locs not only by editing them well but also by -- through the content of the zine -- inspiring loccers to write things, to think about things they might not have otherwise. I'll always miss Don Brazier's TITLE, for instance, because, for one thing, he always jogged my mind, got me thinking (and writing) about things, and in a way I can't by myself..

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

**Charles Stross** ...I've got no excuse but to give in to the threat implicit in your publication of **Loc On Tommy** and do a LoC to ensure my future supply of such an excellent fix for my habit as this one seems to be. Habit? I nearly died. This is the first fanzine someone has sent me spontaneously in months. And the best.

Enough of this third-person egoboo. Tell The Contributor (his definition) that I for one would **never** have learned to write a LoC without his article -- no sarcasm intended. It should be distributed in the BSFA starter kit, along with the latest variable-geometry high-lift propellor hats and the do-it-yourself fanjargon decoder. Hell, it took me months to work out what an apa was, never mind joining one! He did a bloody good job of the literary hatchet-work, using the definitive \*earthy\* language of sleeves-rolled-up blue-collar fandom to scare the bejesus out of any neo who has the temerity to set dot-matrix to paper at the sight of a fanzine. It's very good to be so analytical, a very positive response to the challenge of contributing to the on-going debate on viable modes of self-expression within fandom and so on and so on. But is self-analysis constructive? Looks incestuous to me -- fan-writing at its best and worst simultaneously.

**Can Anyone Help me?** I don't think I can. I could mouth platitudes until

you did your best/ did more than I ever tried to do". But I can't, because the naked trauma visible in this writing cuts past all the normal levels of communication that get between the reader and reality. This piece -- although well enough written, I'll grant -- could never have appeared in the national or local press because they like their meat cold and well-digested because such writing sticks in the throat of the great public voyeurist and they stop reading if they don't enjoy it. It hurt to read, and I'm glad that **Crystal Ship** can carry such an article off, but I'm glad that you don't do it the whole time because if you did I'd be tempted to use any subsequent issues for firestarting (disregarding the fact that I don't have a fireplace). Guilt-inducing writing is not easy to bring off, and very dangerous if it succeeds because it poisons the casual readers' attitudes to the medium.

Some people are unable to help others, some think that they're unable to do so, and a very small minority **won't**. And not always because they're wicked or bad, but because of what they've been through; the responsibility of not knowing whether they're responsible or not.

\*\*\*                      \*\*\*                      \*\*\*

**Steve Sneyd** ...Your LoCs come second only to those of the late lamented ARENA among UK zines I've encountered for requiring deep thought. This is one aspect Skel didn't mention in his panoramascope or is it panoptic, of locology, namely the trade-off, desirability-wise in editorial/content terms, between locs which accurately reflect/respond to the zine's other content, and locs which in turn provide locs on locs, hall of mirror-wise.

\*\*\*                      \*\*\*                      \*\*\*

**Buck Coulson** ...I admire Skel for getting eight and a half pages out of an article on LoCs, but

really... Besides, he says that "when you write a LoC to editor A it will be considerably different to a LoC you might write to editor B". Nonsense; we're far more advanced here in the States. The "Standard LoC" was published here years ago. One can make up a standard form, run it off on a copier, and adapt it to any English-language fanzine by simply filling in the blanks. Saves an enormous amount of time, though of course it's a bit difficult to copy it on an aerogramme, so I don't use it for locs to other countries. Of course, it **does** tend to make letter columns sound a bit similar...

In his letter, Dave Redd seems to be saying that science fiction is the real world. An interesting hypothesis, but I don't believe I quite agree with it. Even as opposed to fandom, science fiction isn't terribly real, and appearing in stf magazines hardly means that fandom "was tied to the real world". Of course, I wasn't entirely in favour of the original thesis, either; most of the fans I know are considerably more adult than they were in the Fifties. Even I've become a bit more adult, though I was legally adult before the Fifties began. "The Golden Age of science fiction is thirteen" (from Terry Carr) still seems as applicable as it did when he said it, but no more so. Come to think of it, didn't Carr originate that statement in the Fifties? In fact, one or two of the current Trufans seem to have become not just adult, but senile. (No, I'm not thinking of any of your loccers.)

\*\*\*                      \*\*\*                      \*\*\*

Just as well, Buck: hell hath no fury like an insulted loccer, yer know. But, a swift change of subject from:

**William Bains** ...Your experience in giving a presentation is fairly typical. For the first couple of times I did it I found myself giggling uncontrollably every now and again, but this soon wore off.

The most terrible thing about lecturing is when you see yourself doing it. Usually we are not called upon to listen to our own lectures, but thanks to the miracles of the wretched TV, we can. I did a course for new lecturers at the University a few weeks ago, and it was truly horrible. Who IS this shambling idiot shuffling about, dropping his visual aids, mumbling almost incomprehensibly and twitching like he thinks there is a mad axeman in the audience waiting to ask him what the capital of Transylvania is? Surely it cannot be ME? But it was. Oh, the shame. The most horrible thing, though, is when you have an hour's talk to give and run out of things to say in thirty minutes. Then you (well, OK, I admit it) stand there looking like Stan Laurel (or was Oliver Hardy the thin one?... ) saying "Well, that's all...er...I seem to have to...er...say to you today so...er... let's talk about something else." The really brave lecturer would simply say "Oh, finished already have I? OK, let's bugger off for an early lunch". But I lack the courage.

Re: Martyn Taylor:... absolutely, the translation of the bible was the beginning of the end. Especially the hideous 'New English Bible' which is barely English even if it is new... Richard Faulder says that a religion 'dictates appropriate behaviours for those people who accept the explanation...' of the world it provides. Absolutely. Brush your teeth and you will not get toothache. Eat 2g of Vitamin C to cure colds. Land a man on the moon to keep the Russians at bay. (OK, so that one is not strictly science, but it IS strictly comparable to the 'cathedral race' that went on in the 14th and 15th centuries.) Eat low-fibre diets to stop bowel cancer (1950). Eat high-fibre diets to stop bowel cancer (1980). Evolution proves altruism is a good idea (1960, 1980). Evolution proves we should all be selfish (1970). And so on. That is why science IS like a

religion, and not a minor cult like environmentalism (a cult of science) or American Zen (a cult partly of Buddhism and partly of Psychoanalysis).

...A brief word on the mindless violence of the disaffected youth, etc. Certainly it's mindless, and certainly you do not usually get the well educated, well fed, well employed middle class doing it. But it is not all a spontaneous outburst of rage. I have it on the authority of the local chief of police (once removed: I do not know the guy myself) that the police in Tottenham knew for several days that there was going to be trouble in that part of London before there actually WAS trouble. How? A sudden closure of local factories? A case of police brutality due to be brought to court, some soul-less landlord hiking the rents yet again, asking for trouble? No, everything was exactly as it had been for the previous six months. Except that the local sales of milk nearly doubled. Draw your own conclusions (and please don't draw mine for me!).

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

And now for a little egoboo for the artists, those unsung heroes of the fanzine.

**Ted Hughes** Looking at the artwork ...All out of the store cupboard, you say? That cupboard is quite a useful piece of furniture! Steven Fox pleases with his ink-and-brush work. The difficulty with that medium is getting half tones. Drawings tend to be contrast, and hard-edged. But no harm -- your lad is certainly competent. Joan Hanke-Woods' Virgil Finlay-style drawing charmed and nauseated at the same time. On reflection, I'm not sure I haven't seen similar creatures to her monster in old Finlay illustrations -- but I'm too durned idle to delve through the archives to check! No harm again. What better master to be influenced by! Brad Foster's humour amused. But Steve Lines' piece was a

disappointment, especially after his magnificent work in CS9. No doubt it was the ugly subject which revolted me; I'm reminded of the time in my youth, when I had fleeting dreams of becoming a magazine illustrator, and used to take my drawings to a newspaper artist for criticism. Butterworth, as he was known, illustrated the short stories which were then published in the Manchester Evening Chronicle, and later drew a comic strip for the now-defunct Daily Dispatch. (I was a copy-boy, then, at ten bob (50p) a week!). Butterworth never hesitated to criticise content as well as style -- and I'm afraid I've caught the habit...

I read CAN ANYONE HELP ME, and was strangely unmoved. That article should have torn the heart strings. But it left mine unplucked. Why? I'm not hard-hearted. Something just didn't click, and I don't know why. In comparison, Roger Waddington's letter moved me intensely. If one could only find words of encouragement for him! I can assure him that, if he keeps on writing he will sooner or later sell his work. There is nothing wrong with the way he puts words on paper. But, even if he does -- and I've found F&SF sympathetic to new writers, if F or SF is his choice -- he'll struggle to make a living at it. Still, there's no doubt that he's struggling now -- so he may prefer it that way.

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

Just to demonstrate that CS readers come in all shapes and varieties, here's the terribly clairvoyant:

**David Red** I find that like the letters, the articles are generally more interesting if I have some knowledge of or involvement with the subject already. Articles which don't mesh into my worldview have a harder struggle to win my attention. My lack of comprehension of William Bains' article last time (I met him at Novacon, but he

looked so alert, intelligent and happy that I didn't dare engage him in serious conversation) was probably due to my unfamiliarity with his subject matter. Whereas William Morris next time is part of my world-view, albeit a small one, and I look forward to seeing something about his literary activities from you. Because...I am already involved.

I first came across Morris in a tiny green hardcover of Volume II of WATER OF THE WONDROUS ISLES (I'm still looking for Vol.I in that edition) and soon recognised an individual tone, if an erratic one.

For me, reading Morris is something of a lottery -- the winning numbers do come up, but not often. Was it worth reading THE HOLLOW LAND for its moments of magic, to be left with a final disappointment after it petered out? (You could ask the same of Disney's RETURN TO OZ.)

After years of little or no Morris I came across his early poems, finding the same mixture of the miraculous and the ordinary as before. I wonder which order they were written in. The good ones first, last or as intermittent peaks when the Muse came to him? I recall being unimpressed by short pieces such as "Old Love", and resisting the age-of-chivalry dash of "Two Red Roses Across The Moon", if that was its title. So what did I actually like? The black moodiness of "The Haystack In The Floods" was certainly impressive, and as for "The Chapel In Lyonesse" -- well, that one really amazed me. Brilliant. I regard "Chapel" as a personal classic, a miniature verse-play as much a new world with its own reality as was THE TEMPEST on a much larger stage.

That may show you what I see in William Morris. Life being what it is, no doubt the next CRYSTAL SHIP will deal entirely with Socialism, NEWS FROM NOWHERE and printing presses. However, I shall look forward to it. Tell Rastus to get busy.

And as I start to close by saying

thanks for CS, it occurs to me that this LoC falls into a category Skel didn't consider -- the LoC about an issue that hasn't been published yet. It wasn't deliberate, honest. I'm too idle to be that innovative....

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

As part of the 'new tech' process of producing CS11, I kept sending extracts from locs to the main contributors as the letters arrived. This has prompted the following missive from 'Jan 54':

**Jan 54** Thank you for passing on the comments on my article in CS10. There are a couple of things you might like to say in print, in reply to points raised by loccers:

1. I am not currently suicidal or depressed, though I thank the loccers sincerely for their concern. I found that writing the article was a deeply cathartic experience; though I had left the Samaritans some time before, I had never really let go of the accumulated pain. I am still a person who finds it very difficult to admit to being in the middle of a bad time, but at least I can acknowledge the trauma once it's passed. Things are looking up.

2. Jan 54 is a name, not a date. Duty Samaritans don't usually tell anyone (even other Samaritans) their surnames or home addresses, and are usually identified by a first name and a number -- the latter to avoid confusing two Samaritans with the same first name. Jan 54 was not the name I used when I was a Samaritan, though, just a useful pseudonym.

3. I am quietly amused, though unsurprised, to read your comment that most loccers have assumed Jan 54 is a male! I deliberately chose a non-gender-specific name, and referred to my 'spouse' rather than 'husband' or 'wife', to conceal my identity, as I am moderately active in fandom and don't wish to betray the Samaritan principle of

anonymity. In fact, of the first batch of 11 comments you sent me, 8 avoided referring to Jan 54 by a gender pronoun, and 3 explicitly assumed Jan was a male. This seems to indicate that the feminists are right about the existence of the 'invisible woman'; many people think of 'a person' as being male. **Nobody** referred to Jan as 'she'. For the record, there are more female than male Samaritans, for a number of reasons, but "Jan" will remain essentially neuter gender...

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

The same new tech approach also brought the following letter from Skel, in reply to various points raised in this loccol: locs on locs before they are even printed -- where will it all end!

**Skel:** ... Now far be it from me to LoC my own article, but some of the comments have made me wish to respond in turn...

Pamela's point that the introduction was perhaps a little superfluous is well taken. It was my bribe to myself, how I kidded myself into tackling something more 'straight' and less 'fun to write' than my usual style. Having written it, the whole piece, I could see that the intro was precisely as Pamela described it, but I liked it because it was smileworthy. I felt that to remove it would simply be to waste something that was good in and of itself, something that having been written as a specific intro to the piece, would be useless if not used. I now realise that I should have had more faith in my ability to find an alternative use for that particular material...

Pamela's other point, about my use of 'bad' language I also take (and Judith Buffery's too, I see). Now Pamela mentions this every time she writes to me or LoCs my fanzine -- and normally, my dear, I don't give a... er, damn. This is because normally I am trying to be 'me', and project 'me' in my articles,

and frankly I am a foul-mouthed scatological sunofabitch. Ok, not all of me, and possibly not even the greater part of me, but essentially the part of me that most of my articles are coming from -- the part of me that finds it fun to write, to have a few beers and freak out and have weird ideas at the typewriter.

Now being a fanwriter, as distinct from a professional writer, I can be completely self-indulgent. I write what I want to write. I write the things that I find it fun to write. Normally when I write, I have fun doing it. The only part of "LoC On Tommy" that I had fun with was the intro. The rest was not fun to write. I did it because it was a challenge, and I wanted to see if I could do it, but it wasn't fun. I do such pieces occasionally, but not as often as I indulge myself in play. However, having said all that, I must agree with Pamela and Judith on this occasion. Because this wasn't my usual sort of piece, because I didn't need to project the 'me' that normally writes, I didn't need to include such references. I thought about them while I was writing, but decided to leave both them and the intro in by way of being a bridge from where I normally am, to where I found myself in LOT. Again, in retrospect, 20/20 hindsight, I agree was probably a mistake.

The thing is, it is very difficult-vergeing-on-impossible to really judge your own material, and we tend to rely on the editors we send it to to second-guess us and backstop us in this regard. Both Judith and Pamela will be aware of this fact. I have just been re-reading OUTWORLDS 28/29 and there are a few quotes in it that bear upon this point. Greg Benford, wrote in his column: "I can't distance myself from my own work by slipping on some miraculous goggles. Only time does the job; just let the ms sit". However, few of us have the patience in fandom to let it sit long enough. In the same issue of OUTWORLDS Dave Locke ran a 'Fanwriter Symposium' in

which Jodie Offutt underlined this point as follows: "I tend to send material to editors who I think will print it within the next six or so months..." It's true: having written it, we must see it published, and get the response, as soon as possible. In the same symposium Dave Hulan said (as roughly speaking did several others): "It's hard to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of one's own writing". Dave Locke agreed: "Absolutely. I never doubted it for a minute". Dave continued that of all the fanwriters who'd tried to estimate their own strengths and weaknesses for the symposium: "Some seemed to hit the mark, but more often they weren't even on the board".

So, we rely on the editor perhaps more than we should. How did you feel on these points, John? If you had any doubts, why didn't you raise them? If you didn't have any doubts, why not?...

[Actually, I just thought you were being 'you', Skel, hence I didn't raise the question of the 'bad' language, figuring you'd be somewhat miffed if I attempted to 'censor' the article. I don't particularly use such language myself, (except in moments of sudden anger, where it provides a useful outlet) figuring that it is essentially 'noise', cluttering up clear expression, but I won't cut it out where it does form a part of a person's fannish aura, as it does with you.]

As to Iain Byers' comment that I hadn't said anything new...well, of course I didn't. I wasn't trying to, just to organise my own thoughts on the subject, in as interesting a manner as possible... I wasn't trying to tell people what they 'should' do, or even what they might do, only to try and create a background awareness of all the various elements and viewpoints on a LoC. I appreciated, as many of your readers pointed out, that whilst my article is still sitting

there in the forefront of their consciousness, it might be counter-productive, but hopefully as it moves back out of the limelight it will have laid the foundation of a greater awareness of what **might** be involved in a LoC. It wasn't intended to be a yardstick, a set of criteria by which LoCs should be measured, but rather an exercise to strengthen the awareness of potentials.

As to Dave Redd's comment...heaven forfend that I should be in a writers' circle. All I meant was that a little bit of that kind of feedback, as a sort of seasoning to the more usual kind, would be pretty triff. I know that I'm not alone in feeling this way. Yep, I'm going to quote from that OUTWORLDS symposium again. No less a fan-writer and all-round terrific person that Susan Wood wrote: "One of the main problems of fanwriting is, strangely enough, a lack of real feedback. People will say 'Gee, I liked that piece', or 'That stank', or will be prompted to write about similar experiences, or (in a serious article) will go off on long discussions about the Babylonian empire or whatever; but I get very little feedback on style, method of writing, what could be done to improve the article. The response is all content oriented." So what if she said it better than I did -- after all, she was a Hugo-winning fanwriter. I wish I'd known about this quote when I wrote LOT, as I'd have incorporated it: ze old 'Argument from Authority' ploy.

Like Sue Thomason I tend to approach writing intuitively. Reading too, for that matter, but in her reading of LOT she has intuited something that was never meant to be there. It was never my intention to infer that one should deliberately and consciously change one's LoC style from one fanzine to another, but rather that it ought

to be inevitable, and in a way it is in fact suspicious when one's LoC style does not change (by 'style' of course, I mean not only style of writing, but also style of content, subject matter, emphasis, approach, etc.). These are all at least partly dependant on the specific issue of the fanzine that is stimulating you, or at least they should be. If they aren't, then you aren't 'responding', which is surely precisely what I said originally...isn't it?

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

Ok, it's round up time for the **Wahfs and Strays**.

In roughly the order they arrived, we had letters and/or LoCs from: Roger Waddington, Terry Jeeves, Janet & Gordon Stephenson, Sydney Bounds, John F. Haines, Steve Woolhouse, Brad Foster, Martin Helsdon, Shep Kirkbride, Andy Sawyer, Sheryl Birkhead, Rob Gregg, Sue Walker, John Miller, Martyn Taylor, Chuck Connor, Lawrence O'Donnell, John Berry, Eric Bentscliffe, Peter Presford, Helen McNabb, David Bateman, Dave Collins, Kevin Rattan, Pam Wells, ATom, Chester Cuthbert.

### Tailpiece

This is it? The only place for Rastus-writing in the entire 36 page fanzine? Jeez, did I ever get it wrong this time! So much for the 'increased editorial presence' I promised last time. Oh well, can't be undone now, without adding more pages to the issue, and it's late enough already. Next time, though, next time, it'll be different. Oodles of pages full of genuine JDO prose in all its glory, acres of scintillating polemic, column after column of devastating wit and wisdom. (Ghod, the threats a guy has to make to get contributions in!) But for now, it's goodbye-e-e.

=====

The Crystal Ship 11 emanates from the top right hand corner of the county of Buckinghamshire, more specifically from the following address:

John D. Owen, 4 Highfield Close, Newport Pagnell, Bucks. MK16 9AZ, England

Available entirely at the whim of the editor, whose word is final



