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ELIASSON, BARBARA KEATING

"UNDER-TIDES": CONTRAST AND AMBIGUITY IN MEREDITH'S
NARRATIVE POEMS

City University of New York

PH.D.

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"UNDER-TIDES": CONTRAST AND AMBIGUITY
IN MEREDITH'S NARRATIVE POEMS

by

BARBARA KEATING ELIASSON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in English in partial fulfillment of the require-
ments for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The
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1980

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Wendell Stey Johnson
Chairman, Examining Committee

April 28, 1980
date

Morton H. Cohen
Executive Officer (Acting)

G. M. Ridenow
Michael Timko

Wendell Stey Johnson
Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

TO
GWYNETH ELIASSON
AND
IN MEMORY OF
DONALD ELIASSON

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INTRODUCTION

Now, poetry is nothing less than the most perfect speech of man, that in which he comes nearest to being able to utter the truth. It is no small thing, therefore, to succeed eminently in poetry. And so much is required for duly estimating success here, that about poetry it is perhaps hardest to arrive at a sure general verdict, and takes longest.

--Matthew Arnold

For over a century . . . his admirers have found it as hard to accept satisfactory explanations for the overwhelming neglect of Meredith as his detractors have found it difficult to accept the fact of his extraordinary survival.

--Donald David Stone,
Novelists in a Changing World

. . . but the Cretan king
and all his crew were 'ware of under-tides

--George Meredith,
"The Shipwreck of Idomeneus"

Either of two critical stances toward George Meredith-- that the nineteenth-century poet-novelist suffers "overwhelming neglect" or, on the contrary, that he represents an "extraordinary survival"--can be buttressed by supporting opinions within his era and our own. For, during the long years of Meredith's productivity and the even longer years since his death in 1909, Meredith's reputation has swung in extravagantly wide arcs.¹ These arcs have included such extreme points as neglect, vilification and, briefly, near-deification. During the worshipful phase, Lafcadio Hearn (in a 1900 lecture) called Meredith a "'test-poet'--your culture, your capacity to think and feel, is tested by your ability to like such a poet."² His attractiveness as a "test-poet" came from his reputation for being "difficult"--both in content and in style. The study of Meredith as "profound thinker" is evident in the titles of early Meredith criticism: The Philosophy and Poetry of George Meredith; George Meredith, His Life, Genius and Teaching; George Meredith, Novelist, Poet, Reformer.³

In a post-war reaction to that perception of Meredith as philosophical writer, Meredith the poet seems to have been dismissed. In 1928 Harriet Monroe wrote:

When the centenary of George Meredith's birth swung around in February, there were tributes and revaluations from many critics. His novels were dusted off and psycho-analyzed, and put in their

proper place, mostly on the shelf; and the name which had sprung to life so suddenly back in the eighties and had reëchoed for two or three decades among the great ones of the century, seemed to give forth, strangely enough, a slightly hollow sound. Apparently this novelist had tried too hard and too self-consciously; he had written each tale from too definite a thesis. . . .

But, in the articles I happened to see, very little was said about George Meredith's poetry . . .⁴

The little said about Meredith's poetry in the following years was mainly by critics eager to use the poetry as sources of the Meredithian "philosophy." Two related effects stemmed from such an approach: the literary value of individual poems was frequently ignored, and the narrative poetry was often neglected.⁵

My primary concern, then, is the critical analysis of selected narrative poems; but to avoid dissertation sprawl, I am establishing certain technical and temporal limits. First, I use the idea of narrative poetry merely as a principle of selection, and the words "narrative poetry" as a descriptive term for those poems that tell a story. I am not studying the nature or use of narrative in poetry, or any narrative theory divorced from study of the individual poems.

Second, the poems included for study will be from the 1851, 1862, 1883 and 1887 volumes only; each of the first three chapters will be a discussion of a single volume. The 1887 volume, Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life, contains half a dozen substantial narrative poems; that volume will form the subject matter of Chapters IV and V.

Third, some Meredith poems--"Love in the Valley," for example--are familiar; many are not (some, fortunately). To "place" the narrative poems, Chapters I through IV open with comments on the non-narrative poems of each volume.

Finally, to narrow the critical range, in the narratives I concentrate on Meredith's use of contrasted idea and image, the clustering of images with overlapping connotations, and in the more complex narrative poems, the opposition of entire image patterns.⁶ Such oppositions may undercut, or at least qualify, the apparent significance of a poem; as we study Meredith's narrative poems, we should become "'ware of under-tides."

NOTES AND REFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

¹For a brief outline of these arcs see John Lucas, "Meredith's Reputation," in Meredith Now, ed. Ian Fletcher (New York, 1971) and the Introduction to Meredith, The Critical Heritage, ed. Ioan Williams (New York, 1971); the Lucas article emphasizes Meredith the novelist. For a detailed survey of Meredith criticism between 1925 and 1975, see John Charles Olmsted's Introduction to his George Meredith, An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism 1925-1975 (New York, 1978).

²Hearn, Pre-Raphaelite and Other Poets, ed. John Erskine (1922; rpt. New York, 1968), p. 373. Lucas ("Meredith's Reputation") refers to Hearn's judgment and comments: "Reading that now, you feel that with friends like Hearn Meredith hardly needs enemies." p. 6.

³Olmsted, xii; Lucas, among others, makes the same point with a similar list of titles.

⁴Monroe, "Meredith as a Poet," Poetry, XXXII, No. IV (July 1928), 210.

⁵Although Meredith has never regained the reputation that he enjoyed so briefly, there has been, during the last thirty years, a gradual rescue from the oblivion into which Forster, Leavis and other contemporaries of theirs had helped to thrust Meredith. And, as Judith Wilt observes, in the last decade we have seen "something of a Meredith Renaissance." The comment appears in her own contribution to that "Renaissance": The Readable People of George Meredith (Princeton, 1975), p. 3. Her work, a study of the novels, indicates the problem: despite a Renaissance of scholarship and criticism, studies of individual poems--with the single, extraordinary exception of "Modern Love"--remain scarce.

⁶Diane Lain Johnson ("A Closer Reading of Earth: Sexual Mysticism in the Poetry of George Meredith," Diss. Univ. of Calif., Los Angeles, 1969) discusses Meredith's dramatic and verbal ironies, his ambiguity of language. However, she is interested in dramatic poetry, its relation to the novels, and the early influence on Meredith of Richard Henry Horne; her concern with ambiguity lies in--according to her thesis--its reflection of Meredith's personal experience and result-

ing ambivalence about women as sexual beings. Moreover, she does not do close poetic analysis at length, particularly of the longer narrative poems.

CHAPTER I

Yet there is a sense in which paradox is the language appropriate and inevitable to poetry. It is the scientist whose truth requires a language purged of every trace of paradox; apparently the truth which the poet utters can be approached only in terms of paradox I am interested . . . in our seeing that the paradoxes spring from the very nature of the poet's language: it is a language in which the connotations play as great a part as the denotations.

--Cleanth Brooks, The Well Wrought Urn

Mr MEREDITH seems to us a kind of limited KEATS.

--W. M. Rossetti, Critic (1851)

. . . my boy's book in '51 (those Poems were written before I was twenty) . . .

--George Meredith (1861)

Meredith's 1851 volume, with its simple and unlimiting title Poems, is a mélange of widely differing poetic techniques, meters, approaches and--as always with Meredith--quality. Meredith later dismissed the entire volume as his "boy's book"; Phyllis Bartlett comments that Meredith's first volume "displayed none of his future characteristics except lyrical power."¹ It is true that some characteristics of this volume--the imitative quality of many of the poems, especially the short love lyrics; the related fault of triteness of thought and image; the overblown language--are those of youth.² Other characteristics, however, such as strained rhymes, inverted word order, and interest in nature as a source for subject and image, remain with Meredith throughout his career.

Themes, too, that will interest Meredith decades later are here, expressed in language remarkably familiar to the reader of Meredith's later poetry. Thus, he speaks of the uniting of earth and sky; the regenerative power of the earth ("The flower is fading while the new bud blows"); and the relationship between earth and man, a connection that he describes in the frequently quoted closing lines of "South-West Wind in the Woodland":

For every elemental power
Is kindred to our hearts, and once
Acknowledge, wedded, once embraced,
Once taken to the unfettered sense,
Once claspt into the naked life,
The union is eternal.³

This image of a wedding of opposites is one that Meredith sometimes relates without any clearly sexual reverberations

to the contrasts of human life.⁴ In "The Wild Rose and the Snowdrop," however, bridal imagery occurs with its attendant sexual connotations. The two flowers are contrasted, with the rose the center of a crimson-blush-ripe cluster opposed to the pale-white-snowy cluster centered in the snowdrop; the rose is touched by the sun, seen as a masculine image, while the snowdrop, sprung from the snow, is described as untouched, virginal.⁵ Although the contrast in this poem is simple rather than complex, and the use of the red/sexuality-white/virginity opposition is a traditional one, this interchanged imaging of man and nature will remain characteristic of Meredith.

The lyrical poems that have as their subject either nature or love, or an amalgam of the two, are both the best and the worst poems of this volume. Two of the best, "South-West Wind in the Woodland" and the early version of "Love in the Valley," are at least partly amalgams. In "Love in the Valley" the young girl in "maiden bud" is metaphorically identified with nature; the lover, for example, fears "a strange hand [may] pluck her." Spring, the budding season, is linked to the maiden's time of sexual awakening; the girl becomes part of the natural cycle of the seasons:⁶

Shall the birds in vain then valentine their sweet-
hearts?

Season after season tell a fruitless tale;
Will not the virgin listen to their voices?

Take the honeyed meaning, wear the bridal veil.
Fears she frosts of winter, fears she the bare
branches?

Waits she the garlands of spring for her dower?
Is she a nightingale that will not be nested

Till the April woodland has built her bridal
bower?

"South-West in the Woodland" reverses this pattern in a passage that describes the storm-swayed trees in sexual imagery. Less subtle are some love poems that awkwardly mix nature and anatomy. Frequently, the beloved is not the one identified with nature; rather, the lover is compared with a bird, a tree, a drop of rain, a valley, or a flower. This identification, when not controlled, leads to absurdity:

The Flower unfolds its dawning cup,
And the young sun drinks the star-dews up,
At eve it droops with the bliss of day,
And dreams in the midnight far away.

So am I in thy sole, sweet glance,
Pressed with a weight of utterance;
Lovingly all my leaves unfold,
And gleam to the beams of thirsty gold.

At eve I droop, for then the swell
Of feeling falters forth farewell . . .

In addition to its many lyric poems, the 1851 volume contains two narrative poems, "Daphne" and "The Shipwreck of Idomeneus"; several poems containing a narrative element, for example, "The Sleeping City"; and a dramatic monologue, "Antigone."⁷ Many of the poems, including the lyric, have a strong argumentative or didactic strain; some, such as "John Lackland," are swallowed whole by their message.⁸ One poem with a message, "London by Lamplight," with its country/virtue-city/vice dichotomy suffers from the same kind of overwriting that often affects the love poems:

Hark! how their feeble laughter rings,
While still the ballad-monger sings,
And falters their unhappy breasts
With poisonous words and pungent jests.

O how would every daisy blush
To see them 'mid that earthy crush!
O dumb would be the evening thrush,
And hoary look the hawthorn bush!

A subtler poem is the sole dramatic monologue of the volume, "Antigone," spoken by the shade of Polyneices, the brother for whom Antigone defied the law. The entire poem, with the exception of a single line as introduction, and another line as conclusion, is his address to Antigone as she sleeps the night before she is led to her death. As in several of Meredith's narrative poems based on classical literature and myth--"Daphne" and "Bellerophon," for example--the poet sees the story from an unorthodox angle; he also assumes the reader's knowledge of the tale, thus allowing himself the freedom to manipulate the narrative without confusing the reader. "Antigone" does not tell a story, but rather uses it as background and occasion for content. But as an interesting poem both in itself and in its muted use of contrast, it merits a brief discussion.

The poem, written in iambic pentameter, has a conversational flow; the lines usually run together, and the meter is varied. Frequently varied is the first foot of a line; this metrical substitution often occurs with an imperative, adding emphasis: "Give," "Sleep," "Fall"; or with a verb linked to the subject in the preceding line, contributing to flow: "Kindle," "Came." The words chosen to serve as rhyme words can also emphasize or signal underlying connections. Thus, the "sleep"--"creep" rhyme forms a couplet and links two nights: the sleepless night of the past in which Antigone buried her brother, and the present one in which sleep has been displaced by dream and her brother's

"buried voice."⁹ Another set of rhyme words, "chill"-
 "still," is separated by an interval of five lines, the
 longest interval between rhymes in the entire poem. The
 rhyme links, the interval separates, the dead brother and
 the living, but soon-to-die, sister. The "wailing chill"
 of the "wretched, graveless ghost" is stilled by Antigone's
 action; her action, in turn, leads to the conclusion: "She
 woke, they led her forth, and all was still." Antigone
 herself has become part of that stillness. The simplicity
 of the final line exemplifies the plainness of most of the
 diction. Few metaphors occur in the poem; one of these, the
 "dark stream" of death, is figurative only in its juxta-
 position to the sleeping Antigone; the stream is a mythological
 reality.

In a poem simple in the choice and use of words, much
 of the poetic interest lies in a pattern of contrast. Major
 oppositions of the story, such as the personal collision
 between Creon and Antigone, and the contrast between the
 heroine and her sister, have dropped out. Within the poem
 even the major conflict, that between "love and piety" and
 duty to the state, now lies in the past. When Polyneices
 tells Antigone that she "has plucked the bitter flower of
 death," he is speaking of her past decision and its fated
 consequences. Everything seems to be waiting for these
 consequences: "The air is hush'd and dark o'er land and
 sea, / And all is waiting for the morrow light."

The night/dark-morning/light opposition of these lines
 is muted and mixed, for although darkness carries a traditional

association with death, it is not the night, but the "morning light," that will bring death. The opposites will eventually merge; just as night gives way to day, so too death will give way to "Elysium's dawning birth." All opposition finally disappears into cyclical recurrence: night-day-night; life-death-rebirth.¹⁰

Polyneices alludes to that cycle when, after referring to the "bitter flower of death," he expands the image in paradoxical language: "But this will dower thee with Elysian breath, / That fade into a never-fading clime."¹¹ The flower that in its very fading participates in a "never-fading clime" images the merging opposition, that between will and fate, that lies behind Polyneices' appearance to his sister. For despite nature's hushed waiting and the implied acceptance of one's fate with which the poem ends, an aim of Polyneices' address is to strengthen Antigone to act once more: "This thought will never again thy virgin hand / To serve its purpose and its destiny."¹² The hand that scattered dust is urged to act again; thus, "mighty will" and destiny will intermingle through Antigone's ultimately choosing her fated death.¹³

While in the dramatic monologue "Antigone" the poet chooses a static moment from which to glance at both past and future, in the longer poem "Daphne" the story itself, or "narrative of events," assumes importance.¹⁴ In addition, the length of the poem--444 lines in 111 stanzas--allows the development of a complex of associations for the imagery; moving beneath the surface of the narrative, this complex

creates an "under-tide" that modifies the obvious tale of pursuer and pursued.

Meredith's narrative poem tells the tale of Apollo's love for Daphne, his pursuit of the maiden, and her escape from the god by the drastic means of transformation. Although these essentials of the story appear in Ovid's Metamorphoses, the classical myth emphasizes the fated quality of the narrative. Cupid, responding to Apollo's insult, causes both Apollo's love for Daphne, and her rejection of the god:

From his quiver, full of arrows, he drew two darts, with different properties. The one puts love to flight, the other kindles it. That which kindles love is golden, and shining, sharp-tipped; but that which puts it to flight is blunt, its shaft tipped with lead. With this arrow the god pierced the nymph, Peneus' daughter, but Apollo he wounded with the other, shooting it into the marrow of his bones. Immediately the one fell in love; the other, fleeing the very word 'lover', took her delight in woodland haunts . . .¹⁵

God and nymph follow preordained courses, one pursuing, the other fleeing. In eliminating the introductory passages concerning Cupid, Meredith removes much of this parallel predestination from the narrative, and makes room for doubt, hesitancy, and even virginal "near-passion."¹⁶

He more than makes up for omitting Cupid by inserting a long scene of Daphne bathing. Just before this bathing scene, Apollo is likened to a "burnished eagle / Hovering o'er a fluttered bird";¹⁷ the eagle, appropriately for a sun-god, is "burnished," bright, shining, lustrous.

Stanza vii adds to the brightness of the imagery:

Many a morn the naked beauty
Saw her bright reflection drown
In the flowing smooth-faced river,
While the god came sheening down.

The two protagonists are here in the midst of morning and brightness. Daphne is compared with "rosy-born Aurora"; the innocence of the "tall Peneian virgin" is invoked with the descriptive "white as that Thessalian lily, / Fairest Tempe's fairest flower."

But a dark undercurrent moves beneath this bright glow; before the reader even realizes the significance of the water swirling about Daphne, the river has made its way "thro' laurelled sunlight."¹⁸ Before the sensual bathing scene, long before the chase through the woodland, the end--loss for Apollo, transformation for Daphne--is thus pre-figured. This shifting light and shadow of the "laurelled sunlight" image is continued, several stanzas later, in the description of the "bathing bower" beneath which Daphne stands:

There the laurell'd wreaths o'erarching
Crown'd the dainty shuddering maid;
There the dark prophetic laurel
Kiss'd her with its sister shade.

(57-60)

The "laurell'd wreaths" arch over Daphne, forming a bower, a leafy shelter or enclosure.¹⁹ Here the "dark prophetic laurel" reinforces the foreshadowing wreaths, acknowledges the nymph as its (future) sister, and, with the words "dark" and "shade," emphasizes the "laurelled," or darker, aspect of sunlight.

Daphne is in her bower; the god, disguised as the flowing river, is moving toward her. The scene is set; the poet uses words and sound patterns to create the mood:

Breathings of a deep enchantment,
Effluence of immortal grace,
Flitted round her faltering footstep,
Spread a balm about her face!

Witless of the enamour'd presence,
Like a dreamy lotus bud
From its drowsy stem down-drooping,
Gazed she in the glowing flood.

(69-76)

The words in the first of these two stanzas have been carefully selected to indicate Apollo's silent presence.

Unknown to Daphne, the god has surrounded her; his intangible "effluence" and "breathings of a deep enchantment" have become part of her atmosphere.²⁰ This atmosphere surrounds Daphne's "faltering footstep"--a phrase that foreshadows both the chase and Daphne's moments of vacillation--and spreads balm about the nymph. Even the word "balm," meaning aromatic oil, is purposefully chosen; associated with balm is not only the sensuousness of perfume, and the soothing quality of salve, but also the idea of anointing. The sound pattern of this stanza underlines the idea of the "faltering footstep" with its alternations between the plosive consonants --"p," "t," "g," "b"--and its lingering "f" and "s" sounds. Line 71 itself "falters": "Flitted round her faltering footstep." Inserted between the lingering and rolling sounds are the strong "d" and "t" sounds that force momentary pauses.²¹

The following stanza develops the dual reverberations of the "deep enchantment"--delight and loss of will. As Daphne

gazes into the water, unaware of the "enamour'd presence," lines 74 and 75 suggest a hypnotic lassitude and sensuous passivity which would make her vulnerable to Apollo's desires. Line 77 with its reference to a "fluttering presage" develops this bird-unwary prey image. The arrangement of sounds in this stanza contributes to the dreamy and languorous effect. The stanza contains many resonants ("n," "m," "ng") and liquids ("l," "r"), sounds that last as long as one's breath, and several long vowels in the accented position.²² Contributing to the "drooping" effect of the words "down-drooping," is their position at the end of the third line, so that an unvaried metrical pattern allows "drooping" to make up a falling foot.

Up until now, Meredith's stanzas that go nowhere and do nothing have been few; now, however, we have several stanzas, one after another, telling in inflated language of Daphne's beauty as she bathes. Contemporary reviewers must have had some of these in mind when they commented that "'Daphne' [is] objectionably spun out, even if but in regard to length" and that "Daphne," although "charming," is "spoilt" for lack of a "pruning-knife."²³ After two stanzas of exaggerated language, in which Daphne is compared with a star and with a rosebud flecked with "jewell'd dew," the trite, romantically lush images begin both to form clearer image patterns and to assume vaguer, but clearly sexual, meanings.

In stanza xxv the water (or "foamy laughter") is "bubbling round her shrinking waist"; two lines later, the

water dripping from her body forms "glittering pearl-drops chaste." Why is the nymph's waist "shrinking?" Why is "chaste" the chosen rhyme-word? The answers begin to be given in stanza xxvi with the "ruddy ripples" playing about the "maiden rapture." In the next six stanzas, including line 3 of stanza xxvi, twelve lines begin with participles, all apparently modifying the noun "ripples."²⁴ In the midst of this flowing, clasping, trembling and rising, there are references to "the glowing, crescent shine" and to "Cytherea's magic zone." Adding to the sensuousness of these passages is the image pattern: the earlier images of brightness merge here with those of whiteness to suggest the fresh beauty of white flesh; the whiteness is that of a sexually desirable body. Mixed with these rich connotations of whiteness and brightness is the glow of redness: the "crimson daisy tip," the "rose-red lip." These images of redness are not so much opposed to the others in a red-white opposition as they are juxtaposed so that the total effect is one of bloom and ripeness.

The poetry in which these images appear is, unfortunately, weak. The language is inflated, the phrases are frequently formulas, and the result (Daphne's breasts are "twin-heaving havens") is overdone, failing precisely in the attempt to be "poetic." The description, for instance, of Daphne's nipple as a "crimson daisy tip / Budding from the snowy bosom" is not only periphrastic, but not really worth the flowery metaphor. Finally, however, after several stanzas

of watery caressing, Apollo's "delirious passion" makes him "confess," and resume his own shape:

And he stood in all his glory!
But so radiant, being near,
That her eyes were frozen on him
In a fascinated fear!

All with orient splendour shining,--
All with roseate birth aglow,
Gleam'd the golden god before her,
With his golden crescent bow.

(133-140)

The first of these stanzas contrasts the god's glory and radiance with the woman's iciness and fear, a fear that is, nevertheless, "fascinated." Suggested in this scene is a woman momentarily immobilized, or "frozen," by the sudden appearance of a snake. Apollo is no snake, however; the next stanza is a Golden Treasury of words: "golden" with its accompanying gleam and glow, all describing Apollo's "orient splendour shining."²⁵ Yet, a few stanzas later, a problem arises; the lines appear to describe the sun-god, but they do so in feminine images:

Cheeks, and mouth, and mallow ringlets,
Bounteous as the mid-day beam;
Pleading looks and wistful tremour,
Tender as a maiden's dream!

Palms that like a bird's throbb'd bosom
Palpitate with eagerness,
Lips, the bridals of the roses,
Dewy sweet from the caress!²⁶

(149-156)

These lines continue the light imagery with a specific sun image; line 155 begins the nuptial images that assume importance in stanzas 42 and 43. In these stanzas between the narrator's lament and the address to Diana, the atmosphere

is still one of enchantment, but one in which Daphne gradually melts ("Ever warmer by degrees") and apparently responds. This change both in Daphne and in the "still, enraptur'd air" is underlined with rosy-ripe-bridal imagery. Even Daphne's blushes become part of the white-rosy red image pattern, while the lily-rose "metamorphosis" carries the traditional purity-sexuality opposition:

Ah! but lovelier, ever lovelier,
As more deep the colour glows,
And the honey-laden lily
Changes to the fragrant rose.
(189-192)

Another opposition becomes evident here, too, that between the "mortal maiden" and the divine Apollo. The contrast is emphasized at the moment when union, rather than conflict, seems possible. And Daphne, faced with this "celestial choice," is half-won, yet wavering:

Love-suffused she quivers, falters--
Falters, sighs, but never speaks,
All her rosy blood up-gushing,
Overflows her ripe young cheeks.
(181-184)

Again, Meredith uses sound patterns to reinforce this hesitancy. Once more, he alternates lingering sounds (such as the fricatives, "f," "v," "s") with the plosives ("k," "t"), producing pauses that are underscored by both logical and metrical rests. The pause at the end of line 181 is emphasized not only by the position of the word "falters," but also by the repetition of the word at the beginning of line 182. The effect is similar to that of a stutter--or a limp.

Interrupting this "faltering" indecisiveness and following images of the "bridal bower" is the narrator's address to Diana, a stanza that ushers in a shift in connotative effect. No longer do we have white, glowing, desirable skin; we now have a "pale crescent" and "pallid scorn," associating an unhealthy and unnatural whiteness with the "virgin goddess." It is this "forest Virgin" who intervenes; with this intervention, the earlier hints of cold and freezing are reintroduced and expanded. The oppositions are clear: icy-chill-frozen-wintery (and, by implication, sexual frigidity) vs. warmth-melting-budding (sexual responsiveness). These opposing images hint that Daphne, although responding momentarily to Diana, could still respond to Apollo's warmth:

Even as a torpid brooklet
That to the night-gleaming moon
Flashed in turn the frozen glances,--
Melts upon the breast of noon.²⁷
(217-220)

But the next lines contradict that thought with the lament that Daphne will never turn to "that bosom bright"; instead, "All her nerves are strung to flight" (224).²⁸ The word "flight" introduces stanza lvii:

O'er the brows of radiant Pindus
Rolls a shadow dark and cold,
And a sound of lamentation
Issues from its mournful fold.
(225-228)

"Cold" and "dark" are united in their modification of "shadow," a shadow that, in obscuring the sunlight, signals the coming defeat of light-sun-warmth by dark-shadow-cold-ice.

An apparent paradox exists here, however: the "sound of lamentation," issuing from the shadow, and thus associated with rejection of the sun-god, is nevertheless allied with nature--a nature that will work on Apollo's behalf during the ensuing chase. Although this shadow-born cry is evidently not nature itself, but rather the "Voice of the far-sighted Muses;"²⁹ still that cry is not only echoed by nature, but also produces a "natural" reaction. Daphne experiences another moment of indecision, as the cry excites an internal conflict between "her charmed heart" and "the instinct of her feet." (243, 244)

Just as Daphne pauses, briefly torn between two warring impulses, the action, too, pauses; the line "And she pauses for an instant" (245) introduces four stanzas filled with sensuous images:³⁰

And she pauses for an instant;
But his arms have scarcely slid
Round her waist in certain girdles,
And his low voluptuous lid

Lifted pleading, and the honey
Of his mouth for her's athirst,
Ruby glistening, raised for moisture--
Like a bud that waits to burst

In the sweet espousing showers--
And his tongue has scarce begun
With its inarticulate burthen--
And the clouds scarce show the sun

As it pierces thro' a crevice
Of the mass that closed it o'er,
When again the horror flashes--
And she turns to flight once more!
(245-260)

Daphne is still, and Apollo embraces her; as Apollo's arms slide about Daphne, lines 245-248 are packed with sibilants,

producing a hissing sound suggestive of writhing, and a lingering effect. The following lines, representing sexual temptation, do not merely describe a sexual approach; they are also loaded with sexual reverberations. Thus, although stanza lxiii tells of an approaching kiss, the juxtaposition of words--"honey," "athirst," "glistening," "moisture," "bud," "burst"--suggests intercourse. In stanza lxiv, surely the poet wishes the reader to understand that the tongue has functions unrelated to those of speech. And lines 256-258 seem not only clearly sexual, but positively Shandian in their use of a "crevice" through which the sun "pierces."

This mood of sensuality is quickly broken; inexplicably, without any divine intervention, "the horror [of sexual experience] flashes" once again, "And she turns to flight once more!" (260). These eight stanzas--four telling of the echoing call to Daphne, and four depicting a scene of sexual passion--are framed by stanzas lvii and lxvi, stanza lxvi a near-repetition of stanza lvii. The major change in the later stanza is the substitution of the word "sable" for "mournful" in the description of the "sable fold" from which the "sound of lamentation" issues. The darker image is appropriate for the prelude to the chase.

Most of the remainder of the poem is the chase. As the flight and pursuit begin, the sexual imagery that has been important throughout the poem becomes more violent:

Loudly now as swiftly, swiftly,
 O'er the glimmering sands she speeds;
 Wildly now as in the furzes
 From the piercing spikes she bleeds.
 (269-272)

This image, with its suggestion of masculine power and aggression, is sustained in the next two stanzas with the references to the crimson drops produced by Daphne's bleeding. But even this victim-oppressor relationship is not simple; just as Apollo casts his shadow over Daphne--has the power to "darken" her life--so, too, Daphne's will has power over the god:

He above each drop of crimson
 Shadowing--like the laurel leaf
 That above himself will shadow,--
 Sheds a fadeless look of grief.
 (277-280)

Not only Daphne's will is opposed to Apollo; he is even at war with himself: "Then with love's remorseful discord, / With its own desire at war." This internal conflict within both Daphne and Apollo, these brief references to discord and war--these introduce the line, "But all nature is against her!" In the next sixteen stanzas this statement of a major conflict is developed and illustrated.³¹ Every part of the woodland plays an active role in holding Daphne back; shrubs, brambles, and branches knot and trip her, catch at her, and "fling themselves about her" (82). Stanza after stanza uses images of entrapment:

Glens and glades of lushest verdure
 Toil her in their tawny mesh,
 Wilder-woofed ways and alleys
 Lock her struggling limbs in leash.
 (297-300)

Several lines, such as these, echo in their sound patterns the meaning of the words; the lines detailing Daphne's obstacle course are themselves difficult to read, forcing the reader to slow down along with Daphne. While animal-prey associations multiply, words connected with trapping and snaring tumble one after another: "thwart," "clutch," "trammels," "catch," "twine," and, more specifically, "mesh," "lock," "leash," "bridle," "reining," the latter clearly linked with caging and taming.³²

As Daphne flees, attempting to escape from the ensnaring hunter, the sexual undercurrent, which has never disappeared, changes direction.³³ The poet uses sensuous words to describe nature's attempts to hold Daphne for sensuous experience:

Running ivies dark and lingering,
Round her light limbs drag and twine;
Round her waist with languorous tendrils
Reels and wreathes the juicy vine.

(333-336)

Again, the sound pattern underlines the meaning of the words. The concentrated use of liquids and resonants, the way in which the meter is manipulated to emphasize these lingering sounds, even the use and positioning of such words as "lingering" and "languorous"--all contribute to an effect similar to the languid sensuality of the bathing scene. Thus, nature tries to hold Daphne in two ways: through physical obstacles frequently described in harsh-sounding phrases, and through the "languorous tendrils" of sexual temptation.

As Apollo draws near, the sensuous images increase in density:

Reining in the flying creature
 With its ["the juicy vine's"] arms about her mouth;
 Bursting all its mellowing bunches
 To seduce her husky drouth.

Crowning her with amorous clusters;
 Pouring down her sloping back
 Fresh-born wines in glittering rillets,
 Following her in crimson track.

(337-344)

Then, after a comparison of Daphne with "silver-sandalled Arethusa," and another classical comparison--with Io--that invites compassion for the fleeing nymph, the light-dark imagery is picked up once again. Daphne is shadowed by the same greenery that welcomes Apollo, bringing with him "an orient sheen." Apollo is drawing near: after the claustrophobic atmosphere of the chase, the valley now echoes Apollo's voice, the woodland breaks into song, and brightness and beauty are everywhere. "But of all the throbbing beauty / Brightest! singled by the Sun!" (389-390) is Daphne.³⁴ Just before Apollo reaches Daphne, she is described as having "Ivy round her glimmering ancle, / Vine about her glowing brow," in a radiant prefiguration of Daphne transformed. She casts off the figurative comparisons Apollo makes--a bride bowing "her bridal head," a "flower he tramples" (392, 389)--and, just as his "golden arms are round her," Daphne's transformation begins. As her transformation progresses, her pulse slows, then disappears:

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!
 (414-418)

The repetition of the words "pause" and "go," the interplay between meaning and meter that forces pauses as the pulse slows, the word "dying" used as a falling foot--all of these manipulative devices reinforce the idea of a gradually slowing pulse.

The poem ends with the "floating Naiads"³⁵ gazing at the laurel tree, now no longer a dark omen, but a "bright prophetic laurel." The poem closes in silence, broken only by a distant echo:

And in vain the listening Dryad
Shells her hand against her ear!--
All is silence--save the echo
Travelling in the distance drear.
(441-444)

Superficially, little relationship exists between the "vaguely Keatsian Daphne" and Meredith's later narrative poetry.³⁶ The romantic affectation of the poem, indeed of much of the 1851 volume, the highly colored language, the trite images, are signs of the poet's youth; much of these will later disappear. Some of his problems with rhyme, however, will remain; "Daphne" contains such forced rhymes and near-rhymes as these: stood/wooed; eagerness/caress; neck/cheek; spot/caught; war/afar; and mesh/leash.³⁷ Defective as they are, however, I prefer them to these worn-out pairs: flower/bower; spring/wing; breast/nest; charms/arms; and moon/noon.

The meter, too, is so regular that the effect is numbing. The almost metronomic regularity, the preponderance of one- and two-syllable words, the heavy use of lines that end

with a natural pause--all contribute to a monotonously beating effect, at odds with the content of much of the poem.

The poem, then, is faulty, but it is more than an amalgam of deficiencies. In "Daphne" Meredith has taken a story from myth and changed it in ways that seem to be typically Meredithian. The straightforward story, simple as a fairytale, is fated, with the god and the woman playing their predestined roles. There is little ambiguity in this role-playing; even the nymph-turned-laurel remains consistent: Apollo "kissed the wood: but, even as a tree, she shrank from his kisses" (Metam, Book I, p. 43). But Meredith removes Cupid's part in the tale, and, although bound by the myth, he gives the illusion of freedom--the possibility of other choices--to his running figures. Thus, Daphne could stop her flight; Apollo could stop his pursuit. Since Meredith cannot tamper with the result of the myth, he uses manipulation of time--the introductory vision of the chase--and images of prefiguration--the "dark prophetic laurel"--as a literary substitute for fate. And, importantly, he uses image patterns to create the conflict that, without destroying the myth, he cannot overtly emphasize. So, although the reader feels some of Daphne's panic as she flees, the imagery conveys a contradictory message: it is unnatural to flee from sexual experience. And while Apollo is beautiful and glowing, he is also the hunter in search of prey. As he puts his arms about Daphne, the sibilants hiss out the associations of the verb "slid." Complicated, too,

is the imagery used in the long chase. Daphne is struggling for her freedom;³⁸ the density of the entrapment images increases the claustrophobic sensations of enclosure and ensnarement. And yet, counterbalancing that fear of being hunted and cornered is a sensuous undercurrent, a subtle temptation to surrender.

Ambiguity, the result of this juxtaposition of opposites, is a characteristic of the ending, too. The still-sounding echo of the final lines may be the lingering sound of Daphne's last heartbeats; it is also a reminder of the (in itself ambiguous) call to Daphne at the beginning of her flight. Another "metamorphosis"--Meredith's handling of the myth--is now complete.

For the other narrative poem of this volume, "The Shipwreck of Idomeneus," Meredith again turns to classical myth; and again, as in "Daphne" and in "Antigone" he assumes the reader's knowledge of the tale. In fact, that reader foreknowledge of the final events of the story contributes to the ironic substructure, the "under-tide," of the poem.³⁹ "The Shipwreck" is a "miniature epic narrative" in blank verse; following epic convention, the protagonist is the brave and noble king of Crete, Idomeneus.⁴⁰ The five opening lines, swift-moving and epithet-laden, place us in medias res:

Swept from his fleet upon that fatal night
 When great Poseidon's sudden-veering wrath
 Scattered the happy homeward-floating Greeks
 Like foam-flakes off the waves, the King of Crete
 Held lofty commune with the dark Sea-god.

After the introductory lines the poem moves into Idomeneus' lengthy address to Poseidon (99 lines in a 379-line poem). Within this address, shifts of time occur, from the opening present of "that fatal night" of the storm, to the past, the nights and days of battle.⁴¹ Idomeneus interrupts his memories of the past with comments on the present, the transitions from one moment to another accomplished through repetition, comparison, and unifying imagery:

So closely and so fearfully they throng'd,
Savage with phantasies of victory,
A sea of dusky shapes; for day had passed
And night fell on their darkened faces, red
With fight and torchflare; shrill the resonant air
With eager shouts, and hoarse with angry groans;
While over all the dense and sullen boom,
The din and murmur of the myriads,
Rolled with its awful intervals, as though
The battle breathed, or as against the shore
Waves gather back to heave themselves anew.
That night sleep dropped not from the dreary skies,
Nor could the prowess of our chiefs oppose
That sea of raging men. But what were they?
Or what is man opposed to thee? His hopes
Are wrecks, himself the drowning, drifting weed
That wanders on thy waters; such as I
Who see the scattered remnants of my fleet,
Remembering the day when first we sailed,
Each glad ship shining like the morning star
With promise for the world. Oh! such as I
Thus darkly drifting on the drowning waves.

(66-87)

The enemy, in the past, has been "a sea of dusky shapes" and a "sea of raging men." But now Idomeneus, his men, and even the enemy become one in his questioning; all men's hopes are wrecks, and men are drifting flotsam. That image of wreckage links Idomeneus in the present surveying his storm-battered fleet with Idomeneus in the past battling against his sea of enemies. Furthermore, the contrast

between man's hopes and experienced reality serves as a reminder of that hopeful day long ago when they sailed "with promise for the world." With the repetition of the phrase "such as I," and the application of the flotsam image to Idomeneus himself, we move once more from past to present. These kaleidoscopic time-shifts between memory (past) and actuality (present) are smooth enough to create a sense of time flow. Indeed, to the gods, all time is one; or, more correctly, time does not exist:

the Olympians, whose minds
Unbounded like our mortal brain, perceive
All things complete, the end, the aim of all;
To whom the crown and consequence of deeds
Are ever present with the deed itself.
(149-153)

But in this poem of conflict, even the collapse of time does not unify; instead, the perception of time itself becomes a source of conflict. The scholastics wrestled with the problem of God's foreknowledge and man's will. Here, foreknowledge belongs to the Olympians, and that knowledge, which the reader shares with the gods, becomes indistinguishable from fate.⁴² This perception of fated man is opposed to the concept of man as initiator of a causal chain of action and reaction; both views of man exist in "The Shipwreck." The surface conveys an illusion of freedom, in which man's consequence of deeds" is important; a pattern of emotionally charged images, the "under-tide" of the poem, however, carries an opposing impact.

One of the strongest of these images, both literally and symbolically, is that of the stag. After Idomeneus has

concluded his address with the fatal vow, Poseidon pauses momentarily above the tempest; the storm, too, seems to pause, awaiting a "sudden signal" from the sea-god. In just such a way the "faithful hound" awaits a signal from the huntsman. The hunting dog is

Prompt at the slightest sign to scour away,
 And hang itself afresh by the bleeding fangs,
 Upon the neck of some death-singled stag,
 Whose royal antlers, eyes, and stumbling knees,
 Will supplicate the gods in mute despair.
 (140-144)

The "royal" stag falls after a useless supplication to the gods; at the bidding of an indifferent huntsman, the stag is "death-singled," fated to die. Knowledge of the future sacrifice of the king's son forces a stag-child identification. additionally, the stag-as-victim image seems to include Idomeneus-as-victim in its association. The latter association is underscored by the transitional line, "This time not mute, nor yet in vain this time!" (45). Although the implied comparison between stag and king is made only to be denied, the reader knows that the Idomeneus-victim analogy is incorrect only for "this time," and not for the future; the king's apparently successful appeal to the gods ultimately is as bootless as that of the doomed king.

Another animal image within a descriptive digression occurs when Poseidon, his "divine debate" concluded, orders the calming of the storm. His voice is

Of lions like the roar
 Of lions when they hunger, and awake
 The sullen echoes from their forest sleep,
 To speed the ravenous noise from hill to hill
 And startle victims . . .
 (212-216)

Here, the voice of the god is compared with "the roar of lions" in an image that begins with the sound of hungry lions and their "ravenous noise" and concludes with the word "victims." The relationship between the ravenous lions and their victims echoes that between the rapacious hound and the stag. Evidently, the interconnections of the animal world are based upon violence and predacity.

Earlier, the enemies of Idomeneus had been imaged as wolves:

On that wild day when mad with torch and glare,
The frantic crowds with eyes like starving wolves,
Burst . . .

(30-32)

The effect is that of the sudden release of an uncontrolled pack; that impression is strengthened by the words, "We held at bay the swarming brood . . ." (36). Associated, therefore, with the animal imagery applied to the enemy is the idea of overwhelming numbers. Amid the harsh sounds of battle the phrase "the din and murmur of the myriads" stresses the vast numbers of the "swarming" enemy, as well as the loud but indistinct sounds of a mob. The frighteningly constant renewal of this oncoming mob is implied in the subsequent image of the waves beating against the shore. The same power of renewal is, appropriately, the result of the repeated imaging of the enemy as a sea. Later, an image-reversal occurs, and the sea-surges that threaten Idomeneus' ships are likened to "crowds that shout for bread and hunger more" (158). Again, the "restless waves," unrestrained as yet by Poseidon, are compared with men waiting

to hear a royal decree--anxious, "cloudy masses" of men. The lack of order and control associated with a mob exists everywhere in the natural, animal, and human worlds. We are all in danger of shipwreck.

Idomeneus, however, while acknowledging his powerlessness in a turmoil-filled world ("what is man opposed to thee?") has not despaired. He reminds Poseidon, in his address to the god, of the Cretans' "oath to aid the cause of Greece," an oath that has been fulfilled, and in his plea for help includes both complaint and statement of trust:

O God of waters! 'tis a dreadful thing
To suffer for an evil unrevealed;
Dreadful it is to hear the perishing cry
Of those we love; the silence that succeeds
How dreadful! Still my trust is fixed on thee
For those that still remain and for myself.
(88-93)

His thoughts turn to his wife and child, left behind for ten years of war; the war is over and now "Crete whispers in [his] ears, and all [his] blood / Runs keen and warm for home . . ." (99-100). This yearning for home and family produces wrenching dramatic irony when he concludes his address with a vow:

O lay this horror, much-offended God!
And making all as fair and firm as when
We trusted to thy mighty depths of old,--
I vow to sacrifice the first whom Zeus
Shall prompt to hail us from the white seashore
And welcome our return to royal Crete,
An offering, Poseidon, unto thee!
(107-113)

The poem owes much of its complexity to the undercutting that exists throughout: imagery and foreknowledge are used to oppose and qualify. Here, the undercutting is effected

through the juxtaposition of reader foreknowledge against Idomeneus' address to the sea-god; the Cretan king, destined to hear "the perishing cry" of his son, pleads the sorrow of impotent survival in asking for Poseidon's help. He then makes the vow that begins the chain of events ending with that cry. The address, set within the framework of the entire narrative, becomes ironic--and the aid given in response to the "trust fixed on thee" becomes a betrayal.

Immediately following the ironic conclusion to Idomeneus' address are lines summarizing the noise, strife and confusion of the storm:

Amid the din of elemental strife,
No voice may pierce but Deity supreme:
And Deity supreme alone can hear,
Above the hurricane's discordant shrieks,
The cry of agonized humanity.

(114-118)

Opposed to this chaotic and strife-torn world, however, is Idomeneus, yearning for his family, anxious for his men, and trusting in the gods. He is part of a vision of harmony, of man connected--or, a favorite Meredithian word, linked--to others by love and trust. Momentarily, his seems to be the correct world-view. Poseidon has intervened in response to Idomeneus' plea, the seas have quietened, and, in the double security of the end of both war and storm, his men drift off to sleep:

But dreams came not so calmly, as around
Turbulent shores wild waves and swamping surf
Prevail, while seaward, on the tranquil deeps,
Reign placid surfaces and solemn peace,
So from the troubled strands of memory, they
Launched and were tossed, long ere they found the tides
That lead to the gentle bosoms of pure rest.

(296-302)

The sea imagery describes dreams in terms of the shoreward wildness and the "tranquil deeps"; by implication the analogy extends to the lives of the men who have come through the turbulence of battle and near-shipwreck. They should be past the "troubled strands" and out to the calm open sea of "pure rest." This turmoil-rest contrast is underscored several lines later with the contrast between the past "sights and sounds of battle smeared with blood . . . / And wail of execrating kindred . . ." (316, 318) and the present "oblivious slumber" (319) into which the men have gratefully slipped.

But the poet has inserted a warning note in this scene of apparent quiet and safety. For the contrast between the hellish "sights and sounds of battle" and the restful silence of sleep is compared with the false renewal that a midnight murderer experiences in the "full, keen joyance of the day" (315).⁴³ The murder is not undone simply because the night is over; so too, the security in which the soldiers sleep is a false one. Sleep, with its associations of innocence and tranquillity, is the unifying element between the unknowing men on the ship and the equally unknowing child on the shore:⁴⁴

And O, bright Muse! forget not thou to fold
 In thy prophetic sympathy, the thought
 Of him whose destiny has heard its doom;
 The Sacrifice thro' whom the ship is saved,
 Haply that Sacrifice is sleeping now,
 And dreams of glad to-morrows . . .
 (343-348)

The security with which the child dreams of all the "glad to-morrows" he will not possess is as false as that in which the men sleep, having apparently reached "the tranquil deeps." The murderer image disturbs the "placid surfaces and solemn peace" (299) of their dreams just as the knowledge of future events jars the dreams of the child.

These future events are briefly outlined in the closing section, the narrator's address to the Muse. In a few lines, as irony piles on irony, the world view symbolized by Idomeneus collapses. The man who longed to join his family will sacrifice his son; the man imaged as the shepherd of his flock will be sent into exile; the man who placed his faith in god will find that he has been betrayed. He is saved from shipwreck only to face greater disaster; the chaos of the storm-battle-noise cluster has been only momentarily defeated by the order of the calm-peace-silence group. Since the calm is only temporary and the peace built upon ignorance, the conflict of opposites remains unresolved. The poetic substitute for resolution in this poem is a transcendence in which all opposites co-exist in an Olympian absence of time.⁴⁵ Thus, as the king's son lies sleeping in his "happy nest of home," (352), the narrator comments that "Even now the dark inexorable deed / Is dealing its relentless stroke" (370-371). The eternal vision becomes Fate; the causal relation between deeds and their consequences is finally forgotten in the loss of the temporal relation. Against this "relentless" Fate, all

supplication is vain; "the mother's tears, the nation's stormful grief" of the closing lines are, at last, as unavailing as Idomeneus' opening plea.

The poem thus ends as it began, in a vain "pleading voice for life" (375). This circularity of the poem emphasizes the analogy between Idomeneus and his son and reinforces a complex view of Idomeneus as both victim and predator. He is both because his dilemma is that of a man caught between opposing loyalties; before him lies the impossible choice of an Orestes. There are snares everywhere; the "consequence of deeds," no matter the choice, is disaster. Man's only hope is in the gods, for only the gods "can hear, / Above the hurricane's discordant shrieks, / The cry of agonized humanity" (116-118). The gods, however, although they hear the shrieks of both nature and man, are ultimately indifferent to man's agony.

These "discordant shrieks"--the elemental conflict of the storm and the human conflict of war--are major facts of the poem; appropriately enough, the important patterns of the poem center about water and battle images. Even warfare is described in terms of water imagery, and both are merged with animal and mob images to convey an emotionally powerful effect of a chaotic world. Although the poem depicts a world made chaotic through conflict, it ends, not with an attempt at resolution, or even with an exploration of the questions it has raised, but rather with an escape into transcendence.

A reason for the weakness of the ending is Meredith's commitment to struggle and his lack of emotional belief in an intellectual escape.⁴⁶ Without the tension between opposites, all that is left at the end of the poem is sentimentality. The picture of the child whispering "Mother" and--worse--"That other name, twin holy, twin revered" (356), is awash in sentimentality. The poignancy of the situation should be sufficient; indeed, this insistence on the pathetic overpowers the ironic. A related problem is the evasion of a meeting between father and son. Substituted for a confrontation within the world of time is a flight into a timeless view of "agonized humanity": "Oh! whosoe'er ye are the Muse says not, / And sees not, but the gods look down on both" (378-379).⁴⁷

Most of the poem, however, is successful. The diction is generally simple, and although the poem contains the inversions and occasional clumsiness that critics will comment upon throughout Meredith's career, the lines flow well. There is some inflated language (for example, Idomeneus' tears) but generally the language is plain, neither "poetic" nor self-consciously difficult. The natural speech rhythm of the blank verse, the metrical substitutions to avoid monotony, the run-on lines--all combine to produce flow; the sweep of the lines thus echoes the motion and rapidity of storm and sea-god. The structure, too, is simple, with the poem framed by Idomeneus' address to Poseidon and the narrator's address to the Muse.⁴⁸ Under-

neath all is the image of the sea, ever-recurring, upon which men, like "foam-flakes," are scattered. For "The Shipwreck of Idomeneus" is an account of the metaphorical "shipwreck" of Idomeneus, of all of us whose "hopes / Are wrecks," betrayed by a vision of harmony that is ultimately illusory.

Although the diction of "The Shipwreck" is generally plain, much of the 1851 volume is filled with the decorative language of the youthful imitator. In "Daphne," however, lush language is used, not unthinkingly to ornament, but purposefully to convey the sensuousness of the experience that Daphne ultimately rejects. By implying that Daphne's flight is decision--and her hesitation is temptation to sexual surrender--the poet complicates the pursuit and counters the fated quality of the myth. But in "The Shipwreck" surface and undercurrent are reversed: here, Idomeneus' apparent world is that of man's "consequence of deeds"; beneath that world of rationality lies the world of inevitable chaos. We are but part of the flotsam--"drowning, drifting weed" (81)--in a havoc-filled universe.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

CHAPTER I

¹Introduction to the Phyllis B. Bartlett edition of The Poems of George Meredith (New Haven, 1978), I, xxx. All quotations from Meredith's poetry are from this edition.

²Meredith, within months after publication of his first volume of poetry, comments: "My mistake has been in putting forth so many poems together, of so decidedly a sensuous and lyric tendency, as to mislead Critics about the quality of my mind and Muse. More concisely I may say--it all reads--too young." Meredith's letter to A. J. Scott, The Letters of George Meredith, ed. C. L. Cline (Oxford, 1970), I, 18.

³Delmar Bogner quotes these lines as an example of marriage imagery; he further notes that earlier lines of the poem suggest "a kind of rape": ". . . naked birk / Down showering her dishevelled hair / And like a beauty yielding up / Her fate to all the elements," p. 110. After expressing his surprise at the critical neglect of sexuality in Meredith's poetry, Bogner discusses the sexual connotations in the nature poetry, as well as the more evident sexual imagery in the narrative poetry. "The Sexual Side of Meredith's Poetry," VP, VIII (Summer 1970).

The regenerative power of the earth--the natural cycle--remains an important Meredith theme. Norman Kelvin in A Troubled Eden (Stanford, 1961), notes that even in this earliest volume of Meredith's poetry, "no fewer than ten poems contain the idea of rebirth as a major or secondary theme," p. 219n.

⁴In "Sorrows and Joys," for example, man's sorrows, once buried, ". . . shall rise / As souls to the immortal skies." After this metamorphosis both stars (sorrows) and flowers (joys) will "mix sensations deep," forming a union between earth and sky. The language of the poem echoes the confusion of the thought. In the line "Thus art thou wedded to the skies," the argument of the poem implies that "thou" equals human joys, and the wedding is that between joys and sorrows, heaven and earth. However, there is no clear antecedent for "thou" in the preceding lines. A frequent fault in Meredith is his ambiguous pronoun reference; it is an important contributing factor to his reputation for obscurity.

⁵In his review of the Phyllis Bartlett edition, Denis Donoghue mentions this poem: "'The Wild Rose and the Snow-drop' speaks of each flower 'fulfilling nature's law,' mortality is made to seem natural and beautiful. The poem was published in 1851 when it was still easy, following Gray and Wordsworth, to derive a fairly sanguine moral from meditation on flowers, the seasons, the wind, and mountains. Perfection is identified with being, and removed from the qualification you would have to impose if you let being take its chances with time and death," The New York Review of Books, February 22, 1979, p. 38. Time and death, though, are both part of the poem, as Donoghue's comment regarding mortality implies. Further, this poem is a poor example with which to argue that Meredith identifies perfection with being since Meredith himself confusingly negates the argument of the entire poem--that each flower is perfect in its own way--with his closing lines: "The Wild Rose blooms, all summer for her dower, / Nature's most beautiful and perfect flower."

⁶Kelvin, in his discussion of the second version of "Love in the Valley," makes the same point; he sees an interchange between the girl described in images of nature and "nature--particularly the qualities of the four seasons as they change--[seen] in terms of feminine beauty. . . .," p. 130.

⁷Phyllis Bartlett prefaces Meredith's "Beauty Rohtraut" with the following note: "Eduard Mörike (1804-75), who caught the essence of the Volkslied, is considered by many as the greatest of the Swabian lyric poets. Schön-Rohtraut is one of his best-known ballads," I, 66. Meredith's poem has a ballad atmosphere, but does not contain the single essential of a narrative poem: it does not tell a story. It tells briefly (four stanzas) of one incident, that of the "boy in the Castle" kissing Beauty Rohtraut.

⁸"John Lackland" begins: "A wicked man is bad enough on earth; / But O the baleful lustre of a chief / Once pledged in tyranny! O star of dearth / Darkly illumining a nation's grief!" "O star of dearth" is a(n) (im)perfect example of what Meredith's search for a rhyme-word can lead to.

⁹In Sophocles, Antigone scatters dust over her brother's body during the daytime; she is seen, brought before Creon, and then led offstage. The night, as backdrop both to the burial and to the time of the poem before "they led her forth," seems to be an invention of Meredith's.

¹⁰Light-dark imagery is very evident in Sophocles. Creon's order that Antigone be buried alive creates oppor-

tunities for sun/light-darkness/tomb oppositions. Antigone's lament encompasses not only the entombment, but also the stripping away of all that life could have held: "Unwept, unfriended, without marriage-song, I am led forth in my sorrow on this journey that can be delayed no more. No longer, luckless me, may I behold yonder day-star's sacred eye; but for my fate no tear is shed, no friend makes moan. . . . No bridal bed, no bridal song has been mine, no joy of marriage, no portion in the nurture of children; forlorn of friends, unhappy me, I go living to the vaults of death." Teiresias, the seer, points out the central paradox of the situation, that Creon is condemning the living to burial, while denying burial to the dead: "Then know you, and know it well, that you shall not live through many more courses of the sun's swift chariot before one begotten of your own loins shall have been given by you a corpse for corpses, because you have thrust children of the sunlight to the shades and ruthlessly lodged a living soul in the grave but keep in this world one who belongs to the gods infernal, a corpse unburied, unhonored, all unhallowed," "Antigone," in Greek Drama, ed. Moses Hadas, trans. R. G. Jebb (New York, 1965), pp. 100; 101; 104-105.

¹¹The meaning of these lines is arguable. I read the word "that" as part of a pair of demonstratives rather than as a relative pronoun because of the use of "fade" instead of "fades." "This," then, would probably refer to "death," and "that" would refer to "flower."

¹²Earlier, Polyneices' shade tells Antigone to "Sleep, for the Gods are watching over thee! / Thy dream will steer thee to perform their will." The will of the gods is equated with fate, and the dream will "steer" Antigone to fulfill that fate.

¹³In addition, Polyneices promises his sister that, should her "virgin hand" act once more, she will not cross the stream of death alone. And, after she has reached the far side of that stream, "kindred spirits" will be waiting for her. Thus, although the emphasis in Sophocles is on Antigone's isolation--a present moral isolation through her choice, and a future physical one through Creon's condemnation--here, her isolation is overshadowed by the promise of a community of the dead, a community to which Polyneices, a member, calls Antigone.

The view of the afterlife expressed in Meredith's opening lines--"O Sister! couldst thou know as thou wilt know, / The bliss above, the reverence below, / Enkindled by thy sacrifice for me; / Thou wouldst at once with holy ecstasy, / Give thy warm limbs into the yearning earth"--is far removed from that of the Greeks. Their view would

include the importance of a heroic death, but would certainly not encompass either "bliss above" or the embracing of death in a state of "holy ecstasy." The image of the burial of "warm limbs," however, tends to undermine the ecstasy.

¹⁴In his discussion of the novel, E. M. Forster defines the basic story element as "a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence," Aspects of the Novel (New York, 1927), p. 27.

¹⁵Ovid's Metamorphoses, trans. Mary M. Innes (London, 1955), Book I, p. 41.

¹⁶Bogner, p. 114. Bogner devotes three paragraphs to this poem which, in "Daphne" criticism, amounts to detailed commentary. He mentions Meredith's "nicely balanced interest" in pursuer and pursued, claiming that this turns the poem into a "spectator sport."

¹⁷The preying image appears in Ovid--without the fluttering.

¹⁸The opening river reference is to Peneus, the river-god and father of Daphne. Bogner, of course, has noticed the sexual imagery of the bathing scene and comments: "The poet suggests, with his atmosphere as much as in his words, that the water has her [Daphne] in a carnal embrace," p. 114. It is not just the water, however, but Apollo, that has her in an embrace. Such a transformation is not part of the Ovidian Daphne story; it is, however, part of the story of the river-god Alpheus and his beloved, Arethusa.

¹⁹Douglas Bush, after mentioning these 1851 poems based on classical myth, comments, "The vaguely Keatsian Daphne is the most attractive, by virtue of its fresh and exuberant open-air pictures," Mythology and Romantic Tradition in English Poetry (1937; rpt., New York, 1969), p. 386. I agree that most of "Daphne" is comprised of "open-air pictures"; but I think that, at least momentarily, the reader is supposed to receive an impression of a protected, if not enclosed, bower, calm and almost dreamlike, which the god invades.

²⁰The word "effluence" means outflow or emanation, both meanings working well with water and breathing.

²¹See the chapter on "Sound and Meaning" in John Rylander and Edith Rylander, What's in a Poem (Encino, Calif., 1972) for a short, clear outline of a complicated, and fascinating, study.

The word "flitted" that begins this line is poor; probably chosen for its natural meter and sound pattern, neither its meaning nor its associations seems appropriate here.

²²Interestingly, the stanza also contains many plosives; the two "drowsiest" lines include eleven plosives. Evidently their effect is undercut by the other factors that I mention.

²³W. M. Rossetti, Critic (November 5, 1851); and Charles Kingsley, Fraser's Magazine (December, 1851); rpt., Critical Heritage (hereafter CH), pp. 34, 36.

²⁴The sexual current may be glimpsed through a list of these participles: "ebbing," "flowing," "clasping," "sinking," "levying," "trembling," "budding," "rising," "prest," "gleaming," "eddyng" and "bribing."

²⁵"Orient" will remain one of Meredith's favorite words. In this stanza the word is appropriate with its meanings of (noun) the east, and a shining pearl; (adjective) bright, lustrous; and its association with the rising of the sun.

²⁶The description must apply to Apollo, since only that assumption is logical. After Apollo has resumed his own shape--and after the "dazzled light [has] subsided"--Daphne gets her first look at the "beauteous youth." He is compared with a lyre, "uttering ravishments divine"; in addition, he is affected by the "young beloved," who must be Daphne. However, the feminine images, plus Meredith's lack of a clear grammatical connection between descriptive lines and the person described, create some confusion.

²⁷This analogy presumably compares Daphne with the "torpid brooklet," which responds to the moon (Diana) with "frozen glances," yet "melts" in response to the sun (Apollo). The word "torpid" applied to the brooklet means passive, dormant, apathetic.

²⁸I apply the term "lament" to the statement, not because of its meaning--ambiguity exists throughout the poem; there are no "right" answers--but because of its effect, produced within this context of warmth-cold images, and accentuated by the sound pattern of line 221: "But no more--O never, never." The repetition of the word "never" and the use of the back vowels (the "o" of "no" and "o," and the vowel sound in "more"), combined with the lingering liquid consonant ("r") and resonants ("n," "m"), help to create a sense of melancholy. This feeling is strengthened in the next stanza, which uses cold and dark images, contains similar "o" sounds, and ends with the mournful (in both sound and sense) words, "mournful fold."

²⁹The Muses are patron goddesses of the arts and are sometimes considered to have Apollo as their leader. In the stanzas detailing the travels of this "Voice," Meredith uses repetition to reinforce the idea of the echoing cry.

³⁰Contributing to the unity of this pause is the enjambement between each of these stanzas.

The cestus, a girdle, has the power of exciting love.

³¹In these stanzas nature is alive and purposeful; Daphne is a passive victim of natural activity. She does not trip, for example; she is tripped. The active verbs belong overwhelmingly to nature. Daphne finally escapes only through transformation, by becoming part of the nature that has been opposing her. These passages remind me of the lines in Gerard Manley Hopkins' "The Wreck of the Deutschland" describing the drowning of those aboard the ship: "They fought with God's cold-- / And they could not and fell to the deck / (Crushed them) or water (and drowned them) or rolled / With the sea-romp over the wreck." They died, not because they were crushed or were drowned; they died because the deck "crushed them" and the water "drowned them." Meredith has occasionally been linked with Hopkins; one reason that at times they sound alike--aside from syntactical reasons--is this positing of each contributing part of nature as filled with activity.

³²Some of these passages are well done and use the natural properties of brambles, thorns, and "twisting bindweed" to catch at Daphne in her flight. Sometimes, however, the poet forgets the material he is dealing with: "Slips a shrub to thwart her passage, / Slides a hand to clutch her foot" (295-296). Where is this clutching hand coming from? Sometimes, too, as in much of this poem, the poetry is overdone. Bush picks out two such lines and comments: "The fleeing nymph suggests such a horrid image of bombardment as this: 'On her rounded form ripe berries / Dash and die in gory dew,'" p. 386.

³³Meredith will frequently use hunting images in his fiction to describe metaphorically the relation between the sexes; here, these images are particularly apt since the myth contains an actual "hunt." To be sure, Ovid's account contains the hunt-prey analogy: Phoebus calls to Daphne: "'Stay, sweet nymph! You flee as the lamb flees the wolf, or the deer the lion, as doves on fluttering wings fly from an eagle, as all creatures flee their natural foes!'" and, as the god pursues Daphne: "Even so, when a Gallic hound spies a hare in some open meadow he tries by his swiftness to secure his prey, while the hare, by her swiftness, seeks safety . . ." Book I, pp. 42, 43.

The sexual reverberations are there, I believe, even aside from the questionable sado-masochistic "bondage" associations that a contemporary reader might make.

³⁴In his discussion of the image patterns of "Modern Love," Norman Friedman makes the fascinating point that Meredith sometimes uses the sun in his poetry "inferentially

as a vehicle of excessive idealism." He gives an example from "Modern Love" in which the husband longs to see himself play the role of the sun to that of his mistress' sunflower: "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!" Friedman then comments: "And, as we know, this superior-inferior relationship is the desire which, for Meredith, signalizes the sexual Egoist," ("The Jangled Harp: Symbolic Structure in Modern Love," MLQ, XVIII, 1957), p. 16. Friedman gives further examples from Meredith's poetry but does not mention an important instance from Meredith's fiction: Willoughby, the Egoist himself, is frequently imaged as a sun round which others revolve. It is interesting--and complicating--to bear this possible (future) Meredithian association in mind when reading "Daphne," although Meredith's image-making hand has been forced by the selection of a story containing Apollo, the sun-god.

³⁵The "silver" Naiads and "wistful Dryad" of the opening section of "Daphne" are thus witnesses of Daphne's final transformation.

³⁶Bush, p. 386.

³⁷John Lucas ("Meredith as Poet," Meredith Now) makes the parenthetical comment that "much of Meredith's reputation for being a 'difficult' poet comes from his inability to handle rhyme without overtaxing his hold on sense," pp. 14-15.

³⁸Meredith has complicated this struggle, too; Daphne is unlike the Ovidian Daphne: like Pogo, Daphne has met the enemy, and found that he is us!

³⁹These events are not told until the concluding lines of the poem, and then only briefly.

According to Phyllis Bartlett's headnote, Meredith's poem "is based on a post-Homeric account of the return of Idomeneus from the siege of Troy to Crete. The myth that GM elaborates was first given literary currency by Servius (fourth century A.D.) in his note to Virgil's Aeneid 3.121," I, 80. Trevelyan outlines that myth: Idomeneus, the king of Crete, is homeward-bound when the Cretans are caught in a powerful storm. He calls upon Poseidon, god of the sea, to save his men and himself from shipwreck, promising to sacrifice whatever he meets on landing. He meets his son, fulfills his oath by sacrificing the boy, and the angry Cretans send him into exile. G. M. Trevelyan, The Poetical Works of George Meredith (London, 1912), Notes, p. 580.

⁴⁰Bush classifies each of the mythological poems in this volume: "The Rape of Aurora, Daphne, Antigone, and

The Shipwreck of Idomeneus--a lyric, an Ovidian idyll, a dramatic monologue, and a miniature epic narrative--are mainly poetic experiments," p. 386.

⁴¹Although the night has far-reaching, and ultimately deadly, consequences, here the essential meaning of the word "fatal" is fated--doomed.

⁴²Just as the idea of God's foreknowledge creates difficulties for those arguing against predestination, so too, the differentiating line here between knowledge and causation blurs; the problem, of course, lies in our "mortal brain" which does not "perceive / All things complete . . ."

⁴³If he is not the murderer, he is at least "one who from a ghostly watch / In a lone house where murder hath been done, / . . . Emerges . . ." (303-306).

⁴⁴As a further indication of Meredith's manipulation of words and their associations, note the use of this sleep/rest-noise/turmoil opposition. Although the sleep-peace-rest associations are here in positive opposition to the noise-confusion-chaos group, yet a traditional association of sleep with death lingers in the reader's mind. (See the way in which Meredith uses the noise-silence contrast as images of life and death in "Cassandra," 1862 volume). It is appropriate that in a poem which says that nothing is as it appears to be, even the image patterns are not precisely what they seem.

⁴⁵Opposites may also co-exist beneath the distancing eye. The narrator, in addressing the Muse, mentions the calm with which she observes the basic contrasts of human life: "O Muse, that in all sorrows and all joys, / Rapturous bliss and suffering divine, / Dwellest with equal fervour, in the calm / Of thy serene philosophy . . ." (325-328).

⁴⁶The endings of a number of Meredith's works, poems and novels alike, share this weakness, this sense of a falling-off. (I am not, of course, unique in noticing Meredith's weak endings. The latest comment is Donoghue's in NYR: "Meredith was not always strong in his endings: like Donne, he often started best and wavered thereafter," p. 39). The reason for this failure is the same lack of emotional intensity once the struggle is over. What, for example, is Beauchamp to do once he ends his struggles with women and mentors? He can marry sensibly, and die.

⁴⁷I am not arguing against two views of reality, one temporal and one eternal. What I do see as a fault is the substitution of the merger of all oppositions on an Olympian level for a resolution on the human level.

⁴⁸Meredith achieves an effect somewhat similar to that of "South-West Wind in the Woodland," published in the same volume. "South-West Wind in the Woodland," however, has an octosyllabic line; Meredith defended the use of the shorter line in a letter outlining the impression he aimed for: ". . . reckless rushing rapidity, and sweeping sound of the great wind among the foliage which I felt impelled to do in such manner that the ear should only be conscious of swiftness, and no sweetness; and that there should be no direct pause throughout," Cline, I, 16. Bartlett calls attention to this comment in her headnote to "South-West Wind in the Woodland."

Lines	1-14	Introduction
	15-113	Idomeneus' address to Poseidon
	114-198	Poseidon over storm
	199-235	Poseidon calming storm
	236-320	men and Idomeneus after storm
	321-379	address to Muse

However, the balanced pattern of Idomeneus' address representing memory and the past and the narrator's address representing vision and the future--without resolution in the present--demands too high a sacrifice from the poem as a whole.

CHAPTER II

It is this inability to deal beautifully with simple statements that makes the great mass of Meredith's ballads and pure narrative verse, in spite of occasionally great dramatic force, as in 'The Nuptials of Attila,' the weakest section of his poetical work, and one that, taken by itself, would give a reader a very false idea of the poet's real power.

--Priestly in George Meredith

. . . Mr George Meredith's descent from his 'roadside' style of thought and composition to his lyrical mood is, we regret to say, only trifling compared with the change which he undergoes when he indulges in an elaborate analysis of a loathsome series of phenomena which he is pleased to call 'modern love.'

--Saturday Review (1863)

Praise or blame should be thoughtful, serious, careful, when applied to a work of such subtle strength, such depth of delicate power, such passionate and various beauty, as the leading poem of Mr Meredith's volume . . .

--Swinburne (1862)

Unlike the 1851 volume Poems, the 1862 volume of poetry is given a title with "descriptive value": Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside, with Poems and Ballads.¹ Of the lyrics in the volume, most fuse nature and love; several contain images of isolation and death and communicate a mood of melancholy. The poet of "When I would image," for example, imagines his love as "a shrouded head" who "seems of the wandering dead," while the poet of "A Roar through the Tall Twin Elm-Trees," in picturing the winter rose as a pining outcast, likens it to his own loveless and outcast state. Even "Autumn Even-Song," a descriptive poem--no love here--ending with a cozy "valley-cottage [that] beckons warm," conveys the bareness and bleakness of late fall. Here, even the birds' calls are cries of "outcasts in the air," and the "old hall," apparently untenanted, participates in the grimness and loneliness of the natural scene.

The antidote for melancholy and fear of death is prescribed in "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn," a poem "often quoted in explanation of GM's philosophy of nature. . . ." ² Some consolation is required, for beneath the descriptions of natural activity and "joy of motion" lie essential questions of life and death, of loss and decay. Meredith's answer rests with individual participation in "nature's eternal life," a life constantly restocked by the cycle of decay and regeneration:

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?
 (152-162)

And may not men to this attain?
 That the joy of motion, the rapture of being,
 Shall throw strong light when our season is fleeing,
 Nor quicken aged blood in vain,
 At the gates of the vault, on the verge of the plain?
 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.
 (179-189)

The decay of age and the approach of death are facts for the speaker in "Juggling Jerry," one of the group of poems headed "Roadside Philosophers." Although in his monologue Jerry nostalgically recalls the days of youth and strength ("Lord! I could then jump like an eagle: / You danced bright as a bit o' the sun"), his basic attitude is one of unsentimental acceptance of the natural order. In the final stanza of the poem, Jerry compares himself with a stricken gull, and by implication suggests that his death should not also bury his wife:

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!
 (xiii)

In addition to "Juggling Jerry," the roadside poems include two more dramatic monologues--"The Old Chartist" and "The Beggar's Soliloquy"--and one hybrid, "The Patriot Engineer." In the latter poem an engineer and a group of young men are travelling on the "Meuse-boat"; the engineer is on his way home to England after what he terms his exile, while the young men are in search of "Horizons rich with trembling spires / On violet twilights . . ." The engineer's monologues, with the younger group as his audience, are interrupted by two-line comments by one of the young travellers; the last quarter of the poem shifts entirely to the narrator. Much of the interest lies in this edging from dramatic monologue to narrative poem, first through brief descriptive comments, and finally through the substitution of narrator for monologist. The poem ends with a form of unmasking, a favorite Meredith theme; the romantic haze cast by the scenery has been stripped away by the engineer's talk of despotism and butchers, hangings and the "smell of corpses." The poem, however, is faulty; the conversation of the patriotic Englishman, longing to "drink old ale and speak [his] mind" is marred by inversions and inept wrenching of lines. Thus, at one point his words produce the unlikely combined effect of awkwardness and singsongy monotony: "'--From

Austria I come, / An English wife to win, / And find an English home, / And live and die therein'" (9-12). A more serious problem is with the imagery; for example, the jackass becomes symbolic of both the simple freedoms of England and, by extension, the power of reality to dispel illusion. This burden is more than one may reasonably ask any jackass to bear.³

Although confused imagery weakens "The Patriot Engineer," the image patterns of the 1862 title poem "Modern Love" constitute a major source of its unity and power. In addition to "Modern Love," Meredith's "one undoubted major triumph,"⁴ the volume contains four other narratives (and a narrative fragment, "The Doe"): "Grandfather Bridgeman," "Cassandra," "Margaret's Bridal-Eve" and "Phantasy."⁵ These five poems display a marvelous diversity in technique, mood and moment; they also vary greatly in quality. In "Grandfather Bridgeman," a young soldier writes home during the Crimean War. By the time his letter, full of the action of battle, arrives, he has been wounded; his own action is over. The closing stanza of the poem prosaically sketches the mawkish scene of the "old man and a maiden who has the soft warm ways of a wife / With one whom they wheel, alternate; whose delicate flush of new life / Is prized like the early primrose." Although Stevenson rightly dismisses this poem as "a sentimental story of Crimean War days which fell into abysses of triteness and prosiness," Meredith described it as "an idyll: true to English life, and containing a war

episode, approved by friends who have heard it." Meredith's use of the term "idyll," along with his comments on "Jugglers, Beggars, etc. . . . met on the road," indicate that in "Grandfather Bridgeman" as well as in his "roadside" poems, Meredith was striving for the "rustic" touch.⁶

He is striving for a totally different effect in the odd narrative poem "Phantasy."⁷ The time frame is once again the contemporary nineteenth-century world, but no one here resembles a person Meredith might "have met on the road." The narrator, like the narrator of "The Patriot Engineer," is a young man travelling in Europe; he is accompanied by his friend, "cynical Adrian." These two provide the frame for the poem; the narrator's dream, however, forms the core. Part of the dream sequence is as poor in quality as the introductory stanzas (which include the line "And kept my thoughts in a quiver" and the rhyme "vision-admission"):

A young ballet-beauty, who perked in her place,
 A darling of pink and spangles;
 One fair foot level with her face,
 And the hearts of men at her ankles.
 (viii)

Not only is the dancer dressed in stereotypical "pink and spangles," but the last two lines of the stanza mingle fact and metaphor into a confusion of feet, faces, hearts, and ankles.

Despite such mediocre poetry some of the "phantasy" communicates a sense of a nightmare world in which Unreason is King, and the logic of reality has disappeared.⁸ Here

reality and order are contradicted: "cynical Adrian" has metamorphosed into a grinning "mock-priest"; the "cold stone" statues of the cathedral frown, while the "pictured saints" walk; and laughter springs, not from joy, but from unthinking abandon. Thus, although the thesis of the poem is the need to commit oneself to the real rather than to "exotic fancies," because of both their emphasis (24 stanzas out of 31) and their "seductive power," these fancies carry the poem.⁹ This contradiction between the poet's explicitly staged "message" and his unstated but sensed fascination with the irrational provides a major element in the poem's interest. Although faulty, "Phantasy" illustrates one form of a conflict that Meredith addresses in a few oft-quoted sentences: "Much of my strength lies in painting morbid emotion and exceptional positions; but my conscience will not let me so waste my time. Hitherto consequently I have done nothing of mark. . . . My love is for epical subjects--not for cobwebs in a putrid corner; though I know the fascination of unravelling them."¹⁰

As Meredith was writing "Modern Love," his conscience evidently nodded, permitting him to indulge in his fascination with cobwebs; certainly the didactic impulse had little to do with the writing of his "poetic masterpiece."¹¹ When he was asked, "Why did I write it?," Meredith answered his question with another, "Who can account for pressure?"¹² Under this "pressure" of emotion, Meredith produced a "beautifully sane study of the flow and recoil in a personal relationship."¹³ Critics have long seen parallels between this "personal

relationship" and the tempestuous marriage of Meredith and Mary Nicolls. The "real-life" scenario, however, differed from the fictional one in being more melodramatic: Mary Meredith bore a child to her lover with whom she went abroad; later, she returned to England where, her husband still refusing to see her, she died in 1861. The resemblance lies less, therefore, in events than in the complicated, ambivalent bond between two people whose intimacy has become an "unholy battle." In Stevenson's description of the Merediths' failing marriage can be seen the reason for Meredith's acute understanding of "flow and recoil": "Their complex and tormenting relationship, compounded of physical passion and intellectual rivalry, of nervous sensitivity and fluent declamation, had settled into a pattern of violent quarrels. The embers of their love for each other lent heat to the hatred that flared up in their disputes."¹⁴

But such autobiographical details may be overemphasized in a discussion of "Modern Love."¹⁵ Meredith's poem is by no means a "confessional" piece; neither is it a poem destroyed by didactic intent.¹⁶ For whatever the creative pressure behind the poem, when Meredith wrote "Modern Love," he forgot his love for the "epical" and his need for moralizing to focus on the contradictory, ever-changing and totally untidy "stuff" of a dying marriage. The marriage is moribund in stanza i of the poem; glimpses of the days of uncomplicated love appear only in flashback. But now the couple lie side by side in "their common bed," their

physical closeness emphasizing their psychological isolation from each other. Their estrangement as they share their marriage bed is heightened by the analogy between the two lying "from head to foot / . . . moveless" and the "sculptured effigies," usually made of stone, that decorated medieval tombs. The "long darkness" of midnight, the wife's strangled sobs as "She lay / Stone-still" in the silence, the image of husband and wife lying stiffly beside each other--all are concisely summed up in the paradoxical image of "their marriage-tomb." Grammatically, the phrase may be read both as the tomb in which to bury the marriage, and as an identification between marriage and tomb. Either way, the image conveys the fact of a slaughtered marriage, and the atmosphere of immobility, isolation and death; fact and atmosphere will weave through the texture of the entire poem.¹⁷

These images of death darken the poem because of their constantly changing and expanding application. They dramatize the deterioration of a marriage both indirectly (i) and directly ("Here is a fitting spot to dig Love's grave," [xlili]), but they do more than this. These images of death (what Friedman calls the "midnight-tomb-ghost-skeleton-grave-shadow atmosphere") are part of the under-current of the poem, one that surfaces with the husband's cry:

I cannot be at peace
In having Love upon a mortal lease.
I cannot take the woman at her worth!
Where is the ancient wealth wherewith I clothed
Our human nakedness, and could endow
With spiritual splendour a white brow
That else had grinned at me the fact I loathed?
(xxix) 18

A consequence, then, of the death of love is the unwanted vision of "our human nakedness," of the grinning skeleton behind the "white brow." This love that functions, not as an intensification of life, but rather as an opiate, is based upon illusion. The concept of an unchanging and unchangeable love is false; love is as mortal and as subject to change as are those who love.

Thus, in their refusal to accept change in the world of time, in their irrational desire for unending stasis, the couple have themselves been busily digging "Love's grave." This point has been made many times; Stevenson, for example, comments that "the misery of this couple arose from their impossible wish to retain the naïve sensuality of first love instead of growing into maturity and accepting inevitable change without regret."¹⁹ A paradox of the poem is that this rigid attitude toward change is delineated in a "poem of grating ironies, giddily reversing emotions, rapidly shifting images, and subtly blended techniques." Lucas puts it even more succinctly, underlying the paradox: in "Modern Love," "change is its only constant."²⁰ The critics simply echo the narrator, who makes it clear that "the singing sky of May" cannot last:

Lovers beneath the singing sky 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.

(1)

The "advancing hours" of time are an essential element

in the poem; even as husband or narrator speaks, bells strike, the clock ticks, and the seasons pass. Since change is a function of time, the couple's refusal to accept change forces them into an attempt to deny the flow of time.²¹ Because of this denial, husband and wife can now grasp at happiness only through transporting themselves into the past that memory has preserved, or through blotting out the past and living within "this little moment."²² In stanza xii the husband muses that he would be "content, / If the mad Past, on which my foot is based, / Were firm, or might be blotted." He recognizes that the past is operative (his foot is "based" on it) but that his relationship to it is insecure; hence, he longs to "drink oblivion of a day," to forget the past and to drink of Lethe. But the options for which husband and wife yearn are illusions; the past is lost, yet cannot be erased--and "this little moment" is inherently ephemeral. The couple's inability to reject these illusions and accept the flow of time and its interconnections--with the past neither under amber nor consigned to oblivion--is reinforced by the break-up of time: the constant shifts from present to past and back again; the brief scenes of little moments; the abruptly cinematic movements from close-ups to distance shots.

In discussing Meredith's "Phantasy," where illusion is confined to nightmare, Dohrenburg comments that "Meredith's desire at this period in his career [is] to distinguish

sharply between reality and illusion, and to commit himself wholly to the former." Dohrenburg's work is valuable in some of his comments upon the little-discussed "roadside" and "tour" poems; however, his theory of Meredith's "poetic development" with "Modern Love" as its apex (even he does not extend the developmental process further than this) forces him to wrench Meredith's poetic work into a non-existent pattern. Thus, he sees Meredith's poetry as a steady progression toward realism, and "the utmost fidelity to life," a fidelity that he believes accounts for much of the strength of "Modern Love."²³ However, he forgets that it is the clash between reality and illusion that fascinates Meredith, that fascinates him in the early The Shaving of Shagpat and that would be a major concern in the later One of Our Conquerors. Indeed, this illusion-reality clash is a truism in Meredith novel criticism; because of its "allegorical--at times more precisely symbolic"--nature, this clash is clearly outlined in The Shaving of Shagpat.²⁴ In "Modern Love," however, one of the factors contributing to its success is not its sharp distinctions, but rather its acknowledgment both of the existence of oppositions, and of their intermingling.

The clearest intermingling of opposites is that within the husband himself; critics have commented on his varied emotions: love, hate, desire, jealousy, pity; his changing and conflicting qualities: pettiness, generosity, honesty,

and capacity to deceive--himself, as well as others.²⁵ As he shifts from one version of himself to another, we are presented with what Lucas calls "a variety of dramatis personae."²⁶ And here, as Meredith the poet follows the "dramatis personae" being played one after another by the husband, Meredith the novelist reveals his knowledge of men and women: we are all amalgams of conflicting impulses; what we think of as "character" is in constant flux.

Although Meredith the novelist understands the fluctuating desires, temptations, and decisions of the individual, he frequently expresses the varied possibilities of human action in a near-psychomachia. Thus, a problem with several Meredith novels is that the hero resembles a cipher-figure, while his conflicting tendencies are, to a great extent, externalized in the semi-symbolic people surrounding him. To oversimplify, in Evan Harrington, for example, the hero is a tabula rasa ready to be imprinted either by Mrs. Mel, representing reality, or by the Countess, representing disguise.

In "Modern Love," however, such external struggles for control have been internalized; here, conflicting impulses alternate within the personality itself. The husband reacts to stimuli by striking off different facets of himself which, in turn, are accepted, examined, ridiculed and juxtaposed by himself or by the narrator. As the husband experiments with various roles, he also assigns his wife

parts to play in the self-produced drama.²⁷ In addition to their private drama, they are also presenting a play with their friends, or "society," as audience. In stanza xvii these motifs of acting, play and game mingle with the image contrast of surface vs. depths and a complicated grouping of light-love-golden "marriage-knot" opposed to ghost-skeleton and the ghastly light of "Love's corpse-light":

At dinner she is hostess, I am host.
 Went the feast ever cheerfuller? She keeps
 The Topic over intellectual deeps
 In buoyancy afloat. They see no ghost.
 With sparkling surface-eyes we play the ball:
 It is in truth a most contagious game:
 HIDING THE SKELETON, shall be its name.
 Such play as this, the devils might appal!
 But here's the greater wonder; in that we
 Enamoured of an acting nought can tire,
 Each other, like true hypocrites, admire;
 Warm-lighted looks, Love's ephemerioe,
 Shoot gaily o'er the dishes and the wine.
 We waken envy of our happy lot.
 Fast, sweet, and golden, shows the marriage-knot.
 Dear guest, you now have seen Love's corpse-light shine.

Contributing to the vision-shifts of the poem--here, a vision-shift metamorphoses love's glow into its "corpse-light"--is the interplay of drama, play, game and their associated use of masks. The effect of this interplay, together with the literary poses and allusions to "the old book" and "the French novel," is to blur the lines between the actual and the nominal. The narrator emphasizes the error in accepting what is given; after one of the husband's most melodramatic outcries--"O bitter barren woman! What's the name? / The name, the name, the new name thou hast won?" (vi)--the narrator closes the stanza: "--Beneath the surface this,

while by the fire / They sat, she laughing at a quiet joke." The juxtaposition is as "quiet" as the joke and economically undercuts the husband's pose.²⁸

Such cuts slash constantly through "Modern Love." No single undercurrent exists; qualifications are everywhere. Even the ending of both marriage and poem--the wife's suicide--carries its own questions. Most critics question neither the suicide nor the final commentary; Walter F. Wright, for example, remarks: "The climax in Modern Love is the suicide of the wife and the dejection of the husband. Its poignancy is the greater because it represents a waste of lives which should instead have been rich and even ecstatically beautiful."²⁹ Without rejecting the poignancy of waste and loss, I still see the suicide as a flawed ending. Lucas is one critic who indicates some dissatisfaction with suicide as the finale; he also argues for its necessity. His theory is that, since "Modern Love" is a study of the back-and-forth movement of a relationship, the poet "needs the intervention of the arbitrary to halt the poem."³⁰

But the very arbitrariness of the action constitutes its major flaw. Until now the poet's indirect technique of narration has been well handled and appropriate for the fragments of experience, for the broken up bits of time, for the whole complicated and "incessantly shifting dialectic of the relationship." Now, ironically, the husband's and wife's inability to know and communicate with each other,

a lack that is at the heart of the poem, interferes with the reader's acceptance of the suicide; he has been shut out from too much. And even if the reader were more adequately prepared, and the motive clearer and less questionable, the suicide would still function as a deus ex machina.³¹ In "Idomeneus" the struggle ended in transcendence; in "Modern Love" the evasion consists of an arbitrary end to the tug-of-war: one player simply lets go.

"This tragic denouement," Friedman remarks, has been "foreshadowed from the very beginning . . . by the pervasive death imagery which clouds the entire poem."³² Indeed, these death images, combined with the "snake-venom-poison" images applied to the wife, form an emotional "under-tide" predicting the wife's death by poison. Besides the impact of the imagery, the reason that the ending works at all--despite the flamboyance of suicide by a "fatal draught" and the melodramatic request for a final kiss--is that the suicide itself, the narrator's comments, even the much-quoted "message" of the poem are all subject to the interplay of oppositions that marks the entire poem. By her "letting go," for instance, the wife is apparently grasping at the state she and her husband have both desired: stasis, a freedom from change. Instead of finding "rest," however, she will actually undergo the final individual change, that from life to death.³³

The narrator, too, is subject to that same tension between opposites. Yet critics generally accept the narrator as

reliable, if not godlike; his viewpoint is seen as Truth, with a capital "T."³⁴ But in a poem where everything is qualified, where posing, masking, exaggerating, and juxtaposition turn "reality" and "illusion" into terms in a game of semantics, I see no reason to exempt the narrator from qualification. Even a critically accepted "message" based upon the lines, "Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul / When hot for certainties in this our life!--," is a paradox: the poem that Meredith called a "dissection" carries the warning, "Don't dissect!" In addition, to treat this warning against being "hot for certainties" as a certainty is to disregard the warning.³⁵

This counsel is implicit in the imagery of intermingling-- of shadow, dawn, and twilight--scattered throughout the poem.³⁶ These images emphasize the mixture of opposites with the resulting ambiguity: nothing is "black" or "white" but a mixture of the two. Thus, the husband, when rationalizing his desire for an affair with "my Lady," errs in his self-dramatizing cry: "'Tis Love, or Vileness! not a choice between / Save petrification!" (xxxviii).³⁷ For we all live in "the choice between"; we must reconcile ourselves to paradox and ambiguity.

Although the narratives of "Grandfather Bridgeman" and "Modern Love," and the narrative frame of "Phantasy," find their subjects within the nineteenth-century world, in "Cassandra" Meredith turns once more to classical myth;

again assuming the reader's knowledge of the myth, he manipulates time and events, moving in and out between past, present and future, juxtaposing visions of the past and prophecies of the future, confident that his reader can order the incidents of a familiar tale. And a tale is told, despite the strong lyrical quality of the narrative.

Three stanzas, each repeated once, function as lyrical refrains, an effect that is reinforced by the strong beat heard throughout the poem.³⁸ All conveying a single theme--the flow, divergence and ultimate merging of time--these stanzas contribute toward structuring the poem and act as hammer-blows driving in that theme. In stanza i (and xix) the poet sees Cassandra at the moment of the Greeks' homecoming and predicts her future; "Death is busy with her grave"; stanza iii (and ix) is a glimpse of Cassandra in the past as she prophesied the future, a future now fulfilled; and stanza vi (and xvii) offers the contrast between the past "bliss" of battle and the present reality of Cassandra's slaughtered brothers:³⁹ A brief outline of the poem illustrates the way in which these six stanzas (asterisked) mark shifts in time or vision:

- *St. i Captive on a foreign shore, (repeated as xix)
 Far from Ilion's hoary wave,
 Agamemnon's bridal slave
 Speaks Futurity no more:
 Death is busy with her grave.
- ii Present-Cassandra in the midst of "the alien din"
- *iii Once to many a pealing shriek, (repeated as ix)
 Lo, from Ilion's topmost tower,
 Ilion's fierce prophetic flower
 Cried the coming of the Greek!
 Black in Hades sits the hour.

- iv Cassandra, in present, sees "phantoms of the Past":
"Backward moves her sunless soul."
 - v Cassandra's brothers, the "shades" acknowledge the truth of her past prophecy
 - vi O the bliss upon the plains (repeated as xvii)
Where the joining heroes clashed
Shield and spear, and, unabashed,
Challenged with hot chariot-reins
Gods!--they glimmer ocean-washed.
 - vii Shift back to Cassandra amid "Alien voices"
This stanza, while not repeating ii, does contain two repeated images, both applied to the sounds of the homecoming Greeks: the "alien din" of ii becomes "Alien voices" and the image "Thick as water" is repeated exactly.
In st. ii the final line, "Silent lie her slaughter'd kin," contrasts with these joyful sounds; in vii the final line, "White as stars that front the gloom" forecasts the coming end to joy.
 - viii Cassandra as "torch-flame": "Through her shines the Ten-Years' Tale"
- no
repeated
stanzas
between
ix and
xvii
- *ix
 - x Present--looking toward the future
repetition of "sunless soul" of st. iv.
In st. iv, Cassandra sees the past; here, she sees her brief future: "Still upon her sunless soul, / Gleams the narrow hidden space / Forward . . ."
 - xi Agamemnon and Clytemnestra
Final line: "Now Cassandra views her Fate."
 - xii The "joyous din" of "the blinded host"
the future as present: Agamemnon as "the grand majestic ghost"
Final line: "Clytemnestra leads him in."
 - xiii The "Fates and Furies . . . / Tear and mix above the roof"
- present--
struggle
- xiv Cassandra wrestles with the gods
 - xv Cassandra, likened to the "torch-flame" of viii, "struggles with the light, / Helios, bright above all mists!"
the god Apollo above the "mists" of human life

xvi Cassandra sees the "tower" of sts. iii and ix;
in the present, she sees the past, as, in the
past, she saw the future

*xvii

xviii Shift back to present--Cassandra calls on
Apollo as she "Shrieks the deed that shames
the sky"

*xix St. i and its repetition, st. xix, enclose
the entire poem

As this outline briefly indicates, "Cassandra" is packed with contrasts of both idea and image; these contrasts form a pattern of ever-widening significance: the life-death cycle of individuals; the sorrow-joy contrast of human life; the confrontation of peoples in battle; and the temporal contrasts of past, present, and future.⁴⁰ Underlying all of this human struggle is the elemental struggle of men, that against their fate, here represented by Cassandra's foreknowledge. Cassandra, however, is also subject to fate; only "the unsparing Gods" (xiv) remain above the "mists" of human conflict.⁴¹

Organized human conflict--war--forms the background of "Cassandra"; the sounds and incidents of the soldiers' homecoming image the fundamental human contrast between life and death. Thus, mingled with the traditional death-Hades-darkness/light-sun opposition, the poet contrasts the noise and chaos of life against the silence and stillness of death. Image patterns merge as the joyous shouts of the Greeks are imaged as "thick as water" (ii; vii); the happy, unknowing victors are succinctly described as "the blinded" host" (xii); and the entire noisy host is seen to be

"white as stars that front the gloom" (vii).⁴² These images are complicated by the merging of opposites and the use of paradox. For example, despite the association of darkness with death and the coming "gloom," Cassandra sees her dead brothers with "the white light in their eyes," (v) and paradoxically, in her vision they are "Crowding quick [alive] the plains of Troy." (v)

Linked with the image patterns of "Cassandra" is its sound pattern, a blend of the aural and emotional qualities of individual words and word clusters and, throbbing beneath the words, the powerful beat of "Cassandra"'s meter. The poem is written in five-line stanzas in an almost unvarying metrical pattern: trochaic tetrameter, with the omission of the final unstressed syllable. The use of this meter--with virtually no metrical substitution--combined with Meredith's almost exclusive choice of one- and two-syllable words should result in almost unbearably singsong poetry. Yet, the poem is neither singsong nor monotonous. The potential pounding of the beat is controlled by several devices that produce flow from line to line. One way of producing flow is to separate the subject from the verb:

Ilion's fierce prophetic flower
Cried the coming of the Greek!
(iii)

King of men! the blinded host
Shout . . .
(xii)

Not only is the reader forced to join the lines, but the verb receives greater emphasis from both its position and the

slowing caused by the juxtaposition of two stressed syllables.

A variation of the subject-verb separation is the wedging of a prepositional phrase between the verb and the object, a syntactical procedure that Meredith uses frequently, often ruinously, in his poetry. In stanza vi, however, the delay between the verb and the object is justified by the emphasis gained for the word "Gods!"--who, with time and fate, are hovering presences within the poem. In addition, the poet breaks up the insistence of the rhythm with natural pauses that occur in different positions of the line. These techniques, however, only modify the rhythm; the strong beat continues to be heard throughout the poem.

The opening stanza illustrates several aural features of the verse: the incantatory effect produced by rhythm and sound; the linkage of lines produced (paradoxically) by the division of subject and verb (slave/Speaks); and both the unifying and cumulative effect of sound repetition within the stanza. Apparent in the stanza is the use of two similar "o" sounds; that in "shore," "hoary," and "more"; and that in "no." Poe, in "The Philosophy of Composition," refers to "the long o as the most sonorous vowel" and likes the word "nevermore" for both its sonority and melancholy tone. The long "o" Poe mentions is, strictly speaking, in the word "no" rather than in "more"; Meredith out-Poes Poe by placing the two sounds together. In each accented use of the "o" sound, the vowel is combined with the consonant "r"; the resultant lingering of the sound

underlines the dignity and melancholy of the meaning.

Meredith again combines these sounds in stanza iv:

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.

Meredith is using sound to reinforce meaning; thus, the words "shoreward roll" imitate the strong, flowing movement of ocean waters. The preceding lines, with their accented "o" sounds and lingering consonants ("ph," "n," "m," "s," "f"), participate in this imitation of ceaseless movement. In the fourth line, however, the use of the consonant stops in "áncor cást" coincides with, and contributes to, the abrupt break in the forward movement. The sounds and their effect are merged with the meaning of the image: the casting of an anchor; the cessation of motion. Meredith has often been criticized for his careless use--and misuse--of metaphor; here, too, not all of his images can survive intellectual dissection. Apparently "Folded" modifies "the Past," which may be likened to a scroll; but what happens if the reader insists on imagining that scroll "In the deep's long shoreward roll"? The logical problem, however, is not strong enough to cancel the emotional effect of the image pattern.

In this stanza, too, we have a merging of the past and the present. Stanza i is in the present, with a hint of the future. In the second stanza the scene remains in the present; the last line, referring to Cassandra's "slaughter'd kin," shifts to the past, the time of the third stanza. In

the fourth stanza, however, Cassandra, in the present, looks at the past; time present and past is dissolved within her person. Cassandra does not simply muse; she sees "phantoms of the Past." Here, too, the poet draws no distinct lines between the time which Cassandra "sees" and the time in which she stands. Cassandra may be seeing phantoms, illusions, the unreal world of dreams; she may, however, be seeing real phantoms, the "shades" of stanza v. Sound, image and meaning are united--all express the flow of time.

This flow of time is a poetic paradox. Cassandra gazes back to the past and prophesies the future; the ocean constantly renews itself. The opening stanza becomes the closing stanza, and the resulting circularity of the poem gives formal emphasis to the shifting of time within the poem. Yet--that "long shoreward roll" leads inevitably to death. Death has claimed Cassandra's brothers and the heroes on the plains of Troy; he will now claim Agamemnon and Cassandra herself. Agamemnon, alive and smiling, is "the grand majestic ghost"; "in Cassandra's prophetic mind, [he] is as good as dead . . . at the hands of Clytemnestra."⁴³ To see a future event as a present fact is to see the temporal with the vision of the eternal. But Cassandra is mortal; she, too, will die:

Still upon her sunless soul,
Gleams the narrow hidden space
Forward, where her fiery race
Falters on its ashen goal:
Still the Future strikes her face.
(x)

The "narrow hidden space / Forward" probably refers to the brief time remaining to Cassandra. In the substitution of "space" for "time," the two dimensions are collapsed, and the "narrow hidden space" becomes Cassandra's grave. The light-dark opposition suggested elsewhere in the poem is here in the darkness of the grave and Cassandra's "sunless soul" lit by gleams and embers. In the poorer stanzas viii and xv Cassandra is likened to a twisting torch-flame; in stanza x the fire image applies to her life.⁴⁴ The "ashen goal" is a burnt out fire; it is also the end of life, the ashes of the grave.

Death is prefigured, too, for the shouting Greeks. The light-dark contrast is compressed in a descriptive image, "Argives, pale as midnight foam" (vii); the foam connotes insubstantiality and transience. That underlying meaning is reinforced by the succeeding line: "Wax before her awful lips." "Wax" may be read in two ways: as a verb, meaning to grow or strengthen; and as a noun, a substance melting before Cassandra's "awe-full" words. Thus, the stanza apparently describes the joyfully noisy Greeks at their homecoming, their "alien voices" surrounding the isolated figure of their captive. But the counterpoint to that meaning exists in the ambiguity of the lines; unimportant and passing as the foam of the sea, the Greeks, too, are doomed to melt and fade in the fire of life.

Not only does the poem "Cassandra" contain such contradictions; it is itself an example of the paradox that is

so frequently Meredith's poetry. For Meredith can select the one word, "phantoms," that will yield the dual reverberations of spirit and illusion, and yet ignore the childishly pouting connotations of Cassandra's "little sullen chin." He can express the opposing ideas of strength and vulnerability in a brief phrase ("Ilion's fierce prophetic flower") and write a stanza (viii) that not only is clumsily worded, but adds little to the poem. Indeed, he can be

curiously and exasperatingly unequal. We can scarcely remember anyone capable of writing such good verse who is capable also of writing such bad verse. Mr. Meredith has written lines which any poet who ever wrote in English would be proud to admit among his work; he has also written lines as⁴⁵ tuneless as a deal table and as rasping as a file.

"Cassandra," fortunately, has little of the file's rasp, but the poem is uneven. The usual stylistic bases for some of Meredith's poorest poetry are, to a great extent, missing here; the diction is simple; the rhymes, orthodox; and the syntax, fairly regular. However, the poem has too little metrical variation; there are clumsy lines ("Now they tell her not she lies") and weak images ("She, her soaring arms, and wrists / Drooping, struggles with the light"). Most of the poem's weaknesses occur in the second half of the poem. After moving back and forth in time and foreshadowing the deaths of Agamemnon and Cassandra, the poet retreats from the moment for which he has prepared the reader. The last line of stanza xi states that "Now Cassandra views her Fate," and stanza xii closes with the simple--and deadly--line, "Clytemnestra leads him in." But the images

in stanzas xiii through xv are as elusive as the shadowy Furies, and the murder itself becomes a periphrastic phrase.

The last stanza is a repetition of the first. The last line of the opening stanza is a prophecy about the prophesier; with the repetition of that stanza, the poem closes with the final irony. The prophecy is now fact; Death is busy with Cassandra's grave.

Neither classical myth nor contemporary scene forms the subject-matter of "Margaret's Bridal-Eve"; in "one of Meredith's most charming ballad imitations,"⁴⁶ the poet tells Margaret's story of love and death in a way common to ballads: a distanced narrator relates events through a series of brief scenes; these scenes, rather than orderly chronological narration, or combined narration and exposition, and the essential material of the work. Past events gradually emerge through hints and inferences; dialogue is important in the movement toward the one central confrontation.⁴⁷ Despite such narrative techniques and the use of a ballad-like meter and refrain, however, "Margaret's Bridal-Eve" is the work of a nineteenth-century poet, and not a ballad in which "the story is the thing."⁴⁸ It is, rather, a narrative poem in which the story is used to explore some existing problems in the relationship between men and women; further, beneath that exploration runs an "under-tide" that can intensify, but often undercuts, events of the narrative.

The poem, divided into four sections, immediately plunges the reader into the matter of the poem. Part I,

composed of only six stanzas, presents the situation and hints of future complications. After the narrator's single opening line--"The old grey mother she thrummed on her knee"--the poem begins with a conversation between Margaret and her mother concerning a basic man-woman relationship: marriage.⁴⁹ The mother's words are simple and clear; she asks her daughter which of her suitors Margaret has chosen. Margaret's response implies a secret--"O mother, my mother, it never can be: / For I shall bring shame on the man marries me"--but her mother dismisses her daughter's scruples: "Now let your tongue be deep as the sea." The only image in this spare section occurs in this line, the poetic equivalent of "Keep quiet." After these words of the mother, the narrator resumes his telling of the story, as Margaret reluctantly follows her mother's advice. Proposal and acceptance are compressed into two economical lines, with no dialogue between Margaret and her future bridegroom: "O the handsome young man dropped down on his knee; / Pale Margaret gave him her hand, woe's me!" The section thus ends with the narrator's sole first-person comment, the prophetic "woe's me!"; the phrase functions, however, more as a public lament than as a personal statement.

Section II renews the argument between Margaret and her mother, while the reason for Margaret's position slowly becomes clear: she has had a lover. This key point emerges through the mother-daughter dialogue and through Margaret's reminiscent monologue. In the dialogue Margaret

is pleading for truth-telling: "O mother, my mother, this thing I must say, / Ere he lies on the breast where that other lay"; her mother is counselling prudence: "Now, folly, my daughter, for men are men: / You marry them blindfold, I tell you again." But Margaret, in a prelude to her decision of Part III, remembers the past; her monologue contains an inferred contrast between Margaret's "first betrothed" and her present suitor. Her passion lies in the past; her lover's death had brought with it a desire for her own death: "O neither to heaven nor yet to hell / Could I follow the lover I loved so well!" This section is almost as bare of images as Part I; the narrative relies heavily on the speech of the characters. Of the eighteen story lines in the nine stanzas, only two are spoken by the narrator:

Stanza 1	- 2 lines	- spoken by Margaret
Stanza 2	- 2 lines	- spoken by mother
3	- 1 line	- Margaret
3	- 1 line	- mother
4	- 1 line	- Margaret
4	- 1 line	- mother
5	- 2 lines	- narrator
6, 7, 8 & 9	- 8 last lines	- Margaret's monologue ⁵⁰

The opening of Part III breaks into this monologue with three stanzas of third-person narration; an implied time gap accompanies the formal division and the shift in person. This third-person break, however, gives the reader little information. Although the narrator tells us that "Pale Margaret's breast showed a winding scar" (11), it is Margaret's continued monologue that explains the cause of

this scar: "O my breast! I must strike you a bloodier wound; / Than when I scored you red and swooned" (21, 23). Margaret links her past and her present with the phrase "bloodier wound," a reference to the confession she is now determined to make: "I must speak to him under this roof to-night" (17). With the six stanzas of the monologue, images of burning, light, blood and the important red-white contrast erupt into the story line of the poem.

The fourth and last part of the poem is by far the longest, twenty-one stanzas. It opens with the bridegroom waking from a dream and seeing "the figure of his silent bride" (7). In five quatrains the narrator brings the couple together and indicates that, in his view of Margaret, the bridegroom has remained within his dream: "He fell at her feet with love and awe; / A stainless body of light he saw" (17, 19). There is none of the complex psychological probing that Meredith the novelist revels in; only enough of the groom's mental processes are revealed to fulfill a purpose. In the brief dialogue between him and his bride, Margaret attempts to tear off the mask imposed upon her; she is unsuccessful until, in a few brief lines summarily told by the narrator, she confesses her "earthly taint." Given our limited but essential knowledge of the groom, his reaction is predictable. He denounces her, and she dies.⁵¹ In this concluding section of the poem, the associatively passionate images of Part III have faded; here, the major images are colorless: white and stainless. The lead-in to the confrontation is intenser than the

confrontation itself; even the bridegroom's words are indirectly related by the narrator. Two-thirds of this section, in fact, belong to the narrator:

Stanzas	1- 5	narrator
	6	groom
	7	Margaret
	8	groom
	9	Margaret
	10-18	narrator
	19	mother to dead Margaret
	20	narrator
	21	groom to dead Margaret

With the exception of these two concluding stanzas--the bridegroom at the bier--the poem can be charted as a parallel in reverse:

Part	I	dialogue between Margaret and her mother very brief encounter between Margaret and her suiter--no dialogue Margaret accepts suitor
Part	II	Margaret continues argument-dialogue with her mother Margaret's monologue
Part	III	Margaret's monologue
Part	IV	extended encounter between Margaret and bridegroom bridegroom rejects Margaret mother again speaks to her daughter, now dead

This parrallelism serves not only to unify the poem, but also to emphasize the differences in content within the underlying pattern. Part IV, for example, through a reversal of the pattern of Part I, links these two sections of the poem and underscores the essential contrasts between them. Thus, the poem opens with "the old grey mother" speaking to her daughter about marriage; in Part IV she speaks, not to "tall Margaret," but to Margaret's corpse

stretched upon its bier. While the mother speaks, she is dressing her daughter, not for her wedding, but for her burial; such parallelism emphasizes the tragic reversal and increases the emotional effect.

This heightening of tension is one reason for the varied uses of repetition throughout the poem. In Parts I, II and III, however, it generally takes the form of simple repetition of words and phrases; the repetition of separated words and phrases may serve as a unifying device. For example, in the opening stanza of Part I, the mother asks Margaret "And which of the handsome young men shall it be?" (I, 3); the answer to her question comes in the final stanza of that section: "O the handsome young man dropped down on his knee" (21).⁵² Within the dialogue, repeated words contribute both to the rhythm of the line and to the traditional, even stilted, flavor of the conversation: "My daughter, come hither, come hither to me: / Come, point me your finger on him that you see: / O mother, my mother, it never can be . . ." (5, 7, 9). In Part II, Margaret opens three of the first four stanzas with the repeated cry of "O mother"; this reiteration emphasizes her continued mental struggle and prepares the reader for the long monologue that extends through Part III.

In Part IV, however, a more complicated form of repetition, one with variation, becomes a major narrative technique. Incremental repetition, associated with the folk ballad, is a term used to describe the repetition of word patterns

with a single crucial change in the pattern. The change contributes to the movement of the story, while the effect of the reiterated pattern is usually a buildup of suspense. Meredith uses a modified form of incremental repetition throughout the critical meeting between Margaret and her bridegroom, less, however, for suspense (we have been warned that the proposal and its acceptance will bring, not joy, but "woe") than for movement, emphasis, and, in the brief dialogue between the two, contrast and reversal.

But before they speak, the narrator emphasizes the groom's distorted perception of his bride; after the first inversion--"Whiter looked she than a child of sin" (11)--the same word pattern is repeated three times: "She looked so white, she looked so sweet; / She looked so pure he fell at her feet" (13, 15). The second half of this last line is repeated in the next, thereby linking that false perception with the groom's adoration of his idol: "He fell at her feet with love and awe" (17). As the dialogue begins, phrases recur in question and answer; the bridegroom's question is reversed to form Margaret's denial. When the groom asks his bride, "My bride! by the angels at night are you led?" (23), she answers, "I am not led by the angels about" (25). When he addresses Margaret as "my bride and saint" (29), she rejects the halo: "I am no saint, and no bride can I be . . ." (33).

The prelude ends, and Margaret tells her story; the groom's reactions form a loose version of incremental

repetition:

She saw how her body grew freckled and foul;
She heard from the woods the hooting owl;

The bridegroom stamped and called her vile;
He did but waken a little smile;⁵³

The bridegroom raged and called her foul;
She heard from the woods the hooting owl;
(IV, 45, 47, 53, 55, 57, 59)

In this sequence the repetition of word pattern emphasizes the characters' responses; the substitutions do not contribute to a forward movement. Indeed, the narrative movement has paused; in that pause, the exact repetition of the line "She heard from the woods the hooting owl" intensifies this prediction of Margaret's death.⁵⁴

Through this use of repetition with variation, contrast, and reversal, Meredith echoes in his language the misunderstandings, confusion, and ambiguities that exist between men and women who are essentially unknown to each other.⁵⁵ Contributing to the creation of paradox and ambiguity is Meredith's manipulation of images with complex associations. One example of this manipulation is the breast-stab-honor-lie cluster of images; another is the poet's frequent juxtaposition of opposing images and linking of contrasting ideas.

The breast is an important image in the poem, and Meredith plays upon the multiple associations connected with a woman's breast: beauty, sexuality, comfort, maternity. Margaret explains her reluctance to marry in the words, "O mother, my mother, this thing I must say, / Ere he lies on the breast where that other lay" (II, 1, 3). The

intimacy of a man's lying against her breast implies sexual knowledge; later, in her monologue, Margaret explicitly states that her "first betrothed came thrice to [her] bed" (II, 23). But it is in Section III that the breast image becomes important; in this section, too, breast-sexuality becomes linked with stabbing-scarring. This section opens with the narrator's description of Margaret's restless walking; her nightgown falls to reveal a breast marked by "a winding scar." This scar, the result of Margaret's attempt to "follow the lover [she] loved so well," is both the result of her attempted suicide, and the scarlet letter of sexual guilt. For although the breast scar carries no direct sexual meaning, Margaret herself makes the connection between the scar and her uneasiness about her present position: "O few are the brides with such a sign!" (III, 13). The scar has thus become an external sign of her sexual experience.

Margaret, too, links her earlier physical stabbing of her breast with the metaphorical breast-stabbing (the ultimate in breast-beating?) that she must inflict upon herself. The breast upon which her lover once lay, the breast that bears the "winding scar"--the symbol both of Margaret's sexuality and despair--becomes the figurative receiver of a paradoxical "stabbing": "I will stab my honour under his eye; / Though I bleed to death, I shall let out the lie" (III, 25, 27). The paradox lies within the idea of the stabbing itself. Margaret, by telling the

truth, will mar her honor in her bridegroom's sight, but that very wounding, the truth-telling, will "let out the lie" and restore Margaret's honor in her own sight.

The red-white contrast that will assume importance in the refrain of the last section is, in the third section, part of the breast-stab-honor complex of images. Margaret's breast that has been striped with her own blood will now be dealt "a bloodier wound," a figurative wound that is, nevertheless, reinforced by the bleeding image of line 27. Margaret's words extend the red-white-breast imagery by contrasting her own breast--bloody, scored, and scarred--with those of the bridesmaids in their "white sleep": "O happy my bridesmaids! your breasts are clean: / You carry no mark of what has been!" (III, 33, 35). The literal and figurative meanings merge. The breasts of the bridesmaids "carry no mark"; they are not only unscarred, but also pure, white and clean.

These associations with the color white are carried into Section IV and are there linked with the breast-stab-false cluster of the poem. The first half of Section IV emphasizes, through both dialogue and narration, the bridegroom's perception of Margaret. To him, she is a spotless bouquet of adjectives--"white," "pure," "stainless" and nouns--"bride," "angel," "saint." Immediately after Margaret's confession, almost the exact midpoint of the stanza, the point of view not only shifts, but also becomes more complicated. In the early part of the section, the reader

sees Margaret through the bridegroom's eyes; now the reader is briefly brought into the verbal equivalent of a mirrored room. He sees Margaret's recognition of the groom's changed perception of Margaret herself. This shift in viewpoint and in complexity, an artistic change that echoes the double change within both the man and the woman, occurs immediately and economically: "She saw how her body grew freckled and foul" (IV, 45). Marking the groom's rapid movement from one false judgment to another equally false are images--freckled, foul, vile--directly opposed to white, stainless, and clean.

Part of the white-stainless association is the bride-angel-saint cluster.⁵⁶ Margaret herself, when she denies the angelic association, follows her denial with the statement that she has "a devil within to let out" (IV, 27). This avowal not only creates an angel-devil opposition; it also repeats the assertion (and decision) that Margaret had made in the preceding section. There, she had referred to the lie that must be "let out." This parallelism leads to a devil-lie equation; each part of the equation then joins the stab-honor pattern. The devil-lie can be released only through a self-stabbing; Margaret cannot allow herself to be a bride until she has "opened" her breast. She has opened her breast to her lover, and to her knife; now she will open it to the truth and to her betrothed.

Lies and light are part of the pattern even in the closing lines of the poem. The groom, at the bier of the

"white girl," addresses his dead bride: "O had you been false as the women who stray; / You would not be now with the Angels of Day!" (IV, 81, 83). Although Margaret's final association is with the "Angels of Day," with angels and light, the ambiguity characteristic of the poem is here, too, for the angelic company to which Margaret is assigned is an association she had earlier rejected. Adding to that ambiguity is the bridegroom's use of the word "false" with its multiple reverberations; its ordinary meaning links it to devil-lie; its sexual meaning joins it with untrue, unfaithful. These reverberations are thus contradictory: Margaret is not "false," but honest; she is, however, in another sense "false," one among "the women who stray."

The bridegroom's division of women into the pure and the impure is echoed in the concluding refrain; the refrain itself acts as an emotional "under-tide" coursing through the poem.⁵⁷ The four sections of "Margaret's Bridal-Eve" use three different refrains, repeating images from section to section and, in one case, repeating the entire refrain without variation:

- Section I: There is a rose that's ready;
There's a rose that's ready for
clipping.
- Section II: There is a rose in the garden;
And the bird sings over the roses.
- Section III: repetition of Section I
- Section IV: Red rose and white in the garden;
And the bird sings over the roses.

In the bare first section during which Margaret accepts her suitor's proposal, the refrain carries much of the emotional weight. Although the refrain actually interrupts the narrative--an interruption that is visually emphasized by the use of italics--the refrain images symbolically reinforce the story line. Margaret is the "rose that's ready" for marriage and for "clipping," or sexual experience.⁵⁸ Later, when this refrain is repeated, the word "clipping" will shift in its connotations and subtly foretell Margaret's death. Now, however, the effect of clipping a living rose is submerged in the metaphorical connotations of sexual initiation. But in II, an unembellished but informative section, we realize that the "rose" has already been clipped; the revelation of this "clipping," Margaret's secret, is quickly followed by the lover's death and Margaret's longing to follow him. Bogner sees the "rose in the garden" of the changed refrain as a reference to Margaret's readiness for marriage and the bird of this refrain as "the nightingale or any other bird suggestive of the sensual prospects that her new readiness implies."⁵⁹ Such interpretations, particularly that concerning the "rose in the garden," are probably correct, but with the introduction of both death and death-wish into the narrative, an odor of the grave seems to come with the bird singing over the roses. Here, the line accompanies sin and death; it will reappear with the confession and death of Section IV.⁶⁰

Between the story of her lover's death in II and her own death in IV, in Section III Margaret makes her fatal

decision to speak. In an atmosphere changed from that of the virtually imageless opening stanza, beneath a monologue filled with death images, the refrain of Section I is repeated. That refrain has not lost its earlier sexual connotations, but superimposed upon these now are the harsher implications of the words. For in this section that speaks of blood and scars, of burning to death and bleeding to death, the "clipping" of a flower leads to death. Within this changed context the reader is shocked into a vision of "clipping" more sinister than "deflowering": the shears are now in the hands of Atropos.

But in the narrative of confrontation and confession leading to that prefigured death, there are neither death images, nor images of blood or fire; instead, the emphasis in Section IV rests upon the whiteness of the bride, a vision of stainlessness that abruptly yields to one of vileness. Only after Margaret's purification through death does the "white girl" reappear. Yet color, while not part of the narrative, is part of the refrain. For the first time, color-terms are applied to the rose that has been a constant in the changing refrains: now "Red rose and white" mingle in the garden. The red-white contrast suggests the traditional opposition between sexuality and purity; their mingling may suggest the foolishness of any attempt to completely isolate one from the other.⁶¹ Over both "Red rose and white" is the singing bird of the Section II refrain; once again, it accompanies a tale of death.

Bogner believes this bird to be either woman's sensuality or, perhaps, "Margaret's spirit that will depart soon."⁶² Although an association with Margaret's spirit may be one inference, the implications of the refrain extend beyond her death.

Throughout the ballad the refrain has created within the reader an almost physical awareness of an "under-tide"; this undercurrent can emphasize, contradict, or foreshadow events and implications of the narrative. Thus, for example, the reiteration of the "rose that's ready" underlines the choosing of a groom for Margaret, while the exact repetition of the entire first refrain unit in Section III heightens the contrast between the two sections. This contrast, supported by the interplay between narrative and refrain imagery, creates an atmosphere of foreboding; as Margaret paces and her bridesmaids sleep, the sensual refrain of Section II becomes an omen of death. Yet, whatever the specific intent of each refrain, through repetition of words, images and metrical pattern, it produces a cumulative emotional effect, one that turns it into a potent instrument for creating, as well as echoing, thematic content.

Much of the thematic content of "Margaret's Bridal-Eve" is implicit in the material: the tragedy is that of men and women unable to see each other as persons, rather than as projections or possessions. The "games" and "masks" of "Modern Love" are here; Margaret, in rejecting the mask or

role of Spotless Virgin, refuses to play that game. In turn, her stance requires a man freed from the mask of the "conqueror"; the bridegroom, however, capable of worshipping but incapable of loving, can neither discard his mask nor accept Margaret's unmasking. Implicit until the final stanzas, the "message" is unambiguous in the bridegroom's lament: Margaret would be alive if she had played the game and remained silent. Instead of seeking to be the "Honest Lady"--without the corresponding "Enamoured Sage"--she could have accepted the imposed feminine role of "shuffling trickster" ("The Woods of Westermain," III, 122), a deceitful role that her mother had advised her to play. With that thought both Margaret's mother and the bridegroom, symbols of Margaret's internal conflict, finally agree.

At the end Margaret is dead, the groom and her mother grieve, but the roses, garden, and the singing bird continue as before. It is this wider theme--of time, of recurrence, and of all that survives individual loss and death--that is carried to a great extent by the refrain. The refrain unit itself becomes a phrase of recurring stability that counterpoints the seesaw motions of time and love; the final image of the bird "over the roses," seeing yet unseen, present yet uninvolved, assumes the significance of an "immortal bird."⁶³ It is with this image that the poem ends.

In "Margaret's Bridal-Eve" Meredith has written a good poem that misses excellence because of its awkward lines

and occasional tonal or stylistic lapses.⁶⁴ One such lapse occurs in the second and third stanzas of Section III:

"The frill of her nightgown below the left breast, / Had fall'n like a cloud of the moonlighted West; / But where the West-cloud breaks to a star; / Pale Margaret's breast showed a winding scar" (III, 5, 7, 9, 11). The first three of these lines do not fall into the file-rasping category but do exemplify problems frequent in Meredith's poor lines. They are unclear (frill=cloud?; the frill breaks to a star? where exactly is this scar?), and they represent a stylistic modulation. The choice of word and image is self-consciously romantic; the poem as a whole is not.

The greatest weakness of the poem, however, lies in its ending. The opportunity for a dramatic confrontation between the couple is, to a great extent, sidestepped with the substitution of the narrator's summary for Margaret's dialogue. Later, the final stanzas, in a tonal lapse into sentimentality, attempt to present a belatedly repentant bridegroom, a puritanical Lovelace, perhaps. Meredith wants the assurance that his reader will understand his message; such assurance requires the bridegroom's lament. Not only is the bridegroom's sudden conversion improbable--does Margaret's death restore the lost virginity that he had required?--but the explicitness of the message substitutes didacticism for ambiguity, and dilutes the effect of Margaret's death. Once again, as in several of Meredith's

poems ("The Shipwreck of Idomeneus" and "Archduchess Anne") and novels (Beauchamp's Career and The Amazing Marriage), the ending is more of a fadeout than a finale.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, "Margaret's Bridal-Eve" is a success. Not only has Meredith generally maintained a single tone and style; the sections of the poem are unified by image pattern, repetition, and that very specialized repetition, the refrain.⁶⁶ The diction is simple; the words are short, direct, and easily understood. There is little use of "poetic" language, and the words are almost invariably composed of one or two syllables. The complexity of the poem comes neither from difficult language nor confused thought, but from the manipulation of opposing images, the development of contradictory image-patterns and the underplayed use of irony. These contrasts and paradoxes, combined with the general avoidance of naked statement or didacticism, add the depth of ambiguity to the poem.

Of the five narrative poems in this volume, "Grandfather Bridgeman" is both the poorest and the least complex, while the major interest of "Phantasy" is the contradiction between message and emotional emphasis. In "Cassandra," the narrative based upon classical myth, contrasts of image and idea are used to create conflict-patterns ever-widening in scope: war between people; opposition of life and death; temporal contrasts; and the continuing struggle between man and his fate. All of these are finally merged into the recurring cycle of life, a circularity echoed in the

circularity of the poem. "Margaret's Bridal-Eve," the mediievally tinged narrative of the volume, is not as strong a poem as "Cassandra," but here, too, much of its strength lies in the manipulation of opposing images and the final placing of all opposition within a wider context. And the masterpiece of both volume and of Meredith's poetic career, "Modern Love," is so complicated in its shifts, contradictions, implications and masks, that no single undercurrent exists. Everything is qualified: "Modern Love" is itself an "under-tide."

NOTES AND REFERENCES

CHAPTER II

¹Introduction to Bartlett edition, xxxii.

²Phyllis Bartlett headnote to "Ode," I, 194; Bartlett specifically refers to lines 157-62. Joseph Warren Beach, in The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry (New York, 1956), introduces another frequently quoted passage (lines 179-189): "He [Meredith] is dealing essentially with the problem of personal death, and how we may reconcile the thought of death with a belief in nature's goodness. And he takes the position so common in his later poems that our only way of accepting the fact of personal death is to lose ourselves in the thought of nature's eternal life," pp. 472-473. Both passages are quoted in my text.

In Darwin Among the Poets (1932; rpt. New York, 1963), Lionel Stevenson remarks: "The fundamental law of Nature, to Meredith, was that of the constant alternation of life and death, the regeneration always inherent in decay. Nature is never regretful over the inevitable loss of all her lovely things, for she knows that they will recur. For the operation of this law, change is essential, and dissolution must be met gladly. The idea first appeared distinctly in Modern Love . . .," p. 213.

³Meredith seems to have tossed aside every poetic feeling in the search for rhyme words; in describing a "waiting-wench" as "lissome as a hound," his awareness of connotative effect seems numbed. My favorite, however, remains, "You'd sigh to see the jolly nose / Where Freedom's native liquor flows."

⁴John Lucas, "Meredith as Poet," p. 22.

⁵"Cassandra," "Margaret's Bridal-Eve" and "Phantasy" appear under the subheading "Poems and Ballads." Included among this group is the dramatic monologue "Shemselnihar"; see Dorothy M. Mermin, "Poetry as Fiction: Meredith's Modern Love," ELH 43 (1976), for comments on what Mermin (p. 102) calls the "most interesting single precursor of Modern Love," pp. 102-103.

⁶Lionel Stevenson, The Ordeal of George Meredith (New York, 1953), p. 106. Meredith's description of "Grandfather

Bridgeman" as an idyll occurs in his letter of November 19, 1861, to Mrs. Janet Ross, Cline, I, 116.

In a letter dated November 13, 1861, to Augustus Jessopp (Cline, I, 110), Meredith speaks of a deliberate attempt to shift his poetry from "flowers" to "flints": "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. Note the 'Old Chartist,' and the 'patriot Engineer,' that will also appear in Once a Week. They may not please you; but I think you will admit that they have a truth condensed in them. They are flints perhaps, and not flowers."

⁷Stevenson refers to "By the Rosanna" and "Phantasy" as Meredith's "two peculiar poems," Ordeal, p. 98.

⁸Meredith seems psychologically accurate in presenting his "phantasy." Thus, the narrator is swept easily from cathedral to forest; he sees familiar faces (Adrian; an opera dancer; the "village lily") in unfamiliar contexts; and he incorporates his physical sensations into the dream (The dream begins: "The bells led me off to a bridal"; the dream ends: "I felt the cold wave . . ." as Adrian upends the water-jug).

⁹Arlan Paul Dohrenburg in his dissertation "The Poetic Development of George Meredith from The Monthly Observer to 'Modern Love,'" (Northwestern, 1972) sees the narrator to be initially "under the spell of the exotic fancies stimulated by his excursions into the worlds of art . . ., of religion and magic . . ., and of legendary romance. . . ." (p. 140). I use his phrase "seductive power" in a relative sense, that is, in a substandard poem some of the dream sequence is comparatively strong. Dohrenburg sees a "terrifying" power in the poem that I do not see: "It [the dream] plunges, as nightmares often do, from one lurid, enticing, absurd, or terrifying apparition to another. Stocked with cryptically erotic images, it represents the dreamer's unrestrained indulgence in every sort of Romantic impulse and concludes with his engulfment in that unreality which must ensue from such indulgence:

The dreamy-eyed mistresses circled the sedge,
And called for a lover, a lover!

I sank, I rose through seas of eyes,
 In odorous swathes delicious:
 They fanned me with impetuous sighs,
 They bit me with kisses vicious.

(vs. 79-84)." Dohrenburg, p. 139.

I enjoyed these lines thoroughly, with the same appreciation that I brought to "Nephelidia," Swinburne's parody of his own work.

¹⁰Letter dated December 28, 1865, to Frederick A. Maxse, Cline, I, 322-323. Phyllis Bartlett quotes this passage as part of her discussion on Meredith's variety; she is speaking (as Meredith was) of his novels, "The Novels of George Meredith," British Victorian Literature, ed. Shiv K. Kumar (New York, 1969), p. 313. An indication of the sternness of Meredith's conscience in overcoming the cobwebs is the frequency with which critics apply the adjectives "healthy" and "sane" to Meredith's work. In the 1960's the Meredith scholar Phyllis Bartlett refers to him as a "tonic writer," "The Novels of George Meredith," p. 314. In 1975 Judith Wilt combines "healthy" and "sane" by referring to Meredith's "healthy sanity," p. 3.

¹¹Phyllis Bartlett, in her comments on the 1862 volume, says that "Twentieth-century critics have generally considered the title poem, Modern Love, Meredith's poetic masterpiece." After referring to nineteenth-century criticism of the poem, she explains the reason for Meredith's subsequent shift from poetry to novel writing in a single sentence: "The aggregate of the reviews . . . rescued Meredith from the misconception that his poems would earn him money," Phyllis Bartlett, Introduction, xxxii, xxxiii.

¹²Letter dated September 20, 1862, to Augustus Jessopp, Cline, I, 160. Phyllis Bartlett quotes Meredith's question and answer in her headnote to "Modern Love"; so does Dorothy M. Mermin, who, after suggesting exorcism and emotional release as possible impulses behind "Modern Love," makes an interesting point: "More significant, probably, for the genesis of Modern Love was the fact that the experience he had just lived through was precisely the sort he had liked to write about," p. 101.

¹³Lucas, "Meredith as Poet," p. 23.

¹⁴Stevenson, Ordeal, pp. 57-58. Several critics, including Stevenson, quote Meredith's step-daughter, Edith Nicolls, on the relationship between her mother and Meredith: "they sharpened their wits on each other."

¹⁵Stevenson, for example, after commenting on Meredith's technique of unfolding the story through indirection, adds that "For readers unacquainted with the real story underlying it, the action is not easy to decipher . . .," a judgment I find difficult to accept. In addition, Stevenson sees a much greater similarity between the "real events" and the fictional ones than I do: "To some extent the actual experiences were changed, such as the circumstances of the wife's death--partly to disguise the autobiographical origin, partly to achieve dramatic intensity. The only major episode, however, which seems to depart from the real events is the cold-blooded affair of the husband with another woman, after he becomes aware of his wife's infidelity. There is the possibility that this, too, was a confession of what actually happened, though no corroborating evidence happens to survive. But Meredith probably invented the episode to give symmetry to the situation and also to make it typical of the artificial social complexities he intended to impugn," Ordeal, pp. 104, 103-104. Despite this catalogue, the "only major episode" that coincides is the wife's infidelity. And Stevenson himself admits that "the psychological reactions of the characters [are] depicted more fully than the external occurrences." Ordeal, p. 104.

¹⁶Donald David Stone in Novelists in a Changing World (Cambridge, 1972) calls "Modern Love" the "first and finest of modern 'confessional' poems," p. 104.

¹⁷Friedman notes that ". . . the entire poem is pervaded by a thick and heavy atmosphere of sultry immobility, of frozen will and suspended desire." After speaking of the wife's suicide at the end of the poem, he comments that it has been "foreshadowed from the very beginning . . . by the pervasive death imagery which clouds the entire poem." Any discussion of Meredith's imagery in "Modern Love" must begin with Friedman's article; in it, he groups the images into five basic clusters: husband and wife's sentimentalism: time-torpor-game-sun-wing; husband's disillusionment: murder-knife-wound-blood; husband's sensualism: snare-bat-cage-pit-beast; husband's view of wife: snake-venom-poison; atmosphere of poem: midnight-tomb-ghost-skeleton-grave-shadow; husband's final wisdom: music-wave-horse-mark-on-shore; pp. 14, 23, 13. Another article on the imagery in "Modern Love" appeared a year after Friedman's; the editors of The Victorian Newsletter noted that Elizabeth Cox Wright's article, "The Significance of the Image Patterns in Meredith's Modern Love," (Newsletter, No. 13, Spring, 1958), had been prepared before Friedman's article was published in the spring of 1957. In her brief article Wright makes several points, some of which I had thought to be my own. She refers to the importance of stanza i--the "poem in embryo"--and links its death imagery with the "latent water images"

of weeping, rain and river, connecting all of these with the Lethe of stanza xlix. She mentions the place of time in the poem (most critics do; it is imbedded in the work) and reads stanza i as a glance at time in all of its phases: the "regretted" past, the present ("balanced between sobs and silence"), and the future (a hoped-for "severance of bonds"). What makes her article most interesting to me is its emphasis upon contrasts: wakefulness, sleep; movement, stillness; darkness, light; cold, warmth; death, life. She sees that the "buried day represents the past and present, the darkness and the light, the death and life," pp. 4, 8.

¹⁸Michael Lund also quotes most of this stanza parenthesizing the lines with these comments: "Then he [the husband] hopes that another woman (the "My Lady" of the poem) will provide the spiritual qualities needed to transform his "empty world"; and "The 'mortal' quality of this new relationship contrasts sharply with his memory of a 'consecrated' union, something 'more than earth.' The 'ancient wealth' and 'spiritual splendour' of Love are no longer adequate resources to deal with the reality of death ('the fact I loathed'), imaged here in a human skull. The 'great flood' of earlier Love can no longer expand beyond natural limits to fill the space of the speaker's world. More than social isolation threatens the protagonist here, as such images suggest a more cosmic alienation." "Space and Spiritual Crisis in Meredith's *Modern Love*," VP, 16 (Winter, 1978), p. 379. Lund's article is helpful in its analysis of spatial images in "Modern Love," but I think his emphasis on "spiritual crisis" is misplaced. The final sentence of his article--"The protagonist's persistent consciousness of separation in his world suggests that the poem contains also the essential pattern of Victorian spiritual crisis--the discovery of infinite space in the wake of the disappearance of God" (p. 382)--not only distorts the poet's emphasis, but also neglects the opposite of space, physical closeness used to emphasize psychological distance, and the resulting claustrophobia.

¹⁹Stevenson, *Ordeal*, p. 105.

²⁰Friedman, p. 10; Lucas, "Meredith as Poet," p. 26.

²¹Friedman remarks that "The touchstone for the recognition of a sentimentalist is his attitude toward Time, and the final section of the series offers as an analysis of the couple's plight the fact that 'they fed not on the advancing hours: / Their hearts held cravings for the buried day.' The *Egoist* is impatient with the wheeling of the Earth's great cycles, and insists upon an ideal permanence over and above natural change," pp. 13-14.

²²The lines "Love, that had robbed us of immortal things, / This little moment mercifully gave" are from the familiar stanza xlvii, beginning: "We saw the swallows gathering in the sky . . ." (Swinburne's "noble sonnet"). Lund quotes the entire stanza, and then comments: "Overcome in this instant is the separation of past, present, and future which has plagued the speaker throughout the poem, as the couple need look neither 'back' nor 'forward' for answers." After making a valuable point about the separation of time in "Modern Love," he misunderstands his own thought and sees the couple's living in the moment--looking neither back nor forward--as an overcoming of the separation. There is no time flow when the present moment is cut off from both past and future. Lund predictably overextends the meaning of the stanza: "These Victorians still live in a time of transition, unable to achieve a permanent vision of a divine force which pervades the space surrounding each individual," p. 381.

²³Dohrenburg, pp. 140, 113.

²⁴Walter F. Wright, Art and Substance in George Meredith (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1953), p. 34; see Wright's discussion of the routing of illusion in The Shaving . . . , pp. 32-42.

²⁵Norman Kelvin sees that the "central situation in Modern Love is conflict: with oneself and with one's mate," p. 27. In addition, Friedman bases much of his discussion on the husband's "progression through his early sentimentalism, to his subsequent cynicism and half-hearted sensualism, and on to a balanced wisdom which reveals to him his own egoism as a cause of the failure of his marriage," p. 13.

²⁶Lucas, "Meredith as Poet," p. 25.

²⁷Dorothy M. Mermin deals with the novelistic quality of "Modern Love" (Lucas had commented that "Meredith deliberately challenges comparison with the novel," p. 28); with the theme of the "fatal woman," (certainly the serpent imagery is there, but subordinated to the mixture that is passion--and life); and the theory that "the sentimentality of husband and wife is in their belief that love should not be subject to time and circumstance," p. 116 (Friedman had said essentially the same thing twenty years earlier). What I find much more important in Mermin's article than these theories are her discussion of the husband's roles and her re-emphasis of the mingled natures of husband and wife.

First, Mermin sees the literary and artistic roles

that the husband casts for both himself and his wife; for example, "he sees his wife as the Pre-Raphaelite fatal woman" resembling "Rossetti's Lilith," p. 106. While he is assigning his wife these typecast parts, he has been experimenting with a variety of roles: "Epicurean, cynic, Byronic sinner, Othello, aspiring sinner," p. 108.

Second, although I think Mermin's emphasis on the "fatal woman" is misplaced, she herself dispels much of that emphasis by stressing the importance of the couple's "mixed natures"; she quotes several sets of heavily quoted lines, including the important "'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'" and the famous "Their sense is with their senses all mixed in, / Destroyed by subtleties these women are!" (xxxiii, xlvi). Referring to the latter quotation, Mermin comments, "Sense and senses may be wrongly mixed, subtlety may lead to sin or error, but an unmixed nature is inhuman, impossible," p. 106.

²⁸Lucas quotes the entire sonnet and comments that the closing lines "neatly place the impressive absurdity of that invitation to 'Behold me,'" "Poet," p. 25. The line to which he refers follows the lines that I have quoted: "Behold me striking the world's coward stroke!"

In a discussion of Meredith's novel The Egoist Donald David Stone calls attention to Meredith's deliberate use of rhetoric and its liability to misinterpretation: "The inspired use of a character's own projected inner rhetoric to make a thematic point is one of Meredith's innovations in the novel. Critics who have dismissed his rhetorical style as overinflated seldom notice that it is inflated, very often, only at certain moments for certain precise, antirhetorical reasons," p. 127n.

²⁹Wright, p. 164.

³⁰Lucas, "Poet," p. 32. His question and answer are both brief and important enough to quote:

I am not sure that the wife's suicide is the best way of ending "Modern Love." For one thing it is misleadingly liable to hint at a progressiveness of her relationship with the husband. I also think it perhaps over-readily falls into the mode of reversal and unpredictability which Meredith handles with so much human awareness elsewhere in the poem. The suicide comes perilously near to lending itself to the narrator's tone: "Thus piteously Love closed what he begat." On the other hand, I recognize that "Modern Love" can only really end by being cut short, for once Meredith has created this incessantly shifting dialectic of the relationship he needs the

intervention of the arbitrary to halt the poem. And I suppose the suicide makes a further point: that such a relationship cannot be resolved; it can only stop." p. 32.

³¹According to Mermin, "the story has two successive and contradictory endings: the husband's mistaken interpretation of his wife's departure (48) and the narrator's account of her return and suicide (49)." Mermin believes that most critics apply the husband's explanation for the wife's flight--she wants to free her husband for his mistress--to her suicide. However, Mermin argues, the "real motive" is revealed by the narrator: "she is afraid to see once more that he does not love her, and afraid to show her heart to him," p. 115. But there are no two endings, only two events, one commented on by the husband, and one by the narrator. Trevelyan, who had access to Meredith's comments, says essentially the same thing:

"XLVIII. After a real explanation, from which he vainly hoped that a settled relationship would emerge, his wife flies, with the quixotic desire to leave him free to return to his "Lady." He knows that such is her motive, but fears the world will attribute to her a worse one.

XLIX. In the last two sonnets of the sequence the poet speaks, and "he" once more means the husband. He follows his wife and finds her by the sea. She thinks his love for her has returned, and allows herself to dream that their old mutual relations are restored. But she knows her own heart well enough to be aware that this is a dream, and to forestall the awakening she commits suicide--the "strength" of the "desperate weak." (Meredith told the writer of these notes that he meant that she killed herself.)" Notes, p. 584.

³²Friedman, p. 23.

³³And, on an even wider scale, Meredith has elsewhere shown his belief in the ultimate unity of the opposites life and death; see, for example, "A Ballad of Past Meridian." We can pursue the idea too far, until we are caught in the middle of a Chinese puzzle similar to one of Harriet Vane's ivory chessmen. Harriet, in Dorothy L. Sayers' Gaudy Night, is mentally plotting out the psychological makeup of one of her fictional characters: "Wilfrid was becoming like one of those coveted ivory chessmen. You probed into his interior and discovered an intricate and delicate carved sphere of sensibilities, and, as you turned it in your fingers, you found another inside that, and within that, another again," (1936; rpt. New York, 1968), p. 314. A fictional character musing about her fictional character is another ivory chessman, as are the husband--the narrator--the poet in "Modern Love."

³⁴A recent statement of the general view is Mermin's: "The narrator has been a problem for critics: why is the transition from third person to first so blurry? We can partly explain it as a way of distancing autobiography; but the narrator's reappearance at the end suggests a more intrinsic function, and one that clearly marks the essentially novelistic quality of Modern Love: to tell us what the husband cannot and give us a wider vision than the husband's own. . . . So the narrator tells us when and how husband and wife understand or misunderstand themselves and each other, and pronounces final, generalized, and scrupulously equal judgment on them both," pp. 115, 116. One of the exceptions: Lucas' comment that "there is no point in looking for a moral pattern in 'Modern Love.'" Only the narrator comes near to finding one, and it is clear that his Manoa-like, pious inanities are not meant to provide the definitive judgment on what is a beautifully sane study of the flow and recoil in a personal relationship," "Poet," p. 23. For comments regarding a merging of the speakers, see Willie D. Reader, "The Autobiographical Author as Fictional Character: Point of View in Meredith's Modern Love," VP 10 (1972), pp. 131-142; and a relevant note in Arthur L. Simpson, "Meredith's Pessimistic Humanism: A New Reading of Modern Love," Modern Philology 67, No. 4 (May, 1970), p. 350n.

³⁵Nevertheless, statements must be made; we are here dealing with material similar to the undergraduate joke, "All generalizations are false (including this one)." Meredith's most famous lines explain the uselessness of the search for "a dusty answer"; there is no certainty anywhere because "The wrong is mixed": "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." (xliii).

³⁶Friedman, in noting the shadow imagery in "Modern Love," sees that it "serves as an associational bridge to yet another aspect of the prefiguration of death." He also mentions Meredith's use, throughout his poetry, of "dusk and dawn, the two twilights" as "central symbols . . . for death and rebirth," pp. 23, 20.

³⁷Trevelyan explains st. xxxviii: "He [the husband] asks 'my Lady' to give him an ideal love, the only alternative to mere carnal appetite--'vileness.' For, as to his wife, he can no longer even pity her, who slew the love that was between him and her, and who, now that it is dead, sentimentally prizes it. Therefore he insists on being allowed to love 'my Lady,' or he will degenerate into a mere sensualist." Trevelyan's Notes, p. 583.

³⁸In his article "The Iliad, George Meredith's 'Cassandra,' and D. G. Rossetti's 'Cassandra' Drawing," Carl A. Peterson focuses on Rossetti's inspiration for his "Cassandra" drawing, but in doing so he comments on Meredith's poem. He remarks that Rossetti's idea of portraying Cassandra "prophesying from the battlements" came originally from st. iii. of Meredith's "Cassandra" and that Rossetti was inspired more by the "first half of the poem--in which an inner psychological action is described--rather than by the second half, in which Meredith describes two successive external dramatic actions: first, the departure of Agamemnon with his 'purple Queen' into the palace (stanzas X through XIII); second, Cassandra calling thrice upon Apollo and shrieking 'the deed that shames the sky' (stanzas XIV through XVIII)." Peterson finds it interesting that Rossetti should choose "to depict a scene only indirectly alluded to in a lyrical refrain, rather than one involved in the dramatic action and described in detail. . . .," Texas Studies in Lit and Lang 7 (1966), pp. 334, 335.

³⁹The last line of each stanza is consistently important--and important just as frequently for contrast or contradiction to the four preceding lines as for continuation of thought. In st. vi, for example, the first four lines describe the clash of battle; the last line, "they glimmer ocean-washed," describes the brothers who "glimmer as ghosts that have passed the stream of ocean to Hades," Trevelyan's Notes, p. 584.

⁴⁰Many of these contrasts are integral to the story Meredith has chosen, a story that includes war, victory, defeat, death, prophecy, and vengeance, as well as moral ambiguities; Moses Hadas refers to these ambiguities in his introductory comments to Aeschylus' Agamemnon when he remarks that "The tragedy of Agamemnon involves war and politics as well as a domestic triangle, and in none of its aspects is an unqualified right opposed to an unqualified wrong. It was wrong for Trojan Paris to abduct Helen, and right for the crime to be punished; but Helen was an evil woman, and Argives murmured at the slaughter of their young men in a war for an evil woman's sake. The chorus, consistently loyal to Agamemnon, elaborate on the horror of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, the waywardness of Helen, and the cost of the war in Argive blood. . . . Nor is the behavior of Clytemnestra . . . wholly without justification. Agamemnon had earned her hatred, she says, when he wantonly sacrificed her first-born; he had been unfaithful to her in his stay at Troy, and had even brought Cassandra home with him as a concubine; and finally, she was not herself the murderer but only the instrument of fate. . . . The rich and subtle poetry of Agamemnon is a perfect medium for its

problems and insights. Recurrent images and verbal patterns create implicit connections in themes separate in time and place and provide psychological background for the action in hand." Greek Drama, pp. 14-15, 15. Although Aeschylus' play contains such contrast imagery as that of fire-light-dark, the main images are those of blood and entrapment (meshes, snares, web)--both united in the idea of Fate, an inescapable, and often bloody, doom that broods over the house of Atreus.

⁴¹Yet they do engage in struggle: in st. xiii the Fates (controllers of men's lives) and the Furies (relentless pursuers of the unjust) "Tear and mix above the roof"; in xiv Cassandra wrestles with the gods; and in xv she struggles with the sun-god. Although the background of the myth includes the gods' meddling in the lives of Atreus' descendants and in the Trojan War, the poet has minimized their role in man's existence. Fate alone remains as a powerful determining force in human life.

⁴²Not only does this image hint that the joy of the Argives will turn to grief, but the word "front" carries the multiple meanings of "precede" and "confront" plus an association with "appearance" or "surface" ("façade").

⁴³Explanatory Notes, PB, II, 1140.

⁴⁴Fire and water images are important, not only in this poem, but in much of Meredith's work, including his novels. (Barbara Hardy has studied the extensive use of fire and water imagery in Harry Richmond; see "The Structure of Imagery: George Meredith's Harry Richmond" in The Appropriate Form (Evanston, Illinois, 1971). In this poem with its background of the Trojan war, fire imagery is particularly appropriate.

⁴⁵Westminster Review (September, 1887), rpt. CH, p. 299.

⁴⁶Bogner, p. 118.

⁴⁷Briefly, there are three characteristics of a typical ballad: (1) "Ballads focus on a single crucial episode or situation." The ballad begins near the catastrophe; the build-up toward that moment is subordinated, as are details, such as setting. (2) "Ballads are dramatic." The emphasis is upon action and speech; there is little explanation, even identification of speakers. Dialogue is important in ballads. (3) "Ballads are impersonal." The narrator is objective; comments, even those in the first person, are general, rather than personal. Quotations are from the "Ballad" entry by A.B.F. in the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. by Alex Preminger (Princeton, 1965),

p. 62. In this emphasis upon a single event, Gerould compares the ballad with the short story: Gordon Hall Gerould, The Ballad of Tradition (Oxford, 1932), p. 86. Meredith's ballads are, of course, literary imitations of the folk ballads. Albert B. Friedman (the A.B.F. of the Princeton Encyclopedia) discusses both the popular ballad and its influence on the work of later poets in The Ballad Revival (Chicago, 1961).

⁴⁸Friedman, The Ballad Revival, p. 5. Meredith uses some of these "ballad devices" in "Modern Love"; in its progressive movement within a plotted action, however, "Margaret's Bridal-Eve" differs greatly from the psychologically probing longer poem. The subject of "Modern Love" is not the narrative sequence, but the constantly shifting internal responses of the characters, particularly of the husband.

⁴⁹Each line of the narrative alternates with a refrain line; however, since the narrative is understandable without the refrain, I am considering the story line separately and omitting ellipses for the deleted refrains.

⁵⁰In the conflict between Margaret and her mother, the poet gives "equal time" to the two.

⁵¹Since the bridegroom's false vision of Margaret will precipitate the tragic ending, his part has expanded from the brief concluding line of Section I. He, however, remains nameless; his importance is more function than character.

Just as no reason is given for the lover's death, so too, none is given for Margaret's. Bogner states that "she dies of grief (or shame or remorse) before him," p. 118. But even as Bogner suggests a cause of Margaret's death, his addition of alternatives underlines the poet's lack of explanation.

⁵²The interchangeability of all those "handsome young men" is also implied.

⁵³This line exemplifies the power of a terse, objective statement to communicate an internal reaction.

The owl has long been an omen of disaster, and has been associated both with disgrace and death. Probably because of the belief in its power to foretell future events, the owl also became a symbol of wisdom, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 17, 6. Perhaps there is more than one reason that only Margaret hears "the hooting owl."

⁵⁴Margaret's death comes with the line "She fell in a lump on the still dead floor" (IV, 63), a repetition with

variation of the line from Margaret's earlier monologue, "I fell in a lump on the stiff dead floor" (II, 31). In both cases--her swoon after her lover's death and her death after the bridegroom's denunciation--the death images are transferred from Margaret to the floor. The line, and its variation, is poor; in addition, the repetition interferes with understanding since the reader, in making the expected connection between the two scenes, does not realize that Margaret is dead. Confusion, rather than contrast, is the result.

⁵⁵Lucas does not mention "Margaret's Bridal-Eve," but he does refer to, and comment briefly upon, what he labels "a remarkable group of poems" in the 1887 volume, Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life. In speaking of these poems, and Meredith's greater work, "Modern Love," Lucas remarks that Meredith's "best work . . . ranges itself round a single subject, the incommunicabilities, deceptions and violent treacheries of love," "Poet," pp. 20-21.

⁵⁶Intellectual grouping is reinforced by aural linking: stainless, saint, taint; the poet gains increased emphasis by placing "bride and saint" in a rhyming position with "no earthly taint" (IV, 29, 31).

⁵⁷Bogner comments that Margaret's story "turns on her lack of virginity, but the sexual side of the poem is really underscored by the folk-song-type refrain which links the story lines of each stanza," p. 118. I believe that the refrain underscores, but does not link, the story line. Certainly the repetition of a refrain contributes to unity within a stanza, and image repetition in a different refrain contributes to unity between stanzas. However, neither of these "links the story lines" (my emphasis).

⁵⁸"The 'rose that's ready' hardly requires explanation as suggestive of the ripe female; it is the 'clipping,' however, that adds fillip to the symbol of her situation: she is ready to be taken or deflowered or married (however one wishes to express it), and also, more evident as the story proceeds, she is ready for death," Bogner, p. 119.

⁵⁹Bogner, p. 119. Much of what Bogner says is perceptive, but he is limited both by the theme of his article and by the self-imposed necessity of discussing "Margaret's Bridal-Eve" within two paragraphs. These two features encourage a tendency to give flat interpretations, a tendency that runs counter both to Bogner's own recognition of alternatives and to the thesis of his argument. For in speaking of Meredith's sexual imagery, Bogner emphasizes Meredith's enjoyment of word play and sexual punning, his capacity to explore the suggestive possibilities of words

and images. Such an understanding of Meredith's methods leads to an acceptance of multiple inferences, rather than to the selection and cancellation of definite meanings.

⁶⁰It may be "reaching" to suggest a comparison between the introduction of the garden as setting for both rose and bird and that first Garden with man, woman, and their complications.

⁶¹One of Meredith's doctrines is balance; thus, both unthinking sensuality and bloodless asceticism are unbalanced extremes. In the last section of his long poem, "A Reading of Life," he warns against accepting the "chains" of either the "soft Persuader" (Venus) or the "icy Huntress," (Diana), "The Test of Manhood," 149, 150. The bridegroom's error lies in his imposition of the "icy" role on his bride.

⁶²Bogner, p. 119.

⁶³Beach comments on Meredith's "The Thrush in February" (1888 volume): "Like Keats's nightingale, Meredith's thrush is an immortal bird, not individually but by virtue of its deathless song," p. 483. Beach then quotes several stanzas from the poem; I will quote two relevant lines: "Full lasting is the song, though he, / The singer, passes . . ." (65-66). A similar thought exists in "Margaret's Bridal-Eve"; however, in the ballad refrain the contrast is not between the "song" and the "singer," but between the "roses" (Margaret, and by extension, human beings generally) and the "bird."

⁶⁴The poem contains several poor or clumsy lines, but only one funny one: "Her eyes between his, she told him all," IV, 43.

⁶⁵I cannot even suggest that the poem would be improved by lopping off the two concluding stanzas. We would still be left with an anticlimactic ending, the mother's words, "You would not have died and been reviled" (IV, 75). Meredith was evidently more interested in the "child-reviled" rhyme than in the effect of the line as a whole. The "died-reviled" sequence violates not only chronological sequence, but also climactic order.

⁶⁶The poem suggests a vaguely medieval atmosphere, one enhanced by the choice of such words as "hither," "bade," "ere," "tress," and "bier." The reader may be influenced, too, by associations with the traditional ballad.

CHAPTER III

"[The Day of the Daughter of Hades]" . . . has the more serious fault of being a versified treatment of a legend provided by the Greek mythology. . . . In the time in which we live, classical personages are too remote from the imaginative sphere of all but a score or two Greek scholars to be helps to illusion. The nineteenth-century poetical reader knows nothing of Grecian Sicily.

--Mark Pattison in Academy (1883)

There is nothing half-hearted or dispirited in Mr. Meredith's poems. They do not apologize in any way for their existence. They speak out because they have something to say, because the poet is quite sure of his object. The way in which the mythologies are used is an example of the unhesitating spirit of the poems. 'Phoebus with Admetus,' 'Melampus,' and 'The Day of the Daughter of Hades,' are poems taken from Greek legends. None of them show any misgiving about the expediency of repeating old stories. They are not repetitions of old stories, they are not antiquarian poems about Greek gods and heroes--they are poems about the earth and its life.

--W. P. Ker, Contemporary Review (1883)

When we read through the mass of poems he wrote after Modern Love, we get the impression of a man from whom the blood has all run out.

--C. Day Lewis, Notable Images of Virtue

Despite the title of Meredith's 1883 volume, Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth, the poems of this volume are not paeans to earth and its joys. Neither the narrative nor the lyrical impulse predominates here; instead, most of the poems teach, warn, counsel and console. Even the sonnets--there are twenty-five in the volume--do not escape this didacticism, as many of their titles indicate: "Sense and Spirit," "Earth's Secret," "Internal Harmony," "The Discipline of Wisdom," "The State of Age," "Progress," "The World's Advance."

In "Sense and Spirit" the poet cautions against the "trammels" of the senses and urges the acceptance of Earth as a vital spirit; in lines filled with battle imagery, he praises Earth who, through her gifts, has armed us for "endless war."¹ The "battle-field" of "Sense and Spirit" yields to the "lists" and the "race" of "Internal Harmony." Life becomes the scaling of the "rocky steps between the mount and vale"; through that slow ascent the climber keeps his "instrument in tune," thus forcibly merging two favorite Meredith images, struggle and music.

Wisdom comes only through this constant struggle ("The Discipline of Wisdom"); and age itself, struggle over, has but one clear command: "Light the young" ("The State of Age").² That command expresses a theme important to

Meredith: the submergence of the individual in the flow of generations. Both "Progress" and "The World's Advance" speak of the same thing--the ceaseless forward movement of the world.

Even Meredith's sonnets on poets do not escape his philosophical preaching of his doctrine of Earth; an inference of the two sonnets "The Spirit of Shakespeare," for example, is that Shakespeare's genius sprang from his knowledge of Mother Earth.³ In "A Later Alexandrian," a poem that, according to Phyllis Bartlett, describes Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Meredith faintly praises the poet who "sang not Nature's own / Divinest, but his lyric had a tone, / As 'twere a forest-echo of her voice." And in "An Orson of the Muse" Meredith, after commenting that this poet, identified by Trevelyan as Whitman, "to Nature only will he bend the knee," adds that the Muse will listen to him "when he blows of Earth, and Man, and Fate."

A trio of bitter sonnets, "The Point of Taste" and the two sonnets "Camelus Saltat," reveal Meredith's sensitivity to criticism and anger at his critics; in addition, they reveal just how bad his verse can become.⁴ "The Point of Taste" contains the memorable line, "You to reviewers are as ball to bat," but in "Camelus Saltat," Meredith, speaking of a critic-turned-author, goes utterly mad: "O spectacle of Peter, shrewdly pecked, / Piper, by his own pepper from his pouch! / What of the sneer, the

jeer, the voice austere, / You dealt?--the voice austere,
the jeer, the sneer."

It is a dismal collection with only the opening and closing sonnets, "Lucifer in Starlight" and "Time and Sentiment," of any real interest. "Lucifer in Starlight" is one of the few well-known Meredith poems; in the hyperbolic comment toward which all Meredith criticism tends, Stevenson refers to it as "one of the great English sonnets of all time."⁵ While the poem falls short of that judgment, nevertheless the lines describing Lucifer as he hurtles over the earth, first over Africa, then over the Arctic, convey his size, speed and power: "And now upon his western wing he leaned, / Now his huge bulk o'er Afric's sands careened, / Now the black planet shadowed Arctic snows." However, Lucas remarks, after an opening in which "the verse is surprisingly terse and direct," the poem "quite simply fades out":

He reached a middle height, and at the stars,
Which are the brain of heaven, he looked, and sank.
Around the ancient track marched, rank on rank,
The army of unalterable law.

Lucas attributes not simply the fadeout, but the partial failure of the poem, to its lack of "a genuine subject."⁶ Perhaps, the fault, however, lies more with a recurring problem of Meredith's, that of building up the reader for something that does not occur.⁷ As with Lucifer, not an invented but a pre-existing character--with a Miltonic overlay--the sense of anticlimax is strengthened with a

rebellious Lucifer who, risen from the depths of hell, reaches the "middle height"--and then simply looks and sinks. The poem, however, remains a good one.

Another good poem--in a single sentence--is the final sonnet, "Time and Sentiment"; its theme is the passage of time, of youth, and, by inference, of love. The first-person narrator recounts a brief incident: he sees a couple in a wood; "one bends to take a flower." This simple action sets off a contemplation of an imagined future with its inevitable changes and a musing on all that "the teeth of Time devour." The flower then, in its own fading and in its commemoration both of its own past "joy" and "bloom" and those of the couple, will become emblematic of the fading and death of all living things. Thus, the couple's "happy hour" is neither kept nor preserved, but "embalmed"; like the plucked flower, its eventual death is inherent in its bloom. Images of paleness, even of bloodlessness, accompany the description of that "pallid" day in the future when "Haply together, or in solitude," they will "lift the hueless flower and show that dead / Even such, and by this token, is their youth."⁸

The melancholy produced by an awareness of time, aging, and the eventual loss of "the joy, the bloom, and the illusive power"--more pervasive, if less sharp, than personal grief--runs strong within Meredith, a current given little critical emphasis because of the poet's

reiterated insistence on the cyclical processes of birth and renewal. His "bracing" doctrines, however, may have been deliberately constructed as a counterpoise to this melancholy; only a shift in perceiving the wheel of Nature's cycle marks the changed emphasis upon death--or upon the following rebirth.

That movement toward the "Joy of Earth" occurs in many of the twelve long poems of the volume.⁹ The emphasis here is on the relationship between Mother Earth and all that lives and rests upon her; a cautionary note, however, warns of the consequences of disregarding that natural harmony. In "The Lark Ascending," a nature lyric, the lark sings "For all to hear and all to know / That he is joy . . ." (31-32); as he instills his hearers with his joyful love of earth, he unites them all in his song. The lark is man and meadow, field and town, the vitality of children, of sowers, and the elemental "wedding song of sun and rains." And in this unity of Earth the hearer participates as long as he, forgetful of self, should "crave nothing but the song."

"Earth and Man," a long philosophical poem, "contains the fullest expression of Meredith's doctrines of Earth our Mother and her relation to us."¹⁰ The lark is again the image of light and joy; here, however, that joy may be clasped only "amid the glooms" of life. The concluding stanza of "The Lark Ascending" mentions those who, although

"they sing not," love Earth and carry the scars of life's battles. In "Earth and Man" the emphasis shifts to that life-long battle into which Earth catapults us all. For from birth man must fight against his own egoism and fears, and his fear-induced temptation to "escape from and deny his Mother Earth (Nature)."¹¹ But if he will use his Earth-granted gifts, tempering the inward-seeing "devil of Self" (xxxv), he can then join with Mother Earth in work "that lights the shapeless and the dun, / Their common foes" (xxiv).¹² With his work completed and his ordeal over ("When fire has passed him vapour to the sun, / And sun relumed" (xxxvii), he can hear Earth's call: "'Live in thy offspring as I live in mine'" (xxxviii). After this clear statement of Earth's consolation for individual loss of strength and eventual death, the final stanza summarizes the interdependence of "Earth and Man" and the unending cycle of all living things:

Meanwhile on him, her chief
Expression, her great word of life, looks she;
Twi-minded of him, as the waxing tree,
Or dated leaf.

Most of the poem is versified philosophy, with sternly utilitarian imagery serving the thought. One stanza, however, breaks from the philosophically imposed bonds and poetically describes man, frightened by his awareness, not of the "waxing tree," but of the "dated leaf":

Behold his wormy home!
And he the wind-whipped anywhither wave
Crazily tumbled on a shingle-grave
To waste in foam.

(xix)

Another poem concerned with the interdependent relationship between earth and man is "The Woods of Westermain," a poem that restates Meredith's theory that this "fear is the inevitable outcome of egoism and that only the person who has mastered selfish desires can enjoy the rapture of communing with Nature."¹³ Here, egoism is imaged as "the scaly Dragon-fowl"; Meredith uncharacteristically stays with this image, extending the analogy to include the dragon's taming.¹⁴ Taming, rather than destruction, is effected through "Change, the strongest son of Life" (IV, 75); this transformation is imaged as the sloughing off of dead skin.

There is much that is familiar in the poem besides the dragon image; "The Woods of Westermain," since it "contains so many of the important aspects of Meredith's conception of nature," is frequently quoted in discussions of Meredith's "philosophy."¹⁵ Evolutionary theory, egoism as primitivism, the Meredithian triad, the relationship between men and women--all are here; but underlying all is the assumption of a basic kinship between earth and man.

"Love in the Valley" is a celebration of that kinship; gone are the theorizing and moralizing of much of Meredith's nature poetry.¹⁶ Instead, the poem expresses the joyful vitality of both girl and earth. "Indeed," Trevelyan comments, "it is not easy to say whether it should be counted as a love-poem or as a poem of nature; its force derives

from the intimate union of the two themes . . ."¹⁷ This theme of kinship between earth and man, repeated in so many of these poems, recurs in two poems with a narrative element, "Phoebus with Admetus" and "Melampus." "Phoebus with Admetus" is not a narrative but a nature poem; it uses the myth of the god Phoebus' servitude to the mortal Admetus both as thematic underlining and as a frame within which the poet describes the natural and human activities of the year's cycle.¹⁸ Kinship among god, man and nature is more than mere co-existence; Phoebus the sun-god and his sister the moon goddess participate in nature's cycle.

Such kinship is again the theme of "Melampus," a poem that contains a narrative, one submerged, however, in the lesson that the story exemplifies. The legend of Melampus, granted "the power of understanding the language of birds . . .", is used to illustrate the proper relation of the highest human life to the life of animals and insects, and of nature in general."¹⁹ Melampus sees the links--an important word and thought in Meredith's poetry--between all of life, and the poet, in his emphasis upon these likenesses, becomes vague when he speaks of contraries:

So passed he luminous-eyed for earth and the fates
 We arm to bruise or caress us: his ears were charged
 With tones of love in a whirl of voluble hates,
 With music wrought of distraction his heart enlarged.
 Celestial-shining, though mortal, singer, though mute,
 He drew the Master of harmonies, voiced or stilled,
 To seek him; heard at the silent medicine-root
 A song, beheld in fulfilment the unfulfilled.

(xi)

Song--and musical imagery--pull together the disparate "notes"; for Melampus, sage and artist, the world is one of order and harmony.²⁰

In "Martin's Puzzle," nature--with the exception of the "implacable sky"--has disappeared; harmony has become discord, and order, "chance-work." Gone is the sun-god who aided men in his tenure on earth; gone, too, is Melampus' insight into the kinship among god, man and nature. Instead, men--Molly's father and "a fool of a boy"--have the power to inflict suffering, while the gods remain indifferent. The title indicates the theme: Martin is puzzled by the age-old question of the place of suffering in an ordered world; his cry, "I can't understand!" applies both to the universal problem of suffering and to Molly's particular capacity for acceptance.

"Martin's Puzzle" is not a narrative poem, but a dramatic monologue; the facts of Molly's past life are briefly told, then used as a basis for analytical meditation. But in a volume that contains very little of the narrative impulse--and that little generally subordinated to Meredith's secularized version of the great chain of being--"Martin's Puzzle" stands out both in theme and in technique.²¹

The monologue of ten eight-line stanzas has a Browningesque conversational directness; the metrical pattern, basically anapestic tetrameter varied both by substitution (frequently iambic) and by secondary stresses, contributes to the conversational flow. When Martin interrupts this

world in which the answer he is seeking "seems nowhere."
 In such a world even "The sky's a blue dish!--an implacable
 sky!" There is no sense of kinship with that sky; it is
 indifferent, remote from human pain.²³

After the controlled intensity of stanza ix, the final
 stanza seems forced. Martin, after reaching the tentative
 answer that there is no answer, again interrupts--and
 reverses--himself; the last stanza begins with the accented
 plosive, "Stop":

Stop a moment: I seize an idea from the pit.
 They tell us that discord, though discord, alone,
 Can be harmony when the notes properly fit;
 Am I judging all things from a single false tone?
 Is the Universe one immense Organ, that rolls
 From devils to angels? I'm blind with the sight.
 It pours such a splendour on heaps of poor souls!
 I might try at kneeling with Molly to-night.

The "idea from the pit" is an evasion; all that has gone
 before cannot be erased by this stanza. It is Martin who
 is sounding the "false tone," and the "harmony" he longs
 for is illusory. Even the image of the universe as "one
 immense Organ" is both complicated and vague, whereas the
 images for Molly, who exemplifies harmony, are simple and
 clear: "song," "ring of a glass," "stout cord."²⁴

The poem is not quite so simple. Unified by the ques-
 tion-and-answer format and by the use of repetition and
 connection between stanzas, it is also generally unified in
 diction and tone. The diction is simple, the style conver-
 sational, with few inversions. Because of the nature of
 the monologue, however, those inversions that do occur are

intrusive: "Do bullets in battle the wicked select?" (vi). The tone, despite the figure involved in Martin's meditation is reasonably matter-of-fact. The entire poem could easily have been overwhelmed by sentimentality; Molly is, after all, the epitome of a Dickensian "lass" limping courageously through her pain-filled life. A weakness of the poem is that it does occasionally succumb to just that exaggerated sentimentality; unnecessary overloading can lead to parody:

She sings little hymns at the close of the day,
 Though she has but three fingers to lift to the Lord,
 And only one leg to kneel down with to pray.
 (v)

Another problem is the ending. The questions carry emotional force: the "resolution" does not. The ending may well have been a deliberate concession to the public that Meredith hoped to address, but part of the problem lies in the material itself.²⁵ Not only does the poem consist of the questioning, but the questions asked--What is the reason for individual suffering? Does it serve any purpose? Is the world one of order and purpose, or are we all victims of chance?--defy any attempts at hurried conclusions. The questions are real; the answer is sham. One answer, however, is both real and unexplained; Molly, who "holds a fixed "something," has reached a reconciliation that is, for Martin as well as for many of us, a "puzzle."

Of the five remaining long poems in the volume, two-- "The Three Singers to Young Blood" and "The Orchard and the Heath"--are poor. "The Three Singers" describes the "three

views of love"; "The Orchard and the Heath" contains a narrative element, but no plot; it contrasts the farmers' children among the plenty of the orchard with the gypsy children amid their tents on the heath. A third poem, "A Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt," is not, despite its title, a narrative poem; it is a debate between the "ladies" of the title and "a male champion of the old order. . . ." ²⁶ A "lively, odd, curiously effective poem," ²⁷ the "Ballad" is unified through alternating challenge and response, in which repeated images and phrases are tossed by the opponents like boomerangs. Thus, when the man dictates that a woman should be a "home-lamp" lighting a man's way, the women respond that it is difficult to "advance / Beside our lords" once they have been "to that lamp-post fixed" (xxvi). The women's tone is frequently ironic as they attempt to wean their complacent opponent from his vision of women as the protected "angel of the house." Realists themselves, they would like to awaken him from his dream of women: "But O how different from reality / Men's fiction is!" (xxxviii).

In the introductory stage of their verbal battle, the women comment that once "they know men they know the state of war" (iv). In addition to images of battle, they apply animal imagery to the relationship between the sexes: "we have escaped / But partly that old half-tamed wild beast's paw / Whereunder woman, the weak thing, was shaped" (xxviii). ²⁸ The women also apply the image of the serpent, often used by

Meredith as symbolic of woman as temptress, to woman as victim, "the charmed snake" (viii). The serpent image recurs when they respond to the man's claim that, by their stand, they forfeit "much honour and much glory"; the women ask, "--Sir, was it glory, was it honour, pride, / And not as cat and serpent and poor slave, / Wherewith we walked in union by your side?" (xviii). They are fighting against a "union" that is not a union, but conquest and entrapment. Such a metaphorical description of the relationship between the sexes is a common one for Meredith; indeed, much of the fascination of "A Ballad" derives from its effectiveness as a forum for recurring Meredith ideas and images. For example, in both his poetry and his prose Meredith frequently uses animal imagery to emphasize the unequal man-woman relationship. Such imagery expresses both the fault of (usually male) egoism, a fault equivalent to primitivism, and the hunter-prey relationship between the predatory male and the victimized female.

Meredith's preaching is witty, rather than heavy-handed, and although he loads the argument in favor of the "fair ladies," he has given them an articulate, if blindered, opponent.²⁹ No one is named, and this namelessness adds substance to the debate as one between representatives of opposing ideas. That the poem embodies a debate between ideas and attitudes rather than a mere skirmish between the sexes is underscored at the end of the poem when the friend--and judge--decides in favor of the women. The women, passion-

ate in their cause, claim to "have won a champion, sisters, and a sage!" (xlⁱⁱ). Through such conversions they hope to bring understanding--and, of course, their truth--to others.

Very different is the other "ballad" of the volume, "A Ballad of Past Meridian." This poem, thematically linked to the following "The Day of the Daughter of Hades," indicates the complicated, intertwined relationship between the personified oppositions, Death and Life:

Last night returning from my twilight walk
I met the grey mist Death, whose eyeless brow
Was bent on me, and from his hand of chalk
He reached me flowers as from a withered bough:
O Death, what bitter nosegays givest thou!

Death said, I gather, and pursued his way.
Another stood by me, a shape in stone,
Sword-hacked and iron-stained, with breasts of clay,
And metal veins that sometimes fiery shone:
O Life, how naked and how hard when known!

Life said, As thou hast carved me, such am I.
Then memory, like the nightjar on the pine,
And sightless hope, a woodlark in night sky,
Joined notes of Death and Life till night's decline:
Of Death, of Life, those inwound notes are mine.³⁰

The poem, three five-line stanzas of iambic pentameter, is simply structured: the first stanza describes Death, and the second, Life; the third shows their interrelationship. The poem begins at twilight, a favorite Meredith time, and one appropriate for the illustration of the intermingling of the opposites, Life and Death. The "grey mist Death," shapeless and described in images with traditional skeletal and withering associations, carries into the first line of the second stanza; he speaks a simple subject-verb sentence--

the object is implied--and is replaced in the second line by Life, the "shape in stone."

In contrast to the mistily formless Death, Life is described in images of ruggedness and endurance. "Sword-hacked and iron-stained," she has been hammered out through effort and strain; even the metrical variation of "sword-hacked," in its slowing of the line, emphasizes the difficulty of hewing that shape.³¹ Only the "breasts of clay" may be molded rather than chiseled; appropriately for the personification of Life, a secondary meaning for the word "clay" is the elementary material of earth. In startling juxtaposition to the "breasts of clay" are Life's "metal veins"; they shine as metal might, or perhaps, through "sheer plod."³² Again, the figure speaks in the first line of the following stanza, linking the two stanzas, and thus structurally paralleling the theme of interconnection. Now, however, in a complex sentence, Life charges the narrator-poet with his responsibility for her shaping. Unlike Death's words that, by including only himself as subject of the verb, force the narrator into the passive object of Death's action, Life uses the narrator, representative of all men, as its subject. After this expression of man's participation in Life's carving, a natural movement is to man's vision of his own life: through memory, he looks at his past; through hope, he dreams of the future.³³

The last two lines of the concluding stanza form the resolution of the poem, in which the notes of Death and Life

sound "till night's decline," or the coming of dawn; dawn is another time that is neither dark nor light, but a mingling of the two. In these lines, the notes are joined, as are the opposing concepts of Life and Death; and as the night ends, the narrator acknowledges that he, too, participates in both Life and Death, "those inwound notes." Some confusion of meaning exists; there is no explanation, for example, why memory and hope should join "notes of Death and Life." Meredith has done what he often does, imaged concepts (memory and hope as songbirds) and created an analogy from the images. However, despite some fuzziness in the resolution, the poem, with its stark imagery and simple diction, remains a good one.

Perhaps deliberately placed before "The Day of the Daughter of Hades," "A Ballad of Past Meridian" serves as a brief thematic introduction to the long narrative poem whose "central thought . . . is the strange link between Life and Death in spite of their opposition." That "link between Life and Death," apparently strange, is actually natural: linking life and death is the essential place each holds in the never-ending cycle of both man and nature. Skiageneia, the "shadow-born child of Persephone and Pluto," unites these contrasting realities in her parentage and person.³⁴ The story of her day upon earth shapes the only poem in the volume that relates an entire sequence of events.

Twelve sections of varying lengths make up this narrative poem; the first section, only eight lines long, simply introduces "the marvellous tale / Of Callistes."³⁵ The second section, however, presents the interweaving elements of the universal cycle, a cycle that includes most of the oppositions of man's life on earth: winter-spring; darkness-light; night-day; sterility-bloom. In twenty-eight lines the poet places Callistes in his setting and begins the image oppositions that, continued throughout the poem, underscore its theme. Callistes is ready for his meeting with the Demeter-sprung "Daughter of Hades"; the season is that pause between winter and spring when, although winter remains in the "higher rock-hollows," its power is weakening, leaving the "meadows to bud." The time is that between-lights world that Meredith favors, "between the beam and the gloom"; and the place is "Sicilian Enna," the scene of the abduction of Persephone by the "Charioteer / Of Darkness." The poet shifts from the present quiet scene of Callistes waiting for dawn to the past violence and Demeter's grief and anger. Blight and fruitfulness; grief and acceptance--these are the oppositions that occur in the time past-time present motion. Demeter had "Curled the land with the blight of her curse"; the valley, having recovered from Demeter's, and its own, grief, is fruitful once more.³⁶ The section closes with a celebration of the restoration of nature's cycle, of natural bloom replacing unnatural blight.

In Section III Callistes silently observes the meeting between Persephone and Demeter, "of whom / To men are their day, their night, / Mellow fruits and the shearing tomb: / Our Lady of the Sheaves / And the Lily of Hades" (III, 22-26).³⁷ This embrace between the goddess of fertility and the "mate of the Rayless" symbolizes not only the meeting of opposites, but the coming of spring, part of earth's cycle of seasons. Despite the allegorical significance of Persephone's return to earth, however, she brings a whiff of the underworld and images of joylessness and death to the fruitful valley:

But the mate of the Rayless was grave:
 She smiled like Sleep on its flood,
 That washes of all we crave:
 Like the trance of eyes awake
 And the spirit enshrouded, she cast
 The wan underworld on the lake.
 (38-43)

But Persephone is not simply Pluto's wife; she is also Demeter's daughter and therefore shares with Skiageneia a paradoxical nature. Thus, when she, "the shearing tomb," is opposed to Demeter's "mellow fruits," her image associations are not totally those of death. While "shearing" means cutting, severing--appropriate adjectives for a man's tomb--its major association is that of cutting for harvest, or reaping. Such an association unites Persephone with her mother, goddess of the harvest. So, too, the images of mother and daughter as "flower and bud" (37) unite the "Great Mother" with the queen of the dead. Such a double metaphor links them personally with the cycle allegorized in their myth: seed, bud, bloom, fruit, decay and death.

Section IV is a four-line interlude, a reminder of the witness of the meeting; inexplicably Callistes, a mortal, "could see, and survive" (IV, 4). He has seen a vision, but is unsure of its reality.³⁸ In Section V that vision is likened to "dreams" and "smoke melted thinner than air" (V, 3, 7). Thus confused, when Callistes sees Skiageneia, "he thought / It might now be morn, and afar / Within him the memory wrought / Of a something that slipped from the car / When those, the august, moved by" (V, 9-13). But the melting of time and his doubt of what he has seen fade; then the unspoken questions tumble after each other in quick almost breathless lines:

The whence of her, whither, and why
Her presence there, and her name,
Her parentage: under which sky
Her birth, and how hither she came.
(V, 26-29)

They remain unspoken; and in a two-line exchange they accept one another and establish a new kinship between the mortal and the divine.

Section VI opens with Skiageneia's call to the divinity, Helios; ironically, her cry to the sun-god is answered by Pluto's roar, "a tale / Repeated to sunless halls" (VI, 17-18). But on earth the sun is rising: "Shadows fled in a breath, and the walls / Of the lake's rock-head were gold" (20-21). Surrounded by the "dance of the earth"--the varied sights and sounds of swelling waves, birds and bees, nursing kids--Skiageneia is part of it all:

She followed the lines of wheat
 Tripping straight through the field, green blades,
 To the groves of olive grey,
 Downy-grey, golden-tinged: and to glades
 Where the pear-blossom thickens the spray
 In a night, like the snow-packed storm:
 Pear, apple, almond, plum:
 Not wintry now: pushing, warm!
 And she touched them with finger and thumb,
 As the vine-hook closes: she smiled,
 Recounting again and again,
 Corn, wine, fruit, oil! like a child.
 (VI, 44-45)

These lines celebrate the warmth, blossoming and fertility of earth; they express Skiageneia's joyful participation as she recites her litany of abundance, "Corn, wine, fruit, oil!" While contributing to the theme of the poem, they nevertheless come close to unalloyed nature poetry, poetry celebrating "nature's. . . . energy for [its] own sake."³⁹

Much of that vitality stems from the cycle of growth and ripening; Skiageneia, as she walks "in the track of the plough," already knows "how the seed works" and the soil yields. The connecting link between that vitality and the world from which she springs, Skiageneia murmurs the names both of the "Beneficent" and "that Other," probably Persephone.⁴⁰ Demeter urges the sowing "for the birth / Of the grain" (63-64) in an image linking the fertility of earth and man; in contrast with her, Persephone is "the dirge / Of life-light: for whose dark lap / Our locks are clipped on the verge / Of the realm where runs no sap" (65-68). Persephone, linked with darkness and death, is queen of a realm from which the juices of life have been sucked; this image links man and nature, not in fertility, but in death.

Skiageneia, who throughout her day on earth stands "on the verge" of that realm, tells Callistes, "We have looked on both!" (69); her words bring together earth and the underworld, mortal and god. After she has spoken, the section closes with an explicit reference to that merging and an indirect prophecy of the love that Callistes would maintain "to the end":

What links
Were these which had made him her friend?
He eyed her, as one who drinks,
And would drink to the end.

Again, in the long Section VII--116 lines--unity is the theme, with Skiageneia not only the connecting link but also the loving teacher. The section opens with a description of the "meadows," "woodsides," "lake-slopes," and the flowers and creatures that make this land their home. But beneath this scene, one of natural beauty and activity through which Skiageneia moves as she climbs, flows a fascinating "under-tide." For the land is strewn with flowers mythologically associated with violence, death and mourning. The narcissus, for example, was the lure to entice Persephone from her friends and make her vulnerable to Pluto; the asphodel is "sacred to Persephone and associated with the fields of the dead." The "hyacinth-bells" recall the accidental death of Hyacinthus and the creation of the flower stained with his blood; so, too, hidden in the "shade-loved white windflower" is the anemone, formed from the blood of the slain Adonis.⁴¹ Wreathing the lake-banks are tall

trees, among them the cypress, long associated with death and mourning. And moving through the grasses are "the sun-loving lizards and snakes / On the cleft's barren ledges, that slid / Out of sight, smooth as waterdrops, all, / At a snap of twig or bark" (VII, 11-14). As they slide "out of sight" the repeated sibilants create a hissing undercurrent.

Once Skiageneia has reached a height within "the pine-forest dark", all is spread before her:

Vineyard, village, groves, rivers, towers, farms,
The citadel watching the bay,
The bay with the town in its arms,
The town shining white as the spray
Of the sapphire sea-wave on the rock,
Where the rock stars the girdle of sea.

(VII, 21-26)

Nature: rivers, bay; controlled nature: vineyard, farms; man's works: towers; man's works and his society: village, town; and animals--all lie before her, interrelated. As she looks and listens to the goatherds' piping, she speaks of Pan the "Goatfoot God," and "of the gentle spirit that slips / From the bark of the tree . . . / And of her of the wells . . ."⁴² She is speaking now of another merging of opposites: the nymphs, goddesses linked with nature; and Pan, whose "solemn divinity flushed / Through the shaggy brown skin of the beast" (69-70).

She understands nature, even that "of the beak and the claw" (75), but not the destruction of human warfare. When Callistes speaks proudly of slain heroes, Skiageneia

cries, "Not of them!" (100). Following her cry is a long passage in which her vision of "the lost-to-light ghosts grey-mailed" (103) precipitates a physical struggle between the opposing forces within herself: light-sun-life vs. dark-shadow-death; just as the shades cause her body's waning, so her sun-gazing brings strength:

A moment her body waned,
 The light of her sprang and sank:
 Then she looked at the sun, she regained
 Clear feature, and she breathed deep.
 She wore the wan smile he had seen,
 As the flow of the river of Sleep,
 On the mouth of the Shadow-Queen.
 In sunlight she craved to bask,
 Saying: Life!

(106-114)

For the moment she has drawn strength from the sun, and her day on earth continues; time, however--another cycle in which man and earth participate--is passing. The section closes with Callistes' questions--"And who was she? who? / Of what issue?" (114-115)--still unasked; "He dared not ask, / For that partly he knew" (115-116). Callistes, too, is living for, and enjoying, the moment.

The sound of a "long muffled roar" begins Section VIII and makes Skiageneia hasten to use each minute of the quickly passing day. She is climbing once again, leaving behind the "mountain sheep / . . . goat, herbage and flower" (33-34). And from the heights of the mountain, she sings her "Song of Days":

The island was hers, and the deep,
 All heaven, a golden hour.
 Then with wonderful voice that rang

Through air as the swan's nigh death,
Of the glory of Light she sang,
She sang of the rapture of Breath.

She sang of furrow and seed,
The burial, birth of the grain,
The growth, and the showers that feed,
And the green blades waxing mature.
(35-40, 46-49)

In the "golden hour," but late in her day, she sings a song of light and life, that is yet likened with the swan's dying song. Her song is of "furrow and seed and all growing things, of the unchanging cycle of the husbandman's life and labor."⁴³ It is a song to earth's fertility and to the cycle of which she is a part, a "song of the God of the Muse / To the forehead of Morn" (67-68).⁴⁴

Thus, Section VIII, a celebration of light and life, concludes with this reference to Apollo, the sun-god; juxtaposed against that section is one resembling a Song of Darkness. As the "sea dashed" and the "earth shook" (IX, 6), Skiageneia calls out, "Is it night? O not yet!" (7).⁴⁵ This description of Pluto's coming reverberates with Biblical echoes of earth after the death of Christ; here, too, the earth responds to the power and displeasure of a God. Callistes and Skiageneia, "the youth and the shuddering girl" (19), now appear vulnerable; clasping hands, they flee down the "maze" of paths, reversing their earlier joyful ascent. As they flee, nature, active and alive as before, joins the chase in which the young couple become the hunted. The natural sounds of the forest are replaced by stillness.⁴⁶

Yet here,
 Like the pause to things hunted, in doubt,
 The stillness bred spectral fear
 Of the awfulness ranging without,
 And imminent.

(29-33)

The line imaging this momentary pause (30) with its seven one-syllable words and one two-syllable word, echoes its meaning by slowing down the breathless flow of the preceding lines.⁴⁷ The world has turned hostile: Callistes and Skiageneia are associated with "things hunted"; the stillness breeds a death-linked fear.

As they continue their flight down the mountainside and emerge from the forest, new metamorphosed into a "haunted roof" (34), to the valley, the thundering sounds of the approaching god overwhelm the silence. With the coming of the god of the underworld, the natural processes are disturbed; instead of coming with the night, Pluto brings the night with him:

An Enna of fields beyond sun,
 Out of light, in a lurid web,
 And the traversing fury spun
 Up and down with a wave's flow and ebb;
 As the wave breaks to grasp and to spurn,
 Retire, and in ravenous greed,
 Inveterate, swell its return.
 Up and down, as if wringing from speed
 Sights that made the unsighted appear,
 Delude and dissolve, on it scoured.
 Lo, a sea upon land held career
 Through the plain of the vale half-devoured.

(IX, 49-60)

He has not brought the sunlessness of night, but the sunlessness of the other world, a world "beyond sun." The terrible fury of his arrival is compared with the tread of

horses "broken loose," and with the force of fast-breaking waves--of power not fully controlled. But fact and metaphor merge; the "legions of thunderful horse" carry Pluto's chariot from Hades, and an unnatural "sea upon land" cuts through the valley.

Section VIII illustrated the harmony underlying a pattern of contrasts; in Section IX, however, that harmony has been upset. Paradox is the natural mode for a world seen once more as discordant; Pluto himself is described, negatively if not paradoxically, as "void of shape" (63). Skiageneia, who has been perceived as a connecting link, now too is a paradoxical figure, both linking and dividing oppositions. In a variation of her earlier comment, "We have looked on both," she says--while reaching out her hand to her father--"Now we have looked on the Three" (65). Through her use of the pronoun "we" she continues to link herself with Callistes, and both of them with the contrasting divinities. The next line, however, isolates her, separating her from both worlds, while the two concluding lines prefigure her return to the world of her father:

And divided from day, from night,
From air that is breath, stood she,
Like the vale, out of light.

The paradox that is Skiageneia is imaged in the next section:

The sigh of our life she seemed,
The bliss of it clothing in woe.
Frailer than flower when the round
Of the sickle encircles it: strong
To tell of the things profound,
Our inmost uttering song,

Unspoken. So stood she awhile
 In the gloom of the terror afield,
 And the silence about her smile
 Said more than of tongue is revealed.
 I have breathed: I have gazed: I have been:
 It said . . .

(X, 7-18)

She is the "Daughter of Hades" and the "sigh of our life"; she is bliss and woe; she is frail and strong; she is the flower threatened by the sickle that both reaps and cuts down. She calls to her father and yet droops palely when, as in the past, he again sweeps toward the valley of Enna:

On amain the black traveller came.
 Lo, a chariot, cleaving the storm,
 Clove the fountaining lake with a plough,
 And the lord of the steeds was in form
 He, the God of implacable brow,
 Darkness: he: he in person: he raged
 Through the wave like a boar of the wilds
 From the hunters and hounds disengaged,
 And a name shouted hoarsely: his child's.
 Horror melted in anguish to hear.
 Lo, the wave hissed apart for the path
 Of the terrible Charioteer,
 With the foam and torn features of wrath,
 Hurlled aloft on each arm in a sheet;
 And the steeds clove it, rushing at land
 Like the teeth of the famished at meat.
 Then he swept out his hand.

(X, 32-48)

Pluto's elemental power drives through this passage with its images of natural forces and untamed animals. The reiterated "he" and the intervening pauses emphasize the inexorability both of the "implacable" God's coming and of Skiageneia's return to Hades.⁴⁸

Skiageneia is gone, leaving behind only her name-- given here for the first time--and a single cry.⁴⁹ In the twelve-line Section XI, Callistes is left to "rejoice, /

Repine, [and] yearn . . ." (XI, 9-10). The twelfth and final section opens with a description of the valley after the passing of the "wrathfullest God" (XII, 5); the earth, ruined, "Like the spear-pitted warrior's shields / After battle" (3-4), reveals trampled grass and broken vines. Once before, Enna's cycle of sowing, growth and harvest had been disrupted--by Persephone's abduction and Demeter's curse; the valley, however, had returned to fruitfulness. No such hope remains for Callistes:

And Enna had hope of the sheaf:
 There was none for the desolate youth
 Devoted to mourn and to crave.
(XII, 11-13)

In this epilogue to the tale of Skiageneia and Callistes, the idea of harmony, so important throughout this volume of poems, recurs; but the human resistance to force emotion in the path of will, an inability responsible for the under-current of melancholy in the poem, surfaces in the epilogue and creates a final contrast. The valley will be fruitful again, and the cycle of "sowing and reaping" (39) will be re-established; Callistes himself, as Skiageneia's disciple, will sing of Skiageneia's day on earth, "For men to be profited much." Callistes has witnessed the meeting of Demeter and Persephone, he has had a vision of a universe bound in cyclical harmony, he has heard Skiageneia's Song of Days--symbol and celebration of the natural cycle--yet he mourns. In this contrast between universal idea and personal emotion he echoes Skiageneia with whom he shares a

paradoxical union: "In division so were they linked" (35). For although Skiageneia had apparently accepted her return to Hades, Callistes had learned her "secret," her pining for the light and air of earth:

She was fire for the blue and the green
Of our earth, dark fire, athirst
As a seed of her bosom for dawn,
White air that had robed and nursed
Her mother.

(24-28)

Skiageneia represents a union of opposites, but the imagery equates her return home with an almost unnatural exile from earth:

Now was she gone
With the Silent, the God without tear,
Like a bud peeping out of its sheath
To be sundered and stamped with the sere.
And Callistes to her beneath,
As she is to our beams, extinct,
Strained arms: he was shade of her shade.

(28-34)

She is gone, lost to the "God without tear," a bud unseasonably crushed and withered. Callistes is as irretrievably dead--"extinct"--to her as she is to the earth's sunbeams.⁵⁰ Through this doubleloss--Skiageneia's loss of earth and its sunlight, and the couple's loss of each other--Callistes participates in the darkness of her world. The comment "he was shade of her shade" reverberates with both meanings of the word "shade": spirit of the dead; and darkness, loss of sunlight.

Callistes' life has been permanently changed by that one day spent with the child of darkness. After Skiageneia

has left him, he sings of her, and of her joy in the earth's fruitfulness;

the bounteous Giver he praised
Through the island with rites of old time
Exceedingly fervent, and reaped
Veneration for teachings devout,
Pious hymns when the corn-sheaves are heaped,
And the wine-presses ruddily spout,
And the olive and apple are juice
At a touch light as hers lost below.
(67-74)

He is retelling her litany of abundance to the coming generations; he is lighting the young. Although his actions harmonize with all that he has learned, his personal "cravings" remain:

He wept not: he wasted within:
Seeming sane in the song, to his peers,
Only crazed where the cravings begin.
(58-60)

These "cravings" that cannot be eased blast his life; "sane" in his song, he sings of fertility as he withers, "rathe, dry to his prime" (66).⁵¹ The poem ends with a summary of the days until his death spent yearning for the impossible: "to join her, or have her brought back":⁵²

But that soul loving earth and the sun
From her home of the shadows he held
For his beacon where beam there is none
And to join her, or have her brought back,
In his frenzy the singer would call,
Till he followed where never was track,
On the path trod of all.

Throughout the poem the two elements--the narrative, and its underlying symbolic and mythological significance--intermingle; because of this intermingling, one cannot be isolated from the other. However, an arbitrary separation

should indicate not only the importance of opposition in the poem, but also the place of opposing pairs in the varied cycles of man and his home, earth:

<u>Section</u>	<u>Narrative</u>	<u>Oppositions</u>	<u>Mergings or Reconciliations</u>
I	Introduction		
II	Callistes goes out to see the sunrise	winter/spring light/shade beam/gloom past--abduction of Persephone and Demeter's curse of valley present--earth's regeneration	the seasonal cycle the day re-establishment of order
III	Callistes sees meeting between Demeter and Persephone	day/night fruits/tomb	embrace--seasonal cycle
IV	Interlude		
V	Callistes, unsure of the reality of what he has seen, then sees Skiageneia--dialogue	vague mixing of time, memory, illusion mortal/goddess	dialogue--link between the mortal and divine
VI	Skiageneia calls to Helios; Pluto roars beneath activity of earth; Skiageneia speaks	Helios/Pluto radiance of earth/sun- lessness of Hades; fruitfulness of earth/sap- less realm; life/death Demeter/Persephone.	sowing, growth, fruition ("birth / Of the grain") recurring cycle both of earth's fertility and of man's continuing life on earth links among Callistes, Skiageneia and goddesses

VII	Skiageneia and Callistes climb mountain; Skiageneia looks on world spread beneath; she resists Callistes' references to heroes and regains strength of the sun	nature active and alive / (beneath surface) associations with death death and darkness/ life and sunlight	links among animals, men and gods
VIII	ascent of Callistes and Skiageneia Song of Days	subterranean roar/ sound of pine, beams of light; Song of Days/ swan song; burial/birth of grain	cycle of growth in which the "burial" of the grain produces its eventual "birth"
IX	coming of Pluto; flight and descent of Callistes and Skiageneia	opposition lies in the reversal of the natural order: unnatural coming of night, the darkening of the sea, the ocean swallowing the shore, the mountain becoming a maze; Callistes and Skiageneia are the hunted in a chase; the valley is a field "beyond sun"	upheaval and separation-- even Skiageneia, the link, ends "divided from the day, from night, / From air that is breath . . . out of light"
X	Skiageneia is swept off with Pluto	paradoxes within Skiageneia: bliss/woe frail/strong light/shadow	Skiageneia herself, as a union of opposites
XI	Transition		

XII	Epilogue	
	Callistes sings ruined valley/	For the valley--
	Skiageneia's "hope of the sheaf";	ultimate
	Song of Days; Skiageneia's longing	restoration
	he longs for for light and air/	of order and
	her, calling her home among the	fruitfulness,
	for her in shadows;	cycle of growth
	"his frenzy" Callistes' song of	
	until his fertility/ his	For Callistes--
	death own premature	No reconcil-
	withering	iation in his
		lifetime

The harmony preached throughout much of the 1883 volume merges with myth, as the oppositions in the lives of earth and man are absorbed into natural cycles. Even the day of the "Daughter of Hades" is a cycle, beginning and ending in the underworld, an allegory of the life of man. Toward the end of his life Meredith commented on that day: "The Daughter of Hades has intense enjoyment of her one day of light in life, and might read us a lesson"; the "lesson" is certainly there, but the poem is not so single-minded as that.⁵³ Although much of the poem emphasizes the regenerative phases in the cycles of man and earth--day, light, life, fruition--yet we are constantly reminded of the "dark" phases of these cycles. Even Meredith's lecturing remark on the need to enjoy the moment implies the transience of that moment, its fugitive quality echoed by the flow of lines. Stevenson, who sees the poem as incorporating Meredith's "doctrine of defying life's sorrow and brevity" nevertheless comments that the "hurrying movement of the poem, with its long sentences and its run-on lines, almost painfully

reproduced the sense of fleeting time."⁵⁴ That "fleeting time" in every man's life--with its accompanying decay and eventual death--is part of the poem despite the joy of growth and rebirth celebrated in Skiageneia's Song of Days and manifest in the regenerated valley of Enna.

The epilogue containing that regeneration, Enna's "hope of the sheaf," reasserts the balance not only within the earth, but also within the poem. The poem has completed its own cycle that began with Callistes going out at dawn to look at a fruitful valley; it ends with Callistes, singer of that valley, going into his personal twilight. The reassertion of the cycle of fertility forms a resolution in the wider theme of reconciliation. But the narrative of Callistes and Skiageneia that ends with the separation of the lovers and the premature aging and eventual death of Callistes recognizes the element of loss and grief in individual lives. In this double ending the existence of neither ultimate harmony nor individual "frenzy" is denied; such an ending parallels the source of the "effectiveness and beauty" of the poem: "the real contrast between the majesty of the life of earth and the unrest of the life of man."⁵⁵

"The Day of the Daughter of Hades" is an effective poem, and it does have moments of beauty. The "dance of the earth" (VI) and the natural scene as Skiageneia begins her climb (VII) are examples of such moments; Pluto's coming and the couple's hasty flight down the mountainside amid

a suddenly threatening nature (IX), scenes of activity, even of power, are impressively handled. Throughout the poem the lines, rhyming abab, usually flow well; Meredith's characteristic inversions are generally unobtrusive and seldom interfere with that flow. Even the narrative is clear, although Callistes is the only figure regularly identified in the telling. Skiageneia's name occurs only twice: as she is carried off by Pluto, she cries out her name to Callistes (XI); and Callistes, after her departure, finds that "the dim / Lost Skiageneia's caress / Of our earth made it richest for him" (XII). Perhaps due to the accessibility of Trevelyan's Notes, we forget that Pluto, Demeter and Persephone are never named; rather, they are "the Charioteer / Of darkness," the Maid of Enna, and the "majestic Mother and Nurse"; additional variations all stress their functions within myth. With few exceptions, however, identification is simple; the entire narrative, in fact, is seldom obscure.

Obscurity is not a problem; the occasional periphrasis, however, is irritating:

He gave her some redness that streamed
Through her limbs in a fitting glow.
(X, 5-6)

This description of a non-existent blush is even more overblown:

Not a sign of the torch in the blood,
Though her stature had reached the height
When mantles a tender rud
In maids that of youths have sight,
If maids of our seed they be.
(V, 33-37)

And, for variety and humor:

he gave
His eyeballs up to the sight.
(III, 20-21)

Such flaws exist in the poem; heavy-handed didacticism, however, is not a fault here. Meredith even shows us his "lesson"--that Skiageneia uses her "one day of light in life" without useless moaning over its brevity--rather than repeatedly hammering it into us.⁵⁶ Through both selected and invented myth, the cyclical theme is embedded in, not superimposed on, the poetic material. Instead of the thin didactic one-sidedness of much of the poetry of this volume, the strong undercurrent in "The Day of the Daughter of Hades" produces richness and ambiguity. We cannot even judge Callistes with his disastrous "cravings"; in Section III, for example, the imagery applied to Persephone contradicts Meredith's teaching on the submergence of individual desires. For these images imply that as our "cravings" are washed away, our spirit is deadened; only the dead, despite Meredith's hopes for us, are completely free from such longings. And although the poem emphasizes the earth's cycle of recurrence, the powerlessness of that cycle in easing personal sorrow remains an undercurrent, one that flows decisively into the narrative in the final section. There, after an explicit contrast between Callistes, "withered rathe," and the regenerated valley, the poem--and Callistes' life--ends.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

CHAPTER III

¹The generally prosaic quality of these sonnets combines with Meredith's ragged use of negatives in the opening lines of "Sense and Spirit": "The senses loving Earth or well or ill, / Ravel yet more the riddle our lot. / The mind is in their trammels, and lights not / By trimming fear-bred tales; nor does the will / To find in nature things which less may chill / An ardour that desires, unknowing what." Trevelyan interprets the poem in his Notes: "The secret of Earth (Nature) will never be read by those who, allowing their senses to enslave their intellect, spin superstitions dictated by their fears, hoping to find in Earth enduring satisfaction, either of the senses or of the aspirations. There is salvation only in the conception that she has a living Spirit, which prompts us, her children, to heroic life." (p. 586). The poem does not seem to warrant the effort; I would prefer to be left "unknowing what."

²Following this command are images of the old, tumbling one after another: "Thy frame is as a dusty mantle hung, / O grey one! pendant on a loosened peg. / Thou art for this our life an ancient egg, / Or a tough bird: thou hast a rudderless tongue, / Turning dead trifles, like the cock of dung; / Which runs, Time's contrast to thy halting leg." If, however, this "ancient egg" has used Nature's fires "To burn from Self to Spirit through the lash"--a figurative mixture of purgative burning and thrashing--the sons of Earth will honor him.

³Shakespeare's laugh was "broad as ten thousand beeves / at pasture!" an image that indicates the quality of these two sonnets. Stevenson, however, refers to "The Spirit of Shakespeare" as "notable," Ordeal, p. 249.

⁴One of the contenders for "Worst Meredith Poem" might be "A Certain People," a poem intended to preach the message that "A Certain People," like the Puritans, "need their pious exercises less / Than schooling in Pleasures." I find the poem enjoyable for two things: (1) Meredith's rhyming of two of his favorite words, "wax" and "thwacks," and (2) his use of the word "occiput" (the back part of the skull); he rhymes it with "God they glut."

⁵Stevenson, Ordeal, p. 248.

⁶Lucas asks several questions, including important ones such as "Why are the stars the brain of heaven?" and "What is the army of unalterable law?" His major objection--lack of a subject--is linked to these questions; by implication Lucas groups "Lucifer" with much of the poetry that, he theorizes, Meredith wrote in his bid for "serious attention," "Poet," p. 18. Muddled thinking--and poor poetry--may accompany such forcing.

⁷It is, essentially, a narrative problem, and one which Lucas himself hints at in his comment that "Nothing happens" after Lucifer reaches the "middle height," p. 18. For a discussion of the poem see Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Poetry, 3rd ed. (New York, 1938, 1960), pp. 344-348.

⁸That "pallid" day of the future has arrived in "Modern Love."

⁹I use the term "long" to distinguish verses that are not sonnets in the volume. Most of them are actually long poems, but "A Ballad of Past Meridian" exceeds sonnet length by only one line.

¹⁰Trevelyan's Notes, p. 591; see these notes for comments on the major thoughts of the poem, such as the "survival of the fittest."

¹¹Trevelyan's Notes, p. 591. Trevelyan explains that Meredith's term "The Invisible" refers to "the supernatural God as conceived by superstition," man's escape-hatch from the demands of Earth.

¹²Beach quotes stanzas xxiv through xxvii then comments: "The thing works both ways. Earth owes to man whatever is attainable through conscious thought. But man has no thought save from earth; from her he has the very laws which his thought enables him to formulate; from her, the emotional reactions that underlie his religion, wrong or right. Even when he is at odds with her, it is her essence in him that provokes him to this reaction," p. 475.

¹³Stevenson, Ordeal, p. 249.

¹⁴"The 'Dragon' or 'Dragon-fowl' is self, egoism. Savage and cruel as he is before he is tamed, it is an error to attempt to kill him. He must be constrained and set to sociable uses, when he will prove a servant of great power. But this is only possible by passing through a series of changes: so Change must not be feared," Trevelyan's Notes, p. 588.

¹⁵Kelvin, p. 128. Kelvin also calls the poem "largely a poetic failure," an opinion that may be contrasted (almost every opinion on Meredith may be contrasted!) with that of Stevenson who includes "The Woods of Westermain" among the four "magnificent" poems of the volume, p. 249. I lean more toward Kelvin's view than toward Stevenson's.

¹⁶Kelvin refers to this second version of "Love in the Valley" as Meredith's "first unqualifiedly successful poem inspired by his belief that the processes of man's life are equatable with the processes of nature," p. 130. Kelvin shares my opinion of Meredith's nature poetry--much of it is marred by preaching--and sees the lyricism of "Love in the Valley" as a restraint upon Meredith's didacticism.

In Phyllis Bartlett's headnote to the poem, she refers to the early version (in the 1851 volume) of the poem; she gives both versions in her edition because "this later one is a genuine re-creation rather than a revision," I, 250.

¹⁷Trevelyan, The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith (New York, 1906), p. 38.

¹⁸In the opening stanza Phoebus' exile has ended, and the ploughmen and shepherds with whom he had lived introduce their recollections of the god's days among them. In the final stanza, Trevelyan notes, "the shepherds call on animate and inanimate nature, the beasts of the farm and the branches in woodland and rocky stream, to remember the god who had been their fellow," Notes, p. 590. Apollo (Phoebus), sun-god (sun and light are favorite Meredith images) and god of music and poetry, seems a natural figure for Meredith to use.

M. R. Ridley has noted the similarity of metrical effect between "Love in the Valley" and "Phoebus": "'Phoebus with Admetus' has a graver music, not so enchanting a shift and slide of melody, but it is richly satisfying, and it uses a device of which Meredith was fond--which indeed appeared in 'Love in the Valley,' but not so prominently--the triple hammer-stroke following on a flowing rhythm . . .," Second Thoughts (London, 1965), p. 150. I find the rhythm of "Phoebus" both monotonous and irritating; part of the problem lies in the constant use of inversion and straining of syntax. In addition, the four-line refrain, "coming after such stanzaic rhythms, sounds like a clog dance done by a man with wooden legs." Bush, p. 393.

¹⁹Trevelyan, Notes, p. 590. Stevenson describes "Melampus" as a "companion picture to 'Phoebus with Admetus,' in the same melodious Swinburnian lines and with even an intenser utterance of love for living creatures," Ordeal, p. 249. Kelvin, however, sees it as a poem marred, once again, by Meredith's didacticism.

²⁰Douglas Bush comments that "Meredith's portrait of the ancient sage is also a portrait of the artist." Bush continues, "For Melampus, who knows well 'what the mystical woods disclose,' the whole life of man and the creatures and things of earth is one. Nature and Apollo taught him sanity and wisdom, and he saw the harmony between nature and song." p. 390.

²¹Evidently Meredith recognized this fact; in her head-note to the poem, Phyllis Bartlett remarks: "In preparing his poems for the Edition de Luxe GM removed Martin's Puzzle from Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth and placed it, together with Juggling Jerry and The Old Chartist, under the heading Verses (Edition de Luxe 3)," I, 261.

²²This is evidently a reference to the Christian belief that salvation may be achieved through suffering. Faith sees this life as passing and the future life as eternal; consolation for life's sorrows springs from this hope for the future. Meredith scorned those who need religious faith, who, out of fear and the human need to know the answer to "The Question Whither," turn to the "Invisible." But Meredith's "philosophy" has its own wider hope and its own contradictions. Thus, he sees life as a struggle, and personal education and development through suffering, or "ordeal." He asks for a taming of egoism and a substitution of a vision of kinship between man and nature for the narrowed view of the single personality. Part of that wider view is the submergence of the life of the individual in that of the race--"Light the young." Thus, we have the paradoxical effect in his didactic poetry of an almost Pollyanna-like approach to life, reached through his theories of struggle, "thwackings" and suppressed egoism. Meredith, then, to be simplistic, actually affirms a secularized version of faith, including salvation through suffering. Here, his "creed" might be expressed as callously as the parson's: "Lose a leg, save a species . . ."

²³It is precisely this kind of image that Stephen Crane might use to express the essential indifference of nature to human suffering.

²⁴Neither musical analogy works. Discord does not become harmony through a change of perception alone; the notes may remain the same, but they would require rearrangement. As for that "immense Organ" rolling out the sounds "from devils to angels," the inclusion of all notes would not produce harmony, and that "single false tone" would still be false.

It is tempting to think that Meredith deliberately contrasts the images that Martin applies to Molly with that of the universally harmonious vision in the final stanza.

However, I think that the poor image is part of a weak attempt at resolution.

Stevenson apparently accepts the ending; in speaking of the "artless philosopher" of "Martin's Puzzle," Stevenson remarks, "But at last he grasps a clue: just as the component parts of a harmony, if taken separately, might be discords, so he may be drawing a wrong induction from 'a single false note' [sic] and the universe may be 'one immense Organ that rolls from devils to angels.'" Darwin Among the Poets, p. 216.

²⁵In Phyllis Bartlett's headnote to the poem, she remarks: "Although George Smith of the Cornhill Magazine personally admired this poem, he rejected it for publication, thinking that it would 'offend many of his readers,'" I, 261.

A similar problem exists in "Modern Love." When the back-and-forth movement is the poem, how is that movement resolved?

It is perhaps ironic that while Meredith frequently irritates me with evasive endings, in "Martin's Puzzle" it is not evasion, but his attempt at resolution, that disappoints. Given Martin's mental bite, not only his explanation of harmony from discord but also his hope to find answers by "kneeling with Molly" seem weak.

²⁶Trevelyan, Notes, pp. 590, 591. Another, less conservative, man is silent witness and judge.

²⁷Wendell Stacy Johnson, Sex and Marriage in Victorian Poetry (Ithaca, 1975), p. 48.

²⁸Compare this imagery with that of "A Preaching from a Spanish Ballad," stanza xiii. The women are echoing, and attacking, man's perception of woman as a "weak thing" (in "A Preaching" woman is "the creature" writhing "beneath his paw") to be conquered and possessed.

The male speaker, who sees the women as the belligerents, accuses them of uselessly renewing "this vain and outworn strife"; he sees their theories as "insurrection," and their cause as "Whetting its edge to cut the race in two" (xvii).

²⁹"But the conservative case is not lost for want of good pleading or of sound sense," Trevelyan, The Poetry and Philosophy . . . , p. 185.

³⁰Stevenson calls this poem "a brief and austere but yea-saying allegory of middle age," Ordeal, p. 207.

The paradoxical "bitter nosegays" may be composed of flowers blasted by Death's touch; however, the image seems more ambiguous than that: the flowers are not dead, but are "as from a withered bough."

³¹The use of two one-syllable words, each ending in a consonant stop, also contributes to the effect.

³²My association of metal shining through use comes from Hopkins' metaphor in "The Windhover": "sheer plod makes plough down sillion / Shine."

³³Trevelyan comments that in this poem, it is "the universal man uttering the individual thought common to us all," Poetry and Philosophy, p. 60.

Hope is "sightless"; man cannot see the future.

³⁴Notes, p. 589. Skiageneia--and the story of her day on earth--as Trevelyan and Phyllis Bartlett both point out, is an invention of Meredith's.

³⁵Callistes is the youth who meets, loves, and eventually mourns for Skiageneia; they are companions for Skiageneia's single day on earth.

³⁶According to the myth, Demeter blamed the valley for her daughter's disappearance, but restored the land to fruitfulness after she learned of the abduction. After an unsuccessful attempt to have her daughter returned to her, Demeter accepts a compromise by which Proserpine spends half the year on earth with her mother and the other half in Hades with Pluto. "There can be little doubt of this story of Ceres [Demeter] and Proserpine being an allegory. Proserpine signifies the seed-corn which when cast into the ground lies there concealed--that is, she is carried off by the god of the underworld. It reappears--that is, Proserpine is restored to her mother. Spring leads her back to the light of day." Bulfinch's Mythology (New York, n.d.) p. 51.

³⁷Persephone is here being opposed to her mother and linked with darkness and the tomb; her association with Demeter and the springing of the corn, however, reverses these associations when she is contrasted to Pluto.

³⁸Trevelyan explains that "When the vision of 'the Twain' has gone by, Callistes recovers his senses and his memory, and sees standing near him a maiden who had 'slipped from the car,'" Notes, p. 589.

³⁹Kelvin, p. 163.

⁴⁰In her Explanatory Notes, Phyllis Bartlett identifies "The Beneficent" as Demeter, and "that Other" as Pluto (II, 1141). Trevelyan, however, notes "an ancient Greek custom" by which "the hair of the dying was cut for Persephone," which would identify "that Other" as Persephone, Notes, p. 590. Phyllis Bartlett's identification makes the life-death opposition neater, but Trevelyan is probably right since, when Skiageneia says, "We have looked on both!", Callistes

had only seen Demeter and Persephone.

Skiageneia murmurs the name "of the dearth, / The Beneficent." The use of the word "dearth" may be a reference to the "darker side" of Demeter's nature--Demeter "could be very formidable, since being a giver of plenty she could also bring famine." The Oxford Classical Dictionary, ed. M. Cary, et. al. (Oxford, 1949), p. 263.

⁴¹Edith Hamilton puts together several accounts of "lovely young people who, dying in the springtime of life, were fittingly changed into spring flowers" Hamilton theorizes that these stories have "a dark background," perhaps of human sacrifice in times of drought. "Mankind had only a dim feeling that as their own life depended utterly on seed-time and harvest, there must be a deep connection between themselves and the earth and that their blood, which was nourished by the corn, could in turn nourish it at need. What more natural then, if a beautiful boy had thus been killed, than to think when later the ground bloomed with narcissus or hyacinths that the flowers were his very self, changed and yet living again? So they would tell each other it had happened, a lovely miracle which made the cruel death seem less cruel," Mythology (New York, 1942), p. 89.

The anemone "is short-lived. It is said the wind blows the blossoms open, and afterwards blows the petals away; so it is called Anemone, or Wind Flower, from the cause which assists equally in its production and its decay," Bulfinch, p. 59.

The story of the anemone recalls Adonis, who was loved by both Aphrodite and Persephone; "finally Zeus himself had to judge between them. He decided that Adonis should spend half the year with each, the autumn and winter with the Queen of the Dead; the spring and summer with the Goddess of Love and Beauty," Hamilton, p. 90.

These stories with cyclical associations plus what Hamilton terms "flowery resurrections" create an even more complicated "under-tide," for the ominous undercurrent is itself merged within a regenerative cycle.

The asphodel comment is from the Columbia Encyclopedia, p. 119.

⁴²Phyllis Bartlett's Explanatory Notes: "VII.47 her of the wells: probably Arethusa," II, 1141.

⁴³Bush, p. 389.

⁴⁴The "burial" and "birth" of the grain are Persephone's seasons in the underworld and on earth with Demeter. The oppositions are thus linked by the growth cycle; through the use of the terms "birth" and "burial" the life and death of man are also connected in an analogous cycle.

⁴⁵The first words of Section IX actually are "Him loved she," probably a reference to Skiageneia's love for Callistes, and another example of Meredith's irritating use of inversion.

⁴⁶"Stillness" may mean silence or motionlessness; probably both meanings apply here, each contributing to an undercurrent of the unnatural.

⁴⁷The two-word phrase "pouring streams" exemplifies the use of sound in the lines of the "chase." The fluidity of the meaning is reinforced by the use of the liquid "r" (twice); the resonants "ng" and "m"; and the sibilant "s" (twice). All of these consonants may continue for the length of the breath. Only the two plosives, "p" and "t," at or near the beginning of the words, cannot be continued.

⁴⁸Forms of the verb "cleave" are used three times in this passage, giving a strong image of the parting of the seas for the god's entry--and symbolizing the dividing of Skiageneia and Callistes. Interestingly, "cleave" means to stick closely, to adhere, as well as to separate, split, divide.

⁴⁹"Callistes is left alone with her name and her cry in his ears (XI), to long for her till he dies (XII)," Trevelyan's Notes, p. 589.

⁵⁰"Extinct" means dead, but it also means quenched, put out, as light or fire.

"Strained arms" cannot reach across that chasm; in her implied longing for her earthly lover, Skiageneia resembles Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel."

⁵¹The lines ("Our Lady of Gifts prized he less / Than her issue in darkness: the dim / Lost Skiageneia's caress /, Of our earth made it richest for him / And for that was a curse on him raised") indicate that Callistes was probably cursed for prizing the shade-born Skiageneia more highly than the "Lady of Gifts," Demeter; my reading merely extends the application. However, if Demeter is seen symbolically as Earth and Skiageneia personally as Callistes' beloved, the two meanings merge; Callistes' "curse" is the natural consequence of placing individual desires before the demands of earth.

"Rathe," in its obsolete meaning, indicated here, is soon, quickly; another meaning is early in the day or season, a meaning that fits well into the poem.

⁵²The paradoxical image of Skiageneia in her lightless world serving as beacon to Callistes on the sun-lighted earth symbolizes the hopelessness of his yearning.

⁵³Letter to Richard H. P. Curle (January 3, 1905), Cline, III, 1512.

⁵⁴Stevenson, Ordeal, p. 249.

⁵⁵W. P. Ker, Contemporary Review (September 1883), rpt. CH, p. 256.

⁵⁶"She has made the most of her 'day upon Earth,' instead of uselessly repining because it was so brief." Trevelyan's Notes, p. 590.

CHAPTER IV

Roughly speaking, all Mr Meredith's poems might be classed under the titles of his last two books, Poems of the Joy of Earth and Poems of Tragic Life. Between these two classes there is a sharp and sheer division. How it comes about that the same poet's outlook on Nature should be so serene and on life so sombre, we do not profess to be able to explain. These two elements, Nature a source of joy and healing, Life a tragic tangle, form between them the substance or the basis of Mr Meredith's poetry.

--Westminster Review (1887)

He has no sense of the calamitous, no sense of the broken or naked soul, and--fatally--no sense of evil. More than any other novelist of his age, he has the Victorian confidence and in a manner so dazzling and profuse that it is natural he was called Shakespearean. He is: but Shakespearean merely linguistically, by inheritance, at second hand, without any notion of human life as passion or of suffering as more than disappointment. He is a very literary novelist indeed.

--V. S. Pritchett, The New Statesman and Nation (1954)

Four years after the publication of Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth Meredith published Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life. Nature as a "source of joy and healing" has been displaced; in this volume the poet emphasizes the "tragic tangle" of man's life. In such a volume, narrative assumes importance; of the nineteen poems in the collection, seven are narrative poems, and five contain some narrative element. Among the seven non-narratives is the introductory poem "The Two Masks." The "masks" are those of tragedy and comedy; the thought is the intermingling of both--the "change of masks"--in the human drama. The poem, difficult if not ponderous, is marked by absurd rhymes and "mountainous metaphor[s]."¹

Two of these seven poems, "Manfred" and "Hernani," are satiric and didactic; the remaining four are, in varying degrees, "message" poems. "Men and Man" teaches that Man and the Angels can work together and can, despite the "stain of strife," emit light enough to "kindle souls." The message of "The Last Contention" is directed toward a vigorous old man--"Young captain of a crazy bark!"--who loves a young woman; the poet urges that he "worship" her but leave to "the young / In muscle the embrace." Through such acceptance an aging man may protect himself from the indignity of "those / Whose toothless Winter claws at May." Claws of a different kind form part of the message in "Whimper of Sympathy": "Hawk or shrike has done this deed /

Of downy feathers . . ." Nature can be cruel, and to the "totter-knee'd" it seems hard "that one must bleed / Because another needs will bite!" And "Young Reynard" exemplifies a cruelty imposed not by Nature but rather by the "civilized." The poem opens with a gay description of Reynard: "Gracefullest leaper, the dappled fox-cub / Curves over brambles with berries and buds, / Light as a bubble that flies from the tub." Stanza ii abruptly introduces the "cub-hunting troops"; within two lines Reynard "lay far beyond help." The final four lines contain a message--"Wild, my poor friend, has the fate to be chased; / Civil will conquer: were 't other 'twere worse"--followed by a consolation, a flimsy one for Reynard--"Haply you live a day longer in verse." These poems generally are as flimsy as Reynard's consolation. Prosaic and frequently clumsy, they contain no "under-tides"; rather, they are as flat in statement as they are thin in texture.²

The five poems with some narrative element--"The Song of Theodolinda," "Aneurin's Harp," "France, December 1870," "Solon" and "Bellerophon"--represent an extreme range of poetic merit; all, however, while not free of a Meredithian message, are complicated by a narrative aspect, either historical or legendary in origin. In "The Song of Theodolinda" that narrative basis is the "legend of the Iron Crown of Lombardy, formed of a nail of the true Cross by order of the devout Queen Theodolinda . . ."³ The queen's "Song" is not a narrative poem although it does use

a narrative framework--the legend, Meredith's invented branding of the queen, and the forming of the crown. Once the situation is created, however, the interest of the poem lies, not in the story, but in Theodolinda's frenzied state echoed by the poem's hypnotic beat. Even though "story" is subordinate here--Meredith labeled the poem a "dramatic song"--two factors suggest that the poem warrants a brief discussion. First, "The Song of Theodolinda" is a fascinating poem with strange subject matter; second, with its constant manipulation of physical and psychological oppositions, it is a dramatic example of my own subject matter, Meredith's contrasts, juxtapositions, and "undertides."

Part of the undercurrent in "The Song of Theodolinda" is the beat pounding through the twenty-one-stanza poem. With the exception of four lines, the poem is composed of six-line stanzas in truncated trochaic tetrameter; the fifth and sixth lines of each stanza contain the repeated phrases "red of heat" and "white of heat," usually one phrase to each line, occasionally both juxtaposed within the same line. The reiterated phrases occur within the metrical pattern, with the accent falling upon "red," "white," and "heat." These words are used again in the closing four-beat couplet that extends the opening and closing stanzas to eight lines: "Beat, beat! white of heat, / Red of heat, beat, beat!" The strong accent, the forced pauses, and the

repeated sound of these refrain-like lines contribute toward the incantatory effect characteristic of the poem. Reinforcing that effect is the unvarying beat of the trochaic meter; it echoes the hammer beats of the monks as they brand Theodolinda's breast with the fiery nail, then remold the nail into the iron crown.

That beat continues steadily as Theodolinda swings abruptly from "presumption" to "prostration," a psychological movement between extremes that Meredith imaged as a recurrence "like an interchange of alternate black and bright." That alternation expresses the paradox of the queen, who is both horrified and fascinated by the nail that pierced the skin of Christ, that thirsted after God's blood:

I behold our morning day
When they chased Him out with rods
Up to where this traitor lay
Thirsting; and the blood was God's!
Red of heat, it shall be pressed,
White of heat, once on my breast!
(vii)

The branding, too, is not what it appears to be; an apparently penitential act, protested by the body--"the reptile in me shrieks, / Not the soul"--it is really an act of pride, a desire to become one with God, unique, "sole on earth." Contrast and paradox are inherent in the self-branding, a complex blend of exaltation and masochism, of spiritual pride and a blood-obsessed eroticism, of a Swinburnian equation of rapture and pain:

Quick! the reptile in me shrieks,
Not the soul. Again; the Cross
Burn there. Oh! this pain it wreaks
Rapture is: pain is not loss.

Red of heat, the tooth of Death,
White of heat, has caught my breath.

Brand me, bite me, bitter thing!
Thus He felt, and thus I am
One with Him in suffering,
One with Him in bliss, the Lamb.
Red of heat, O white of heat,
Thus is bitterness made sweet.

(viii, ix)

Seesawing with that "presumption" of divine union is
Theodolinda's equally extreme "prostration":

Martyrs! hungry peaks in air,
Rent with lightnings, clad with snow,
Crowned with stars! you strip me bare,
Pierce me, shame me, stretch me low,
Red of heat, but it may be,
White of heat, some envy me!

(xvii)

The "song" speaks neither of asceticism nor of spirituality; it is completely rooted in the human body and its world. The emphasis is on blood, fire and pain; even the vision of the crucifixion, with its stress upon pain and blood-letting, de-emphasizes the redemptive purpose of the Cross. Theodolinda's self-mutilation becomes an arrogant attempt to parallel the crucifixion; the senselessness of the attempt reveals its perversion and cancels the idea of sacrifice.

Theodolinda's vision of the crucifixion seems to have been hypnotically induced by her gazing into the fire; the furnace is a dominant feature in the poem as scene of activity, source of vision, and origin of metaphor. Although the furnace represents the Meredithian ordeal, the shaping of character from molten metal, it is also the actual source of

heat, light and fire. The association of heat and fire with scorching, branding, pain and blood contributes to the sense of the abnormal, the frenzied; in the closing stanzas, however, the hysteria, as well as the fire, seems to be dying. The images of blood and violence have disappeared, and Theodolinda ends her song in a paradox: she pleads for ardor as an escape--"Give me wings of great desire, / Lest I look within, and fail!"--while she recognizes the inevitability of struggle--"wrestling"--in man's life.

Much of her song, however, does contain word-clusters that emphasize the cruelty and pain of an attempted religious experience; pulsing through the poem, too, is the beat that undercuts any perception of mystical union. Both metrical pattern and the "refrains" reinforce the blows of the "brown-cowled hammermen"; the sheer physicality of the strokes overwhelms even the implied metaphor of the ordeal, of purification through suffering.

The poem intrigues. Theodolinda herself is an intriguing paradox; a woman spiritually ambitious and intellectually committed to the subordination of the body, she nevertheless sees Christ's Passion and death--and her own attempted union with His suffering--in physical, at times masochistically sexual, terms. Her strangely overwrought vision and alternating "black and bright" of psychic extremes indicate her passage into irrationality, while the beat of the poem increases the sense of building hysteria. Meredith has thus, through the poet's tools of rhythm and language, preached

his "gospel" of sanity and balance with neither flat statement nor prosy didacticism. But the poem is flawed; here, the flaws are two typical Meredith problems: an occasional straining after rhyme; and an inability to recognize the odd literal meaning of a line. Thus, in order to end a line with a rhyme-word for "earth" Meredith writes: "Those old martyrs sloughed their pride, / Taking humbleness like mirth" (xix); in what way does "humbleness" resemble "mirth"? An exaggerated version of the second fault occurs in stanza iv: "Hard against the furnace core / Holds the Queen her streaming eyes." The poem, however, has strengths enough to outweigh its weaknesses; it is, finally, a strangely effective poem.

Far less effective is "Aneurin's Harp," a poem in which history serves the function of legend in "The Song of Theodolinda." The narration, recalling the battle of Gododin fought between the Welsh and the invading Saxons, begins in the third person, shifts for one stanza to an exchange of boasts and taunts between the opposing sides, and then shifts once more to the first person; the speaker is apparently the poet, who identifies with the Welsh. That long-ago defeat by the Saxons is seen within the context of English history and the formation of the English people. The Saxons defeated the Celts, but the conquerors, in turn, were conquered by the Normans to create "a tide of races" (xvii) united into a single people. The poem concludes with a warning to the English people against making gold into a

god; in addition, the poet urges England's preparation as a nation through moral development, "the growth of brains" (xix) and national defense. The poem, with its bad rhymes, its symbolic use of the "Norman nose," its dragged-in use of Aneurin, and its undisguised preaching, is an extremely poor one.⁴

As "Aneurin's Harp" is to England, so "France, December 1870" is warning and call to France.⁵ But "France, December 1870" is a superior poem, a complex work, and an ode, containing a narrative element only in the widest sense of presenting an historical overview. For the poet gazes at France's past, not in a close-up view of individual actions or events, but in a panoramic vision of the nation's strengths, dreams and errors. France, imaged as a woman, has been inspiration and model for the world; it was she who

made the brave appeal
For manhood when our time was dark,
And from our fetters drove the spark
Which was as lighting⁶ to reveal
New seasons . . .

(II, 1-5)

Now, however,

She likewise half corrupt of sin,
Angel and Wanton! can it be?
Her star has foundered in eclipse,
The shriek of madness on her lips;
Shreds of her, and no more, we see.
There is horrible convulsion, smothered din,
As of one that in a grave-cloth struggles to
be free.

(ii, 14-20)

Meredith's fears that he might be "poetically weakened by the pressure of philosophical reflection" do not apply to

this ode; here, the reflection, more historical and moral than philosophical, is emotionally resonant. The preaching--both the laments over France's "fall" and the poet's call to France to "rise afresh" (xi, 8)--is far removed from dry or forced didacticism. Instead, the mourning over France's sins, the belief in her regeneration after her ordeal, and the appeal for that rebirth resemble in their intensity the fiery ardor of old-time preaching. That ardor creates a paradox: in a poem in which reason is so entwined with emotion, the poet stresses the primary importance of reason in a nation's history.

Unified in tone and by a network of interconnected images, through sheer emotional power the poem surmounts its occasional clumsiness and frequent obscurity. Its lament is not just for a nation's lost promise; it is a cry against the destructive power of war--and the power of one man's ambition to produce chaos and death; the conquering legions

were the earthquake and the hurricane,
The lightnings and the locusts, plagues of blight,
Plagues of the revel: they were Deluge rain,
And dreaded Conflagration: lawless Might.
(v, 13-16)

Much of the power of the poem comes from the emotional balance between anguish over that "conflagration" and a hopeful vision of the future:

green earth forgets.
The gay young generations mask her grief;
Where bled her children hangs the loaded sheaf.
Forgetful is green earth; the Gods alone
Remember everlastingly: they strike

Remorselessly, and ever like for like
 By their great memories the Gods are known.
 (v, 24-30)

The "green earth forgets"; only the Gods "remember everlastingly." Thus, the sowing-reaping images of the poem not only express the stern law of natural consequences--the Biblical reference applies to the consequence of deeds (France brought herself to this pass by forgetting her ideals)--but also implies an eventual "forgetfulness" and fruitfulness. In another version of Meredith's belief in regeneration from decay, France, too, can participate in the cycle of earth. The last lines of the poem foresee the end of France's ordeal, her triumphant use of disaster, and her resumption of her role as a moral force in the world:

Make of calamity thine aureole,
 And bleeding lead us thro' the troubles of
 the sea.

"Solon," too, deals with public morality and principles of government. It is not a narrative poem; instead, a brief episode--the Athenian tyrant Peisistratus passes his cousin, the sage Solon--leads into a double meditation. The major technique is that of contrast: of the men, their positions, and most important, their views of government based upon two contrasting views of the people. To the tyrant the people are animals--"sheep," "wild horses," "hot bulls"--who "need the crook and rein"; while Solon believes in man's capacity for growth. But the Athenians have resigned that capacity to their ruler and, blind themselves, they have "accepted sight from him" (iii).

Peisistratus may now tyrannize over his people, but such tyranny will not last. The closing lines of the poem refer, in a sowing image, to a Meredithian cycle in which, the present "overcast" times having moved into the past, the seed of "an unborn now" will flourish in the future.⁷

The past was a time of glory for the title character of "Bellerophon," but in the time setting of the poem, the former hero is now "maimed, beggared, grey; seeking an alms; with nod / Of palsy doing task of thanks for bread" (i).⁸ "Bellerophon" is not a narrative since telling a story is not its major purpose, and no clear progression of events exists within the poem. Nevertheless, the reader learns of past events in the old man's life; these are told, not directly by the narrator, but indirectly, as tales passed from one generation to another. These reports, distanced in time and emotional stance, tell of a prince's riding the fabulous Pegasus and slaying the monster Chimaera. But the hero of the tales is nameless, and that time of his heroic deeds is gone. To the cottagers who give him food Bellerophon is only "a thing by fate / Cursed in unholy babble to his grave" (vii). Juxtaposed against that view of the babbling old cripple are three stanzas telling the heroic tales; they end with the hero's attempt to soar toward the heavens: men "saw the winged shoulders: him they saw not more" (x). Bellerophon, unable to identify that reckless overreacher as himself, does so indirectly through juxtaposition; after the hero's tale ends with the two words "He fell," the stanza continues:

and says the shattered man, I fell:
 And sweeps an arm the height an eagle wins;
 And in his breast a mouthless well
 Heaves the worn patches of his coat of skins.
 (xi)

The focus of the poem upon a single major contrast, and the use of that specific form of contrast, dramatic irony; the simple diction of the poem; its communication of emotional effect without a directly stated "message"--all contribute to its effectiveness. Tompkins (p. 292) calls "Bellerophon" a "beautiful and moving thing." It is moving, but its beauty is marred by intrusive inversions ("Who him for theme did not reject," vi) and a weakened closing stanza.

The effect of the poem is one of pathos; that poignancy lies not only in the contrast between Bellerophon's strong, daring youth and his pitifully "shattered" age, but more important than his crippled and beggared age are his lost honor and recognition, his debasement to a babbling "thing," and his utter isolation from men--an isolation that extends even to the separation of himself from his own history. The poem remains within the "tragic tangle" of Bellerophon's life, offering neither lesson nor consolation.⁹

The seven narrative poems of the volume--"A Preaching from a Spanish Ballad," "The Young Princess," "King Harald's Trance," "Archduchess Anne," "Periander," "The Nuptials of Attila," and "Phaéthôn"--are all explorations of that "tragic tangle." The "tangle," a web of man's conflicting passions and his own inevitable fate, ends only with death. Lucas, one critic who acknowledges the

"remarkable group of poems" in this volume, sees death in these poems as "the outcome of love; it is the price people pay for deep personal involvement."¹⁰ Lucas is brilliantly concise in his evaluation of both these poems and Meredith's poetry as a whole; here, however, I would qualify his comment. "Deep personal involvement," for example, is nowhere evident in "The Nuptials of Attila"; it is the lack of such involvement that the poem criticizes. In many of the poems love does not exist; in "The Nuptials" love is replaced by lust; in "A Preaching," by possession. Where is love? Power, pride, sex, desire for conquest--these are the intermingled passions explored in this group of poems.

All of these passions are aroused within the private battleground of marriage in "A Preaching from a Spanish Ballad."¹¹ Although the events are simple enough--a Spanish "seigneur," finding that his wife has been unfaithful, kills her--the poem is more than a tale of sexual sin and private revenge. Too didactic to contain an implicit "under-tide," "A Preaching" nevertheless uses both exposition and subtler imagery to overturn the simplicity of events.

The juxtaposition of opposites begins with the opening stanza, a stanza that in statement and in image declares its didactic intent:

Ladies who in chains of wedlock
Chafe at an unequal yoke,
Not to nightingales give hearing;
Better this, the raven's croak.

Immediately after this introductory warning to women that, instead of listening to the seductive song of the nightingale,

they should listen to the harsh realism of "the raven's croak," the "seigneur" appears. He is both introduced and summed up in lines that indict his superficiality, his smugness (what Meredith would call his "egoism"), and his flawed approach to human relationships. While he is strolling along the Prado on the prowl for "pirate fellowship," his wife is imprisoned at home, alone, starved for attention and affection. Here, the imagery emphasizes her emotional deprivation: she is like a "flower bent to ground," "sun-forsaken," both thirsting and "starved of common food."¹²

Within this sympathetic context, we may understand her reaction to a lover's declarations:

Love me? she his vows repeated:
 Fiery vows oft sung and thrummed:
 Wondered, as on earth a stranger;
 Thirsted, trusted, and succumbed.
 (v)

Completely isolated, unused to words of love--she hears the words, wondering, "as on earth a stranger"--she responds to her lover's "vows," and in that response ironically breaks her own "vows" to her husband.¹³

She speaks as she watches over her sleeping lover:

Pray for him my blood's dear fountain,
 While he sleeps, and watch his yawn
 In that wakening babelike moment,
 Sweeter to my thought than dawn!--
 (x)

The stanza accomplishes two purposes before the violence of the coming action. It is a quiet moment, a moment of tenderness, and fulfillment that, by contrast, adds to the horror of the confrontation soon to come. Further, its metaphoric

description of the lover--"my blood's dear fountain"--serves both as hint of that confrontation and as paradoxical summary: her lover has brought her to life and will cause her death; her blood has been stirred and, as a consequence, it will be spilled.

The moment, the pause, ends; the following stanzas, as her husband bursts in upon the lovers, tell of a sudden, and violent, contrast. With the entrance of "her lord of thunders"--as opposed to the lover, yawning his way, "babelike," into wakefulness--the scene has been transformed from one of contented post-lovemaking sleepiness into one of anger, fear and threatened death:

Thundered then her lord of thunders;
Burst the door, and flashing sword,
Loud disgorged the woman's title:
Condemnation in one word.¹⁴

Grand by righteous wrath transfigured,
Towers the husband who provides
In his person judge and witness,
Death's black doorkeeper besides!

Round his head the ancient terrors,
Conjured of the stronger's law,
Circle, to abash the creature
Daring twist beneath his paw.

(xi-xiii)

The exaggeration of stanza xii--the use of words such as "grand," "transfigured," and "towers"--undercuts the righteousness of the husband. Similarly, the remembered picture of the cruising Spaniard contradicts this inflated description of the wrathful, and injured, husband.

In another pause between the husband's entrance and the wife's final, indirectly narrated words followed by her

slaying, the action stops; much of the remainder of the poem is "preaching." The husband--"judge and witness," as well as "Death's black doorkeeper"--is supported by the "stronger's law"; the imagery of stanza xiii reduces both man and woman to the level of animals. In this animal-like relationship, the woman ("creature") is trapped beneath the stronger animal's "paw." Woman, however, is a victim, not only of this superior physical force but also of the social "law" that sheer power may produce. Man's power, then, becomes the source of a socially approved double standard; in such a society "Honour" becomes an empty term, a useful masculine concept--and excuse:

She inheriting from many
Bleeding mothers bleeding sense,
Feels 'twixt her and sharp-fanged nature
Honour first did plant the fence.

Nature, that so shrieks for justice;
Honour's thirst, that blood will slake;
These are women's riddles, roughly
Mixed to write them saint or snake.
(xv, xvi)

Much of this message is confusing, but one point at least seems clear: woman, in herself close to reality--the lines referring to her inheriting "bleeding sense" from "bleeding mothers" connote not only wisdom accumulated through suffering, but also woman's natural menstrual cycle --is forcibly separated from that reality by the artificiality of man's "code," a code drawn up in man's interest and for man's convenience.¹⁵ In applying that code, man may categorize woman as either "saint or snake," as Madonna or

fallen woman; the metamorphosis of saint to snake constitutes an offense against "Honour," an offense that can only be washed out in blood.

That code, and punishment for "sins" against it, will continue to exist until its source of power, "the giant thews and sinews" of man, are themselves overpowered by "their Godlike overmatch," Reason; until then, women are condemned to live as prisoners, victims not only of their conquerors, but also of their own assent to society's laws, legislated by those conquerors. Through such assent they place themselves beneath the "paw" and allow men to maintain total power over them: as "judge and witness," warden, and, finally, executioner. Thus, the Spanish wife, after pleading for the life of her young lover,

ceased her prayer.

Then commending to all women
Chastity, her breasts she laid
Bare unto the self-avenger.
Man in metal was the blade.
(xxii, xxiii)¹⁶

She does not see that her husband "hath squandered Honour"; she accepts her own guilt, her own offense against the social code, without understanding her oppressor's role in creating that code. Through her submission she participates in her own condemnation and execution.

The entire relationship between the sexes, "the sexes' war" (xvii), is one that needs "reading": "Read that riddle, scorning pity's / Tears, of cockatrices shed" (xx).¹⁷ Pity is not what is needed, either for the trapped woman of the

poem or for the women for whom she acts as symbol and substitute. "Pity's tears" are useless; only an entire restructuring of the relationship between the sexes can end the warfare. In "The Woods of Westermain" the poet warned that men and women must strive for a new and equal relationship; otherwise, the "ancient battle" forces men into the role of tyrants, and women into "shuffling trickster[s]." The events of "A Preaching" dramatize the consequences of such a relationship based on tyranny and possession; images of imprisonment, deprivation and conquest underline that "unequal yok[ing]."

Contrast becomes a tool in showing the gap between reality and society's perception of that reality. Thus, the juxtaposition of the predatory stroller against the wife, sitting in her home-prison, heightens the sense of woman caged; later, the predator's outrage is deflated by that earlier dual vision. Such manipulation contributes to the major contrast of the poem, that between the expected reaction of society and the reaction encouraged--and explicitly urged in the "preaching"--from the reader. Society does not participate in the events--the narrative is limited to the privacy of the triangle--but the power of society is felt in its creation of the vengeful husband, and even more, in its molding of the wife, as she accepts her guilt and atonement. Society has been listening to the song of the nightingales, to the sweetness of "romance," while ignoring the underlying reality. Despite the brief interlude of love,

however, the poem has little to do with the nightingale. Instead, "A Preaching" ends with "the raven's croak," promised in the opening stanza: the closing line expresses man's sexual and physical dominance. The poem contains many such excellent lines, but it is marred by frequent syntactical inversions and by a meter too unvaried to avoid monotony. Finally, however, "A Preaching" is ruined by its adherence to purpose; too heavily didactic, the "preaching" overwhelms the poetry.

Very different in atmosphere is the ballad "The Young Princess"; gone, too, is the claustrophobic world of the three people in "A Preaching." But here, within a society peopled by princess and squire, lords and ladies, similar passions emerge: the drive for sexual conquest, the motivating factor of pride, and the violent reaction of murder. Even in outline, the story contains the elements of melodrama: Lord Dusiote, after boasting that he can conquer the "lady of ice," the princess, pretends that he has fought a duel to protect her name. The princess, believing him to be dying as a result of this "duel," marries him. Dusiote then flees, returning the day before the "widowed" princess is to be married. He presses his claim and is killed by lords of the court.

The poem, however, is not the simple black-and-white of melodrama, and the "villain" is nothing like the Gothic avenger of "A Preaching." Instead, the poem contains an "under-tide" of imagery that questions the identity of the

victim and, in its literal and metaphoric use of play-acting, even questions the accuracy of all perception. The "under-tide" begins in Part I, introduced with the princess: "There came a young princess to Court, / A frost of beauty white" (Part I, st. ii). The princess' coming to court is the single major event of Part I; these opening stanzas create a courtly setting and romantic atmosphere, and place the frosty beauty at the center of a society based on the "old laws of love."¹⁸

Perhaps because of the lack of narrative discipline, the six stanzas of Part I produce some confusion, a confusion, however, that leaves the important image pattern of frost, ice, and distance comparatively unaffected. These images applied to the princess serve both as preparation for later events and as a unifying pattern within the section. Thus, the princess is "a frost of beauty white," whose "glittering dream" may be liable to "thaw." The word "glittering," with its connotations of coldness and brightness as well as light, links the image of "frost" with that of the "moon unmoved" and prepares for the combination of light, cold and distance in the "chilling moon." That moon may be both actual moon and image of the princess, bright, cool and uninvolved.

Less effective, and more confusing, is the repeated image of the vine that meanders through Part I; its appearance in the opening stanza--"The training of Love's vine of flame / Was writ in laws"--plays upon the word "training,"

and its application to people, as well as to vines. Fortunately for the reader cursed with visual imagination, the "vine's" later appearances are accompanied by negatives: "No vine of Love her bosom gave"; and "She gave no vine of Love to rear." It is reassuring that the princess is not sprouting vines--from her "bosom" or, indeed, elsewhere.

The sound of the phrases "vine of Love" and "wine of Love" suggests that the poet has sacrificed clarity to chiming; a similar sacrifice--of image and meaning to alliteration and assonance--is suggested by the lines, "She left them to lie, like the light that has gone / From wine-cups overproved (iv).¹⁹ How can a comparison be made with a "light that has gone"? Are the wine-cups literal cups of wine, or are they references to the wine of love?²⁰ In either case, the lines seem to image the lords as drunken suitors. Paralleling that image is one in stanza v when the "rival lords / As willow-wands lie strewn"; here, both the duels fought over the princess, and their victims, are trivialized. The icy images, the hints of the princess' cool incitement, her implication in duels fought in her behalf--all these form an undercurrent: the princess may not be the completely innocent victim in Dusiote's trickery; she, too, has been playing the "game."²¹

Part I has little action; even the duels are muffled in figurative language. But Part II opens with a contrast between the lords of the court and Lord Dusiote, and in the first spoken words of the poem, quotes Dusiote's boast:

The lords of the Court they sighed heart-sick,
 Heart-free Lord Dusiote laughed:
 I prize her no more than a fling o' the dice,
 But, or shame to my manhood, a lady of ice,
 We master her by craft!

Heart-sick the lords of joyance yawned,
 Lord Dusiote laughed heart-free:
 I count her as much as a crack o' my thumb,
 But, or shame of my manhood, to me she shall come
 Like the bird to roost in the tree!

The importance of both contrast and boast is emphasized by the near-repetition of the two stanzas. Lord Dusiote's words reveal him to the reader; motivated by the egoism that sees an unconquered woman as an insult, he sees the princess as an object, rather than as a person. His egoism demands that the princess will "come / Like the bird to roost in the tree!" Here, he sees the princess as a "bird" he will lure to destruction; his images of evaluation-- "fling o' the dice" and "crack o' my thumb --reduce, not the princess, but himself.

The contrast between Dusiote and the lords of the court, an opposition of dramatic importance later in the poem, juxtaposes the "heart-sick" lords against the "heart-free" Dusiote. These opposing phrases are repeated in both stanzas; Dusiote's boast to "master" the "lady of ice"-- surely a violation of the "old laws of love"--proves his "heart-free" state.

The stage is now set for Dusiote's play-acting; although the coming scene is not labeled a hoax, Dusiote's boast and his willingness to use "craft" prepare the reader for a plot against the princess. That plot begins immediately after

Dusiote's words; the princess, awakening in "dead of night," is told by her maid that Dusiote, near death, has asked that the princess "light him to his dark end" (II, v). The princess finds Dusiote, accompanied by priest and squire, a handkerchief pressed against his chest, to "stay the red flood at his breast, / And bid cold ladies melt" (vi). Both light and cold are part of the complicated imagery in Dusiote's address to this cold lady:

O lady, though you are ice to men,
All pure to heaven as light
Within the dew within the flower,
Of you 'tis whispered that love has power
When secret is the night.
(vii)

The imagery is as open to conflicting interpretations as is Dusiote's reality-rumor contrast. The linking of purity and heaven to the "light / Within the dew within the flower" conveys the idea of an enclosed and protected innocence. Against that cluster, however, Dusiote juxtaposes the whisper that everything changes "when secret is the night." The light-night rhyme emphasizes the light-dark opposition, and the word "secret" not only allies itself with dark and night, but also implies a shift in meaning from protected to hidden; innocence is changing to the "dark secret joy" of Blake.

In the next stanza, in which Dusiote claims to have "silenced the slanderers," he applies the image of the lily to the princess; the lily, with its literal whiteness and its traditional association with purity, links the light-ice-purity images, while its context, an accusation of impurity,

acts as counterpoint.²² This counterpoint of opposing images and associations is complicated by the unreliability of the central confrontation. The reader believes the entire scene between Dusiote and the princess to be a lie, yet narrative and dialogue are presented without comment or judgment by the narrator. The dialogue, however, contains clues to the lie. The slander that Dusiote claims to have silenced is a boast of conquest, his own sin against courtesy. Dusiote's duplicity becomes clearer when he proclaims his love for the princess; the disparity is too great between his "late-avowed" love and his earlier words. The scene is one of dramatic irony: the princess believes Dusiote's avowal of love just as the reader is convinced of the falsity of the entire scene. The princess, acting on her belief, gives her hand to the "dying" lord:

You are dying, O great-hearted lord,
 You are dying for me, she cried;
 O take my hand, O take my kiss,
 And take of your right for love like this,
 The vow that plights me bride.

(x)

The princess' use of the term "great-hearted" underlines the error of her perception: Dusiote is "heart-free," not "heart-sick"--and certainly not "great-hearted." It is through that deception--Dusiote's claim of love--that the princess consents to marriage; she believes him to have earned it through the strength of his love: "And take of your right for love like this, / The vow that plights me bride."²³

Part II ends with the princess' perception of the scene: the priest's words, followed by Dusiote's apparent death ("Lord Dusiote's soul to waft to bliss"), and Dusiote's assumed burial ("his body was borne away"). But with the first words of Part III, the play is over, and all reader uncertainty has disappeared: "Lord Dusiote sprang from priest and squire." The dramatic contrast between this opening line and the closing of Part II emphasizes Dusiote's deceit. Ironically in Part III, which begins with a denial of the play-acted death, the images are increasingly those of death. In Part II the light-ice-purity and the opposing night-dark-secret images suggest a sexual undercurrent to the staged death scene; only the maid voices a light-dark contrast in which the "dark end" means death. The opening stanzas of Part III, however, while continuing the earlier light images, begin a movement toward the final life-death opposition.

The laughter that began Part II has now grown "slack"; an unknown--and unexplained--force drives Dusiote away from the princess, her "lighted room," and the bright, blooming morning. Dusiote, cut off from all of this, flees "Like the shade of a bird in the sun" (III, ii); he is darkness in the midst of light. Another image of his flight is that of the drowned man; he is a dead man, a ghost, alienated now from the daylight world.²⁴ Once that alienation has been established, the light images fade, and the images of death become stronger.

In Part I the princess, "a frost of beauty white," was grave and cold, but these words described the princess' coolness and distance. In Part III, however, the reference to the princess as "grave and cold" (v) foreshadows her reaction to Dusiote's sudden appearance before her: "Her eyes were like the grave that is wide / For the corpse from head to heel" (vii); the literal adjective has yielded to the figurative noun. This is no description of the princess' personality or sexuality; she is looking at Dusiote and measuring his grave. The drowned man, the ghost, the corpse--these images all join that measuring gaze in predicting Dusiote's death. He, however, who once deceived the princess and now deceives himself, once again precipitates a series of events. In reply to his blunt, "I come to your door this night" (viii), the princess simply says, "If a ghost should come a ghost will go" (ix). Her implied threat is emphasized by an anapestic substitution that accents the double use of the word "ghost." That threat is not mere verbiage or a continuation of an image pattern. It refers to the death scene of Part II; Dusiote himself, by convincing the princess of the reality of that scene, can now exist only as a ghost. The reader hears no more of Dusiote's direct speech; the princess, too, is silent except for a single deadly response:

If a ghost should come a ghost will go:
 No more the lady said,
 Save that ever when he in wrath began
 To swear by the faith of a living man,
 She answered him, You are dead.

(ix)

The events of Part II have led to this confrontation. Dusiote, in deceiving the princess, has sinned against the "old laws of love": "in her soul the young princess / Believed that love had been" (III, iii). Through what the narrator has finally labeled as "treacherous doing" (iv), Dusiote has led the princess to accept a false love as true. Now that she has learned the truth of the earlier scene and the falsity of Dusiote's claim to love, the contrast between truth and falsehood, between faith and deceit, lies beneath this brief verbal skirmish. The princess' first reply contrasts past "fact" (the death that she had witnessed) with future fact (if Dusiote claims a husband's rights, he will become an actual ghost). Her second reply negates whatever Dusiote might say. He cannot swear by "the faith of a living man"; the fact that he is a living man demonstrates his faithlessness.

The opening lines of Part IV echo the word "dead" with which Part III closes: "The soft night-wind went laden to. death / With smell of the orange in flower." These two lines synopsise the final section: it is night, and the deceptively bridal scent of orange blossom is in the air; death, however, will be the outcome of this night. Dusiote's squire, one of the earlier play-actors, is now "at watch by the palace-gates"; tonight he is audience, witness, and link between illusion and reality. Unaware, he watches the play-turned-reality in the "plot" initiated by his master; sure of the outcome of events, he thinks that "women are weak" and that the "proudest are yielding mates" (IV, iii).

He hears the "undertones / Of a priest in prayer" (v) and compares them with sounds that would be made "were there a soul to save." And, glancing toward the light showing near a doorway, he thinks the lamps have been raised, "Belike on a passing bier" (vi). Although the squire cannot understand the implications of what he sees, nevertheless his observations lead the reader to a gradual realization of what is happening. In Part III the princess had warned Dusiote of the consequences of his coming to her that night; in Part IV night has come, and the squire's watch implies that Dusiote has entered to claim his bride.²⁵ The "ghost" has come; the reader, who does not share the squire's --or Dusiote's--illusions over the princess' yielding, is thus prepared for the "ghost" to go.

One reason for the squire's lack of understanding is the element of replay in the night's activities. The action of Part IV--the death and burial of Lord Dusiote--has already been acted in Part II; even the members of the cast are unchanged: Dusiote, the princess, the priest, and the squire. But as the squire knows, "No priest was hired for the play this night" (vi). During the "play" of Part II the word was not mentioned; now that drama has metamorphosed into reality, the image of the play is retroactively superimposed upon the earlier events. The juxtaposition of "this night" against the earlier night forces a collapse in time and a comparison between the two nights of parallel action. That comparison, however, emphasizes, not the

similarity of action, but the essential difference between the two nights: the earlier events--duel, wound, and death--were part of a deceptive "play," as false as the lord's avowal of love, but this night, a year and a day later, the play-acted events have become reality.

Deception, play-acting, and the merging of illusion and reality--all are underscored by the use of the words, "mask" and "masque."²⁶ Neither word is used when the masked Dusiote is playing the principal role in his private masque. Like the word "play" that appears only after the play is over, the words "mask" and "masque" appear only as the masks begin to be ripped off and the masque has reshaped itself into truth. Thus, Dusiote reveals himself as alive, and the night of bridal vows and death as false, at a "masque," and when the feigned death has become actual, the lords of the court emerge from the palace door "All cloaked and masked, with naked blades, / That flashed of a judgement done" (IV, vii). The lords may be "masked," but their blades, the weapons of judgement, are "naked." And as Dusiote is buried, one of the lords tells the reason for that judgment: the lady's "cause" was based upon her "faith in the mask of a love untrue."

These explanatory stanzas are one of the weaknesses of "The Young Princess"; a good poem, it displays major faults at the beginning and at the end. In general, Meredith's problems fade with the narration of event and dialogue; the lords' final words, however, form an address, both over-

explanatory and anti-climactic. Meredith's ability to write lines of power and compression is clear in the terse dialogue between the princess and the just-returned Dusiote, but even within the narrative, the poet can be seduced by sound. Thus, in the wordy stanza ix of Part II, after Dusiote's declaration of love to the princess, "She flew in the folds of a marvel of love." Despite such vaguely bloated lines, much of the strength of the poem lies in its conflicts, oppositions, and resulting ambiguity--in its "under-tide."

To speak of the "under-tide" in "The Young Princess" is to speak of its substance. Undercutting has become so much a part of the poem that it is difficult not only to label reality and illusion but even to separate them. While the play is performed, it seems to be real; only when it becomes real is it labeled a play. The squire sees reality and is confused because it might be a play. The princess looks at the living Dusiote and, as the word "grave" changes its connotations, she sees her false lover's corpse. And at Dusiote's actual burial, one of the lords comments, "'Tis a year and a day since in this place / He died" (IV, ix). In these words the lord claims that Dusiote died on the day of his feigned death; on the day of his actual death, only his "ghost" is laid to rest. Illusion seen as reality, and reality seen as illusion--a confusion that creates total chaos by infusing doubt into all perception--this is the result of masking, play-acting, emotional falsity and deliberate deceit.

The reader applies this undercutting of the reality of events to his perception of the princess. The narrative presents the princess as a victim of Dusiote's "craft"; the reversal that neatly metamorphoses Dusiote's plot into narrative plot should be a simple triumph of innocent victim over wily conqueror. But the icy images and the lady's implied participation in the game of love contradict the flatly unambiguous view of the princess as victim. Even the explanation for the lords' action cannot erase a lingering doubt about the lady who, through drastic championing, escapes being "snared of her nobleness."²⁷

Thus, Dusiote, whose original passion was not love but drive for possession, is overthrown by lords committed to saving the princess from that possession. Dusiote's major error was his belief that the deceived princess would "come / Like the bird to roost in the tree!"; the price of his error is death. The ending of "The Young Princess" is "A Preaching" in reverse: the "conqueror" dies, and society--the lords, supported by the code of "old laws of love"--not only approves, but brings about, the princess' rescue, or revenge. Unlike the heavily didactic "A Preaching," the narrative of "The Young Princess," while indicating sympathy for the princess and approval of society's judgment against Dusiote, nevertheless contains enough ambiguity, and emotional distance from both major characters, to leave the reader unsure of the princess' culpability in the deception, duels, and death she has caused.²⁸

Deception and death are part of the society of men and women; even observance of society's "laws" brings death. But the events of "The Young Princess" are not only set within that society; juxtaposed against the world of men and women--of pride, deceit and sexual warfare--is a larger, timeless world. This final juxtaposition, or "under-tide," is suggested by the circularity of the poem; the "refrain" of Part I disappears from the poem to re-emerge in the final stanza. A new version of that refrain, however, appears in the opening stanza of Part IV: "The bird of the passion sang over his tears; / The night named hour by hour." The night is one of death; in this context, in which the "night-wind" is death-laden and the scent of orange blossom is overpowered by the "tainted wind," the bird's "tears" foreshadow Dusiete's death. But after his death a shift occurs: the opening lines of the final stanza are a near-repetition of the first lines of the poem; once again, the nightingale is singing over a May bower. The poem then closes, forming a circle within a circle, with a version of the Part IV "refrain": "The bird of the passion sang over his tears / To the breeze and the orange-flower." The "tainted wind" has yielded to "the breeze and the orange-flower"; within this setting, the emphasis has shifted from the tears to the singing. "The bird of the passion" serves a function similar to that of the singing bird in "Margaret's Bridal-Eve": he is a reminder of all that is abiding after plots, trickery, human life itself, are all ended.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

CHAPTER IV

¹"There may be persons to whom the imperfect jingle of 'people' (pipple) with 'ripple' gives satisfaction, and who so delight in the chiming of 'Athos' with 'pathos' as to overlook or excuse, perhaps even to admire, the titanic effort whereby the mountainous metaphor is lugged into the verse. Even these persons, however, must surely wonder what is meant by a 'museful ripple', and ask themselves whether the 'tendrils' of Thalia's lips do not exist simply and solely for the purpose of hanging on to the 'looks' in the second line." Pall Mall Gazette (May 26, 1887), rpt. CH, p. 292. Stone comments on this poem in his very brief remarks on the volume it heads. After discussing the 1883 volume, he summarizes: "In Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life (1887), a less distinguished collection, Meredith acknowledges that man's fate has hitherto been thwarted by his blind egoism. In the lead poem for that volume, 'The Two Masks,' he once more notes the importance of the Comic Muse in drawing forth man's potential 'Nobleness' by subjecting him to the 'stress of action's fire.' The theme of the collection, however, is 'tragic life'; as in The Tragic Comedians, he shows how the comic in men's undisciplined natures leads inevitably to what the world labels a tragic issue." p. 145.

²In her headnotes to the poems "Manfred" and "Hernani," Bartlett describes "Manfred" as a "blast against Byron's 'projection' of the guilty, lonely, romantic character Manfred, in his play Manfred (1817) . . ." and identifies Hernani as the hero of the Hugo tragedy of that name. Bartlett, I, 344, 345. Meredith sees the humor of romantic posing and sentimentality but is himself so idiosyncratic in these poems that they, too, could be targets of the Comic Spirit. Trevelyan's remark that "Manfred, Hernani and Empedocles give at its best the Meredithian satiric comedy, flavoured with the salt of philosophic wisdom" (Poetry and Philosophy, p. 52) is misguided since "Manfred" and "Hernani" are neither comic nor salty. See, for example, the second stanza of "Manfred": "Considerably was the world / Of spinsterdom and clergy racked / While he his hinted horrors hurled, / And she pictorially attacked. / A duel hugeous. Tragic? Ho! / The cities, not the mountains, blow / Such bladders; in their shapes confessed / An after-dinner's indigest."

In her headnote to "Whimper of Sympathy," Bartlett comments that the poem "may have been intended as an answer to Tennyson's In Memoriam (1850), lyric 55, in which the poet bemoans Nature's carelessness 'of the single life.' In Tennyson's poem the poet falters and falls, thus exhibiting, in GM's words (line 8), 'The feelings of the totter-knee'd.'" I, 342.

"Young Reynard," while the most interesting poem of this group, is nevertheless an odd one; even the fox's death is at once inflated and pathetic. To equate "fate" with the "cub-hunting troops" seems to satirize fox-hunting; yet the clumsy phrase "were 't other 'twere worse" undercuts that satire. The final line inflates both the death of the fox and the poem; poor Reynard is embalmed in stanza ii.

³In Cornhill, September 1872, and in Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life (1887), the following note was appended to this poem: 'The legend of the Iron Crown of Lombardy, formed of a nail of the true Cross by order of the devout Queen Theodolinda, is well known. In the above dramatic song she is seen passing through one of the higher temptations of the believing Christian. [Trevelyan identifies the 'temptation' as probably 'that of spiritual pride,' Notes, p. 592.]

"In a letter to Hilda de Longueuil, June 8, 1887, GM wrote in reference to an unfavorable review of his volume: 'Poor Theodolinda is "enigmatical." . . . Theodolinda is in a white heat. Having (as I invent) branded her breast with the fiery Nail, she conceives herself elect, almost the Bride of the Crucified, and again, in a flash, corrects her presumption by the extreme of Christian prostration etc., etc. The recurrence is like an interchange of alternate black and bright.'" Bartlett, headnote, I, 318.

In a letter to Mrs. Anna C. Steele (July 30, 1872), Meredith remarks that "Theodolinda" shows "the perils of religious ecstasy," Cline, I, 468.

⁴Some contemporary reviewers disagreed with this opinion; Henley, for example, found the poem to be "a notable warning to the England of today set forth with admirable energy and directness," CH, p. 296.

The battle (c. 600), ending in defeat of the Welsh, was commemorated in a long elegiac poem by the Welsh bard, Aneurin.

"The 'Norman nose' is the type of England's aristocracy--once a reality in the days of the Conqueror, now a title to gild wealth." Trevelyan, Poetry and Philosophy, pp. 204-205.

According to Trevelyan (p. 206) the poem includes Meredith's "warning to England of her danger, and his doctrine of imperial defence, based upon armaments, democratic laws, and, above all, on education."

Some examples of rhymes in the poem are: "Aneurin / fire in"; "Saxon / thwacks on"; "lyre in / Aneurin"; "liquor / beaker."

⁵The title in the Table of Contents is "France, December 1870"; in the text the poem is entitled "France 1870" and subtitled "December 1870." Bartlett's headnote refers to a letter of December 7, 1870, to John Morley in which Meredith writes: "Now to business--I have a Grand Ode to France--called simply 'France 1870'." I, 369. (The letter is in Cline, I, 431.) Michael Collie, however, lists "France, December 1870" among the titles of the first edition of Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life; George Meredith: a Bibliography (Toronto, 1974), p. 137.

From the December 7 letter: "Latterly I have felt poetically weakened by the pressure of philosophical reflection, but this is going, and a fuller strength comes of it, for I believe I am within the shadow of the Truth, and as it's my nature to sing I may now do well." Bartlett, I, 369.

⁶PB edition; I prefer Trevelyan's "lightning."

⁷"The Athenians were unripe for his laws, but there is still the future to look to: 'The times are overcast. / But still may they who sowed behind the plough / True seed fix in the mind an unborn Now / To make the plagues afflicting us things past.'" J. M. S. Tompkins, "Meredith's Periander," RES, New Series, Vol. XI (1960), 295.

⁸"Bellerophon, mounted on the winged horse Pegasus, slew the monster Chimaera. There is another tradition, the basis of this poem, that he afterwards attempted to rise with Pegasus to the home of the gods on Olympus, but that Zeus sent a gadfly which stung Pegasus, so that he threw Bellerophon, who, thus falling from on high to earth, was lamed and blinded. His pitiable latter state is here described: his attempts to tell his own story are regarded as the babble of an old beggar, whom no one connects with the famous rider of Pegasus." Notes, p. 595.

⁹Tompkins speaks of Bellerophon's isolation:

"The poem is not a narrative; the events are all in the past, forgotten by the world and incommunicable by the broken hero, who wanders unrecognized in crippled old age, begging his bread from a charitable but preoccupied peasantry, who hear his confused babbling with 'patient inattention'. They have learnt from their fathers of a hero who controlled a winged horse with a golden bit, the gift of a Goddess, and slew a monster, but they do not connect him with the old wanderer. . . . We can discern through a noble symbol the isolation

of experience, oblivion annulling heroic achievement, the failure of contact between the hero and the crowd, and between the survivors of one generation and their successors. We can discern also the action of age, weakening body and mind, turning the 'martial prince' into 'a crazy beggar grateful for a meal', and, proceeding from the traditional interpretation of the winged horse as inspiration, we can discern the poet fallen on silence . . . Bellerophon has no moral; it is truly a poem of tragic life." (pp. 292-293, 293, 294).

¹⁰Lucas, "Poet," pp. 20, 21.

¹¹Bartlett gives both background information and a comment on Meredith's didacticism in her headnote to the poem: "The popular ballad is to be found in J. G. Lockhart's translation of The Spanish Ballads (New York: Scribner, Wedford [sic] and Armstrong, n.d. [1873?]) with the title, The Ill-Married Lady. Lockhart's version runs to eight quatrains as against GM's twenty-three, so that most of the preaching is GM's." I, 325.

¹²She is also "rain-surcharged," an image that contradicts the rest of the pattern; I should prefer her to be parched, like Susan in "Earth and a Wedded Woman," waiting for rain. Possibly, however, "rain-surcharged" is an ornate image for tears.

¹³Although the wife's action is treated sympathetically, the choice of the word "vows" is probably deliberate. Another irony is that the wife's relationship with the lover is a loving repetition of her relationship with her husband. She speaks to her lover in words of humility and service and even uses chivalric terms in reverse: she will be her lover's "succour," "shield," and "squire." (Stanza iv of the original ballad includes the line, "I will serve thee late and early . . ."; see "The Ill-Married Lady" in Lockhart, pp. 163-164.)

¹⁴Norman Friedman links at least one aspect of the husband of "Modern Love" with the husband of "A Preaching"; he quotes the lines from "Modern Love" in which the husband asks for the "name, the name, the new name thou hast won?" "This," Friedman comments, "is the language of the sexual Egoist, whose view of woman is distorted by his projected faithlessness." So, too, in "A Preaching," ". . . we see an adulterous nobleman slaying his wife who, having taken a lover in compensation for her husband's neglect, is accused of being a whore," p. 17.

¹⁵In his Notes on the poem, Trevelyan comments: "The faithless husband considers himself the just executioner of

his unfaithful wife. The poet in his comment (XIV-XXII) uses 'nature' in a sense inferior to that in which he often uses the word,--to mean the mere impulse towards personal satisfaction causing woman to dote on man and man to be unjust to woman. Until nature grows into something more than that, until 'the head' helps 'the heart' (XX), physical force will always have the last word in any struggle between the sexes. In XVIII-XXI the poet is speaking to women ('you'); 'she' is nature; 'he' is man ('the child which crows'); the 'Godlike overmatch' of brute force is Reason," p. 592.

My interpretation of this section of the poem imposes shifting meanings upon that amorphous word "nature." Thus, in stanza xvii when "nature" never "cherished woman," but favored "man, the muscular"--"nature" here is the law of physical survival; but in stanzas xv and xvi, when man's concept of "Honour" is the artificial barrier between nature and woman; and nature, seeking justice, and Honor, seeking blood, seem to be contraries--"nature" here suggests a way of acting, free of such hypocrisies and artificialities as "Honour."

The confusion may stem from Meredith's own mixed attitude. Restraint, for example, which he believed in, may be called an artificiality of civilization; the idea of balance, however, is Meredith's usual corrective--and unifier. The lack of balance is the implied lesson in Bogner's remarks on the poem: "Neither the erring husband nor his unfaithful wife, in 'A Preaching from a Spanish Ballad' . . . is in the right; the latter is carried away by Blood, while the former is more simply unjust in his lack of understanding (Brain). The idea that Brain must in some way control Blood is a commonplace in Meredith's thought." p. 115. But, not only is the narrator's sympathy for the wife too overpowering to justify such a summary, but also, the husband's slaying of his wife seems to be at least as dramatic an example of being "carried away by Blood" as the wife's infidelity.

¹⁶Bogner, in his comments on the last line, praises the kind of powerful reverberation that Meredith could produce: "In the remarkably brutal image of the last line, Meredith fuses man's sexual role, the wife's sense of shame and punishment, and the injustice perpetrated by her husband. It is characteristic of the sudden insight, the brilliant metaphoric leap (for which the poet has not received wide enough recognition) that repays the reader for surviving many a lame, strained, or obscure line in Meredith's work. Attention should be called to the frequency with which such flashes of poetic genius make use of sexual imagery or word play. In this poem, a rather conventional infidelity situation and the lesson to be gained from it are raised from banality by a parting image that is actually the heroine's ironic last intercourse." p. 116.

¹⁷The cockatrice is a fabulous serpent with a deadly glance; the word, a corruption from the Latin crocodilus, unites connotations of hypocrisy and fatality, and both with the "snake" of the poem, man's image of fallen woman.

¹⁸The poem is subtitled "A Ballad of Old Laws of Love"; according to Trevelyan, "the 'laws of love' are those administered among the romantic chivalry of mediaeval Provence." Notes, p. 593.

The poem is divided into four sections: Part I contains six stanzas; Part II, eleven stanzas; Part III, nine stanzas; and Part IV, twelve stanzas. Each stanza contains five lines; the first line of each of the six stanzas in Part I functions like a refrain: "When the South sang like a nightingale"; "When the South sang like a nightingale" (repetition); "The South sang like a nightingale" (omission); "The South grew all a nightingale" (variation); "When the South was a fervid nightingale"; and "The South had throat of a nightingale." The last word in each stanza, "nightingale," does not participate in the rhyme scheme of the stanza; the last four lines of each five-line stanza rhyme abba. Parts II, III and IV, while not using such a refrain-like line, following the rhyming pattern of Part I; the first line of each stanza throughout the poem does not participate in the abba pattern of the rest of the stanza.

¹⁹Although the antecedents of "she" and "them" are unclear, the pronouns probably refer to the princess and to the lords of the court.

²⁰These questions are reminiscent of one posed by Lucas: "In one poem he images France as a Maenad 'Ravishing as red wine in woman's form' (are you supposed to drink it or take it to bed?) . . ." "Poet," p. 16.

²¹In a variation of an earlier trio of lines, Part I closes with "She gave no vine of Love to rear, / Love's wine drank not, yet bent her ear / To themes of Love no less." The implication of "bent her ear" echoes the more ambiguous "Like the banner of war she led them on" (iv). In the latter example "she" is probably the princess; I would guess that this line had then the reverberations apparent to the modern ear: "She led them on," acted as inspiration--and gave them some (sexual?) encouragement.

Trevelyan's view of the princess is different. In his Notes on Part I he remarks: "The 'Princess' feels love for none of the lords, though she is of gentle spirit. Duels are fought on her account." p. 593.

²²As he so often does, the poet, having used a metaphor for the princess, then ignores the literal meaning; the reader is thus left with the disconcerting sight of a lily bowing "To the oath of a bended knee" (viii).

²³The emphasis is mine. Trevelyan's single note for Part II explains: "At last Lord Dusiote, pretending to have been wounded to death in fighting for her honour, obtains her troth, which she gives him as to a dying man, in pity and gratitude." Notes, p. 593. This explanation, however, emphasizes the feigned death-wound, and minimizes the feigned declaration of love.

²⁴Trevelyan comments, "Not daring to face her by daylight, he leaves the court." Notes, p. 593. This comment may be an explication of the awkward ". . . who made the daybeams flame / To scare what he had done" (ii), but it still does not give a reason for his flight: Dusiote "knew not the force that pushed him back." The narrator gives no further explanation, but traditional ballads frequently omit explanations of the cause-and-effect variety. Here, though, the question is not the mystery of Dusiote's reaction to his successful trick. The real problem occurs later in Part III and involves the reader's expectations. Dusiote's initial reactions, his flight and the reason for his return ("And the lady beloved drew his heart for return"), prepare the reader for repentance and a recognition of his love, not for lust and threats.

²⁵"At midnight in the garden Lord Dusiote's squire waits under the orange boughs for the return of his master, who has gone in to claim the Princess as his affianced bride. He returns--dead, borne on the shoulders of the other lords, who have made him 'a ghost' indeed." Trevelyan, Notes, p. 593.

²⁶Although these words are sometimes used interchangeably, the primary meaning of "mask" is disguise, and that of "masque" is dramatic entertainment.

²⁷"A trap for the sweet tooth, lures for the light, / For the fortress defiant a mine: / Right well! But not in the South, princess, / Shall the lady snared of her nobleness / Ever shamed or a captive pine" (IV, xi). In discussing Meredith's novels, Walter F. Wright remarks, "Woman was to be a strong 'fortress'; yet since fortresses are passive, she must paradoxically be helpless and so in need of man's protection." P. 28. The princess is in the paradoxical position of helpless victim of a man's plot and beneficiary of "man's protection" (that of the lords).

²⁸Interestingly, Trevelyan who sees the princess as a "gentle spirit" (despite the "duels fought because of her") and innocent victim, refers to Dusiote as "the trickster" (Poetry and Philosophy, p. 57). Certainly, the term is a correct one, especially since Trevelyan is discussing the

elaborate trick Dusiote plays on the princess in the staged death scene. However, Meredith has used the term "trickster" to describe woman forced into such a role by man's power. Perhaps Dusiote is not just a man whose pride has been touched by rejection--but a man reduced to trickery by a frosty maiden who nevertheless enjoys the battles she incites?

Bogner thinks that "The Young Princess" "falls within a Provencal-like tradition of medieval romance. Lord Dusiote, challenged by the icy beauty and virtue of the young princess, dupes her into marriage at his apparently imminent demise, leaves her inexplicably, and is slain by her friends when he returns later lasciviously and spitefully to claim her hand. The sexual imagery is less interesting in this case than the curious subject matter of the poem. The story and her honor turn upon: (1) his playful lust; (2) her virginity as her honor; and (3) his legal claim upon her virginity, which she scorns to the point of seeing him killed. ("You are dead," she tells him when he comes back to take her as his bride). The upshot is that her honor and purity of motive are upheld in a sexually bizarre situation." Bogner, p. 116. I disagree with much of this interpretation: the princess is motivated more, I believe, by pride than by "her virginity as her honor." She was doubly deceived--in Dusiote's claim to love her, and, because of that love, to have received a fatal wound--and will not acknowledge the "legal claim" of a dead man. Her "purity of motive," too, is suspect; the poem resists such a clearcut schematization.

CHAPTER V

How black his gods behind their marble screens
--"Periander"

 green earth forgets.
The gay young generations mask her grief;
Where bled her children hangs the loaded sheaf.
Forgetful is green earth; the Gods alone
Remember everlastingly: they strike
Remorselessly, and ever like for like.
By their great memories the Gods are known.
--"France, December 1870"

The characters of the narrative poems discussed in Chapter IV, "A Preaching" and "The Young Princess," although set within and conditioned by society, are nevertheless private persons caught in the common "tangles" of sexual passion, pride and conquest. Now, however, the titles of "King Harald's Trance," "Archduchess Anne," and "Periander" indicate the entry of another complicating factor: that of public power. And in the last two poems, "The Nuptials of Attila" and Phaethon," man's need to conquer spreads disaster to entire civilizations, even to earth itself.

Trevelyan remarked of "The Young Princess" that here "we catch hints of a mystic beauty, which, elusive as it is, seems the very essence of romance."¹ In "King Harald's Trance" we receive hints neither of "romance" nor of "mystic beauty." Within the society of "King Harald's Trance," far different from that based on "old laws of love," Harald as king plays a central role. The opening lines present him as a powerful leader, deadly in battle:

Sword in length a reaping-hook amain
Harald sheared his field, blood up to shank:
 'Mid the swathes of slain,
 First at moonrise drank.

Battle over, hunger "pricked" Harald's ribs. His hunger for food is satisfied within his society; he feasts with his men, a feast interrupted by the scop-like lines: "Name us glory, singer, name us pride / Matching Harald's in his deeds of strength" (iv).² The satisfaction of

private sexual hunger is merely implied: after "half a winter night" of feasting, ". . . he bade / Wife to chamber fly" (v).

Immediately following this command, the narrative jumps suddenly in time; the reader, closed out of the scene during Harald's attack and lapse into unconsciousness, is readmitted to the story only as Harald returns to consciousness, two days after the onset of his "trance":³

Twice the sun had mounted, twice had sunk,
Ere his ears took sound; he lay for dead;
Mountain on his trunk,
Ocean on his head.

(vi)

The images of the last two lines of the stanza not only link Harald with the massive forces of nature, a link made in other images of the poem, but also indicate Harald's helplessness. With a "mountain" and an "ocean" upon him, the body with which he "sheared his field" becomes a dead weight.

Harald's body may be motionless, but he can hear, see-- and feel. He lies helpless as his people plan a "burial to fit their lord of war" (viii) and hail Harald's successor. In the midst of these plans Harald's

blind sight saw:
Woman stood with man
Mouthing low, at paw.

Woman, man, they mouthed; they spake a thing
Armed to split a mountain, sunder seas:
Still the frozen king
Lay and felt him freeze.

(x-xi)

The images applied to the man and woman suggest both

animality and slyness, suggestions that isolate the couple from the noisy scene: Harald's wife and lover whispering near what they assume to be Harald's corpse. Earlier Harald had been frozen by his motionless limbs; now, he is frozen by what he sees with his paradoxically "blind sight." But these lines contain a hint of the coming thaw; the whispered words, powerful enough to "split a mountain, sunder seas," are powerful enough to cut through the "mountain" and "ocean" holding Harald motionless. Strengthened by the "smell of brine," Harald prepares for action in two concentrated lines: "Hand for sword at right / Groped, the great haft spanned" (xiii).⁴

The remaining stanzas include lines of similar concentration; from Harald's rising from his place "prone upon the bier" to his slaying of his wife, the tale is briefly told. Harald

Strode, as netters wade,
Straightway to his wife.

Her he eyed: his judgment was one word,
Foulbed! and she fell: the blow clove two.
(xv-xvi)

He has reached his wife, pregnant with his child; his strength, however, gives out before he can reach "the third." The poem closes with that collapse of strength and a final analogy between Harald and an impressive part of nature:

Sudden, as it were a monster oak
Split to yield a limb by stress of heat,
Strained he, staggered, broke
Doubled at their feet.⁵

The poem is an odd combination of strengths and flaws; among the strengths is the meshing of story, ethos and form. Although the poem is generally classified as a ballad, such a classification is probably due to the importance of the story, the objectivity of narration, and the subordination of events to a single episode; the meter, however, does not resemble a ballad meter. The eighteen four-line stanzas rhyme abab; lines 1 and 2 are in truncated trochaic pentameter, while lines 3 and 4 are in truncated trochaic trimeter. With the exception of the climactic stanza xvi, each stanza is a single sentence; the linking between lines 1 and 2, often followed by a break, runs together ten feet, a long unit in a "ballad" stanza. Juxtaposed against this long unit is the "unit" of the two trimeter lines; the effect resembles that of brief commentary.

The diction of the poem is simple; in eighteen stanzas only four three-syllable words occur. The poem, despite Trevelyan's comment that it lacks lucidity, is clear enough.⁶ The only possible confusion occurs in two lines of stanza ix--"King they hailed a branchlet, shaped to fare, / Weighted so, like quaking shingle spume"--when a cluster of metaphoric language makes a literal interpretation unsure.⁷ Inversions, although fewer in "King Harald's Trance" than in many Meredith poems, seem out of place against the simplicity of Harald, his society and its code. Compression, however, and the use of such words and word

combinations as "kingling" and "iron-clang," contribute to the heroic atmosphere of the poem.

The imagery, used sparingly in the poem, is both strength and flaw. No continuing pattern of images emerges; Harald, however, is frequently described in terms of natural forces. Such imagery may be simple and dignified, as the final view of Harald, fallen like a "monster oak," or inappropriate and overdone, as the image of Harald gulping food and drink: "Smoking flesh the thresher washed down fast, / Like an angry sea / Ships from keel to mast" (iii). And an attempt to convey the frustration of the body-imprisoned warrior-- "this Thor / Failed a weak lamb's baa" (viii)--succeeds only in absurdity, an effect considerably increased by the rhyme-word: "ha!"⁸ A puzzling use of imagery occurs in stanzas x through xii. Bracketing the animal images applied to wife and lover are repeated images of Harald as "doglike" and "hoglike." Apparently, these images should suggest Harald's mental confusion and his gradual emergence, through his slowly clearing senses, to clarity of vision--of sight and of mind. Actually, however, these images interfere with the emotional impact of the repeated description of the lovers.

But other images, in their simplicity and compression, give strength to the poem; one example is the picture of Harald, "clamped to couch," as "his fiery hearing sucked / Whispers that at heart made iron-clang" (vii). Another is the terse image of Harald striding, blade at hand, "as

netters wade, / Straightway to his wife." Such images are not mere poetic decoration; when related to the opening glimpse of Harald the warrior-king and the hints of the tribe- and battle-centered society he heads, they form a sympathetic portrayal of a king who acts spontaneously and rightly in killing his wife. There is no "preaching" in this poem and no mention--ironic or otherwise--of "Honour." Narration, not exposition, carries the weight of the poem; the linking of Harald with Thor and with natural elements reinforces the narrative and edges the reader into viewing Harald as a leader who has been betrayed.

Only through seeing the wife's action as treacherous can we see Harald's action as justified.⁹ Now we can understand the reason for the sketch of Harald's society, a society based on warfare and on bonding against the enemy. "The great virtue in a society such as this was loyalty: therefore the worst crime was treachery."¹⁰ Indeed, Trevelyan refers to the overheard words between woman and lover as "treason"; the vagueness of "they spake a thing . . ." seems deliberately ambiguous. The conversation might simply reveal that they are lovers or it might be the final step in a plot to replace Harald with the lover, not only in bed, but in power. Whatever the truth, the wife, in her faithlessness, has betrayed Harald, who is not only her husband, but her king. However unsure the reader may be of the magnitude of the offense, he agrees with Harald's one-word judgment--"Foulbed!"--and condemnation.

The death sentence that Harald passes and executes is quickly followed by his own death; that death is another difference between "A Preaching" and "King Harald's Trance." Apparently, the Spaniard escapes while Harald dies; actually, what happens after the Spanish wife's death is unimportant. Her story serves as platform for the didactic purpose of the poem. Within such a context the fate of the unnamed "seigneur" is of no significance; such a dismissal is the final undercutting of the self-important wife-slayer.

But in "King Harald's Trance" Harald is the center of interest, and surrounding him in ever-widening circles are his wife, his comrades in battle, and the society in which he plays a leading role. In this unselfconscious society, action is the essential; the narrator, responding to his material, accepts the code of this society; neither critical nor preachy, he follows the action. First, we see Harald in battle; then, we hear praise of Harald, great in "deeds of strength." In this world Harald, "blood up to shank," is a hero-king. Later, his strength all but gone, he responds to betrayal with one final effort; his aim accomplished, he dies, "split" like a "monster oak." This final image of Harald underlines the dignity of his death.

We have moved far from the poseur of "A Preaching"; here, masking is a fault, and not a requirement, of civilization. Harald is in accord with his society; the poem thus becomes a paradox: Harald's final act of violence,

instead of being part of the principle of chaos, restores order within his world. For the poem is not only a tale of infidelity and revenge; it tells, too, of "chaos both inside and outside the head"--and the power of will to work upon both.¹¹ Harald defeats physical paralysis and mental confusion to punish treachery; the uncertainty over the exact nature of the treachery emphasizes the merging within Harald of private and public roles. Whatever the betrayal, Harald acts according to the code of his society; because this code is not contradicted, no continuing "under-tide" threatens the surface of the poem. The reader remains within Harald's society and accepts its rules; he is, however, manipulated through the emotional focus upon Harald and through infrequent images that juxtapose the deceitful lovers against the hero-king.

With "Archduchess Anne" we enter another world, one of self-consciousness, of internal conflict, and of rationalized decisions. It is one in which action and reaction--infidelity and death--are not quite so simple as in "King Harald's Trance"; yet similar passions, complicated by political power, drive both the characters and the narrative of "Archduchess Anne." Here, the ruler is a woman whose love for one of her subjects, Count Louis, has made the middle-aged archduchess vulnerable, despite her power:

"Archduchess Anne the Council ruled, / Count Louis his great dame; / And woe to both when one had cooled!" (I, v).

Louis has "cooled"; the story tells of the "woe" that follows his cooling. The poem is a tale of conflict; that conflict ranges from the private psychomachia within Archduchess Anne, through her perception of the power struggle between men and women, to the civil war that finally rips through her land, immersing her crown in "seas of blood" (III, xx). Such a story requires the language of contrast and paradox. Even the civil war becomes not only fact, but also image and consequence of the archduchess's internally chaotic state. Simplicity is not part of this warfare, however; the outcome is a triumph for nothing but ambiguity. No one emerges a victor: all--the archduchess, Louis, Louis' bride, and Kraken, Anne's "faithful savage old warrior"--are victims.¹² Among the victims is the land in which all live or rule.

All of the characters are introduced early in the first part of the three-part poem. Situation, focus, and forecast are given in the opening stanza:

In middle age an evil thing
 Befell Archduchess Anne:
 She looked outside her wedding-ring
 Upon a princely man.

The following stanzas present the "princely man"; Count Louis, imaged as "the bow / Bestrung to fly the shaft" on the battlefield, lacks that directness and intensity in his emotional life. His love for women cannot compete with his love for battle either in importance or in stability: "In idle hours his heart would flow / As winds on currents

waft" (I, iii). Another complicating factor in the love that has become one-sided is Louis' position as "chieftain of the warrior tribes often in revolt against her [Archduchess Anne's] royal power."¹³ Another is Kraken:

He revered her name and line,
Nor other merit had
Save soldierwise to wait her sign,
And do the deed she bade.

(I, vii)

Only one important character remains--Louis' "fair young bride"; her introduction to the court, and to the story, precipitates the movement of events.

These events begin with the smallest of motions, the only outward sign of Archduchess Anne's emotional reaction to her lover's taking a wife: as Anne meets the couple and smiles "royally," her hand jumps.¹⁴ Other than that single reflex, there is no external response; Archduchess Anne has begun her struggle against what she sees as her weakness as a woman: "She seemed a woman scarce of flesh" (I, x). Kraken, now described in animal imagery, sees his lady's motion and, wanting vengeance upon the count, settles down to watch and wait.¹⁵ And there is much to watch.

In the second half of Part I, Louis leads his men into war, crying out his reason for rebellion.

'Forefend it, heaven!' Count Louis cried,
'And let the righteous plead:
My country is a willing bride,
Was never slave decreed.

(xvii)

In his protest he images his country as a woman, and in the contrasting images of "willing bride" and "slave" he extends the man-woman relationship to speak metaphorically of the difference between partnership and domination. Merged in his double metaphor are the individual and social issues of love, loyalty and power; Louis is fighting because he rejects powerlessness for himself and for his people.

But Louis is doomed: "He rode while omens called, beware / Old Kraken's pledge of faith!" (xxi).¹⁶ Even the flickering of the rebel campfires casts an ominous "crimson spot" across Louis' chest, and as he rides into "darkness" waving to his men, "outward flew the wraith" (xxi). The wraith, Louis' ghost, prefigures his death, a prefiguration reinforced by the sound pattern of mournful long "o"'s in the next stanza:

Before pale morn had mixed with gold,
His army roared, and chilled,
As men who have a woe foretold,
And see it red fulfilled.

(xxii)

In the final stanzas of Part I the focus shifts from Louis to Kraken, the instrument of Louis' (past) capture and (future) death:

Old Kraken roped his white moustache
Right, left, for savage glee:
--To swing him in his soldier's sash,
Were kind for such as he!

Old Kraken's look hard Winter wears
When sweeps the wild snow-blast:
He had the hug of Arctic bears
For captives he held fast,

(xxiv-xxv)

Kraken's gleeful swinging of his moustache images the death by hanging that the old chief wants for Louis. The coming "woe" is further foreshadowed in the images applied to Kraken: the earlier animal images have yielded to an identification between Kraken and the "Arctic bears" whose hug can hold and kill. Associated with the bear image are the coldness and hardness of an Arctic winter; Louis' enemy is cold, hard--and implacable. Part I ends with the image of Kraken, bear-like, holding fast.

The opening line of Part II, "Archduchess Anne sat carved in frost," continues Kraken's Arctic imagery; the line also connects the frosty archduchess with her earlier reaction to Louis' taking of a bride: "She seemed a woman scarce of flesh." But the archduchess' coldness is different from that of Kraken. She is not, like her follower, dedicated to "Vengeance"; rather, she has withdrawn, "shut off from priest and spouse" (II, i), into a private world of internal conflict. That conflict forms the content of the entire twenty-six stanzas of Part II; to convey the ever-shifting opposition of this section, the poet uses a pattern of contrasted meaning and image.

In a stanza alive with hissing sounds, Anne holds the order for Louis' execution as she debates her line of action:

One hand enclosed a paper scroll,
 Held as a strangled asp.
 So may we see the woman's soul
 In her dire tempter's grasp.
 (II, ii)

With the single image of "a strangled asp" an entire group of associations surrounds the death-scroll: Cleopatra, another woman-ruler-lover; the serpent, the "dire tempter"; even the first woman, whose fall into temptation climaxed a special woman-serpent-tempter relationship. This asp, however, is "strangled"; as Anne struggles against its venom, the sibilants underly and support that meaning. The struggle is as real as the archduchess' life-and-death power over her lover, and, as promised, "we see the woman's soul" as Anne wavers in emotion, decision--and rationalization. The major conflict--that between the stiffening force of pride and the softening influence of love--is imaged in terms of the powerful natural elements of fire, water, storm and tempest. Paired opposites suggest the ruler's seesawing as first one tendency and decision, then another, gain mastery over the archduchess.¹⁷ The struggle is complicated both by some blurring of the opposing edges ("hate in love and love in hate," iv) and by the archduchess' attitude toward women and her view of herself as woman and ruler. The entire second section is itself a struggle to reveal the moment-by-moment swinging of her heart:

Between the day that struck her old,
 And this black star of days,
 Her heart swung like a storm-bell tolled
 Above a town ablaze.

(v)

The image of the "town ablaze" connotes not only the fiery power of the emotions with which the archduchess is dealing; it also carries the suggestion of uncontrollability, of a

raging force beyond human restraint. It further suggests the archduchess' fear of emotional slavery or powerlessness, a weakness that she associates with her sex.

To communicate this complexity of thought and emotion, the poet uses a variety of voices--interior monologue; third-person narration; and dialogue--often interrupting, contradicting, and undercutting each other. Following the narrator's comment likening the archduchess' heart to a swinging "storm-bell," two third-person lines illustrate the rapidity of change in that wavering heart: "His beauty pressed to intercede, / His beauty served him ill" (vi). The woman's memory of her lover's "beauty" can, within moments, create contradictory effects, depending on the strength of Louis' physical power over her, or her shame over submission to that power. Immediately, an interior monologue cuts through the narrator's summary of those reactions: "--Not Vengeance, 'tis his rebel's deed, / 'Tis Justice, not our will!" (vi). The plural pronoun emphasizes Anne's conception of herself as Justice: she is practicing royal rationalization.

The third-person narration then resumes, or rather, the interruption is in turn interrupted:

Yet who had sprung to life's full force
 A breast that loveless dried?
 But who had sapped it at the source,
 With scarlet to her pride!

He brought her waning heart as 'twere
 New message from the skies,
 And he betrayed, and left on her
 The burden of their sighs.

In floods her tender memories poured;
 They foamed with waves of spite:
 She crushed them, high her heart outsoared,
 To keep her mind alight.

(vii-ix)

The narrator uses contrast and paradox to explicate Anne's ongoing debate. The transitional words of "Yet" and "But" signal first a contradiction of Anne's claim to Justice, followed by a contradiction of the contradiction. Louis himself is the paradox from whom these contradictions flow: he is both source and destroyer of the archduchess' renewal, strengthener and betrayer of the "waning heart." Paradoxical function leads to paradoxical effect: the archduchess' "tender memories" are afoam with "waves of spite." Her inability to be single-minded is underscored by the ambiguity of pronoun reference: the antecedent of "them" ("She crushed them") could refer to either the opposing "tender memories" or "waves of spite."

Now the spite is winning; the third-person telling is again interrupted by the archduchess speaking to herself:

--The crawling creature, called in scorn
 A woman!--with this pen
 We sign a paper that may warn
 His crowing fellowmen.

(x)

On the whole, imagery belongs to the narrator; here, however, the archduchess applies an image of animality and inferiority to herself as a woman. Juxtaposed against that debased image--ironically, the scorn of those who demean women is matched by that of the archduchess--is Anne's decision in favor of a power play; she will sign Louis' death warrant as

a warning to his "crowing fellowmen." The meaning is ambiguous: the caution may be read as one against rebellion, and the "fellowmen" as Louis' rebelling troops; or the meaning may be enlarged to include a warning to all men not to dismiss the "crawling creatures" since they have the power to silence any hasty "crowing."¹⁸ Either meaning may be extended into the next stanza:

--We read them lesson of a power
 They slight who do us wrong.
 That bitter hour this bitter hour
 Provokes; by turns the strong!
(xi)

The struggle, whether between Louis and Anne, or men and women, is that of power; the power struggle in society mirrors the struggle within the archduchess, as one "bitter hour" provokes, and succeeds, the other.

The archduchess is struggling, not only against love and conscience, but against her own concept of womanhood. In her longing to be freed from what she perceives as weakness stemming from her sex, to be Justice, "Above our sex, above the throne" (xii), she echoes the earlier frosty and fleshless images of the narrator. Having succumbed to the "weakness" of women ("--That we were woman once is known"), her pride has suffered; although she has disavowed Vengeance, her vision of herself as Justice includes the sight of "men quaking." Pride and power thus intermingle whenever her decision is in favor of Louis' death.

She has not, however, rested in that decision. The next stanzas contain images of the ongoing struggle: storm, wrestling, and "counterfloods." An extended image portrays Anne's emotional quandary: she feels the "demon of her sex pursue / Incensing or to melt" (xiii). The "demon," associated with the earlier asp-tempter image, is here linked with the archduchess' sex, with the "crawling creature." Again, Anne's perception of her womanhood is demonic; she sees her sexual identity as a force making her vulnerable both to passion and to love. It is that duality--passion and love--that makes the pairing of opposites, "incensing or to melt," so accurate. Love may melt the frozen regions of the heart; the word "incensing" seems to contradict that softening effect. However, to incense has a double set of meanings: to enrage or inflame; and to offer incense to, in effect, to worship. An apparently simple opposition is, in fact, as complicated as human emotion--and the archduchess' heart.¹⁹

The idea, if not the image, of the "demon of her sex" continues in later stanzas as Archduchess Anne seeks to "disentangle one clear wish / Not of her sex" (xv). What she seeks is the impossible: to know what she would want were she free of her sex, of her love, of her body--of herself. She is far from disentangling "one clear wish"; despite her attempt at royal identification with Justice, she is struggling with a mixture of emotions. Among them is a fear that she might be thought "crazed and aged," or

"enamoured of a sweet / Withdrawn, a vengeful crone!"

(xvi, xvii). Immediately after the words "a vengeful crone," an abrupt shift occurs; the archduchess has noticed a "figure at her feet." Louis' bride has come to plead for her husband's life.

The countess begins the dialogue with a contrast in perceptions; although her husband, she says, sees the archduchess as "Justice dread," the countess sees Anne as "Mercy dear." Because of that difference she, and not her husband, can ask for his life. She knows enough about the human qualities of "Mercy," however, to attempt flattery: "I had not marriage with his mind, / His counsel could not share" (xx). But the bride's major hope seems to be that her "weakness" will influence the archduchess to choose the role of Mercy over that of Justice; she is counting on a woman's response to her appeal.

It is the wrong approach:

'Hence with the woman in your speech,
For nothing it avails
In woman's fashion to beseech
Where Justice holds the scales.'
(xxiii)

Anne, who wants to suppress what she sees as "womanish" in herself, refuses to respond to a plea made in "woman's fashion." The irony is that the more she resists what she labels the "woman" in herself, the closer she moves, not toward her self-proclaimed role as Justice, but rather toward the Vengeance of Kraken.

The dialogue between the women is over; the narrator returns in the final three stanzas of the section. These stanzas contain elemental images of conflict--storm, wind and fire--that echo the opening images of Part II. Here, after one stanza of narration, the images appear only in the first two lines of the closing stanzas; in each stanza, this two-line unit is interrupted by the archduchess' thoughts. The oppositions become extremely complicated in these closing stanzas: Archduchess Anne is emotionally embattled, her conflicting emotions leaving her unsure about her final decision. Against the third-person telling of this struggle are juxtaposed the archduchess' thoughts; finally, her thoughts are themselves an opposition between possible views of the young wife. The countess might be, the archduchess thinks, either "the fool of wives, / Or cunningly designed!" In a ballad-like repetition with variation she muses, "His wife must be a subtle witch / Or else God loves her well!" The final contrast is that between the external quiet--the archduchess seated, apparently motionless--and her internal warfare imaged as the "flame that strives / To hold on beating wind." She sits until the "tempest-pitch / In her torn bosom" has quieted. No decision has been made; it is as difficult to achieve as mastery of flame over wind.

Part III opens with Kraken reading a letter of instruction from his lady; the struggle seems to be over. But it has not ended. The letter, product of a heart still

at "tempest-pitch," is ambiguous. Since Anne has not given "definite orders for forgiveness," she has abdicated the decision-making responsibility to Kraken.²⁰ Kraken is more than ready to accept that responsibility and to read his ruler's letter his own way. In the opening third of this section the major contrast is that between the archduchess' words and Kraken's reactions. The letter, vague though it is, breathes of "woman's feeling"; Kraken's reaction to such an atmosphere is to stamp a "heel more like a hoof" (III, ii). Now linked with both animals and the devil, Kraken has become Vengeance. That element in Archduchess Anne tending toward Mercy, perceived both by her and by Kraken as weakness, is itself too weak to lead her to write a clear, unambiguous order for Louis' release. Without that direct order Kraken is free to act upon his own interpretation. Once again we have a clash; now, however, the struggle is not within the archduchess, but between a partially suppressed longing of Anne and the single-minded will of Kraken. In such an unequal struggle, the outcome is preordained. Undercutting fragments of Anne's letter is "old Kraken," described in two major image groups: animal imagery and cold-snow-storm-ice imagery, a combination with which Part I closed. Since the archduchess has evaded direct responsibility, Kraken may ignore her "nods and winks." His attitude is similar to his lady's: he dismisses them as "woman's fog" (vii).

A form of dialogue is thus created as the archduchess' words are interrupted by the old soldier's actions and comments. As part of that continuing counterpoint, Kraken takes the archduchess' words and twists them to his purpose; thus, for example, he contrasts, not the opposing concepts of mercy and vengeance, but the opposing readings of "mercy": death by bullet or by hanging. The entire scene is a lesson in the complexities of language, and its vulnerability to ignorant--or deliberate--misinterpretation.

Kraken opposes his "mercy" to that of Archduchess Anne as part of another contrast, that of clothing and stripping; Kraken wants the archduchess' love "clothed" and her "cloak" of self-delusion ripped away. Paradoxically, that very stripping is designed to conceal; the final irony is that Kraken, who loathes disguise, nevertheless uses trickery and deceit to achieve his end.

That end, Louis' death, continues the pattern of paradox: "At morn the hero said Good-night" (xii). In a form of ballad repetition, the count's death is replayed:

At morn the Countess Louis heard
 Young light sing in the lark.
 Ere eve it was that other bird,
 Which brings the starless dark.
 (III, xiii)

Louis is dead; while his bride longs to join him in death, Archduchess Anne mutely turns killing looks toward Kraken. The archduchess' conflict is over:

The pride that fenced her heart in mail,
 By mortal pain was torn.
 Forth from her bosom leaped a wail,
 As of a babe new-born.
 (xvi)

In Part II Louis is, paradoxically, the cause of both revitalizing and sapping the archduchess' loveless breast, a breast torn by internal warfare. Now, however, it is her armor of pride that is torn; her breast, released of its love, has become an image of fruitfulness.

That release has come too late; Anne's personal civil war has yielded to civil war in her land. The war that rips the country apart is seen as the result of Anne's vacillation: "O had she on old Kraken urged / Her word of mercy clear!" (xxi). The crown eventually wins, but the "triumph" of both crown and ruler is a costly one. The crown has "furled a draggled flag" and "sheathed a broken blade" (xxv). Archduchess Anne is metamorphosed into a decaying "hag"; and Kraken, his honor lost, has gone into exile.

The poem, a generally good one up until the final dozen stanzas, contains typical Meredith faults.²¹ As in "Margaret's Bridal-Eve," the poet has a problem with the heroine's eyes: "Her eyes were in her brows" (II, i). The archduchess' breast, too, is in trouble; within that breast are leaping, stormy "counterfloods"; further, "counterfloods" seems to be the subject of "wrestled in angels' form" (II, xiv). Despite all of this internal activity, "Archduchess Anne ascending flew" (xiii).

After the archduchess has returned to earth, Louis' bride pleads for her husband's life; at the end of the dialogue, an internal rhyme brings the sound of the nursery into the countess' plea: "Then bent and went the lady wan" (xxiv).

After Louis' death such faults become concentrated:

The Crown on seas of blood, like swine,
Swam forefoot at the throat:
It drank of its dear veins for wine,
Enough if it might float!

(III, xx)

This stanza is marked by confusion (the Crown swam forefoot? at whose throat? the Crown drank of its own veins?) and by tongue-twisting sound (Enough if it . . ."). The emotional intensity of inter- and intra-personal conflict is gone; in later stanzas the conflict of civil war has no power to overcome clumsy or confusing lines. God is suddenly and irrelevantly dragged into a poem that has been filled with human passion and indecision. Even the final lines of the poem are vague--and tame: "Great were her errors, but she had / Great heart, Archduchess Anne."

It is a poor epitaph for a woman torn between opposing forces of love, power, fear and pride--and a weak ending for a poem of internal and external conflict. Indeed, the process of struggle itself is often the subject of the "dramatic narrative"²² and is even echoed in the struggle among the voices. The first part, from the introduction of the characters to Louis' capture, is told mainly from the outside; the third-person narration is broken only by Louis' words and a two-line gleeful interior monologue of

Kraken's. In Part II, an analysis of Archduchess Anne's internal struggle, the major teller is the narrator; he is interrupted by the archduchess' thoughts--a prefiguration of Anne's letter counterpointed by Kraken in Part III--and Anne's dialogue with Louis' bride. The section ends with a "dialogue" between the narrator and the archduchess. In Part III we have the letter, Kraken's reactions in image, his reactions summarized by the narrator, and Kraken's interior monologue; this dialectic is followed by a dialogue between Kraken and Louis. With Louis' death the narrator resumes control of the story.

Through these manipulations of thought and event, through shifts and juxtapositions of angle of vision, through interruptions and contradictions, certain images remain. Some form into clusters (an important example is the cold-ice-snow cluster); some shift in meaning; some remain in paired opposition. Of the paired oppositions, several are ideas, not images (love-pride); at least one important opposition is symbolic (mercy-vengeance). Mercy and Vengeance are elements in Anne's psychomachia; finally, however, Kraken becomes personified Vengeance, the archduchess' other self. In addition to the oppositions, the most important recurring images are those of natural forces; wind, storm, floods and fires move restlessly through the poem, changing in context, but always indicating conflict. Early in the poem, for example, the wind images Louis'

instability in love, contrasted with his steadiness in battle; later, it blows into a storm, or beats against the flame, within the archduchess' breast. Such images do not disappear from the poem until all conflict is over.

After internal and external conflict is ended, the archduchess is described as "she that helped to slay, yet bade / To spare the fated man." Archduchess Anne's action, or, more accurately, her inaction, produces the paradoxical result of contributing to the death of the man she wanted to spare. But more important than this paradox is that which sees the consequences of human will in individual death and civil war--and then contradicts that cause-effect sequence by referring to "the fated man." We have circled back to the beginning of the poem: "an evil thing / Befell Archduchess Anne." An even clearer absolution from responsibility is contained in the lines, "And woe to both when one had cooled! / Little was she to blame."²³ Through such clues we are able to detect an "under-tide" in "Archduchess Anne." The poem implies that the ever-widening circles of chaos ending in civil war have at their center the archduchess' psychic struggle. Any implied criticism of her evading both decisive mental judgment and external action rests upon one assumption: the ability of men and women to make rational decisions and the power of those decisions to affect events. But a counter-current of the poem indicates the impossibility of making judgments based entirely on reason; the irrational is too much a part of the human

makeup. Even if "our one clear wish" were to make a rational decision, unaffected by emotion or prejudice, we would be as unsuccessful as the archduchess in disentangling that wish. The result then is human helplessness before our own chaotic passions. Death is the only resolution: Louis is dead; Anne is emotionally dead; Kraken has gone into exile; the land is half-dead from civil war. The sole hint of rebirth belongs to the count: "Count Louis' dust would fill an urn, / His deeds are waving grain" (III, xxvii).

No hint of rebirth ends the poem "Periander." The cycle is one of death: the poem begins and ends with murder. The opening line, "How died Melissa none dares shape in words," implies that like Browning's Duke, Periander has given commands for his wife's death; her son, loyal to his mother, bearing "brows black of her," is imaged as a "cur" that "runs barking for his bread."²⁴ The people of Corinth, too, as the Athenians in "Solon," are imaged as animals who breathe and think only through their ruler; the tyrant's control over city and people is total:

His Corinth, to each mood subservient
In homage, made he as an instrument
To yield him music with scarce touch of stops.
He breathed, it piped . . .

(iv)

That forced subservience indicates not only the power of tyranny, but also, for the tyrant, a more profound isolation than that he has imposed upon his son: "Up on his marble fortress-tower he sits, / The city under him . . ." (ii).

Periander's absolute power over wife, son and the "city under him" is both background and catalyst for the focus of the poem: the conflict between Periander and Lycophron. Periander's wielding of power has caused the estrangement between father and son; the father's position as ruler of Corinth now forces him to consider the question asked by an adviser, "Who next?" (vi). The answer, Periander reluctantly admits, is "that rebel with his mother in his brows" (v). It is "passion for his line" (viii), not for his son, that precipitates the disastrous meeting between father and son, a meeting that ends in Periander's sending Lycophron into exile.²⁵

Time, however, is on Lycophron's side: "The seasons rolled like troops of billows blown / To spraymist. The prince gazed on capping night" (x). For Periander, the vision of his future "capping night" urges him to rescind his order:

He heard historic echoes moan his name,
As of the prince in whom the race had pause;
Till Tyranny paternity became,
And him he hated loved he for the cause.

(xi)

The "cause" is not the only reason for "tyranny" to be submerged in "paternity"; Periander has begun to think of Lycophron not only as his mother's son, but as a reincarnation of himself: "Not Lycophron the exile now appeared, / But young Periander, from the shadow cleared, / That haunted his rebellious brows" (xii).²⁶ Periander's daughter acts as intermediary between father and son; when the ruler

receives the "sweet words" that Lycophron has agreed to return to Corinth as his father's heir, Periander orders a fleet sent to bring the exile home:

He waved the fleet to strain its westward way
On to the sea-hued hills that crown the bay:
Soil of those hospitable islanders
Whom now his heart, for honour to his blood,
Thanked. They should learn what boons a prince
confers
When happiness enjoins him gratitude!

(xiv)

Since the poet assumes that the reader knows the story, this stanza--with its reference to the "hospitable" islanders and the projected "boons" a grateful Periander will confer--is concentrated dramatic irony. As Idomeneus, on the deck of his ship, thinks of the coming reunion with his wife and child, so too Periander, watching for the return of his fleet, thinks of the coming meeting and reconciliation. In anticipation of seeing "his youth revived" through his son, the prince imagines a renewal of his past "great ideas gone to smoke" (xv, xvi). His musing is interrupted by the appearance of "the fleet brown-flocked on the sea-verge!" (xvi). There will be no meeting--and no reconciliation:²⁷

Oars pulled: they streamed in harbour; without cheer
For welcome shadowed round the heaving bier.
They, whose approach in such rare pomp and stress
Of numbers the free islanders dismayed
At Tyranny come masking to oppress,
Found Lycophron this breathless, this lone-laid.
(xviii)

The literal and figurative shadow that had marked
Lycophron's brow--and had, in Periander's view, been cleared
by a fusing vision of son/self--falls once more upon the

youth; now, however, the shadow is that of death. Lycophron, who has been isolated from his father by suspicion, from his people by his father's edict, and from his home by exile, has entered the final isolation of death. In death, however, Periander sees his son "close-linked" with the mother whom Lycophron resembled and to whom he had remained loyal:

Who smote the man thrown open to young joy?
 The image of the mother of his boy
 Came forth from his unwary breast in wreaths,
 With eyes. And shall a woman, that extinct,
 Smite out of dust the Powerful who breathes?
 Her loved the son; her served; they lay close-
 linked!

(xviii)

Tompkins' comment that the climax of the poem comes not with the death of Lycophron but with this "explanation" is probably correct; here, however, Meredith's narrative indirection at an emotionally intense moment is not an evasion. As the title of "Periander" indicates, the emphasis throughout has remained not with the son, but with the father; thus, the climax is not just an "explanation" of Lycophron's death but a brief statement of Periander's complex emotional reaction to that death. Until this moment, father and son have been locked in a power struggle in which neither gains complete victory nor suffers total defeat; the father's public power has been matched by the son's power to resist. Even in the confrontation at the shore--it is the only encounter we see; when Periander next sees his son, Lycophron is dead--the narrator describes the two as "paired / For

stiffness" (ix).²⁸ Even Lycophron's acceptance of his father's offer to return to Corinth as Periander's heir shows the two in equilibrium: the narrator comments that Lycophron "to his father bowed" while Periander, awaiting his son's return, looks forward to pardoning the son who has "subdued" him.²⁹

Periander can accept being "subdued" by the son whom he has come to see as a younger version of himself; what adds to the anguish of the failed reconciliation is the bitter thought that he has been conquered, not only by his son but also by his wife. He, "the Powerful," is impotent before a woman who can "smite out of dust"; in a psychological reversal Periander, who has used his power to send his wife to death and his son into exile, recognizes at last that it is he who has been the exile, who alone has been left behind. Ironically, this recognition comes only after Periander's perception of Lycophron has come full circle: after originally linking Lycophron with Melissa, Periander gradually identifies his son with himself; only when he sees his son dead does he once again link Lycophron and Melissa--in accusation against himself.³⁰

The concluding stanza delineates a further reversal; in Periander's need for vengeance, the just-begun metamorphosis--from tyranny to paternity--is reversed, and the grieving father finds consolation in the vengeance-seeking tyrant:

Dead was he, and demanding earth. Demand
 Sharper for vengeance of an instant hand,
 The Tyrant in the father heard him cry,
 And raged a plague; to prove on free Hellenes
 How prompt the Tyrant for the Persian dye;
 How black his Gods behind their marble screens.

The final line of the poem may carry the meanings Tompkins mentions; particularly intriguing is the suggestion that the "marble screens" symbolize "the structures of any art."³¹ However, when the entire movement of the poem is considered, the "marble screens" may refer to Periander's briefly assumed role "behind" which his dark gods of tyranny still lurk. With the death of his son he resumes the role in which revenge, part of those dark gods, displaces his lost paternity.

In transforming the story told by Herodotus, Meredith uses the devices both of amplification and of compression; for Periander's reflections--the major amplification--the plot allows the mediating narrator to see into Periander's mind. But the inversions and clumsy lines that simply irritate elsewhere become jarring in lines expressing thought: "Errors aforetime unperceived were bared, / To be by his young masterful repaired" (xvi). The juxtaposition of two difficult three-syllable words, plus the common Meredithian practices of placing a modifying adjective after the noun and of substituting an adjective for a noun ("masterful" for "masterful son") combine to form a rather lumpish piece of mental material. Much of the poem, in fact, represents a struggle for the verbal capacity to express the sharply perceived complexities of a fundamental human relationship.

Complicating that father-son relationship is the third person of this "triangle"--Melissa; Melissa's connection to both husband and son does not remain in the past but casts its "shadow" into the present. Also part of the resulting triangular tug-of-war is Periander's movement between, and merging of, public and private roles. Thus, for example, Periander's public duty and position urge him toward an attempt at reconciliation with his son; public and private roles merge when he uses his power to exile his son. In a way reminiscent of "Modern Love" this constant flux--although the roles are strictly limited--becomes part of the subject-matter of the poem.

Dramatic irony, the contrast between perceptions of reality, is especially important here. As in other Meredith poems in which classical story is narrative source, the reader's knowledge becomes analogous to Fate. The essential irony is that Periander's desire to acknowledge his son's dignity as heir ("To bring him back a prince the father vowed") ensures that his son will not succeed; heightening that irony is the portrayal of Periander, impatiently waiting on shore, wrapped in imagined plans for the future that will not arrive.³² A final contrast of perceptions occurs not between Periander and the reader, but within the poem between Periander and his people. Periander's men find Lycophron "this breathless, this lone-laid"; Periander, however, sees Lycophron removed from him, and forever "close-linked" to Melissa. Through this final loss of his

son and Periander's emotional recognition of Lycophron's tie to his mother, Periander returns to his original isolation in his "marble fortress-tower." Following both recognition and isolation, the role of tyrant, briefly submerged in that of father, returns to power; it is the tyrant of Corinth who avenges the death of Lycophron.

The poem thus establishes its own circularity: beginning with murder, it ends with murder; beginning with tyranny, it ends with tyranny. Indeed, the islanders' perception of Periander--their fear of "Tyranny come masking to oppress" (xvii)--causes Lycophron's death; if there is any moral, it is that destruction breeds destruction.

In the splendid "The Nuptials of Attila," too, destruction breeds destruction. Henley, whose review of the 1887 volume irritated Meredith, finds the poet of "The Nuptials" to be "sustained in inspiration, rapid of march, nervous of phrase, apt of metaphor, and intoxicating in effect" The Pall Mall Gazette, in a generally negative review of the volume, considers "The Nuptials" to be "the finest" poem of the collection and admits that its "movement" is "magnificent"; Elton, in his one-sentence critique of the poem, singles out that "magnificent" movement: "In The Nuptials of Attila" there is a new tune, fierce, rapid, and insurgent, which sweeps us over all the rugged places to a crashing close."³³

There are indeed "rugged places" in this "barbaric" poem, but even these do not usually interrupt the flow of

line.³⁴ The meter, trochaic tetrameter with an omitted final unstressed syllable, is the meter of the early "Cassandra." But while the "Cassandra" metrical pattern is rigidly contained within five-line stanzas rhyming, "The Nuptials of Attila" contains no regular stanzas, only sections of widely varying length, and a changing rhyming pattern. In "Cassandra" repetitions of entire stanzas formed structural units; in "The Nuptials" most of the sections are punctuated by changing exclamations to or about Attila. "Eye and have, my Attila!"; "Make the bed for Attila!"; "Attila, my Attila!" These lines fall outside the rhyming pattern of the section and together function as a form of refrain.

The lines are end-rhymed, but the effect of the poem is to de-emphasize that rhyming. Much of the effect comes from a combination of varied rhyme; the refrain-like, and unrhymed, "Attila" lines; and the changing section length.³⁵ Another reason for that de-emphasis is the persistence of the beat, and its resemblance in effect to the strong four-stress rhythm of Old English verse. That resemblance is heightened by the handling of the caesura. In "Cassandra" one of the ways in which the poet offset the possibility of monotony was to vary the position of the caesura; in "The Nuptials" the natural pause usually falls between the second and third stresses of the line. That insistent beat; the simple diction; the effective stressing of basic grammatical units--nouns and verbs; and the overwhelming use of one- and two-syllable words--all contribute to the power of the poem.

Such power is appropriate for a poem about man's fearful power to warp human relationships and to blast Earth's fruitfulness. Trevelyan sees the "motif" of the poem to be "the huge, wild, primitive forces, of nature and of man,"³⁶ but nature's "primitive forces"--water, fire, flood--are metaphors for the destructive capacity, not of nature, but of man. Event and image tell of havoc created by men: bloody war, scorched land, blackened crops, slain and captive people. Fear, and the violence between vulture and prey, becomes the common nexus between people; such a "bond" extends to the sexual connection between man and woman.³⁷

The major contrast in the poem, then, is an implied one, that between the general havoc caused by Attila and his army and the underlying order of nature. That fundamental order has been overturned, but the overturning is temporary; the destroyer is ultimately destroyed. The restoration of order underlies the imagery of the opening section; as Attila pauses, the natural cycle--of "sun and rain, and rain and sun," of men waxing, crawling and dying, of "the bridled earth" waiting for spring--reasserts itself.

That pause has begun with the opening lines of the poem: "Flat as to an eagle's eye, / Earth hung under Attila." The Earth "hung" motionless, spread beneath Attila, the eagle, the bird of prey. In that pause Attila is at his height; supremely powerful, he allows natural fruitfulness only through his own non-interference. His "warrior host,"

deprived of fighting, are immobilized, "cut in stone"; Attila, the death-dealer, is the giver of life to his army (they have "life from him alone"). The closing lines of Section I--"O for the time when God did cry, / Eye and have, my Attila!"--add another dimension to Attila's power over life and death. God has not simply been acquiescent as Attila tramples the earth; in a reversal of the Christ-devil temptation, God has spread the earth before Attila and said, Take.³⁸

Attila has "taken" the earth; now he has turned his attention to another form of "taking": the major time-shifts occur between the narrative concerning "The Nuptials of Attila" and the recollections of past battles; the imagery weaves the two together. Thus, after the introductory section establishing the pause for "The Nuptials" and the second section telling of past "havoc," Section III opens:

He breathed peace and pulled a flower.
 Eye and have, my Attila!
 This was the damsel Ildico,
 Rich in bloom until that hour.

In the peace that he allows the earth, Attila must "pull" a flower; the "refrain" that follows that plucking equates Attila's possession both of land and of flower. The fate of the plucked flower, the blooming Ildico, is foreshadowed in the ominous "until that hour."

The equation between the two objects of conquest, woman and earth, is reinforced in Section IV; seen and desired by Attila, Ildico is passively "led to him straightway." The

future object of Attila's ravishing, she is clothed in the "fruit" of his past ravishing: "Rifled lands were her array, / Jewels bled from weeping crowns, / Gold of woeful fields and towns." At the nuptial banquet, Attila's "iron horsemen," whose lives are based on perpetual warfare, shout their hope that Attila will slake his sexual thirst quickly and "unleash" them for battle:

Eagle, eagle of our breed,
Eagle, beak the lamb, and feed!
Have her, and unleash us! Live,
Attila! my Attila!³⁹

(v)

Attila is again the eagle, preying now upon the "lamb," Ildico; the shout, "Have her" echoes God's cry, "Eye and have, my Attila!" That image of preying continues in the women's imaging Ildico's brow as shadowed by "a vulture's claw / Gript in flight" (vii). It is a vision.

Such as wicked dreams betray
When pale dawn creeps o'er the bed.
They might show the common pang
Known to virgins, in whom dread
Hunts their bliss like famished hounds.

(vii)

Here is another form of preying: sex as the hunt, and intercourse as blood-letting.

Later, as Ildico "lay waiting" for Attila,

still he hung
Like the fever-dreading air,
Cursed of heat; and as a corpse
Gathers vultures, in his brain
Images of her eyes and kiss
Plucked at the limbs that could remain
Loitering nigh the doors of bliss.

Make the bed for Attila!⁴⁰

(xiv)

Here, the vulture image reappears, but now the vultures are images of Ildico, plucking at the plucker; these vultures, we are explicitly reminded, gather about a "corse." Lust, prey, disease and death--these are the images of "the carnal pleasures just ahead"--"pleasures" underscored, and mocked, by the refrain "Make the bed for Attila!"

Death, that commonplace of the battlefield, has earlier been linked with the nuptials:

--Who breathed on the king cold breath?
Said a voice amid the host,
He is Death that weds a ghost,
Else a ghost that weds with Death?
Ildico's chill little hand
Shuddering he beheld: austere
Stared, as one who would command
Sight of what has filled his ear:
Plucked his thin beard, laughed disdain.
Feast, ye Huns! His arm he raised,
Like the warrior, battle-dazed,
Joining to the fight amain.
Make the bed for Attila!

(x)

The linkage is puzzling; who is Death? who is the ghost? The "cold breath" upon the king and Ildico's "chill" hand produce a shudder in Attila; that shudder of foreboding is emphasized by the following pause and the forced slowing down of "austere / Stared." But the king dismisses both moment and omens, like a "battle-dazed" warrior before rejoining the fight. Ildico leaves the banquet hall; she is "to meet / On a midnight, near a grave, / Flapping wide the winding sheet" (xi). While Attila remains at the feast, "Death and she walked through the crowd, / Out beyond the flush of light" (xii). Death is now either Ildico's partner--

or Ildico herself.

As Attila "loiters," the poem, too, pauses. The angle of vision widens as the narrator questions whether warnings were sounded--or rejected.⁴¹ But the questions have already been answered; Attila is fated to die:

Passion on one hand, on one,
Destiny led forth the Hun.
Heard ye outcries of affright,
Voices that through many a fray,
In the press of flag and spear,
Warned the king of peril near?
Men were dumb, they gave him way,
Eager heads to left and right,
Like the bearded standard, thrust,
As in battle, for a nod
From their lord of battle-dust.

Attila, my Attila!
Slow between the lines he trod.
Saw ye not the sun drop slow
On this nuptial day, ere eve
Pierced him on the couch aglow?
Attila, my Attila?⁴²

(xv)

The slow sunset is an omen of Attila's coming death; the single-syllable words, varied vowel sounds, and repeated sibilants echo the slow dropping of the sun. The contrast of light and dark; the glow of the sun and the darkness of the night; the piercing of the penis--and knife-thrust--all bring together the sex-battle equation and predict the end of Attila's "day." Ironically, the soldiers clear the way for "their lord of battle-dust"; he will shortly be dust after a "battle" ordained both by his own "Passion" and inescapable "Destiny."

As the death images gather about the coming sexual consummation, Attila's movement toward the nuptial chamber is

interrupted once again; here, as the warrior-king studies the faces of "his fighting brood," we are given another look backward at past battles:

Red were they whose mouths recalled
Where the slaughter mounted high,
High on it, o'er earth appalled,
He; heaven's finger is their sight
Raising him on waves of dead:
Up to heaven his trumpets blown.
O for the time when God's delight
Crowned the head of Attila!
Hungry river of the crag
Stretching hands for earth he came.
Force and Speed astride his name
Pointed back to spear and flag.
He came out of miracle cloud,
Lightning-swift and spectre-lean.
Now those days are in a shroud:
Have him to his ghostly queen.
Make the bed for Attila!

(xv)

Attila's power in battle is not only literally based upon the "waves of dead"; a death-merchant himself, he is metaphorically identified with the "spectre-lean" figure of Death. His soldiers, afraid that their days of death-dealing might now be over (vanished "in a shroud") are reassured by Attila's cry of "Rome!" Instead of being lost in the grip of "his ghostly queen," Attila shares the soldiers' longing to march on Rome; he shares, too, their view of women as an inferior, less lasting, form of "plunder":

Eagle, snakes these women are:
Take them on the wing! but war,
Smoking war's the warrior's wife!
Then for plunder! then for brides
Won without a winking priest!--

(xvii)

The next section juxtaposes the outer noisy world of the soldiers against the inner, silent world of Attila and his bride; the actions of the soldiers on the morning

after the wedding night are all within "the nuptial casement's view." While "the woman holds him fast" inside, Attila's soldiers race, trumpets blow, and horses neigh:

Down the hillspurs, out of tents
 Glimmering in mid-forest, through
 Mists of the cool morning scents,
 Forth from city-alley, court,
 Arch, the bounding horsemen flew;
 Joined along the plains of dew,
 Raced and gave the rein to sport,
 Closed and streamed like curtain-rents
 Fluttered by a wind, and flowed
 Into squadrons: trumpets blew,
 Chargers neighed, and trappings flowed
 Brave as the bright Orient's.

(xviii)⁴³

Noon comes:

Nigh upon the fiery noon,
 Out of ranks a roaring burst.
 'Ware white women like the moon!
 They are poison: they have thirst
 First for love, and next for rule.
 Jealous of the army, she?
 Ho, the little wanton fool!
 We were his before she squealed
 Blind for mother's milk, and healed
 Kicking on her mother's knee.
 His in life and death are we:
 She but one flower of a field.
 We have given him bliss tenfold
 In an hour to match her night:
 Attila, my Attila!
 Still her arms the master hold,
 As on wounds the scarf winds tight.

(xix)

The soldiers' earlier view of women is echoed here, but fear has widened the woman-snake image to include its poisonous associations. The soldiers, in their warning against women and their charge of jealousy against Ildico, are expressing their own jealous claim to precedence. Despite their perceived opposition between women and warfare, the stanza "makes explicit the sex-battle equivalence."⁴⁴

Time is passing; the build-up of suspense, however, is less important--the outcome is fated--than an increasing edginess as discovery is delayed. During that delay, images of death prepare for the revelation behind the "silent door." Night comes, and rumors begin: "Dead are ye! / Dead, ye Huns, and torn piecemeal! / See the ordered army reel / Stricken through the ribs" (xx). The paradoxically "ordered army"--ordered to produce disorder--shows signs of collapsing into disorder with the rumors of Attila's death. Like all rumors, they are contradictory:

--Death to them who call him dead!
 Death to them who doubt the tale!
 Choking in his dusty veil,
 Sank the sun on his death-bed.
 Make the bed for Attila!
 (xx)

It is sunset again; an entire day has passed since the wedding and the bedding.⁴⁵ The soldiers, in a frenzy, break down the door to the room; their frenzy is imaged with the natural forces of storm and sea. The "horror" of what they find, imaged with "snaky locks," is verbally intensified through repeated sibilants. In this section reeking with madness and death, "the sexuality of the refrain "Make the bed for Attila!" has yielded to its ominous undertone:

'Tis the room where thunder sleeps.
 Frenzy, as a wave to shore
 Surging, burst the silent door,
 And drew back to awful deeps,
 Breath beaten out, foam-white. Anew
 Howled and pressed the ghastly crew,
 Like storm-waters over rocks.
 Attila, my Attila!
 One long shaft of sunset red
 Laid a finger on the bed.

Horror, with the snaky locks,
 Shocked the surge to stiffened heaps,
 Hoary as the glacier's head
 Faced to the moon. Insane they look.
 God it is in heaven who weeps
 Fallen from his hand the Scourge he shook.
 Make the bed for Attila!

(xxi)

Attila, "their lord of day and night," is dead; with him
 in the chamber is his bride:

 Name us that,
 Huddled in the corner dark,
 Humped and grinning like a cat,
 Teeth for lips!--'tis she! she stares,
 Glittering through her bristled hairs.

(xxii)

Sex, blood, madness and death are all linked; the men
 themselves, crazed by the sight, even speak of vengeance
 in terms that merge sex and death: "Rend her! Pierce her
 to the hilt" (xxii). That sex-death merging maintains the
 ambiguity surrounding Attila's death: "She was of his
 heart's blood clad: / Oh! the last of him she had!" (xxv).⁴⁶
 Earlier rumors had been contradictory; so, too, are the
 theories of Attila's death and Ildico's role as villain
 or victim:

Death, who dares deny her guilt!
 Death, who says his blood she spilt!
 Traitor he, who stands between!
 Swift to hell, who harms the Queen!
 She, the wild contention's cause,
 Combed her hair with quiet paws.
 Make the bed for Attila!

(xxv)

The narrative is drawing to a close; the ghastly
 discovery at sunset gives way to the anarchy of the night.
 Maddened and confused, the army is breaking up: "Night was
 on them like the mould / On the buried half alive" (xxvi).

Such an image prefigures both the disintegration of the army and one of the last actions of the narrative: Attila's gravediggers are themselves slaughtered and buried.⁴⁷ It is the final irony; the destroyer, even as he is destroyed, has the power to destroy others with himself.

The poem, however, does not end with the narrative; most of the final section is a description of another "breaking up," not of an army, but of a frozen river. The Danube, used occasionally as a reminder of a life outside that of Attila and his followers, is breaking free from its ice bondage:

Lo, upon a silent hour,
When the pitch of frost subsides,
Danube with a shout of power
Loosens his imprisoned tides:
Wide around the frightened plains
Shake to hear his riven chains,
Dreadfuller than heaven in wrath,
As he makes himself a path:
High leap the ice-cracks, towering pile
Floes to bergs, and giant peers
Wrestle on a drifted isle;
Island on ice-island rears;
Dissolution battles fast.

The Danube, strong beneath its frozen surface, forces "ice-cracks," and finally "a gentle-breathing morn / Frees the stream from bank to bank." The "chains" of winter ice are broken, dissolved; so, too, "the Empire built of scorn / Agonized, dissolved and sank."⁴⁸ Attila is dead, his soldiers dispersed, his "Empire" as lasting as the ice that temporarily "imprisoned" the Danube. But Nature, with its power of renewal, with its implied cycle of the seasons, remains.

That abiding world of order is not introduced in the concluding section of the poem; like the cyclic recurrence of Nature, the freeing of the Danube is itself a variation of the cyclic imagery of Section I. As the poem opens, the "bridled" earth longs for spring; in the closing stanza, that longed-for spring has arrived, bringing its thaw to the Danube. The poem, in its own circularity, echoes the circularity of nature's processes. These processes in which all living things participate are imaged throughout the poem: "See the green tree all in leaf: / See the green tree stripped of bark!"--(iv). These contrasted images, although following a description of Ildico, seem to prophesy Attila's death.⁴⁹ That interpretation is reinforced by a variation of these lines after the soldiers' grim discovery: "Him they see an oak in bud, / Him an oaklog stripped of bark" (xxii). Ildico is generally likened to a flower; "rich in bloom" until seen and plucked by Attila, she is later viewed as the soldiers' rival: "His in life and death are we: / She but one flower of a field." Her end is imaged, not as a flower, but as a leaf on the surface of the Danube: "Of the Queen no more was told / Than of leaf on Danube rolled."

The powerful tide of the Danube runs as geographical fact and symbolic "under-tide" through the poem; with Attila's death and the freeing of the Danube, natural order has emerged from unnatural disorder. That disorder, vast in scope, suggests a world turned upside down. The supreme

power in this upside-down world is neither benevolent nor even indifferent; rather, earth is his "prey." The results of his passing lie everywhere in "ravaged cities" and piled corpses; the very order of nature is reversed: cornfields are "dry and black"; his men leave behind them rivers streaked with red. In the banquet hall Attila's men long for a return to battle; a remembrance of their past battles reads like a reversal of the creation:

O for the time when God decreed
 Earth the prey of Attila!
 God called on thee in his wrath.
 Trample it to mire! 'Twas done.
 Swift as Danube clove our path
 Down from East to Western sun.
 Huns! behold your pasture, gaze,
 Take, our king said: heel to flank
 (Whisper it, the warhorse neighs!)
 Forth we drove, and blood we drank
 Fresh as dawn-dew: earth was ours:
 Men were flocks we lashed and spurned:
 Fast as windy flame devours,
 Flame along the wind, we burned.

(viii)

As the nuptial bedding approaches, fear, madness, and death become associated with sexual taking. The silent, enclosed room in which that taking is to occur seems to be contrasted with the outside world of noise and activity: the warriors, too, oppose their battle-hunger against their leader's sex-hunger. Yet the two are different manifestations of the same dehumanized need for conquest; the inner, isolated world of madness and death is but a concentrated version of the death- and havoc-inhabited world of Attila's armies. One feeds the other; when the soldiers find their leader's body, "In the sunset red the dead / Dead avowed him,

dry blood-red" (xxiii). The soldiers, having gained life through Attila, are now "dead" through his death; Attila, "dry blood-red," is united in death with the people and lands he devastated.

The "under-tide" of order beneath that devastation suggests a vision of the world as it should be. But, although the poem is a judgment against the chaotic world of conquest, in which the sole relationship between people is that between devourer and prey, nevertheless it acknowledges the impossibility of complete order in the world of men. For man must deal with two mighty forces, the one, "Passion," within himself, and the other, "Destiny," external to him. Certainly, the world of "The Nuptials" is an exaggeration of--and warning against--the "tragic tangle" man produces for himself, just as war is the multiplied result--and metaphor--of his unchecked "passions." Beneath that chaotic world, however, the poem hints of another world of order; in the final section that "under-tide" surfaces, and Nature offers her consolation: the eventual destruction of destroyers; and the placing of both destroyers and their victims within a larger framework. Such consolation does not deny human suffering; the devastating results of Attila's passage --blackened earth and piled corpses--are too powerfully described to be forgotten. But as order is restored to Nature, that restoration--and its cyclic promise of Nature's enduring regenerative power--provides a context for the suffering of all, victim and vulture alike.⁵⁰

The power-drive that causes so much destruction in "The Nuptials of Attila" extends more widely and threatens the entire earth in the poem "Phaethon." The issue of power here is not that of man over other men, but the power of a god over the rising and setting of the sun. Phaethon, son of Apollo, the "flaming Sun-God," (10) longs for mastery over the chariot of the sun; when Apollo rashly promises to grant whatever boon his son requests, Phaethon replies: "Rule of day give me; give it me, / 'Give me place that men may see me how I blaze, and transcendingly, / 'I, divine, proclaim my birthright'" (14-16)⁵¹ Apollo, having "repented of his oath," (Metam, p. 51) tries to persuade Phaethon to choose any other of his "mighty gifts":

Darkened Helios, and his
utterance
Choked prophetic: 'O half mortal!' he exclaimed in
an agony,
'O lost son of mine! No! put a prayer for another
thing:
'Not for this: insane to wish it, and to crave
the gift impious!
'Cannot other gifts my godhead shed upon thee?
(16-20)

His words, however, are as "sea-waves scattered broad from the rocks away" (29); his "half mortal" son is determined to hold Phoebus to his promise.⁵² The narrator echoes Phoebus' cry of "'O lost son of mine!': "What shall move a soul from madness? Lost, lost in delirium" (30). Phaethon has become "lost in delirium," lost to madness, to an ambition so vaulting as to be insane. The consequences of such insane ambition are inescapable.

Before the dialogue in which Phaethon asks for "rule of day," and his father reluctantly grants a temporary transfer of power, the poem opens with a view of the normal order: "At the coming up of Phoebus the all-luminous charioteer, / Double-visaged stand the mountains in imperial multitudes, / And with shadows dappled men sing to him, Hail, O Beneficent!"; in Phoebus' light "there is music thro' the poplar and river sedge, / Renovation, chirp of brooks, hum of the forest--an ocean-song" (5-6). Beneath the light and sound of daylight activities, however, runs the disastrous hint of Apollo's "clouding": "For they shudder chill, the earth-vales, at his clouding, shudder to black" (4).⁵³ Both outcomes--the immediate one of the father-son confrontation, and the wide-ranging consequences of Phaethon's short-lived victory--are foreseen in the words: "Who usurps his [Apollo's] place there, rashest?" (9). Phaethon holds his father to his "oath irrevocable," and with his willed act of usurpation begins a chain of fated events.

That subsequent events, once set in motion by that single act of will, are fated and that Phaethon himself is doomed are part both of myth and poem: "All the end foreseeing, Phoebus, to his oath irrevocable, / Bowed obedient, deploring the insanity pitiless" (43-44).⁵⁴ Defeated by his son's insistence, the sun-god watches Phaethon prepare to drive the chariot: "stood the God, as in harvest fields, / When the reaper grasps the full sheaf and the sickle that severs it: / Hugged the withered head with one hand . . ."

(55-57). Thus Phoebus sees Phaethon "in the pride of youth and strength" (Metam, p. 54) placing himself beneath the sickle; the future becomes part of the present as Phoebus hugs the "withered head" of his doomed son. Phaethon's doom is foreseen by the reader as well as by the sun-god; again, because of the poet's use of a well-known story, the reader's foreknowledge imposes another layer of fatality to the events of the narrative.

For the moment, however, Phaethon is triumphant; he cannot even listen to his father's words of advice:

vain were the words: scarcely
listening,
Mounted Phaethon, swinging reins loose, and, 'Behold
me, companions,
'It is I here, I!' he shouted, glancing down with
supremacy;
'Not to any of you was this gift granted ever in
annals of men;
'I alone what only Gods can, I alone am governing
day!'

(63-67)

But the future that Phoebus has foreseen is rushing upon Phaethon; his dream of "supremacy" is quickly shattered. Juxtaposed against his boast of "governing day" is the terse half-line: "Short the triumph, brief his rapture" (68). Gone is his youthful "vision of inviolability" (77); with his realization that he is caught in an unequal struggle for mastery, he acknowledges his "ambition immoderate" (81). In his regretful call to those he loves, he cries "I am lost!"; his father's fear has turned into reality.

But Phaethon's reckless act is not one of individual concern alone; his action has turned the world into one of

chaos and disorder.⁵⁵ The entire earth is ablaze, ash-laden, smoking amid her ruins:

Now a wail of men to Zeus rang: from Olympus
 the Thunderer
 Saw the rage of the havoc wide-mouthed, the bright
 car superimpending
 Over Asia, Africa, low down; ruin flaming over the
 vales;
 Light disastrous rising savage out of smoke
 inveterately;
 Beast-black, conflagration like a menacing shadow
 move
 With voracious roaring southward, where aslant,
 insufferable,
 The bright steeds careered their parched way down
 an arc of the firmament.
 For the day grew like to thick night, and the orb
 was its beacon-fire,
 And from hill to hill of darkness burst the day's
 apparition forth.

He aloft, the frenzied driver, in the glow of the
 universe,
 Like the paling of the dawn-star withers visibly,
 he aloft:
 Bitter fury in his aspect, bitter death in the
 heart of him.
 Crouch the herds, contract the reptiles, crouch
 the lions under their paws.
 White as metal in the furnace are the faces of
 humankind:
 Inarticulate creatures of earth, dumb all await
 the ultimate shock.

(90-98; 106-111)

Seeing the destruction of the earth, listening to the

"wail of men," Zeus launches his bolt; Phaethon, struck,

relinquished rein and footing, raised not
 a cry,
 Like the flower on the river's surface when expanding
 it vanishes,
 Gave his limbs to right and left, quenched: and so
 fell he
 precipitate,
 Seen of men as a glad rain-fall, sending coolness
 yet ere it comes:
 So he showered above them, shadowed o'er the blue
 archipelagoes,

O'er the silken-shining pastures of the continents
 and the isles;
 So descending brought revival to the greenery of
 our earth.

(115-121)

Phaethon, in his quenching, becomes a "glad rain-fall" to men; through his descent and death he brings "revival" to earth. Thus, the poet emphasizes another version of the eternal cycle of death and rebirth; through Phaethon's death, the fruitfulness of earth is restored. The final transformation of Phaethon himself into a "bruised purple cyclamen" completes the resolution of the narrative; after the conflicts of the story and the violence of Phaethon's struggle and fall, the poem ends with the quiet return of Phaethon to the Earth he attempted to master.

The conflicts of the narrative--between Phaethon and his father; between Phaethon and the horses of the sun; and finally between Phaethon and all of earth and her creatures for survival--are echoed in a counterpoint between the lines written quantitatively and read accentually. The poem is an experimental imitation of a classical meter; Meredith subtitled "Phaethon" "attempted in the galliambic measure." In a note added to its publication in 1887, Meredith admitted that a "perfect conquest of the measure is not possible in our tongue. For the sake of an occasional success in the velocity, sweep, volume of the line, it seems worth an effort; and, if to some degree serviceable for narrative verse, it is one of the exercises of a writer which readers may be invited to share."⁵⁶ The following

brief discussion is my attempt to answer that invitation.

The galliambic meter is written in ionic tetrameter catalectic; the greater ionic foot is made up of two long syllables followed by two short, whereas in the lesser ionic foot that order is reversed, two short syllables followed by two long. In "Phaethon" Meredith seems to use the lesser ionic foot; because, as Saintsbury has remarked, "Ionics . . . do not suit English," any metrical analysis of the first eight lines of the poem must be hesitantly made:⁵⁷

At the coming up of Phœbus the all-luminous
 charioteer,
 Double-visaged stand the mountains in imperial
 multitudes,
 And with shadows dappled men sing to him, Hail,
 O Beneficent!
 For they shudder chill, the earth-vales, at his
 clouding, shudder to black;
 In the light of him there is music thro' the
 poplar and river-sedge,
 Renovation, chirp of brooks, hum of the forest--
 an ocean-song.
 Never pearl from ocean-hollows by the diver
 exultingly,
 In his breathlessness, above thrust, is as earth
 to Helios.

With elision each line contains fifteen syllables and generally follows the — — — — — ionic pattern; a frequent substitution is — — — — — . Reading accentually, however--an automatic response of anyone reading poetry in English--the lines fall generally into a trochaic pattern; the long lines break naturally in the middle. Meredith thought the galliambics to be "near on the mark"; Henley, who found much that was "rough and arbitrary" even in a passage he

admired, (98-120) nevertheless admitted that "if the passage be nothing else it is poetry at least, and poetry of a good type and high quality."⁵⁸

Henley is right on both counts: "Phaethon" contains some splendid poetry; it also has many "rough" spots.⁵⁹ The wrenching of language and the clumsiness of word and phrase--these are explained, but not excused, by the poet's experimental purpose. Who but Meredith would include these in a single poem: "the effulgent foreseër," "his sister-ancillaries," "his sister Phaethontiades," and "Quivering in his loins parental"? Included, too, however, are lines that justify the poet's claim to "occasional success in the velocity, sweep, volume of the line"; that claim is particularly true in Phaethon's cry and in the description of the earth during the darkness of the anti-creation.

Order is restored, however, at the end of the poem; again, as in "The Nuptials," the "under-tide" of the poem is that world of order and regularity. Even the circularity of the poem underlines the ever-recurring cycles of nature: "Phaethon" opens with a sunrise and the sounds of earth--an "ocean-song"; it closes with "a glad rain-fall" and the continuing sounds of earth--although some now are those of mourning. The "renovation" that begins both the poem and the new day is now the "revival" of the earth's greenery; part of that "revival" is Phaethon's metamorphosis, or rebirth. There is no such rebirth in Ovid; the nymphs bury

the "still smouldering" body and place this inscription at the site: "Here Phaethon lies: his father's car he tried - / Though proved too weak, he greatly daring died" (Metam, Book II, p. 58). Thus, although the tale shows Phaethon's rashness and stubbornness, and brilliantly details the destructive possibilities that his action could bring to the world, the ending nevertheless indicates a nobility to his failure--the classic failure of the over-reacher. Meredith's poem emphasizes the madness, the irrationality, of youth in rebellion against order; doomed by that order, Phaethon's foreseen death is placed within a context in which the pathos of his death is not denied but, like Phaethon himself, transformed.⁶⁰

That transformation completes a series of images introduced by Phaethon's prophetic self-description: "'Only, Thou, my Father, Thou tell how aloft the revolving wheels, / 'How aloft the cleaving horse-crests I may guide peremptorily, / 'Till I drink the shadows, fire-hot, like a flower celestial" (38-40). After Phoebus has granted his son's wish, and Phaethon is anxious to be off, his impatience is likened to a "blossom . . . shaken by winds" (52).⁶¹ In the concluding image of the poem, the narrative--including Phaethon's terror and regret and earth's suffering as a result of his self-will--merges with the "under-tide" of the poem. Even in Phaethon's transformation the pain of human life, the "bruising," remains:

now his sisters shivering weep,
By the river flowing smooth out to the vexed sea
 of Adria,
Where he fell, and where they suffered sudden
 change to the tremulous
Ever-wailful trees bemoaning him, a bruised
 purple cyclamen.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

CHAPTER V

¹Poetry and Philosophy, pp. 56-57.

²Stanley B. Greenfield speaks of the "spirit and code of conduct" common to "Secular Heroic Poetry," in Chapter V of his A Critical History of Old English Literature (New York, 1965): "This heroic spirit manifested itself most strongly in the desire for fame and glory, now and posthumously; the code of conduct stressed the reciprocal obligation of lord and thanes: protection and generosity on the one part, loyalty and service on the other, a mutuality that was the core of the comitatus relationship described as early as A.D. 98 by the Latin historian Tacitus in his Germania and demonstrated as late as the tenth century in the historic English poem The Battle of Maldon," p. 80. We are, in "King Harald's Trance," within the world of the comitatus.

³Probably, too, if the onset of Harald's "trance" were presented, the dramatic quality of such a scene would create two centers for the poem.

⁴Bartlett notes: "Lafcadio Hearn explained that burial for the 'lord of war' would have been cremation on a beach and that Harald's body had been carried there, armored, with his sword by his side on the bier. Hence he was strengthened by the smell of brine . . ." Explanatory Notes, II, 1144. See Chapter VI, "The Poetry of George Meredith" in Pre-Raphaelite and Other Poets. Hearn is helpful in some of his comments on background; his criticism is decidedly odd. He comments that the name Harald is a "name common in Scandinavian history" and that King Harald is probably a Norwegian king. "The Vikings of old Norway were the most terrible men that ever lived, but they were also among the grandest and noblest. Their trade was war, their religion was war, their idea of happiness after death was still war--eternal war in heaven, ghostly fighting on the side of the gods. Such an idea of life requires many great qualities as well as natural fearlessness and great physical strength." Hearn believes that Harald sends his wife away because he and his men have been overdrinking; his "trance" is a drunken stupor. The moral of the poem: "that moral pain is much more powerful than physical pain--that it is capable of breaking down any strength," pp. 314, 317, 323.

⁵"GM's Harald must stem from the same folk source as Johann Ludwig Uhland's poem Harald. In Uhland's poem Harald is left sitting on a stone in a permanent sleep; occasionally he brandishes his sword." Bartlett, Explanatory Notes, II, 1144.

⁶"In ballads a specially high standard of lucidity is generally, and perhaps rightly expected; and this requirement is scarcely met by King Harald's Trance and Archduchess Anne." Poetry and Philosophy, p. 56.

⁷Bartlett annotates stanzas viii-x: "The chiefs chose a 'kingling,' the young wife's lover, instead of waiting for the birth of his [Harald's] legitimate son." Explanatory Notes, II, 1144. Admittedly, at first glance "kingling" seems to refer to Harald's coming child ("his blood's own heir"); presumably, the "kingling" is chosen because he is "shaped to fare," ready to do battle as Harald had done. What interests me is Bartlett's ability to know that the wife is carrying Harald's "son."

⁸A reviewer in the Pall Mall Gazette (May 26, 1887), after writing the "Thor" line as prose, comments: "We purposely write the phrase as though it were prose, in order to show what execrable prose it would be. Mr Meredith may urge that the best of verse, because of its rhythmic quality, would make bad prose; but this prose is bad, not because it is rhythmic, but because it is not rational human speech." CH, p. 293.

The comparison between Harald and Thor is a good one; Thor is not only god of thunder and of strength, but of war. The error lies in applying even an unarticulated "baa" to such a figure.

⁹In another social context, and without that element of betrayal, Meredith would surely see Harald as another of the "conquerors."

¹⁰David Wright makes this comment about the world of Beowulf in his introduction to his translation of Beowulf (Baltimore, 1957), p. 18.

Trevelyan remarks that Harald "lies silent and hears treason talked at the side of his couch by his wife and a warrior." Notes, p. 593.

¹¹Judith Wilt, in her discussion of Meredith's novel The Amazing Marriage, remarks: "Like the 'dazzling intellectuality' of that other unworldly novel, The Egoist, the 'tenderness' of this one results from Meredith's attempt to confront and humanize a world of extreme violence and chaos both inside and outside the head," p. 218.

¹²Trevelyan's description of Kraken, Notes, pp. 591-592.

¹³Trevelyan, Notes, p. 591.

¹⁴Kraken sees Anne's hand "jump at her side"; Trevelyan interprets this to mean that the "Archduchess puts her hand to her heart . . ." Notes, p. 591.

¹⁵Or, as Trevelyan comments, "He determines to wash out her dishonour in Count Louis' blood." Notes, p. 592.

¹⁶Kraken traps the count in a way not spelled out except that the count's downfall is his "trust in plighted word" (xix).

¹⁷In his novels Meredith frequently externalizes an important character's internal struggle by surrounding him with figures having a symbolic value; here, Kraken assumes the role of Vengeance, one aspect of the archduchess' temptation.

¹⁸If the archduchess is speaking about the extended sexual struggle, her warning is not quite accurate; very few of the "crawling creatures" have the power to sign an execution order for one of the "crowing" men.

¹⁹Depending on the emphasis on past fulfillment or on present abandonment, memory of love can have the contradictory effects of Anne's memory of Louis' "beauty." Hearn's commentary on Anne's emotional state--as well as his "extraordinary case"--is delightful: "When a good woman--and by 'good' I mean especially affectionate--has once loved a man, it is scarcely possible that anything could make her afterwards really hate him. There was of course the extraordinary case of Christina of Sweden, who had her lover stabbed to death before her eyes, but in such a case as that we do not believe there was a real affection at any time," p. 325.

²⁰Trevelyan's annotation on Part III: "She writes to Kraken, wishing him to spare Count Louis, but her pride will not let her give definite orders for forgiveness. She only speaks vaguely of mercy (I-VI). Kraken is convinced that forgiveness will be taken as a sign of her infatuation for Louis, and chooses to understand 'mercy' as meaning that Louis is to be shot instead of hanged (VII-X). The Archduchess hates Kraken for the deed, for which her own pride, not her will, was in part responsible. A popular rising ensues (XIX). After a civil war (XX) Kraken flies the land (XXVI). The power of the Crown barely survives the struggle, and the Archduchess lives on with a broken heart (XXV)." Notes, p. 592.

²¹Henley's judgment was harsher: "It is hard . . . to follow the poet through the tortuosities of 'Archduchess Anne'; it is a ballad, and to break the secret of a ballad one should not need a dark lantern and a set of jemmies," Athenaeum (June 11, 1887), rpt. CH, pp. 295-296.

²²Bartlett's headnote to the poem: "The dramatic narrative is fictitious." I, 301.

²³The explanation of our "tragic life" lies in those familiar lines--probably the best-known lines of Meredith's poetry--"In tragic life, God wot, / No villain need be! Passions spin the plot: / We are betrayed by what is false within."

²⁴". . . Periander made a proclamation to the effect that anyone who gave the boy shelter, or even spoke to him, should be fined a certain sum, the money to be dedicated to the service of Apollo." Herodotus, The Histories, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt (Baltimore, 1954), p. 196. (Tompkins cites Herodotus as Meredith's source, p. 287.)

²⁵This exile ("It had resemblance to a death," x) prefigures Lycophron's final isolation in death. The place of exile is the island of Corcyra: ". . . Periander put him aboard ship and sent him away out of his sight to Corcyra, which was also a part of his dominions." Herodotus, p. 196.

²⁶Much of my commentary on the narrative echoes J. M. S. Tompkins' remarks in "Meredith's Periander." We both outline the spare events of the narrative, we both use many of Meredith's words and phrases--and we both must refer to the same major events and images. Thus, for example, Tompkins quotes the "cur" and "brows" images for Lycophron and refers to the clearing of that "shadow": "Periander there-upon exiles his son to 'the Island'--Corcyra, though Meredith does not use the name--and more years pass, until the ageing king, anxious for the future of his state, begins to regard his proud son as a 'young Periander', 'from the shadow cleared / That haunted his rebellious brows', and sends his daughter to Corcyra to bring back her brother." p. 288.

²⁷Tompkins remarks: "The nucleus of the poem is the estrangement of father and son and their belated and abortive reconciliation" and likens this estrangement to that between Meredith and his own son, Arthur. In citing parallels between the facts of the Meredith father-son relationship and the details of the Periander-Lycophron story, she mentions such interesting parallels as Arthur's sea-voyage, and the use of Arthur's sister as go-between, parallels that occurred after the publication of the poem. One detail in the poem,

she notes, does not have its source either in Herodotus or in Plutarch, but in the resemblance between Arthur and his mother, Mary Nicolls Meredith. The emotional core of the poem, Tompkins believes, lies in Meredith's recognition of "his own persona in the tyrant of Corinth,"; Meredith's sudden realization of a long-existing estrangement, his epiphany in which he anticipates his son's early death, making any reconciliation impossible--all become part of the poetic material. "The poem is not biography, but a symbol through which he could express the shock of his painful and self-accusing emotions. The intensity of the climactic verse makes this clear. This is not the verse that records the death of the son, but the explanation that follows: [stanza xviii, quoted in my text]. The survival of the past--a past thirty years buried for Meredith--is perceived with resentment, remorse, and recognition." p. 289.

²⁸Tompkins describes this confrontation as "the encounter of the two stubborn wills," p. 287.

²⁹That equipoise is clear in Herodotus: Lycophron's sister pleads with him to accept the power that Periander can bequeath: "'Power has never lacked lovers to woo it--and the path to it is full of pitfalls. Our father is an old man now--far past his prime of life. Take then what belongs to you, and keep it--do not abandon it to strangers.' Periander had told the girl to use these arguments, as most likely to influence her brother; but his only reply was that he would never return to Corinth while he knew that his father was still alive." Periander then acts to break the stalemate: "Periander, when he heard of it, made a third and last effort: he sent a messenger to say that he was willing to come to Corcyra himself, if his son would return to Corinth and there take over the government of the state. To this Lycophron agreed, and each began his preparation for leaving--Periander for Corcyra, Lycophron for Corinth," Herodotus, p. 197.

³⁰Tompkins comments upon "the culminating moment of the poem, when Periander encounters his dead son: 'The image of the mother of his boy / Came forth from his unwary breast in wreaths, / With eyes.' Here the force of the last two syllables seems to derive, not only from the succeeding metrical pause, but from a likeness and a contrast we hardly have time to apprehend, between the accusing eyes of the mother, as they still live in the tyrant's memory, and the closed eyes of the son, that accuse no longer." p. 292.

³¹"The lines, with their concluding political reflection, can be read as Meredith's gesture of disassociation from the ancient city-building, city-sacking tyrant of Herodotus; or perhaps, on the other hand, a self-condemning

vibration may still be detected in them. It was the historical Periander who beautified Corinth with the great temple of Apollo and built the fountain for the spring, Pirene, to which Meredith makes him proudly refer; but 'marble screens' can stand for the structures of any art, even Meredith's own." p. 289. As part of my interpretation, see the reference to Periander in his "marble fortress-tower" (ii).

³²There are smaller ironic contrasts; one example is the "heaving bier" (xvii). The bier heaves only because it is aboard ship; Lycophron, no longer capable of movement himself, can move only with the ship. See the return of another beloved corpse, brought home by sea: "And dead calm in that noble breast / Which heaves but with the heaving deep." Tennyson's "In Memoriam," XI.

³³W. E. Henley forms the "impression" that "The Nuptials" is Meredith's "right work" and that "if he always wrote as here, and were always as here sustained in inspiration . . . and intoxicating in effect, he would be delightful to the general, and that without sacrificing on the vile and filthy altar of popularity." Athenaeum, rpt. CH, p. 296.

Gazette, rpt. CH, p. 293.

Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature 1830-1880 (London, 1920), II, 330.

³⁴The "barbaric" label is Meredith's in his January 3, 1905, letter to Richard H. P. Curle, Cline, III, 1512.

³⁵In the first ten of the twenty-nine sections, for example, these are the line counts (including the "refrain"): section I, 20 lines; section II, 10 lines; section III, 8 lines; IV, 20; V, 15; VI, 16; VII, 17; VIII, 41; IX, 9; and X, 13.

³⁶Poetry and Philosophy, p. 54.

³⁷In making a point about "the mystery of Attila's death," Lucas remarks that "this can be fitted to the theme of social duty--Attila shouldn't have slipped back into a private life . . .," ("Poet," p. 22); this comment implies a contrast between Attila's roles as soldier-king and as sexual being. However, the merging of sexual and battle imagery puts both roles together: Attila is a conqueror of both woman and land.

³⁸The probable reason for Attila's being called the "Scourge of God" is the Christian view of Attila's being used as a tool of God, as punishment for sin. "All Gaul was terrified; here was no civilized warrior like Caesar, no Christian--however Arian--invader like Alaric and Gaiseric; this was the awful and hideous Hun, the flagellum

dei come to punish Christian and pagan alike for the enormous distance between their professions and their lives." Will Durant, "The Age of Faith," Vol. IV, The Story of Civilization (New York, 1950), p. 40. Disorder is punished by disorder--but the punishment cleanses, in preparation for eventual order. In this poem, however, God appears as willing partner in purposeless destruction.

Gibbon tells of a godlike Attila: Attila, "as the rightful possessor of the sword of Mars, asserted his divine and indefeasible claim to the dominion of the earth. . . . Whether human sacrifices formed any part of the worship of Attila, or whether he propitiated the god of war with the victims which he continually offered in the field of battle, the favourite of Mars soon acquired a sacred character, which rendered his conquests more easy and more permanent; and the barbarian princes confessed, in the language of devotion or flattery, that they could not presume to gaze, with a steady eye, on the divine majesty of the king of the Huns." Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Vol. II (New York, n.d.), p. 247. Attila was, Gibbon remarks, "dreaded, not only as a warrior, but as a magician," p. 248.

In her headnote to "The Nuptials," Bartlett gives background information: "The source of the poem was almost undoubtedly Edward Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, chapters 34 and 35. The scene is Attila's famous wooden palace beyond the Danube; the year is 453. Attila had had many wives before Ildico. As GM told Edward Clodd in 1905, the subject of the poem is not a love-story but 'the fall of an empire' (Clodd, Memories, p. 146)."

³⁹Bogner precedes his quotation of these lines with the comment that Attila's "battle-hungry men salute him at the wedding feast in double-entendres, referring to both the food and the girl (both impede their plans to move on to further conquest)." Following the quotation, Bogner remarks: "The refrain, which will be ironic by the end of the poem, is the ringing, 'Make the bed for Attila!' As Attila anticipates the nuptial bed, Meredith blends the sense of remembered battle pleasures behind and the carnal pleasures just ahead." p. 117.

⁴⁰Attila is evidently pausing, or "loitering," outside the nuptial chamber; we are probably not wrong to suspect a sexual double meaning, however, to "the doors of bliss."

⁴¹The scene is told in the third person; Attila is seen walking through the crowd of his soldiers on his way to meet "his bride's embrace." But the second person is used in the questions, addressed less to Attila--within the questioning, Attila is "the king" and "him"--than to the world at large.

⁴²The ambiguous image of piercing on the nuptial couch maintains the mystery of Attila's death; even the subject of "pierced" (eve/Eve?) contributes to the puzzle. Gibbon describes the scene after Attila's men "broke into the royal apartment": "They found the trembling bride sitting by the bedside, hiding her face with her veil, and lamenting her own danger, as well as the death of the king, who had expired during the night. An artery had suddenly burst: and as Attila lay in a supine posture, he was suffocated by a torrent of blood, which, instead of finding a passage through the nostrils, regurgitated into the lungs and stomach." II, 294. In a footnote Gibbon adds that the report of Ildico's "guilt" reached Constantinople, where it obtained a very different name; and Marcellinus observes, that the tyrant of Europe was slain in the night by the hand and the knife of a woman." p. 294,n.

⁴³The scene-shift is further marked by the change from past tense (the soldiers' activity) to present tense ("Still the woman holds him fast / As a night-flag round the mast").

⁴⁴Bogner, p. 117. Bogner precedes his quotation of this stanza with this comment; he follows the quotation with these remarks (p. 117): "Their leader does not appear the next day. They assume that he is enslaved by amorous Ildico, when, in fact, that unsmiling lady, 'cold as salt' and forebodingly white during the feast, has killed the warrior-king. The helpless girl has conquered the mighty man who was to have 'conquered' in quite another way; Attila's men fear that she will seduce him away from his and their real work, when in fact she has repulsed him so thoroughly that he will never fight again. There is no point or simple moral in this story; Meredith is playing with another bizarre situation, irony heaped on irony, all spooned neatly into a sexual pot."

⁴⁵Lucas says that the "soldiers break into his room the morning after his nuptials . . ." ("Poet," p. 22). Trevelyan, in his Notes, is ambiguous; he could mean that Attila is found at sunset either one or two days after the feast. The poem seems clear: Attila is found at sunset on the day after the feast.

⁴⁶The first line could variously mean that Attila died of a burst artery; that Attila held her in his heart; or that Ildico has Attila's blood--literally or morally--on her hands. The second line may refer to intercourse, Attila's death, Attila's murder--or all three. It is not necessary to reach any conclusion within the poem; historians' comments are irrelevant here. The poet deliberately leaves the question open; the sex-stabbing-blood imagery retains the ambiguity of Ildico's stabbing or the traditional theory

of a burst artery and blood-suffocation. Since much of Lucas' brief critical commentary on "The Nuptials" is concerned with what he sees as the problem of Attila's death, I will quote his entire critique here:

This [the fear of "deep personal involvement"] is particularly evident in 'The Nuptials of Attila'. The horror here is intensified, and is perhaps betraying, because we are never allowed to know why Attila died. We are told of his army's prescient fear for him, since a woman 'holds him fast'. When soldiers break into his room the morning after his nuptials they find him dead and his wife mad, 'Humped and grinning like a cat, / Teeth for lips'. And she destroys not only him but the army's male comradeship, its unity: some want to kill her, others defend. 'Death, who dares deny her guilt! / Death, who says his blood she spilt. . . . She, the wild contention's cause, / Combed her hair with quiet paws.' 'The Nuptials of Attila' is a poem which centres on a fearful unknowableness about love and in particular sexual passion. At its heart is the mystery of Attila's death, and although this can be fitted to the theme of social duty--Attila shouldn't have slipped back into a private life--it will not explain the poem's urgency, its obsessive feeling for the horror of personal involvement. It is a strange and compelling poem, and a deeply disturbing one. Partly this is because it seems to have come from something deep inside the poet that he hardly knew how to handle or control. A good deal of the detail is gratuitous and hints at Meredith's own uncertainty, his uneasiness as to what he was trying to write about. But the poem is also disturbing because it fends off all explanation; we simply do not know what went on inside that room. 'The Nuptials of Attila' is a statement, not an exploration; it turns its back on the mystery. For that reason its achievement is limited, though still real enough. ("Poet," pp. 21-22.)

Lucas' comments on the center of "The Nuptials" seem to contradict his judgment that leaving the death a mystery limits the achievement of the poem. Why must the mystery be cleared up? Bogner states that Ildico killed Attila; any other explanation is "unbearably anti-climactic." Lucas wants to know "what went on inside that room." Trevelyan points to the truth: "The Huns do not know, any more than posterity knows, whether he died by Ildico's hand or by the bursting of a blood vessel; Ildico is found speechless and mad in a corner of the room." Notes, p. 594. He dies--that is the important point; important, too, is the ambi-

guity regarding the mixture of "Passion" and "Destiny" in his death. Further, in order to know exactly what happened inside that room, a close-up viewpoint would have to be assumed, a viewpoint that would contradict the acceptance of that room as both core and reflection of universal madness.

47 The reason for the slaughter of the gravediggers: "None of earth shall know his grave. / They that dig with Death depart."

48 "'The Empire built of scorn' is a happy instance of the art by which he packs a complex idea into a single phrase. The whole moral of the poem is fitted into that one line. The Huns scorned the rest of mankind, so they perished. So must perish every power that is founded on disregard for others," Trevelyan, Poetry and Philosophy, p. 56. Only part of the "moral" lies in "that one line"; what I enjoy most about this comment is the understatement of the Huns' "disregard for others."

49 The contrast, again, is one that merges within a natural cycle of birth, flowering and death. Another parallel between man's and nature's cycles occurs with the soldiers' discovery of "their lord of day and night" at sunset; intermingled are the deaths of the day and of the king: "Sank the sun on his death-bed."

50 In his discussion of The Ordeal of Richard Feverel (p. 10), Kelvin comments upon the natural cycle in the individual's life and sees its disordering as the source of tragedy in that novel: "In nature, according to Meredith and most of the Romantics to whom he was indebted, the life history of an individual goes from birth to seed-time to fruition to death and then to rebirth in some form--usually in the form of the next generation. For Meredith, the last stage of this process has a spiritual meaning akin to the meaning resurrection has for the Christian. Significantly, therefore, the tragedy in Richard Feverel stems from a disordering of this natural, joyful, and affirmative cycle." In "The Nuptials" the cycle is that of earth, thrown into tragic disorder by the acts of man; the eventual re-establishment of order forms part of man's consolation.

51 Phaethon has boasted that his father is Phoebus, and his boast has been challenged; Phaethon asks his mother to give him proof that he is indeed the son of the god. After his mother suggests that, if he wishes, he might travel to the palace of the sun, Phaethon does so. When Phaethon arrives, he asks that the sun-god give him proof of his fatherhood; Apollo answers, "'To clear away your doubts, ask any boon you wish, and you shall have it from

me. Let the lake by which the gods take their oaths, that lake which my eyes have never seen, be witness to my promise.'" Metamorphoses, Book II, p. 51. Thus, a classical version of the "rash promise."

⁵²Phoebus' exclamation of "'O half mortal!'" suggests part of the problem: "'What you want to do is dangerous. It is a major privilege that you are asking, Phaethon, and one unsuited to your strength or to your boyish years. You are but a mortal, whereas the thing you desire is not one that a mortal can attempt. In your ignorance, you aim at more than can be granted even to the gods.'" Phoebus to Phaethon, Metamorphoses, Book II, p. 51.

⁵³This line could simply mean the obvious: the earth is dark after sundown. The myth, the use of foreshadowing throughout the poem, the word "shudder," however, all indicate an additional, ominous, interpretation.

⁵⁴Phoebus placed his rays upon his son's head and "sighing deeply from his troubled heart--for he foresaw the grief that was in store for him--he said 'At least obey your father's instructions, my son, if you can.'" Metamorphoses, Book II, p. 53. Meredith emphasizes the madness of Phaethon's action; the phrase "insanity pitiless" indicates the "pitiless" quality--toward self and others--of such single-minded determination.

⁵⁵See Ovid's magnificent descriptions of Phaethon's inability to control the sun-god's chargers and the consequence of that inability--the parched earth crackling with fire. Metamorphoses, Book II.

⁵⁶Bartlett, Explanatory Notes, II, 1146.

⁵⁷George Saintsbury, Historical Manual of English Prosody (1910; rpt. 1966), p. 283. "Galliambic--A classical metre of which the most famous, and only substantive, example is the magnificent Atys of Catullus, but which has been imitated in two fine English poems, Tennyson's great Boadicea and Mr. George Meredith's Phaethon. Both of these have given a rather trochaic-dactylic swing to the metre, which is probably unavoidable in English," Glossary, p. 281. In his chapter on "The Foot System," Saintsbury remarks: "It is quite true that the proportion of syllables of absolutely fixed quantity--that is fixed capacity of filling up what corresponds to the long or short places of a classical verse--is, in English, very small." p. 21.

⁵⁸In her headnote, Bartlett writes: "On October 23,

1868, GM asked Augustus Jessopp whether he had seen 'the poem of "Phaëthon" done in Galliambics in the Fortnightly Review of last September a year back? To my mind they are near on the mark, but as the public is not near it I might as well have missed. Two or three lines want a correcting touch.' The apparatus criticus shows that he retouched several lines before republishing the poem in 1887." The letter to which Bartlett refers is in Cline, I, p. 375.

Henley, Athenaeum, rpt. CH, p. 297.

⁵⁹I am speaking here of "Phaethon" simply as poetry; I am not qualified to speak of the "roughness" of Meredith's galliambics.

⁶⁰The ending of the poem uses the "tradition that he fell into the Po and was changed into a cyclamen, and that his sisters were changed into poplars." Trevelyan, Notes, p. 596.

⁶¹During the earth's "havoc" Phaethon is "the day's apparition," an image that pictures the youth both as odd vision--and dead man.

CONCLUSION

Passion on one hand, on one,
Destiny led forth the Hun.
--"The Nuptials of Attila"

Lo, you look at Flow and Drought
Interflashed and interwrought:
Ended is begun, begun
Ended . . .
--"The Woods of Westermain"

Through manipulation of time and knowledge, and the opposition of image patterns and structural units, Meredith complicates many of his narrative poems, creating an "under-tide" that qualifies their significance. The resulting clash between narrative and "under-tide" frequently contrasts man's "Passion" with his "Destiny"--and beyond that, opposes the world in which man lives his tangled life against the world of order and renewal.

Even that apparently simple opposition between man's freedom to act and the inevitability of his fate is complex: man may have the power to will and to act--and yet be powerless to stop, or change, the fated sequence of events that he himself began. Thus, although Phaethon may impose his will upon the sun god and "usurp" Apollo's power, once that choice is made, he is doomed. His fate is prefigured in images of death and transformation; the imagery is underscored by the foreknowledge shared by god and reader. And in "The Shipwreck of Idomeneus" the assumed power of man to carve out his own "Destiny" is undercut by a vision of a chaotic world in which choice has become meaningless.

Man's will itself is not only opposed to "Destiny"--it is also divided against itself. In "Daphne," for example, the poet, in retelling a familiar tale of flight and pursuit, uses sound and image to suggest temptation for

the nymph and at least momentary hesitation for the god. Internal conflict forms the central part of "Archduchess Anne" as the archduchess swings wildly from one decision to another: "Her heart swung like a storm-bell tolled / Above a town ablaze." Unable to "disentangle one clear wish," the archduchess is caught in her own web of opposing passions. That complicated web is the substance of the poem "Modern Love," a "poem of grating ironies, giddily reversing emotions, rapidly shifting images, and subtly blended techniques."¹ Spinning those webs over vast areas, Meredith can write emotionally charged lines portraying a world turned upside-down: Attila sweeping across a charred landscape; Phaethon losing control of the sun-chargers; Hades storming from the underworld to reclaim his daughter. Juxtaposed against all of these pictures of anti-creation, however, is another world, one of order, recurrence and rebirth.²

Even in "Modern Love," Meredith's brilliant "dissection" of man's tangled life, at least one of the constantly shifting "under-tides" surfaces in stanza xlvii:

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.

Arline Golden remarks that the "concluding image of the swan with her young suggests a growing recognition and acceptance of nature's cycle of birth and death. At the same time, the archetypal implications of the imagery--sea,

twilight, West and swan--transcend the boundaries of this particular man and this particular sequence. The experience becomes universal and timeless . . ."³ In this poem, however, Meredith's acknowledged masterpiece, and in most of his strong but lesser known narrative poems, the emotional emphasis lies in the tangle, and not in the consolation.⁴ That cycle sets man's life in perspective; it does not cancel the pain or "frenzy" of human life. Like Callistes, we may praise the "bounteous Giver"--but we will mourn for all that we have lost.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

CONCLUSION

¹Friedman, p. 10.

²The same kind of contrast is the theme of the sonnet "Lucifer in Starlight"; according to Brooks and Warren, the poem embodies the conflict between "the principle of anarchy and disorder" and "the principle of order in the universe," p. 344.

³Arline Golden, "'The Game of Sentiment': Tradition and Innovation in Meredith's Modern Love," ELH 40 (1973), p. 283; C. Day Lewis in his introduction (p. xxiii) to Modern Love (London, 1948) refers to the "unearthly calm" of this stanza. Siegfried Sassoon observes that most of Meredith's "finest poems are inspired by the connection of human life and passion with the life of nature . . ." (New York, 1948), p. 262.

⁴These poems form the middle ground between Meredith's "nature" poems that are thinned by didacticism and such undiluted poems of the "tragic tangle" as "King Harald's Trance" that leave the reader within his own "tangle."

Simpson's article "Meredith's Pessimistic Humanism: A New Reading of Modern Love," opens with this sentence: "For years critics have encountered difficulty in reconciling the major poem for which Meredith is read today with the poetic world view of optimistic naturalism that is implicit and explicit in most of his poetry." He argues that, although optimism describes Meredith's mature poetic viewpoint, many of his poems of the 60's and 70's "suggest an indifference and hostility between man and nature, as well as a kind of existential despair which grows with man's increasing awareness of this indifference and hostility." Simpson sees this attitude as a transitional one between Meredith's poems of youth and those of his maturity and then summarizes the difference in outlook between "Modern Love" and the later poetry: "Modern Love" "does not hold the Meredithian harmonic triad of blood, brain, and spirit to be a significant possibility for man, because it has a regretful, pessimistic attitude toward change and natural recurrence instead of one of joyful acceptance, and because it implies a basic normative difference between man and nature." pp. 341, 342, 347. Speaking of the difference

between nature and man, Simpson remarks, "Man's time is linear and finite; Nature's is cyclical and infinite. Human values are transient; natural facts are recurrent," p. 348. However, this observation seems to discount the importance of emphasis, or angle of vision. Thus, even "man's time" is cyclical and infinite when man is viewed as Man, and not as an individual; to complete the contradiction, "Nature's time" is both linear and finite if one speaks of the individual bird, the individual flower, and not the "permanence" of Bird or Flower. The fundamental differences, then, lie in the human emphasis upon the individual, the individual's vulnerability to suffering, and human resistance to consolation for personal suffering through submergence in universal recurrence.

There is, however, a streak of melancholy in Meredith throughout the period of my study, a streak that may have forced him to construct his secularized version of religious faith. Such remarks are no longer heretical in light of Simpson's article and comments such as that of Tompkins in her article on "Periander": "Solon," she remarks, is informed by Meredith's "convinced and almost professional hopefulness." p. 294.

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