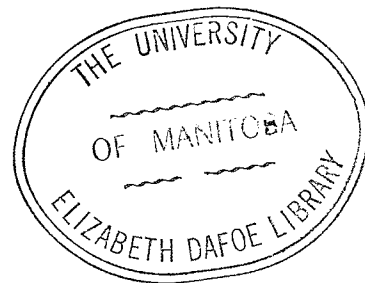


THE RELATIONSHIP OF MAN AND NATURE: A DEVELOPING THEME  
IN GEORGE MEREDITH'S POETRY

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
The University of Manitoba

In Partial Fulfilment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
Kenneth Mortimer McKay  
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The purpose of this thesis is to trace George Meredith's growing understanding of the relationship of man and nature through his poetry. The various meanings which Meredith attached to the terms "man" and "nature" at different stages of his career and the character of their progressive union in his mind are examined.

The poetry is divided into four periods, each of which corresponds to a stage in the development of the relationship of man and nature. In the first stage, that which has as a basis the poetry published in 1851, Meredith understands nature to be either country landscape or the seasonal renewal cycle. Man is conceived of as being outside of nature, a comparatively insignificant being. A union between nature and man is mentioned, but it is a union based only upon man's sensing within himself the same principle or power of love which is found in nature; therefore, no real relationship or union exists between man and nature at this stage. There is no recognition of a unity-in-process or evolution, no awareness of common progress: only man's need of nature for emotional and spiritual fulfillment.

The second stage of the theme's development is found in the poetry published between 1851 and 1861. Neither nature nor man is to be seen clearly in this period. It appears that in an attempt to move beyond the nature worship of 1851 Meredith is torn between a sentimentality or emotionalism latent

in that early poetry and a greater rationalism, a greater control and direction of the emotions by the mind. There is, however, a tendency towards the acceptance of man as the equal of nature and not simply as a worshipper.

In 1862, particularly in "Modern Love," Meredith recognizes and accepts man as a part of nature. Nature is seen to be progressive process, and man must know and accept his existence as a natural being, finite and earth-bound, or be doomed to unfulfilment and despair. Man and nature are united in process.

The fourth and final stage of Meredith's development of the relationship of man and nature occurs in the poetry published between 1862 and 1909. The chief development is the result of the clear acceptance of the doctrine of evolution. Nature and man are seen as progressing together in evolutionary process. Of central importance in this process is love. Man makes evolution possible for the species by propagating, by love between his kind, and he is made capable of understanding his individual part in the over-all evolutionary pattern by his love for nature or earth. Nature as evolutionary process is a creative balance of opposing but complementary forces: blood, brain, and spirit, or animal vitality, intellect, and an over-all, meaningful pattern. To be in harmony with nature man must keep these same forces in balance within himself. In later years Meredith reduced the complex of three forces to two: militant asceticism and quiet contemplation. Man is of nature, but to retain his role as the leader of nature's evolution he must forever strive further to understand, love, and imitate her.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE RELATIONSHIP OF MAN AND NATURE AS A THEME IN MEREDITH'S POETRY

George Meredith's poetry has always been more severely criticized and less understood than his novels. If Meredith's novels have developed a reputation for obscurity or awkwardness, people have still felt it profitable to read them for their social and psychological insight or their passages of brilliant and moving prose. Charges of obscurity, awkwardness, or didacticism directed at his poetry, however, have resulted in the general rejection of the poetical works as excessively difficult. The only exceptions to this general rejection are "Modern Love" and "Love in the Valley." These two poems, because of the one's unprecedented psychological insight and the other's undeniable lyrical beauty and power, have been accorded some measure of acceptance and popularity. While, that is, Meredith has been accounted one of the more powerful and provocative English writers, his novels have been the cause; his poetry, generally, has been shunted into the limbo of minor Victorian verse.

This general rejection of Meredith's poetry has taken place, however, without any real understanding of his poetry or his thought. No one, to date, has published a detailed analysis of Meredith's poetry as a whole: its development, its ideas, its language. Rejection of his poetry is, there-

fore, premature. Not until his poetic work has been examined more thoroughly than it has been to the present time can Meredith's position as a poet be known.

To begin the long struggle towards an understanding of Meredith's poetry as a whole, it is the purpose of this study to outline in some detail the developing relationship of man and nature in his poetry. This study examines, that is, in the poems published by Meredith between 1851 and 1909, the meanings attached to "man" and "nature" and the various relationships conceived as existing between them. To the extent that this theme is of central importance throughout much of Meredith's poetry and to the extent that his poetical growth coincides with its development, this study is intended to be a contribution to the detailed and critical understanding of Meredith's poetry as a whole.

The actual examination of the theme takes place in four chapters, followed by a fifth, concluding chapter summarizing the more important findings of the whole investigation. With the inclusion of this introduction there are six chapters in all. Because it has no direct bearing on the examination itself and, therefore, cannot be included in the body of the text, a brief statement of biographical data has been included in an appendix for anyone wishing to compare the personal life of Meredith with his poetic development.<sup>1</sup>

In the first chapter of actual study, the earliest volume of Meredith's collected poetry is examined. Poems<sup>2</sup>, published in 1851, is composed almost entirely of poetry written to celebrate the sensuous, vital joy of living. One is more impressed in these poems by the energy and vitality of the language than by any thought contained in them. The language is, by and large, lush and sensuous, suggestive of a thinned but healthy Keats. There is no sense of morbidity in Meredith's poetry; however, at this stage he is more inclined to sensuous word-painting than to serious exposition of ideas.

Behind the poetry, nonetheless, permeating and directing the word-painting, are a number of assumptions regarding the character and relationship of man and nature. Nature is assumed to manifest itself as either renewal pattern or landscape. Meredith, that is, is aware of nature either as the process of sensuous, seasonal, and daily renewal or as the beauty, peace, and health of country landscape. As renewal pattern and landscape, nature is self-sufficient and harmonious. It is, however, in Meredith's conception, essentially static. Nature can perpetuate herself yearly, renew herself daily, but that is all; there is in Meredith's conception no principle of evolution or general progress.

In the 1851 poetry, man is a nearly forgotten element. One becomes aware of his existence, indeed, chiefly through

a contrast, indicated or implied, with the beauty, power, and self-sufficiency of nature. Man is an insignificant being without meaning or direction when apart from nature. There is, moreover, no real connection between the two: each is an entity separated from the other. The only connection between them is man's awareness within himself of an "elemental power" related to that underlying the seasonal renewal of nature. This power would appear to be that of chaste but sensuous love. It is said that there is no real connection between man and nature because, first, awareness of the similarity or relation of the power in either of them is restricted to man alone: there is no indication that nature recognizes its presence in man. Second, the powers are merely related, not one and the same. Third, man and nature are related only in this one respect, which is based, ultimately, upon man's emotional projection, not upon participation in a common cause or realization of a common, rational, evolutionary or progressive principle.

Despite the absence of any rationally based relationship between man and nature, Meredith conceives of man as being dependent upon nature for a sense of fulfilment. This fulfilment, one feels, is of an essentially religious character. Nature is felt to be an harmonious, self-sufficient, and sublime power with which man can communicate only by succumbing to it as a worshiper to a deity. There is about nature,

both as landscape and renewal pattern, an aura of divinity and perfection, and, when Meredith paints a scene from nature or expresses the harmony of the renewal process, he does so, as it were, with a hushed exultation or with a vibrant and intense awareness of the multitudinous manifestations of nature's beneficence.

The second chapter of the study examines the relationship of man and nature in poems published between the 1851 volume and the "Modern Love" volume, published in 1862.<sup>3</sup> The poetry of this period reveals Meredith to be in a state of transition between the comparatively derivative and immature poetry of 1851 and the maturer work of 1862. On the whole, the poems are unsatisfactory and irritating, their effectiveness being destroyed by a debilitating conflict between tone and thought. One does not find in the poetry of this period a unified basis of reaction such as one finds in the earlier and later periods. The earlier poetry has, as a basis of reaction in all poems, Meredith's love of sensuous, harmonious nature. The poetry published between 1851 and 1862 is torn and fragmented by a conflict between a naive emotionalism, present in the earlier poetry, and a more demanding rationalism, requiring a firmer grasp of concrete reality and a more critical attitude to man and nature. The presence of critical intelligence in the poetry is new and marks an advance by Meredith in his development, but this

element of rationalism is adulterated by the effect of the emotionalism taking the form of sentimentality. Poems which attempt to express a rational understanding of man, nature, life, or death are destroyed or fragmented by an emotional and sentimental tone. The poetry is, with one or two possible exceptions, frustrating or awkward.

The dissatisfying character of the poetry, however, indicates that change is taking place. The earlier poetry pleases by its very immaturity: its self-conscious rhythm and sensuousness, its relative indifference to conceptual thought. The poetry of the transition period suggests that Meredith is struggling to think for himself and develop a personal manner of expression. He consciously begins the re-assessment of man and nature.

It is this conscious re-assessment which causes man to assume a new role in the poetry of this period. If in the poetry of 1851 Meredith tends to forget man except as a foil to nature, in the transition period he emphasizes man as a separate, mortal entity groping for the right mode of living and dying in a world of concrete reality. In this period he becomes aware of the burden and responsibility of man's life, seen by the light of reason rather than the warm darkness of emotion. Man's fate is becoming more important to the poet.

While there is a great variation from poem to poem in the relative position of man in regard to nature-- from the

rejection of human society and escape into the nature of country landscape to an emphasis upon man as isolated from an indifferent or threatening nature -- it is important to note that in this period Meredith, for the first time, speaks of the equality of man and nature and the necessity of one to the other for the fulfilment of either. After this period, nature is never again remote from man. Meredith here ceases to regard nature as a near-mystical, self-sufficient entity separated from man, and he begins to see the necessity of the union of the two for the preservation and enrichment of life generally.

The fourth chapter of this thesis, which examines the poetry of the "Modern Love" volume, published in 1862<sup>4</sup>, is, perhaps, the most important, certainly the most detailed section of the study. A great deal of time and space is given to an analysis of "Modern Love" because, first, this poem is central to the development of the relationship of man and nature in the poetry; second, it is undoubtedly the most well known and probably the best poem written by Meredith; and, third, it is felt that the particular approach taken in this study sheds some light on the unity and meaning of the poem which has gone unnoticed or unremarked by critics to this time. If it is felt that comparatively little time has been spent on poems other than "Modern Love" in the 1862 volume, it must be realized, as is suggested in the text, that the



other poems, even "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn," do little or nothing more with the theme of the relationship of man and nature than is done in the title poem. One finds a clearer, less dramatic expression of ideas in the lesser poems, but there is no change in the ideas themselves.

The 1862 volume of poetry is the turning point in Meredith's poetic career. The struggle between naive emotionalism and sentimentality on the one hand and rationalism coloured by a healthy awareness of the emotional element on the other achieves its culmination in "Modern Love." In this poem there is expressed dramatically Meredith's urge to come to grips with and accept man's meaning and place in the world. In contrast to most analyses of the poem, which suggest as its theme the disintegration of a married love and as its chief interest the poet's psychological insight and success in expressing varying emotions and attitudes, this study, while not denying the significance of love's death or the power of the poet's writing, suggests as the main theme of the poem, giving it both unity and universal application, the inevitable tragedy of man's life, the futility of his existence when he irrationally chooses to ignore his place and function in nature's processes; or, to be more precise, the tragedy of man's life when he refuses to accept the necessity of growing and maturing in time, when he refuses, that is, to accept the transience both of life and life's moments of joy

as is required by nature for her upward progress or development. Very generally, one might say that the theme of "Modern Love" is the tragedy of man's life when he fails to understand or accept his proper relationship with nature.

"Modern Love" is analyzed sonnet by sonnet -- there are fifty sonnets in all -- first to show that the tragedy of man's life apart from nature is the main theme of the poem, and, second, to delineate in some detail the actual development of the poem to an acceptance of man's place and function in nature's processes. Apart from these reasons, there is the desire to set down an interpretation which seems to lend to the poem a unity and meaning denied it by critics to the present day. It is hoped that the analysis of "Modern Love" given in this thesis will indicate the relationship of man and nature in Meredith's poetry at this stage and will also go part way in proving that the poem is not an isolated, unforeseeable creation, but the product of a struggle in Meredith's mind which began consciously after the publication of his first volume of collected poetry. It is hoped, that is, that the study of the relationship of man and nature in Meredith's poetry will have ramifications in the understanding of the development of his poetry as a whole.

The struggle in "Modern Love" between irrational emotion or sentimentality and reason or acceptance of man's place in nature's processes is represented in a style never

before or after achieved by Meredith. As he never before had succeeded in bringing the forces of reason and sentimentality face to face to struggle consciously for the predominant position in his mind, so Meredith never before needed a style at once so powerful, so sensitive, so varied. With the termination of the struggle in favour of reason and the acceptance of man's place in nature, with the conscious acceptance of nature as a developing process which includes man, Meredith never again needed or could use the excellent stylistic qualities exhibited in "Modern Love." The style is born of the struggle and it dies with the struggle. It would not be an exaggeration to say that after 1862 Meredith ceases to be a dramatic poet, concerned primarily with the effective representation of emotions and attitudes, and becomes, instead, a poet of exposition, presenting, explaining, and developing ideas. After 1862 tension and struggle have no major role in his poetry. Meredith has found a satisfactory basis for his thought. There remains the task of exploring and developing.

The fourth chapter of this study examines the poetry of Meredith's mature years, from 1862 to 1909,<sup>5</sup> to trace the final stages of the development of the relationship of man and nature. While all of the poetry published in this forty-seven year period is, of course, taken into consideration, it is not all mentioned or reported on. Only those poems which indicate some development in the theme under

study are analyzed. While the same practice is used in all the chapters, in this instance it requires special note because of the length of time covered and the great number of poems published in the period.

Between 1862 and 1909 the most decisive development in the relationship of man and nature in the poetry takes place as the result of Meredith's assimilation of the doctrine of evolution. While a concept of upward progress is part of his thought in 1862, the character and implications of the progress remain vague. With his acceptance of actual evolution in the poetry of the 1883 volume, the thought of the poems gains a greater clarity and direction, for Meredith can view existence in terms of an acceptable scientific principle and speak of man's development with assurance. The concept of evolution provides a rational principle around which Meredith can develop his thought in a systematic manner.

Between 1862 and 1883 Meredith is concerned with coming to grips with the immediate consequences for man of the "Modern Love" position. By 1883, however, he has adjusted completely and can accept evolution as the basis of his thought. This acceptance of evolution is of great importance in the development of the relationship of man and nature, for, in 1883 and after, Meredith identifies the evolutionary with the natural processes. As man, after "Modern Love," is considered part of the natural processes, a study of the relationship of man and nature inevitably means an examination of

Meredith's understanding of man's place and function in the evolutionary processes.

Meredith conceived of man's evolution as taking place in three stages, no stage being excluded by another but all remaining intact, balanced, and harmonious. The three stages of man's development are the same as the elements composing nature: blood, brain, and spirit. In man these elements manifest themselves as animal vitality, rationality, and an awareness of the place and function of the individual in nature's over-all plan. In nature they signify the presence of animal vitality, rationality, and an over-all, guiding plan or pattern of evolution. A failure by man to keep the three elements in balance will result in his being out of harmony with nature.

The predominance of one of the elements at the expense of the others is a consequence of an undue influence of the predatory ego or Self. The Self demands for the individual a position denied it by the processes of nature. It manifests itself in an excessive desire to gratify the senses. It demands an increasing variety of things to touch, to smell, to see, to have. It demands a life after death, for it refuses to accept the obliteration of the individual as nature's laws require. The Self attempts to interrupt the inexorable processes of nature to favour the individual rather than the species. The predominance of Self in man can lead only to destruction, for apart from nature's laws

and nature's harmony there is nothing.

The immediate stimulus to man's evolution is love, personal and for nature. Through personal love, man begets the future generations which make progress possible. Through love for nature, man learns to understand and accept her laws and processes and is, thus, able to see that he must strive for ever higher goals and struggle always to understand nature further.

In later years Meredith reduced the blood-brain-spirit complex to two chief opposing but complementary forces. He came to see man's evolution as taking place by a creative balance being struck between the forces of chastity and striving, on the one hand, and love and beauty, on the other, or as between foresight and patience. Regardless of the terminology used, the balance is always between the forces of action and asceticism, and inaction and enjoyable contemplation. The reduction of the triad to two forces, however, makes no practical difference in Meredith's thought: his expression of the struggle for balance includes all of the elements of the triad.

The last chapter of this thesis summarizes the findings of the earlier chapters in an attempt to outline the salient features of the development of the relationship of man and nature in Meredith's poetry. Outlining this development involves stating conclusions reached as a result of this study

on the character of the theme's development and its relative importance in Meredith's poetic work as a whole.

The general rejection of Meredith's poetry as awkward, obscure, or didactic is reflected in the critical articles available on the poems.<sup>6</sup> From 1892 to the present day there have been approximately thirty-five articles written on them. While this low number, in itself, would seem to indicate a comparative lack of interest in the poetry, one becomes much more conscious of the poet's lack of an interested public when one realizes that, of these thirty-five articles, twenty-four were written in the period of twenty-three years from 1906 to 1929, and that twelve of these were written in the four years from 1906 to 1910. Of the remaining eleven articles, three were written between 1892 and 1900, and eight between 1930 and 1958. Of these eight, seven have been published since 1944. Clearly, after a brief rise immediately before and after his death in 1909, Meredith's reputation as a poet gradually faded away, to all but disappear in the 'thirties and early 'forties. The last twenty years have seen what is, perhaps, the first feeble effort towards a reassertion of his popularity and influence.

Articles in periodicals have been chosen to indicate the ebb and flow of Meredith's reputation as a poet rather than books because, first, it would seem reasonable to suppose that they reflect more immediately the changing interest of

readers, and, second, if the publication of books on the poems were taken as an indication of his poetic reputation, one would be led to believe that his poetry was never read or responded to by anyone after his death -- and the very existence of the articles would seem to deny this. Only two books have been published on Meredith's poetry alone: G.M. Trevelyan's The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith<sup>7</sup> in 1906 and J.R.P. Sclater's The Sons of Strength<sup>8</sup> in 1910. Other discussions of the poetry, beyond the articles, are restricted to references or sections in books on English poetry at large. One cannot feel sure that such discussions are prompted by interest in Meredith's poetry and not by the necessity of dealing with a famous name in English literature.

While the periodic articles appear reasonably reliable as a basis for discovering the course of Meredith's poetic reputation, they are, generally, of only limited use in understanding the poetry itself. In the first place, there is an insufficient number of them to penetrate deeply or to give one an accurate if broad view of the poetry, and, secondly, the majority of the articles up to the early 'fifties seem to be more introductory in nature than analytical, or they tend to be interested in the poetry only insofar as it reflects a philosophy. John C. Bailey's "The Poetry of George Meredith,"<sup>9</sup> for example, published in 1909, while interesting and informative, becomes, in effect, an introduction to Meredith's poems



for the hesitant reader. Saying that, in 1909, "thinking and talking turn principally around the novels" of George Meredith, and that "there is no point of view from which any sane critic would pretend that Meredith was the greatest of our poets, while there is one from which he may be regarded as the greatest English novelist,"<sup>10</sup> Bailey proceeds to skip through the poetry, indicating that, while it is often "harsh, difficult, and obscure,"<sup>11</sup> it also "abounds in matter, in the stuff of brain and will and character, in real and vital knowledge of human life, in power of insight into the great forces that lie about us."<sup>12</sup> Within fourteen pages, Bailey touches on the poetry's style, thought, weaknesses, strengths, and similarities to the poetry of earlier men. Such rapid treatment is useful in preliminary study, but it is of little use to one seeking an understanding of the poetry in detail.

An article published in 1916 by the Reverend James Moffat explicitly disclaims much interest in the poetry itself in an analysis of "The Empty Purse."<sup>13</sup> He proposes to analyze the poem "not so much for the sake of its literary qualities as in order to bring out the argument and the ideas," for he had "been often asked for help of this kind by teachers who discover in some of their more intelligent pupils among the higher forms an interest in Meredith's poetry which feels for something more than artistic structure and rhythm."<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately Moffat's explanation of the "something more" is

largely unnecessary as, by and large, Meredith's meaning is clear enough. The poem, which is subtitled "A Sermon to our Later Prodigal Son," is only made more dull by the persistent search for a philosophy in its entrails.

Towards the end of and after the Second World War, articles begin appearing again on Meredith's poetry. While the critics of the earlier period were interested in the general ideas of the poetry, those writing after the 1940's are concerned more with the historical, biographical, and literary detail of the poems. Several of the articles, indeed, explain details of so picayune a nature as to be no use whatever, at the present time, in understanding the poetry. In an article published in 1944, for example, Nina Cust suggests that "Hymn to Colour" was Meredith's favourite poem.<sup>15</sup> In 1958, J.M.S. Tompkins points out a parallel between the story of Periander and his son, Lycophron-- in the poem entitled "Periander"-- and the relationship of Meredith with his son, Arthur.<sup>16</sup> Finally, C.H. Ketcham suggests that Meredith makes a hidden reference to a Count Boraslaski in lines seven to eleven of sonnet thirty-one in "Modern Love."<sup>17</sup> While one cannot say that the information given in these articles will never be of any use, one can say that such information is of no use to one at the present stage of scholarship on the poetry. Meredith's poems still lack basic, broad scholarship and interpretation. When the outlines and

character of the poetry are known, one can indulge in and make use of minute details on the fringe of the poems.

Two articles have been published in recent years which make a serious attempt to reveal the over-all meaning of one of Meredith's poems. Norman Friedman, in 1957, published "The Jangled Harp: Symbolic Structure in 'Modern Love',"<sup>18</sup> and Elizabeth Cox Wright, in 1958, published "The Significance of the Image Patterns in Meredith's 'Modern Love',"<sup>19</sup> To a certain degree these two articles are useful in understanding the poem. While both tend to see it as a series of static units composed of fixed image patterns or clusters rather than as a developing, organic whole, they, nonetheless, uncover the imagery and, thereby, prepare one for the depth of meaning revealed through it by Meredith. While Friedman and Wright distort "Modern Love" by failing to see its unity, they do give one the key, as it were, to the poem.

Nothing reveals the lack of recent, detailed penetrating scholarship on the poetry more quickly than a reading of G.M. Trevelyan's The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith.<sup>20</sup> This small book, although it was published in 1906, remains the best discussion of the poetry. Despite the passage of over fifty years since its publication, one must often return to it for the most recent, or, at least, the best interpretations of most of the poems. Trevelyan

succeeds in being fair to the thought and language of the poetry while remaining critical. The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith, however, is essentially an introduction to the poems. One glances at the quality of Meredith's poetry, his subject matter, and his philosophy, as revealed in the chief poems, but the analyses are not detailed and are intended, primarily, to convince one of their merits as poetry rather than to explain their deeper meaning. When an analysis appears detailed, it is because nothing else of consequence has been written on the particular poem.

To a degree it is strange that Trevelyan's book should not have stimulated deeper analyses, that it should mark the effective end as well as the beginning of an understanding of Meredith's poetry. Instead of causing others to delve more deeply into the poetry, Trevelyan seems to have stimulated them only to repeat his introductory assessment of the poems and the poet. The article, for example, by J. Bailey, which was looked at earlier,<sup>21</sup> says nothing which is not to be found in The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith. Bailey is aware of the book, saying that it is a "most interesting and useful book which makes many rough Meredithian places plain," but he, nonetheless, introduces Meredith as a poet once again. To date no one has published a book on the poetry-- or even an article-- which would indicate that scholarship has perceptibly advanced. Like Bailey,

most critics have been satisfied to rephrase Trevelyan.

The tendency of critics to repeat and rephrase Trevelyan's estimate of Meredith's poetry is quite understandable, for he has written so much on it-- compared with what others have produced-- and he has covered such a wide area that it is practically impossible for one to say precisely for what points one is indebted to him. Often what one feels to be an original suggestion turns up as either an explicit point or an implication in Trevelyan's book. When dealing with individual poems one is scarcely ever free of his influence. He may say little or nothing about a particular poem, but he does suggest the atmosphere and spirit of the poetry and, thereby, directs one in an interpretation of any one of the poems.

While this thesis is concerned with the development of the poetry and the development of a theme, aspects which Trevelyan does not discuss, it is, nonetheless, deeply indebted to him. One's initial understanding of Meredith's concepts of man and nature, of Meredith's language and philosophy generally, is developed by Trevelyan's analyses of the poetry. Because it is the only prolonged study of Meredith's poetry, any later work must have as its foundation The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith.

Second to Trevelyan's book, that which has probably had the greatest influence on this study is an unpublished

doctoral thesis written by J.V. Fletcher for the University of Washington in 1936.<sup>22</sup> That thesis, "The Background and Development of George Meredith's Ethics," while it does not deal with the poetry alone, does make extensive use of it; moreover, as the study is concerned with the development of one aspect of Meredith's work and thought, it has been particularly useful as a parallel and related examination, providing stimulation by many occasions for disagreement or corroboration. If Trevelyan stimulates enthusiasm for the poetry and provides a general understanding and sense of direction, Fletcher provides the first detailed awareness of Meredith's development as a whole. The final form of this thesis is the result, to no small degree, of agreement and disagreement with Fletcher's conclusions. The study of the developing relationship of man and nature is necessarily, in part, a study of Meredith's ethical development. The chief differences between this study and Fletcher's are as follows: this thesis is not concerned with the background of Meredith's development; it is restricted to the poetry alone; its emphasis is not upon the ethics but upon the relationship of man and nature as expressed by Meredith's poetry and as it indicates his poetic development. Fletcher's study is concerned primarily with the history of ideas; this thesis is concerned only with the development of Meredith's poetry as manifested in the development of the relationship of man and nature.

A book of considerable interest and some relevance to this study is Georg Roppen's Evolution and Poetic Belief.<sup>23</sup> This is a study of the doctrine of evolution, its interpretation and application by poets. While this thesis does not concern itself with comparisons and contrasts, regardless of open invitations -- it is considered no purpose of this study to place, in any way, Meredith's thought and poetry in the field of English or European literature -- Roppen's work is very useful as a source of information regarding the use by other poets of the evolutionary doctrine. While such information has little relevance to the study itself, it gives one a greater sense of security while dealing with Meredith's particular application of the doctrine. Roppen's analysis of the concept of evolution behind Meredith's mature poetry, moreover, is useful and illuminating.

Brief mention should be made of one book which considers both the prose and poetry and attempts to see "nature and society" as "the controlling themes of Meredith's works."<sup>24</sup> Norman Kelvin's A Troubled Eden, published in 1961, at first glance appears to be similar to but larger than the present study, insofar as it proposes to deal with nature and society as themes in Meredith's works. In reality the studies differ greatly, both in approach and conclusions.

The most obvious difference between the two studies lies in Kelvin's consideration of Meredith's prose as well

as his poetry. This thesis is restricted to the poetry alone. As well, while Kelvin is concerned to prove, simply, that nature and society are "controlling themes" in Meredith's works, this study attempts to trace the development of a particular theme, to indicate, in part, the character of Meredith's poetic development.

The great difference between the studies, however, lies in Kelvin's use of the term "nature" and his understanding of the relationship of nature and man. He writes: "Nature and society are the controlling themes in Meredith's works, but they alternate in ascendancy."<sup>25</sup> It is the contention of this thesis that nature and man, after 1851, are equally dominant in Meredith's poetry; indeed, that their relationship is the controlling theme and not man or nature separately. Behind this disagreement lies a difference in understanding of the term "nature" as it is used in Meredith's poetry. Kelvin seems to feel that nature is not always a beneficent power to Meredith, but occasionally a power of evil-- for example, his assumption in "Modern Love" that "the wedded pair are doomed by character and by passion - i.e., nature -- to endless conflict and misery."<sup>26</sup> It is held in this study that, from his earliest to his latest poetry, Meredith always feels nature to be an ultimately benevolent power upon which man is dependent for meaning in life.

In the final analysis, A Troubled Eden, if the findings



of the present study are correct, distorts the poetry by perceiving there the influence of nature without the influence of man, or by suggesting that, in the mature poetry, man and nature are divided in Meredith's mind rather than united in process. However true Kelvin's findings are of the novels, it is felt that they continuously do the poetry an injustice.

Because of the comparatively few studies of Meredith's poetry in existence and because none of these studies analyzes many of Meredith's major poems in detail, this thesis is based almost entirely upon original interpretations of the poems. While inexperience or insensitivity will undoubtedly show itself, a genuine effort has been made to keep in balance the requirements of the study and the demand of the poetry. The greatest danger, perhaps, in writing a study of this nature and length is that of distorting the poetry to provide unity, coherence, and plausibility to the theme. Distortion of Meredith's poetry can take place either by emphasizing unduly certain facts while suppressing others or by suggesting that the theme under discussion is the only one present in the poetical work. On the first point, it must be said that in this study no fact and no poem has been consciously suppressed or unduly emphasized. Poems which are not mentioned appear either to corroborate or to have no real bearing on the theme. At no time is a poem left unmentioned because it appears to contradict the general theme or tenor of the poetry.

The danger of implying that the theme under discussion

is the only one in the poetry enters through the length of the study and the long concentration upon the single theme. There is in this thesis no pretense that the relationship of man and nature is the only theme of Meredith's poetry. It is felt, however, that this theme is central to Meredith's poetical development. As Meredith developed his concept of the relationship of man and nature, that is, as his understanding of their relationship deepened and changed, his poetry changed as a whole. The theme discussed in this thesis is not the only one in the poetry; but it is a theme which must be understood before one can penetrate to any depth in the poetry of Meredith.

There is a further danger of distortion which is suggested by F.R. Leavis in The Common Pursuit.<sup>27</sup> In the chapter entitled "Literary Criticism and Philosophy" he takes Dr. R. Wellek severely to task for confusing poetry with philosophy. Leavis points out that Wellek's exclusive concern with a poet's expression of a unified body of thought sacrifices the peculiar force of poetry as an art form. Application of philosophic criteria to poetic form, he suggests, causes Wellek to distort and misunderstand poetry.

A similar criticism might possibly be levelled at this study, for by far the largest portion is concerned with the character and development of Meredith's thought rather than his poetry as a whole. To justify the form of this

thesis, one might point out that Meredith's poetry after 1862 is primarily concerned with exposition, that Meredith, while a poet of considerable force, is, first and foremost, a poet of ideas. It is felt that to understand the character of Meredith's poetry as a whole one must first have some idea of the thought.

There is, moreover, in each chapter an effort made to indicate the character of the poetry as a whole, the relation of language, tone, and thought. While the discussion of imagery and language does not equal that of Meredith's ideas, it is felt that enough is said to save the poetry from distortion.

It must be emphasized, nonetheless, that Meredith is a poet of power. A reading of any of his greater poems indicates this at once. "Love in the Valley," "Modern Love," "Hymn to Colour," and "The Woods of Westermain" leave no doubt in one's mind that they were written by a man with no negligible talent. It is hoped that this study will make the power of Meredith as a poet still more clear by providing some of the answers to questions which are at the root of much of the poetry.

## NOTES

1. See Appendix, p.249.
2. George Meredith, The Poetical Works of George Meredith with some notes by G.M. Trevelyan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), pp.1-90. Here and later, all of the poetry included in the pages indicated is not necessarily of the same period. Trevelyan occasionally intermixes poems published at different times. He gives the year of publication for each poem, however, in the table of contents. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Meredith's poetry made in any of the following chapters are from the above edition. It will be referred to simply as The Poetical Works.
3. Ibid., pp.90-112.
4. Ibid., pp.117-172.
5. Ibid., pp.178-572.
6. For a rough statistical account of articles published on Meredith's poetry, see Appendix, p.254.
7. George Macauley Trevelyan, The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith (London: Constable, 1912).
8. J.R.P. Solater, The Sons of Strength (New York: Fleming H. Revell & Co., 1910).
9. John C. Bailey, "The Poetry of George Meredith," The Fortnightly Review, New Series, 76: 32-46, July, 1909.
10. Ibid., p.32.
11. Ibid., p.33.
12. Ibid., p.35.
13. J. Moffat, "The Empty Purse"; a Meredithian study for the times," Hibbert Journal, 14: 613-26, April, 1916.
14. Ibid., p.613.
15. Nina Cust, "Meredith's 'Hymn'," Times Literary Supplement, 1944, December 16, p.611.

16. J.M.S. Tompkins, "Meredith's Perianther," Review of English Studies, 11: 286-95, August, 1960.
17. Carl H. Ketcham, "Meredith's 'Modern Love', XXXI, 7-11," Explicator, 17: 7, October, 1958.
18. Norman Friedman, "The Jangled Harp: Symbolic Structure in 'Modern Love'," Modern Language Quarterly, 18: 9-26, March, 1957.
19. Elizabeth Cox Wright, "The Significance of the Image Patterns in Meredith's 'Modern Love'," The Victorian Newsletter, 13: 1-9, Spring, 1958.
20. Trevelyan, op.cit.
21. See above, p.16.
22. James Vertner Fletcher, "The Background and Development of George Meredith's Ethics." Unpublished Doctor's dissertation, University of Washington, 1936.
23. Georg Roppen, Evolution and Poetic Belief (Oslo: Oslo University Press, 1956).
24. Norman Kelvin, A Troubled Eden; nature and society in the works of George Meredith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), p.2.
25. Ibid., p.2.
26. Ibid., p.25.
27. F.R. Leavis, The Common Pursuit (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952) pp.211-223.

## CHAPTER II

### THE EARLY POETRY

Meredith's first volume of collected poetry, Poems, published in 1851, serves as a firm foundation for his whole poetic career. This volume reveals his initial assumptions about the characters of man and nature and their relationship. One finds here Meredith's deep love of nature and the reverential joy with which he beholds her throughout his life. Although immature and of only minor interest when considered by itself, Poems assumes a position of comparative importance when seen in relation to the development of the poetry as a whole. Without knowledge of this early publication, one would miss much of the emotional fervor and enthusiasm which lies under Meredith's mature poetic work.

What most clearly distinguishes the poetry of 1851 from that of later periods is Meredith's tendency to forget man in his glorification of nature and in his celebration of her beauty and harmony. In 1851, one becomes aware of man's existence chiefly through a contrast implied-- when not made explicit-- between nature's harmony and self-sufficiency and man's insignificance. Meredith is conscious of nature as either country landscape or renewal pattern and man, in either case, is deeply divided from it. Man may experience a sense of union with nature, but it is a union which actually emphasizes their separation. They are related as a worshiper to an unknown but ultimately beneficent god: by a deep feeling

of reverence and joy in the deity's presence and by a profound, emotional sense of thanksgiving for whatever good he feels himself to have gleaned from communion with it.

One can be quite sure that Meredith did not write the poems of the 1851 volume primarily to express ideas or to work out the relationship of man and nature. Poems was written primarily to paint sensuous representations of nature's beauty and harmony. When ideas enter they are not, generally speaking, original in character nor in a position of first importance. Ideas are used, by and large, simply as a canvas upon which to paint.

The language of the poetry often strikes one as being similar to that of Keats. "The Rape of Aurora," for example, and "Daphne" have something of the pictorial, sensuous quality present in many of Keats' poems. While the language of Meredith is lush and rich, however, it does not have the morbid quality which that of Keats occasionally has. Meredith's language is too vital, too active to become morbid or idly egocentric.

As Meredith's language is similar to and yet different from that of Keats, so some of his ideas are vaguely reminiscent of but different from those of Wordsworth. "South-West Wind in the Woodland," for example, reminds one somewhat of "Tintern Abbey," but, while nature is looked upon as a beautiful, beneficent entity, comforting and consoling man, there

is about the poem an atmosphere of activity and vitality which is foreign to the quietly contemplative tone of Wordsworth's poem. It would be accurate, perhaps, to say that Meredith gleaned from the Romantics a love of nature and a love of language itself, but that he did not perceive the depths of their writings.

The simplest and, therefore, perhaps the best approach to Meredith's 1851 poetry and his concept of the relationship of man and nature is to glance at the first of a series of eight poems entitled "Pastorals."<sup>1</sup> In this poem Meredith conceives of nature in its simplest form, as beautiful country landscape, and manifests his deep love for it and his keen awareness of its fullness and harmony. The language is pictorial and this, combined with the tone of quiet joy, evokes a near-religious quality in the poem:

How sweet on sunny afternoons,  
For those who journey light and well,  
To loiter up a hilly rise  
Which hides the prospect far beyond.  
And fancy all the landscape lying  
Beautiful and still:

Beneath a sky of summer blue,  
Whose rounded cloudlets, folded soft,  
Gaze on the scene which we await  
And picture from their peacefulness;  
So calmly to the earth inclining  
Float those loving shapes!

Like airy brides, each singling out  
A spot to love and bless with love,  
Their creamy bosoms glowing warm,  
Till distance weds them to the hills,  
And with its latest gleam the river  
Sinks in their embrace.



And silverly the river runs,  
 And many a graceful wind he makes,  
 By fields where feed the happy flocks,  
 And hedge-rows hushing pleasant lanes,  
 The charms of English home reflected  
     In his shining eye:

Ancestral oak, broad-foliaged elm,  
 Rich meadows sunned and starred with flowers,  
 The cottage breathing tender smoke  
 Against the brooding golden air,  
 With glimpses of a stately mansion  
     On a woodland sward;

And circling round, as with a ring,  
 And distance spreading amber haze,  
 Enclosing hills and pastures sweet;  
 A depth of soft and mellow light  
 Which fills the heart with sudden yearning  
     Aimless and serene!

No disenchantment follows here,  
 For nature's inspiration moves  
 The dream which she herself fulfils;  
 And he whose heart, like valley warmth,  
 Steams up with joy at scenes like this  
     Shall never be forlorn.

And O for any human soul  
 The rapture of a wide survey --  
 A valley sweeping to the West,  
 With all its wealth of loveliness,  
 Is more than recompense for days  
     That taught us to endure.

The first six stanzas can leave no doubt that Meredith is word-painting or that he is responsive to sensuous detail. The "rounded cloudlets" are "folded soft" and have "creamy bosoms glowing warm" and the river "sinks in their embrace." One is made very conscious of light and form in the poem by such terms or phrases as "sunny," "blue," "creamy," "gleam," "silverly," "shining," "sunned," "starred," "golden," "amber,"

"soft and mellow light," "still," "rounded," "folded," and "graceful." The sensuousness of the description combined with the simplicity of the lines creates an atmosphere of richness and well-being.

There is running through the poem, and particularly through the last two stanzas, an implied contrast between the world of nature and the world of man which, at once, relates man's sense of joy and fulfilment to the beauty of nature as landscape and emphasizes his separation from and comparative insignificance to nature. The first line of the seventh stanza suggests the contrast by saying that one is not disenchanted "here," and the suggestion, in the last line of the same stanza, that one who responds with joy to nature "shall never be forlorn" implies that in the world of man one is or can be forlorn. The division of the two worlds is later emphasized by the suggestion that only ~~by~~ responding to nature can man be recompensed for "days/That taught us to endure." Man clearly is not of nature but is a separate entity dependent for a sense of fulfilment upon communion with her.

A clear expression of this separation of man from and his dependence for fulfilment upon nature is to be found in the second poem of the "Pastorals."<sup>2</sup> Speaking of a field, fruitful and mysterious, Meredith writes:

The heart that throbs beneath it holds  
 A bliss so perfect in itself  
 Men's thoughts must borrow rather than bestow.

There can be no doubt of Meredith's sense of religious awe in the face of nature, his consciousness of nature's perfection and harmony, his awareness of man's comparatively small worth. Apart from the statement of nature's perfection and the necessity of man's borrowing from her, the tone of the lines indicates the deep separation of which he is conscious between man and nature.

While the "Pastorals" are useful in suggesting Meredith's concept of nature as landscape and in indicating his love and reverence for it, one must look at other poems of 1851 to understand his concept of nature as renewal pattern. Three poems, "The Wild Rose and the Snowdrop,"<sup>3</sup> "The Rape of Aurora,"<sup>4</sup> and "Daphne,"<sup>5</sup> illustrate Meredith's understanding of nature as harmonious renewal pattern. While the "Pastorals" imply a contrast between nature and man, while they clearly indicate a consciousness of man's division from nature's harmony, these three poems-- with the partial exception of "The Wild Rose and the Snowdrop"-- in no way show an awareness of man's existence. The poems indicate only the character of nature's harmony and renewal pattern. The relation of man to nature's harmony is stated in a later poem, "The South-West Wind in the Woodland." In the three poems in which the actual concept of nature's harmony and renewal

pattern is given expression, no references are made to man, only to nature.

The identification of nature's harmony with the renewal pattern, while present in many poems of 1851, is most explicit in "The Wild Rose and the Snowdrop." In this poem Meredith is concerned to demonstrate that apparent opposites in nature are not contradictory but complementary. Within nature's renewal process, the snowdrop and the wild rose are one, although the birth of one means the death of the other. The destruction of the exquisite beauty of the snowdrop to make way for the wild rose is viewed not as cruel, wanton destruction, but as part of a fertile process. The snowdrop's existence does not lose but gains meaning from its destruction, for in being destroyed it realizes its only function: to die for following life. The reconciliation of the snowdrop's destruction and the wild rose's birth is suggested in the first three lines of the poem:

The Snowdrop is the prophet of the flowers;  
It lives and dies upon its bed of snows;  
And like a thought of spring it comes and goes ....

It is the function of the snowdrop to prophecy the coming of the flowers, and because of this it is one with or is contained within the wild rose: "Much of that early prophet look she shows, / Mixed with her fair espoused blush which glows...."

The fourth stanza states clearly that nature's harmony is found in the renewal pattern:

For each, fulfilling nature's laws, fulfils  
 Itself and its own aspirations pure;  
 Living and dying; letting faith ensure  
 New life when deathless Spring shall touch the hills.  
 Each perfect in its place; and each content  
 With that perfection which its being meant ....

The key to the harmony of the snowdrop and the rose, to the harmony of nature, is a sense of joy and contentment, stemming from an awareness that the basic urge in nature is to renewal of life, and that death is merely a preparation for life. Spring, or the urge to life, is "deathless" and the snowdrop and the rose have "faith" that it will return to give them life.

It can be seen, then, that Meredith conceives of nature's harmony as being the reconciliation of life and death within the renewal pattern. Two other poems of the 1851 volume shed still more light on his concept of nature's harmony: "The Rape of Aurora" and "Daphne." The tone and language of these poems make it clear that Meredith wrote them primarily to celebrate the sensuous joy and richness of life by painting in lush, sensuous terms the mythological tales of Aurora and Daphne. The poems, nonetheless, indicate that acceptance of nature's harmony as the consequence of the renewal pattern means acceptance, as an integral part of the harmony, of the power of sensuous, chaste love, for the poems, in effect, illustrate the working out of the principle of chaste, sensuous love in nature. The rape of Aurora, on the one hand,

and the death of Daphne, on the other, demonstrates the existence in nature of a real and demanding principle of love. The figures become the representatives or the victims of the presence of love in nature.

A reading of "The Rape of Aurora" reveals immediately that it was written chiefly, not to express an idea, but to present a word picture. At first glance, indeed, the robustly mirthful and sensuous tone of the poem seems to preclude the expression, intentional or accidental, of a serious idea. When the poem is examined more closely, however, one realizes that tone has a decisive influence on the prose meaning. One becomes aware, in the word-picture of the rape, of an essential propriety and chastity, for the humorous tone causes one to feel that Apollo's action is actually well-intended and innocent. While one feels, that is, that Meredith's chief aim in writing the poem was to paint a colourful and evocative picture, and not to express an idea, the humorous tone succeeds in contributing to one's understanding of his concept of nature by suggesting that the sensuous love and joy in nature's processes are desirable and proper-- are, in effect, chaste.

The tone of the poem is indicated from the opening puckish lines of mock protest:

Never, O never,  
Since dewy sweet Flora  
Was ravished by Zephyr,

Was such a thing heard  
In the valleys so hollow!

The mocking character of the first lines is rapidly made  
clear as the self-consciously sensuous description reveals  
Meredith's enjoyment and approval of Apollo's action:

Till rosy Aurora,  
Uprising as ever,  
Bright Phosphor to follow,  
Pale Phoebe to sever,  
Was caught like a bird  
To the breast of Apollo!

Wildly she flutters,  
And flushes all over  
With passionate mutters  
Of shame to the hush  
Of his amorous whispers:  
But O such a lover  
Must win when he utters,  
Thro' rosy red lipsers,  
The pains that discover  
The wishes that gush  
From the torches of Hesperus.

One finger just touching  
The Orient chamber,  
Unflooded the gushing  
Of light that illumed  
All her lustrous unveiling.  
On clouds of glow amber,  
Her limbs richly blushing,  
She lay sweetly wailing,  
In odours that gloomed  
On the god as he bloomed  
O'er her loveliness paling.

Great Pan in his covert  
Beheld the rare glistening,  
The cry of the love-hurt,  
The sigh and the kiss  
Of the latest close mingling:  
But love, thought he, listening,  
Will not do a dove hurt,  
I know, -- and a tingling,

Latent with bliss,  
 Prickt thro' him, I wis,  
 For the Nymph he was singling.

Apart from the humorous tone of the poem, the key to understanding lies in the last stanza where the only reaction of Great Pan, the god of forests and wildlife, or, as Meredith conceived of it in 1851, of nature, is to condone the rape and feel in himself a "tingling/Latent with bliss... For the Nymph he was singling." Great Pan, the god of nature, asserts the presence of the power of sensuous love in nature; coupled with the humorous tone of the poem, this sensuous love reveals itself to the reader as chaste and innocent as well. While "The Wild Rose and the Snowdrop," then, persuades one that the harmony of nature lies in the renewal pattern, "The Rape of Aurora" persuades one, further, of the possibility that the renewal pattern has at its base the power of chaste, sensuous love.

An analysis of "Daphne" shows clearly that Meredith did conceive of chaste, sensuous love as being the basis of nature's renewal pattern and harmony. This poem is a retelling of the myth of Apollo's attempt to seduce Daphne, of her flight, and of her consequent transformation into a laurel tree. The poem is written in quatrains with alternating eight and seven-syllable lines. The short, sensitive stanza and line permit Meredith to develop the poem through individual but connected word-pictures. The poem becomes, essentially, a



series of bright, sensuous pictures leading to Daphne's final transformation into a laurel. The quatrain form permits a flexibility of treatment and a sensitivity to detail which would likely have been precluded in a longer stanzaic form.

The initial description of Daphne and Apollo combines sensuousness with chastity to suggest the potential fruitfulness of the situation:

Never flashed thro' sylvan valley  
 Visions so divinely fair!  
 He with early ardour glowing,  
 She with rosy anguish rare.

Only still more sweet and lovely  
 For those terrors on her brows,  
 Those swift glances wild and brilliant,  
 Those delicious panting vows.

Timidly the timid shoulders  
 Shrinking from the fervid hand!  
 Dark the tide of hair back-flowing  
 From the blue-veined temples bland!

Lovely, too, divine Apollo  
 In the speed of his pursuit;  
 With his eye an azure lustre,  
 And his voice a summer lute!

The stanzas are permeated with an awareness of vigour, health, and naturalness. Apollo glows with "early ardour," his hand is "fervid," his eye on "azure lustre," his voice a "summer lute." Daphne glows with "rosy anguish," is "sweet and lovely" for the "terrors on her brows," her glances are "swift," "wild and brilliant," and her "panting" vows "delicious." The obvious sensuousness of the description combines with the health and vigour of the imagery to suggest that the attempted seduction

is natural and essentially chaste.

Sensuousness and chastity combine in the quatrains describing Daphne's bathing in the river Peneus, whose form Apollo has momentarily taken in preparation for her seduction:

Plunging 'mid her scattered tresses,  
With her blue invoking eyes;  
See her like a star descending!  
Like a rosebud see her rise!

Like a rosebud in the morning  
Dashing off its jewell'd dew,  
Ere unfolding all its fragrance  
It is gathered by the muse!

Beauteous in the foamy laughter  
Bubbling round her shrinking waist,  
Lo! from locks and lips and eyelids  
Rain the glittering pearl-drops chaste!

Such terms as "scattered tresses" and "shrinking waist" can leave no doubt as to the sensuousness of the description. The propriety of Apollo's attempted seduction, however, and Daphne's need to succumb to his advances to remain within the natural processes are clearly suggested through the rosebud and water imagery. Daphne is seen rising from the "god impregnate water" as a rosebud shedding its morning dew before being "gathered by the muse," or by Apollo, as god of music and poetry. As the rosebud, that is, sheds the morning dew to be "gathered" to Apollo, Daphne should shed the waters of the god-filled Peneus to be successfully seduced by him. As the shedding of the morning dew is merely the preparation by the rosebud for the final unfolding of "all its fragrance," for its final ful-



filment, Daphne's bathing in the Peneus should be merely her preparation for final fulfilment in seduction by Apollo. The propriety and chastity of the seduction are implied in its being described in terms of natural processes, but the description of the water as "glittering pearl-drops chaste" can leave no doubt that Meredith intended to suggest that Apollo's seduction of Daphne would have been right and chaste within the renewal pattern of nature.

Daphne's separation from the natural processes in evading Apollo, in following the command of Dian, the huntress and moon goddess, by flying from Apollo's grasp, is stated clearly in the description of her flight:

But all nature is against her!  
Pan, with all his sylvan troop,  
Thro' the vista'd woodland valleys  
Blocks her course with cry and whoop!

In the twilight of the thickets  
Trees bend down their gnarled boughs,  
Wild green leaves and low curved branches  
Hold her hair and beat her brows.

Obviously the seduction would have been natural and right. Her flight from the seduction, her turning from the proper use of the senses in the renewal pattern results in her being turned into a laurel tree, a thing apart from the pulse, the heart, the senses:

And the god whose fervent rapture  
Clasps her finds his close embrace  
Full of palpitating branches,  
And new leaves that bud apace.

Round his wonder-stricken forehead; --  
 While in ebbing measures slow  
 Sounds of softly dying pulses  
 Pause and quiver, pause and go;

Go, and come again, and flutter  
 On the verge of life, -- then flee!  
 All the white ambrosial beauty  
 Is a lustrous Laurel Tree!

Whereas "The Rape of Aurora" suggests the possibility that chaste, sensuous love is the basis of the renewal pattern, the basis of nature's harmony, "Daphne" leaves no doubt. To Meredith in 1851 nature clearly demands a proper exercise and enjoyment of the senses for participation in her harmony. While he approaches nature as a worshiper would a deity, Meredith, nonetheless, understands that she has her roots firmly implanted in the sensible world.

With an understanding of Meredith's concept of the character of nature, of her harmony and renewal pattern, one is in a position to analyze what is, perhaps, the best poem of the 1851 volume: "South-West Wind in the Woodland."<sup>6</sup> In this poem Meredith makes the most explicit statement of his understanding, in 1851, of the relationship of man and nature. In both language and thought, this poem reveals Meredith's deep love for and sense of communion with nature. The poem is in two parts: first, a detailed description of the sound and sight of the wind in the woodland; second, a statement of its meaning for man. Meredith "felt impelled" to write the poem in blank stanzas -- perhaps "paragraphs" would be a more accurate

term -- with lines of four feet to give his impression of "the reckless rushing rapidity, and sweeping sound of the great wind among the foliage" and to cause the ear to be conscious only "of swiftness, and not sweetness."<sup>7</sup> His conscious suggestion of the wind's sound in the foliage becomes, in effect, word-painting, for there is presented an image of the wind as a powerful, vigorous force. Through the vital description of the wind, one becomes aware of the vigour, power, and health of nature in Meredith's mind:

He comes upon the neck of night,  
Like one that leaps a fiery steed  
Whose keen black haunches quivering shine  
With eagerness and haste, that needs  
No spur to make the dark leagues fly!

The beauty and harmony of nature, too, is conveyed by the language and description. As the wind momentarily dies, the foliage of the trees ceases to "shriek, and shout, and whirl, and toss," becoming instead a "symphony" and a "harmony":

... not trembling now  
The aspens, but like freshening waves  
That fall upon a shingly beach; --  
And round the oak a solemn roll  
Of organ harmony ascends,  
And in the upper foliage sounds  
A symphony of distant seas.

The harmony is not merely stated: it is impressed upon the reader by such words as "solemn," "roll," and "organ." The soft s, the liquid sound of "roll" and "organ" combine to stimulate in one an awareness of richness, fullness, and beauty. There is running throughout the descriptive passages a sense of

joy and vitality so keen as to make one suspect that Meredith's chief aim in writing them was not so much to prepare the way for the statement of nature's meaning for man as to give expression to his deep love of the sight and sound of nature. The richness and vitality of his description, however, does prepare for the later statement. Despite the division of the descriptive from the expository passages, Meredith's joy in nature is transferred by the reader to inform and colour the statement of meaning.

The last stanza of the poem clearly reveals nature to be an entity separate from man, an entity with which man can merely commune:

The voice of nature is abroad  
 This night; she fills the air with balm;  
 Her mystery is o'er the land;  
 And who that hears her now and yields  
 His being to her yearning tones,  
 And seats his soul upon her wings,  
 And broadens o'er the wind-swept world  
 With her, will gather in the flight  
 More knowledge of her secret, more  
 Delight in her beneficence,  
 Than hours of musing, or the lore  
 That lives with men could ever give!  
 Nor will it pass away when morn  
 Shall look upon the lulling leaves,  
 And woodland sunshine, Eden-sweet,  
 Dreams o'er the paths of peaceful shade;--  
 For every elemental power  
 Is kindred to our hearts, and once  
 Acknowledged, wedded, once embraced,  
 Once taken to the unfettered sense,  
 Once claspt into the naked life,  
 The union is eternal.

When one looks at this passage for its bearing on the relationship of man and nature, one is struck most by the deep gulf

between them despite the "union." Nature is "untouched and untroubled by the human element."<sup>8</sup> She is a beneficent "mystery" to which man must yield for "balm" and "knowledge of her secret." The separation of man and nature is clearly indicated by the poet's turning from man in his effort to understand nature. Man is not conceived of as being part of nature. In yielding to her, man learns only of nature: there is no indication that he learns anything of himself.

Significantly the union which Meredith feels to exist between them is one between nature as an "elemental power" and the "heart" of man. The term "elemental" itself is sufficient to cause one to suspect that he is referring to nature as the power of chaste, sensuous love-- insofar as "elemental" refers to something which is simple or primal-- but when one notices further that the power is kindred to man's "heart" and that the description of the union is entirely in terms of love, that the power is "wedded," "embraced," "taken to the unfettered sense," "claspt into the naked life," one becomes sure that Meredith's sense of union between man and nature is simply man's feeling in his heart the presence of a power related to that of chaste, sensuous love in nature. Man and nature, that is, are related only insofar as man is capable of recognizing in himself a power affined to that which is basic to nature's renewal pattern and harmony. The union is, of course, no real union at all, for its existence

is dependent upon man alone, as nature is apparently unconscious of it. It is, moreover, a sense of union based on the emotions, not on reason, on the heart, not on the mind. One feels sure that Meredith's feeling of union with nature springs simply from his overwhelming joy in its beauty and harmony.

In the final analysis, "South-West Wind in the Woodland" re-affirms the impression one gains from the other poems of the volume: that to Meredith in 1851 nature is an harmonious entity separate from man, with which man communes as a worshiper with the worshipped. The chief contribution of the poem to an understanding of Meredith's concept of the relationship of man and nature is the establishment of chaste, sensuous love as the basis of communion.

Poems has as its chief inspiration Meredith's love of and reverence for nature as landscape and renewal pattern. Man, indeed, is all but forgotten in the celebration of nature's beauty and harmony. In no later poetry does Meredith so "neglect the human mind and the tribute it brings to nature."<sup>9</sup> Insofar as man and his position are perceivable in the poetry of 1851, it seems clear that Meredith felt man and nature to be two distinct entities with no basis for mutual communication. Man may experience a sense of union with nature as he becomes aware of the same power of chaste, sensuous love operative in his heart as exists in nature's renewal pattern, but there is



no suggestion of a relationship based on mutual recognition of a unity-in-process. Nature remains divided from man, a beautiful entity, harmonious and self-sufficient through the reconciliation of apparent opposites within its renewal pattern. Man, in the poetry of 1851, stands apart from this entity, capable only of responding to its beauty and experiencing a sense of fulfilment upon becoming conscious that he, as well as nature, can feel the power of love.

## NOTES

1. Meredith, The Poetical Works, pp.47-48.
2. Ibid., pp. 48-50.
3. Ibid., pp. 7-8.
4. Ibid., pp. 22-23.
5. Ibid., pp. 30-42.
6. Ibid., pp. 23-26.
7. From an unpublished letter in the Berg Collection, dated July 9, 1851, quoted by Norman Kelvin in A Troubled Eden, p. 143.
8. Fletcher, "The Background and Development of George Meredith's Ethics," p.39.
9. Ibid., p.39.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE TRANSITION POETRY

The ten years following Poems of 1851 were years of struggle, change, and maturation for Meredith, but they were not years of great poetic production. Between Poems and "Modern Love," Meredith published only fourteen poems, none of great poetic or philosophic power. These few poems, however, are sufficient to indicate that Meredith was groping for a more rational approach to the question of man's relation to nature. This is not to say that all of the poetry between 1851 and 1861 deals with or suggests strongly a more rational understanding of nature, but the tendency of the poetry of the period is to stress man and the usefulness of nature to man rather than the necessity of man's exultation in the processes of nature.

In the final analysis, the poetry of 1851 to 1861 must be seen as marking the transition of Meredith from his early understanding of the relationship of man and nature to his more mature understanding in "Modern Love." The poetry of this period is marked by a conflict between the emotional nature worship of 1851 and an increasing tendency to rationalism and common sense. No end is reached in the conflict, but Meredith's sense of dissatisfaction with his position in Poems and his first movements towards a new position are registered.

Approximately one-half of the fourteen poems published between 1851 and 1861 express little or no development of ideas beyond Poems. The remaining poetry reflects, in varying degrees, a development of thought beyond the simple nature worship of 1851. The poetry of the period as a whole, however, expresses a change in tone from that of the early poems. One feels throughout the 1851 volume the youthful enthusiasm, the exalted emotional rapture of Meredith in nature and in natural processes. One is not given the impression that Meredith has felt man's sorrows and privations deeply or personally. Poems seems to be the work of a youth inspired still by the dreams of boyhood, unshattered yet by the demands of the world. A subtle change, however, manifests itself after 1851. One feels that Meredith is no longer merely word-painting, is no longer content to embrace nature for herself alone. After 1851 Meredith's poetry is more subdued, as life begins to leave its imprint upon him, as he is forced by living to see meaning in human existence. Nature remains an object of love and veneration, the celebration of the renewal pattern is still suggested, but the tone of the poetry is more solemn than that of 1851: it is permeated with an awareness of pain and death, and with the hardness of life.

To say that the tone of the poetry is more solemn is not to exclude jocularly and humour: it is to suggest that there is always a throb of conscious, intellectual serious-

ness under the surface of the lines. Occasionally the humour is the roadway into the essential seriousness of the poem. An example of the shift in tone is "Autumn Evensong." In this poem a strong undertone of isolation suggests itself despite the outward, joyful acceptance of night and storm as in the earlier "South-West Wind in the Woodland." While the poem would seem to be closely knit in thought to the 1851 volume, Meredith's concentration on and keen awareness of the bareness, and the cold, hard outline of nature in the fall creates a tone or atmosphere foreign to the exultation of Poems. In "South-West Wind in the Woodland" one feels that Meredith is experiencing physically and joyfully the buffeting wind and is rejoicing as he feels and hears the "voice of nature"; in "Autumn Evensong" there is no suggestion of physical joy in nature, and his welcome to night and storm has a ring of defiance, as if he will remain snug and warm despite the chilling character of nature. Night and storm in "Autumn Evensong" do not give Meredith a sense of union with a greater harmony: they close in on him, leaving him alone on a barren heath:

The long cloud edged with streaming grey  
                   Soars from the West;  
 The red leaf mounts with it away,  
                   Showing the nest  
 A blot among the branches bare:  
 There is a cry of outcasts in the air.

.....

Pale on the panes of the old hall  
 Gleams the lone space  
 Between the sunset and the squall;  
 And on its face  
 Mournfully glimmers to the last:  
 Great oaks grow mighty minstrels in the blast.

Pale the rain-rutted roadways shine  
 In the green light  
 Behind the cedar and the pine:  
 Come, thundering night!  
 Blacken broad earth with hoards of storm:  
 For me yon valley-cottage beckons warm.

While physical nature is the background of "Autumn Evensong," as it is of the poetry of the 1851 volume, the tone and attitude struck in this poem differ from that of the early poetry. The suggestion that the nest is a "blot among the branches bare" and that the birds are "outcasts in the air," crying in the face of nature's impending onslaught, creates a sense of isolation and anguish unknown in 1851. There creeps into the lines a melancholy note through the description of the space between the "sunset and the squall" as "pale," "lone," and glimmering "mournfully." One is dimly aware of an unreal character to the roadways as they shine "pale" and "rain-rutted" in "the green light/Behind the cedar and the pine." If there is nothing actually forbidding in the description, one does feel that in the vaguely unreal world before the storm, man is even more of an outcast than the birds.

One is aware of this subtle change of tone, though not so clearly, even in a poem celebrating spring. "The Sweet o' the

Year"<sup>2</sup> is akin to "The Rape of Aurora" in celebrating the assertion of the renewal pattern, but here, despite the richness of language, there is a restraint and emotional balance suggesting that there are forces at work in Meredith more subtle than those causing him to revel in the sensuous renewal pattern in nature. One feels in the poem the presence of the intellect. The tendency of the poetry of 1851 to concentration on the merely sensuous in nature is controlled in "The Sweet o' the Year" by the pressure of the mind's perceiving in the renewal pattern fulfilment for man. Man's life is infused with order and meaning as he, with the other creatures of nature, with which he is here identified, celebrates the coming of spring:

Now the frog, all lean and weak,  
     Yawning from his famished sleep,  
 Water in the ditch doth seek,  
     Fast as he can stretch and leap:  
     Marshy king-cups burning near  
     Tell him 'tis the sweet o'the year.

.....

Now the merry maids so fair  
     Weave the wreathes and choose the queen,  
 Blooming in the open air,  
     Like fresh flowers upon the green;  
     Spring, in every thought sincere,  
     Thrills them with the sweet o' the year.

.....

Now all nature is alive,  
     Bird and beetle, man and mole;  
 Bee-like goes the human hive,  
     Hearty faith and honest cheer  
     Welcome in the sweet o'the year.

The inclusion of man in nature in the poem, however, does not seem the consequence of serious thought, for Meredith appears unaware of any unwontedly profound significance in the situation. The presence of man in nature and the welcoming in of spring with "hearty faith and honest cheer" humanizes and makes more rational the renewal pattern, restrains the more sensuous aspects of the season, but it does not establish a new stage in Meredith's thought. "The Sweet o'the Year," nonetheless, is noteworthy for its more solemn tone, for it is indicative of the general movement of Meredith's poetry at this time to a more balanced and rational position.

"The Song of Courtesy" is a serious poem insofar as it suggests the efficacy of peace, harmony, or courtesy among people, but it is a poem whose serious theme is presented through hilariously exaggerated imagery and landscape. The naive thought at the heart of the 1851 poetry is chastened and matured by the play of the mind. "The Song of Courtesy" reveals a greater depth of understanding than the poems of 1851 because it is self-critical even as it is sincere.

The wit and exaggeration are readily seen in the first stanza:

When Sir Gawain was led to his bridal-bed  
 By Arthur's knights in scorn God-spied:--  
 How think you he felt?  
     O the bride within  
 Was yellow and dry as a snake's old skin;  
     Loathly as sin!  
     Scarcely faceable,  
     Quite unembraceable;



With a hog's bristle on a hag's chin!--  
 Gentle Gawain felt as should we,  
 Little of Love's soft fire knew he;  
 But he was the Knight of Courtesy.<sup>3</sup>

The situation in the poem is actually serious, for Sir Gawain, the perfect knight, is being subjected to a test of his courtesy, really to a test of his morality. The exaggeration in form and content, however, lightens what would otherwise be a heavy, unconvincing seriousness. The description of Gawain's bride as "yellow and dry as a snake's old skin" and the following exaggeration of her repulsiveness through the rapid syllabic compression-- from ten syllables to four-- succeed in lending the poem a tone of gentle mockery. The sudden change from a basically iambic structure to three lines with initial trochees throws an exaggerated emphasis on "Loathly," "Scarcely," and "Quite" which, when combined with the effect of the sudden syllabic reduction, casts over the whole an aura of mock seriousness which, strangely enough, permits one to take the idea of the poem seriously. While the humour in "The Rape of Aurora" contributes to the thought underlying the poem by disarming the critical faculty of the reader and suggesting the innocence of Apollo, the comedy inherent in "The Song of Courtesy" activates the critical eye and the intelligence to cause the reader to see beyond the scene to the idea.

The shift in tone from 1851 can be seen as well in the second and third stanzas of "The Song of Courtesy." One can feel a greater depth of experience and understanding informing

the central idea. The very awareness of the presence of the intellect in the poem gives the poem a greater validity in the reader's mind:

When that evil lady he lay beside  
 Bade him turn to greet his bride,  
 What think you he did?  
     O, to spare her pain,  
 And let not his loathing her loathliness vain  
     Mirror too plain,  
     Sadly, sighingly,  
     Almost dyingly,  
 Turned he and kissed her once and again.  
 Like Sir Gawain, gentles, should we?  
Silent all! But for pattern agree  
 There's none like the Knight of Courtesy.

Sir Gawain sprang up amid laces and curls:  
 Kisses are not wasted pearls:--  
 What clung in his arms?  
     O, a maiden flower,  
 Burning with blushes the sweet bride-bower,  
     Beauty her dower!  
     Breathing perfumingly;  
     Shall I live bloomingly,  
 Said she, by day, or the bridal hour?  
 Thereat he clasped her, and whispered he,  
 Thine, rare bride, the choice shall be.  
 Said she, Twice blest is Courtesy!

The apparent virtuosity of style in the poem is subordinated to the comic tone. Insofar as a comic tone indicates an awareness of the comedy of life as well as its earnestness, and insofar as the awareness of the comic reveals the presence of the intellect, Meredith has matured and developed beyond 1851.

Despite the shift in tone, one must not forget that the poems discussed above are, in thought, at approximately the same stage as the poems of 1851. The tone of the poems

suggests a greater awareness of man and the nature of life, but Meredith is still heavily influenced by his 1851 concept of nature and man. This is nowhere more clearly evidenced than in "Over the Hills,"<sup>4</sup> surely one of the poorest poems ever published. Insofar as the piece conveys a definite meaning, "Over the Hills" suggests that nature is scenery and an escape for man. Meredith, indeed, would seem bitter in his revulsion from man and society. As there is no real development within the poem, one may quote stanzas at random without fearing loss of meaning:

Here among men we're like the deer  
 That yonder is our prey:  
 So, over the hills, we'll bound old hound,  
 Over the hills and away.

The hypocrite is master here,  
 But he's the cock of clay:  
 So, over the hills we'll bound, old hound,  
 Over the hills and away.

The women, they shall sigh and smile,  
 And madden whom they may:  
 It's over the hills we'll bound, old hound,  
 Over the hills and away.

.....

The torrent glints under the rowan red,  
 And shakes the bracken spray:  
 What joy on the heather to bound, old hound,  
 Over the hills and away.

The sun bursts broad, and the heathery bed  
 Is purple, and orange, and gray:  
 Away, and away, we'll bound, old hound,  
 Over the hills and away.

The conception of nature and man in the poem is clearly that of 1851, in which man and nature are divided, and nature is a self-sufficient harmony to which inadequate man applies for consolation. While the central idea of the poem is of 1851 vintage, the tone of the poem shows clearly that new forces are at work in Meredith. Bitterness is unknown in 1851. The same force which causes Meredith to subdue exultation in "Autumn Evensong" and "The Sweet o' the Year," the same force which causes him to suggest the comic element in "The Song of Courtesy" is at work in "Over the Hills" to produce the tone of bitterness: the force of the intellect grappling with human existence. Meredith's reaction to nature and man is being qualified by his chastening contacts with life. The tone of the poems has shifted and not the ideas, but the new tone is a premonition of deeper changes.

Meredith's movement away from the simple nature worship of 1851 is attested by more than the tone of the poetry published between 1851 and 1861. This period saw the publication of at least two<sup>5</sup> poems which indicate clearly that Meredith was consciously seeking a new understanding of the relationship of man and nature, an understanding with a rational, not an emotional, basis. "The Last Words of Juggling Jerry"<sup>6</sup> and "By the Rosanna"<sup>7</sup> suggest that Meredith was re-examining his 1851 position in an attempt to see meaning

in life for the individual man, to understand the meaning for men of nature, death, permanence -- of life itself. In relation to his new emphasis on the existence of man, his concern with the actual living of life after 1851, it is interesting to note what Meredith says himself. In a letter to the Reverend Augustus Jessopp, dated November 13, 1861, Meredith writes:

But one result of my hard education since the publication of my boy's book in '51 (those poems were written before I was twenty) has been that I rarely write save from the suggestion of something actually observed. I mean, that I rarely write verse. Thus my Jugglers, Beggars, etc., I have met on the road, and have idealized but slightly. I desire to strike the poetic spark out of absolute human clay. And in doing so I have the fancy that I do solid work -- better than a carol in mid air .... Of course I do not think of binding down the Muse to the study of facts. That is but a part of her work.<sup>8</sup>

Meredith's turning to observable fact, and to humanity in particular, is conscious. After 1851 there is a concentrated effort to understand life by understanding man. Man begins to assume a central position in Meredith's rationale of existence.

"The Last Words of Juggling Jerry" might be read merely as a character study, but in this poem Meredith is face to face with the problem of death and the nature of change. The old juggler is dying by the hedge-side in the arms of his wife. His last words consist of comment on the

nature of living, dying, and of death. There is a unity of tone and attitude in the poem, stemming from the informing realization of death's nearness, which lends the poem a measure of validity and penetration, a modicum of effectiveness. In the final analysis, however, one must feel that both the tone and the content of the poem are forced, do not spring from true convictions of Meredith so much as from a driving desire to provide answers to the questions of life, to questions which he has not yet fully understood. The first stanza suggests the tone of the poem and the juggler's attitude to death:

Pitch here the tent, while the old horse grazes:  
 By the old hedge-side we'll halt a stage.  
 It's nigh my last above the daisies:  
 My next leaf'll be man's blank page.  
 Yes, my old girl! and it's no use crying:  
 Juggler, constable, king, must bow.  
 One that outjuggles all's been spying  
 Long to have me, and he has me now.

Death is to be stoically met, is to be accepted as inevitable. No question is asked of the meaning of death, but there is a suggestion of a greater force than man which levels and consumes. The stanza succeeds in convincing the reader of the presence of death.

The only false note in the passage is the juggler's excessive protestation of his acceptance of death. The tone of the lines is intended one feels, to give the impression of Jerry's calm resolution in the face of death; in reality

the tone reveals an uncertainty and emotional fear. The line "Yes, my old girl! and it's no use crying," while it ostensibly suggests the uselessness of pity and sorrow, actually becomes a plea for pity by producing a pervading, honey-sweet pathos in the lines. The language and imagery of the whole stanza lend themselves to this tone of pathos. The horse is old, the hedge is old, the wife is old. The lines "It's nigh my last above the daisies:/My next leaf'll be man's blank page" are patently sentimental and pathetic. The tone of the stanza, then, causes one to feel the thought forced and untrue in the situation. Meredith is facing the problem of death, but he is cheating in his answer to the problem, for he is not being honest with himself: he knows the pose, the attitude he would like to adopt, but he is not yet prepared to accept the full consequences of that attitude. Meredith is at an interim stage in the development of his attitude to death; he is considering death in its meaning for man, which is an advance from 1851, but he has not yet defined and accepted this developed attitude. The play of reason has caused him to consider death as a problem complicating the simple 1851 position, but it has not yet enabled him to free himself of the toils of emotion and sentimentality which prevent his arriving at a satisfactory solution.

The tone of pathos, seriously qualifying the acceptance of death, pervades the whole poem. Meredith, nonetheless,

suggests several points which show that he has penetrated further into the nature of existence than he had in 1851, or, at least, that he is aware of a greater complexity in existence than he was earlier. The most striking development is, perhaps, in Meredith's attitude to nature. There is no suggestion even of an emotional union with it. Nature, as scenery, is indifferent to the death of Juggling Jerry. While there is essential division between man and nature in Poems, man can at least find emotional consolation in it. "The Last Words of Juggling Jerry" suggests no consolation, no sense of harmony. Reason has intervened to make Meredith aware of nature's indifference to the individual, but it has not yet provided him with any alternate security. Nature's indifference can be seen in the following passage:

Yonder came smells of the gorse, so nutty,  
 Gold-like and warm: it's the prime of May.  
 Better than mortar, brick and putty,  
 Is God's house on a blowing day.  
 Lean me more up the mound; now I feel it:  
 All the old heath smells! Ain't it strange?  
 There's the world laughing, as if to conceal it,  
 But He's by us, juggling the change.

Nature's harmonious self-sufficiency merely accentuates the mortality of man. Nature seems to conceal the approach of death from man by not concerning herself with death at all, and, therefore, making it impossible for man to see his death in her. In this poem, man must look elsewhere than to nature for consolation as he hovers on the verge of apparent



oblivion.

Concerned as he is between 1851 and 1861 with the meaning of death for the individual, Meredith, conceiving of no relation between man and nature, must look to some concept of God and eternity. His unsatisfactory and fragmentary explanation of the ultimate fate of Juggling Jerry suggests once again that Meredith has not yet worked out or defined for himself his position. There is constant reference in the poem to a "Great Juggler," representing, it would seem, a power superior to man, controlling man's fate. The "Great Juggler" is, apparently, God, stripped of all traditional, supernatural, and religious connotations. Jerry rejects organized religion and its agents:

It's past parsons to console us:  
 No, nor no doctor fetch for me:  
 I can die without my bolus;  
 Two of a trade, lass, never agree!  
 Parson and Doctor! -- don't they love rarely  
 Fighting the devil in other men's fields!  
 Stand up yourself and match him fairly:  
 Then see how the rascal yields!

While this rejection of organized religion does suggest a rejection of much of the traditional content of religion as well, insofar as the doctor and parson are seen as jugglers and medicine and religion are seen as opiates, it does not clarify one's understanding of Jerry's concept of a "Great Juggler," for no connection between the right mode of living and the "Great Juggler" is suggested. One feels that the

failure to clarify stems from a basic confusion in Meredith's mind.<sup>9</sup> In stanza nine Jerry says:

Cheer up! the Lord must have his lease.  
 Maybe -- for none see in that black hollow --  
 It's just a place where we're held in pawn,  
 And, when the Great Juggler makes as to swallow,  
 It's just the sword trick -- I ain't quite gone!

The fate of the individual after death is not clear, but Meredith once again compromises to suggest the possibility of life after death. As in the matter of meeting death stoically, Meredith's sentimental and emotional element forces him to compromise in an effort to have the best of both possible worlds. The compromise, however, is unsatisfactory, suggesting merely Meredith's failure to understand the problem or himself.

"The Last Words of Juggling Jerry" suggests, not only Meredith's position regarding death and dying, but his concept of the good life at this time. Living is seen as juggling, as keeping several balls in the air at once, timing one's movements in a way not to disrupt the moving balls, being careful not to misstep lest one drop the balls, lose one's spectators, lose one's money. Living, seen as juggling, is a continuous process of taking what one can. In stanza five, Jerry says:

Juggling's no sin, for we must have victual:  
 Nature allows us to bait for the fool.  
 Holding one's own makes us juggle no little;  
 But, to increase it, hard juggling's the rule.

You that are sneering at my profession,  
 Haven't you juggled a vast amount?  
 There's the Prime Minister, in one Session,  
 Juggles more games than my sins'll count.

This rugged individualism is explained further in the following stanza:

I've murdered insects with mock thunder:  
 Conscience, for that, in men don't quail.  
 I've made my bread from the bump of wonder:  
 That's my business, and there's my tale.

One can see in this concept of living no suggestion of a moral force, nothing to curb or restrain the individual's desires and actions, no criteria of right behaviour. Jerry would seem to be essentially amoral. Nature does not provide man with a positive criterion and he has nothing within himself to guide his actions but a conscience which is undefined and apparently inoperative. Juggling Jerry would seem to be the most rugged of rugged individuals functioning in an open, laissez-faire society.

Meredith, however, compromises once again. For no apparent reason, he provides Jerry with a sense of morality and responsibility. In stanza eight Jerry points out carefully that "we two were married, due and legal:/Honest we've lived since we've been one." In stanza ten Jerry feels obliged to point out that his wife will be left with a considerable sum of money and that he treated her well during life:

I, lass, have lived no gipsy, flaunting  
 Finery while his poor helpmate grubs:  
 Coin I've stored, and you won't be wanting:  
 You shan't beg from troughs and tubs.

Can there be any doubt that this unwarranted and illogical sense of morality and responsibility in Jerry stems from a failure of Meredith to apply his intellect fully to the problem of living, a failure stemming, in turn, from the influence of the emotional and sentimental element? The poem is saturated with sentimentality and repressed emotion. One may look anywhere to see the confusing influence of sentimentality. Stanza six, in which Jerry had said boldly of his juggling, "That's my business, and there's my tale," contains all of the sentimentality and emotion which could possibly be forced into a respect for monarchy: "Ay! and I've had my smile from the Queen:/Bravo, Jerry! she meant: God bless her!" After pointing out the morality of their relations in stanza eight, Jerry says, with calculated sentimentality, of himself and his wife in youth:

Birds in a May-bush we were! right merry!  
 All night we kiss'd, we juggled all day.  
 Joy was the heart of Juggling Jerry!  
 Now from his old girl he's juggled away.

Nowhere is the underlying sentimental and emotional tone of the poem felt more strongly, however, than in the last stanza. The image of the two gulls flying together happily, to be divided by the shot of a chance hunter, is so patently

sentimental as to be unconvincing; indeed, the effectiveness of the poem is seriously undermined by the weakness of the last stanza:

I mind it well, by the sea-beach lying,  
 Once -- it's long gone -- when two gulls we beheld,  
 Which, as the moon got up, were flying  
 Down a big wave that sparked and swelled.  
 Crack, went a gun: one fell: the second  
 Wheeled round him twice, and was off for new luck:  
 There in the dark her white wing beckon'd:--  
 Drop me a kiss -- I'm the bird dead-struck!

The stoic acceptance of death and the necessary indifference of the living to death, suggested in the phrase "off for new luck," is sadly qualified and adulterated by the grossly sentimental and melodramatic image of the last two lines.

An analysis of "The Last Words of Juggling Jerry" shows clearly that Meredith, after 1851, became concerned, as he had not in Poems, with the individual's life, death, and ultimate fate. The concern would seem to have been the result of an increased play of the mind and Meredith's experience with life. In any case, he is concerned to understand the nature of the individual and his relation to the whole of existence. The expression of this concern reveals, however, that Meredith had not yet arrived at firm conclusions, was not yet free of the emotional element found so strongly in Poems. "The Last Words of Juggling Jerry," while it shows development from 1851, is still clearly transitional and unsatisfactory as an expression of a unified view of existence.

In the 1851 volume of poetry, Meredith conceives of a union existing between man and nature. The basis of the union is individual man's awareness of the existence in his heart of the same sensuous love as is in the heart of nature. Man, that is, in communion with nature, feels the same driving force in himself which he conceives to be in nature. In 1861, in "By the Rosanna," Meredith conceives of the possibility of union between man and nature again; this time, however, the union is between man as a species and nature. The ultimate nature of the union cannot be determined, for Meredith says little of the manner in which the union is to be brought about. His proposed union, however, is significant in two respects: it indicates his growing concern with the need of a relationship between man and nature more broadly based than that suggested in 1851, and it suggests an equality of man and nature foreign to the nature worship of Poems. In "By the Rosanna" only by union can man or nature find fulfilment.

"By the Rosanna" is a difficult poem to comprehend in its entirety, for it is at once occasional, personal, and seriously intended. The complex and confusing character of the poem is indicated by Meredith in a letter to the Reverend Augustus Jessopp:

Apropos of the "Rosanna," it was written from the Tyrol, to a friend, and was simply a piece of friendly play. Which should not have been published, you add? Perhaps not,

but it pleased my friend, and the short passage of description was a literal transcript of the scene. Moreover, though the style is open to blame, there is an idea running through the verses, which, while I was rallying my friend, I conceived to have some point for a larger audience.<sup>10</sup>

While it is "simply a piece of friendly play," it has "an idea running through the verses." Considering the personal nature of the poem, it would probably be unfair and incorrect to attribute its roughness of phrasing and dimness of meaning to a failure in Meredith to understand just what he wanted to say: undoubtedly much of the poor quality of the poetry and the vagueness of meaning stems from his assumption of good humour and understanding in his friend. Meredith, nonetheless, did publish the complete poem in 1861, and, therefore, must have felt the poem to be sufficiently well-wrought to bear criticism.<sup>11</sup> In the final analysis, one can attempt only to determine what Meredith is actually saying while allowing for the element of humour and vagueness in the poem.

The poem<sup>12</sup> turns upon the poet's seeing in the river Rosanna an image of the onrush of the world of business rather than of the world of nature apart from man:

The roaring voice through the long white chain  
Is the voice of the world of bubble and brain.

I find it where I sought it least;  
I sought the mountain and the beast,  
The young thin air that knits the nerves,  
The chamois ledge, the snowy curves;  
Earth in her whiteness looking bold  
To Heaven for ever as of old.

And lo, if I translate the sound  
 Now thundering in my ears around,  
 'Tis London rushing down a hill,  
 Life, or London; which you will!

And men with brain who follow the bubble,  
 And Hosts without, who hurry and eddy,  
 And still press on: joy, passion, and trouble!  
 Necessity's instinct; true, though unsteady.

.....

Business, Business, seems the word,  
 In this unvarying On-on-on!  
 The volume coming, the volume gone,  
 Ghosts, glancing at Beauty, undeterred:  
 As in the torrent of cabs we both  
 Have glanced, borne forward, willing or loth.

His seeing the world of man, the world of business, in nature  
 is in contrast to the attitude of the friend to whom the poem  
 is addressed,<sup>13</sup> who keeps separated the world of nature and  
 the world of man:

Is it enough to profane your mood,  
 Arcadian dreamer, who think it sad  
 If a breath of the world on your haunts intrude,  
 Though in London you're hunting the bubble like mad?

For you are one who raise the Nymph  
 Wherever Nature sits alone;  
 Who pitch your delight in a region of lymph,  
 Rejoiced that its arms evade your own.

The Nymph of nature would seem to be the beauty of nature  
 ignored by the rushing waters of the river, referred to in  
 the earlier quoted lines: "The volume coming, the volume gone,/  
 Ghosts, glancing at Beauty, undeterred...." In contrast to  
 the poet, the friend is an "Arcadian dreamer" who separates  
 the world of man and the world of nature, who sees the Nymph



of nature's beauty only where "Nature sits alone." The friend, moreover, rejoices that the Nymph remains divided from him, separated from mankind. The suggestion would seem to be made, as well, that the friend's rejoicing in the division of man and nature's beauty actually consists of an attempt to escape reality. This, of course, is suggested in the poet's reference to him as an "Arcadian dreamer," but the following lines would seem to indicate even more clearly the unreality of the friend's position:

I see you lying here, and wistfully  
 Watching the dim shape, tender and fresh;  
 Your Season-Beauty faithless, or kiss'd fully,  
 You're just a little tired of flesh.

The friend's being "tired of flesh" would seem to suggest that he is trying to escape it, trying to escape reality in "watching the dim shape" unrelated to human experience.

The poet feels that the Nymph's existence apart from man is not enough. She must, he thinks, have some use to man or she will fly from him:

She lives, I swear! We join hands there.  
 But what's her use? Can you declare?  
 If she serves no purpose, she must take wing:  
 Art stamps her for an ugly thing.

Will she fly with the old gods, or join with the new?  
 Is she made of the stuff for a thorough alliance?  
 Or, standing alone, does she dare go thro'  
 The ordeal of a scrutiny of Science?

Although one cannot pretend to follow the logic of the poet when he says that "Art stamps her for an ugly thing," it is

clear that Meredith feels that the Nymph must have a purpose for man, must be allied with man, or have a reality and purpose in physical nature as examined by Science.

With apparently no logical transition, Meredith suddenly suggests that the Nymph of nature's beauty is on trial, seemingly for her life. It would appear that she must recognize that she is only partly of nature, that her life comes from "the human heart." The implication is that, unless she acknowledges her relation to man, she will die:

Your Nymph is on trial. Will she own  
Her parentage Humanity?  
Of her essence these things but form a part;  
Her heart comes out of the human heart.

With a complete lack of logic once again, Meredith suddenly suggests that the Nymph will gain a "soul," a permanence, apparently, by wedding the London cabman, the epitome of practicality and the onrush of human affairs. The lack of logic is confessed, for he says in justification, "Don't ask me why:--when Instinct speaks,/Old Mother Reason is not at home." Meredith suggests earlier that the Nymph should be introduced to "a short-neck'd, many-caped, London cabman," that the meeting would do the cabman good, and that the Nymph can not afford to refuse to meet him, for, "if Sentiment won't wed with Fact,/Poor Sentiment soon needs perfuming."

The Nymph of nature's beauty, or "Sentiment," dependent upon man for life, is now seen to need marriage to the cabman,

or practicality, for permanent existence:

Tremendous Thought, which I scarce dare blab, man!  
 The soul she yet lacks -- the illumination  
 Immortal! -- it strikes me like inspiration,  
 She must get her that soul by wedding the cabman!

The nearest Meredith approaches to explaining how the union is brought about is to say that "If we screw ourselves up to a certain pitch,/She meets us -- that I know of her." The Nymph of nature's beauty being prepared to meet the cabman, Meredith suggests that the cabman, in contact with "the thunder of waters," will permit her to "enter him by the gate of wonder." Through the union of the Nymph and the London cabman, the Nymph gains permanent life and the cabman gains fulfilment as a man:

It takes him doubtless long to peel,  
 Who wears at least a dozen capes:  
 Yet if but once she makes him feel,  
 The Man comes of his multiform shapes.

Man and the beauty of nature, it would seem, are dependent upon one another for full life.

Despite the jocularity, the roughness, the illogical character of "By the Rosanna," one catches a gleam of an advance in Meredith's thought. Although the Nymph is the beauty of nature and not nature as a whole, man and nature can be seen as necessary to one another's fulfilment. Without man, nature's beauty can neither live nor have permanence; without nature, man is an incomplete being. While man and

nature remain two separate entities, man has assumed a more central role in existence and nature is no longer completely self-sufficient. A vulnerable spot has been found in the armour of nature; she will no longer bear herself in the same manner as she did in 1851.

## NOTES

1. Meredith, The Poetical Works, pp.91-92.
2. Ibid., pp.90-91.
3. Ibid., pp.92-93.
4. Ibid., pp.94-95.
5. Brief mention should be made of a poem, first published in 1860, which suggests that Meredith was developing a concept of man and eternity far advanced beyond ideas expressed in Poems or those expressed in the poems of the transition period. "The Head of Bran the Blest" is essentially a patriotic poem demanding that the people of Britain retain the strength and courage of the legendary Bran the Blest. The last stanza of the poem, however, suggests a concept of life and eternity not previously mentioned in Meredith's poetry:

Brim the horn! a health is drunk,  
 Now, that shall keep going:  
 Life is but the pebble sunk;  
 Deeds, the circle growing!  
 Fill, and pledge the Head of Bran!  
 While his lead they follow,  
 Long shall heads in Britain plan  
 Speech Death cannot swallow!

While it is to be granted that the lines "Life is but the pebble sunk;/Deeds, the circle growing!" do not offer a definitive conception of life and the nature of deeds, still the suggestion is of interest. The individual life is here conceived as being important only insofar as it brings about deeds, or, more precisely, the lines suggest that only deeds tell of the importance of life. The emphasis upon deeds rather than life itself indicates the possibility of a further development in Meredith's thought. The individual loses his supreme importance in the unfolding of history. It is vaguely suggested that death is overcome, that a permanence of a sort is established, by seeing the true significance of living in the endless panorama of ever-increasing deeds rather than in the individual life.

"The Head of Bran" is the only poem in which this concept

of life and eternity is implied in this period; therefore there can be no attempt to place the poem centrally in Meredith's development. The point is, moreover, expressed vaguely and one does not feel that it is strongly felt by Meredith. It can remain only incidental in his thought at this time. Still it is incidentally interesting to note and important to recognize the idea's presence in Meredith's mind at this stage, for it indicates a rational approach to an understanding of life which Meredith later accentuates and stresses.

6. Meredith, The Poetical Works, pp.95-98.
7. Ibid., pp.107-112.
8. George Meredith, Letters of George Meredith, collected and edited by his son. (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1912), p.45.
9. Justification might seem needed for identifying the mind of Meredith with that of Juggling Jerry. When one considers the character of the poetry in this transition period, however, and the later development of Meredith's thought, the identification seems quite reasonable.

First, as has been indicated, the poetry between 1851 and 1861 does not have a unified basis, as does that of every other period in Meredith's poetic career. If it appears reasonable to say, therefore, that the unity of "Modern Love" is the consequence of the unity of Meredith's thought, that his feeling that man must accept his identity with nature's processes lends to the poem a unity which it would not otherwise have, is it not also reasonable to say that "The Last Words of Juggling Jerry" is weakened by the poet's failure to achieve within himself a similar unity of thought? In short, when the rest of Meredith's poetry apparently reflects what the poet thought, is it not reasonable to say that the poems of the transition period reflect his thoughts as well -- with all the weaknesses or unresolved conflicts inherent in them?

The apparently unconscious conflict in "The Last Words of Juggling Jerry," moreover, between sentimentality and reason, is precisely the same conflict which later, in different terms, is brought into the open and resolved in "Modern Love." It would appear that the unconscious conflict within Juggling Jerry is the same conflict which existed within Meredith himself and, therefore, that

identification of Jerry and Meredith is only reasonable.

10. Meredith, op.cit., p.44.
11. The ten lines after line forty-four were omitted by Meredith in 1862. In 1898 he omitted all but the first twenty lines. Trevelyan restores the poem as it existed in the 1861 publication. For details of Meredith's omissions, see The Works of George Meredith, Memorial Edition, vol. 37 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), p.260.
12. Meredith, The Poetical Works, pp.107-112.
13. Frederick Augustus Maxse (1833-1900).

## CHAPTER IV

### THE POETRY OF MATURATION 1862

While the poetry published between 1851 and 1861 is weakened by the conflict between sentimentality and reason, as if Meredith were growing conscious of the demands of life but was not yet sufficiently matured to penetrate their deeper implications or to give a balanced and controlled expression of his reactions to them, the poetry of 1862 forces the conflict into the open, gaining beauty and power through the conscious and controlled opposition of the two. Sentimentality and reason are exposed as struggling for mastery of man, with tragedy or richness of life awaiting the result.

The poems first published in 1862, in Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside, are clearly divisible into two parts: the title poem, "Modern Love," in which the actual struggle between sentimentality and reason is represented, and the shorter poems, such as "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn," in which the broader ramifications of man's acceptance of reason as a guide rather than sentimentality are given expression. While external evidence is lacking to show that "Modern Love" was written prior to the shorter poems published in 1862, a reading of them can leave no doubt that, regardless of the time of actual composition, the shorter poems are, in fact, relaxed meditations on the proper relationship of man



and nature as revealed in "Modern Love." Because of the comparative excellence of the title poem, because there is a tendency among critics to misunderstand it, and because one can witness therein the course of Meredith's struggle to maturity, by far the greatest emphasis in this chapter is upon "Modern Love." The shorter poems say little or nothing not found in some form in the title poem. Their chief advantage lies in their straight-forward, undramatic exposition of Meredith's new-found understanding.

The 1862 volume of poetry represents the turning point in Meredith's understanding of the relationship of man and nature. Hitherto, regardless of his dependence upon nature for fulfilment, man was not an integral part of nature's processes nor subject to her laws. In 1862 and after, however, Meredith recognizes a unity-in-process between them, as nature is conceived of as progressing and man as the leader in her progress. After 1862, trust, love, and understanding of nature are not only the means to man's sense of fulfilment but man's duty within nature's processes. Man must strive to serve nature's ends to serve his own.

The process of maturation at work in the "Modern Love" volume affects more than Meredith's understanding of man and nature. The poetry itself undergoes a transformation. Gone are the awkward and often irritating experiments of the

transition period. The unthinking sentimentality in "Juggling Jerry" and the self-conscious and painful phrasing of "By the Rosanna" are replaced by the severely controlled, terribly sensitive lines of "Modern Love" and the eloquent exposition of "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn." The grim struggle in "Modern Love" between reason and unreason or nature's demands and sentimentality is reflected in the alternation and juxtaposition of lines of great lyrical beauty and savage, lacerating irony. Meredith's use of the sonnet form permits the development of a horrible tension within an apparently relaxed statement. Through the use of a sonnet series Meredith is able to combine an informal, pictorial, and scenic manner of presentation and the order, tension, and direction necessitated by the sonnet form. Nowhere else in Meredith's poetic works can one find such satisfaction both in detail and general organization.

The conflict which marks "Modern Love," however, has comparatively little part in "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn" and progressively less in the poetry of later years. It is very much as if the struggle in "Modern Love" between sentimentality and reason were the only one necessary to the establishment of mental and emotional security in Meredith; after "Modern Love" his poetry becomes one of exposition or pure, lyrical song: conflict, caustic irony, and brilliant

but brutal wit lose their raison d'être as Meredith becomes sure of the character of reason and the proper relationship of nature and man. In "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn," for example, while one is aware of the freshness of the ideas, of Meredith's still-trembling grasp of the changed situation, suggesting, possibly, the lingering presence of some latent conflict, it is clear that the poem is essentially lyrical description and impassioned exposition. The 1862 volume of poetry is, at once, the culmination of Meredith's poetic career and the beginning of a new development.

Meredith's 1862 volume of poetry is dominated by the title poem, "Modern Love."<sup>1</sup> In both size and quality this poem excels any other in the book. Composed of fifty sixteen-line sonnets, it combines the strength of the narrative and the sensitivity and polish of the sonnet. Its excellence has been recognized insofar as it has been the object of the most sustained analyses given any of Meredith's poems. Two of the more provocative studies are those of C. Day Lewis<sup>2</sup> and of Norman Friedman.<sup>3</sup> Day Lewis sees the poem as the beginning and the end of Meredith's poetic career:

And here, perhaps, we have reached the core of Meredith's failure as a poet after Modern Love. He was a humanist who, because of his extreme sensitivity, tried to insulate himself from the human condition .... The hideous and long-drawn suffering which produced Modern Love devastated him, I suggest, in two ways: it left a large area of scorched earth behind it; but it also forced Meredith to withdraw to a position in which

he could never be so badly hurt again. In making this withdrawal, he cut away, surrendered, too much of himself: it was a major operation which left his poetry permanently invalid....He tried to dissociate himself from his first marriage, to forget the agony of the past: and thus the stature of his soul, of his poetry was shortened.<sup>4</sup>

An assessment less reminiscent of soap opera and more persuasive in its sanity is given by Friedman in his discussion of the symbolic structure of "Modern Love":

However, I think it is Meredith's best poem for the same reason that it is a complex one: it is the record of the man he was in the process of becoming, so to speak, the man he is. Both biographically and aesthetically this poem and its background represent the most crucial transition point in Meredith's life. Just as he suffered through the personal tragedy which brought to a dismal close his marriage with Mary Peacock Nicolls before achieving a lasting union with Marie Vulliamy, so he wrestled in "Modern Love" with a set of attitudes and images which were to become the very foundation of his later work. Thus, while his early poetry is characterized by a pseudo-Keatsian lushness...and a pseudo-Browningsque heartiness..., the poems following "Modern Love" are characterized by an austere optimism and a hardy texture which are his alone. Yet whatever virtues these latter may contain -- and there are many -- they lack the natura naturans of "Modern Love". It is a poem of grating ironies, giddily reversing emotions, rapidly shifting images, and subtly blended techniques.<sup>5</sup>

It is to be noted that both writers emphasize the importance of the poem in Meredith's poetic career and that both relate the character of the poem to his personal life. "Modern Love" is certainly important in the development of the poetry,

and a similarity between the poem's narrative and Meredith's marital adventure with Mary Peacock Nicolls is obvious. An undue emphasis upon the similarity of Meredith's first marriage and that providing the meat of the poem's narrative, however, results in a distortion of "Modern Love" and the poetry as a whole.

The first consequence of reading "Modern Love" as the record of a personal marriage failure is to understand the action of the poem as revealing only the conflict of two people unwillingly bound by the ties of marriage. Insofar as one becomes conscious of a theme at all in the poem, it is simply the revelation of a couple's unsuccessful struggle to maintain a marriage. As Norman Kelvin points out, "that the poem is about the failure of a marriage" is a "fact."<sup>6</sup>

In a very real and undeniable sense, this is true; but one is deceiving oneself and distorting the poem if one does not go further to see that, while it is "about" a marriage failure, the poem is given meaning and unity by a theme which has a broader application than simply to the incidents in "Modern Love." The theme of the poem is the tragedy of man's life when he refuses to understand and accept the character of nature's processes and his place in them. In "Modern Love" the essential conflict is between the forces of sentimentality, refusing to recognize the existence or meaning for man of time's inevitable change, particularly in the realm of love,

and reason, demanding man's recognition of the existence and fruitfulness of time's changes. As change is the key to the beneficence of nature's processes and acceptance of reason is acceptance of time's fruitfulness, the theme of "Modern Love" can be seen to be the tragedy of man's failure to recognize and accept his proper relationship with nature. The marriage of the couple in "Modern Love" fails because the husband does not recognize soon enough and the wife does not recognize ever the necessity of love's growth in time, involving the death or destruction of one phase as it is supplanted naturally by another. The grim sentimental determination of the couple to retain or to recognize as real only the first, impassioned, and ideal phase of their love relationship blinds them to the reality of nature's processes. Only when her clinging to the ultimate reality of sentimental or idealistic love results in his wife's death does the husband recognize and accept fully man's place and function in nature. "Modern Love" is about a marriage failure, and there is a rough parallel between the incidents of the poem and Meredith's marital history. But the poem reflects much more the struggle in Meredith's mind between reason or nature's claims on man, which deny his meaning beyond her processes, and sentimentality, which refuses to accept the ultimate reality of nature and demands special privileges for man.

To say, therefore, as Day Lewis does, that the "hideous and long-drawn suffering which produced Modern Love devastated" Meredith and "left his poetry permanently invalid" is to fail to see beyond the melodramatic situations in the poem to the tragic theme uniting them, is, in short, to distort both the poem's philosophic significance for Meredith and its meaning for the later poetry. If one realizes that through the suffering recorded in "Modern Love" Meredith is actually drawing nearer to an understanding and acceptance of life by seeing as the cause of this suffering a failure to understand the nature of reality, then it is impossible for one to speak of his insulating "himself from the human condition." The truth is, surely, that Meredith is actually baring himself to the "human condition," is consciously and, perhaps, brutally exploring the nature of reality for man.

Day Lewis would seem to be suggesting that because of "Modern Love" Meredith was never again able to deal adequately with the "human condition," with reality. Clearly, if "Modern Love" is more than a recording of a "hideous and long-drawn suffering," if it is, in fact, the tragedy of a couple's failure to understand reality -- which implies, of course, the necessity of understanding reality, or actually, the proper relationship of man and nature -- then Day Lewis is wrong, and Meredith did not try "to dissociate himself from

his first marriage" or "forget the agony of the past," did not, in short, turn from reality. Instead, he tried to assimilate and use the experience of "Modern Love." Philosophically and, perhaps, psychologically, Meredith was matured by the experience.

From the point of view of poetry as lyrical expression or musical and delightful language, however, it might appear that "Modern Love" "devastated" Meredith and rendered his later poetry "invalid," for after 1862 his style of writing changes. While in Poems, in the Transition Period, and in "Modern Love" itself language, imagery, and style generally are employed by Meredith in an attempt to create particular effects, the poems published after 1862 tend more and more to find their raison d'etre in the ideas expressed rather than in their manner of expression. Form in poetry, after "Modern Love," seems to be less important in Meredith's mind than content. To the extent that Meredith's later poetry is unsatisfactory as poetic expression, and to the extent that this weakness is traceable to the philosophic strengthening he received from the "Modern Love" experience, it might be possible to say that Meredith was "devastated" and his later poetry made "invalid."

But is Meredith's later poetry sufficiently weak to warrant Day Lewis's accusation of invalidity and to justify the melodramatic description of Meredith as "devastated"?



Is all of Meredith's poetry after 1862 dull, unimaginative, obscure, or unsatisfactory as poetic expression? In short, is Meredith a "failure as a poet after Modern Love"? The answer, for anyone who has read the later poetry, must be that he is not. "Love in the Valley," "Hymn to Colour," "Lucifer in Starlight," and "Song in the Songless," among others, testify to the strength of Meredith as a poet as well as a philosopher. These poems admit of no devastation or invalidity. Surely no critic would label these poems as poor.

One must admit, of course, that, while "devastated" and "invalid" are excessive when applied to Meredith and his later poetry, there is a dropping off from the striking effectiveness of "Modern Love." With the possible exception of "Love in the Valley," no poem after 1862 can compare with "Modern Love" for power, technical mastery, or sensitivity to language and image. But no poem before 1862 can compare with "Modern Love" either. The conclusion to be drawn, surely, is not that "Modern Love" is the only significant poem written by Meredith, but simply that it is his best. All poems except "Modern Love" cannot be termed weak because they are not the equals of this work. Meredith is not a poorer poet after 1862 than he was before; indeed, he is a better poet, for his ideas are more coherent, more valuable. While one will find a greater number of weak poems in the later poetry than in the poetry written before 1862, one must suspect that the cause lies as much with the greater total number of poems written in the later period as with any possible influence of the "Modern Love" experience

upon Meredith's attitude to life or art. Properly speaking, the dropping off which takes place is only from "Modern Love." Excepting this one peculiarly effective poem, the poetry written by Meredith after 1862 compares favourably with that written before. While there is a change of style in Meredith's poetry after "Modern Love," it cannot truthfully be said that this style is weaker, in terms of poetic effect, than that employed before 1862. "Hymn to Colour" compares favourably with "Daphne."

Day Lewis's failure to perceive the uniting theme of "Modern Love," therefore, results in his distortion of the poem's meaning in Meredith's career. Instead of seeing it as merely Meredith's best poem, he tends to see it as the only valid poem written by Meredith—unless he believes that some of the earlier poems qualify for acceptance. The point is, of course, that "Modern Love" is an integral and important part of Meredith's career as poet. In the poem the various ideas and attitudes which had earlier been in silent conflict are brought face to face to struggle openly for mastery of Meredith's mind. The victory of reason, meaning the acceptance of nature and her processes as the final reality for man, determines the character of Meredith's later poetry. Poems are never again empty of conscious thought or weakened by unrecognized and unresolved conflicts. "Modern Love," being

the battlefield of ideas, is a uniquely exciting poem, but its success does not invalidate the later poetry. "Modern Love" makes the later poetry possible.

Friedman's error in his comment on "Modern Love" has the same source as the error of Day Lewis: a failure to see beyond the narrative of the poem to the actual theme. He fails to see the poem as a unity, saying, "It is a poem of grating ironies, giddily reversing emotions, rapidly shifting images, and subtly blended techniques." The poem as he describes it, has no centre, no core, no theme: it is merely a kaleidoscope of highly finished, brilliant, but essentially separate pieces. While Friedman seems aware of a deeper significance when he writes that Meredith "wrestled in 'Modern Love' with a set of attitudes and images which were to become the very foundation of his later work," he nowhere demonstrates that he conceives of a unifying theme. An understanding of the tragedy of "Modern Love" is nowhere expressed.

To date no one has recognized "Modern Love" as a tragedy in structure and design as well as in its unhappy ending. No one has taken the trouble to analyze the poem sonnet by sonnet in an effort to see it as a unified whole. No one has attempted to understand the character of its development. "Modern Love," therefore, has suffered from a misunderstanding

both of its meaning as a poem and of its significance in Meredith's development as a poet and thinker.

"Modern Love" is the tragedy of a married couple who fail to recognize the character of nature's processes and who are, therefore, fated to unhappiness, frustration, and an unreal, distorted, and futile existence leading to despair and death. From the first sonnet the couple are revealed to be divided from one another and, therefore, from the proper or natural married state. The tragedy opens, as it were, with the kingdom divided and right order inverted. The couple's failure to understand nature has caused them to cling to the sentimental first stage of their relationship as being the only state of real love which exists. They have, that is, tried to ignore the passage of time to retain the original character of their love. The result has been their utter division, for as they believe in the reality of love only as it exists at its inception they cannot grasp and accept the change naturally wrought in their relationship by the passage of time. At the opening of the poem, the wife has already taken a lover, or, at least, has committed some act involving another man which the husband thinks a "sin." The husband, however, is guilty too, for, instead of recognizing a measure of personal blame for the division between them, he blames the wife entirely. Communication between the two has ceased and they are enveloped in an unreal world of their own making. The

lack of communication, the deep division between them, is emphasized by the husband's violent physical attraction to the wife and his coincidental revulsion from her as the supposed destroyer of their love.

The world of the couple has about it an atmosphere of hell in its horrible intensity, refined savagery, and poignant futility. All effects are heightened by the awareness one has of the great need and desire of the couple to communicate and the hopelessness of the desire as it dies upon emptiness. There is, indeed, an image of hell introduced. The wife is thought of by the husband as "a star with lurid beams" crowning "the pit of infamy." As well as these examples of satan and hell imagery, words and phrases are used in reference to the wife in the distorted world of the couple which are suggestive of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Through the imagery one grasps the inversion, unreality, and horror of the world in which the husband and wife exist and which they inevitably created by failing to recognize the character of nature's laws and their application to man.

Imagery, in fact, is one of the chief means of tracing the development of the couple's relationship and seeing to what degree sentimentality has been abandoned for reason. While the imagery of hell is used to indicate the static, inverted world of the couple, ocean, particularly wave, imagery is used to indicate the passage of time. As the couple identify

themselves with sentimental, idealized love or see it as the only true form of love and in its destruction the destruction of their whole relationship, they are represented as being destroyed by the waves of time; to the same extent to which they feel themselves being destroyed, they are described in terms of hell and satan imagery. The husband's acceptance of nature's processes and their application to man is represented by his recognizing the necessity of abandoning as dead the spent force of love's early, impassioned, and idealistic stage. Acceptance of nature's processes, he sees, means the acceptance as reality, not of particular waves of time -- as that of impassioned, first love -- but of the continuous movement of time's waves, from being to non-being, from vibrant life upon time's ocean to hissing death upon oblivion's shore. The tragedy of "Modern Love," in terms of the two chief strands of imagery in the poem, is the failure of the couple to recognize that only by accepting the constant change of the waves of time's ocean as real and meaningful rather than the permanence of an individual wave can they achieve happiness and fulfilment and escape being utterly destroyed, escape the horrible, hell-like, unreal world of timelessness in time. Their clinging to a particular wave of time, to a particular stage of development as being the only reality, causes them to suffer death with it as it plunges madly ashore to expire. Refusing to see the true nature of reality causes their love relationship to die.

and brings about self-destruction from despair and sentimentality. They are caught up on the shore of time in a hell-like, timeless, inverted world of horror for which they have only their own short-sightedness and sentimentality to blame.

The fiftieth sonnet of "Modern Love" succinctly and effectively analyzes the tragedy of the couple's relationship. It makes clear that the tragedy lies in the couple's failure to grow in time. The sonnet and the whole poem close with the sound of the ocean, terribly beautiful, inexorably moving, pressing its significance upon one's mind:

Thus piteously Love closed what he begat:  
 The union of this ever-diverse pair!  
 These two were rapid falcons in a snare,  
 Condemned to do the flitting of the bat.  
 Lovers beneath the singing skies of May,  
 They wandered once; clear as the dew on flowers:  
 But they fed not on the advancing hours:  
 Their hearts held cravings for the buried day.  
 Then each applied to each that fatal knife,  
 Deep questioning, which probes to endless dole.  
 Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul  
 When hot for certainties in this our life!--  
 In tragic hints here see what evermore  
 Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,  
 Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,  
 To throw that faint thin line upon the shore!

The last four lines of the sonnet have been the object of considerable critical activity. The various interpretations given them will be dealt with later;<sup>7</sup> meanwhile it is sufficient to note the presence of the wave imagery and its relation to what has been said of the necessity of moving or growing with time. One is to see in the couple's failure to feed "on

the advancing hours," in their craving "for the buried day," in their "deep questioning," "tragic hints" of the existence of a force or power which moves "evermore" with the fury and destructiveness, with the relentless energy and speed of "ramping hosts of warrior horse." One is to see "hints" of this force, but the force itself remains unseen, imperceptible, "dark as yonder midnight ocean's force"; its presence is known by its "thundering" and the "faint thin line upon the shore." It would seem only reasonable that this force is that of time's inexorable movement and that the "faint thin line" is the residue, foam, or debris cast up on time's shore by spent waves. The "faint thin line," that is, is the dead past cast out from the moving, vital ocean of time, mutely testifying to the necessity of man's acceptance of time's movement as real and fruitful rather than individual waves or particular stages if he is to escape being carried ashore to expire with the past.

When the couple's marriage failure is seen in the light of the wave imagery of the last four lines, it becomes apparent that their failure to feed on "the advancing hours," their craving "for the buried day" inevitably results in the destruction of their whole relationship and makes possible the wife's death by suicide, for the "buried day" to which they cling, the youthful, impassioned, and idealistic stage of love, is destroyed in the natural and inevitable passage



of time. Their clinging to this stage as the only reality in love necessitates the death of their relationship. The "faint thin line," the foam of the hissing, dying waves, is the unreal, hell-like world of the divided couple. Only the husband's last-minute acceptance of time's meaning for man, of nature's laws, permits him to escape this satanic world. The wife, believing in the reality only of youthful, idealistic love and not recognizing or accepting the character of nature's laws, of time or their significance for man, commits suicide, thereby intending to make possible the husband's marriage with a woman of whom she conceives him to be enamoured. The wife's sentimental, despairing action reveals to the husband and the reader the full range of the destructiveness of sentimentality, or of clinging irrationally to one stage of development, to one wave of time as being real and permanent. The futility of the wife's suicide reveals the full tragedy of "Modern Love."

Before studying the fifty sonnets of "Modern Love" individually to trace the development of Meredith's growing understanding of the relationship of man and nature, it is interesting to note the presence of the wave imagery in three short poems of the 1862 volume of poetry. In "Cassandra,"<sup>8</sup> "Shemselnihar,"<sup>9</sup> and "By Morning Twilight"<sup>10</sup> one finds Meredith using wave and ocean imagery to suggest the passage of time; indeed, in "By Morning Twilight" one finds, as well, a strong suggestion of the "faint thin line." It seems clear

that the passage of time, with the ocean and waves as its symbol, was a dominant theme in the thought of Meredith during the composition of the poems of the 1862 volume. It will be sufficient merely to quote pertinent lines from the poems to indicate the presence of the imagery and its significance. In "Cassandra" the prophetess is remembering the past and the coming of the Greeks. The image of past events is fused with an image of the ocean. Cassandra, the prophetess, remembers Helen's coming to Troy as she, herself, after Troy's destruction, is carried a prisoner to Sparta. As Helen's arrival in Troy is the beginning of the city's destruction, is the beginning, as it were, of the scroll of Cassandra's prophecy of doom, so Cassandra's arrival in Sparta is the end. The "long shoreward roll," or the wave in which the anchor of the ship carrying her is cast, becomes the curled end of Cassandra's prophetic scroll as Helen's arrival in Troy was the beginning. The image of the scroll, representing the passage of time, the working out of Cassandra's prophecy, becomes, both visually and thematically, one with the waves of time's ocean:

Eyeing phantoms of the Past,  
 Folded like a prophet's scroll,  
 In the deep's long shoreward roll  
 Here she sees the anchor cast:  
 Backward moves her sunless soul.

One stanza later the warriors on the plains of Troy are seen, in Cassandra's imagination, to "glimmer ocean washed."

As well as an obvious reference to the warrior's spray-dashed armour, it seems only reasonable to see in the descriptive phrase a further reference to their being a part of the past, to their being "washed" by the ocean of time, insofar as they are part of the prophetic scroll which, in the earlier stanza, was identified with the passage of time:

O the bliss upon the plains,  
Where the joining heroes clashed  
Shield and spear, and, unabashed,  
Challenged with hot chariot-reins  
Gods! --they glimmer ocean washed.

In "By Morning Twilight" the poet's being cast "pale on the beach" is strongly suggestive of the "faint thin line":

Night, like a dying mother,  
Eyes her young offspring, Day.  
The birds are dreamily piping.  
And O, my love, my darling!  
The night is life ebb'd away:

Away beyond our reach!  
A sea that has cast us pale on the beach;  
Weeds with the weeds and the pebbles  
That hear the lone tamarisk rooted in sand  
Sway  
With the song of the sea to the land.

It would not, perhaps, be reading too much into a few lines to understand "the song of the sea to the land" as nature's exhortation to man to grow in time, specifically, to grow in love.

In "Shemselnihar" the suggestion of time's passage in wave imagery is made in only two lines, but it is made unmistak-

ably. In the opening two lines of the poem, Shemselnihar cries out at the coming of morning to separate her from her lover and make her, once again, the beloved captive of her proper lord: "O my lover! the night like a broad smooth wave/ Bears us onward, and morn, a black rock, shines wet." Clearly in these lines the passage of time is fused with the wave imagery. Shemselnihar and her lover are carried on the "broad smooth wave" of time towards morning.

It is of considerable importance to note the presence of wave imagery in poems of the same volume as "Modern Love" and its clear suggestion of the passage of time, for it tends to confirm the interpretation given the imagery in the present analysis of the title poem. As will be seen, it has not been the common practise of critics to understand the wave imagery as indicating, simply, the passage of time in "Modern Love."<sup>11</sup> Meredith's using the imagery in other poems of the same period goes far to justify the approach of the present analysis.

One does not find, in "Modern Love," a narrative of events. One finds instead a series of psychological and philosophical analyses conducted within the confines of fifty sixteen-line sonnets, each sonnet related to those preceding and following it by theme but unconnected with them, except in the most general way, by an actual, external plot movement. The unity of "Modern Love" is found, not in external action, but in the continuous development of its theme. Events happen,

not for their own sake, but to reveal the mental and emotional states of the couple. Each sonnet, by and large, has as its basis one scene which, as it is presented, is, by tone, attitude, and phrasing, probed and analyzed to reveal the couple's situation in its stark, savage nakedness. Generally speaking, the movement of the poem tends to be circular rather than linear. Each sonnet, that is, seems to lead one further and further into the reality of the couple's hell-like world, as if to the centre of a series of concentric circles rapidly decreasing in size. Each sonnet assumes the character of another smaller circle in which the horror increases directly as the size diminishes. As the sonnets of "Modern Love" gain their power by ruthless concision, by suppression of all but the absolutely necessary, as they reveal, thereby, a depth of emotional and mental turmoil otherwise incommunicable, they come to stand for the couple's world itself, externally controlled, internally mad.

The development of "Modern Love," then, can not be traced merely by noting passing events. In reality, few events happen in a physical sense. One must trace, therefore, the psychological states of the husband in the poem if one is to understand the character of the change which he and the reader experience. Generally speaking, the poem can be seen to move from the initial situation of division between the

husband and wife, to the husband's questioning of the division, to his realization of the character of nature's laws and their significance to man, to his apparent acceptance of nature's laws, to his final acceptance. A simpler and more accurate breakdown of the poem would see it moving through three stages. The first stage would include the presentation of the initial situation, the husband's questioning of the division, and his realization of the character and meaning of nature's laws. The second stage would have as its centre the husband's affair with a woman identified only as "my Lady." In this affair the husband operates in accordance with the laws of nature as he has learned them. The affair, that is, represents a true union, a natural union, as it were, within the boundaries of the false, unreal union of the husband and wife. It is akin to a play within a play, demonstrating the right order of things and acting as a foil to the main action. The third stage extends from the destruction of this affair by the re-entry of the wife and the reassertion of the influence of the couple's hell-like world to the couple's barren reunion and the wife's committing suicide. It is in this last stage that the full horror, the full tragedy of the couple's marriage is realized, for here is seen the end result of the couple's failure to understand and accept nature's laws. The wife's conviction that love is necessarily impassioned and idealistic causes her to destroy herself, for she conceives

that her husband's love for "my Lady" has returned and that she is, therefore, in the way. Not conceiving of the possibility of change or growth in love, she has identified herself with the past idealistic love between her and the husband, has destroyed herself, and has become part of the "faint thin line."

The first sonnet of "Modern Love" reveals the situation, the theme, and the tone of the whole poem. One gathers from it an awareness of the couple's division, the relation of this division to their separation from growth in time, and a consciousness of the restrained violence and unreality permeating and controlling their existence. The first sonnet is pervaded by the image of the marriage bed. Upon this bed, the symbol of married harmony, of physical, mental, and spiritual union, the couple are seen to exist in a state of utter division:

By this he knew she wept with waking eyes:  
That, at his hand's light quiver by her head,  
The strange low sobs that shook their common bed  
Were called into her with a sharp surprise,  
And strangled mute, like little gaping snakes,  
Dreadfully venomous to him. She lay  
Stone-still, and the long darkness flowed away  
With muffled pulses. Then, as midnight makes  
Her giant heart of Memory and Tears  
Drink the pale drug of silence, and so beat  
Sleep's heavy measure, they from head to feet  
Were moveless, looking through their dead black years,  
By vain regret scrawled over the blank wall.  
Like sculptured effigies they might be seen  
Upon their marriage-tomb, the sword between;  
Each wishing for the sword that severs all.

The wife's sobbing in itself indicates some disunion between the couple, but it is the description of the sobs and the image employed to suggest the character of their strangling which reveal the depth and nature of the division between them:

The strange low sobs that shook their common bed  
Were called into her with a sharp surprise,  
And strangled mute, like little gaping snakes,  
Dreadfully venomous to him.

The description of the sobs as "strange" and "low" and as shaking "their common bed" is significant, for it suggests, first, that they are not the result of some common marital misadventure but of something which undermines their whole marriage relationship, and, second, that, as they are "low" the wife is attempting to prevent the husband's becoming aware of them, that she is, in short, struggling to prevent communication with her husband. This latter fact is made clear by her drawing them in "with a sharp surprise." The fact that the "common bed" is shaken is sufficient evidence to prove that the marriage itself is in jeopardy.

It is the representation of the suppressed sobs as "little gaping snakes/Dreadfully venomous to him" which most strikingly reveals the division of the couple. One is first struck by the horror contained in and expressed by the adjective "gaping." It suggests the horror of the whole marital existence of the couple. Particularly, "gaping," when combined with "strangled



mute," expresses the savage restraint imposed upon the wife's thoughts and her insanely intense desire and need to communicate. The extreme violence of the image indicating the wife's cutting off of her sobs reveals an impenetrable division between the husband and wife. With such violence no communication is possible. The sobs, moreover, as "strangled mute" and "gaping" snakes, are "dreadfully venomous" to the husband. Their venom, of course, lies in their being the product of the wife's unexpressed fury and anger with the man. There is, however, another, a broader, and a more significant sense in which the sobs are "dreadfully venomous" to the husband. They are venomous to him insofar as they represent his poisoned marital state. Without the husband's being aware of it at this time, the sobs, in effect, mean the death of his marriage.

The contrast which is clearly implied between the couple's marriage and marriage as it should be, in the first six lines of the sonnet, is carried into the remaining ten lines to reveal the difference between their actual relation to the passage of time and that which should exist. In three sentences the couple are seen to be motionless: "She lay/Stone-still"; "they from head to feet/Were moveless"; "Like sculptured effigies they might be seen." This static character of the couple is in sharp contrast to the movement or passing of time: "the long darkness flowed away/With muffled pulses"; "midnight

makes/Her giant heart...beat/Sleep's heavy measure." There is, further, a suggestion of time's having passed in their "looking through their dead black years." The point of the contrast, of course, is to relate the couple's division from each other to their division from the passage of time. It is to be noted, for example, that immediately after the wife strangles her sobs she lies "stone-still." Clearly one is to perceive that her violent suppression of the sobs, her fear of communicating with her husband, isolates her, sets her, like a stone, apart from the passage of time. That her existence, therefore, is a death-in-life and that it is created by her division from time are emphasized by the following line which shows time and life to be passing: "the long darkness flowed away/With muffled pulses." Time and life pass, taking with them the opportunity to communicate and destroy her unreal, stone-like existence. The couple's separation from time's passage, from growth in time, causes the night to be seen as no more than a "long darkness," flowing away, significantly, with "muffled pulses." The terms "darkness" and "muffled" suggest the lack of communication between the two and the term "pulses" relates this futile world to the passing of life. The implication clearly is that the couple's failure to move with time, which brings them the "long darkness" and sense of futility, results in the waste of life.

The couple's division and their separation from time is further explored in the following lines:

Then, as midnight makes  
 Her giant heart of Memory and Tears  
 Drink the pale drug of silence, and so beat  
 Sleep's heavy measure, they from head to feet  
 Were moveless, looking through their dead black years,  
 By vain regret scrawled over the blank wall.

The passage seems to mean that in the same way as midnight drugs her heart, her "Memory and Tears," with silence and causes them to sleep, to be unconscious of the outside world, so the couple drug their hearts, their memories and tears, with silence, do not communicate, do not move to one another. Each turns in upon himself alone. Their failure to move with time causes their hearts to be asleep to each other, brings about a lack of contact between them, causes their past to consist only of "dead black years." Their regret over the past, is, of course, "vain," for time has passed and regret is pointless in face of time's inexorable passing.

The image in the final three lines of the sonnet demonstrates quite clearly the couple's failure to move with time, the consequent division between them, and the resulting futility of their lives:

Like sculptured effigies they might be seen  
 Upon their marriage-tomb, the sword between;  
 Each wishing for the sword that severs all.

The distinguishing character of the image is its static, yet violent quality. The figures are motionless and silent on the

grave of marriage; yet one feels in them an arrested fury. It is the sword which lies between the figures which lends to the image its peculiar dual nature. The figures are, at once, divided and controlled by its presence. Even as they are separated by it, as the symbol of violence, it acts as a focal point around which they are situated. Insofar as it does act as a focal point of the two figures, however, it gives them a certain unity, but it is a unity based on actual division; therefore, one feels the unity to be false and the whole situation unreal. The presence of the sword, in short, causes one to regard the situation as paradoxical, or more precisely, as irrational.

The image is composed of three elements which appear to be related in a process of cause and effect: the sculptured effigies, the sword, and the marriage-tomb. The character of the "sculptured effigies" appears, at least, two-fold. First, the term "sculptured" clearly recalls the wife's lying "stone-still" upon realizing the husband is awake to hear her sobs and that there might, therefore, be communication between them. It suggests, that is, that both man and wife are guilty of a failure to communicate. Second, the term "effigies" indicates the presence of human forms without life; therefore, the death-in-life existence implied in the earlier "stone-still" image here assumes definite form, to reflect on the existence of the couple together.

Between these two figures, separating and controlling them, as has been noted, lies the sword. The earlier passing of time, upon the wife's becoming "stone-still," here seems to become a sword separating the two. It seems to represent the gulf of time between them, that is, the years that have passed, carrying them further and further from each other, from the early phase of their relationship to which they persist in clinging. In effect, it is a sword of silence, the lack of communication dividing the two. The traditional sword of chastity becomes here a sword of frustration and futility.

The chief symbol of the futility of the couple's world is the marriage-tomb upon which the effigies are seen. This tomb is the "common bed" of marriage, the symbol of union and harmony, transformed. It would seem that the couple's failure to grow in time, their division and lack of communication, has led to the death of their marriage relationship. Not only is the transformation of the "common bed" into a "marriage-tomb" a consequence of the couple's division, but the image of them bound within the confines of a dead marriage accentuates for one the unnaturalness, the unreality, the horror of their existing union.

That one is intended to feel the unreality of the couple's existence is clear from the last line of the sonnet. That each should wish "for the sword that severs all," for actual death, in short, is clear evidence of the futility of the couple's

lives. By refusing or failing to grow in time, to communicate, they have destroyed the possibility of fulfilment for themselves; they have inevitably doomed themselves to a living death.

As Elizabeth Cox Wright suggests,<sup>12</sup> the first sonnet of "Modern Love" holds the key to the rest of the poem. Contrary to what she suggests, however, the sonnet's importance lies, not in its presentation of images which are carried throughout the poem, but in its organizing these images in an intelligible manner. The first sonnet groups the images to indicate the importance of man's relation to time within the poem. With an understanding of the first sonnet of "Modern Love," one can move through the poem seeing its meaning and unity.

While the first sonnet reveals the theme of the poem and the division of the couple from time and from each other, sonnets two to seven, roughly speaking, reveal the initial situation in the story of their relationship's disintegration. They are deeply divided; the woman has taken a lover; the husband is torn between desire for her and revulsion from her; he cannot accept the death of their love; and the whole of his life is affected by his emotional turmoil upon realization of their love's apparent death.

In the second sonnet one finds the division of the two revealed, the turmoil within the husband, and his distorted

vision of the world:

Each sucked a secret, and each wore a mask.  
 But, oh, the bitter taste her beauty had!  
 He sickened as at breath of poison-flowers:  
 A languid humour stole among the hours,  
 And if their smiles encountered, he went mad,  
 And raged deep inward, till the light was brown  
 Before his vision, and the world, forgot,  
 Looked wicked as some old dull murder-spot.  
 A star with lurid beams, she seemed to crown  
 The pity of infamy:....

The first line of the quotation suggests the division of the couple: "Each sucked a secret, and each wore a mask." The second and third lines reveal the simultaneous attraction and repulsion of the wife for the husband. Her "beauty" had a "bitter taste" at which he "sickened as at breath of poison-flowers." The term "poison-flowers" itself suggests the dual nature of the husband's attitude to his wife. In different terms, the image of the divided effigies of sonnet one is here renewed. But instead of the couple's division being effected by the sword of silence or of time, for which both are responsible, the husband feels that the wife is solely responsible for the death of their love. The static quality of the effigies' relationship to one another and to time is, furthermore, suggested in the line: "A languid humour stole among the hours." As a result, that is, of the wife's simultaneous attraction and repulsion for the husband, time, as it were stands still, and the couple become entrapped in an unreal, insane world.

If "their smiles encountered," if the husband became aware of possible goodness or friendliness in the wife, if he felt the possibility of communication, apparently he was driven to seeing her as supremely evil, as Satan crowning the "pit of infamy." It is important to note, however, that this happened when "he went mad...and the world, forgot,/ Looked wicked as some old dull murder-spot." His seeing as the sole or prime cause of the destruction of their love relationship his wife rather than their joint failure to grow in time, their mutual insistence upon love's static character, occurs when reason is rendered impotent, when the world as it is is forgotten, and he can understand their situation only in terms of two extremes: timeless Eden and timeless hell. The husband, that is, sees his wife as a fallen Eve, responsible for the destruction of their timeless Eden-like love. The world becomes for him "some old dull murder-spot," "wicked" in its atmosphere of death and violence. Existence for the husband is reduced to an intense but futile awareness of his changed world. The irrationality of the husband's position and the horror of his world is indicated, finally, in the image of his wife as Lucifer overlooking hell, in his seeing a mere fallen woman as Satan.

The irrationality of the husband's position is readily perceivable when one remembers the true nature of the situation



as presented in sonnet one. Husband and wife are equally responsible for their division. It is not the wife who is the cause of their separation but their mutual failure to grow in time; therefore, for the husband to hold that she alone is the cause of the fall from Eden-like love is an error, is irrational.

The presence of the hell-satan imagery, however, reveals the character of the couple's world. Like hell, it is timeless and meaningless; it is permeated with horror and madness. Chiefly, it is an unreal world, a world of illusion, a world of unreason. In separating themselves from growth in time, from an understanding and acceptance of nature's laws, of reality, the couple condemn themselves to hell.

The third sonnet clarifies the character of the wife's fall, which, in the eyes of the husband, caused the couple's division: she has a lover:

This was the woman; what now of the man?  
 But pass him. If he comes beneath a heel,  
 He shall be crushed until he cannot feel,  
 Or, being callous, haply till he can.  
 But he is nothing:—nothing?...  
 It cannot be such harm on her cool brow  
 To put a kiss? Yet if I meet him there!

One can see in the relation of the lover to the snake imagery the development of the imagery from suggesting merely a lack of communication in the first sonnet to indicating the whole distorted vision the husband has of the world and time. The satan-hell imagery and its relation to time are closely inter-

twined in the last four lines of the third sonnet:

Ah, no! I know too well  
I claim a star whose light is overcast:  
I claim a phantom-woman in the Past.  
The hour has struck, though I heard not the bell!

The husband knows "too well" that his wife has fallen and that he is drawn to her only as he remembers her. The very capitalization of "Past" suggests the static, motionless, and unreal world to which he is drawn. Time has passed and time has changed the world, but the husband refuses to accept the change: he "heard not the bell."

The futility of life for the husband when he is turned in upon himself and divorced from time's movement is indicated in the fourth sonnet:

All other joys of life he strove to warm,  
And magnify, and catch them to his lip:  
But they had suffered shipwreck with the ship,  
And gazed upon him sallow from the storm.  
Or if Delusion came, 'twas but to show  
The coming minute mock the one that went.  
Cold as a mountain in its star-pitched tent,  
Stood high Philosophy, less friend than foe:  
Whom self-caged Passion, from its prison bars,  
Is always watching with a wondering hate.  
Not till the fire is dying in the grate,  
Look we for any kinship with the stars.

The first four lines reveal that "all other joys of life" have suffered the same fate as the wife in sonnet three: as she has become a "phantom-woman in the Past" to the husband, so "all other joys" now but "gaze upon him sallow" and cannot be warmed, magnified, or caught to his lip. In short, as the wife has become essentially unreal to the husband,

has become a "phantom-woman," his whole existence has become essentially unreal and illusory. The image of "all other joys" gazing upon the husband is reminiscent of the staring dead men in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," reminding the Mariner that he is cursed with a death-in-life. In any case the husband's inability to "warm" "other joys of life" reveals that they have become illusory and phantom-like to him.

The central image in the first four lines relates the husband's awareness of life's futility or unreality to his failure to recognize or accept the change wrought by time in his love relationship with his wife. "All other joys of life" have "suffered shipwreck with the ship." The ship of love, as it were, or the ship bearing the couple's youthful love relationship on the ocean of time has been wrecked, and, as the husband has seen "all other joys of life" as being part of the same ship's company, they have suffered the same fate as the wife and the love relationship he has known. They have become unreal, phantom-like, and "gaze upon him sorrow from the storm." Whether or not Meredith was conscious of the similarity in imagery between the "other joys" gazing at the husband and the dead men staring at the Ancient Mariner, the effect, surely, is the same: to indicate that the husband, on the one hand, and the Mariner, on the other, are cursed with death-in-life. The point is that as the

wife has become a "phantom-woman" to the husband because "the hour has struck" though he "heard not the bell," so the husband's whole existence has become joyless and futile because the ship of love, has, in a sense, "struck," has been wrecked, and because he has seen in their youthful and impassioned love relationship life's meaning and joy. The "other joys" can but remind him that he is cursed -- or really has cursed himself -- with death-in-life. To the husband, at this stage, the ship of impassioned and youthful love is, as well, the ship of life.

The husband's despair and sense of futility is revealed in the last three quatrains of the sonnet. He finds that the "coming minute" comes but to "mock the one that went," that "Philosophy" is beyond him and that "self-caged Passion" can but regard it with a "wondering hate." The husband concludes that "wisdom never comes when it is gold," but that "we have it only when we are half earth." In short, the husband feels that there is no help for him, that all has "suffered shipwreck with the ship."

The husband, "self-caged" and apart from "Philosophy," reveals in sonnet five that his world has become hell-like, insofar as it is filled with doubts, fears, suspicions, and desires frustrated by personal weakness. The husband becomes, indeed, a satanic figure, regarding his wife as Satan does God after his banishment. Satan is attracted to Him -- although

his personal degradation causes him to think of God in unworthy terms -- but he is unable to attain union with Him again because he can not conquer his own weakness, his own pride -- indeed he seems unconscious of it; moreover, his very alteration makes union impossible. As well, however, one is made to realize through the imagery the way to salvation for the husband: he must abandon as lost the reality of sentimental love and accept and understand the reality of nature and time.

The sonnet is also important, of course, in that it reveals the husband to be as satanic as he elsewhere thinks the wife. He, too, insofar as he is a satanic figure, is responsible for their hell. Both the husband and the wife have denied their proper relation to nature and time by regarding their sentimental and youthful love as static and real, and have, therefore, caused themselves to be banished to their hell, apart from time and truth:

A message from her set his brain aflame.  
 A world of household matters filled her mind,  
 Wherein he saw hypocrisy designed:  
 She treated him as something that is tame,  
 And but at other provocation bites.  
 Familiar was her shoulder in the glass,  
 Through that dark rain: yet it may come to pass  
 That a changed eye finds such familiar sights  
 More keenly tempting than new loveliness.  
 The 'What had been' a moment seemed his own:  
 The splendours, mysteries, dearer because known,  
 Nor less divine: Love's inmost sacredness  
 Called to him, 'Come!' -- In his restraining start,

Eyes nurtured to be looked at scarce could see  
 A wave of the great waves of Destiny  
 Convulsed at a checked impulse of the heart.

The character of the husband's world or of his mind can be seen generally in the first five lines. He becomes irrational, or his "brain" is set "aflame," upon receiving a "message from her." He is suspicious of "hypocrisy designed" even in her concern with "household matters." He feels, in short, that she is treating him as "something that is tame," as a lap-dog, possibly, as an inferior being. The tone of the fourth line suggests that he resents what he supposes to be her failure to consider him at his worth, her tendency to regard him as a tame thing who "but at other provocation bites" and who must, therefore, be fondled, pampered, petted, who must be kept quiet with trifles.

That the husband's world as it is revealed in the first five lines is a hell of doubts and suspicions is made clearer in the lines following in which the husband becomes a satanic figure looking upon a lost, divine world or upon God. The sense of resentment conveyed by the line suggesting that he is treated as "something that is tame" is shown by what follows to be the resentment of God by Satan. The husband is drawn to his wife, desires her, as he sees her -- presumably in some state of undress--before a mirror:

Familiar was her shoulder in the glass,  
 Through that dark rain: yet it may come to pass  
 That a changed eye finds such familiar sights  
 More keenly tempting than new loveliness.

On one level, of course, the lines indicate simply that the husband finds his wife more desirable because division has come between them. But behind the phrasing lies imagery which relates the scene directly to the theme of "Modern Love" by indicating the husband's satanic character and, therefore, the hell-like condition of his world.

It must first be noted that the husband is looking at the wife "in the glass," in the mirror, and that he sees her through a "dark rain." The "rain" must be the atmosphere of distrust spoken of in the first five lines. It is, however, "dark," and this has a significance beyond indicating an emotional and mental turmoil in the husband. It bespeaks an ominous and sinister identity. This identity and the cause of the "dark rain" are to be understood from the manner in which the husband views his wife: not directly but in the mirror. This, clearly, is not simply the husband but the devil viewing the soul of a woman which, by the mirror, has been projected out of her body. This old wives' tale explains much of the vaguely threatening tone in the lines: the devil can snatch the soul as it is reflected in a mirror and, thereby, kill the body. The husband has become a satanic figure and he is tempted to claim the soul of his wife.

As well, however, the husband finds his wife "familiar" and he looks upon "such familiar sights" with a "changed eye." More is involved, obviously, than the plucking of a soul.

The husband, as a satanic figure, has had earlier experiences with the "familiar sights." It would seem clear that the wife has become a lost heaven to the husband -- or a God, insofar as the image must be particularized to conform to the individual and animate figure of the wife. The husband's eye has "changed" in the same way that Satan changed after and because of his banishment: he has undergone a degeneration. As Satan became more degraded when the love relationship between him and God ceased, so the husband has become degraded since the death of the couple's love relationship. His "changed eye," his degeneration, is clear from the nature of his attraction. He is drawn to his wife by physical desire: he finds "her shoulder" "keenly tempting." Even the term "familiar" has a sensual ring to it.

The husband finds "such familiar sights/More keenly tempting than new loveliness." Again on one level, this line indicates no more than a common psychological truth: the known but lost is more desirable than the new and obtainable. But "new loveliness," when viewed through the satan-heaven imagery, assumes a much greater significance by revealing its relation to the main theme of the poem. In Paradise Lost -- and much of the satan-hell-heaven imagery finds its source in that work -- Satan, before resolving to go to earth to tempt the newly created man, first considers the re-taking of heaven.



He finds, that is, "familiar sights/More keenly tempting than new loveliness." He is tempted to try the impossible, to regain his former seat, rather than exploit the new situation.

In the same way, the husband is tempted to re-assert the old love relationship, or rather is tempted to renew it in a lustful, degenerate manner. As Satan, for a time, ignores the "new loveliness" of earth and man in a vain wish to renew the dead past, the husband overlooks the reality of his situation, the possibilities afforded by it, and wishes to renew the old state of a sentimental love relationship, which can now be no more than a lustful liaison. The "new loveliness," as an individual in "Modern Love," will be "my Lady," with whom the husband has an affair in sonnets twenty-seven to thirty-nine and by whom he learns or has demonstrated to him the efficacy and power of love within the processes of nature, within time.

There is, of course, one obvious objection to making "my Lady" the "new loveliness," making the husband a satanic figure torn between heaven and earth: "my Lady" and nature's processes are beneficial to the husband and, the implication is, the husband's knowledge of them is a positive good, but it is nowhere suggested in Paradise Lost that Satan benefitted -- spiritually at least -- from his acquaintance with earth and man, and man certainly did not benefit from the introduction

of Satan into his world. At this point one must remember that imagery is employed to produce effect or deepen meaning, not to impose restrictions upon meaning, not to narrow or reduce the effect of a poem. Meredith is not simply transferring imagery from Paradise Lost to "Modern Love": he is using it differently and to another end. The husband is a satanic figure, but he is, first, a human being. The satan image can not be wholly applied. As a human being the husband is beneficial to and benefits from his acquaintance with "my Lady" and nature's processes. He is a satanic figure who is saved. One can see, indeed, in this sonnet of "Modern Love," Meredith's later suggestion, in "The Woods of Westermain," that the "Dragon red" of the predatory Self is a constant and vital element in man. In the suggestion of Satan's salvation through the "new loveliness" one might well see the Self, subdued to serve a vital and necessary function in life.

The hell-like character of the couple's world is emphasized in the following quatrain in which the husband is clearly revealed as a satanic figure looking upon God or heaven:

The 'What has been' a moment seemed his own:  
The splendours, mysteries, dearer because known,  
Nor less divine: Love's inmost sacredness  
Called to him, 'Come!'

The final quatrain completes the satan imagery in the sonnet and relates the husband's inability to unite with his wife again to the theme of "Modern Love":

In his restraining start,  
 Eyes nurtured to be looked at scarce could see  
 A wave of the great waves of Destiny  
 Convulsed at a checked impulse of the heart.

"Eyes nurtured to be looked at," of course, refers -- within the image patterns employed in this sonnet -- to God or heaven, for the all-seeing God also has all eyes trained upon Him as He is the centre of attraction and love. God could see the "checked impulse of the heart," could see Satan's weakness, his pride, preventing him from seeking entrance to heaven again, but He "scarce could see" a "wave of the great waves of Destiny/Convulsed" by this checking. God could not see that Satan's decision to avoid heaven and to enter the world of earth and man would set in motion a wave of time which would become a part of man's "Destiny." God could not see that Satan would save and be saved by man, that, as Self, controlled by and subordinated to reason, Satan would become an integral part of man's future, man's "Destiny."

As God could not see the eventual significance of Satan's decision to leave heaven as being hopelessly lost to him, so the wife can not see the full significance of the husband's decision not to attempt reunion with her. By leaving her, by giving up the reality for him of sentimental love, he opens up for himself a new world of possibilities and truth. By abandoning the concept of sentimental love the husband makes possible a meaningful existence within earth or

nature's processes. If heaven is gone, then nature, earth, and time must be lived with and enjoyed.

In the fifth sonnet, then, the husband's world is clearly a hell and the husband himself a satanic figure. The hell is of his own creation insofar as he insists upon reclaiming the lost sentimental love. Not until he finally accepts earth, nature, and time as the only elements by which he can achieve fulfilment will the husband be free of the hell.

In the sixth sonnet the husband recognizes the death of his wife's love for him and its transfer to another man. He struggles to grasp the possibility of this while life remains in her. He struggles, that is, to grasp the growing or active character of love:

Dead! is it dead? She has a pulse, and flow  
Of tears, the price of blood drops, as I know,  
For whom the midnight sobs around Love's ghost,  
Since then I heard her, and so will sob on.  
The love is here; it has but changed its aim.

Life assumes a tragic, sad appearance for the husband as he recognizes love's death for him. A "flow/Of tears" strikes him as being the price of the "pulse," of "blood drops" or life, since the recognition of his wife's lack of love for him in sonnet one. The distorted vision of the world which he has as a result of his intense attraction to and repulsion from his wife is deepened by a strong but repressed urge in him to damn his wife as an adultress. The pressure one feels

within the husband is agonizingly increased by his denial of the urge and also by the quiet, relaxed atmosphere of the setting:

O bitter barren woman! what's the name?  
 The name, the name, the new name thou hast won?  
 Behold me striking the world's coward stroke!  
 That will I not do, though the sting is dire.  
 --Beneath the surface this, while by the fire  
 They sat, she laughing at a quiet joke.

The profound division of the couple, the essential silence of the two to each other, and the hell-like unreality of the situation are evident in the lines. The terms "striking" and "sting" pick up the recurrent serpent-hell imagery to place both together in a hell of their own making. The unreality, the irrationality, of a hell is suggested in the last two lines: "--Beneath the surface this, while by the fire/They sat, she laughing at a quiet joke." There is no communication to each other of the direness of their mutual plight. The refined savagery of the husband's reaction to his wife stems in part from this avoidance of the true nature of the situation.

Sonnet seven appears to sum up the initial situation as it is presented in sonnets two to six:

She issues radiant from her dressing room,  
 Like one prepared to scale an upper sphere:  
 -- By stirring up a lower, much I fear!  
 How deftly that oiled barber lays his bloom!  
 That long-shanked dapper Cupid with frisked curls  
 Can make known women torturingly fair;  
 The gold-eyed serpent dwelling in rich hair  
 Awakes beneath his magic whisks and twirls.

His art can take the eyes from out my head,  
 Until I see with eyes of other men;  
 While deeper knowledge crouches in its den,  
 And sends a spark up:-- is it true we are wed?  
 Yea! filthiness of body is most vile,  
 But faithlessness of heart I do hold worse.  
 The former, it were not so great a curse  
 To read on the steel-mirror of her smile.

The opening three lines pick up the satan imagery of earlier sonnets to combine it with a new image of the rising sun. This combination permits his wife's beauty and repulsiveness to be felt at once. The husband's attraction to her and his repulsion from her is described further and explained in the lines following, containing the Cupid-serpent-hell imagery. The wife's beauty and attractiveness are seen to be the effect of Cupid or love. Significantly, however, Cupid is seen as an "oiled barber," as "long-shanked" and "dapper" "with frisked curls," as one who "can make known women torturingly fair." While Cupid, that is, can make the husband see "with eyes of other men," can cause him to be intensely attracted to the wife, one is made aware of the husband's feeling that her beauty is essentially false. The falsity of the wife's beauty for the husband, of course, springs from his consciousness of the object of her love: not him, but her lover. His consciousness of the cause of the wife's attractiveness destroys the possibility of any communication between the two, even at a physical level, and the horror of the situation drives the man to ask if it is possible that they are wed. In affirming that they are, the husband reveals, through his tone and

intensity, that love for him is a static ideal to which he clings. The violence of his denunciation of his wife reveals that it is her supposed destroying their Eden-like love that causes him to revile her. Idealistic, youthful love, he wants to feel, is static and eternal:

Yea! filthiness of body is most vile,  
But faithlessness of heart I do hold worse.  
The former, it were not so great a curse  
To read on the steel-mirror of her smile.

The body is known to be ephemeral and, therefore, his wife's abusing it he can tolerate; but the husband considers love to be static and eternal, and his wife demonstrates that it is not. The sight of her mocks his belief in the permanence of love.

In sonnets eight to twelve there is begun a conscious examination of the couple's disintegrated love. The man struggles to grasp the full significance of their division, in terms of its meaning for the nature of love itself and its meaning for man. There runs throughout the sonnets, however, an awareness of the wife's guilt which suggests that the husband cannot yet accept the changed situation, has not yet fully understood the meaning of love and time for man. In sonnet eight there is a degree of softening in the husband's tone which results from the introduction of pity into his attitude for the first time. Although he retains his ambivalent attitude towards his wife, the husband feels pity for her in their situation. The introduction of this new element

into his attitude, while it cannot produce communication, does relax the demonic intensity of the couple's world sufficiently to permit him to examine the division between them:

Yet it was plain she struggled, and that salt  
Of righteous feeling made her pitiful.  
Poor twisting worm, so queenly beautiful!  
Where came the cleft between us? whose the fault?  
My tears are on thee, that have rarely dropped  
As balm for any bitter wound of mine:  
My breast will open for thee at a sign!

At this point, however, he is still within the toils of passion and the hopeful note struck in the last-quoted line is overcome by a sense of futility and despair:

But, no: we are two reed-pipes, coarsely stopped:  
The God once filled them with his mellow breath;  
And they were music till he flung them down,  
Used! used! Hear now the discord loving clown  
Puff his gross spirit in them, worse than death!

The pathos which informs the lines does not bring the couple closer; it merely re-emphasizes the husband's yearning for his lost Eden-like love. That his attitude has not changed despite the new element of pity is evident from the last four lines of the sonnet:

I do not know myself without thee more:  
In this unholy battle I grow base:  
If the same soul be under the same face,  
Speak, and a taste of that old time restore!

Pity does permit him, however, to recognize that meaning in life for him is bound up with his division from his wife. Recognition of his degenerate character in the existing situ-



ation causes him, not to seek a new relationship on the basis of the old, but to cry for some sign that the old love remains under the changed exterior. Pity, at this point, causes him to examine the situation, but it does not lead to a new understanding.

Sonnet nine re-affirms the husband's great physical desire for his wife and the division between the couple by a recurrence of the satan-hell imagery. The intensity of the husband's desire for his wife in the ninth sonnet causes him, in sonnet ten, to examine again the nature of their relationship and the nature of love:

But where began the change; and what's my crime?  
The wretch condemned, who has not been arraigned,  
Chafes at his sentence.

For the first time in the poem, the husband, in sonnet ten, suggests that youthful, idealized love is unreal in life, that it is not static or permanent:

Prepare,

You lovers, to know Love a thing of moods:  
Not, like hard life, of laws. In Love's deep woods,  
I dreamt of loyal life: -- the offence is there!  
Love's jealous woods about the sun are curled;  
At least, the sun far brighter there did beam. --  
My crime is, that the puppet of a dream,  
I plotted to be worthy of the world.

The husband sees the change in their relationship as beginning when he ceased to "mince/The facts of life" and began to dream of "loyal life." He feels that in the eyes of his wife his crime is that he attempted to become a member of the actual world, of life, rather than remain a member of their illusory

world of love. The husband, clearly, is moving towards a fuller understanding of the meaning and nature of life and love for man. Love, at least as he knows it, he recognizes as a "thing of moods," as essentially illusory and, therefore, not a final reality in itself. In contrast to the world of love, he now sees the world of "hard life," a thing "of laws."

Sonnet eleven reveals the continuity and permanence of nature in contrast to the impermanence of love. The last four lines of the sonnet pick up the sun imagery again:

Look, woman, in the West. There wilt thou see  
 An amber cradle near the sun's decline:  
 Within it, featured even in death divine,  
 Is lying a dead infant, slain by thee.

The husband sees in the sunset the symbol of the couple's dead love. Sun imagery, hitherto used to signify the falseness of the wife and ideal love, is here employed to suggest the falseness of the husband's position and his failure to perceive the true character of the situation. He sees the sun "even in death divine." He clings to the youthful, idealistic stage of love, feels it "divine," and is unable to see that it is illusory and false now that time has destroyed it.

In sonnet twelve the husband regrets bitterly the nature of life, which requires that the past be remembered to inform present thought and action. He feels that he could tolerate his wife's destruction of their particular love, her destruction of present joys, but he cannot tolerate her destroying

for him, by destroying, to his mind, youthful love, his belief in its static quality:

Methinks with all this loss I were content,  
 If the mad Past, on which my foot is based,  
 Were firm, or might be blotted: but the whole  
 Of life is mixed: the mocking Past will stay:  
 And if I drink oblivion of a day,  
 So shorten I the stature of my soul.

The past does not offer the husband security, for in it love's impermanence was proven, and he cannot forget it, for life is of a piece and the present is affected by the past. The "mad Past," therefore, is a "mocking Past," for it mocks him ever with the impermanence of love. Because life is of a piece, "is mixed," he cannot "drink oblivion of a day" without reducing, at the same time, "the stature" of his "soul." The husband cannot, that is, forget the transience of love as taught by the past without destroying at the same time a portion of his own development from which he is intended to benefit by the very nature of life. The importance of these lines lies in the husband's recognition of the nature of love and his persistent refusal to act upon the new understanding given him by the recognition. He remains torn between believing in the static nature of love and following to their end the ramifications of his newly gained understanding.

Sonnet thirteen must be considered an important turning point in "Modern Love." In this sonnet Meredith causes the husband to state explicitly that nature gains her "harmonies"

by accepting death as a necessary element in her fertility pattern, and that man must learn from nature, his "only visible friend," to accept change and death of love as necessary and fruitful within the passage of time, within the laws of nature. While the husband is sure that man can learn the lesson from nature, Meredith causes him to state explicitly, as well, his overpowering desire to retain the "renewed forever" "great bliss" of love. All of the sonnets between thirteen and twenty-seven are informed by and gain a refined brutality in tone, a caustic bitterness, a near-masochistic morbidity from the horrible struggle in the husband's mind between these now clearly conscious opposites. This sonnet states clearly the necessity of accepting the passage of time as fruitful, the necessity of growing with time, and it states equally clearly the irrationality of accepting love as a static element in life -- which, nonetheless, strongly attracts the husband:

'I play for Seasons; not Eternities!'  
 Says Nature, laughing on her way. 'So must  
 All those whose stake is nothing more than dust!'  
 And lo, she wins, and of her harmonies  
 She is full sure! Upon her dying rose  
 She drops a look of fondness, and goes by,  
 Scarce any retrospection in her eye;  
 For she the laws of growth most deeply knows,  
 Whose hands bear, here, a seed-bag -- there, an urn,  
 Pledged she herself to aught, 'twould mark her end!  
 This lesson of our only visible friend  
 Can we not teach our foolish hearts to learn?  
 Yes! yes! -- but, oh, our human rose is fair  
 Surpassingly! Lose calmly Love's great bliss,

When the renewed for ever of a kiss  
Whirls life within the shower of loosened hair!

This sonnet is particularly significant as it reaffirms nature's role as a guide and counsellor to man, as Meredith suggests in Poems. Here, of course, there is a depth of experience and meaning brought to the understanding of nature which is far beyond the elementary attitude of 1851.

After the clear revelation of the struggle in the husband's mind in sonnet thirteen, the first four lines of the fourteenth sonnet set the stage for much of the action and tone in the following fourteen sonnets: the husband apparently rejects the lesson of nature:

What soul would bargain for a cure that brings  
Contempt the nobler agony to kill?  
Rather let me bear on the bitter ill,  
And strike this rusty bosom with new stings!

The husband, in these lines, feels it impossible to accept nature's clear lesson, for acceptance would entail reducing love's position to contemptuous insignificance. He chooses, instead, to continue the agony by throwing himself, once again, into the pit of love. The nature of love as conceived of by the husband is suggested by the recurrence of "bitter ill," "strike," and "stings." The lesson the husband learns from nature has yet to overcome his emotional, his sentimental acceptance of love as a static, eternal element.

As has been suggested, sonnets fourteen to twenty-seven are informed by the struggle between nature's lesson and the

concept of love dominating the husband's mind. Several of the sonnets are concerned to indicate, chiefly, the division between the couple, but it is indicated with unwonted ferocity, stemming from the struggle in the husband's mind. The husband alternates between vicious condemnation of his wife, condemnation of himself, and condemnation of life as a meaningless game. Sonnet fifteen displays the morbid concern of the husband with the death of his wife's love for him. He viciously persecutes his wife by waking her to show her two love letters, an old one to him and a new one to her lover. The refined brutality of the husband is evident in the restraint of the lines:

Her waking infant-stare  
Grows woman to the burden my hands bear:  
Her own handwriting to me when no curb  
Was left on Passion's tongue. She trembles through;  
A woman's tremble -- the whole instrument: --  
I show another letter lately sent.  
The words are very like: the name is new.

The husband's regretting the loss of belief in love's eternal nature assumes a new acidity after the exposition of the struggle in sonnet thirteen. In sonnet sixteen there is remembered his wife's refusal to accept the possible death of love even at the moment in time when idealistic love was proper. Time was clearly passing, but she chose to remain ignorant of its import:

In our old shipwrecked days there was an hour,  
When in the firelight steadily aglow,  
Joined slackly, we beheld the red chasm grow  
Among the clicking coals...and hushed we sat  
As lovers to whom Time is whispering.

From sudden-opened doors we heard them sing:  
 The nodding elders mixed good wine with chat.  
 Well knew we that Life's greatest treasure lay  
 With us, and of it was our talk. 'Ah, yes!  
 Love dies!' I said: I never thought it less.  
 She yearned to me that sentence to unsay.  
 Then when the fire domed blackening, I found  
 Her cheek was salt against my kiss, and swift  
 Up the sharp scale of sobs her breast did lift: --  
 Now am I haunted by that taste! that sound!

The days in which the couple's love was alive, in which youthful, impassioned, and idealistic love was healthy and natural, have been "shipwrecked," as in the fourth sonnet, but even before those days were gone the wife refused to accept the possibility of its death. "Time" was "whispering" to them and, symbolically, the fire was dying, but she refused to accept the possibility of change. The husband is now "haunted by that taste! that sound," for he recognizes in her refusal the cause of their present suffering. There is a possibility, too, that "taste" and "sound" are related to the wave imagery -- particularly as developed later in sonnets forty-nine and fifty--insofar as the taste of salt and the "sharp scale of sobs" suggest the "faint thin line" and the sound of the dying waves carrying their love relationship to its death. If the relation is valid, then one can see that the couple's failure to move with time is, once again, seen as the cause of their division.

In sonnet seventeen life begins to assume the character of a morbid, pointless game for the couple. Their love is dead, but they try to keep the fact hidden from their friends.

Their life is an unreal and false game of "HIDING THE SKELETON," of which the husband says morbidly and with a sense of despair: "you now have seen Love's corpse-light shine."

Life's unreality for the husband in his refusal to accept the teaching of nature is carried over, in sonnet eighteen, to infect his attitude to people who accept nature's counsel. His life's unreality causes him to see the fruitfulness of others' lives in a caustically cynical manner:

Here Jack and Tom are paired with Moll and Meg.  
 Curved open to the river-reach is seen  
 A country merry-making on the green....  
 I have known rustic revels in my youth....  
 What life was that I lived? The life of these?  
 Heaven keep them happy! Nature they seem near.  
 They must, I think, be wiser than I am;  
 They have the secret of the bull and lamb.  
 'Tis true that when we trace its source, 'tis beer.

The husband's whole rationale of life has been undermined by the demonstration of love's impermanence, and he is not able to put his trust even in the validity and reality of others' lives which demonstrate the fruitfulness of time when properly lived with.

The cynicism of sonnet eighteen is mellowed in the nineteenth to portray a pointless, anarchic life in which there is no standard of values nor any meaning in men's lives: "No state is enviable. To the luck alone/Of some few favoured men I would lay claim." The struggle in the husband's mind causes him to see fullness in life, not as the result of growth in time, but as the consequence of "luck." While life is meaningless to the husband, his conceiving of life as irrational



permits him to relent in his insistence upon the guilt of his wife: "I bleed, but her who wounds I will not blame." In a world in which "the maddest gambler throws his heart," there is no point in recriminating when one loses. The husband is plagued, however, even in this interim state of anarchy, by his need to conceive of love as eternal:

Can I let  
My Love's old time-piece to another set,  
Swear it can't stop, and must for ever swell?  
Sure, that's one way Love drifts into the mart  
Where goat-legged buyers throng.

He does not yet conceive of time as continuous growth, but as fragmentation and a process of destruction. In this anarchic world, in which one must merely change the objects of one's desire to accord with a changed situation, must see the old destroyed without reason and accept in its place another unrelated fragment of existence, the husband sees the only state "enviable on earth" to be that of the "born idiot" who, "as days go by," is happy, for he is insensible to the fragmentation of life:

If any state be enviable on earth,  
'Tis yon born idiot's, who, as days go by,  
Still rubs his hands before him, like a fly,  
In a queer sort of meditative mirth.

Sonnet twenty picks up the ocean-wave imagery again to suggest the husband's development to a stage in which he is prepared to accept responsibility for the course of his life. He is prepared, that is, to recognize his responsibility for the couple's internal division and for their separation

from growth in time:

I take the hap  
Of all my deeds. The wind that fills my sails  
Propels; but I am helmsman. Am I wrecked,  
I know the devil has sufficient weight  
To bear: I lay it not on him, or fate.

The husband's acceptance of responsibility causes what had been pity in sonnet eight to be charity:

I have just found a wanton-scented tress  
In an old desk, dusty for lack of use.  
Of days and nights it is demonstrative,  
That, like some aged star, gleam luridly.  
If for those times I must ask charity,  
Have I not any charity to give?

The words "aged star" and "gleam luridly" recall the earlier satan imagery through which the falseness of the wife and idealistic love is indicated. The recurrence of the imagery here is significant, for it suggests the husband's growing rationality in recognizing his adultery as contributory to the couple's division. The struggle in his mind has carried him to a stage in which he sees life as anarchic; this stage, in turn, enables him to relax his condemnation of his wife. While he is without direction, he is now more balanced than at any earlier point in the poem.

In sonnet twenty-one the couple are joined by a friend recently struck by love. He asks their blessing as of wedded lovers, but they, of course, cannot, do not bless him: they but "pat him, with light laugh." Faced with the grim irony of the situation and with the possibility of exposure,

the wife faints. This sonnet, in effect, demonstrates the power of time to create love as well as destroy:

He who at love once laughed  
Is in the weak rib by a fatal shaft  
Struck through, and tells his passion's bashful dawn  
And radiant culmination, glorious crown....

One cannot be sure whether the sun imagery in the lines is intended to suggest the essential falseness of the friend's love or whether it is to suggest, on the other hand, the fullness and reality of his love, for the imagery has always been used to suggest falseness. In this instance, however, the imagery is rich, beautiful, and progressive: from dawn to "radiant culmination." There is not a hint of falseness in it; indeed, the progress, the change, of the friend's love suggests health and rationality. In the final analysis, one feels that the friend's love is intended to act as a foil to the time-lost love of the couple.

This interpretation would seem to find corroboration in the imagery of the last four lines:

Fainting points the sign  
To happy things in wedlock. When she wakes,  
She looks the star that thro' the cedar shakes:  
Her lost moist hand clings mortally to mine.

The first line of the quotation is ironic, of course. The wife's fainting does not indicate pregnancy, as "happy things" implies, but rather the wife's inability to break the shell of silence and unreality surrounding the couple. Her fainting, however, would seem to constitute a breaking

point in the wife's development. While no verbal communication actually takes place between the couple, the fainting spell would seem to be tacit recognition by the wife of the death of her and the husband's youthful love. The last two lines of the quotation appear to indicate that even with mere tacit recognition of its death the wife assumes a death-like character premonitory of her final death upon open acceptance of its destruction by time. The wife "looks the star that through the cedar shakes" and her hand is "lost," "moist," and "clings mortally" to her husband's. The term "star," of course, recalls the satan imagery employed earlier to indicate that the wife is regarded by the husband as the Lucifer dominating their hell, created by their refusal to reject as dead impassioned, idealistic love. The image of her as "the star that through the cedar shakes" seems to suggest that she is weakening or faltering, and the term "lost," "moist," and "mortally" suggest the presence of death. When seen together -- her tacit recognition in fainting of idealistic love's death, her weakening as the Lucifer or Satan of their hell-like world, and the suggestion that she is in the presence of death or feels death in her -- there appears to be already an indication that she is identifying herself with idealistic love in its death. The friend's growing love appears in contrast to the relationship of the couple, for while his love is healthy and harmonious, the couple's love

relationship is recognized as dead, and, moreover, the wife appears to be dying with it.

The unreality of the couple's sundered world, the wife's need of communication, her weakening, and the husband's growing attraction to the harmonious world of the "burly lovers" are revealed in sonnet twenty-two:

She has desires of touch, as if to feel  
That all the household things are as she knew.  
She stops before the glass. What sight in view?  
A face that seems the latest to reveal!  
For she turns from it hastily, and tossed  
Irresolute steals shadow-like to where  
I stand; and wavering pale before me there,  
Her tears fall still as oak-leaves after frost.  
She will not speak. I will not ask. We are  
League-sundered by the silent gulf between.  
You burly lovers on the village green,  
Yours is a lower, and a happier star!

The division between the couple and their division from growth in time remain, but the last two quoted lines suggest more strongly than earlier the husband's growing readiness to accept nature's lesson.

The precise meaning of sonnet twenty-three is unclear, but it would seem to imply, at once, the division of the couple and the husband's awareness of the need for, as it were, salvation. The tone and meaning of the lines are informed by the husband's awareness of the Christmas season and its significance:

'Tis Christmas weather, and a country house  
Receives us: rooms are full: we can but get  
An attic crib. Such lovers will not fret  
At that, it is half said. The great carouse  
Knocks hard upon the midnight's hollow door,

But when I knock at hers, I see the pit,  
 Why did I come here in that dullard fit?  
 I enter, and lie couched upon the floor.  
 Passing, I caught the coverlet's quick beat:-  
 Come, Shame, burn to my soul! and Pride, and Pain --  
 Foul demons that have tortured me, enchain!  
 Out in the freezing darkness the lambs bleat.  
 The small bird stiffens in the low starlight.  
 I know not how, but shuddering as I slept,  
 I dreamed a banished angel to me crept:  
 My feet were nourished on her breasts all night

The first three lines suggest an obvious parallel between the couple's arriving at a "country house" and Joseph and Mary's arriving at the inn at Bethlehem. As Joseph and Mary were forced to remain in the stable, so the couple are forced to take an "attic crib." The parallel is ironic, of course, for, in contrast to the supreme fruitfulness of the stay of Joseph and Mary, that of the couple is barren, merely accentuating the lack of communication between them. Lines four to eight bring home clearly the difference between the two events. While the "great carouse," the celebration of Christ's entry into the world to save man, "knocks hard upon the midnight's hollow door," or approaches the midnight hour, the movement of change from day to day, the point at which it is most clear that time passes, the husband knocks at the wife's door to find, not the happiness and fruition of time's passing, but "the pit," or hell, a place of horror beyond time.

Precisely what the character of the "dullard fit" is, in which the husband enters the bedroom, is difficult to say, but it would seem reasonable to think that he has entered the

room momentarily infused with the spirit of Christmas, of salvation and true love. Upon entering the room, "the pit" of hell, the spirit of salvation, or the hope for salvation and true love appear to him as no more than a "dullard fit." Hope must be abandoned. Aware of the difference between his world and the "saved" world outside the husband lies "couched upon the floor." This action would seem to have a two-fold purpose. On the one hand, it accentuates the difference between the two worlds as well as the division between the couple. On the other hand, it can be seen as a form of penance to which the husband is subjecting himself, insofar as he is denying himself even the physical proximity of his wife. That his lying on the floor is a form of penance seems to be confirmed by the following lines in which the husband notices the "coverlet's quick beat," the presence of his wife in bed, conscious and alive to his passing, a person from whom he is most deeply divided but to whom he should be most closely bound. He consciously rejects, that is, his physical desire and deliberately tortures himself in an effort to be purified. That this is his intention seems reasonably clear from his call for "Shame" to "burn to my soul" and "enchain" "Pride, and Pain--/Foul demons that have tortured me"; he cries, that is, to be saved, to be removed from his present hell.

Immediately upon his cry for salvation come the two lines apparently suggesting the entrance of Christ, the coming

of salvation and mercy into the world: "Out in the freezing darkness the lambs bleat./The small bird stiffens in the low starlight." The first quoted line seems to refer to Christ's birth into a world of sin, and the second, possibly, to the sacrifice of a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons upon His presentation to the Lord, His circumcision or purification. Immediately upon the husband's cry for salvation and purification, that is, one is made aware of their coming to the world outside.

The last three lines of the sonnet reveal that the husband's effort to have "Pride" and "Pain" enchained is unsuccessful. Between the husband crying for salvation and the outside world experiencing it, there lies a gulf of "Pride" which he is unable to cross. He dreams that a "banished angel," or his wife, comes to him begging forgiveness, but he is unable to offer it:

I know not how, but shuddering as I slept,  
I dreamed a banished angel to me crept:  
My feet were nourished on her breasts all night.

It is significant that he should see his wife as a "banished angel," as Satan banished from the sight of God, for it means that the husband sees himself as a God-like figure, as being the upholder of right against wrong. It means, in fact, that while he sees his wife as a "banished angel," he himself is equally damned, for he has manifested satanic pride in feeling himself the equal of God.

The husband's damning pride and his inability to forgive



his wife are revealed in the last line of the sonnet: "My feet were nourished on her breasts all night." First, it must be noticed that the husband conceives of his wife as remaining at his feet, that she has not been permitted to rise as would one who had been forgiven. Second, the husband conceives of his "feet" as being "nourished on her breasts." It would seem reasonable to see this as a parody of Christ's receiving suck from Mary, or, more remotely, as a parody of man's receiving suck or nourishment in the form of love and forgiveness for sins from God through Christ. In either case, the fact that it is the husband's "feet" which are "nourished" and not his lips or head indicates that his position is, in effect, the reverse of that held by the child, Christ, or normal Christian man. The husband is not in accord with Christ or with the rest of man. The slightly grotesque image emphasizes the husband's isolation from the experience of common man and suggests that he is caught up in a strange, distorted world of his own.

The world is, of course, that of Satan. Far from achieving salvation, far from having "Pride" enchained, the husband is revealed in the dream as feeding his pride by keeping his wife at his feet. In contrast to Christ himself, or to the Christian world, the husband does not forgive but uses another's humility to bloat his pride in the sense of his own righteousness. As well as the pride involved in

seeing himself as God, the husband is guilty of feeding this pride at another's expense.

If this is the proper explanation of the lines, however, how does one relate the husband's failure to be truly contrite to the birth of Christ? The only apparent explanation lies in seeing the birth of Christ as the birth of love and mercy. If one so conceives of Christ's birth, then one can see that the husband, in his dream, in rejecting the wife's bid for forgiveness for her sin -- which in his eyes is the destruction of youthful, idealistic love -- is actually denying the principle of love and mercy brought into the world by Christ. In short, the husband's dream reveals that his inability to forgive his wife her supposed sin against love prevents him from achieving happiness, prevents him from being removed from hell.

The interpretation given sonnet twenty-three would seem to be confirmed by a reading of sonnet twenty-four. The husband speaks of the wife's doing "penance" only for her sin against love and of his inability to forgive her:

The misery is greater as I live!  
To know her flesh so pure, so keen her sense,  
That she does penance now for no offence,  
Save against Love. The less can I forgive!  
The less can I forgive....

He is aware of her essential innocence, but he is still unable to crush his repulsion from her for her having supposedly destroyed their love and his belief in the permanence of love.

His inability, through pride, to forgive her, and the hell-like character of his world are seen in the last two lines:  
 "Pluck out the eyes of pride! thy mouth to mine!/Never!  
 though I die thirsting. Go thy ways!"

Sonnets twenty-five and twenty-six reveal the husband's final bitterness and despair at this stage of "Modern Love." Sonnet twenty-five expresses his bitterness and acidity in his struggle to accept the demands of life. In a discussion of a novel the wife suggests that it is unnatural for a wife to choose her husband over a lover. The accumulated fury and frustration of the husband can be felt as he strikes out at her with the lines: "Unnatural? My dear, these things are life:/ And life, some think, is worthy of the Muse."

The fury and despair of the husband which result from the struggle in his mind between nature's lesson and his undermined belief in the static, eternal quality of love are evident in sonnet twenty-six. Love, before the ravages of time, the husband conceives of as an eagle; but love injured by time he sees as a serpent. He says:

I had the eagle in my bosom erst:  
 Henceforward with the serpent I am cursed.  
 I can interpret where the mouth is dumb.  
 Speak, and I see the side-lie of a truth.  
 Perchance my heart may pardon you this deed:  
 But be no coward:-- you that made Love bleed,  
 You must bear all the venom of his tooth!

In sonnets twenty-seven to forty the second stage or movement of "Modern Love" is worked out. In an affair with a

woman identified only as "my Lady," the husband moves more and more closely to a rejection of a static and sentimental conception of love. He seems, indeed, to have succeeded in completely destroying the claims of his illusions when, in sonnet thirty-nine, his wife appears with her lover to reveal that the husband has still one more hurdle to leap before finally being free. The affair with "my Lady," apparently in accord with nature's laws, with the movement of time, is revealed to have a rotten foundation, for the husband still feels the claims of love as a static ideal. Despite its basic weakness, however, the husband's affair is an effective demonstration, within the bounds of failure, of the real possibility of a sane and wholesome love relationship in time. The affair approaches the stature of a play -within-a-play, serving as a norm by which to judge the main action.

The seeds of failure are sown at the beginning of the affair, in sonnet twenty-seven, when the husband undertakes the affair with "my Lady," not from a recognition of time's fruitfulness and the death of his old love, but from an effort to forget the "mocking Past" of sonnet twelve. He is willing at this stage as he was not at the earlier to "blot" the past and shorten the "stature" of his "soul":

Is the devil's line  
Of golden hair, or raven black, composed?  
No matter, so I taste forgetfulness.  
And if the devil snare me, body and mind,  
Here gratefully I score: -- he seemed kind,  
When not a soul would comfort my distress!

O sweet new world, in which I rise new made!  
 O Lady, once I gave love: now I take!  
 Lady, I must be flattered. Shouldst thou wake  
 The passion of a demon, be not afraid.

After the line indicating that he is willing to sell his soul to the devil, the line "O sweet new world, in which I rise new made" is filled with a cruel dramatic irony. The husband, because he is trying to "taste forgetfulness," is incapable of rising completely "new made" in the Eden-like "sweet new world" of the affair. The deep dramatic irony of the line is made particularly clear by the following three lines in which the husband stresses his need for flattery and adulation. "O sweet new world, in which I rise new made" is a clear echo of Miranda's exclamation upon seeing Ferdinand, but, far from achieving the purity and innocence of Miranda, the husband says, "Shouldst thou wake/The passion of a demon, be not afraid." At the centre of his reaction lies the satan imagery, indicating that he still does not understand or accept the nature of love for man.

The false position of the husband is accentuated in sonnet twenty-eight where he assumes a vaguely threatening tone in speaking to "my Lady":

Be watchful of your beauty, Lady dear!  
 How much hangs on that lamp you cannot tell.  
 Most earnestly I pray you, tend it well:  
 And men shall see me as a burning sphere;  
 And men shall mark you eyeing me and groan  
 To be the God of such a grand sunflower!  
 I feel the promptings of Satanic power,  
 While you do homage unto me alone.

Behind the husband's relationship with "my Lady" lies a

false and egotistical attitude to love. The affair is doomed to failure.

Sonnet twenty-nine finds the husband fumbling with his new effort to understand and accept the passage of time. He finds that he cannot be satisfied with love upon a "mortal lease":

Am I failing? For no longer can I cast  
A glory round about this head of gold.  
Glory she wears, but springing from the mould;  
Not like the consecration of the Past!  
Is my soul beggared? Something more than earth  
I cry for still: I cannot be at peace  
In having Love upon a mortal lease.  
I cannot take the woman at her worth!

He cannot accept a glory "springing from the mould," from an awareness of love's development, of passing time. He cannot yet accept the fruitfulness of time, but cries for a "consecration." His soul is, indeed, "beggared" by his refusal to abandon his concept of idealized love. He must yet learn to take the woman "at her worth."

The husband reveals in sonnet thirty what would be essentially a proper understanding of love and life in time and nature if it were not for his basic insincerity in accepting it. Sonnet thirty explains correctly man's relationship with nature. What is wrong is not the explanation but the husband's attitude to it, as seen in sonnets twenty-seven to twenty-nine, and as revealed in the tone of the lines:

What are we first? First, animals; and next  
Intelligences at a leap; on whom  
Pale lies the distant shadow of the tomb,

And all that draweth on the tomb for text.  
 Into which state comes Love, the crowning sun:  
 Beneath whose light the shadow loses form.  
 We are the lords of life and life is warm.  
 Intelligence and instinct now are one.  
 But nature says: 'My children most they seem  
 When they least know me: therefore I decree  
 That they shall suffer.' Swift doth young Love flee,  
 And we stand wakened, shivering from our dream.  
 Then if we study Nature we are wise.  
 Thus do the few who live but with the day:  
 The scientific animals are they.--  
 Lady, this is my sonnet to your eyes.

The husband understands man as being, first animal,  
 then "Intelligence." As an "Intelligence" man is aware of  
 the destructiveness of death and his life is informed by  
 death. The term "pale" suggests the condition of life for  
 man so conceived: his life lacks meaning and health. Under  
 the "crowning sun" of love, death ceases to have the signifi-  
 cance for man which it did when he was "Intelligence." In  
 the presence of love man feels fulfilled beyond time and  
 death. Man as animal and man as "Intelligence" appear to  
 unite. The unreal nature of this union and of this state  
 is clearly suggested by the use of the sun imagery. Aside  
 from the many other references to the falsity of idealized love  
 in terms of the sun, in sonnet ten the sun is clearly identi-  
 fied with the unreal and deceptive in the line "Love's  
 jealous woods about the sun are curled." The feeling that  
 "we are the lords of life and life is warm" is a deception  
 when based upon a static concept of love,

The deceptive, unreal nature of this feeling is to be

seen in the lines:

But nature says: 'My children most they seem  
When they least know me: therefore I decree  
That they shall suffer. 'Swift doth young Love flee....

Man, experiencing or believing in "young love," does not recognize nature to be kind and fruitful. He claims idealistic love as a static element and does not see it as being bound up with nature's processes, subject to death and change in time's passage. Man in love, therefore, man when he most knows the kindness of nature, the goodness of nature, seems least to be nature's child, for he sees eternities when nature plays only for seasons. To make man seem more her child nature must make him suffer, for only by suffering does man realize that he must find the meaning of life in nature, in the passage of time in nature, which is marked by the changing seasons.

After the destruction of idealistic love, when man suffers, when "we stand wakened, shivering from our dream," man must study nature to understand the meaning of life, to fulfill himself in life:

Then if we study nature we are wise.  
Thus do the few who live but with the day:  
The scientific animals are they.

Man must learn to "live but with the day"; he must dispense with thoughts of eternities. Any eternity which might exist, it is clearly implied, exists only in the renewal and progress of nature: it does not lie in the individual. He is part of



the renewal pattern in nature and must see his significance there. Men who "live but with the day," men who live in the proper relation to nature, are "scientific animals."

When considered in connection with what has been said, the term "scientific animal" is self-explanatory. The man who lives in the proper relation to time and nature is "scientific" insofar as he understands the meaning of life by a rational, unemotional understanding and study of nature. He is "animal" as well, however, for he is a part of nature's processes, gaining fulfilment and meaning from his inevitable participation in the processes. Essentially the "scientific animal" is a combination of the animal in man and the intelligence. The determining difference between the "scientific animal" and the man in love or the man clinging to a static conception of love is that the former's position is based solidly upon an understanding of the meaning of time for man, while the latter is based upon a confused, sentimental, and unreal understanding of the nature of love. In the final analysis, the difference is between truth and chimera.

Considerable time has been spent on sonnet thirty because an understanding of it is essential to an understanding of Meredith's meaning in "Modern Love." In this sonnet the husband states precisely the understanding of nature and time necessary to man. The point is that he has not yet accepted the understanding which he himself has. This, while it is

abundantly clear from the three introductory sonnets, is confirmed by the tone of sonnet thirty, particularly of the last line: "Lady, this is my sonnet to your eyes." The line, in its latent savagery, expresses the husband's discontent with what he recognizes to be a necessary position. There is in the line a strong sense of loss, as if he resents his inability to speak in terms of their love's permanence. The statement of nature's lesson is bare, and brutal in its bareness. He has not yet learned to accept, learned to take joy in a life without an individual destiny.

At this point it would be useful to look at an interpretation of sonnet thirty by Norman Friedman in his analysis of the image structure in "Modern Love." He writes:

Cynic and sensualist meet in XXX, where the husband, lecturing upon the brevity of love, concludes with the live-but-in-the-day moral -- the creed, he says, of "scientific animals." <sup>13</sup>

Friedman suggests that the import of "scientific" may be inferred from "Foresight and Patience," a poem of Meredith's published in 1894, in which Foresight accuses the Nineteenth Century of ignoring both her and her sister: "Its learning is through Science to despair."<sup>14</sup> Clearly, however, the "scientific animal" of "Modern Love" is not the one to despair: it is the husband who tends to despair -- and he refuses to become a "scientific animal." The understanding of man's relation to time, to nature or reason given in sonnet

thirty, is clearly intended to be the proper understanding. The husband is something of a cynic and sensualist because he refuses to accept the understanding as truth.

Sonnets thirty-one and thirty-two reveal the husband apparently acting in accordance with nature's lesson, but struggling against it in spite of himself. The subtle influence of the claims of sentimental love can be seen in sonnet thirty-one as he speaks of his relationship with "my Lady":

This golden head has wit in it. I live  
Again, and a far higher life, near her....  
Great poets and great sages draw no prize  
With women: but the little lap-dog breed,  
Who can be hugged, or on a mantle-piece  
Perched up for adoration, these obtain  
Her homage. And of this we men are vain?  
Of this! 'Tis ordered for the world's increase!  
Small flattery! Yet she has that rare gift  
To beauty, Common Sense. I am approved.  
It is not half so nice as being loved,  
And yet I do prefer it.

The Lady has "Common Sense" and so she does not love him, but follows nature and gives him her approval. He misses the love of old, but he prefers approval. To this degree he has accepted nature's lesson. He, nonetheless, finds women's giving "homage" to little men, because comfortable and necessary to the "world's increase," a "small flattery."

The same attitude is expressed in sonnet thirty-two when he says that in kissing her he feels "that I am matched; that I am man," but that still "one restless corner of my heart or head,/That holds a dying something never dead,/Still frets...."

The "dying something never dead" is, of course, as Friedman suggests,<sup>15</sup> the ideal of romantic love. Its presence indicates an incomplete acceptance of nature's lesson. The husband explains its presence as meaning that "woman is not.../Her sex's antidote," and he is correct in this instance, for his failure to accept the meaning of time for man is the result of his unwillingness to accept his changed wife. Until he accepts his wife, he cannot accept time's change.

In sonnet thirty-three the husband reveals a complete awareness of the degeneration he is undergoing as a result of the struggle in his mind between the concepts of growth in time and idealized love. Speaking of a picture in the Louvre in which Satan is easily vanquished, the husband says:

'Oh, Raphael! when men the Fiend do fight,  
They conquer not upon such easy terms.  
Half serpent in the struggle grow these worms.  
And does he grow half human, all is right.'  
This to my Lady in a distant spot,  
Upon the theme: While mind is mastering clay,  
Gross clay invades it.

While the first four quoted lines indicate the degeneration of the husband or his awareness that men become "half serpent in the struggle" against "the Fiend," the last three lines of the quotation suggest that he has, in fact, entered a new phase in his understanding of man and nature. The theme of his lines upon man's struggle with "the Fiend," he says, is that "While mind is mastering clay,/Gross clay invades it."

It is significant that he should conceive of himself as "mastering clay," for this would seem to indicate clearly that he sees himself as understanding man's life as a part of nature's processes, as grasping the character of man as a finite being. "Gross clay invades it" would refer to the violence and imbalance he experiences as he struggles to understand, or possibly it refers to the "foul" demon of pride which binds him in sonnet twenty-three. In any case, it is clear that he has not yet fully understood or accepted man as a part of nature and that he must undergo further purgation. But it is important that he should now conceive of himself as "mastering clay."

Sonnets thirty-four to thirty-seven show that all is not well with the husband. There is still no communication between him and his wife. There is no suggestion of condemnation of her, but the "gross clay" succeeds in preventing an understanding. In sonnet thirty-seven the husband, aware of the passage of time, the death of their love, is moved by the unreality of the situation to ask: "Our tragedy, is it alive or dead?" He too is aware of a tragedy, a waste in their relationship. Until communication occurs, waste will continue.

In sonnet thirty-eight the husband delivers an ultimatum to "my Lady":

Give to imagination some pure light  
 In human form to fix it, or you shame  
 The devils with that hideous human game:--  
 Imagination urging appetite!

...my dear Lady, let me love!  
 My soul is arrowy to the light in you.  
 You know me that I never can renew  
 The bond that woman broke: what would you have?  
 'Tis Love, or Vileness! not a choice between,  
 Save petrification! What does Pity here?  
 She killed a thing, and now it's dead, 'tis dear.

He demands to be let love to save him from "vileness." Note, however, that this is not youthful, idealized love of which he speaks and that he is asking permission to love. He needs "pure light/In human form" to fix imagination and prevent it from becoming the tool of appetite. This "pure light" he finds in "my Lady": "My soul is arrowy to the light in you." The healthiness of his need is clear in that the imagery used to express it is not demonic but "pure," and the direction of the light has changed from sonnet twenty-seven, in which he wishes to be seen as a "burning sphere." Now he wishes merely to be permitted to bask in her light, or love her. Obviously he has progressed a long way towards understanding the nature of love for man in time and has rejected, in this relationship, his concept of selfish, static, sentimental love. The only betraying element is his too cold rejection of his wife and pity. "Gross clay" has invaded to drive him beyond acceptance of nature's lesson to a rejection of genuinely human feelings.

Sonnet thirty-nine closes the husband's affair with "my Lady." In this affair he struggled to assume the proper attitude to time and nature and, during the affair, learned to

accept nature's teaching. Within itself the affair demonstrates the proper attitude to love and life. It might be seen as a healthy modern love within an improper disintegrating one. The relationship of the husband and "my Lady" is destroyed, not by internal factors, but by the husband's inability to apply and accept fully the same attitude to love in regard to his wife as he assumes within the affair. The husband's late learning of nature's lesson destroys both his old and new love.

The healthiness and reality of the love between "my Lady" and the husband is clear from the lines of sonnet thirty-nine:

She yields: my Lady in her noblest mood  
 Has yielded: she, my golden-crowned rose!  
 The bride of every sense! more sweet than those  
 Who breathe the violet breath of maidenhood,  
 O visage of still music in the sky!  
 Soft moon! I feel thy song, my fairest friend!  
 True harmony within can apprehend  
 Dumb harmony without. And hark! 'tis nigh!  
 Belief has struck the note of sound: a gleam  
 Of living silver shows me where she shook  
 Her long white fingers down the shadowy brook,  
 That sings her song, half waking, half in dream.

Harmony is the keynote of his reaction. Harmonious within himself, he is aware of the harmony in nature. No longer does he feel that an understanding of nature brings "contempt the nobler agony to kill," as in sonnet fourteen. An understanding of nature and time causes love to become vital and full. He understands as beautiful the harmony of nature of which he is a part. The moon, the symbol of harmonious nature,

sings her song "half waking, half in dream." The harmony of nature, that is, is expressed through life and death. Her harmony requires both. The husband understands the harmony of which he is a part, seeing it symbolically, and significantly, as a "gleam/Of living silver."

The love of the affair, however, is destroyed by his failure to apply his understanding of nature and life to his marriage. At the sight of his wife with her lover, the foundation of the husband's new understanding and position is swept away:

What two come here to mar this heavenly tune?  
A man is one: the woman bears my name,  
And honour. Their hands touch! Am I still tame?  
God, what a dancing spectre seems the moon!

Nature decrees, not only that man understand her harmony, but that, for him to be harmonious, his awareness of his life must be complete. The past, which the husband tried to forget by undertaking the affair, has surged to the surface of his consciousness again to destroy the harmony he had achieved in the affair. Significantly, he marks that the woman bears his "name,/And honour," and that her hands touch her lover's. False pride and selfishness have yet to be vanquished in the husband.

The remaining eleven sonnets of "Modern Love," from thirty-nine to fifty, record the final death of the husband's concept of sentimental, idealized love and his final acceptance



and understanding of the meaning of life for man in nature, subject to the passage of time. The husband's changed situation is revealed clearly in sonnet forty:

Can I love one,  
And yet be jealous of another? None  
Commits such folly. Terrible Love, I ween,  
Has might, even dead, half sighing to upheave  
The lightless seas of selfishness amain;  
Seas that in a man's heart have no rain.  
To fall and still them. Peace can I achieve,  
By turning to this fountain-source of woe,  
This woman, who's to Love as fire to wood?  
She breathed the violet breath of maidenhood  
Against my kisses once! but I say, No!  
The thing is mocked at! Helplessly afloat,  
I know not what I do, whereto I strive.  
The dread that my old love may be alive  
Has seized my nursling new love by the throat.

The "true harmony within" the husband which could "apprehend/  
Dumb harmony without" has been destroyed by the appearance  
of the wife and her lover. The husband is confused and immobilized by the opposing claims on him of sentimental, idealized love -- and of jealousy and pride which are a part of it -- and of the natural, reasonable, and harmonious love demonstrated in the affair. He says, "I know not what I do, whereto I strive./The dread that my old love may be alive/  
Has seized my nursling new love by the throat."

"Terrible Love" has stirred up the "lightless seas of selfishness" in his heart, has destroyed his new love, but the husband is unable to turn to his wife for succor, is unable to make their relationship meaningful again, for selfishness or jealousy causes him to feel that "Terrible Love," idealized,

sentimental love, is mocked at by the wife, the supposed destroyer of their relationship. The husband, in short, is "helplessly afloat" on the ocean of time. The harmony which had existed between the husband and "my Lady" and between them and nature has been wrecked, and the husband is unable to bring the same harmony into his relationship with his wife. Both avenues of escape are blocked to the husband, and, until he fully understands and accepts the meaning of nature and, therefore, of time for man and love, he will necessarily remain out of harmony, "helplessly afloat."

Driven by selfishness and their unwillingness to abandon as dead their youthful love, the couple, in sonnet forty-one, strive to recapture their dead relationship. The husband is immediately aware that they are acting from selfishness and that their selfishness has destroyed the true love of the affair:

They waste the soul with spurious desire,  
That is not the ripe flame upon the bough.  
We have taken up a lifeless vow  
To rob a living passion: dust for fire!

With midnight marking the passing of time from day to day, as in sonnet one and twenty-three, the couple prepare for bed, fully aware that their position is false and destructive:

Madam is grave, and eyes the clock that tells  
Approaching midnight. We have struck despair  
Into two hearts. O, look we like a pair  
Who for fresh nuptials joyfully yield all else?

In sonnet forty-two the husband's plan to avoid contact or communication of any kind with his wife is foiled by her

failing to be in bed as he expected. "The hands/Of Time now signal" that she should be in bed and that the moment has come, therefore, for him to follow without fear of having desire aroused by the sight of her undressing, but he finds that she has not yet gone to bed: "Where first she set the taper down she stands:/Not Pallas: Hebe shamed!" In the unexpected situation the husband is driven to her --but not by love. Physical desire, "thoughts black as death," causes the husband to be united with her. In this union of lust the concept of sentimental, idealized love, destroying and deranging the husband, meets its end.

In sonnet forty-three, one of the more sadly-beautiful sonnets in "Modern Love," the husband finally realizes and accepts the death of his and his wife's love, realizes that its death was caused by their common failure to grow or move with time. The sonnet combines the serpent imagery of false love and the wave imagery of time's passing to reveal the final casting out of unreal, static, idealized love:

Mark where the pressing wind shoots javelin-like  
 Its skeleton shadow on the broad-backed wave!  
 Here is a fitting spot to dig Love's grave;  
 Here where the ponderous breakers plunge and strike,  
 And dart their hissing tongues high up the sand:  
 In hearing of the ocean, and in sight  
 Of those ribbed wind-streaks running into white.  
 If I the death of Love had deeply planned,  
 I never could have made it half so sure,  
 As by the unblest kisses which upbraid  
 The full-waked sense; or failing that, degrade!  
 'Tis morning, but no morning can restore  
 What we have forfeited. I see no sin:

The wrong is mixed. In tragic life, God wot,  
 No villain need be! Passions spin the plot:  
 We are betrayed by what is false within.

The couple's love is dead and the husband buries it, symbolically, "in hearing of the ocean, and in sight/Of those ribbed wind-streaks running into white. "He buries it, that is, by the ocean to signify that sentimental love is not a final reality in itself but merely an ephemeral, shadow-like impression on one passing wave of time. When the wave loses its force, when it expires on time's shore, sentimental love, too, meets its end.

The first two lines of the sonnet reveal the character of sentimental love and its relation to time: "Mark where the pressing wind shoots javelin-like/Its skeleton shadow on the broad-backed wave!" The "pressing wind" of sentimental love causes a "skeleton shadow" to be formed on a "broad-backed wave" of time. It must first be noted that the "wind" is "pressing," that it manifests itself as a "skeleton shadow," and that the wave is "broad-backed." The wave of time both carries sentimental love -- "broad-backed" indicates that it is made for or accustomed to bearing things -- and is pressed or driven by this love. The love exists, however, only as a "skeleton shadow" impressed upon the wave by the wind. That is, it is essentially unreal and death-like. The "skeleton shadow," moreover, is shot "javelin-like" onto the wave.

Not only is sentimental love death-like; it is death-dealing. Sentimental, idealistic love, then, has no final reality in itself: it exists only insofar as it is impressed upon a wave of time -- and it destroys and is destroyed by that same wave.

The character of sentimental love, as it is seen in the two quoted lines, becomes clearer still when the javelin image is compared to an image contained in an earlier reference to the love of the husband for "my Lady." In sonnet thirty-eight the husband, asking "my Lady" to let him love, says, "My soul is arrowy to the light in you." While the term "arroy" suggests a piercing quality, it, nonetheless, is used properly and traditionally in reference to love, for it is by Cupid's arrow that one is made to feel love. The javelin, on the other hand, is foreign to the field of love and belongs to that of war, death, and destruction. The difference between the terms, of course, reveals the difference between the loves. The husband's love for "my Lady" is based upon a recognition of time's passage and nature's laws, while his relationship with his wife is based upon a denial of time and nature. The former is harmonious; the latter is violent and destructive.

The following five lines demonstrate through wave and serpent imagery the justice of the symbolic burying of the couple's love on the ocean shore:

Here is a fitting spot to dig Love's grave;  
 Here where the ponderous breakers plunge and strike,  
 And dart their hissing tongues high up the sand:  
 In hearing of the ocean, and in sight  
 Of those ribbed wind-streaks running into white.

The ocean shore is, as it were, the death-bed of the waves and the graveyard of the "wind-streaks." The "broad-backed wave" of the first two lines, which bore the "skeleton shadow" of sentimental love, here becomes "ponderous breakers" which "plunge and strike,/And dart their hissing tongues high up the sand." The identity and character of these breakers, or of their "hissing tongues" at least, is made clear, not only by the serpent imagery -- which recalls the false, inverted, hell-like world of the couple throughout "Modern Love" -- but by the later reference to them as "ribbed wind-streaks." This phrase picks up the earlier image of sentimental love as a "pressing wind" shooting "javelin-like/Its skeleton shadow on the broad-backed wave." The term "ribbed" recalls "skeleton" and "wind-streaks" combines in itself the suggestions of "wind," "shadow," and "pressing." The image of the javelin is possibly contained in the image of the breakers plunging, striking, and darting; in any case, the generally destructive, violent, and deathful character of the wave imagery is sufficient to remind one of it.

The ocean shore, therefore, is a "fitting spot to dig Love's grave," for, as the ocean's waves crash into shore, hissing and darting, causing the "ribbed wind-streaks" to run "into white," so the couple's sentimental, idealistic love

crashes onto the shore of oblivion, becomes serpent-like and hell-like, and finally dies or runs "into white." As the "pressing wind" causes a wave to assume its shadow-form and as it destroys and is destroyed with the wave on shore, so sentimental love causes a phase of time to assume its character, and it destroys and is destroyed with the phase in time.

The husband's recognition and acceptance of the death of love are expressed in lines which convey to the reader an awareness of the deep sense of loss he feels in its death:

If I the death of Love had deeply planned,  
I never could have made it half so sure,  
As by the unblest kisses which upbraid  
The full-waked sense; or failing that, degrade!  
'Tis morning: but no morning can restore  
What we have forfeited.

The union of the couple suggested in sonnet forty-two, stimulated by the "pressing wind" of sentimental love, is really "ribbed wind-streaks running into white," the final death throes of the "skeleton shadow" of idealistic love. The kisses are "unblest" because they are out of harmony with time; they are the result of jealousy and false love; they are the "hissing tongues high up the sand." The "full-waked sense" in the morning is upbraided or degraded by the false union because, then, the unreality and falseness of the union is evident. Symbolically, the morning reveals the union to be no more than the white froth left on the shore by the dying waves of time. The "unblest kisses"

destroy the last vestige of love between them. The husband accepts this, but he is filled with a sense of loss bordering on melancholy by the awareness of what has been forfeited.

With the false nature of their love in mind and with an awareness of time's meaning for man, the husband examines the cause of the disintegrated marriage:

I see no sin:  
The wrong is mixed. In tragic life, God wot,  
No villain need be! Passions spin the plot:  
We are betrayed by what is false within.

The husband no longer sees his wife's adultery as the sin which caused the destruction of their marriage. He feels the wrong to be "mixed," to be mutual. He feels that he and his wife are in "tragic life," life which does not move or grow with time but is swept to oblivion and destruction by time. In life cut off from the full meaning of time he feels there is needed no villain to destroy man. In such a life man is the servant of passion and is deracinated from an understanding of the meaning of the individual life. Man, apart from time, is "betrayed by what is false within," is betrayed by the false, sentimental feeling within him that something is eternal for the individual.

With the acknowledged death and burial of idealized love in sonnet forty-three, the husband has developed to his final stage in the poem. He has yet to learn the full destructiveness of the failure to understand and accept the laws of



nature, the meaning of time, but to all intents and purposes the husband has reached full maturation. In sonnet forty-four he feels the pity for his wife which he rejected as irrelevant in sonnet thirty-eight. He is no longer caught up in the throes of "Terrible Love." He realizes that his feeling of pity for her signifies that "I Love's temple leave,/And that the purple doors have closed behind." His wife, of course, rejects his pity as a cheat and "foul hypocrisy." While he has accepted sadly the death of their love, his wife cannot do so: "Never, she cries, shall Pity soothe Love's thirst...." While he has matured, therefore, she has not yet accepted or understood the meaning of time; she has not rejected the claims of idealized, sentimental love, and, therefore, there is still no communication between them.

The lack of communication and the wife's immaturity are revealed in sonnet forty-five. He plucks a rose and sniffs it, remembering his love of the affair, as the rose is "my Lady's emblem in the heart of me." The husband drops the rose and she crushes it with "trembling limbs," indicating the internal turmoil which she still suffers. She refuses to accept her husband's changed position as he had earlier refused to accept hers. The gulf between them is revealed by her talking casually to him as she sees and denies the change time has effected.

In sonnet forty-six there are taken the first tentative

steps to communication. The husband finds his wife with her lover. He makes "proffer" of his arm and she comes without a "rude alarm." They are one step nearer recognizing to each other the nature of the situation. Before she can say anything he declares his "firm belief in her." Significantly, upon this avowal of trust, "A ghastly morning came into her cheek,/While with a widening soul on me she stared." The avowal of trust, rightly or wrongly made, causes a "ghastly morning" to come into her cheek, recalling the "morning" of sonnet forty-three which indicates to the husband the final death of their love. She now, too, recognizes its death and looks upon her husband with a "widening soul" as she realizes that they are bound together in a marriage which has no basis.

Sonnet forty-seven reveals the husband and wife together viewing the sunset, the symbol of their dead love. There is now no tension between them; instead there is a sense of richness in the lines as they look back upon their past, no longer one of "dead black years" as in sonnet one. Their past has been accepted for what it is without resentment:

We saw the swallows gathering in the sky,  
 And in the osier-isle we heard them noise.  
 We had not to look back on summer joys,  
 Or forward to a summer of bright dye:  
 But in the largeness of the evening earth  
 Our spirits grew as we went side by side.  
 The hour became her husband and my bride.  
 Love, that had robbed us so, thus blessed our dearth!  
 The pilgrims of the year waxed very loud  
 In multitudinous chatterings, as the flood

Full brown came from the West, and like pale blood  
 Expanded to the upper crimson cloud.  
 Love, that had robbed us of immortal things,  
 This little moment mercifully gave,  
 Where I have seen across the twilight wave  
 The swan sail with her young beneath her wings.

Idealistic love, while it has robbed them of "immortal things,"  
 of true love growing with time, now, in its death, provides  
 a beauty in which man and wife participate together.

The couple's love is dead and both recognize it, but  
 the wife does not, therefore, abandon it and proceed to  
 develop a new relationship, a true love with her husband;  
 instead she, from "jealous devotion" to her husband in  
 their loveless marriage, decides to free him to follow  
 "my Lady." The wife does not see that the husband's affair  
 has been destroyed. The husband is in a position now to  
 build with the wife a new love on the ashes of the old,  
 but the wife does not grasp the possibility:

Their sense is with their senses all mixed in,  
 Destroyed by subtleties these women are!  
 More brain, O Lord, more brain! or we shall mar  
 Utterly this fair garden we might win.  
 Behold! I looked for peace, and thought it near.  
 Our inmost hearts had opened, each to each.  
 We drank the pure daylight of honest speech.  
 Alas! that was the fatal draught, I fear.  
 For when of my lost Lady came the word,  
 This woman, O this agony of flesh!  
 Jealous devotion bade her break the mesh,  
 That I might seek that other like a bird.  
 I do adore the nobleness! despise  
 The act! She has gone forth, I know not where.  
 Will the hard world my sentence of her share?  
 I feel the truth; so let the world surmise.

The husband feels that women, and his wife in particular, do

not react rationally but with a mixture of "sense" and "senses." The mixture, sentimentality, destroys them because the emotional element, the "senses," causes the "sense," the rational element, to react before it has fully understood a situation. The wife's sentimentality causes her to "break the mesh" and so threaten to destroy "utterly, this fair garden we might win": true love as required by nature's laws. The wife has accepted the death of their love but has not understood the possibility of true love's growing from the old; she has not, indeed, recognized the existence of any love but that which she now knows to be dead.

Sonnet forty-nine closes the tragedy of "Modern Love." The wife's partial understanding of nature's lesson, her sentimentality, causes her, finally, to identify herself with the dead love of herself and her husband. The wave imagery informs the description of her to suggest her sense of identification with the love and the presence, in a sense, of its death in her:

He found her by the ocean's moaning verge,  
Nor any wicked change in her discerned;  
And she believed his old love had returned,  
Which was her exultation, and her scourge.  
She took his hand, and walked with him, and seemed  
The wife he sought, though shadow-like and dry.  
She had one terror, lest her heart should sigh,  
And tell her loudly she no longer dreamed.  
She dared not say, 'This is my breast: look in.'  
But there's a strength to help the desperate weak.  
That night he learned how silence best can speak.  
The awful things when Pity pleads for Sin.  
About the middle of the night her call  
Was heard, and he came wondering to the bed.  
'Now kiss me, dear! it may be, now!' she said.  
Lethe had passed those lips, and he knew all.

The husband's finding her "shadow-like and dry" by the "ocean's moaning verge" suggests the wife's identification with their dead love thrown on shore by the wave of time. The "wicked change" which the husband fails to discern in her is the change wrought by her sense of identification and her consequent decision to destroy herself. The thought that the husband's "old love" for "my Lady" has returned is her "exultation" and her "scourge," for from it she receives, at once, sentimental satisfaction by feeling that her planned death will clear the way for the love, and anguish upon realizing anew that the idealistic love between her and her husband is dead. Her "one terror" is that she should suddenly feel that she is no longer part of idealistic love but free to grow in love with her husband, free to live. In a sense her death with and for their dead love gives it a permanence or reality in her mind, insofar as by dying with it she seems to indicate that it remains alive in her. By dying with and for the love she sentimentally lends it permanence. She dares not reveal her thoughts to her husband, but by killing herself she reveals "all." The wife's committing suicide teaches the husband "how silence best can speak/The awful things when Pity pleads for Sin." The wife's death, that is, teaches him the pitifulness of a life caught up in and destroyed by an irrational clinging to a single element in the passage of time. The wife's sin

is her clinging to idealistic, sentimental love and refusing to understand or grow in time.

With the wife's death the fully tragic nature of the couple's relationship is revealed. Their refusal to understand readily and accept the laws of nature, the meaning of time for man, destroys any possibility of a fruitful relationship between them as well as any hope for fulfilment in life; finally, their irrationality brings about the actual physical death of the wife. The husband is saved from total destruction by his tardy recognition and acceptance of idealistic love as a mere phase in love's development, but the wife is swept to her death by insisting that it is real, static, and permanent. At the end of "Modern Love" the husband is left to survey the needless and irrational destruction of their relationship by a simple failure to comprehend reality.

In sonnet fifty, as has been suggested,<sup>16</sup> the tragedy of the couple's relationship is analyzed, finally, to reveal its cause, character, and result. Considering the position and nature of the sonnet, it would, perhaps, be of value to examine it again in the light of the above study and other analyses intended to suggest its deeper meanings. A reading of the lines reveals immediately to what degree the sonnet is a profound, if succinct, analysis:

Thus piteously Love closed what he begat:  
The union of this ever-diverse pair!

These two were rapid falcons in a snare,  
 Condemned to do the flitting of the bat.  
 Lovers beneath the singing skies of May,  
 They wandered once; clear as the dew on flowers:  
 But they fed not on the advancing hours:  
 Their hearts held cravings for the buried day.  
 Then each applied to each that fatal knife,  
 Deep questioning, which probes to endless dole.  
 Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul  
 When hot for certainties in this our life! --  
 In tragic hints here see what evermore  
 Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,  
 Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,  
 To thro that faint thin line upon the shore!

The central image of the third and fourth lines of the first quatrain is of "rapid falcons in a snare." The character of the "snare" is revealed in the second quatrain where it is seen that "they fed not on the advancing hours" but "held cravings for the buried day," for the time in which, as "lovers beneath the singing skies of May,/They wandered once." The "snare," in effect, is their failure to move with time, their "cravings" for the love of the past. As a result of their being caught in the snare, of their being "condemned to do the flitting of the bat," they rend each other with the "fatal knife,/Deep questioning," or search each other's entrails, as it were, for evidence that their old love still exists or that the partner has let it die. They search, that is, for "certainties," for static, permanent elements in life, which, by the laws of nature, is necessarily progressive, destructive of "certainties." The questioning is "fatal," the answer "dusty," for belief in and the demand for "certainties" in an existence which does not know them inevitably

leads to death and destruction.

The final quatrain of the sonnet and its imagery have been commented on earlier.<sup>17</sup> It is of interest, however, to see and compare the present analysis of the lines with that of other critics. Two recent and provocative assessments of "Modern Love" as a whole and of sonnet fifty in particular are those of Norman Friedman<sup>18</sup> and Norman Kelvin.<sup>19</sup> The analyses of these two writers do little to make the poem more intelligible in detail, for they tend in their studies of sonnet fifty to isolate the imagery in the final quatrain, treating it as if it were peculiar to the sonnet and not an important element throughout the poem. The consequence is that their interpretations tend, not so much to be right or wrong, as essentially irrelevant to "Modern Love." Their failure to relate the wave imagery of the last sonnet to that of the earlier sonnets results in a failure to understand the character of the poem's tragedy or of its theme. The wave imagery becomes for them complicated and obscure rather than a simple method by which Meredith can represent meaningfully the couple's relation to the passage of time.

Norman Friedman sees "Modern Love" in terms of a blood-brain-spirit triad which Meredith, in later years, developed to explain the progress of man from the beginnings to the present day.<sup>20</sup> It is by this triad that Friedman explains sonnet fifty:



The crash and roar of the ramping waves of youthful experience upon the shore of the heart represent the suffering and turmoil of fighting one's way through Blood (the senses) to Brain and Spirit (which appeared as phantoms to youth.) Out of this bubble and wreck emerges -- after the 'martial brass' of sensuous youth has ceased to blare -- a transparent sheet left by the withdrawing wave (the ebbing of time) which mirrors in its thin translucency the wisdom of harmony and integration....<sup>21</sup>

Normal Kelvin, reacting to Friedman's interpretation, writes:

The 'ramping hosts' are indeed the irrational drives of mankind, but they are 'thundering' through history, conceived of as evolutionary process. The 'faint thin line' is composed of men who have emerged somewhat wiser and better from both personal and historical struggle. I believe this historical, or evolutionary, reading is necessary to explain the force and movement of the imagery; to explain why the 'faint thin line' emerges from the ranks of the warrior horse.<sup>22</sup>

Continuing his thesis that the "faint thin line" is composed of the saved, Kelvin writes:

Thus when we return to the fact that the poem is about the failure of a marriage, we see that the reason for the failure is that the husband and wife have not battered their way to the 'shore'. Still caught up in a conflict within themselves, they have turned their 'dark' passions outward upon each other, and though sensitive and perceptive, have approached each other as barbarian aggressors. They are not individuals transformed by reason and capable of passion without destructiveness, the definition of love for the 'faint thin line'.<sup>23</sup>

Still later in his discussion, Kelvin commits the following strange suggestion to print:

Through her instruments, passion and transiency, nature causes man to suffer. Nowhere else

in Meredith's work is nature, 'our only visible friend,' depicted as so inherent a source of tragedy.<sup>24</sup>

The suggestion becomes more strange when one realizes what Kelvin means by "nature": "'Passion', after all, is nature; and in this poem...nature, taking the form of human life, is tragic."<sup>25</sup>

Little can be said about the interpretations of Friedman and Kelvin. They are, as has been suggested, more irrelevant than wrong. The blood-brain-spirit complex simply has no part in the poem. One can be frightened or irritated by such gross misreadings of "Modern Love" as that suggested by Kelvin's understanding of "nature," necessitating as it does ignoring the whole trend of Meredith's poetry and the details, the significance of the poem; but one can do little more than protest. When seen in light of the poem itself, the last quatrain of "Modern Love" clearly refers to the couple's failure to grow in time and the consequent tragedy of their relationship. As the sculptured effigies of sonnet one represent the character of the couple's existence, so the faint thin line represents the necessary end of such a life.

If one feels that Meredith recorded much of the tragedy of his own marriage in "Modern Love," one feels much more strongly that he traced in the poem a theme particularly important and pertinent to his own mental and emotional development. It is not in the account of love's disintegration

alone that one is struck by a note of anguished sincerity, but also in the gradual, painful acceptance of man as a "scientific animal," bound by necessity to find meaning and significance in time's passage, as expressed in the renewal and progress of nature. In sonnet fifty there is no sense of jubilation, but a near-melancholy recognition of the state of life. One cannot help feeling that Meredith is recording his own struggle with and acceptance of the reality and meaning of human life in nature. The disintegration of youthful, idealistic love by time's passage strikes at the heart of Meredith's buoyant, irrational acceptance of love and nature in Poems and provides him with the necessary focal point from which to re-examine his whole attitude to life. The growing rational tendency, which was noted in the transition period in Meredith's poems, receives direction and focus from love's disintegration to provide him with the concentration and determination necessary to his overcoming all sentimental prejudices. With sentimental, idealistic love destroyed, Meredith is enabled to see man as a part of nature, mortal as all things in nature, receiving fruition and fulfillment only within nature. "Modern Love" is the turning point in Meredith's mental and emotional development, for never again does he conceive of man apart from nature or of any power beyond the natural. After 1862 Meredith's poetry is concerned with the further examination and expression

of the relation of man and nature as understood in "Modern Love."

While "Modern Love" forms the heart of the 1862 volume of Meredith's poetry, other poems in the volume reflect his concern with the character of love and life for man. The short lyrical poem "By Morning Twilight" has already been quoted in connection with "Modern Love."<sup>26</sup> One feels in the lines a sense of desolation resulting from an awareness of the inexorable movement of time : a movement which has left him abandoned on time's shore:

The night is life ebb'd away:

Away beyond our reach!  
A sea that has cast us pale on the beach;  
Weeds with the weeds and the pebbles  
That hear the lone tamarisk rooted in sand  
Sway  
With the song of the sea to the land.

"Shemselnihar," another short poem of the period, is concerned with the passage of time and the destruction of a false, distorted love: "O my lover! the night like a broad smooth wave/Bears us onward, and morn, a black rock, shines wet."<sup>27</sup>

The short lyrical poems of love, however, act merely as background harmony to "Modern Love" and "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn." Regardless of which poem was written earlier -- and it is impossible to say from the presently published material on and by Meredith -- there can be no doubt that the thought of the "Ode" springs from the experience of "Modern Love." The melancholy acceptance of time's meaning

for man in "Modern Love," with its background of anguish, frustration, and sorrow, has been, in "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn," transformed into a rich, vibrant, joyful acceptance of man's union with nature in her renewal processes.

"Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn"<sup>28</sup> combines Meredith's youthful joy in nature's processes as expressed in Poems with his new understanding of the man-nature relationship expressed in "Modern Love." The poem, indeed, is composed of two quite distinct divisions: a description of "Mother Earth" in the Autumn evening, and an explanation of her character and meaning for man. In the first division, that of description, one is aware of the youthful Meredith's love of the beauty and fertility of nature:

Fair Mother Earth lay on her back last night  
To gaze her fill on Autumn's sunset skies,  
When at a waving of the fallen light  
Sprang realms of rosy fruitage o'er her eyes.  
A lustrous heavenly orchard hung the west,  
Wherein the blood of Eden bloomed again:  
Red were the myriad cherub-mouths that pressed,  
Among the clusters, rich with song, full fain,  
But dumb, because that overmastering spell  
Of rapture held them dumb: then, here and there,  
A golden harp lost strings; a crimson shell  
Burnt grey; and sheaves of lustre fell to air.

The beauty of the scene for Meredith is obvious; such terms as "rosy fruitage," "heavenly orchard," "clusters," "golden harp" make it clear. The fertility and sensuousness of the scene are also clear from the terms. One feels a different tone in the lines, however, from that of Poems.

Meredith is not merely word-painting; he is speaking through the scene. One becomes more aware of this when one considers the image of the first two lines in relation to sonnet thirty-two of "Modern Love."<sup>29</sup> In this sonnet the husband is rejoicing in the new sense of harmony and fullness he feels in the presence of "my Lady." He says:

Full faith I have she holds that rarest gift  
 To beauty, Common Sense. To see her lie  
 With her fair visage an inverted sky  
 Bloom-covered, while the underlids uplift,  
 Would almost wreck the faith; but when her mouth  
 (Can it kiss sweetly? sweetly!) would address  
 The inner me that thirsts for her no less,  
 And has so long been languishing in drouth,  
 I feel that I am matched; that I am man!

The occurrence of much the same image in both poems suggests that Meredith had in mind in the "Ode" the same awareness as the husband in "Modern Love" of the essential fruitfulness for man of time in nature and the natural processes. While at this point in the poem no explicit connection is made between nature and man, the recurrence of the image makes one aware of a deeper, more solemn and rational tone in the "Ode" than in Poems.

The deeper tone in the lines of the "Ode," however, does not preclude Meredith's joy in the frankly sensuous. The sensuous merely assumes an added significance and meaning with the background of time's meaning for man and love:

The crimson-footed nymph is panting up the glade,  
 With the wine-jar at her arm-pit, and the drunken ivy-  
     braid  
 Round her forehead, breasts, and thighs: starts a Satyr,  
     and they speed:

Hear the crushing of the leaves: hear the cracking of the  
bough!  
And the whistling of the bramble, the piping of the weed!

It is, perhaps, his awareness of the necessity of  
struggle in time's passage, however, which causes Meredith  
to suggest a strength and virility in nature which is not  
to be found in the early poetry, not even in the poem most  
similar to the "Ode," "South-West Wind in the Woodland." In  
the "Ode," Meredith suggests a tumultuous, burly joy in an  
oak tree's struggle with the wind:

But the bull-voiced oak is battling now:  
The storm has seized him half-asleep,  
And round him the wild woodland throngs  
To hear the fury of his songs,  
The uproar of an outraged deep.  
He wakes to find a wrestling giant  
Trunk to trunk and limb to limb,  
And on his rooted force reliant  
He laughs and grasps the broadened giant,  
And twist and roll the Anakim;  
And multitudes, acclaiming to the cloud,  
Cry which is breaking, which is bowed.

The underlying awareness of man's identity with nature,  
however, his destruction by time in nature's processes, event-  
ually emerges clearly from the descriptive passages. He sees  
in the brief appearance of a star through the racing clouds  
a symbol of his own brief life:

A star has nodded through  
The depths of the flying blue.  
Time only to plant the light  
Of a memory in the blindness.  
But time to show me the sight  
Of my life thro' the curtain of night;  
Shining a moment, and mixed  
With the onward-hurrying stream,  
Whose pressure is darkness to me;  
Behind the curtain, fixed,

Beams with endless beam  
That star on the changing sea.

His life is like the star's, appearing briefly, shining with life, to be eventually darkened by the "onward-hurrying stream" of time. The pressure, the flow of time brings death or darkness to him. In contrast to the darkness of death, which ends all life for him, the star "beams with endless beam" behind its curtain of darkness. A pervading sense of loss informs the contrast to suggest the strangeness Meredith still feels in his new understanding of man and nature.

Filled with a sense of loss in his new understanding, Meredith appeals to "Great Mother Nature" to teach him to understand and accept fully man's new position:

Great Mother Nature! teach me, like thee,  
To kiss the season and shun regrets.  
And am I more than the mother who bore,  
Mock me not with thy harmony!

Teach me to blot regrets,  
Great Mother! me inspire  
With faith that forward sets  
But feeds the living fire,  
Faith that never frets  
For vagueness in the form.  
In life, O keep me warm!  
For, what is human grief?  
And what do men desire?

Teach me to feel myself the tree,  
And not the withered leaf.  
Fixed am I and await the dark to-be.

And O, green bounteous Earth!  
Bacchante Mother! stern to those  
Who live not in thy heart of mirth;



Death shall I shrink from, loving thee?  
 Into the breast that gives the rose,  
 Shall I with shuddering fall?  
 Earth, the mother of all,  
 Moves on her stedfast way,  
 Gathering, flinging, sowing.  
 Mortals, we live in her day,  
 She in her children is growing.

There is a very real danger in this passage for a reader to assume that "Great Mother Nature" or, as he refers to her in the opening line of the poem, "Fair Mother Earth" is a static element worshipped blindly as a God. One must notice, however, that "Mother Nature" is growing herself, that she is not static, and that the poet merely asks her for guidance in assuming in himself the same harmony she enjoys. She is, of course, the "mother of all" and the end of all, but she is essentially process. Because she is the source and end of man, he must accord with her harmonies or be a "withered leaf," cut off from the only source of meaning for him. Georg Roppen in his book Evolution and Poetic Belief, writes on this matter:

...Meredith's conception of 'Mother Earth' is not a clue to a philosophy, nor to a mythology--though it has certain affinities with the human projection into nature through which a myth takes form. 'Mother Earth' is a metaphor already well-worn in both poetry and prose, yet Meredith has chosen it because, through the associations radiating from both words, a complex and evocative meaning emerges which might be indefinitely expanded and related to the birth, growth and fulfilment of life.<sup>30</sup>

For one determining the relationship of man and nature,

the importance of "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn" lies in Meredith's clear acceptance of nature-as-process, identified as "Great Mother Nature," as the final reality for man. Nature is conceived as harmonious, fruitful, mirthful, and progressive. Man has his only source in "Earth, the mother of all" and to her he must remain loyal, for without her he has nothing: "Mortals, we live in her day." Within the renewal pattern of nature death has no terror for man; indeed he should accept it as necessary to his fulfilment:

Death shall I shrink from, loving thee?  
 Into the breast that gives the rose,  
 Shall I with shuddering fall?

Nature is not merely cold clay but a living process which, even as it takes life, "gives the rose." Man in harmony with nature kisses "the season" and shuns "regrets." He moves with time and has faith in the goodness of the future:

Great Mother! me inspire  
 With faith that forward sets  
 But feeds the living fire....

Nature, however, as has been suggested, is not static, is not restricted to the seasonal renewal pattern, but "she in her children is growing." As her children, as man, that is, improves, grows in perfection, nature grows, for man is of her. Man, in order to improve, however, must accept death in the renewal pattern, must accept the reality and truth of nature:

She can lead us, only she,  
 Unto God's footstool, whither she reaches:  
 Loved, enjoyed, her gifts must be,

Reverenced the truths she teaches,  
 Ere a man may hope that he  
 Ever can attain the glee  
 Of things without a destiny!

One must be careful not to be misled by Meredith's using the term "God" to think he is referring to the traditional God or any supernatural power. "God," indeed, is not a power at all but a state achieved within nature's processes. An examination of the above quotation readily shows that "God's footstool," unto which only nature can lead us, is a "glee" in "things without a destiny." The point is that nature is growing: she grows with man and man can grow only with her.

The key at all times to Meredith's understanding and acceptance of nature, of nature's processes, of nature's reality, is his awareness of her basic goodness and joy:

For once, good souls, we'll not pretend  
 To be aught better than her who bore us,  
 And is our only visible friend,  
 Hark to her laughter! who laughs like this,  
 Can she be dead, or rooted in pain?  
 She has been slain by the narrow brain,  
 But for us who love her she lives again.  
 Can she die? O, take her kiss!

It is interesting that Meredith should describe nature as "our only visible friend," for he uses the very same phrase in sonnet thirteen of "Modern Love" where the husband is struggling to accept nature's lesson but is inhibited by the surpassing beauty of "our human rose," "Love's great bliss."<sup>31</sup> In "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn" Meredith has learned to understand that only by accepting nature's

lesson can "Love's great bliss" have significance for man. Significantly, nature "has been slain by the narrow brain," by men who are concerned with an individual destiny, with eternal elements. Nature is not alive to them, or is "rooted in pain" because they cannot see her beneficence for the death she exacts of them and for her indifference to the individual. By accepting nature-as-process as the final reality for man, Meredith sees that life is meaningful and death fruitful:

Life thoroughly lived is a fact in the brain,  
 While eyes are left for seeing.  
 Behold, in yon stripped Autumn, shivering grey,  
 Earth knows no desolation.  
 She smells regeneration  
 In the moist breath of decay.

Little need be said of thought in the poems of the 1862 volume beyond "Modern Love," for little, if anything, is contained in them which is not said or implied in the title poem. Even "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn" does little more than state clearly and unequivocally ideas worked out and expressed in "Modern Love." The shorter poems of the 1862 volume are valuable for their clear expression of Meredith's ideas and for their demonstration of his renewed interest in the lyric, in imagery, and in nature's fruitfulness. "Modern Love" must remain, however, the key poem of the volume and the key poem of Meredith's poetic career.

## NOTES

1. Meredith, The Poetical Works, pp.133-135.
2. Cecil Day Lewis, Notable Images of Virtue: Emily Bronte, George Meredith, W.B. Yeats (Toronto: Ryerson, 1954).
3. Norman Friedman, "The Jangled Harp: Symbolic Structure in 'Modern Love'." Modern Language Quarterly. 18: 9-26, March, 1957.
4. Day Lewis, op.cit., pp.50-51.
5. Friedman, op.cit., p.10.
6. Norman Kelvin, A Troubled Eden, p.26.
7. See below, pp.175-177.
8. Meredith, op.cit., pp.159-162.
9. Ibid., pp.170-171.
10. Ibid., pp.169-170.
11. See below pp.175-177.
12. Elizabeth Cox Wright, "The Significance of the Image Patterns in Meredith's 'Modern Love'," pp.3-4.
13. Friedman, op.cit., pp.19-20.
14. Meredith, op.cit., p.416.
15. Friedman, op.cit., p.20.
16. See above, pp.94-96.
17. See above, pp.94-95.
18. Friedman, op.cit.
19. Kelvin, op.cit., pp.25-35.
20. See below, ch.V., pp.204-215.
21. Friedman, op.cit., pp.24-25.
22. Kelvin, op.cit., p.26.

23. Ibid., p.26.
24. Ibid., p.32.
25. Ibid., p.33.
26. See above, p.98.
27. Meredith, op.cit., pp.170-171.
28. Ibid., pp.172-178.
29. See above, pp.154-155.
30. Georg Roppen, Evolution and Poetic Belief, p.210.
31. See above, pp.131-132.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MATURE POETRY

With the publication of the "Modern Love" volume of poetry Meredith's understanding of nature and man becomes settled. The concept of man as part of nature's processes, finding fulfilment only within those processes, and as the key element struggling in the vanguard of nature's progress, remains with Meredith to form the basis of his later development of the man-nature relationship. From "Modern Love" in 1862 to his death in 1909, Meredith's understanding of the relationship of man and nature undergoes slow but constant development; at no time, however, is there any revolutionary change equivalent to that found in the 1862 volume. The development, instead, takes the form of a gradual growth and refinement of the relationship expressed in "Modern Love." The poetry of Meredith's last forty-seven years is marked by a uniformity of tone and attitude. To a very large degree the vast body of Meredith's remaining poetry is an application of his 1862 understanding to the demands of changing life, and an assimilation and digestion of the ideas produced in time's passage.

To say that the remaining poetry of Meredith reveals a uniformity of tone and attitude is not to say that the poetry is dull or unfruitful. This period reveals a richness and depth which Meredith could not have produced at any

earlier period. Meredith, after 1862, is in command of himself, he knows what he considers to be truth, and he has a norm by which to determine the relative validity of any situation, action, or idea. There is in reading Meredith's poetry from 1862 to 1909 all of the excitement and challenge possible in watching a keen and balanced mind creatively analyze man, life, and existence.

As has been suggested, the style of Meredith's poetry after 1862 is determined, or appears to be determined, by the resolution in "Modern Love" of the problem of man's proper place in and relation to nature. One will not find after "Modern Love" poems of Meredith which have as the source of either their strength or weakness a conflict between emotion and reason. After 1862 the quality of a poem is determined by the brilliance of the imagery and the strength of the language in exploring and presenting ideas.

As the early poetry has as the basis of both its appeal and weakness Meredith's indifference to conceptual thought and concentration on the sensuous and non-rational, so the later, mature poetry has as the basis of its strength and weakness his concentration on the rational and the subduing of the purely emotional. Meredith's greatest achievements in poetry after "Modern Love" occur where the thought of a poem is persuasively presented by imagery and language which stimulate emotion. His most striking failures occur



when an idea is presented alone, bare and stark, unemotional and dull.

Between 1862 and 1909 Meredith published seven separate volumes of poetry: 1883: Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth; 1887: Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life; 1888: A Reading of Earth; 1892: Modern Love, with The Sage Enamoured and the Honest Lady, and Poems; 1901: A Reading of Life, with other Poems; 1909: Last Poems. One can trace the development of the relationship of man and nature from 1883 to 1909 in these volumes quite clearly, but one must glance at poems printed in periodicals between 1862 and 1883 to see Meredith in an interim state between "Modern Love" and "The Woods of Westermain." Of the thirteen poems published in this period, the two entitled "Time and Sentiment"<sup>1</sup> and "In the Woods"<sup>2</sup> serve best to illustrate Meredith's position. The first is a sonnet expressing merely his awareness of time's inevitable passage with the consequent destruction of youth; the second is a highly personal affirmation of his looking to earth for meaning, of his finding fulfilment within nature's processes. "A Mark in Time" is filled with the same sense of loss and sadness which is found in the last sonnet of "Modern Love":

I see a fair young couple in a wood,  
And as they go, one bends to take a flower,  
That so may be embalmed their happy hour,  
And in another day, a kindred mood,  
Haply together, or in solitude,  
Recovered what the teeth of Time devour,  
The joy, the bloom, and the illusive power,

Wherewith by their young blood they are endued  
 To move all enviable, framed in May,  
 And of an aspect sisterly with Truth:  
 Yet seek they with Time's laughing things to wed:  
 Who will be prompted on some pallid day  
 To lift the hueless flower and show that dead,  
 Even such, and by this token is their youth.

Clearly, in 1870, the year in which the poem was published, Meredith is still struggling towards a full acceptance of the nature-man relationship grasped in "Modern Love."

"In the Woods," however, published in the same year, reveals that he has, in essence, been reconciled. In beautifully phrased and solemn lines he recognizes the deep significance and responsibility of life apart from eternal elements:

I am in deep woods,  
 Between the two twilights.

Whatsoever I am and may be,  
 Write it down to the light in me;  
 I am I, and it is my deed;  
 For I know that paths are dark  
 Between the two twilights:

My foot on the nodding weed,  
 My hand on the wrinkled bark,  
 I have made my choice to proceed  
 By the light I have within;  
 And the issue rests with me,  
 Who might sleep in a chrysalis,  
 In the fold of a simple prayer,  
 Between the two twilights.

Flying safe from even to morn:  
 Not stumbling abroad in air  
 That shudders to touch and to kiss,  
 And is unfraternal and thin:  
 Self-hunted in it, forlorn,  
 Unloved, unresting, bare,  
 Between the two twilights:

Having nought but the light in me,  
 Which I take for my soul in arms,  
 Resolved to go unto the wells  
 For water, rejecting spells,  
 And mouthings of magic for charms,  
 And the cup that does not flow.

I am deep in the woods  
 Between the two twilights:

Over valley and hill  
 I hear the woodland wave,  
 Like the voice of Time, as slow,  
 The voice of Life, as grave,  
 The voice of Death, as still.

In the woods of life, between birth and death, he has resolved to proceed by the only guide there is, his own understanding, and, recognizing his identity with natural things, to reject the "spells" and "charms" of God or gods, of religion and its unreal, unnatural superstitions. He knows of time and life's passage, of the coming of death, but he accepts them, for he knows that only within nature's processes lies fulfilment:

I know that since the hour of birth,  
     Rooted in earth,  
     I have looked above,  
     In joy and grief,  
     With eyes of belief,  
     For love.  
     A mother trains us so.  
 But the love I saw was a fitful thing;  
     I looked on the sun  
     That clouds or is blinding aglow:  
 And the love around had more of wing  
     Than substance, and of spirit none.

Then looked I on the green earth we are  
 rooted in,  
     Whereof we grow,  
 And nothing of love it said,  
 But gave me warnings of sin,  
 And lessons of patience let fall,  
 And told how pain was bred,  
 And wherefore I was weak,  
 And of good and evil at strife,  
 And the struggle upward of all,  
 And my choice of the glory of life:  
     Was love farther to seek?

Of this last passage Fletcher writes:

Nature, in other words, gives no explicit signs of love in the ordinary sense, but because she gives man the kind of steadfast, inspiriting help that he needs, hers is a more genuine beneficence than that of the God of conventional religion.<sup>3</sup>

To a large degree Fletcher is correct; but Meredith clearly feels that the help "green earth" gives him is not merely "beneficence" -- although that it certainly is in part -- but the only genuine love which exists. The conventional God, that is, cannot give love because he does not exist; "the green earth we are/rooted in" does exist and gives love by giving understanding. The love of the conventional God is ephemeral, without permanence or "spirit"; nature's love is lasting, for it gives man understanding of the significance of the individual life and the life of the species. Nature gives life pattern; God reduces life to fragments.

The love or understanding which nature gives man permits him to see that the destruction of the weak by the strong in nature is not evil but an integral part of the "struggle upward of all." Of the "sweet sentimentalist"

viewing the destruction in nature, Meredith writes:

Complain, revolt; say heaven is wrong,  
Say nature is vile, that can allow  
The innocent to be torn, the strong  
To tower and govern -- witness how!

O it were pleasant with you  
To fly from this struggle of foes,  
The shambles, the charnal, the wrinkle:  
To be housed in the drop of dew  
That hangs on the cheek of the rose,  
And lives the life of a twinkle.

To this passage Fletcher objects:

But Meredith has not really answered the charge of cruelty which the 'sentimentalist' brings against his goddess; in his usual manner he has merely countered the objection with his faith that if nature apparently reveals herself as evil, the onlooker must be wrong, not nature.<sup>4</sup>

To a point Fletcher has misread the poem. Meredith is not saying that the "onlooker must be wrong" in seeing cruelty in nature. He is saying, instead, that the onlooker is wrong to condemn nature as cruel for her destructiveness. The sentimental onlooker cannot accept death and the passage of time, cannot see that death is a necessary and fruitful element in the "struggle upward of all." The cruelty of nature is not cruelty, properly speaking: it is fruitfulness. Meredith is not blinking "the real question by throwing the argument back upon the premise which he holds on faith," as Fletcher charges elsewhere,<sup>5</sup> but is stating the necessity of growing in time, which is surely more common sense than "faith," and is affirming the "struggle upward of all," which is part of his Romantic and Victorian heritage. If faith is

at the bottom of Meredith's reaction, it is a faith thoroughly grounded in common sense and observation.

Meredith, while he is aware of the solemnity of death for the individual, gladly accepts his new understanding of nature's meaning for man. Aware of man's participation in nature's processes and of man's mortality, Meredith becomes aware of the joy of life itself and the sterility of life wasted in excess, apart from nature's pattern:

The lover of life holds life in his hand,  
Like a ring for the bride.  
The lover of life is free of dread:  
The lover of life holds life in his hand,  
As the hills hold the day.

But lust after life waves life like a brand,  
For an ensign of pride.  
The lust after life is life half-dead:  
Yea, lust after life hugs life like a brand,  
Dreading air and ray.

Meredith, between 1862 and 1883, accepts fully and joyfully the immediate implications of the relationship of man and nature worked out in "Modern Love." By 1883, in Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth, Meredith is prepared to move to a new stage in his development.

In Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth, published in 1883, Meredith clearly advances one step beyond his position in "Modern Love." In this volume he consciously sees nature and man related in evolutionary process, and his acceptance of the process enables him to conceive of man and nature as one within a rational system. The development of Meredith is spoken of by Fletcher:

Several of Meredith's basic beliefs, -- a belief in the beneficence of nature, a belief in progress, and a feeling that if man can understand nature rightly a great good will result which he sometimes labels God, were firmly established by 1870. But in 1883 he had synthesised those beliefs into a system and added some new conceptions which helped him to explain the existence of evil in a beneficent system of nature.<sup>6</sup>

It has already been suggested that Meredith had earlier solved the problem of destruction in nature by relating it to the "struggle upward of all."<sup>7</sup> The term "evil," which Fletcher uses, is misleading and incorrect: Meredith never recognizes the existence of evil in nature, only suffering and destruction. From "Modern Love" until Meredith's last poems, evil can exist nowhere in nature, only in man striving to exist apart from the natural processes, unaware of nature's goodness. In 1883, however, Meredith does synthesise his earlier belief into something like a system, with the concept of evolution at its core. Georg Roppen expresses the union of the earlier nature worship and evolution neatly:

...Meredith combines in his vision of existence the pantheistic one - substance theory with the doctrine of evolution in a synthesis where the 'God within' is identical with the life-force underlying the natural process.<sup>8</sup>

With the doctrine of evolution as a stabilizer, Meredith is able to penetrate further into the relationship of man and nature.

No poem of the 1883 volume of poetry can be found which does not throw some light on Meredith's new stage of develop-

ment, but two poems in particular illuminate the character of his understanding: "Earth and Man"<sup>9</sup> and "The Woods of Westermains."<sup>10</sup> The first two stanzas of "Earth and Man" reveal, in essence, the nature-man relationship:

On her great venture, Man,  
Earth gazes while her fingers dint the breast  
Which is his well of strength, his home of rest,  
And fair to scan.

More aid than that embrace,  
That nourishment she cannot give: his heart  
Involves his fate; and she who urged the start  
Abides the race.

One must notice that earth or nature can give only "nourishment" to man and that she is "his well of strength, his home of rest." Notice as well, however, that man is earth's "great venture," and that man is in a "race" started by earth. Man clearly is caught up in the evolutionary process. In the evolutionary struggle man must gain his strength from earth and to earth he must return in death; but earth can guarantee nothing; she "abides the race," for man's "heart/ Involves his fate." Earth can guarantee nothing, that is, because there is involved in man's survival of the evolutionary struggle his ability or willingness to change or adapt. Man's survival depends upon his ability to control and direct his "heart." Man's failure means that other species will assume the direction of life. The third and fourth stanzas corroborate this interpretation:

For he is in the lists  
Contentious with the elements, whose dower  
First sprang him; for swift vultures to devour  
If he desists.



His breath of instant thirst  
 Is warning of a creature matched with strife,  
 To meet it as a bride, or let fall life  
 On life's accursed.

Man's survival of the evolutionary struggle depends  
 upon his understanding nature and his place in her processes.  
 In essence, his survival depends on his destroying Self,<sup>11</sup> or  
 individual selfishness:

He will not read her good,  
 Or wise, but with the passion Self obscures;  
 Through that old devil of the thousand lures,  
 Through that dense hood:

Through terror, through distrust;  
 The greed to touch, to view, to have, to live:  
 Through all that makes of him a sensitive  
 Abhorring dust.

Man's being dominated by Self is evidenced by his turning to  
 a supernatural, miracle-working God. To ask for miracles  
 and personal salvation is to ask that nature's pattern be  
 destroyed:

Therefore the wretch inclines  
 Afresh to the Invisible, who, he saith,  
 Can raise him high: with vows of living faith  
 For little signs.

Some signs he must demand,  
 Some proofs of slaughtered nature; some prized few,  
 To satisfy the senses it is true,  
 And in his hand,

This miracle which saves  
 Himself, himself doth from extinction clutch,  
 By virtue of his worth, contrasting much  
 With brutes and knaves.

From dust, of him abhorred,  
 He would be snatched by Grace discovering worth.  
 'Sever me from the hollowness of Earth!  
 Me take, dear Lord!'

Man's cry for supernatural aid is a consequence of his failure to see the pattern of nature. The evolutionary struggle demands that he see his meaning in the furthering of the race. In asking supernatural aid, he is responding to earth's demand that his life have meaning; but in going apart from nature, he perverts earth's request:

If he aloft for aid  
 Imploring storms, her essence is the spur,  
 His cry to heaven is a cry to her  
 He would evade.

Earth's evolutionary struggle demands that man forever strive to understand existence and his part in it; striving is the means of evolution:

The mystery she holds  
 For him, inveterately he strains to see,  
 And sight of his obtuseness is the key  
 Among those folds.

He may entreat, aspire,  
 He may despair, and she has never heed,  
 She drinking his warm sweat will soothe his need,  
 Not his desire.

Man's "obtuseness" in understanding nature drives him onward to deeper penetration.

Man and nature evolve together, for earth progresses with man. Man and nature have interpenetrated to produce the present world:

... Him she owes  
 For half her loveliness a love well won  
 By work that lights the shapeless and the dun,  
 Their common foes.

He builds the soaring spires,  
That sing his soul in stone: of her he draws,  
Though blind to her, by spelling at her laws,  
Her purest fires.

Through him hath she exchanged,  
For the gold harvest-robcs, the mural crown,  
Her haggard quarry-features and thick frown  
Where monsters ranged.

And order, high discourse,  
And decency, than which is life less dear,  
She has of him: the lyre of language clear,  
Love's tongue and source.

Man, however, to achieve fulfilment, must understand that nature too is striving for "happiness, for lastingness, for light," that she and life are Spirit, essentially. He must see that nature is "stern joy" and that he can achieve fulfilment and joy only by understanding that he is an integral part of her Spirit or final pattern and meaning:

Not elsewhere can he tend.  
Those are her rules which bid him wash foul sins;  
Those her revulsions from the skull that grins  
To ape his end.

And her desires are those  
For happiness, for lastingness, for light.  
'Tis she who kindles in his haunting night  
The hoped dawn-rose.

Fair fountains of the dark  
Daily she waves him, that his inner dream  
May clasp amid the glooms a springing beam,  
A quivering lark:

This life and her to know  
For Spirit: with awakedness of glee  
To feel stern joy her origin: not he  
The child of woe.

Man's "inner dream," his desire for fulfilment, will be satisfied only when he sees that the desire itself is part

of nature and life's overall pattern. Predominance of the senses, however, of individual selfishness, has so far prevented man's seeing and accepting earth's meaning:

But that the senses still  
Usurp the station of their issue mind,  
He would have burst the chrysalis of the blind:  
As yet he will;

As yet he will, she prays,  
Yet will when his distempered devil of Self; --  
The glutton for her fruits, the wily elf  
In shifting rays; --

He singularly doomed  
To what he execrates and writhes to shun; --  
When fire has passed him vapour to the sun,  
And sun relumed,

Then shall the horrid pall  
Be lifted, and a spirit high divine,  
'Live in thy offspring as I live in mine,'  
Will hear her call.

Man's fulfilment, his eternity, lies in his offspring. Nature does not know personal, individual eternity; the individual gains meaning by producing for the future.

When man learns to see earth as Spirit, when he sees her as love, the Self will be destroyed and he will understand, accept, and enjoy life rationally:

His fables of the Above,  
And his gapped readings of the crown and sword,  
The hell detested and the heaven adored.  
The hate, the love,

The bright wing, the black hoof,  
He shall peruse, from Reason not disjoined,  
And never unfaith clamouring to be coined  
To faith by proof.

The ultimate end of life, the ultimate meaning of earth's pattern,

will remain unknown to man until he has understood earth fully, until he has accepted her meaning for him, her "gifts" for him:

She her just Lord may view,  
Not he, her creature, till his soul has yearned  
With all her gifts to reach the light discerned  
Her spirit through.

Man views the "just Lord" only through nature and nature's processes. The "just Lord," as in "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn,"<sup>12</sup> is clearly not intended to be conceived of as a supernatural power, but as a state achieved by man as a species, a state foreign to the concept of personal salvation. Spirit is the underlying, fruitful, love-conceived pattern running through the natural processes of earth in her and man's evolution to the "just Lord."

"Earth and Man" can serve, as a comparatively bare statement of Meredith's 1883 position, to introduce and clarify the more tightly wrought, more suggestive poem, "The Woods of Westermain." While "Earth and Man" provides a general rationale of the relation of man and nature, "The Woods of Westermain" finds its focus in the relation of the individual to life in the evolutionary struggle. The title of the poem provides the central metaphor through which the relationship is delineated. The woods of Westermain are the woods of life, inspired and directed by the natural processes. The proper and improper relationship to the woods is indicated in the first stanza:

Enter these enchanted woods,  
     You who dare.  
 Nothing harms beneath the leaves  
 More than waves a swimmer cleaves.  
 Toss your heart up with the lark,  
 Foot at peace with mouse and worm,  
     Fair you fare.  
 Only at a dread of dark  
 Quaver, and they quit their form:  
 Thousand eyeballs under hoods  
     Have you by the hair.  
 Enter these enchanted woods,  
     You who dare.

The woods of life are to the individual as the waves of water are to the swimmer: if approached with courage and love they support and make progress possible; if feared and distrusted they harry and destroy. If one takes joy in life and is at peace with all creatures living, life is good; but if one fears life, fears death which is part of it, life becomes unreal, demonic, and evil.

If one loves life one gains fulfilment in feeling oneself to be part of the whole life process; one gains sanity, perspective, and joy in feeling in oneself the over-all pattern of nature working itself out through pain and joy:

You with them may gather ripe  
 Pleasures flowing not from purse.  
 Quick and far as Colour flies  
 Taking the delighted eyes,  
 You of any well that springs  
 May unfold the heaven of things;  
 Have it homely and within,  
 And thereof its likeness win,  
 Will you so in soul's desire:  
 This do sages grant t' the lyre.  
 This is being bird and more,  
 More than glad musician this;

Granaries you will have a store  
 Past the world of woe and bliss;  
 Sharing still its bliss and woe;  
 Harnessed to its hungers, no.

In harmony with the evolutionary processes of earth, one is  
 in harmony with the past, one finds beauty and joy in the  
 past:

You shall seat the joy you feel  
 ... where old-eyed oxen chew  
 Speculation with the cud,  
 Read their pool of vision through,  
 Back to hours when mind was mud;  
 Nigh the knot, which did untwine  
 Timelessly to drowsy suns;  
 Seeing Earth a slimy spine,  
 Heaven a space for winging tons.

When one looks upon the earth with love, she becomes  
 alive and vital. The pagan gods and goddesses assume life,  
 for their source is a proper understanding of nature's pro-  
 cesses:

Banished is the white Foam-born  
 Not from here, nor under ban  
 Phoebus lyrist, Phoebe's horn,  
 Pipings of the reedy Pan.  
 Loved of Earth of old they were,  
 Loving did interpret her;  
 And the sterner worship bars  
 None whom song has made her stars.

Love of earth and life reveals that nothing is really destroyed.  
 Even the momentary beauty of a dawn faced by a setting moon  
 is permanent to a mind seeing earth as love:

One another fair they front,  
 Transient, yet outshine the time;  
 Even as dewlight off the rose  
 In the mind a jewel sows.

Earth controls and directs; she does not destroy:

This is in the tune we play,  
Which no spring of strength would quell;  
In subduing does not slay;  
Guides the channel, guards the well:  
Tempered holds the young blood-heat,  
Yet through measured grave accord  
Hears the heart of wildness beat  
Like a centaur's hoof on sward.

Awareness of earth's dual nature, control and wildness, permits one to experience true personal love. In personal love alone, earth permits the Self to express itself in a healthy manner, for in love alone the two characteristics of nature can meet to further earth's evolutionary pattern. In love the Self is directed toward procreation, the physical future. If one understands the two-fold character of nature,

Sweetest fellowship ensues  
With creatures of your kind.  
Ay, and Love, if Love it be  
Flaming over I and ME,  
Love meet they who do not shove  
Cravings in the van of Love.  
.....  
Love, the great volcano, flings  
Fires of lower Earth to sky;  
Love, the sole permitted, sings  
Sovereignly of ME and I.

Love unites the "fires of lower Earth," the senses of Self with the "sky," or earth's higher design. If, however, one permits the cravings of Self to dominate a relationship, "discords out of discords spin" and "nightmare upon horror broods."

Only by an intense love of life can one grasp the unity



of nature to see the oneness of life and death:

You must love the light so well  
That no darkness will seem fell.

.....  
Then you touch the nerve of Change,  
Then of Earth you have the clue;  
Then her two-sexed meanings melt  
Through you, wed the thought and felt.  
Sameness locks no scurfy pond  
Here for Custom, crazy-fond:  
Change is on the wing to bud  
Rose in brain from rose in blood.

Change or death is revealed through a love of life and earth to be the means to a more highly developed stage. Through love "the thought and felt" become one as it is realized that the beauty and joy in life have a significance and permanence in the rational pattern of nature.

The threat at all times to loving, understanding, and enjoying life is the undue influence of Self, the "scaly Dragon-fowl." Not until it is subdued can one fully understand and love earth. Self will not, cannot be destroyed, but it can be made useful to man:

Oft has he been riven; slain  
Is no force in Westermain.  
Wait, and we shall forge him curbs,  
Put his fangs to uses, tame,  
Teach him, quick as cunning herbs,  
How to cure him sick and lame.

One must subdue the Self to be truly in harmony with earth's evolution. The self will be retained, however, to provide for one a clear-sighted, progressive shrewdness:

Him shall Change, transforming late,  
Wonderously renovate.

...slip thy scales, and slough!  
 Change will strip his armour off;  
 Make of him who was all maw,  
 Inly only thrilling-shrewd,  
 Such a servant as none saw  
 Through his days of dragonhood....

In subduing Self, Change is in harmony with Spirit, or the progressive, overall pattern of earth's evolution. The wedding of Change and Spirit within man permits and will permit him to strive, evolve, and progress. The maintenance of Self, however, is necessary to man's evolution, for the individual man contributes to the general evolution by striving for and experiencing love, in which Self plays an essential role.

With the cravings of Self subdued, as has been suggested, the wildness and virility of the individual combine in love with the control and direction of nature's evolving pattern to cause man's progress:

Change, the strongest son of Life,  
 Has the Spirit here to wife.  
 Lo, their young of vivid breed  
 Bear the lights that onward speed,  
 Threading thickets, mounting glades,  
 Up the verdurous colonnades,  
 Round the fluttered curves, and down,  
 Out of sight of Earth's blue crown,  
 Whither, in her central space,  
 Sprouts the Fount and Lure o'the chase.  
 Fount unresting, Lure divine!  
 There meet all: too late look most.  
 Fire in water hued as wine  
 Springs amid a shadowy host;  
 Circled: one close-headed mob,  
 Breathless, scanning divers heaps  
 Where a heart begins to throb,

Where it ceases, slow, with leaps:  
 And 'tis very strange, 'tis said,  
 How you spy in each of them  
 Semblance of that Dragon red,  
 As the oak in bracken-stem.

With the Self subdued one can understand the permanence of Spirit, uniting all of life, for with Self's subjection one is in harmony with the whole and has within a portion of the total pattern, or Spirit. One's awareness of the meaning and pattern of one's own life, that is, enables one to see the meaning of the whole, enables one to see that a real permanence lies beyond the sense, in the gradual, meaningful evolution of earth and man:

Look with spirit past the sense,  
 Spirit shines in permanence.  
 That is she, the view of whom  
 Is the dust within the tomb,  
 Is the inner blush above....

Once one glimpses the unity and permanence of earth in Spirit, once one sees that there is meaning in existence, one is filled with courage in the face of death and change: "Then is courage that endures/Even her awful tremble yours." If one has courage in the face of death and change and an awareness of life's meaning, Reason, with love as a basis, will expose the unreal character of pain and fear:

Then, the reflex of that Fount  
 Spied below, will Reason mount  
 Lordly and a quenchless force,  
 Lighting Pain to its mad source,  
 Scaring Fear till Fear escapes,  
 Shot through all its phantom shapes.

The meaning and significance of life understood, the meaning-less character of fear revealed, one experiences genuine pleasure in life, for one is balanced, sane, and whole: a microcosm of the macrocosm earth, composed of three vital and balanced elements: blood, brain, and spirit:

Then for you are pleasures pure...  
Pleasures that through blood run sane,  
Quickening spirit from the brain.  
Each of each in sequent birth,  
Blood and brain and spirit, three  
(Say the deepest gnomes of Earth),  
Join for true felicity.

The three elements, blood, brain, and spirit, can not be separated or one's wholeness, one's sanity is destroyed as one is no longer in harmony with earth:

Are they parted, then expect  
Some one sailing will be wrecked:  
Separate hunting are they sped,  
Scan the morsel coveted.  
Earth that triad is: she hides  
Joy from him who that divides;  
Showers it when the three are one  
Glassing her in union.

When one is in harmony with earth, all of life is revealed to be a progressive whole. Life becomes something to be used and developed in the furthering of earth's evolution: life thrills "for service to be stamped." No part of life is destroyed or lost. Even physical nature and urban existence are seen to be part of one process:

...here, their worths exchanged,  
Urban joins with pastoral:  
Little lost, save what may drop  
Hush-like, and the mind preserves.  
Natural overgrowths they lop,

Yet from nature neither swerves,  
 Trained or savage: for this cause:  
 Of our Earth they ply the laws,  
 Have in Earth their feeding root,  
 Mind of man and bent of brute.

Both the mind of man, imposing order and direction on pastoral nature, and "bent of brute," providing the beauty, joy, and vitality of life, are of earth and necessary to her evolution. With blood, brain, and spirit united one sees life as significant, joyful, and whole.

"Earth and Man" and "The Woods of Westermains" contain Meredith's fullest statement of the man-nature relationship in the 1883 volume of poetry; indeed, the fullest statement of the relationship as a whole in his mature poetry. The remaining poetry of the 1883 volume does not go beyond the ideas expressed in "Earth and Man" or "The Woods of Westermains," and the poetry published later by Meredith develops particular aspects of the 1883 position without altering it as a whole. Essentially, in the 1883 volume of poetry, Meredith has arrived at his final position: little remains but refinement.

The chief change between "Modern Love" and "Earth and Man" or "The Woods of Westermains" lies in Meredith's clear acceptance of the doctrine of evolution as the basis of the relationship of man and nature. While in "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn" and "In the Woods" Meredith is aware of earth's development, there is no suggestion that

he is thinking in terms of actual evolution. There is nothing to suggest that he has in mind more than the Romantic and Victorian feeling that progress is taking place. In 1883, however, evolution is clearly at the base of Meredith's thought. Man is striving in the 1883 volume, not merely to progress, but to prevent his being superseded. Man's understanding of nature's processes in "Earth and Man" and "The Woods of Westermain" is necessary, not merely to his emotional and mental fulfilment as in the earlier poetry, but to his survival as earth's "chief expression." Evolution provides a coherent framework to Meredith's thought.

Evolution permits Meredith to conceive of a Spirit or a general, rational pattern informing nature's processes. Earth and man, brute and mind are evolving together in harmony with the Spirit or general pattern. Earth is conceived of as being composed of three elements, interpenetrating and necessary to her progress: blood, brain, and spirit, or the senses, the mind, and meaningful pattern. Man, to progress fully with earth, must hold the same three elements in balance within himself. He must, that is, combine the Self, the mind, and an awareness of life's meaning within nature to evolve with earth. The immediate stimulus to man's striving or evolution is love: personal love, apart from cravings of Self, and love of earth. Through

personal love, fulfilment is given man and future generations are produced; through love of earth man sees life's meaning as lying in the fulfilment of earth's demands or pattern and, therefore, sees life's meaning in striving for higher goals for man as a species. An individual eternity for man does not exist: the individual must find his final fulfilment, his eternity, in the future generations.

J.S. Stone has an interesting comment on this aspect of Meredith's position:

Meredith, following Goethe's lead, thus came to regard ethical evolution as a result primarily of man's willingness to work without demanding personal immortality as a reward for his toil.... and since he did not agree with Darwin that self-preservation was the basic evolutionary urge, he could see no reason why man should desire a non-earthly reward. The poet's belief that the force behind evolution was altruism (or co-operation) rather than egotism (or self-preservation) made transcendentalism unnecessary to his philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

Stone is quite correct in saying that transcendentalism is unnecessary to Meredith's philosophy, but he is essentially incorrect in suggesting that Meredith felt altruism to be the "basic" force behind evolution. Meredith states clearly in "The Woods of Westermains" that love is the "Fount and Lure o'the chase," and he explains clearly that love is a meeting ground of Self and earth's evolutionary pattern. Love, then, with the presence of Self in its "thrilling-shrewd" form, or egotism, or the urge to self-preservation

is the force behind evolution. Meredith suggests that altruism is the result of love, individual and for earth. Meredith could conceive of no transcendental state because of his firm belief in the ultimate reality and fullness of earth or nature. Transcendentalism is not merely unnecessary in his position: it is unthinkable.

The relationship of man and nature expressed in Meredith's 1883 volume of poetry is the product of his whole poetic career. He expresses in this volume the love of nature found in Poems, the rationality found in the 1851-61 transition period, the integration of man and nature found in "Modern Love," and the new man-nature synthesis brought about through the doctrine of evolution. To all intents and purposes the search for truth begun, in a sense, in 1851 is over. Man, nature, and existence are understood, if not in their entirety, at least in their essentials.

In Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life, published in 1887, there is one poem which, perhaps, suggests an advance from 1883: "Men and Man."<sup>14</sup> G.M. Trevelyan suggests in his note on this poem that,

The Angels do not admire the ways of 'Men'  
collectively, till they see them united in the  
peace of the churchyard. The individual 'Man'  
is the hero preferred.<sup>15</sup>

The poem can be read in this way. Fletcher suggests the same interpretation.<sup>16</sup> One cannot prove or disprove this



interpretation on the basis of the poem alone. As well as Trevelyan's interpretation of the poem, however, there is the possibility of seeing the poem as suggesting that the Angels do not admire the ways of "Men" collectively, but they do admire "Man" as an evolving species. A reading of the poem readily shows the possibility of confusion:

Men the Angels eyed;  
And here they were wild waves,  
And there as marsh descried;  
Men the Angels eyed,  
And liked the picture beat  
Where they were greenly dressed  
In brotherhood of graves.

Man the Angels marked:  
He led a host through murk,  
On fearful seas embarked;  
Man the Angels marked;  
To think without a nay,  
That he was good as they,  
And help him at his work.

Man and Angels, ye  
A sluggish fen shall drain,  
Shall quell a warring sea.  
Man and Angels, ye  
Whom stain of strife befouls,  
A light to kindle souls  
Bear radiant in the stain.

Man's leading "a host through murk" and "Man and Angels" bearing a "light to kindle souls" would seem to support Fletcher's reading that,

heroic individuals must bear the burden of progress, and that humanity in the mass forms the background for the activity of heroes.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time it is quite possible to interpret

the lines as meaning "Man" as a species. This interpretation assumes additional weight when it is remembered that the stress in Meredith's poems to this point has been on the species rather than the individual. One is either still further convinced that he is speaking of "Man" as a species or is further confused by a letter of Meredith's, dated June 8, 1887:

Looking back over History will help you  
look forward, above and beyond the tumble of waters.  
What you do is to begin a flight with your mind,  
and quickly relapse on your sensations, with a sigh  
and a cry for a capable crowned Man to come and  
settle affairs. And if he came he would but passingly  
smooth them.

For permanent work the poeple must be active.  
Already it is perceptible that they are everywhere  
thoughtfuller than they were. Can you truly deny it?  
Rather let my dear Lady ask herself whether she  
does not too unresistingly weary of even the sight  
of the struggle. Her cry for the capable Man is one  
of the errors of Democracy also. It means the cry  
for the Sword to cut the difficult knot. And that,  
as we observe in History, represents a fracture,  
which has to be mended by many decades of labour.  
Democracy nevertheless is learning. I do not perceive  
that Royalists show so handsome a front to the  
lessons of the day.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, for Meredith "humanity in the mass" forms more than "the background for the activity of heroes." One cannot say definitely, however, that Meredith did not conceive of leaders in the vanguard of earth's evolution. Such leaders can be seen in "The Thrush in February"<sup>19</sup> and "Forest History."<sup>20</sup> In the end one must compromise, to say that, if "Man" in "Men and Man" is interpreted as the individual hero

he is not a Napoleonic "capable crowned Man" but the individual who first leads mass man into a proper relation to and understanding of nature and earth's evolution. If one takes this view, Meredith has advanced somewhat from his 1883 position by stressing the influence and need of the individual within the evolutionary processes. This in no way alters the 1883 position: it is merely a refinement of it, a logical extension. If, on the other hand, one understands "Man" to refer to the species, there has been no advance from 1883. One suspects that Trevelyan's view is essentially correct if it is understood that "hero" does not refer to a Napoleon.

Meredith's 1888 volume of poetry, A Reading of Earth, contains four poems suggesting notable advances from his 1883 position: "Hard Weather,"<sup>21</sup> "The Thrush in February,"<sup>22</sup> "Hymn to Colour,"<sup>23</sup> and "Meditation under Stars."<sup>24</sup> The advances are in Meredith's understanding of earth's destructiveness, of the hero's place in nature, of the function of love, and of the character of nature itself. Each advance is a refinement of Meredith's position in "The Woods of Westermmain" and does not basically alter the position as a whole.

In the poem of 1870, "In the Woods," Meredith explains the destructiveness of nature by referring to the necessity of destruction in the "struggle upwards of all." This position, implicit in "The Woods of Westermmain," has essentially

the same basis in "Hard Weather" as it had in "In the Woods." The primary difference between the two poems lies in Meredith's awareness in 1888 that destruction has an immediate benefit for man as well as a general, evolving benefit. In "Hard Weather" the ravaging east wind's destruction of vegetation serves to remind man that "contention is the vital force" of nature, and that man must struggle and strive. The destructiveness of hard weather gives "us edging keen." The function of destruction in nature can be seen in the following lines:

Behold the life at ease; it drifts.  
 The sharpened life commands its course.  
 She winnows, winnows roughly; sifts,  
 To dip her chosen in her source:  
 Contention is the vital force,  
 Whence pluck they brain, her prize of gifts,  
 Sky of the senses! on which height,  
 Not disconnected, yet released,  
 They see how spirit comes to light,  
 Through conquest of the inner beast,  
 Which Measure tames to movement sane,  
 In harmony with what is fair.

Destruction reminds man of the necessity of struggling to survive. By being subjected to destruction or hard weather man is dipped in nature's "source," "contention." Through contention man is purged of the cravings of Self and the brain is enabled to control and direct. The brain enables man to perceive that he is a meaningful part of an evolving pattern.

"Hard Weather" does no more than shift the emphasis from evolving man to individual man. In a sense "Hard

Weather" grants a greater sense of fulfilment to man, insofar as he is enabled to see an immediate as well as a distant reason for destruction. Man is bettered, not merely by reconciling cruelty within nature's overall pattern; he is bettered by realizing anew the immediate joy and meaning of nature.

In "The Thrush in February" Meredith clearly conceives of a hero leading humanity into a new understanding of nature and man. Meredith feels that the city, despite its striving "without a mark for strife," its feasting "beside a famished host," is the focal point of man's development and the creator of man's heroes:

Yet there our battle urges; there  
Spring heroes many: issuing thence,  
Names that should leave no vacant air  
For fresh delight in confidence.

Life was to them the bag of grain,  
And Death the weedy harrow's tooth.  
Those warriors of the sighting brain  
Give worn Humanity new youth.

They scorned the ventral dream of peace,  
Unknown in nature. This they knew:  
That life begets with fair increase  
Beyond the flesh, if life be true.

Just reason based on valiant blood  
The instinct bred afield would match  
To pipe thereof a swelling flood,  
Were men of Earth made wise in watch.

Though the numbers count as drops  
An urn might bear, they father Time.  
She shapes anew her dusty crops;  
Her quick in their own likeness climb.

The chief advance made by Meredith in this poem is not so much in the conception of the hero, as such, as in seeing the hero issuing from the city. For the first time he places the responsibility for evolution in a particular area. It must be granted, of course, that the city's being the breeding ground of evolution, so to speak, is implicit in Meredith's poetry from "Earth and Man" where man is spoken of as earth's "great venture." The city is the centre of human activity. Never before, however, has Meredith been explicit in his references to man's evolution. "The Thrush in February" clearly sees man and earth's evolution centered in the city where the "warriors of the sighting brain" are bred. These heroes understand life to be a challenge to take up. These people know that "if life be true," if they live within and accept nature's processes, life has a meaning after death, insofar as their lives have been useful in furthering nature's ends. They live after death in memory as examples of sane, fruitful living. In "The Thrush in February" Meredith's understanding of man and nature assumes a practicality hitherto unseen.

In "Hymn to Colour" Meredith stresses love as the force granting unity and meaning to evolving life. "The Woods of Westermain" reveals love to be the "Fount and Lure" of evolution and the force which "flings/Fires of lower Earth to sky," and love of nature is a constant element in Meredith's

attitude to nature throughout his poetry. "Hymn to Colour," however, reveals love to be, not merely another element in the man-nature relationship, but the key to man's proper understanding of life. The importance of love in understanding life is implicit throughout Meredith's poetry, but in this poem it receives a new and increased significance. In "Hymn to Colour" the poet walks in winter between the pre-dawn light and the darkness of earth, between Aurora and darkness, between life and death:

With Life and Death I walked when Love appeared,  
And made them on each side a shadow seem.  
Through wooded vales the land of dawn we neared,  
Where down smooth rapids whirls the helmless dream  
To fall on daylight; and night puts away  
Her darker veil for grey.

As the pre-dawn light is flooded with the colour of the rising sun the poet feels that both the light and darkness, life and death, are mere shadows on either hand. Love seems to be the chief reality. As the colour-filled light falls on the snow, however, he becomes aware that love unites life and death, making them one in nature's pattern:

Love took my hand when hidden stood the sun  
To fling his robe on shoulder-heights of snow.  
Then said: There lie they, Life and Death in one.  
Whichever is, the other is: but know,  
It is thy craving self that thou dost see,  
Not in them seeing me.

A failure to see the principle of love in both life and death, a failure to see that they are united and informed by love, indicates a failure in one to see beyond the senses, beyond

the Self. Existence is whole, that is, and a fragmentation of it indicates that one is out of harmony with the processes of life.

Although the brilliant dawn-rose disappears in the full light of day, although the first bloom of love fades into maturity, an awareness of love and its uniting power remains:

He is the heart of light, the wing of shades,  
The crown of beauty: never soul embraced  
Of him can harbour unfaith; soul of him  
Possessed walks never dim.

Love eyed his rosy memories: he sang:  
O bloom of dawn, breathed up from the gold sheaf  
Held springing beneath Orient! that dost hang  
The space of dewdrops running over leaf;  
Thy fleetingness is bigger in the ghost  
Than Time with all his host!

Of thee to say behold, has said adieu:  
But love remembers how the sky was green,  
And how the grasses glimmered lightest blue;  
How saint-like grey took fervour: how the screen  
Of cloud grew violet; how thy moment came  
Between a blush and flame.

Love is essential to an understanding of life and life's pattern and to man's evolution with earth:

This way have men come out of brutishness  
To spell the letters of the sky and read  
A reflex upon Earth else meaningless.  
With thee, O Fount of the Untimed! to lead;  
Drink they of thee, thee eyeing, they unaged  
Shall on through brave wars waged.

Through love alone can time be overcome, for love reveals that life is continuous, that death is part of life, and that with love man as a species does not age but evolves



upward to Spirit.

The principle of love in "Meditation under Stars" causes Meredith to broaden his concept of nature to include, not earth alone, but the whole of the universe. Looking at the stars, the poet feels, first, that earth, "our blood-warm Earth," is "a shuddering prey/To that frigidity of brainless ray." In struggling, however, to find "what links are ours with orbs that are/So resolutely far," Meredith writes:

Yet space is given for breath of thought  
Beyond our bounds when musing: more  
When to that musing love is brought,  
And love is asked of love's wherefore.  
'Tis Earth's, her gift; else have we nought:  
Her gift, her secret, here our tie.  
And not with her and yonder sky?  
Bethink you: were it Earth alone  
Breeds love, would not her region be  
The sole delight and throne  
Of generous Deity?

The implication of the last four quoted lines is that earth is not the sole "delight and throne/Of generous Deity" or of the over-all pattern of nature, Spirit. When one looks upon the stars with love, which gives birth to spirit, one realizes that it is only the Self that sees earth threatened by a "brainless ray," that the stars, too, are evolving, are part of the same love-inspired process as earth:

To deeper than this ball of sight  
Appeal the lustrous people of the night.  
Fronting yon shoreless, sown with fiery sails,  
It is our ravenous that quails,  
Flesh by its craven thirsts and fears distraught.  
The spirit leaps alight,  
Doubts not in them is he,  
The binder of his sheaves, the sane, the right:

Of magnitude to magnitude is wrought,  
 To feel it large of the great life they hold:  
 In them to come, or vaster interwolved,  
 The issues known in us, our unsolved solved:  
 That there with toil Life climbs the self-same Tree,  
 Whose roots enrichment have from ripeness dropped.

If one is guided by spirit in seeing the stars, by the  
 "lord of Mind," as Meredith refers to it in the poem, one  
 realizes that we,

The specks of dust upon a mound of mould,  
 We who reflect those rays, though low our place,  
 To them are lastingly allied.

Earth and the stars are revealed through love to be one in  
 the evolutionary process: no division exists in nature:

The fire is in them whereof we are born;  
 The music of their motion may be ours.  
 Spirit shall deem them beckoning Earth and voiced  
 Sisterly to her, in her beams rejoiced.  
 Of love, the grand impulsion, we behold  
     The love that lends her grace  
     Among the starry fold.

Never before "Meditation under Stars" does Meredith  
 suggest that evolution affects more than earth. The sugges-  
 tion is merely a logical extension of his 1883 position, but  
 his awareness of a universal Spirit creates in him a deeper  
 sense of joy and wonder for earth. The joy he feels in  
 evolving with earth is deepened by the awareness of earth's  
 evolution within the universe:

A wonder edges the familiar face:  
 She wears no more that robe of printed hours;  
 Half strange seems Earth, and sweeter than her flowers.

Nature proves more wonderful, more joy-inspiring than even

Meredith had been aware.

A word should be said on Fletcher's comment on "Meditation under Stars." Although his criticism is usually sane, if occasionally misplaced, Fletcher seems, when speaking of "Meditation under Stars," to lose contact with the poem in his zeal to prove that Meredith's explanation of evil is inadequate. Objecting to Meredith's reconciling all, even death, within the natural processes, he writes:

... when in 'Meditation under Stars' he peoples the stars with life and purpose in order to avoid the death of this planet, for no other reason than that Earth's gifts are too good to be limited to one planet, he all but reduces his explanation of evil to a systematic wish-fulfillment.<sup>25</sup>

What Fletcher fails to notice is that the poem is not concerned to suggest a means of avoiding "the death of this planet." The problem of destruction and death is not involved in the poem, certainly not the problem of "evil." The poem suggests merely the possibility of evolving life existing elsewhere in the universe. Fletcher's implication in saying that Meredith "peoples the stars with life and purpose" because "earth's gifts are too good to be limited to one planet" would seem to be that Meredith willfully and irrationally transfers earth's gifts to the universe from fear and a sentimental attachment to earth. Clearly this is not the case at all. Meredith says simply that "the music of their motion may be ours." Given his

understanding of the evolutionary process on earth, his suggestion is surely no more than a rational application of the evolutionary principle to the universe. If one were to read a deeper motive into Meredith's reaction to the stars, it would be, not that of fear and sentimentality, but that of a desire to share the good of earth with the universe. Fletcher fails to perceive that it is love of earth which causes Meredith to see love and Spirit operative within the universe as a whole and that the basic drive in Meredith is to share, not to cling to earth's goodness and love.

After A Reading of Earth in 1888, Meredith published two volumes of poetry: A Reading of Life in 1901, and Last Poems in 1909. There is nothing in Last Poems to suggest that Meredith had refined his conception of the man-nature relationship beyond 1901. In A Reading of Life, however, Meredith included two poems which suggest a new synthesis of his earlier ideas. The synthesis is new only in that it is a simplification of the position taken by him in 1883: it in no way contradicts or modifies essentially the earlier position. All of his earlier ideas are implicit in the new position. "The Test of Manhood"<sup>26</sup> suggests that man evolves by struggling successfully to keep in balance within himself the forces of love and beauty, and chastity and striving. "Foresight and Patience"<sup>27</sup> suggests that the balance

is between the attributes indicated in the title: foresight and patience. Meredith's conceiving of two different groups of balancing forces in no way suggests a contradiction or confusion in his thought. To all intents and purposes the two groupings are the same: love and beauty alone lead to stagnation and decay; patience without foresight leads to death in life. In "The Test of Manhood" the struggle in man's breast is between the Huntress or Artemis, and the Persuader or Aphrodite. Artemis, of course, is the goddess of chastity and hunting; Aphrodite is that of love and beauty. Meredith conceives of man developing through the ages to the modern day in which he is free from fear and superstition. Man's new maturity is marked by Reverence, created by man himself as he balances the opposing forces of Artemis and Aphrodite:

That quiet dawn was Reverence; whereof sprang  
 Ethereal beauty in full morningtide.  
 Another sun had risen to clasp his bride:  
 It was another earth unto him sang.  
 Came Reverence from the Huntress on her heights?  
 From the Persuader came it, in those vales  
 Whereunto she melodiously invites,  
 Her troops of eager servitors regales?  
 Not far these two great Powers of Nature speed  
 Disciple steps on earth when sole they lead;  
 Nor either points for us the way of flame.  
 From him predestined mightier it came;  
 His task to hold them both in breast, and yield  
 Their dues to each, and of their war be field.  
 The foes that in repulsion never ceased,  
 Must he, who once has been the goodly beast  
 Of one or other, at whose beck he ran,  
 Constrain to make him serviceable man;  
 Offending neither, nor the natural claim  
 Each pressed, denying, for his true man's name.

Reverence, the key to man's progress, springs, not from either the Persuader or the Huntress alone, but from man's holding within himself the two forces -- love and beauty, and chastity and striving -- in a balance. This is the core of Meredith's final position. The comparatively complex balancing of blood, brain, and spirit in "The Woods of Westermain" is simplified to become a balancing of two elements only: love and beauty, and chastity and striving. The Self, as a separate entity, is lost sight of in the simplified struggle. Despite the different terminology, however, there is no real change in Meredith's position. Struggle, in both 1883 and 1901, is the essence of man's progress. In both "The Woods of Westermain" and "The Test of Manhood," man, to progress with earth, must combine love with the evolving strife-demanding pattern of nature. A failure to unite the two satisfactorily in either poem results in stagnation and death.

As has been suggested, "Foresight and Patience" is essentially the same as "The Test of Manhood." The central idea of the poem can be seen in the first twelve lines, in which the poet speaks of foresight and patience:

Sprung of the father blood, the mother brain,  
 Are they who point our pathway and sustain.  
 They rarely meet; one soars, one walks retired.  
 When they do meet, it is our earth inspired.

To see Life's formless offspring and subdue  
 Desires of times unripe, we have these two,  
 Whose union is right reason: join they hands,

The world shall know itself and where it stands;  
 What cowering angel and what upright beast  
 Make man, behold, nor count the low the least,  
 Nor less the stars have round it than its flowers.  
 When these two meet, a point of time is ours.

While there is not the same struggle between foresight and patience as between love and striving, still their wide separation and the necessity of holding them in union for "right reason" implies a strain equal to struggle. The point is that the poem reduces, once again, the complex of elements in "The Woods of Westermain" to two alone. As in "The Test of Manhood," however, the reduction is merely a simplification of the earlier position, not an alteration. "Foresight and Patience," indeed, speaks in the same terms as "The Woods of Westermain." Foresight and patience are born of blood and brain. One would probably not be wrong in suggesting that foresight and patience are part of the spirit which evolves from blood and brain in "The Woods of Westermain." One possessed of foresight and patience, that is, understands the evolutionary pattern of earth, and is able to find fulfilment in the moment by recognizing it as an integral part of the over-all pattern. "When these two meet, a point of time is ours," for, with the meeting of foresight and patience, life and work are permanent in that both are directed to higher ends, not to themselves.

The two poems, "The Test of Manhood" and "Foresight and Patience," represent an advance in Meredith's thought beyond

1883 insofar as they simplify and in some respects clarify the earlier position. Neither poem can be said to represent any real alteration in Meredith's position. In the final analysis the poems' significance must be seen to lie in their placing man within nature's evolutionary process, dependent for survival upon the success of his struggle to keep in balance two opposing but complementary forces. While Meredith's final understanding of the relationship of man and nature is to be seen fully developed in the 1883 volume of poetry, the 1901 volume succeeds in restating the relationship in a more simplified form.



## NOTES

1. Meredith, The Poetical Works, p.181. Originally the poem was entitled "A Mark in Time." See The Works of George Meredith, Memorial Edition, vol. XXVII (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), p.313.
2. This poem is to be found in its original and complete form in The Works of George Meredith (cited above), pp.273-278, which is the source of the quotation made in this chapter. It also appears in The Poetical Works but much altered and as three separate poems: "Whisper of Sympathy" (p.285), "Woodland Peace" (p.338), and "Dirge in Woods" (p.341).
3. Fletcher, "The Background and Development of George Meredith's Ethics," p.43.
4. Ibid., p.44.
5. Ibid., p.36.
6. Ibid., p.49.
7. See above, p.196.
8. Georg Roppen, Evolution and Poetic Belief, p.220.
9. Meredith, The Poetical Works, pp.240-246.
10. Ibid., pp.193-205.
11. A word should be said here on the use of capital letters in this chapter and in the thesis as a whole. The general rule has been not to capitalize unless there is danger of misreading or of confusion of some kind. The terms "man," "nature," and "earth," for example, have not been capitalized because it is felt that page after page of such capitalizations would be both pretentious and unsightly. There is a precedent, moreover, for Norman Kelvin in A Troubled Eden does not capitalize "nature" or "society." In the present chapter, however, and occasionally elsewhere, such terms as "Self" and "Spirit" have been capitalized because it is felt that a failure to do so could result in confusion. The intention is to combine the greatest degree of clarity with the greatest degree of readability.
12. See above, ch.IV, p.186.

13. J.S. Stone, "Meredith and Goethe," University of Toronto Quarterly, 8: 163, January, 1952.
14. Meredith, op.cit., p.302.
15. Ibid., p.594.
16. Fletcher, op.cit., pp.114-115.
17. Ibid., pp.114-115.
18. R.E.G. George, "Unpublished Letters of George Meredith," Nineteenth Century, 103: 157, 1928.
19. Meredith, op.cit., pp.327-331.
20. Ibid., pp.549-553.
21. Ibid., pp.318-321.
22. Ibid., pp.327-331.
23. Ibid., pp.362-364.
24. Ibid., pp.365-367.
25. Fletcher, op.cit., p.15.
26. Meredith, op.cit., pp.540-546.
27. Ibid., pp.413-421.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In seeking to understand the relationship of man and nature as a developing theme in the poetry between 1851 and 1909, one is seeking in large part an understanding of the growth of Meredith's love for nature, for once one has penetrated the character of this love at any stage one is in a position to see to what degree and in what way he conceives man to be related to nature. Love of nature is the constant element in Meredith's poetic development. It might be deepened, broadened, enriched, and made more rational, but it is always present. As his knowledge of man and nature grows, so his love of nature develops.

Meredith's earliest poetry, that of Poems, published in 1851, reveals a love of nature as landscape on the one hand and as renewal pattern on the other. In this early poetry, however, man and nature are essentially static elements unrelated to each other. Meredith's love of nature becomes in effect a worship of nature, and man can do no more than look in awe upon it, deeply conscious of his own comparative insignificance. Apart from rejoicing in the physical beauty of nature, man's one means of finding fulfilment seems restricted to recognizing and celebrating the presence in his heart of the principle or power of chaste, sensuous love. Man can achieve a sense of fulfilment in this recognition because, apparently,

this is the one link which he has with nature: the principle of chaste, sensuous love appears to be the basis of Meredith's concept of the renewal pattern as well as of man's joy. The sense of union which man can have with nature is readily seen, however, as being essentially illusory. The union is entirely dependent upon man's feeling this power in nature and himself: there is no suggestion that nature is conscious of it in man. In short, the union is based upon man's emotions, not upon a rational principle or awareness of related, mutual progress. Poems reveals Meredith's love of nature in 1851 to be essentially exclusive of man in its concentration upon the beauty of nature as landscape and its harmony as renewal pattern.

In the transitional poetry of 1851 to 1861 Meredith's love of nature is confused, his perception of it fragmented by the rival claims of emotion and reason. While in the early poetry Meredith's concept of the relationship of man and nature is controlled by the uniformly sensuous and emotional character of his response, the poetry of the transition period lacks focus and direction because of an unresolved and often apparently unconscious conflict in his mind between understanding nature's significance for man emotionally or rationally. The poetry is severely weakened by a constant division between tone and content, between intention and

effect. Meredith seems to have become more fully aware of the character of man and nature and to be struggling fitfully but yet unsuccessfully to achieve a unified vision once again.

It is to be noted, however, despite the confusion within individual poems, that the general tendency of the period is toward an increased rationalism as against emotional or sensuous responses alone. There is a tendency, that is, not to worship nature, but to study her to see her true relationship to man. In "By the Rosanna," for example, through an exercise of the mind unknown in the poetry of 1851, man and nature are seen as equals, dependent upon each other for fulfilment if not existence.

Meredith's final commitment to viewing man and nature rationally instead of emotionally takes place in the "Modern Love" volume of poetry and specifically in the title poem itself. "Modern Love" is the chief turning point in Meredith's poetic career. In this poem love of nature is revealed to mean acceptance of nature as the sole beginning and end of man and as the only source of his fulfilment. Love of nature means, for man, recognizing himself as a part of nature, subject to her laws and given meaning by her processes. "Modern Love," in part, is the story of a man's development to a true love of nature; as he achieves this state the man recognizes and accepts nature's relation to humanity. With

the acceptance of nature as the sole source of meaning for man, with the achievement of a true, rational love of nature, Meredith is no longer troubled by the conflicts of the transition period. The critical stage of maturation is at an end. What remains is a filling out, a strengthening, and a refinement.

"Modern Love" provides the basis of Meredith's final conception of the nature-man relationship, but between 1862 and 1909 Meredith's ideas gain form and clarity, gain strength and direction, from the influence of one concept: evolution. The poems of 1870, "Time and Sentiment" and "In the Woods," reveal Meredith in an interim stage between his 1862 position of nature worship and his 1883 position of evolving man and nature. In 1870 the stage is prepared for further developments, for in the two poems of that year he traces to their end the ramifications of "Modern Love" and "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn." He accepts and rejoices in the rigorous demands of nature upon man apart from eternal elements. Life assumes, at once, a joyful, vital character and a solemnity and seriousness. Apart from God or gods, apart from a personal life after death, life for man is, at once, filled with freedom and responsibility. Man must strive constantly, both to fulfill himself and to contribute to the "struggle upward of all."

The poems of the 1883 volume of poetry are permeated

by the doctrine of evolution. Two poems in particular reveal Meredith's new understanding of the relationship of man and nature: "Earth and Man" and "The Woods of Westminster." These two poems reveal man and nature to be evolving together to a higher state, Spirit. Man and nature are evolving together, for man is part of nature and, therefore, inevitably raises nature with him. Part of man's evolution, moreover, is his transforming nature from the crude to the ordered, from the irrational to the rational. The poems of 1883 reveal man and nature to be inextricably bound together. Man has no life or meaning apart from nature and nature's processes, and nature -- or earth -- is dependent upon man for progress. Man, however, dare not rest from striving, for, should he fail to grow with nature, he will be superseded in the struggle to survive, in the struggle to lead nature's evolution.

The chief danger to man's evolution lies in Self: personal cravings and selfishness, as manifested in the desire to indulge the senses irrationally, to seek personal salvation. Self, as such, cannot be eliminated, but it can be subdued. The cravings of Self can be eliminated or sufficiently subdued to render them harmless. Subdued Self, indeed, is a necessary part of man's evolution, for it is Self which drives man to experience love. In love the Self, properly subdued to be merely "thrilling-shrewd," united with the

general evolving pattern of nature to produce the future generations of man. Only in love can the Self manifest itself in a healthy manner, for only in love does it contribute to, not detract from, nature's pattern or Spirit.

Love is necessary to man's evolution. Only with love for nature and her processes can man see beyond the senses or Self to understand his meaning in nature. With love for nature man's brain sees that fear of death, fear of nature, is the result of an excessive indulgence of Self. With love of nature, with a rational understanding of man in nature, man grasps the significance and love-inspired character of the evolutionary pattern. Man sees life and death in proper perspective, as one process, and he grasps the joy, the beauty, and the love of evolving nature. Man, that is, grasps or evolves to Spirit. Man evolved to Spirit is in harmony with nature or earth. He maintains in balance within himself the three elements of nature: blood, brain, and spirit. He maintains in balance, that is, the Self, the intelligence, and -- the consequence of the first two -- an awareness and acceptance of nature's evolutionary pattern.

The 1888 volume of Meredith's poetry does no more than refine the 1883 position. Destructiveness in nature is seen as beneficial to man, for by it he gains awareness of the necessity of constant struggle in nature. The city is seen as the focal point of man's evolution, as from it spring the



leaders or heroes leading humankind to a deeper awareness of nature and nature's laws. In "Hymn to Colour" Meredith re-emphasizes the necessity of seeing all of nature, including life and death, as one process, inspired and united by love. In "Meditation under Stars" he suggests that nature's evolutionary pattern affects the whole universe, that the earth and stars are part of the same evolving, love-filled pattern.

The 1901 volume of Meredith's poetry merely restates in simplified form the 1883 position. The earlier balance of blood, brain, and spirit, and the struggle to subdue the Self is reduced to a struggle in man to keep in balance two opposing but complementary forces: in "The Test of Manhood," love and beauty, and chastity and striving; in "Foresight and Patience," the attributes suggested by the title, foresight and patience. In both the 1883 and 1901 volumes of poetry the essence of man's survival is struggle. In both volumes he must keep in balance a force tending to remain stationary and a force tending to break free of restraint. Man must, at once, be able to enjoy the present and prepare for the future.

Between 1862 and 1909 Meredith accepted fully and joyfully man's position in evolving nature. Meredith conceived of no existence for man apart from nature. From nature man is born, by nature he is nourished, and to nature

he returns in death. Within the processes of evolving nature life is significant and fruitful, and death is regeneration. Man is inexorably bound up with the evolutionary processes, and his future depends on his ability to adapt, to understand, and to accept nature as his source, inspiration, and end.

Of the several contributions intended to be made to an understanding of Meredith's poetry by this study, none is more important than that involved in tracing the development of the poetry as it is reflected in the growing theme of the relationship of man and nature. Although the light shed upon the whole question of development by a study of a single theme is necessarily dim and occasionally unsure, still the thematic approach seems to offer reasonable hope of some success; moreover, it becomes rapidly apparent that the theme of man and nature's relationship is of central importance in the major poems of Meredith and, therefore, is particularly valuable as a means of determining his progress. The present study contributes to the understanding of Meredith's poetry as a whole by suggesting that the development of his poetry is directly related to the development of his understanding of the relationship of man and nature.

A second contribution of this thesis is its tentative analyses of several of the chief poems and the relation of the poems of one period to those of another. Although other

studies have used particular poems occasionally to illustrate a point made in relation to Meredith's published work as a whole, there has, to date, been no effort made to see the poetry in its entirety, as being composed of individually meaningful but still related pieces. In tracing the theme of man's relation to nature it is intended that something of the general pattern and meaning of the poetry should emerge.

The analysis of "Modern Love" given in this thesis, although restricted to the poem's meaning for the particular theme under study and, therefore, incomplete and inadequate as a full analysis, is intended to throw upon the poem some light which has hitherto gone unregarded by critics. It is hoped that the rather lengthy examination of the poem will convince the reader that the true theme of "Modern Love" must be seen as the tragedy of man's failure to understand his proper relationship with nature. When the poem is understood in this manner, it assumes a depth of meaning both in itself and in its relation to the rest of Meredith's poetry which, otherwise, is generally and almost inevitably denied it. Although no pretense is made of having thoroughly analyzed the poem, it is hoped that the present analysis is sufficiently complete to persuade the reader that the proper interpretation lies in further study along the lines suggested here.

Generally, it is intended that the present thesis should contribute to the understanding of Meredith's poetry by laying down a framework on which a future study, more detailed, more thorough, more trustworthy, might be built. In many ways this study is a pioneering effort, with all the crudeness, inaccuracies, and false starts usually associated with such a work. In reality this study can but prepare the way for another, better examination.

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## APPENDIX A

George Meredith was born on February 12, 1828, the only child of Augustus and Jane Meredith. Five years later, in 1833, Jane Meredith died, leaving George in the loving but financially unstable care of his father. The tailoring business which Augustus inherited from his father, Melchizedek Meredith, gradually fell to pieces, resulting, in November, 1838, in Augustus' being declared a bankrupt.

The early years of Meredith were years, if not of actual hardship, at least of considerable difficulty and isolation. After his mother's death he received a small annuity from what had been an inheritance of his mother and he lived with relatives in Southsea, attending St. Paul's School. Later, on the strength of an added inheritance, he attended a boarding school, and then, in 1842, he entered the Moravian School at Neuwied on the Rhine. Meanwhile the little practical control which Augustus Meredith had over his son was effectively terminated in 1841 when George became a ward in Chancery.

Except for the knowledge that Meredith entered the Moravian School in 1842 and spent some time there, the character of his life between that date and February 3, 1846 is open to speculation. Upon the latter date, however, Meredith was articled to Richard Stephen Charnock, a solicitor and aspiring literary man. The new relationship did not result in Meredith's learning law; but it did introduce him to other young

men with literary leanings and, apparently, determined the course of his life. Many of the poems of the 1851 volume of poetry must have been written at this time under the eyes of Charnock, and he met, through association with Charnock, Mary Ellen Nicolls, a young widow and daughter of Thomas Love Peacock.

In August, 1849, George Meredith was married to Mary Nicolls, the widow of a Lieutenant Edward Nicolls of the Royal Navy and the mother of a five year old daughter. With marriage came responsibility and Meredith's literary career became a serious endeavour to earn a living. Although he still received an annuity, it was inadequate to his needs. He took to writing for magazines and he began writing novels. His first novel, The Shaving of Shagpat, was published in 1855. It was well received, obtaining a very high praise from the yet unknown author, George Eliot -- or Marian Evans. But it sold poorly. It was followed in 1857 by Farina. This book received kind reviews generally, but it was largely granted that it was inferior in quality to Shagpat. Both books were fantasies and as such were reasonably satisfactory efforts; but they represent a phase of Meredith's career which was rapidly drawing to a close.

The marriage of Meredith and Mary Nicolls was dying. The couple spent more and more time apart, unable to bear the quarrels which living together was beginning to impose upon them. In 1857 Mary Nicolls visited North Wales with an artist friend, Henry Wallis. When she became pregnant it seems to have

been generally accepted that Wallis was the father. Meredith would not permit her to return to him or to see their son, Arthur Gryffyd, born in 1853. Mary left England with Wallis in 1858, leaving Meredith with a burden of debts and a five year old son. She was never again to see Meredith, for she died in 1861, pitifully asking to see their son Arthur and being denied permission until the last moment. Meredith himself refused to see her.

Meredith in the meantime had re-invigorated his love of nature on a walking tour of France and Italy. He had in 1859 published The Ordeal of Richard Feverel and he had settled into Copsham Cottage out of the town of Esher. Nature became a close friend and companion. The land around the cottage, moreover, was open and was the haunt of beggars, gypsies, and tramps. Many of the poems of the transition period were written at this time.

The "Modern Love" volume of poetry came out in May, 1862. By and large, the title poem was found to be obscure and repulsive by critics. In face of the torrent of abuse which was being directed at Meredith for writing "Modern Love," his friend Swinburne wrote a letter to The Spectator protesting the excellence of the poem and maturation of the poet. Except for this letter, however, "Modern Love" went largely unappreciated.

With Mary Nicolls dead and "Modern Love" published, an era in Meredith's life would seem to have closed. He appears to have been freed of the past but prepared for the future. As if to mark the change, Meredith courted and, in 1865, married Marie Vulliamy, an Anglo-French woman with a personality sharply in contrast to that of Mary Nicolls. Whereas Mary Nicolls was a very attractive woman, of sparkling wit and biting tongue, Marie Vulliamy appears to have been a quiet, domestic, and humble woman, content to remain in the shade of her husband's career. To all intents and purposes Meredith's second marriage appears to have been a happy one. From 1865 until her death in 1885, Marie Vulliamy appears in Meredith's life as the quiet, unassuming wife, the source of much of his deeper joy.

With his marriage to Marie Vulliamy Meredith's life assumed a pattern which it retained essentially until his death. In their cottage at Box Hill -- and after 1877 in a chalet he had built on his property -- Meredith wrote novels, received friends, and composed articles. He wrote regularly for The Ipswich Journal and frequently for other magazines such as the Cornhill and the Fortnightly. At all times he spent long hours out of doors enjoying nature directly and, as long as he was able, every day walking miles across the hills.

His later years, of course, were marked by sad if not

unusual events. In 1885 his wife, Marie, died and in 1890 his son by his first marriage, Arthur. Meredith himself gradually lost the ability to walk and he became quite deaf. Throughout his hardships, nonetheless, he retained his hardy optimism and inspiring good cheer. He was, however, doomed to suffer the agony of the long-lived: to see his best friends drop by the way one by one while he himself continued.

By the time of his death in 1909 Meredith was highly regarded as a novelist. In 1898 he received an address upon his birthday which was signed by thirty notable people, such as Hardy, James, Barrie, and Swinburne. In 1892 he had been chosen to succeed Tennyson as President of the Society of Authors. In 1905 he received the Order of Merit from King Edward VII. At all times in his later years he received letters from people from both Great Britain and America asking for advice or demanding information. Meredith, by the end of his life, had become a literary personality sought by both high and low. He missed being buried in Westminster Abbey only because he was not Christian. He possessed the necessary fame.

## APPENDIX B

There is here no pretense that the list of articles is complete; merely that the over-all pattern of publication is roughly accurate. The chief sources of publication data are: Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, International Index to Periodicals, The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature, vol. III, Bibliographies of Studies in Victorian Literature for the Thirteen Years 1932-1944, edited by William D. Templeman, and for the Ten Years 1945-1954, edited by Austin Wright. As well, the bibliographies contained in the following periodicals were used: PMLA, 70: 150, April, 1955; 71: 151, April, 1956; 72:226, April, 1957; 73:180, April, 1958; 74: 148, April, 1959; Modern Philology, 51: 258, May, 1954; 53: 264-265, May, 1956. It must be borne in mind that the articles referred to are those which are or appear to be restricted to discussion of the poetry alone.

Year	Number of articles
1892	1
1894	1
1897	1
1906	3
1907	2
1908	1
1909	5

Year	Number of articles
1910	1
1911	1
1912	3
1916	2
1919	1
1921	1
1923	1
1927	2
1929	1
1931	1
1944	1
1946	1
1951	1
1952	1
1957	1
1958	2