William Morris (1834-96)

2 The Sailing of the Sword

Across the empty garden-beds,	
When the Sword went out to sea,	
I scarcely saw my sisters' heads	
Bowed each beside a tree.	
I could not see the castle leads,	5
When the Sword went out to sea,	
Alicia wore a scarlet gown,	
When the Sword went out to sea,	
But Ursula's was russet brown:	
For the mist we could not see	10
The scarlet roofs of the good town,	
When the Sword went out to sea.	
Green holly in Alicia's hand,	
When the Sword went out to sea;	
With sere oak-leaves did Ursula stand;	15
O! yet alas for me!	
I did but bear a peel'd white wand,	
When the Sword went out to sea.	
O, russet brown and scarlet bright,	
When the Sword went out to sea,	20
My sisters wore; I wore but white:	
Red, brown, and white, are three;	
Three damozels; each had a knight,	
When the Sword went out to sea.	
Sir Robert shouted loud, and said:	25
When the Sword went out to sea,	
Alicia, while I see thy head,	
What shall I bring for thee?	
O, my sweet Lord, a ruby red:	
The Sword went out to sea.	30
Sir Miles said, while the sails hung down,	
When the Sword went out to sea,	
O, Ursula! while I see the town,	

What shall I bring for thee?	
Dear knight, bring back a falcon brown:	35
The Sword went out to sea.	
But my Roland, no word he said	
When the Sword went out to sea,	
But only turn'd away his head;	
A quick shriek came from me:	40
Come back, dear lord, to your white maid.	
The Sword went out to sea.	
The hot sun bit the garden-beds	
When the Sword came back from sea;	
Beneath an apple-tree our heads	45
Stretched out toward the sea;	
Grey gleam'd the thirsty castle-leads,	
When the Sword came back from sea.	
Lord Robert brought a ruby red,	
When the Sword came back from sea;	50
He kissed Alicia on the head:	
I am come back to thee;	
'Tis time, sweet love, that we were wed,	
Now the Sword is back from sea!	
Sir Miles he bore a falcon brown,	55
When the Sword came back from sea;	
His arms went round tall Ursula's gown:	
What joy, O love, but thee?	
Let us be wed in the good town,	
Now the Sword is back from sea!	60
My heart grew sick, no more afraid,	
When the Sword came back from sea;	
Upon the deck a tall white maid	
Sat on Lord Roland's knee;	
His chin was press'd upon her head,	65
When the Sword came back from sea!	

1858

(From *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1916)