4-1982

Meredith's women in time : Diana Merion and Clara Middleton

Dana Sims Brewer

MEREDITH'S WOMEN IN TIME: DIANA MERION AND CLARA MIDDLETON

BY

DANA SIMS BREWER

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
IN CANDIDACY
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
IN ENGLISH

APRIL, 1982

In The Egoist and Diana of the Crossways, George Meredith joins the ranks of Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill in a slowly evolving cultural crusade to gain self respect, dignity, and independence for Victorian women. In The Subjection of Women, Mill addresses the problem in a concrete fashion:

> . . . the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes--the legal subordination of one sex to the other--is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hinderances to human improvement.[1]

Legal inequality, however, is only symptomatic of a more serious disease--the moral and emotional dependency entrenched in every aspect of the Victorian woman's life:

> Men do not want solely the obedience of women, they want their sentiments. All men, except the most brutish, desire to have the woman most nearly connected with them not a forced slave but a willing one, not a slave merely, but a favorite . . . . All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will and government by self-control, but submissive and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them it is the duty of women, . . . to live for others, to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections.[2]

Most Victorian men ruled their households as benevolent despots and it is not surprising that the "object of being attractive to men had

---

[1]John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women," in Victorian Literature, ed. G.B. Tennyson and Donald J. Gray (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976), p. 564.

[2]Mill, "Subjection," p. 571.

. . . become the polar star of feminine education and formation of character."[3] Meredith supports the progressive views of Mill but holds a dramatic edge over this essayist. Meredith brandishes the literature of power and recreates the experiences which will make us empathize with Victorian women and the issues facing them. What is most remarkable about Meredith's feat is his penetrating insights into the minds of women. He captures the uniquely feminine aspects of his heroines' personalities and as one of his female contemporaries comments, "Your knowledge of women is almost indecent."[4] Meredith has an androgynous mind and with it he takes aim at the relationship between the sexes.

So often in Victorian literature women are only the tender-hearted helpmates of men and even as arresting a figure as Dorothea Brooke looks to a husband for guidance and purpose. In Frail Vessels, Hazel Mews examines nineteenth century women writers and the roles and duties of their women characters. She states:

> A women's role is largely concerned with relationships--she is so often thought of as 'Sydney's sister, Pembroke's mother;' rather than as an individual in her own right.[5]

Meredith's women, however, are refreshing and startling alternatives to typical Victorian heroines. Diana Merion and Clara Middleton are often neither prim, nor proper, nor very heroic. But they are clearly drawn individuals of intense dramatic power who struggle to stand as persons in their own right.

---

[3]Mill, "Subjection," p. 571.

[4]J.A. Hammerton, George Meredith His Life and Art in Anecdote and Criticism (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1909), p. 231.

[5]Hazel Mews, Frail Vessels (University of London: The Athlone Press, 1969), p. 7.

The ambivalence of critical regard for Meredith has not changed greatly since the appearances of The Egoist in 1897 and Diana of the Crossways in 1885. For some now and then, he is a genius; for others, he is obscure. One nineteenth century reviewer describes him as "tediously amusing; . . . brilliant to the point of being obscure; his helpfulness is so extravagant as to worry and confound."[6] In "Meredith's Reputation," John Lucas posits a twentieth century evaluation: "Meredith is badly flawed, often infuriating, sometimes downright silly and vulgar. But he is also--or ought to be--of permanent interest, and at his best he is probably a master."[7]

Meredith's difficult obscurity does not invite a plethora of Meredithiana but he is an important bridge between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If his prose is among the most difficult Victorian writing, his women are recognized among the forbearers of twentieth century women. There is no extensive analysis comparing Diana and Clara but discussions of each women are plentiful.

Analysis of Diana Warwick tends to emphasize the disassociation of intellect and sexuality in her personality. Gillian Beer suggests the "central theme of the novel is the disparity between the awakened intellect and the slumbering sexual

---

[6]W.E. Henley, review of The Egoist. in Athenaeum, 1 November 1879, in Meredith The Critical Heritage, ed. Ioan Williams (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 207.

[7]John Lucas, "Meredith's Reputation," in Meredith Now Some Critical Essays, ed. Ian Fletcher (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 12.

nature of his Diana-heroine . . . "; [8] Walter Wright argues that "collective mankind demands that the individual upper-class woman conform to a pattern which denies the existence of blood and requires the disguise of intellect . . ."; [9] Judith Wilt emphasizes Diana the novelist and explicates the "Nuptial Chapter" in which Diana realizes her "readiness to kindle"; [10] Jan Gordon analyzes the mythic dimensions of Diana as goddess of chastity as well as spirit of childbirth and her struggle to integrate the two. [11]

Criticism on The Egoist does not focus so exclusively on Clara but she is not, of course, to be excluded from an analysis of the novel. Discussions concerning her tend to emphasize the growing independence of her feminine nature as Willoughby attempts to enforce the policy of absorption on his bride. Beer writes that the same social decorum that disguises Willoughby's "animal voraciousness" also prevents Clara from fulfilling her full identity by imposing "static," "anti-evolutionary" models. [12] Wright states that Clara's triumph over the need . . . to build Willoughby . . . into her ideal, lest her whole world of ideals collapse . . .

---

[8] Gillian Beer, Meredith: A Change of Masks (University of London: The Athlone Press, 1970), p. 140.

[9] Walter F. Wright, Art and Substance in George Meredith (University of Nebraska Press, 1953), p. 142.

[10] Judith Wilt, The Readable People of George Meredith (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 73.

[11] Jan Gordon, "Diana of the Crossways: Internal History and the Brainstuff of Fiction," in Meredith Now Some Critical Essays, ed. Ian Fletcher (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 247.

[12] Beer, Masks, p. 166.

constitutes her education."[13] In John Goode's article, "The Egoist: Anatomy or Striptease?," he identifies Clara as "good imagination" and suggests that her imagination endows her with the knowledge of perception that allows her to pierce Willoughby's suave facade and see him for what he is.[14]

Although the plotlines of the novels and the personalities of the heroines are quite different, The Egoist and Diana of the Crossways have remarkably similar casts of characters.[15] Both heroines are fetching young women wooed by charming English gentlemen with exceedingly conventional views of women--Augustus Warwick and Sir Willoughby; both have honorable men-in-waiting--Tom Redworth and Vernon Whitford; both have trustworthy women friends--Emma Dunstane and Laetitia Dale--who give moral strength to their integrity. These parallels magnify the omnipresence of static molds and conventional expectations for women. Though their situations are entirely different both Diana and Clara have demandingly similar resources and obligations confronting them as they search for the Holy Grail of freedom. Moreover, these similarities justify a comparative analysis and lead toward a deeper understanding of Meredith's view of women.

---

[13]Wright, Substance, p. 72.

[14]John Goode, "The Egoist: Anatomy or Striptease?," in Meredith Now Some Critical Essays, ed. Ian Fletcher (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 221.

[15]Although I read Lionel Stevenson's book before writing my paper and before deciding on a thesis, I had no recollection until the last couple of weeks that he makes brief analogies between The Egoist and Diana of the Crossways. To avoid plagiarism of any sort, I want to acknowledge his ideas in: The Ordeal of George Meredith by Lionel Stevenson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 257-258.

Meredith's vindication of the rights of women is carefully contained within the parameters of his aesthetic theory. About himself, Meredith writes: "For my part, I love and cling to earth, as the one piece of God's handiwork that we possess. I admit that we can re-fashion; but of earth must be the material."[16] It is in his re-fashioning that Meredith's muse draws us into the world upon which he wants us to focus. The guiding hand of Meredith's creative efforts, the Comic Muse, is a selective spirit whose hunting ground is "the drawing room of civilized men and women, where we have no dust of the struggling outer world, no mire, no violent crashes, to make the correctness of the representation convincing."[17] Thus Meredith's work, though not always lifelike, is true to life. His poetic spark does not light "cobwebs in putrid corners"[18] but seeks to give us "earth with an atmosphere."[19]

In other words, he is not concerned with every flibbertigibbet Diana or Clara might have had. His is a specialized artistic interest in which he examines the characters and their relationship with society. "Remember," writes Meredith, "that characters mainly . . . . are interesting to the world, not for

---

[16]George Meredith to Augustus Jessopp, 20 September 1862, in The Letters of George Meredith, ed. C.L. Cline (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 161.

[17]George Meredith, The Egoist (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), p. 3.

[18]George Meredith to William Hardman, 1 January 1866, in The Letters of George Meredith, ed. C.L. Cline (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 323.

[19]George Meredith to Augustus Jessopp, 20 September 1862, in The Letters of George Meredith, ed. C.L. Cline (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 161.

themselves, but for the part they are playing."[20] Thus Meredith's careful dissection of Diana and Clara's minds is not an end in itself. It is his effort to open our minds to the dilemma facing women. It is his eccentric paradox that intense dissection of individuals is his most important means of enlisting our support for the gender.

In The Idea of Comedy, Meredith clearly articulates the links between women's place, society and art. He argues, "Where the veil is over women's faces, you cannot have society, without which the senses are barbarous and the Comic Spirit is driven to the gutters of grossness to slake its thirst."[21] Through the power of the Comic Spirit, Meredith champions the potential of women to civilize society and lead it towards millennium. But to do so they must become more than "the pretty idiot, the passive beauty, the adorable bundle of caprices":[22]

> Comedy is an exhibition of their battles with men, and that of men with them; and as the two, however divergent, both look on one object, namely, life, the gradual similarity of the impressions must bring them to some resemblance. The comic poet dares to show us men and women coming to this mutual likeness; he is for saying that when they draw together in social life their minds grow liker; just as the philosopher discerns the similarities of boy and girl, until the girl is marched away to the nursery.[23]

---

[20]George Meredith to Frederick A. Maxse, late December 1860-early January 1861, in The Letters of George Meredith, ed. C.L. Cline (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 73.

[21]George Meredith, "On the Idea of Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit," In Victorian Prose, ed. G.B. Tennyson and Donald Gray (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1976), p. 1047.

[22]Meredith, "Idea," p. 1041.

[23]Meredith, "Idea," p. 1041.

So Meredith's arena is the drawing room and we do not have serene women baking bread or suckling babies. The underpinnings of the Victorian world are supported by the subjection of women and as challengers of the conventions of femininity, Diana and Clara must grapple with the most difficult and compromising situations that would stifle their moral, emotional, and intellectual growth. In the novels, Meredith recreates the intricate social cocoons that surround his heroines only to reveal their struggle to escape the constricting environs. Through much of their stories we see them stumbling in graceless efforts to disentangle themselves from compromising alliances. They must find new ways to think about themselves and the situations they confront. But they emerge from their ordeals as fragile and as beautifully resilient as butterflies; and they evolve from innocent girls into discerning women.

In a letter to Frederick Maxse, a naval captain of "strong literary taste" and intimate friend,[24] Meredith capsulizes the qualities an enlightened man must look for in women and indeed, they are the virtues he would have women look for in themselves:

> She is, I am sure, a very sweet Person; but how strong she is, or can be made, my instinct does not fathom. I am so miserably constituted now that I can't love a woman if I do not feel her soul and that there is force therein to wrestle with the facts of life (called the Angel of the Lord) . . . . Happy you with all the colour of life about you! Has she principle? Has she

---

[24]Siegfried Sassoon, Meredith (London: Constable, 1948), p. 27.

any sense of responsibility? Has she courage?[25]

As Diana and Clara become increasingly introspective during their stories, they learn the meaning of principle, responsibility and courage.

Diana and Clara, like most Victorian women, live under a double standard which subordinates them to men but society's exotropic vision of woman's character make the facts of life which confront them particularly difficult to sort. On the one hand, they are the carriers of the Apple Disease who should be avoided at all costs. On the other, they are paragons of rectitude and propriety. As Diana prepares herself for Warwick's lawsuit, Emma capsulizes this unfocused vision:

> The marriage was to blame. The English notion of women seems to be that we are born white sheep or black; circumstances have nothing to do with our colour. They dread to grant distinctions, and to judge of us discerningly is beyond them . . . . There is a class that does live honestly; and at any rate it springs from a liking for purity; but I am sure that their method of impressing it on women has the dangers of things artificial. They narrow their understanding of human nature, and that is not the way to improve the breed.[26]

Emma's husband, Sir Lukin, graphically caricatures the "black sheep" as he warns Percy Dacier against the perdition of womanflesh. The devil, he says is never more deadly than when he "baits with a petticoat:"

I was talking about women. They are the devil--or he makes

---

[25]George Meredith to Frederick A. Maxse, 19 October 1861, in The Letters of George Meredith, ed. C.L. Cline (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 105.

[26]George Meredith, Diana of the Crossways, Memorial Edition (London: Constable and Co., 1910), pp. 142-143. Hereafter all references to this novel will be given within the text of the paper and recognized by the shortened title Diana.

> most use of them; and you must learn to see the cloven foot under their petticoats, if you're to escape them (Diana, p. 298).

The white sheep of English women are the reservoirs of breeding and propriety. Lady Wathin is Diana's virtuous critic. Meredith describes her as "one of the order of women who can do anything in a holy cause" with "erectness of dignity." Lady Wathin boasts a morality that defines virtue quite independently of experience. When Diana refuses to return to Warwick after winning the lawsuit, Lady Wathin describes Diana as a "cold adventuress" and "clever intriguer." At the same time she promotes the case of her good friend, Constance Asper, who pines after Percy Dacier as he courts Diana. Constance is a "casket of all the trusty virtues, as well as the security of frigidity in the casket" (Diana, p. 222). Such is Dacier's "native taste" and Sir Willoughby shares it.

Sir Willoughby cultivates the "common male Egoist's ideal of a waxwork sex."[27] He desires his mate:

> . . . to have come to him out of an eggshell, somewhat more astonished at things than a chicken, but as completely enclosed before he tapped the shell, and seeing him with her sex's eyes first of all men (Egoist, p. 18).

He is contemptuous of:

> . . . modern young women, who run about the world nibbling and nibbled at, until they know one sex as well as the other, and are not a whit less cognizant of the market than men; pure, possibly; it is not so easy to say innocent (Egoist, p. 35).

---

[27]George Meredith, The Egoist (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), p. 124. Hereafter all references to this novel will be given within the text of the paper and recognized by the shortened title Egoist.

In short, Willoughby, Dacier and society in general expect good women to pay tribute to the mask of decorum. Few women would choose to be "black sheep." But, to avoid this, to be socially acceptable, a young woman must be conventionally proper, showing no eccentric propensities. Meredith writes:

> . . . for the world is ever gracious to an hypocrisy that pays homage to the mask of virtue by copying it; the world is hostile to the face of an innocence not conventionally simpering and quite surprised; the world prefers decorum to honesty (Diana, p. 117).

Meredith and his heroines fight for individual consideration from society. They refuse classification as white sheep or black sheep, or astonished mother hens, or "modern" young women. The odds are against them and few men or women will give them that consideration.

In the beginning of their stories, Diana and Clara seem fetching prospects in the marriage market. A black-haired Irish beauty, Diana has a keen intellect and quick wit. She is the "bright cynosure" of the Irish Ball and "makes everything in the room dust round a blazing jewel" (Diana, p. 22). Clara's nymph-like beauty is no less lovely. At eighteen "she has money and health and beauty, the triune of perfect starriness, which makes all men astronomers" (Egoist, p. 32).

And yet, they are different from other young beauties and it is not their physical beauty that distinguishes them. It is rather the potential energy of their minds and characters that sets them apart. Both are quite innocent but neither is simpering or surprised. Meredith writes "A witty woman is a treasure; a witty beauty is a power" (Diana, p. 2). Diana is a power and she wields her strength with innocent self-confidence. Redworth is intimidated

by her: "The least affrighted of men was frightened by her taste, and by her aplomb, her inoffensiveness, in freedom of manner and self-sufficiency--sign of purest breeding" (Diana, p. 36). Clara is equally unique. The conversational sage of the neighborhood, Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, describes her as a "rogue in porcelain." As much as Willoughby presses for clarification of the incongruous description, so unfitting for the mistress of Patterne Hall, Mrs. Mountstuart only muddies her epithet by noting that "she will be a novelty to our neighborhood and an animation of the Hall" (Egoist, p. 38). The significance of these descriptions must not be dismissed. Meredith's heroines defy categorization as he captures the charisma of their unique personalities.

Both women are but imminent rebels and, as of yet, neither has been challenged by the events that will push them to insurrection. The particulars of these events are different but the experiential motifs are similar--both women are threatened by hackneyed existences that would make them mere shadows of their potential.

Diana's wit, beauty, and purest breeding are not sturdy enough to fend off the advances of Sir Lukin without a serious undermining of her self-sufficiency. He categorizes her innocent aplomb and charming forthrightness as light-headed coquetry. Her conversation is not conventionally simpering nor her demeanor that of a freshly hatched chicken. When left to her innocence in the glitter of an Irish Ball, she is sure-footed and courageous. When evil, cloaked in the dress of Lukin, encroaches upon her innocence, Diana has no emotional protection against his advances.

In a vain effort to protect herself and shield Emma, Diana rushes headlong into a marriage with Warwick. Diana knows little of her husband when she marries, but her quick sketches of his manner and attitude tell us that he has assumed the typical posture of ruling Victorian husbands. She suggests his worst fault is perhaps "an affected superciliousness before the foreigner . . . . You are to know, dear Emmy, that we English are the aristocracy of Europeans" (Diana, p. 70). For someone as Irish as Diana, surely this remark is not ingratiating. But Warwick's manner of dealing with the world and with opinions differing from his own forbode certain trouble in their relationship:

> His difference of opinion were prefaced by a "Pardon me," and pausing smile of the teeth; then a succinctly worded sentence or two, a perfect settlement of the dispute. He disliked argumentation. He said so, and Diana remarked it of him, speaking as a wife who merely noted a characteristic. Inside his boundary, he had neat phrases, opinions in packets. Beyond it, apparently the world was void of any particular interest (Diana, p. 71).

When he sues her for adultery with Lord Dannisburgh, she reflects:

> No two have ever come together so naturally antagonistic as we two. We walked a dozen steps in stupified union, and hit upon crossways. From that moment it was tug and tug; he me, I him. But resisting, I made him a tyrant; and he, by insisting, made me a rebel . . . (Diana, p. 156).

Clara and Willoughby's natures are equally antagonistic. Had Willoughby more perception, he could have read Clara's face and understood that hers was a "spirit with a natural love and liberty, and required the next thing to liberty, spaciousness, if she was to own allegiance" (Egoist, p. 39). Instead, Willoughby interprets their engagement as a mandate not only for developing her character but for seizing her soul as well. If the Meredithian comment about

poetry--"Those that have souls meet their fellows there" (Diana, p. 12)--is true, then Willoughby has not a chance for Clara's soul. Clara has a "liking for poetry, and sometimes quoted the stuff in defiance of his pursed mouth and pained murmur: 'I am no poet'" (Egoist, p. 41). And yet, Willoughby ignores their differing interests and forges ahead to mold "her character to the feminine of his own" (Egoist, p. 39):

> He explained to his darling that lovers of necessity do loathe the world . . . . In their hearts they must despise it, shut it out, that their love for one another may pour in a clear channel, and with all the Force they have. They cannot enjoy the sense of security for their love unless they fence away the world (Egoist, p. 40).

Clara loves the world and loathes Willoughby for his patronizing assumption that she too must despise it:

> she would not burn the world for him; she would not, though a purer poetry is little imaginable, reduce herself to ashes, or incense, or essence, in honour of him and so by love's transmutation, literally be the man she was to marry. She preferred to be herself, with the egoism of women! She said it; she said: "I must be myself to be of any value to you, Willoughby (Egoist, p. 41).

His arrogant domination forces her "little mind" to activate and she finally wonders how she ever agreed to the engagement:

> Had she seen him with the eyes of the world, thinking they were her own? That look of his, the look of "indignant contentment," had then been a most noble conquering look, splendid as a general's plume at the gallop. It could not have altered. Was it that her eyes had altered (Egoist, p. 47)?

The women's rejections of Warwick and Willoughby coincide with and contribute to their awareness of woman's place in society. Diana comments to Emma:

> I suppose we women are taken to be the second thoughts of the Creator; human nature's fringes, mere finishing touches, not a part of the texture . . . the pretty ornamentation (Diana, p. 158).

Clara realizes that, as ornaments, women are insidiously coerced into their role of coquette:

> I have latterly become a Egoist, thinking of no one but myself, scheming to make use of every soul I meet. But then, women are in the position of inferiors. They are hardly out of the nursery when a lasso is round their necks; and if they have beauty, no wonder they turn it to a weapon and make as many captives as they can. I do not wonder! My sense of shame at my natural weakness and the arrogance of men would urge me to make hundreds captive, if that is being a coquette. I should not have compassion for those lofty birds, the hawks. To see them with their wings clipped would amuse me. Is there any other way of punishing them (Egoist, p. 132)?

Clara and Diana are victims of social constrictions because Lukin, Warwick and Willoughby expect "their" women to play the "pretty idiot, the passive beauty, the adorable bundle of caprices." Lukin loses his head over Diana's beauty; Warwick is known as a "desperate admirer of beautiful woman" (Diana, p. 73); Willoughby considers Clara a suitable mate because she is "young, healthy, handsome" (Egoist, p. 37). Both women realize how precarious is their place on these pedestals. They qualify as "white sheep" so long as they please men while one misstep can make them "black sheep" forever.

As Diana and Clara come to terms with how poorly the facade of decorum fits their needs and how unspontaneous they must be to fit the mold, the stakes are suddenly much higher than their rejection of a single man. Their complaints are with the entire social fabric of their "drawing rooms." In one of Meredith's letters to Maxse is an appropriate metaphor for the ambivalence Diana and Clara feel as they begin their challenge of society's expectations of women:

> But the necessity of state overbears the duties of flesh. They must marry something Royal, and what if their children howl, or hang limp, so long as the blood is kept pure?--The philosopher laughs sadly at these things. He inclines to say, "Down with Institutions!" They do much for us--do they not undo more? The truth is that everything that is right (according to the optimist, who sees half the truth) would be right, I say, if we were just wise enough to pluck the flower and not tie ourselves to the roots. So the age of an Institution . . . becomes the slavery of its supporters. To know when a thing hath perished or is vital, is one of the tests of wisdom. Figure to yourself a lover who hears a void in his ghostly bosom, demanding answer to the question--"Was it all delusion?" And thus he bases his logic--"Impossible, it could not be delusion for the dream was so immense, the rapture so heavenly." We all cling to the days that were and won't be the sons of Time. To be the sticks and stones of a glorified past day we think better.--Better be men, I say.[28]

As Diana and Clara stand in limbo between outright rebellion and the safety of convention each women takes a nostalgic look back and wonders whither has fled her visionary gleam. When Redworth first rescues Diana at the Crossways, preventing her from fleeing England, she risks a look back:

> 'As to happiness, the looking forward is happiness,' he remarked.
> 'Oh, the looking back! back!' she cried.
> 'Forward! that is life.'
> 'And backward, death, if you will; and still it is happiness.' (Diana, p. 126).

Diana knows that the days before her encounter with Sir Lukin were her last days of blessed, innocent happiness. When Clara approaches Patterne Hall for the first time, already suspecting she cannot marry Willoughby, she remembers his courtship:

> The spirit of those days rose up within her to reproach her and whisper of their renewal: she remembered her rosy dreams and the image she had of him, her throbbing pride in him, her

---

[28]George Meredith to Frederick A. Maxse, early May 1863, in The Letters of George Meredith, ed. C.L. Cline (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 202..

> choking richness of happiness: and also her vain attempting to be very humble, usually ending in a carol, quaint to think of, not without charm, but quaint, puzzling (Egoist, p. 47).

"Forward, that is life." Meredith wishes his heroines to be women--women in time and however lovely the past might look, however bleak the future seems, there is no going back.

Warwick's suit forces change on Diana and the alternatives with which she can respond are equally unappealing. Her instinctive choice is to leave England and rid herself of his hated name. But in doing so she loses honour and vindicates Warwick's accusations. If she stays in England and wins the suit, she redeems her honour but retains the brand Warwick. She succumbs to Emma and Redworth's insistence that she defend her innocence but the irony of the situation does not escape Meredith: " . . . name the sort of world it is, . . . for which we are to sacrifice our one hope of freedom, that we may preserve our fair name in it" (Diana, p. 114).

For Diana, however, the situation is even more complex. She feels "deformed" by marriage not only because it taught her the inferior position of women but also because that inferiority taught her the deceit of which she is capable. Diana promises Emma that she is innocent of Warwick's charges but confesses standing before an open window to warn Dannisburg that she and Warwick were arguing and that he should not call. Warwick's demands for obedience mean imprisonment to Diana and compelled her to act in a way she believes is dishonourable--all for the sake of social honour. She laments but offers herself no pardon for such wiliness: "A woman who can do as I did by instinct, needs to have an angel always near her, if she has not a husband she reveres" (Diana, p. 158). Diana has no

illusions about the dependency of women upon men. While women remain in the infancy of their intellectual, emotional, and moral evolution, they need a guiding hand. True friends to women, such as Dannisburg, can help women grow but such sympathetic guides are rare finds. Thus, for the moment Diana has no guiding force in her life and the most important dynamics are the tension between self-esteem and social honour.

Clara experiences similar conflicts after she is convinced that she and Willoughby are mis-matched. She feels guilty about her dislike of Willoughby and thinks: "Poison of some sort must be operating in her. She had not come to him today with this feeling of sullen antagonism; she had caught it here" (Egoist, p. 52). Like Diana, there appears no recourse for her guilt; it is a question of self-esteem or social honour:

> What could she do?--she was caged; by her word of honour, as she at one time thought; by her cowardice, at another; and dimly sensible that the latter was a stronger lock than the former, she mused on the abstract question whether a woman's cowardice can be so absolute as to cast her into the jaws of her aversion . . . she must have the courage to break with honour, she must dare to be faithless, and not merely say, I will be brave, but be brave enough to be dishonourable (Egoist, p. 79).

Diana and Clara are trapped by the social mores to which "proper" ladies must adhere. But more importantly, both are in their particular dilemma for the same reason--neither their beauty nor their singluarity has given either woman a knowledge or understanding of the world. Diana's girlish vision of a virile man is a soldier but when Sir Lukin, a soldier, makes advances she has no way of coping with his dishonourable intentions. In a flurry of emotional panic she rushes into a foolish marriage and in no way understands the reasons for her rash actions:

> Here, . . . in this very house of her happiness with her father, she had bound herself to the man: voluntarily, quite inexplicably. Voluntarily, as we say. But there must be a spell upon us at times. Upon young women there certainly is (Diana, p. 114).

Clara is being coerced into a unwanted marriage after engaging herself when she knew nothing of men--not nibbled at, if you will. As she comes to know Sir Willoughby and herself, she realizes, "I did not choose . . . . I consented" (Egoist, p. 125).

At this point, both women look for self-sufficiency but find it impossible to attain because neither is in control of her actions. Diana speaks for both when she states, "Give us the means of independence, and we will gain it, and have a turn at judging you, my lords" (Diana, p. 159)! But to gain true independence, Diana and Clara must find the "force therein to wrestle with the facts of life (Called Angel of the Lord)." At this point, Meredith begins perusing their sense of responsibility, principle, and courage. There is no easy access to maturity, however, and though they must learn to identify the egoistic power of Willoughby and Warwick, their most difficult task will be facing the best and the worst of themselves.

Diana admits that she made Warwick a tyrant by resisting his demands.

> You know that a certain degree of independence had been, if not granted by him, conquered by me. I had the habit of it. Obedience with him is imprisonment--he is a blind wall (Diana, p. 157).

On the other hand, Warwick exploited Diana's wit and beauty for his own social and political ends. In reality, Diana states:

> He is also a double-dealer. Or no, perhaps not in design. He was moved at one time by his interests; at another by his idea of his honour. He took what I could get for him, and then turned and drubbed me for getting it (Diana, p. 156).

Diana becomes increasingly introspective during the lawsuit as she struggles to analyze her past. She counsels the Diana of her girlhood, a "simple little sister:"

> They were two in one, and she corrected the dreams of the younger, protected, and counseled her very sagely, advising her to love Truth and look always to Reality for her refreshment (Diana, p. 138).

Diana's crucial mistake is failing to redefine her relationship with men in a positive way. Instead she makes a negative resolve to completely disengage them from her heart. She would be a friend to men but in her heart be "Diana of coldness" (Diana, p. 163) and "keep out of pulling distance of that line where friendship ceases" (Diana, p. 131).

As Clara learns more about Willoughby she, too, begins to grow. Meredith comments that she "ceases to think like a girl" (Egoist, p. 79). She learns to evaluate Willoughby for the reality he is rather than the cavalier courtier he appeared. But freeing herself is more difficult than the initial resolve is to make. As of yet, she does not realize the force of Willoughby's demands or the depth of power his environment bestows upon him.

She begins sensing this while observing his relationship with his sweet gray-haired aunts, Isabel and Eleanor. Meredith could not have chosen more mild and faceless sounding names and they contrast sharply to the crisp enunciation "Clara" demands. Willoughby has complete dominion over them: "Clara wondered whether inclination or Sir Willoughby had disciplined their individuality out of them and made them his shadows, his echoes" (Egoist, p. 64). Though superficially munificent in his requests, Willoughby is intransigence in his demands for unwavering and unquestioning

devotion from his dependents in Patterne Hall. Any attempt at independence means termination of Willoughby's generosity. If one should attempt freedom, "He goes for good. It is the vital principle of my authority to insist on that. A dead leaf might as reasonably demand to return to the tree. Once, off, off for all eternity" (Egoist, p. 90)! Clara recognized that this attitude has reduced his aunts to mere shadows of vital human beings.

She begins to fear Willoughby's power and counters the threat of such a shade-like existence with the assertion, "My mind is my own, married or not" (Egoist, p. 64). But unlike Diana, who has lived with a husband's tyranny, Clara has no firsthand experience with man's power over women:

> But as yet she had not experienced the power in him which could threaten and wrestle to subject the members of his household to the state of satellites. Though she had in fact been giving battle to it for several months, she had held her own too well to perceive definitely the character of the spirit opposing her (Egoist, p. 64).

At this juncture, neither woman has learned a good deal more about the world but each is beginning to recognize the means by which they are controlled--they must behave themselves or they will be cast aside as so many dead leaves. Essentially, this is what Warwick has done to Diana and should Clara marry Willoughby this would be the force behind her good behavior. As they collect more information about the world, Meredith reveals their slow maturity and incipient emergence from girls into women. Neither has forsaken her youth but each ventures beyond it through close observation of her environment and careful reflection of her experiences and feelings. Diana's European travels are a brief respite from the turmoil of England. She awakens from "the trance of a deadly

draught," and a "wintry bondage" (Diana, pp. 171-173). She loves the wild flowers because they are inseparable from the vibrancy of the countryside. Though beautiful, they are more than nature's "finishing touches," "ornamentation;" they are an intimate part of earth's texture and as such become Diana's image of hope for herself and other women. She disdains garden flowers because they are "cultivated for decoration, grown for clipping" (Diana, p. 182)--Meredith's metaphor for English women grown for beauty and cultivated for marriage. For the moment, however, Diana feels free from such bondage. She regains an inner peace and her confidence is qualitatively different than the innocence of her girlhood:

> To be a girl again was magical. She would fancy her having risen from the dead. And to be a girl with a woman's broader vision and receptiveness of soul; with knowledge of evil, and winging to ethereal happiness, this was a revelation of our human powers (Diana, p. 153).

In The Egoist, Meredith writes:

> It is here that the seed of good teaching supports a soul, for the condition might be mapped, and where kismet whispers us to shut eyes, and instruction bids us look up, is at a well-marked crossroad of the contest (Egoist, p. 165).

Diana and Clara take different paths at this crossroad. Until after her love affair with Percy Dacier, Diana never comes to a true reckoning about her relationship with men. In Europe she shuts her eyes to this problem and walls off the world. As a married woman she cannot marry Dacier and this helps her avoid confronting the apparent incompatibility of loving a man while protecting her integrity.

Clara vacillates between shutting eyes and looking up. In some ways it would be much easier to accept her fate:

> What was the right of so miserable a creature as she to excite disturbance, let her fortunes be good or ill? It would be quieter to float, kinder to everybody. Thank heaven for the chances of a short life! Once in a net, desperation is graceless. We may be brutes in our earthly destinies; in our endurance of them we need not be brutish (Egoist, p. 165).

Marrying Willoughby would be her life-long punishment for her inexperienced acceptance of his proposal.

The thought which goads Clara out of passivity and spurs her to irreversible revolt is the inevitability of a sexual relationship with husband Willoughby. Clara's distaste for Willoughby's cosmology coincides with and contributes to her repulsion for his touch. She could never imitate Vernon's passive modesty toward Willoughby's arrogance:

> . . . the clash of a sharp physical thought: "The difference! the difference!" told her she was woman and never could submit. Can a woman have an inner life apart from him she is yoked to? She tried to nestle deep away in herself; in some corner where the abstract view had comforted her, to flee from thinking as her feminine blood directed. It was a vain effort. The difference, the cruel fate, the defencelessness of women, pursued her, strung her to wild horses' backs, tossed her on savage wastes. In her case duty was shame; hence, it could not be broadly duty. That intolerable difference proscribed the word (Egoist, p. 166).

But in the wake of such rebellion, Clara still feels frightened and guilty at her inconstant affections:

> From her loathing, as soon as her sensations had quickened to realize it, she was hurled on her weakness. She was graceless, she was inconsistent, she was volatile, she was unprincipled, she was worse than a prey of wickedness--capable of it; she was only waiting to be misled. Nay, the idea of being misled suffused her with languor; for then the battle would be over and she a happy weed of the sea, no longer suffering those tugs at the roots, but leaving it to the sea to heave and contend (Egoist, p. 167).

In her most desperate moments, Clara's fair name means very little and only good teaching and the counsel of Vernon Whitford steer her toward patience and honesty. As her midnight meditations end, she

can only rage with frustration: "But all of her--she was all marked urgent. This house was a cage, and the world--her brain was a cage, until she could obtain her prospect of freedom" (Egoist, p. 168).

Diana and Clara live through the tedious moments of their ordeals but for each there are critical events that push them toward maturity. They must confront the best and the worst of themselves. Society's exotrophic vision and male domination of women are formidible foes but their most towering adversary is their own selves. (Says Pogo, "We have met the enemy and he is us.") Neither woman has a rational course of action with which to counter social convention. Diana denies its existence by fleeing England and Clara can only rage against it in her midnight meditations. Theirs are emotional rejections of convention but they now need positive action to forge ahead toward independent lives. This is difficult because Diana and Clara are pioneers and there are no prefabricated conventions upon which they can lean. They float in fluid, metamorphosing situations of their own making in which truth must be rediscovered and redefined. They grasp at strength and stability only to discover they must find it within the fluctuating boundaries of their best and most moral selves.

Meredith finds Diana's best and most honourable self in her commitment to friends. When she returns to England to sit in Dannisburgh's death chamber, she proves herself a true rebel, strong enough to respect the dying wish of a friend despite the contemptuous snubs of his surviving family. She sits in grieving meditation, grateful for the privilege of honouring him. It gives her serenity and repose before his burial. As Dacier watches her,

he is struck by the depth of her emotion and her dedication to Dannisburgh's spirit. He can only utter, "How you can love! . . . You love with the whole heart when you love" (Diana, p. 228). Diana's simple answer is "I love my friends" (Diana, p. 228).

We see this noble strength again during Emma's operation. Diana hurries to Emma's side just as we are ready to judge her capricious for promising to run away with Dacier. Indeed, this is the ordeal which first separates her from Dacier and the mortal happiness he offers. Her reward is living through Emma's pain and fear. Diana loves with her whole heart and in doing so she accepts the burden of Emma's agony to help her friend through the ordeal. Sir Lukin, weak fool though he is, recognizes that Diana "hasn't a peer for courage" (Diana, p. 298).

Our view of Diana is through Dacier's eyes as she leaves the operating room:

> He was petrified by Diana's face, and thought of her as whirled from him in a storm, bearing the marks of it. Her underlip hung for short breaths; the big drop of her recent anguish still gathered in her brows; her eyes were tearless, lustreless; she looked ancient in youth, and distant by a century, like a tall woman of the vaults, issuing white-ringed, not of our light (Diana, p. 300).

Though very human, Diana's majesty is her ability to reach beyond herself, or into herself, to a reservoir of strength that makes her capable of deeds beyond the power of ordinary beings. When Dacier leaves, the hypocritic lover's grief with which he came to Diana is replaced by one image:

> The crisis of mortal peril in that house enveloped its inmates, and so wrought in him as to enshroud the stripped outcrying husband, of whom he had no clear recollection, save the man's agony. The two women, striving against death, devoted in friendship, were the sole living images he brought away; they were a new vision of the world and our life (Diana, pp. 301-302).

The last of Diana's ordeal, the betrayal of Dacier's secret to the newspapers, is the point during which she must meet the worst of herself. When the scene begins, she and her maid race boisterously through dark midnight streets as though out for a short holiday. Diana shrieks to a halt at the newspaper building. Her most desperate and deceptive self is met by a world in which women are not only absent but mean nothing:

> Her feminine self-esteem was troubled; all ideas of attractiveness expired. Here was manifestly a spot where women had dropped from the secondary to the cancelled stage of their extraordinary career in a world either blowing them aloft like soap-bubbles or quietly shelving them as supernumeraries (Diana, p. 374).

Why Diana carries out her rash plan is not clear. Pressed on by feverish mental anguish, she thinks of her need for money, her desire to re-establish herself in Mr. Tonan's eyes as Queen of the Salon, her disgrace by Dacier's advances as a mortal lover and her shame at discovering herself "an unmasked actress" who forgave him and embraced the memory (Diana, p. 370). All this seems to justify her anger at Dacier and the world who see her as a pretty ornament.

Diana's punishment for her betrayal is a second and more life-threatening wintry bondage. When Dacier denounces and leaves her "the pallor and cold of death took her body" (Diana, p. 390). In the final analysis, it is Diana's courage that sets her apart as a true heroine. Her commitment to Lord Dannisburgh's death-chamber and her steadfastness during Emma's operation took courage but her confession to Dacier enforces a moral courage upon her that insists she face the consequences of her betrayal. Her confession sacrifices the relationship that has brought her mortal happiness

since her separation from Warwick. When Emma comes to nurse Diana, she realizes:

> Tony's love of a man, . . . would be wrought of the elements of our being: when other women named Happiness, she said Life; in division, Death (Diana, p. 409).

The experienced woman Diana forged in Europe after Warwick's suit is crucified and she must now find the courage to reconstruct her ego.

Our insights into the best and worst selves of Clara are necessarily more subtle than the incidents that reveal Diana's character. Diana's world is a wide scope that includes London, Europe, Copsley and the Crossways while Clara's is confined to the rolling hills of Patterne Hall. Neither Clara's best nor worst self is portrayed by gallant loyalty to sick friends or by climactic betrayals of political secrets. On the contrary, Meredith reveals her strengths and weaknesses through anxiety-ridden meditation and quiet but desperate conversations with Vernon and Laetitia.

However, Clara's worst quality--impetuousity--is not so different from Diana's and under emotional stress it is this flaw that leads to their near demises. Throughout The Egoist, we see various interpretations of Clara's impetuous nature. Mrs. Mountstuart senses it immediately and calls her a "rogue in porcelain" and in Vernon's love struck eyes it is an equally charming, if dangerous, French impatience. Clara, however, is much harder on herself and in the tempest of her midnight meditations it is graceless, reptilious inconstancy. As Clara makes first Vernon, then Laetitia and Mrs. Mountstuart her confidants, many critics see this as evidence of her brash indelicacy. At the close of her ordeal, even Clara laments the object Vernon loves "that has gone

clamouring about more immodestly than women will bear to hear of . . ." (Egoist, p. 412).

For Meredith, however, Vernon and Laetitia provide a function similar to that of Emma Dunstane for Diana. They are Clara's "Angels of the Lord" who can guide her towards "self-examination and patience" (Egoist, p. 168). Vernon struggles to remain an unbiased counsel and tells her, "Take the matter into the head: try the case there." Clara's quick nature struggles with such measured advice: "Are you not counselling me as if I were a woman of Intellect?" Vernon recognizes one of her best qualities that she has not yet developed: "You have intellect" (Egoist, p. 173).

Before Clara gains control of her impetuous nature, she makes one dramatic dash for freedom. Meredith does not excuse Clara's impulsiveness but he does attempt to explain it:

> . . . sometimes the tangle descends on us like a net of blight on a rose-bush. There is then an instant choice for us between courage to cut loose, and desperation if we do not. But not many men are trained to courage; young women are trained to cowardice. For them to front an evil with plain speech is to be guilty of effrontery and forfeit the waxen polish of purity, . . . They are trained to please man's taste, for which purpose they soon learn to live out of themselves, and look on themselves as he looks, almost as little disturbed as he by the undiscovered. Without courage, conscience is a sorry guest; and if all goes well with the pirate captain, conscience will be made to walk the plank for being of no service to either party (Egoist, p. 204).

Although Colonel De Craye actually escorts Clara back to Patterne Hall, it is Vernon's appeal to her best nature that gives her the courage to return. When Vernon finds her at the railway station, Clara feels as though she is "in a web and cannot do right whatever she does" (Egoist, p. 226). But she recognizes the egoism

of her impetuous dash--she who can do "anything for herself . . . and nothing to save a friend" (Egoist, p. 221). Vernon reiterates what Clara knew before her flight but chose to ignore. Leaving Patterne Hall is not only running from her problems but shaming her father, condemning Crossjay and distressing her friends. Clara has known from the beginning that she must be "brave enough to be dishonourable" but now she must be courageous enough to chose to sacrifice personal desire for the well-being of those who love her and the slim hope that she can escape Willoughby's claim some other way.

Throughout the novels Meredith sets up a dichotomy between the honour of women and the honour of men and in doing so tempts us to fit the scattered pieces of this important theme that reflects the tension between his heroines' rebellious struggles and the mores of society. The honour of men as depicted in Warwick, Dacier, Willoughby and De Craye is a prideful honour that in great part depends upon the subjugation of women. Warwick's idea of honour entails wifely obedience that means imprisonment for Diana. Dacier's honour, "externally soft and polished" revels in Diana's worship so "long as favouring circumstances and seemings nurse the fair object of their courtship" (Diana, p. 426). Willoughby's idea of an honourable marriage means complete absorption for Clara; and for De Craye, though a sweeter, more generous Willoughby (Egoist, p. 170), honour is dependent upon his success as an "amorous hero" who glories in "pursuing, overtaking, and subduing" (Egoist, p. 180).

Even Vernon Whitford and Tom Redworth, though as open and as accepting mates as we could hope for our heroines, fall victims of a

stylized honour that betrays their true feelings. As Vernon leaves Clara at the railway station, he reflects on his behavior as a "man of honour" who took:

> no personal advantage of her situation; but to reflect on it recalled his astonishing dryness. The strict man of honour plays a part that he should not reflect on till about the fall of the curtain, otherwise he will be likely sometimes to feel the shiver of foolishness at his good conduct (Egoist, p. 227).

Through Diana's ordeal, Redworth chafes at his material sense of honour that prevented him from asking for Diana's hand before she married Warwick. He was hampered by an honour:

> that no man should ask a woman to be his wife unless he is well able to support her in the comforts, not to say luxuries, she is accustomed to (Diana, p. 61).

Meredith's idea of the honour of a woman is not so clearly defined but as Diana and Clara's senses of principle, responsiblity and courage fall bit by bit into place, our sense of a woman's honour takes shape. Its keystone is a never-static, evolving perception of their own integrity and an empathy with the probity of others. Gillian Beer's insights into Meredith's perception of personality provide a useful metaphor to understand this idea. Beer suggests that a comment of D.H. Lawrence's on the ego parallels Meredith's vision of personality:

> All thing flow and change, and even change is not absolute. The whole is a strange assembly of apparently incongruous parts, slipping past one another. . . . In all this change, I maintain a certain integrity. But woe betide me if I try to put my finger on it. If I say of myself, I am this, I am that! --then, if I stick to it, I turn myself into a stupid fixed thing like a lamp-post.[29]

Diana first pleads her "honour as a woman" when

---

[29]Beer, Masks, p. 166.

Dannisburgh's letters are to be exposed in court: "On my honour, as a woman, I feel for him most. The letters--I would bear any accusation rather than the exposure. Letters of an man of his age to a young woman he rates too highly" (Diana, p. 130)! But Meredith's heroine has moved beyond simply living for others. As Diana regains her strength after the betrayal, she decides to "show her face in public" not only for the sake of friends who have remained loyal but for herself:

> The debts we owe ourselves are the hardest to pay. That is the discovery of advancing age: and I used to imagine it was quite the other way. But they are the debts of honour, imperative. I shall go through it grandly, you will see. If I am stopped at my first recreancy and turned directly the contrary way, I think I have courage (Diana, p. 436).

Clara is desperate for her freedom after but a few days at Patterne Hall and though she has learned to loathe Willoughby, she has no desire to publicly degrade him. Like Diana, who is willing to suffer public embarrassment if only she could shield Dannisburgh, Clara is willing to protect Willoughby's honour in the hopes that he will respect hers:

> It is my wish--you must hear me, hear me out--my wish, my earnest wish, my burning prayer, my wish to make way for her. She appreciates you: I do not--to my shame, I do not. She worships you: I do not, I cannot (Egoist, p. 107).

Clara knows her petition is ignoble in the honour of society but she attempts to make Willoughby understand her sense of responsibility to her own honour: " . . . women have their honour to swear by equally with men:--girls have: they have to swear an oath at the altar" (Egoist, p. 108).

Even Mrs. Mountstuart, though sympathetic to the rogue in Clara, fully comprehends the idea of static honour that is expected

of her. She tests her resolve with chastisement: "The church-door is as binding as the altar to an honourable girl . . . . You are just as much bound to honour as if you had the ring on your finger" (Egoist, pp. 294-295, passim). Clara's sense of honour in marriage, however, is dependent upon love and respect and she responds to Mrs. Mountstuart's claim: "In honour! But I appeal to his, I am no wife for him" (Egoist, p. 295).

When Vernon appeals to Clara to return to Patterne Hall, his suggestions recall Diana's determination to appear in public and pay the debt of honour she owes herself. He reasons:

> You have a masculine good sense that tells you you won't be respected if you run . . . . Stay: there you can hold you own . . . . You have beauty and wit: public opinion will say, wildness: indifference to your reputation, will be charged on you, and your friends will have to admit it (Egoist, p. 225).

As Clara returns to Patterne Hall, she is not certain why she has chosen to retrace her steps: "She speculated on the circumstances enough to think herself incomprehensible, and there left it" (Egoist, p. 229). But we may surmise that she returns not only for the sake of others but also because she owes this to herself.

This paper leaves Diana and Clara with fully developed characters and senses of honour that gives them ballast to face society. Meredith's Heroines of Reality "knock at the doors of the mind, and . . . . Mind and heart must be wide open to excuse their sheer descent from the pure ideal of man" (Diana, p. 400). In their descent, their spirits have been purified and will be tempered by the fire of their re-entry into society. As Diana prepares to face society after she regains her strength, she tell Emma, "I feel my new self already, and can make the poor brute go through fire on

behalf of the old" (Diana, p. 427). Clara confides to Laetitia after Willoughby releases her:

> I should be glad to think I passed a time beneath the earth, and have risen again . . . . if I had been buried, I should not have stood up seeing myself more vilely stained, soiled, disfigured . . . . I need purification by fire (Egoist, pp. 409-412, passim).

Their characters have been recast by experience but Meredith will not allow them the isolation of their honour. Their marriage to "men who can be friends to women" is their re-entry into society.

With gentle prodding and moral support from their "Angels of the Lord," Diana and Clara have learned the meanings of principle, responsibility and courage. With these tools, they have faced difficult moral dilemmas and carved out a sense of honour for themselves. It is this sense of personal integrity that allows them self-worth though they have faced the most degrading and selfish aspects of their own characters. It is this kind of strength, intelligence and perception that Meredith believes women must gain if they are to become more than the "pretty idiot, the passive beauty, the adorable bundle of caprices."

Diana of the Crossways and The Egoist are Meredith's bildungsromane for women and as such Diana and Clara evolve from innocent, if vivacious, girls into women with a keen sense of their best selves as well as a painful awareness of their worst selves. (To love comedy, says the Comic Spirit, "You must know the real world, and know men and women well enough not to expect too much of them, though you may still hope for the good."[30])

---

[30]Meredith, "Idea," p. 1044.

Both Diana and Clara have courage enough to defy convention but Meredith will not allow their rebelliousness to decry all social institutions. He wishes them to be wise enough to pluck the flower even though they do not entangle themselves in the roots. They are women in Time and though they have refused to be the sticks and stones of a glorified past day, they have not rejected civilization but, on the contrary, have suffered to make it better.

Selected Bibliography

Adams, Robert M. "A Counter Kind of Book." In The Egoist. By George Meredith. pp. 551-560. Edited by Robert M. Adams. New York: Norton & Co., 1979.
A fun and perceptive article that gives The Egoist and George Meredith their due without taking them too seriously.

Adams, Robert M. Preface to The Egoist, by George Meredith. New York: Norton & Co., 1979.
A wonderful preface. "Civilization is unthinkable without its discontents."

Altick, Richard. Victorian People and Ideas. New York: Norton & Co., 1973.
Helpful and interesting guide to Victorian people and culture.

Beer, Gillian. Meredith: A Change of Masks. University of London: The Athlone Press, 1970.
A comprehensive study of Meredith's novels with particularly interesting ideas on the rather modern idea of flux and change in his work.

Butcher, Lady. Memories of George Meredith O.M. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919.
Quaint work by a woman who knew Meredith well.

Calder, Jenni. "The Insurrection of Women." In The Egoist. By George Meredith. pp. 472-480. Edited by Robert M. Adams. New York: Norton & Co., 1979.
Stresses Meredith's important theme of "mutual likeness" of men and women. Suggests The Egoist is a fiction about women making decision.

Chislett, William, Jr. George Meredith A Study and an Appraisal. New York: Haskell House, 1966.
By an avid Meredith fan, this book has brief chapters that survey Meredith's ideas on topics ranging from "the new women" to "the content of Meredith's poetry." Not very helpful.

bibliography, cont'd.

Cline, C.L., ed. The Letters of George Meredith, 3 vols. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970.

A marvelous, professional and infinitely helpful edition of Meredith's letters. One of the most interesting sources on Meredith.

Forman, Maurice Buxton, ed. George Meredith Some Early Appreciations. London: Chapman & Hall, Ltd., 1909.

Although this book is not as inclusive as William's Critical Heritage, it is interesting to note the choice of reviews by a Meredith contemporary.

Goode, John. "The Egoist: Anatomy or Striptease?" In Meredith Now Some Critical Essays, pp. 205-230. Edited by Ian Fletcher. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971.

Analyzes influence of Comte's positivism, difference between egoist and egotist, and the interaction of Clara, Laetitia and Vernon as right imagination, right temper, and right vision.

Henderson, Archibald. Interpreters of Life and the Modern Spirit. New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1910.

Meredith is one of four authors examined. Rather dated and general.

Hill, Charles J. "Theme and Image in The Egoist." In The Egoist. By George Meredith. pp. 518-523. Edited by Robert M. Adams. New York: Norton & Co., 1979.

Short but helpful and clear article which sorts out the images of aggression that create the tension between Clara and Willoughby.

Hudson, Richard B. "The Meaning of Egoism in George Meredith's The Egoist." In The Egoist. By George Meredith. pp. 460-471. Edited by Robert M. Adams. New York: Norton & Co., 1979.

Discusses Meredith's trinity of blood, brain, and spirit and egoism as the reversal of the evolutionary progress.

Johnson, Diana. The True History of the First Mrs. Meredith and Other Lesser Lives. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972.

An interpretive biography of Mary Ellen that does not draw her as the "black sheep" that some Meredithians would have us believe.

bibliography, cont'd.

Kelvin, Norman. A Troubled Eden. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1961.
Helpful work discussing Meredith's philosophy on nature as a force in human lives.

Lucas, John. "Meredith's Reputation." In Meredith Now Some Critical Essays, pp. 1-13. Edited by Ian Fletcher. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971.
Rather dry article on Meredith's reputation as a novelist and man of ideas.

Mayo, Richard D. "The Egoist and the Willow Pattern." In The Egoist. By George Meredith. pp. 453-459. Edited by Robert M. Adams. New York: Norton & Co., 1979.
Interesting analysis of the willow pattern story and its relationship to the plot.

Sassoon, Siegfried. Meredith. London: Constable, 1948.
Classic biography and interpretation of work.

Stevenson, Lionel. The Ordeal of George Meredith. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953.
Invaluable biography. Most important one on Meredith.

Sundell, Michael. "The functions of Flitch in The Egoist." In The Egoist. By George Meredith. pp. 524-530. Edited by Robert M. Adams. New York: Norton & Co., 1979.
Creative article on the functions of a minor character in advancing the plot and revealing the personalities of major characters.

Williams, David. George Meredith. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977.
Rather loose biography.

Williams, Ioan. Meredith The Critical Heritage. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971.
Very helpful compilation of contemporary reviews of Meredith's work.

Wilt, Judith. The Readable People of George Meredith. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1975.
Suggests Meredith's work must be addressed with "muscular readerhood." States Meredith's fictions are governed by three ideas he calls sentimentalism, egoism, and civilization.

bibliography, cont'd.

Woods, Alice. George Meredith as Champion of Women and of Progressive Education. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1937.
Attributes Meredith with great advances for women from the end of the nineteenth century through the beginning of the twentieth century. Discusses specific women in each short chapter.

Wright, Walter F. Art and Substance in George Meredith. University of Nebraska, 1953.
Discusses relationship between Meredith's art and ideas and puts particular emphasis on Meredith as an evolutionist. Helpful.

Young, G.M. Victorian England Portrait of an Age. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974.
Helps sort out political happenings as well as cultural events.