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THE DEVELOPMENT OF GEORGE MEREDITH'S
POETIC WORLD VIEW.

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The Development of George Meredith's Poetic World View

by

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Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis Director's signature:

[Signature]

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PREFACE

The main purpose of this dissertation is to examine the development of the world view expressed in the poetry of George Meredith. The concept of evil which is explicit and implicit in this world view will be used as something of a focal point in the examination because it—uniquely among philosophic components of a world view—provides an avenue of approach to both ethical and metaphysical ideas. In addition to describing the development of Meredith's poetic vision, I hope to indicate part of the relation of the naturalism of the mature poetry to the varieties of theism and humanism to which it offered itself as a viable alternative.

In this study the term evil refers in a broad sense to the destruction or degradation of value or of that which has the potential for creating or sustaining value. The term value functions in a similarly broad sense to refer to that thing, relationship, process, or activity worthy of human creation or sustenance. This is to use the term value in a way similar to that of T. H. Green's classic expression: "Our ultimate standard of worth is an ideal of personal worth. All values are relative to value for, of, or in a person." Although Green and Meredith were on opposite sides of the metaphysical fence, Meredith would probably have been able to accept such a definition, provided that it was understood that being a person in the fullest sense of the term demanded the right
kind of subordination of personality or self to the instruction of what he sometimes called "spirit" and sometimes called "Earth." The term moral evil, which is an ethical term referring to a misdirection of the will from a higher to a lower choice, is to be distinguished from natural or physical evil, the seeming gratuitous destruction of value or of value potential in which human will is not involved. The terms in which concepts of moral or physical evil are treated in a given world view are indicative of its most basic tenets. Any position--theistic, naturalistic, or whatever--which claims ontological status in the universe for a principle of beneficence, as Meredith's does, is going to have a problem with the concept of evil. Such positions usually encounter difficulty in maintaining the ontological primacy of a principle of good if they are able to give a significant and meaningful account of the tragic dimensions of human experience.

The argument of this dissertation is that the world view of Meredith's poetry developed in a way that revealed shifts in emphasis in philosophical orientation: it developed from a position similar to that of the later Wordsworth--one which gave emphasis to the affirmation of a teleological transcendent spiritual principle antecedent to and constitutive of all aspects of spiritual and physical reality, through a period of intellectual and emotional affinity to a kind of Arnoldian humanism which was metaphysically agnostic and ethically dualistic, to a final evolutionary
naturalism that largely translated the emphasis on ethical and metaphysical transcendence (which had been like that of the later Wordsworth and of the Christian theistic tradition) into naturalistic terms. In making this translation, Meredith's world view retained, by its affirmation of monism and ontological beneficence, essentially the same problems of theodicy (or in this case geodicy might be a better term) that theism has always had. Meredith's final world view attempts to account for value, evil, and ontological beneficence in naturalistic and immanent terms and to provide a late nineteenth century vision of life which could incorporate the basic spiritual concerns of his cultural heritage.
Chapter I

Introduction: A Developing Poetic World View

The break-up in the last half of the 18th century of the unified view of reality grounded in Christian Theism as it was inherited from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance—as described by Earl Wasserman, J. Hillis Miller, and others—resulted in the 19th century in a cultural-literary-philosophical climate of opinion in which it was impossible (in Wasserman's phrase) to summarize a single homogeneous world view which could be attributed to the Romantics or to the Victorians or to the Moderns. According to Miller, the one major theme of the literature of this period "is the sense of isolation, of alienation brought about by man's new situation."

One can agree with Wasserman and Miller about the multiplicity of world views arising in the 19th century and still distinguish three main types or classes into which this multiplicity can be analyzed. It is possible to see three main types of world views arising in the 19th century in something of consecutive order and to designate these types by the terms theism, humanism, and naturalism. Some discussion of these types is in order here because the development of the world view of George Meredith's poetry reflects a successive involvement in all three.

The theistic type of world view in the 19th century was not necessarily Christian in the way that that of the
18th century had been. Theism admits categories of reality to God, man, and nature; in the 19th century it was possible for the "God" of this triad to be some version of the God of Christianity, but it was also possible for this "God" to be conceived in more general terms as a transcendent spiritual reality which was antecedent to and constitutive of all phenomena—physical, spiritual, and moral—and which therefore manifested itself immanently in nature, but which did not have further basic resemblance to the Christian God. To call a poet a theist in this sense is simply to assert that he believes the universe to contain a principle of spirituality which is independent of man—a principle in which man may and does participate, but one which is prior to the human spirit metaphysically and which does not require man's participation in order to come into being. Such a principle of spirituality is suggested by Wordsworth's "infinitude of Book VI of The Prelude:

... whether we be young or old,
Our destiny, our being's heart and home,
Is with infinitude, and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be.
Under such banners militant, the soul
Seeks for no trophies, struggles for no spoils
That may attest her prowess, blest in thoughts
That are their own perfection and reward,
Strong in herself and in beatitude
That hides her, like the mighty flood of Nile
Poured from his fount of Abyssinian clounds
To fertilize the whole Egyptian plain.
The later world view of Wordsworth represents only one particular type of 19th century "theism." Into this general category also fall the world views of Tennyson, Browning, and Hopkins. Granting all the distinctiveness of their private symbol systems and methodologies, these poets can all be categorized this way because they all make a distinctively theistic affirmation: that reality has a spiritual ontological basis independent of man which is constitutive of value, human mind, and the world of nature.

The 19th century humanist alternative to the Christian theism of the 18th is a world view admitting categories of reality to man and to nature, but stressing the alienation of the two in terms of value. Matthew Arnold's admonition, "Live by thy light, and earth will live by hers!" glosses this. Humanism rules out transcendence and stresses the absolutely immanent ground of value, but this ground of value is not in nature but in the human spirit. The human spirit may have originated in nature because man evolved in nature, but humanism affirms it to have broken away from these origins to become capable of self-consciousness and self-direction. The very condition for the existence of value in the universe is the human spirit's awareness of itself as a pursuer and a sustainer of ends which can run counter to purely physical goals, as Arnold indicates in In Harmony with Nature:
Know, man hath all which Nature hath, but more,
And in that more lie all his hopes of good. (my italics)
Nature is cruel, man is sick of blood;
Nature is stubborn, man would fain adore;
Nature is fickle, man hath need of rest;
Nature forgives no debt, and fears no grave;
Man would be mild, and with safe conscience blest.

Man must begin, know this, where Nature ends;
Nature and man can never be fast friends.
Fool, if thou canst not pass her, rest her slave!

The humanist world view is generally dualistic in terms of value and ethics. Since no claim for nature as an ontological ground of value is made, there is no need to see nature as beneficent. Good and evil can occupy the same metaphysical status and nature (or earth) becomes solely an environment for physical and spiritual endeavor—an immanent "vale of soul-making."

The naturalist world view holds the only category of reality to be that of nature. Nature ("Earth" was Meredith's later term) is at once the ground and source of all reality, physical and spiritual. The principal theoretic distinction between the humanist and the naturalist is that the naturalist denies the qualitative distinction insisted on by the humanist between man and nature. For the naturalist, nature operates at the spiritual level through its creation, the human mind. Naturalism found various forms of poetic expression in the later 19th century in the work of Swinburne, Meredith, Hardy, Butler, Shaw, and Housman. The differences among just these
naturalists suggest the varieties of form and content that philosophical naturalism can assume. It can be pessimistic or optimistic, non-teleological or emphatic about purpose. It can encompass the negative metaphysical speculations of a Hardy; it can reflect the pessimistic agnosticism of a Housman; or it can express the social doctrines of a Shaw. This eclectic potential of naturalism is seen in the mature poetic vision of Meredith.

The naturalistic world view of Meredith's later poetry is not a simple one. The strength, the complexity, and the very inconsistencies of this poetic vision are largely attributable to the fact that Meredith, probably more than any other of the naturalistic poets of the later 19th century, tried to provide a comprehensive world view which could account for the broad range of values and interests held by his society. This is not to say that Meredith was a "public" poet in the way that Tennyson and Browning were. He had no specifically "public" message which contrasted with a "private" one. Meredith's poetry was for the most part directed at what he considered the intelligentsia. He faulted Tennyson because he thought the older poet was not what Meredith prided himself on being, a philosophical poet. 8 Meredith seems to have thought that his mature poetry was providing a poetic-philosophical framework for concepts and values for the comprehension of which theism and humanism had shown themselves to be inadequate.
Joseph Warren Beach, comparing Meredith to Swinburne, has written that Meredith is "more in line with the constructive line of Victorian thought." This is another way of saying that Meredith's poetic vision, attempted, for better or for worse, to account for many basic and divergent concepts and values that were a part of the poet's cultural heritage. Evolution, progress, teleology, value, spirit, ontological beneficence, natural law, and morals were among the many topics he attempted to correlate in his naturalistic poetic vision. Such a correlation was a complex matter and did not spring forth full-blown at any one point in the poet's career. It was essentially a matter of development, and its achievement in its fullest form came about in the last of three periods in which Meredith's poetic world view developed.

The idea that there are three periods in Meredith's poetic career is something of a departure from both older and more recent critical views. Lionel Stevenson in 1932 voiced what has become the dominant critical opinion on this by suggesting that there were simply two stages in the poet's development:

When he became acquainted with Darwinism, his philosophic system developed promptly and completely (my italics); so the stages of its growth cannot be chronicled.10

The idea here seems to be that Meredith did not have much of a philosophical position prior to his encounter with
Darwin's ideas and that after this encounter—say between 1859, the date of the publication of *The Origin of Species*, and 1862, the date of the publication of Meredith's *Modern Love, and Poems of the English Roadside, with Poems and Ballads*, the first of Meredith's volumes to give significant indication of evolutionary ideas—his poetic world view was "completely" developed into a homogeneous expression of one basic position.

Later major critics, while not necessarily agreeing fully with the implications of Stevenson's statement, have in the main followed his two-part division. In 1936 Joseph Warren Beach generally agreed with Stevenson, distinguishing between "early nature poetry" that was "thiny Wordsworthian" and the rest of Meredith's poems.¹¹ Earlier than either Stevenson or Beach, in 1906, Trevelyan had largely ignored the early poems in *The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith*.¹² More recently, Siegried Sassoon, Norman Kelvin, Graham Hough, and Phyllis Bartlett have generally accepted Stevenson's division and, while noting certain thematic and topical links between the earlier and the later poems, have tended to see the poems after 1862 as poetic expressions of one established position.¹³

The common two stage view of Meredith's poetry does not adequately account for the complex development that occurred in the course of the poetic career. A careful reading of the total body of the poetry, with close attention to later alterations of initial versions of poems,
will bear out the assertion that a development in three stages can be seen in Meredith's poetic world view. Meredith is rightly known in literary history as a naturalistic poet, and expressions of philosophical naturalism appear in some poems of the first two stages of development that are to be described in this study. But Meredith's final naturalistic world view did not appear suddenly in 1862. Poets are seldom strict and systematic philosophers, and it is doubtful that Meredith was one at any time in his life. The development of his poetic vision did not proceed through absolutely clearly marked stages of systematic theism, humanism, and naturalism. The world views in all three stages of the poetry— including the last—are best described in terms of primary emphasis or tendency. The poetry of the first period did reflect an important theistic bias; that of the second period was pessimistic and did portray a hostility, typical of humanism, between man and nature, while it, more than the poetry of any other period, abjured metaphysical concerns; and the mature version of Meredithian naturalism bears the marks of the earlier emphases.

The "two-stage" approach to Meredith's poetry envisions an unrealistically sudden shift in the world view of the poems— a shift from one which was (in Beach's phrase) "almost sheer Wordsworth" to one of evolutionary naturalism. Stages in the growth of this world view can be chronicled. It seems very unlikely that a poetic vision could
shift immediately from an emphasis on a transcendent spiritual principle at the ontological basis of all reality to an affirmation of the metaphysical immanence of the ground of spirit and value. It seems reasonable to expect that there would be some kind of transition period that would mediate between and link such divergent positions. The poems published between 1862 and 1881 do indicate such a transition period. Revisions and suppressions, during this nineteen year period, of earlier poems, as well as later revisions and suppressions of these middle poems themselves, mark this period as one of change; and they are indicative of the shifting philosophical orientation from theism through humanism to naturalism.

Meredith published his first volume of poetry, Poems by George Meredith, in 1851. His next volume of poems was Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside, with Poems and Ballads in 1862. This was followed in 1883 by what is probably his best volume of poems, Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of the Earth. Other volumes followed, as will be discussed later, but the last two mentioned will serve to mark the major divisions of Meredith's poetic career.

The poems published by Meredith up to 1861 reveal a definite bias toward or emphasis on theism, as it has been defined earlier. The concept of evil in this first period is rather ill defined and is not well integrated into or accounted for by the theistic emphasis found in these poems. Some of the poems of this period, however,
even some of the earliest ones (such as *Requiem*, London by Lamplight and *The Shipwreck of Idomeneus*, all in the 1851 volume), point forward in theme, symbol, and mood to the darker poems of the transition period. The humanistic bias appearing in the theme of the separation of values between man and nature shows up in certain poems late in this early period—poems like *Autumn Evensong* (1859) and *The Meeting* (1860) in which the contrast of natural and human values is dramatized in terms of an unresolved alienation between mankind and a hostile natural environment. Such poems seem clearly to anticipate the transition period of Meredith's developing world view.

The transition period is indicated by publication between 1862 and 1881. The breaks between the periods are less than precise, and some of the important poems of this period point backwards to the earlier emphasis on transcendence. Such a poem, for example, is *Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn*, from which, in editions published after the transition period, Meredith removed the lines most suggestive of theism. The revisions of this poem and others of this period will be discussed in detail in Chapters III and IV.

The poems of the transition period include Meredith's masterpiece, *Modern Love* (1862) and other poems which deal in some detail with the problems of moral and natural evil—poems such as the original version (which was never reprinted in Meredith's lifetime) of *In the Woods* (1870),
A Ballad of Past Meredian (1876), I Chafe at Darkness (1862), Mastaba Puzzle (1865), and The Orchard and the Heath (1868).

The transition period saw the composition of much of the poetry for which Meredith is read today. The complex psychological realism of Meredith's treatment of remembered pain and the existential quality of the poem's failure to resolve questions of guilt, innocence, and blame made Modern Love (1862) something of an anomaly in the Victorian age; and these same features partly account for the poem's appeal to the contemporary reader, who may respond more readily to a portrayal of isolation.

If Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn (1862) pointed backwards (in its original form) toward an emphasis on theism, other poems of the transition period, especially later ones such as The Lark Ascending (1881), pointed forward to Meredith's last period--1883 to 1909--in which his final affirmation of his creed of joyful naturalism was made in such basic poems as The Woods of Westermain (1883), Earth and Man (1883), The Thrush in February (1885), The Question Whither (1888), Hard Weather (1888), A Faith on Trial (1888), The Empty Purse (1892), The Sage Enamoured, and the Honest Lady (1892), and A Reading of Life (1901).

There were, to be sure, mutations in the course of the evolution of Meredith's world view, but there were few absolute breaks in the process. The treatment of evil in the three periods serves also to suggest the gradual deve-
lopment of the poetic vision, because in spite of what some critics have called Meredith's "boisterous Victorian optimism,"\textsuperscript{16} there can be seen in the poetry an ongoing and concurrent theme of intense involvement with and concern for the darker side of man's existential situation. This involvement and concern was more pronounced in the transition period and was more qualified and subdued by joyful acceptance of the beneficence of Earth in the last. Another element of continuity in the poetry is to be found in the fact that Meredith's encounter with "Earth" was always intense and vivid--so much so, in fact, that at all periods of his career one can find poems that almost match those dealing with occasions of intense, quasi-mystical experience of communion with Nature, such as that described in \textit{South-West Wind in the Woodland} (1851) of the first period. In fact, the last poem published during Meredith's lifetime, \textit{On Como} (1908), deals with a version of just such an experience.

This study undertakes a chronological examination of Meredith's poetry in order to describe the successive involvements of his world view in philosophic orientations that were first partly theistic and then mainly humanistic, prior to the appearance of his mature version of naturalism.
Notes to Chapter I


5. The Prelude, VI, 603-616.


8. In a letter to F. M. Maxse of December 27, 1869, Meredith wrote in part, "Tennyson has many spiritual indications, but no philosophy, and philosophy is the palace of thought." William Maxse Meredith, ed., Letters of George Meredith, I (New York, 1912), p. 198.


10. Lionel Stevenson, Darwin among the Poets (New York, 1963), p. 183. This study was originally published in 1932.


12. G. M. Trevelyan, The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith (London, 1913). This study was originally published in 1906.


15. Most of the poems in Hough's edition were first published in the transition period of 1862-1861.

Chapter II

The Early Poems: Publication through 1861

Meredith's 1862 volume, Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside with Poems and Ballads, marks the end of his first period of poetic activity. Most of the poems of this first period appeared in his first published volume, Poems by George Meredith in 1851, although a number of important early poems were published before and after the first volume in such periodicals as Household Words, Fraser's Magazine, and Once a Week.¹

Except for South-West Wind in the Woodland and perhaps the first version of Love in the Valley, these early poems have been by and large either critically by-passed or disparaged—reactions that are somewhat understandable. If a critic is concentrating his attention solely on Meredith's mature poetic vision, he justifiably by-passes most of the early poetry; if he is basically concerned with determining the relative merit of Meredith's poems, he certainly finds that there are fewer poetic successes here than in poems of later periods.²

The early poems are probably not as bad as many earlier and later critics have said, although Meredith himself recognized the limitations of what he later called his "boy's book" of 1851.³ Most often, critical complaints about the early poems have been based on the extent to which they are
rehearsals of themes, images, and symbols directly associated with earlier romanticism. Graham Hough, the editor of a recent edition of selected poems of Meredith, has called the early poetry "largely preparatory and derivative," and he has labeled most of the poems of the 1851 volume as "small scale romantic verse, with a strong bias towards natural description." The statement may be generally accurate, but the trouble with such comments is that they tend to obscure the fact that although an early body of poems may not contain many good ones, it may still reflect the first stages of a complex, developing world view and may be quite instructive to an understanding of the later work of the poet.

The purpose of this chapter is not, however, to analyze Meredith's mature poetic vision; neither is it to evaluate the early poems. The purpose is first, to show that the world view of the early poems is a changing and developing outlook containing a number of diverse elements, including even a tendency toward theism which appears with varying specificity in a number of poems before 1861; second, to show how Meredith's early theistic bias contained within it, especially in terms of the concept of evil, seeds of later modifications; and third, to show how certain of the later poems of the first period anticipate the development of a humanistic emphasis in the second period.

Aspects of the theistic world view of the early poetry are obviously derivative from certain types of 19th century
romanticism. This statement is worth noting, although the demonstration of it is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In the early poems Meredith uses the romantic term "Nature" to indicate the spiritual ground of all reality, which he most often presents as transcendent. In addition to taking his basic images and symbols from the natural landscape, Meredith makes free use in the early poetry of such romantic tags as aeolian harps, certain flowers, nightingales, and skylarks. Discussing the indebtedness of the early poems to romanticism provides one way of suggesting some parts of the theistic world view present in them, but because not all the romantics were philosophical theists, and for many of the same reasons that A. O. Lovejoy, Jacques Barzun, and others have cited in their objections to the use of "romanticism" as a generic critical term, the word is not a very useful one for the description of Meredith's first period of poetry: it tends to obscure the multiplicity of both theme and form in the poems of this period.

This multiplicity of what Seigfried Sassoon calls the "competent and promising juvenelia" is noted in his comment that "every kind of poem Meredith was afterwards to write is represented in the (1851) volume." Sassoon's statement is correct when extended to apply to the entire first period of Meredith's poetic activity. Almost every kind of poem for which the poet has been, justifiably or not, praised, blamed, or neglected appears in the early period. The range is great.
It includes poems like *The Olive Branch* (1851)\(^7\) in which science, peace, progress, mercantilism, and morals are called on to "Bless future fleets about to launch;/Make every freight a freight of love;/And every ship an olive branch"\(^6\)--poems that tend to justify partially the charge of "mere boisterous Victorian optimism" that has been leveled at Meredith's work as a whole. It includes poetry in an elegiac vein such as *Requiem* (1851) and *The Shipwreck of Idomeneus* (1851), as well as the worst kind of practiced sentimentalizing in pieces such as *The Two Blackbirds* (1850). It also contains works that anticipate *Modern Love*'s careful control of imagery and dramatic situation in relation to theme--poems such as the first version of *Love in the Valley* (1851), *Autumn Evensong* (1859), and *The Meeting* (1860). Lyric, narrative, humorous, and satiric pieces are present, as well as dramatic monologues. Poems of these various types vary in number and in quality; it is true, however, that the dominant characteristic of the poems of this early period is that the majority of them are nature poems of romantic derivation--poems of the sort that Joseph Warren Beach has somewhat pejoratively described as "rather vaguely and thinly Wordsworthian in thought."\(^9\) Another way of describing the basic orientation of these early poems is to say that certain elements of the "romanticism" in the intellectual and poetic climate of opinion by which they were nurtured and in which they appeared are strongly reflected in the theistic emphasis of these poems which
stresses both the transcendence and the beneficence of
the ontological ground of all reality.

Elements of Theism in the Early World View

A theistic world view was described in the first chap-
ter as one affirming a transcendent ground of all reality—
sometimes, but not always, called "God"—which is metaphys-
sically prior to and constitutive of man, nature, and all
dimensions of spirit and value found in them. Many of the
poems of the first period which reflect a philosophical
orientation at all suggest an intellectual and emotional
alignment with such a world view.

One of the clearest suggestions of this theistic orien-
tation in the early poems appears in South-West Wind in the
Woodland, first published in the 1851 volume. As the title
of the poem indicates, it is an early presentation of two
items of landscape that were to develop later into basic
components of Meredith's symbol system:

South-West Wind in the Woodland

The silence of preluded song—
Aeolian silence charms the woods;
Each tree a harp, whose Eolian strings
Are waiting for the master's touch
To sweep them into storms of joy,
Stands mute and whispers not; the birds
Brood dumb in their Eoreboding nests,
Save here and there a chirp or tweet,
That utters fear or anxious love
Or when the ouzel sends a swift
Half warble, shrinking back again
His golden bill, or when aloud
The storm-cock warns the dusking hills
And villages and valleys round:
For lo, beneath those ragged clouds
That skirt the opening west, a stream
Distemper light and windy flame
Spreads lengthening southward, and the sky
Begins to gloom, and o'er the ground
A moan of coming blasts creeps low (23)
And rustles in the crisping grass;
Till suddenly with mighty arms
Outspread, that reach the horizon round
The great South-West drives o'er the earth,
And loosens all his roaring robes
Behind him, over heath and moor.
He comes upon the neck of night
Like one that leaps a fiery steed
Whose keen black haunches quivering shine
With eagerness and haste, that needs
No spur to make the dark leagues fly!
Whose eyes are meteors of speed;
Whose mane is as a flashing foam;
Whose Hoofs are travelling thunder-shocks; --
He comes, and while his growing gusts,
Wild couriers of his reckless course,
Are whistling from the daggered gorse,
And hurrying over fern and broom,
Midway, far off, he feigns to halt
And gather in his streaming train.

Now, whirring like an eagle's wing
Preparing for a wide blue flight;
Now, flapping like a sail that tacks
And chides the wet bewildered mast;
Now, screaming like an anguish'd thing
Chased close by some down-breathing beak;
Now, wailing like a breaking heart,
That will not wholly break, but hopes
With hope that knows itself in vain;
Now, threatening like a storm-charged cloud;
Now, cooing like a woodland dove;
Now, up again in roar and wrath
High soaring and wide sweeping; now,
With sudden fury dashing down
Full-force on the awaiting woods.

Long waited there, for aspens frail
That tinkle with a silver bell
To warn the Zephyr of their love,
When danger is at hand, and wake (24)
The neighbouring boughs, surrendering all
Their prophet harmony of leaves,
Mad caught his earliest windward thought,
And told it trembling; naked birk
Down showering her dishevelled hair,
And like a beauty yielding up
Her fate to all the elements,
Had swayed in answer; hazels close,
Thick brambles and dark brushwood tufts,
And briared brakes that line the dells
With shaggy beetling brows, had sung
Shrill music, while the tattered flaws
Tore over them, and now the whole
Tumultuous concords, seized at once
With savage inspiration,—pine,
And larch, and beech, and fir, and thorn,
And ash, and oak, and oakling, rave
And shriek, and shout, and whirl, and toss,
And stretch their arms, and split, and crack,
And bend their stems, and bow their heads,
And grind, and groan, and lion-like
Roar to the echo-peopled hills
And ravenous wilds, and crake-like cry
With harsh delight, and cave-like call
With hollow mouth, and harp-like thrill
With mighty melodies, sublime,
From clumps of column'd pines that wave
A lofty anthem to the sky,
Fit music for a prophet's soul—
And like an ocean gathering power,
And murmuring deep, while down below
Reigns calm profound;—not trembling now
The aspens, but like freshening waves
That fall upon a shingly beach;—
And round the oak a solemn roll
Of organ harmony ascends,
And in the upper foliage sounds
A symphony of distant seas.

The voice of nature is abroad
This night; she fills the air with balm;(25)
Her mystery is o'er the land;
And who that hears her now and yields
His being to her yearning tones,
And seats his soul upon her wings,
And broadens o'er the wind-swept world
With her, will gather in the flight
More knowledge of her secret, more
Delight in her beneficence,
Than hours of musing, or the lore
That lives with men could ever give!
Nor will it pass away when morn
Shall look upon the lulling leaves,
And woodland sunshine, Eden-sweet,
Dreams o'er the paths of peaceful shade;—
For every elemental power
Is kindred to our hearts, and once
Acknowledged, wedded, once embraced,
Once taken to the unfettered sense,
Once claspt into the naked life,
The union is eternal.(26)

The symbolic function of the southwest wind and the
woods is immediately indicated in the two-part structure
of the poem. In the first part—the first three stanzas—the
woods and the southwest wind are described from the
beginning to the height of the storm. The imagistic move-
ment of the first section of the poem is from silence through
discordance to harmony. The basic image of the first section
is that of harmony being created in and by a musical instru-
ment (the woods) under the "master's touch"(23). In the
second part of the structure—the last stanza—the speaker
(in Arnold's phrase) "finds a thought"\textsuperscript{10} in the sights and
sounds of this natural landscape. In this thought the basic
image of the first section is repeated at a symbolic level,
as the "voice of nature"(25) creates "knowledge" and "de-
light"(26)—the equivalent of the first section's "harmony"—
for and in the man who acknowledges his dependence on nature
by yielding "his being to her yearning tones" and seating
"his soul upon her wings"(26). Structurally, the poem is
reminiscent of Shelley's \textit{Ode to the West Wind}, but Meredith's
use of four-beat, unrimed, run-on lines seems more appro-
priate to the rapid movement of the storm than Shelley's
rimed pentameters.
As the movement of the poem proceeds from discord to harmony, the woods are not seen in this poem specifically as a symbol for the world as an area of endeavor as they are later in such poems as The Woods of Westermain (1883). Here they represent passive, inert possibility which awaits the inspiration and motivation of the southwest wind which in the harmonious union of wind and woods—this union is something that the woods gains, something which it did not have before—a positive union constituted and initiated by the wind. The passivity of the woods and their subordinate position to the wind is presented in the opening lines of the poem. The trees are silently waiting for a master whose touch will have a beneficent effect: "To sweep them into storms of joy" (23). It is important for an understanding of the theistic orientation of this poem, as it appears in symbolic parallels between the first and the second sections, to note that that which takes the active role in the production of the harmony, the wind, is clearly shown in the opening lines to be qualitatively different from and not on the same level as that in which the harmony is produced—the woods. The relationship is that of the master musician and his instrument in the production of harmony, and this image serves to unify the first section of the poem as it appears at the beginning (23) and at the end of the section.

The approach of the southwest wind upon this woodland silence is presented in images mainly of violence and uneven
activity and force:

Now, threatening like a storm-charged cloud;
Now, cooing like a woodland dove;
Now, up again in roar and wrath
High soaring and wide sweeping; now,
Full-force on the awaiting woods. (24)

As the storm approaches its highest pitch, the disturbance of the woods is presented in visual images of response to violent sexual approach—images that prepare the way for a positive climax to a violent beginning:

... naked birk
Down showering her dishevelled hair,
And like a beauty yielding up
Her fact to all the elements,
Had swayed in answer. (25)


The "delight," although harsh, with which the woods cry out anticipates the somewhat unexpected quality of the climax of the storm (as well as the "delight" available, under the right conditions, to man in the second section of the poem). The storm reaches a climax not of discord, but of harmony. The storm began with the trees like silent harps; at the climax the trees are shown to

... harp-like thrill
With mighty melodies, sublime
From clumps of column'd pines that wave
A lofty anthem to the sky. (25)
The first section of the poem ends with the storm at its greatest intensity: an intensity described in terms of "harmony" and "symphony:"

... round the oak a solemn roll
    Of organ harmony ascends,
    And in the upper foliage sounds
    A symphony of distant seas. (25)

Throughout the first section of the poem, the woods have been the passive recipient of the force of the wind which was constitutive of the music, the harmony, and the symphony that was available to them. In terms of the basic symbol operative in the first section of the poem—that of a musical instrument being played by a "master," the wind was a force external and symbolically transcendent to the woods which joins with the woods and in constitutive of the value—the harmony and the symphony—in which they participated.\(^{11}\)

Meredith's use of the aeolian harp image in this poem is evidence both of his links to the earlier romantic tradition and his departures from it. In *South-West Wind in the Woodland* Meredith speaks of music and harmony in terms of song, organ, and symphony as well as of harps, but to the considerable extent that he is comparing the woods to an aeolian harp, he is making a somewhat different use of the image than did some of the romantics. For Coleridge, for example, in *The Eolian Harp*, the harmony is *in* the harp, and it becomes active and apparent as a result of the
interaction of the harp and the wind, and the wind is not basically different (qualitatively or metaphysically) from the harp. The music of the harp for Coleridge was symbolic of

... the one life within us and abroad
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul.\(^{12}\)

Later in the poem Coleridge spells out in detail the implications in terms of pantheism and immanence of his aeolian harp image:

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze;
At once the soul of each and God of all?\(^{13}\)

In Coleridge's poem there is only one kind of life, and this life is in man "and abroad"—there is no transcendent constitutive principle. This one life is "at once" the "soul" of every aspect of animated nature and the "God of all."

Meredith's was not this kind of harp in *South-West Wind in the Woddland*: parallel patterns of symbol and image in the two sections of the poem prevent a reading stressing such immanence as appeared in Coleridge's poem. In Meredith's poem, the relation of the "voice of nature" to man parallels the musical instrument image showing the relation of the wind to the woods (master musician to instrument). The symbolic referents of the wind and the
woods are made apparent (some critics might say too apparent) in the second section of the poem:

The voice of nature is abroad
This night; she fills the air with balm;
Her mystery is o'er the land;
And who that hears her now and yields
His being to her yearning tones,
And seats his soul upon her wings,
And broadens o'er the wind-swept world
With her, will gather in the flight
More knowledge of her secret, more
Delight in her beneficence,
Than hours of musing, or the lore
That lives with men could ever give! (26)

The "voice of nature" of this second section is analogous to the wind of the first; he who would "yield his being to her yearning tones" (achieving a symblic harmony with them) is analogous to the woods of the first section. The voice of nature is pictured as a mysterious (26), pervasive (25), powerful (26), beneficent (26) ground of the full life of value realization, of the "knowledge" and "delight" (26) available to man on the condition that he acknowledge (seat "his soul upon her wings") a source external to him and not in his power as a ground of value. Man is essentially the passive participant in and recipient of value constituted by this external source.

The transcendence of both the wind and the voice of nature is stressed in South-West Wind in the Woodland, but this is not to say that the relation of this transcendence to immanence (or more accurately, the way this transcendence manifests itself immanently) is not presented. If one were
to read the last section of the poem in isolation from the first, there would be little reason for seeing the voice of nature as symbolic of a transcendent ground of spirit and value. Taken by itself, the last section could be seen as describing an immanent power functioning in this way—an immanent power similar to Coleridge’s "vast intellectual breeze." Taken alone, the last part of the last section of Meredith’s poem does seem to suggest such a view of the interdependence of man and the immanent ground of reality:

Nor will it (Knowledge and delight) pass away when morn
Shall look upon the lulling leaves,
And woodland sunshine, Eden-sweet,
Dreams o’er the paths of peaceful shade;—
For every elemental power
Is kindred to our hearts, and once
Acknowledged, wedded, once embraced,
Once taken to the unfettered sense,
Once claspt into the naked life,
The union is eternal. (26)

Part of the tendency to read these lines as an expression of immanence is bound up with the problem that most theistic orientations have in portraying the relation of the transcendent ground of value to man and nature. Transcendence makes itself active in history, according to theism, by operating in a more or less orderly fashion through the world of nature and the human spirit, while these still retain their autonomy as distinct from, and yet related to, transcendence. Something of this idea is meant by saying that transcendence manifests itself immanently in nature.
When this immanent manifestation is described, as it is in the last section of the poem, it is subject to misinterpretation unless its transcendent source, which was previously presented, is kept in mind.

The last section of the poem is about the net effect of man's yielding his being to the yearning tones of the voice of nature. Man gains something he did not have before once he realizes and acknowledges his relation to this ontological ground of being. Once it is "acknowledged," "wedded," "embraced," and "taken to the unfettered sense" that our hearts are "kindred" to "every elemental power"(26), then something positive is gained forever. But what makes it probable that this "ontological ground of being" which establishes the kinship between man and elemental powers is transcendent and not immanent in South-West Wind in the Woodland? Transcendence is probable because nowhere in the poem is it suggested that man, although "kindred" to the elemental powers and in a relationship of dependence to the voice of nature, is metaphysically the same as these two. Nowhere in the poem is there the suggestion that there is, in Coleridge's wording, "one life within (man) and abroad." In fact, man's difference from the voice of nature is stressed (26) and only his kinship to, not his identity with, nature is presented in the last section. The wind, the woods, the voice of nature, and man are never dramatized in the poem as different manifestations of one pantheistic reality. The wind and the voice of nature have
many more attributes of transcendence than of immanence. They are mysterious and beneficient; they are external to, prior to, and infinitely more powerful than the woods or man. The symbol system operating in the two part structure of South-West Wind in the Woodland presents two analogous affirmations of the basic elements of the theistic world view.¹⁴

It is important to stress here that this argument is for the theistic emphasis of the early poems. The argument of this chapter should not be construed as disputing Joseph Warren Beach's often quoted passage in The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century English Poetry which speaks out against the interpretation of Meredith's poems in theistic terms;

As to nature's possessing a "spiritual element," I think it misleading to say that Meredith made any such assertion except in the sense that man's mind, which is itself a part of nature, develops in the direction of spirituality.¹⁵

Beach's statement does reflect a definite theme of the nature Meredith and is an established interpretation (although it is disputed in other criticism--see Chapter V) of part of the world view of the late poetry. Beach is here talking about only the later poems: he supports his argument by reference only to Meredith's Later poems—all published after 1883.¹⁶ Specifically, Beach is objecting in this comment to Lionel Stevenson's assertion in Darwin among the Poets that Meredith's later poems did concern themselves with such a "spiritual element" in nature.¹⁷ Professor
Stevenson seems to be correct in suggesting that the naturalism of the last period was not as systematic as Beach and others have said, but this is a discussion for a later chapter. The point to be made here is that the early poems did place emphasis on a "spiritual element" that was not the same as man or nature, although kindred to them.

In addition to South-West Wind in the Woodland, a number of other poems of the 1851 volume suggest the early theoretic bias. These include two rather bad love poems, Angelic Love and Twilight Music, a number of lyrics simply called Pastorals, and the important "mountain" poem of the first volume, Swathed Round in Mist.

In Angelic Love the speaker compares the feeling of his beloved for him to an abstract personification of love in general that is described as both "angelic" and "heroic."

This is followed by a Keatsian description of his own "heart" receiving the ministrations of this elevated love:

**Angelic Love**

Angelic love that stoops with heavenly lips
To meet its earthly mate;
Heroic love that to its sphere's eclipse
Can dare to join its fate
With one beloved devoted human heart,
And share with it the passion and the smart,
The undying bliss
Of its most fleeting kiss;
The fading grace
Of its most sweet embrace:--
Angelic love, heroic Love!
Whose birth can only be above,
Whose wandering must be on earth,
Whose haven where it first had birth!
Love that can part with all but its own worth.  
And joy in every sacrifice  
That beautifies its Paradise!  
And gently, like a golden-fruitied vine,  
With earnest tenderness itself consign,  
And creeping up deliriously entwine  
Its dear delicious arms  
Round the beloved being!  
With fair unfolded charms,  
All-trusting, and all-seeing,—  
Grape-laden with full bunches of young wine!  
While to the panting heart's dry yearning mouth  
Buds the rich dewy mouth—  
Tenderly uplifted,  
Like two rose-leaves drifted  
Down in a long warm sigh of the sweet South!  
Such love, such love is thine,  
Such heart is mine,  
O thou of mortal visions most divine! (17)

Angelic Love represents Meredith at his worst in the 1851 volume. The poem creates an unhappy union of two central features of the early poetry: a philosophic bias towards a theistic vision of reality and a derivative Keatsian sensuousness seemingly indulged in for its own sake. Lionel Stevenson points out that contemporary criticism condemned the sensuousness of the early volume more because of its supposed immorality than for its derivative Keatsian quality. The primary fault of Angelic Love is an unresolved conflict between theme and tone. Meredith unsuccessfully seeks the best of two worlds: he wants a theme dealing with the positive effect of a perpetually pure, self-sacrificial ideal love which is defined by its own value ("can part with all but its own worth") on a very mortal lover; but he wants to present this theme in terms of a sensuous imagery which he simply does not significantly or generically relate
to the ideal love as he envisions it. There is nothing in the initial presentation of the ideal angelic-heroic love which can account for or justify its entwining its "grape-laden" Self "deliriously" with its "beloved being."

Evaluation, however, of such poems is not the central concern here. A bad poem can still be important if it reflects a stage of development of a poet's world view, and analysis of the categories of reality dramatized in such a poem can be instructive, since such categories indicate something about the terms in which the world view of the first period understood reality. Angelic Love is a weak poem, but it does reflect the theistic bias of Meredith's early poetic vision. The "love" of the "mortal vision most divine"--the speaker's lover--is described in terms suggestive of transcendence: it is "angelic" and "heavenly," as opposed to the "earthly quality of its object. Its worth is part of its condition of being: it is not dependent on an external source of value--it is "love that can part with all but its own worth." The poem is quite explicit about the qualities of transcendence attributed to the origin, career, and destiny of this angelic, heroic love

Whose birth can only be above, 
Whose wandering must be on earth, 
Whose haven where it first had birth! 
Love that can part with all but its own worth, 
And joy in every sacrifice 
That beautifies its Paradise! (17)

There does exist the possibility that this attributing of "qualities of transcendence" to the angelic, heroic love
may be a purely honorific gesture. Certainly this possibility tempers a critical understanding of the "theistic" emphases of the poem. The rhetoric of the poem, however, seems explicit enough in its use of theistic categories to justify the critical idea that these categories may be indicating at least one aspect of a poetic world view. The wandering on earth of that "Whose birth can only be above" might be a utilization, however, inappropriate in this context, of the theistic concept of the transcendent source of reality manifesting itself immanently in nature. The birth "above" of this "angelic love" is reminiscent of that of the soul in the fifth stanza of Wordsworth's Immortality Ode:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The soul that rises with us, our life’s star
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home.

The "angelic love" is also beneficent and constitutive of value in Angelic Love, as in its heroic dimension it joins its fate with the human or the earthly as far as its worth will allow; and its beneficence, although presented in the imagery as grape-flavored, is still a part of its relation to the earthly. Actually, it is testimony to the vigor of the theistic bias in the early world view that it could be operative at all in such a Keatsian context as that of Angelic Love.
Twilight Music repeats the theistic bias and the heavily sensuous (although this time, auditory) imagery of Angelic Love. In this poem the speaker is saying to his lover that her voice affects him like a kind of mystic experience of "twilight music:"

**Twilight Music**

Know you the low pervading breeze
That softly sings
In the trembling leaves of twilight trees,
As if the wind were dreaming on its wings?
And have you marked their still degrees
Of ebbing melody, like the strings
Of a silver harp swept by a spirit's hand
In some strange glimmering land,
'Mid gushing springs,
And glistenings
Of waters and of planets, wild and grand!
And have you marked in that still time
The chariots of those shining cars
Brighten upon the hushing dark,
And bent to hark
That Voice, amid the poplar and the lime,
Pause in the dilating lustre
Of the spherical cluster;
Pause but to renew its sweetness, deep
As dreams of heaven to souls that sleep!
And felt, despite earth's jarring wars,
When day is done
And dead the sun,
Still a voice divine can sing,
Still is there a sympathy can bring
A whisper from the stars!
Ah, with this sentience quickly will you know
How like a tree I tremble to the tones
Of your sweet voice!
How keenly I rejoice
When in me with sweet motions slow
The spiritual music ebbs and moans--
Lives in the lustre of those heavenly eyes,
Dies in the light of its own paradise,--
Dies, and relives eternal from its death,
Immortal melodies in each deep breath;
Sweeps thro' my being, bearing up to thee
Myself, the weight of its eternity;
Till, nerved to life from its ordeal fire,
It marries music with the human lyre,
Blending divine delight with loveliest desire.(17-18)

Once again there is a clash between a tone set by sensuous imagery and a theme dealing with spiritual rejuvenation. The lady's voice is compared to a kind of mystical music which has affinities with the transcendence of theism. The music is like that produced by a spirit inhabitant of "some strange glimmering land"--an area not common on this earth--"of waters and of planets wild and grand." The "Voice" producing this music is beneficent as it suggests--or "brings"--a kind of positive unity between man and nature--a unity like that "kindred" relationship achieved between man and the "elemental powers" in South-West Wind in the Woodland. The voice leads man to feel that

... despite earth's jarring wars,
When day is done
And dead the sun,
Still a voice divine can sing,
Still is there sympathy can bring
A whisper from the stars!(18)

The voice of the lady and its effect on the speaker are described in the second section in images similar to those used to present the mystic voice in the first: the lady's voice is "spiritual" music living in "heavenly" eyes, and it participates in immortality and eternity in Meredith's images; this is to say that it, too, has features suggestive of transcendence. In Twilight Music as
in *Angelic Love*, value is grounded in the activity of transcendence as it positively relates itself to the earthly. The poem is only a little, if any, more successful than *Angelic Love*, but it is another example of how Meredith's early poetry reflected an approach to experience and reality in theistic categories.

Some better poems of the 1851 volume which reveal aspects of the early worldview are among the seven descriptive lyrics simply entitled *Pastorals*. To some extent these poems are youthful exercised in dramatic situations, imagery, and themes that are obviously derivative from any number of romantic poets. Some of them—numbers I, IV, V, and VII—reflect a joyful sense of immediacy with the cycle of nature and do not necessarily indicate any particular world view. The others reflect more definitely certain relationships of god (transcendence), man, and nature.

Many of the philosophical nature poems of Meredith's first period portray man and nature as having an affinity—physical and spiritual—for one another because both are children of transcendence. This is part of why man can achieve a deeper understanding of the ultimate ontological ground of value through nature. *Pastoral II* is suggestive of this outlook on nature and value. The first three stanzas are sufficient to make the point; the italics are mine:
An upland slope which hides the sun
Ascending from his eastern deeps,
And now against the hues of dawn
One level line of tillage rears;
The furrowed brow of toil and time;
To many it is but a sweep of land!

To others 'tis an Autumn trust,
But unto me a Mystery;--
An influence strange and swift as dreams;
A whispering of old romance;
A temple naked to the clouds;
Or one of nature's bosoms fresh revealed,

Heaving with adoration! there
The work of husbandry is done,
And daily bread is daily earned;
Nor seems there ought to indicate
The springs which move in me such thoughts,
But from my soul a spirit calls them up. (48-49)

The theistic orientation of such a poem is suggested by
the three main components of the dramatic situation: the
speaker who is able to see a symbolic dimension in the
natural landscape, the natural landscape itself, and the
"spirit"--something external to them both--which is the
source of the speaker's vision. Theism is further suggested
by the fact that the value the speaker realized in nature
is made possible by a power external to him: there are
no "springs" in the speaker to cause or originate the
thoughts by which he is able to appreciate the "mystery"
of nature. The speaker's "soul" may contain "such thoughts"
in a dormant form, but the action of "a spirit" to call
them up from his soul is necessary for the speaker to
realize the value of his insight into nature--an insight
much deeper than that of those who see the upland slope
as merely "a sweep of land" or "an Autumn trust." The
"spirit" is active and beneficent; the passive "soul" is led into a relation with the mystery of nature not unlike the "kindred" one between the "elemental power(s)" and the human heart in South-West Wind in the Woodland (26). The three components of the dramatic situation of Pastoral II--nature, man, and spirit--do not prove the theistic orientation of the poem, but the parallelism of these components with the theistic categories of reality does provide another item of evidence in support of an argument for the theistic element forming an important part of Meredith's early poetic world view.

Such an argument must recognize, however, that theism certainly is not the only outlook reflected in the early poems. A poem like Pastoral III requires that one speak of the early poetry in terms of primary philosophic emphasis rather than those of strict system:

**Pastoral III**

Now standing on this hedgeside path,  
Up which the evening winds are blowing  
Wildly from the lingering lines  
Of sunset o'er the hills;  
Unaided by one motive thought,  
My spirit with a strange impulsion  
Rises, like a fledgling,  
Whose wings are not mature, but still  
Supported by its strong desire  
Beats up its native air and leaves  
The tender mother's nest.

Great music under heaven is made,  
And in the track of rushing darkness  
Comes the solemn shade of night,  
And broods above the earth.  
A thing of Nature am I now,
Abroad, without a sense or feeling
Born not of her bosom;
Content with all her truths and fates;
Ev'n as yon strip of grass that bows
Above the new-born violet bloom,
   And sings with wood and field. (50-51)

Pastoral III strongly anticipates a dominant element of
Meredith's later naturalism as the speaker stresses his
own immanence in nature: A thing of Nature am I now,/
Abroad, without a sense or feeling/Born not of her bo-
som"(50). This kind of absolute identity of man and
nature is alien to theism, which sees man and nature as
kindred because transcendence manifests itself immanently
in both of them, but in theism this kinship never equals
metaphysical identity. The image of the human spirit
rising "like a fledgling" from the nest of its mother--
Nature--which is the source and ground of whatever value
is available to it suggests a kind of immanent autonomy of
the human spirit--autonomy in the sense that it is de-
pendent on nothing (it is "unaided" by any external mo-
tivating "thought") dramatized as outside of or beyond the
natural order, such as the "spirit" of Pastoral II, for its
origin.

Such an emphasis on strict immanence is not, however,
typical of many of the early poems, or even of most of the
Pastorals. Pastoral VI returns to a poetic ordering of
reality according to theistic categories:

Pastoral VI

How barren would this valley be,
Without the golden orb that gazes
On it, broadening to hues
Of rose, and spreading wings of amber;
Blessing it before it falls asleep.

How barren would this valley be,
Without the human lives now beating
In it, or the throbbing hearts
Far distant, who their flower of childhood
Cherish here, and water it with tears!

How barren should I be, were I
Without above that loving splendour,
Shedding light and warmth! without
Some kindred natures of my kind
To joy in me, or yearn towards me now! (52)

The basic image of the poem involves the comparison of
the speaker to a valley. As the valley would be "barren"
without the sustaining influence of the sun and without
the influence of man—of "the human lives now beating/
In it," so the speaker or man would be "barren" without the
sustaining influence of what is a vaguely realized symbolic
analogue in the last stanza for the sun in the first, "that
loving splendour" above "shedding light and warmth." Man
and nature of the theistic triad of reality are present in
the poem in the speaker and in the valley and sun. The
question to be answered is whether a beneficent transcen-
dent ground of spirit and value is present in the poem. It
almost has to be, unless "that loving splendour, / Shedding
light and warmth" from above is taken strictly at the
literal level as meaning "sun." Such a reading weakens
and oversimplifies the poem by making it state a theme to
the effect that "the valley is barren without the sun
and people, and I, the speaker, am barren without the
sun and people." That the poem does convey such an exact correspondence between man and valley seems quite unlikely, since it makes little sense to speak literally of man's barrenness in the absence of the sun as if that barrenness were the same as a valley's. One is forced to a symbolic reading of "barren" in the last stanza, and this reading demands a symbolic dimension for the "loving splendour." In this symbolic dimension the "loving splendour" would have to refer to some source or ground of value having a relation to the human spirit analogous to that of the sun to the valley, i.e.: above it, beyond it, sustaining it, and creating value in it. A certain lack of coherence among these symbolic components of Pastoral VI indicates that the poem is not a complete success. The "loving splendour" symbol itself is too vague and is not generically related to the speaker as was the sun to the valley; furthermore, there is something wrong with the image in stanza two of the "human lives" as the heart of the valley: the absence of these metaphoric hearts would result in death, not barrenness. Regardless of the poetic success of Pastoral VI, however, it seems clear that whatever the "loving splendour" might be, it is different from man and nature; it is above man and is a source of value for him; and if this is the case, then it can be argued that this poem, like Pastoral II, reflects and is suggestive of a theistic ordering of reality in terms of God (transcendence), man, and nature.
It was noted earlier that in *South-West Wind in the Woodland* Meredith introduced two symbols which were to receive much more extensive use and greater development in the later poems—the wind and the woods. The same is true of the mountain, as it appears in *Swathed Round in Mist* in the 1851 volume and in later poems. In the later poems the mountain becomes a place of spiritual rejuvenation. Not a place of permanent abode except for sage-like characters who would stand the rarified, frigid atmosphere, the mountain becomes associated later with the attainment of deeper human insight into the nature of things. As places of insight and sources of inspiration, Meredith's later mountains stand out clearly, and one always knows where he stands in relation to them. The earlier mountain is a bit more obscure, but the peak in *Swathed Round in Mist* is the important mountain poem of the 1851 volume:

*Swathed Round in Mist*

Swathed round in mist and crown'd with cloud,  
O Mountain! hid from peak to base—  
Caught up into the heavens and clasped  
In white ethereal arms that make  
Thy mystery of size sublime!  
What eye or thought can measure now  
Thy grand dilating loftiness!  
What giant crest dispute with thee  
Supremacy of air and sky!  
What fabled height with thee compare!  
Not those vine-terraced hills that seethe  
The lava in their fiery cusps;  
Nor that high-climbing robe of snow,  
Whose summits touch the morning star,  
And breathe the thinnest air of life;  
Nor crocus-couching Ida, warm
With Juno's latest nuptial lure;
Nor Tenedos whose dreamy eye
Still looks upon beleaguered Troy;
Nor yet Olympus crown'd with gods
Can boast a majesty like thine,
O Mountain! hid from peak to base
And image of the awful power
With which the secret of all things,
That stoops from heaven to garment earth,
Can speak to any human soul,
When once the earthly limits lose
Their pointed heights and sharpened lines,
And measureless immensity
Is palpable to sense and sight. (60)

This mountain is somewhat different from Meredith's later ones; as was the wind in South-West Wind in the Woodland, this early mountain is a symbol of transcendence. The immensity of the peak is taken on faith. Because of its "mystery of size sublime," no actual "giant crest" can dispute its "supremacy of air and sky," and no "fabled height" can compare with it. Not even mountains "whose summits touch the morning star,/And breathe the thinnest air of life" are able to "boast a majesty" like that of the mysterious mountain. Its majesty clearly transcends this earth and this life. The mountain is a symbol, as Meredith says in the conclusion of the poem, of the ontological base of all spiritual and physical reality. Rarely in the early poems is the theistic orientation of Meredith's early world view made so explicit as in Swathed Round in Mist. There is, in the terms of Meredith's imagery, a "secret of all things" which has an "awful power" by which it can "stoop" to be constitutive of physical reality ("to garment earth") and spiritual reality (to "speak to any
human soul"). The conditions under which this constitutive activity can be comprehended sound like some kind of mystical experience: "earthly limits" must be overcome, and "measureless immensity"—a term for transcendent infinitude—must somehow become "palpable to sense and sight." The symbolic treatment of the mountain shows a tendency in Meredith's early poems to—in a phrase Mary Shelley used to describe a poetic technique of her husband's—"idealize the real." The mountain of Swathed Round in Mist comes close to being a symbolic version of Shelley's "power" in Mont Blanc:

Power dwells apart in its tranquility,  
Remote, serene, and inaccessible:  
And this, the naked countenance of earth,  
On which I gaze, even these primeval mountains  
Teach the adverting mind.

Meredith's idea that the mountain is an "image of the awful power/With which the secret of all things/That stoops from heaven to garment earth/Can speak to any human soul" recalls the lesson that the "primeval mountains" teach and compares to Shelley's final apostrophe to Mont Blanc:

The secret strength of things  
Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome  
Of heaven is as a law, inhabits thee!

As in other of the early poems, there are technical difficulties in Swathed Round in Mist. Again, these are not the primary concern here, although it is obvious that Mere-
dith's basic symbol is strained. It is difficult to use a massive immobile object--invisible or not--as an image for infinitely active agency or power. The mountain continues to be one of the most important items--along with the wind, the woods, and the ocean--in Meredith's symbolic use of landscape. It appears significantly in important poems of all periods, and is, in fact, basic to the last poem Meredith published in his lifetime, On Como (1908). Poems making considerable use of the mountain symbol are often important ones for the description of changes in Meredith's poetic world view and stages in its development. By the Rosanna is one such poem to be discussed in this chapter. For these reasons, and also because it gives rather explicit expression to a basic theme recurring in other early poems, Swathed Round in Mist can be considered an important indication of the theistic bias of Meredith's early period.

The Concept of Evil in the Early Poems

The poetry published through 1861 represents only the first stage of a developing world view, and it is to be expected that such a body of poems would reflect tendencies of thought which, if not running directly counter to the dominant philosophic bias, do not directly relate to it. Several types of poems illustrate this point. Some of the early poems simply do not have very much to do with any philosophic orientation. A Halloween piece such as
Will O' the Wisps (1851), songs such as Two Wedded Lovers, Watched the Rising Moon (1851) and Thou to Me Art Such a Spring (1851), and the early elegiac commemoration of one of the engagements of the Sikh Wars of 1849—Ghulam-Allah (1849)—are examples. Certain nature poems of this period have as their major theme the joyful reaction to and acceptance of the principle of recurrence of value in the cycle of nature, a theme which receives considerable emphasis in Meredith's last period. Three poems of this sort in the early period are The Wild Rose and the Snowdrop, The Flower of the Ruins, and The Death of Winter—all of the 1851 volume. The joyful acceptance of the cycle of nature basic to these poems would be suggestive of a theistic or of a naturalistic world view, but the theme does not necessarily suggest either. The metaphysical implications of such poems are by and large indeterminate. Like the later poems, these stress the importance of numbers over that of individuals. Unlike the later poems, they stress the importance of the future over that of the present. Either stress is equally amenable to both philosophical theism and naturalism, and this is probably the reason that poems on these themes appear in both early and late periods of Meredith's poetic development. The topic which most effectively reflects the shifting and developing quality of the world view of the early poems is the treatment of the concept of evil. A perfectly consistent philosophical theism affirming the beneficence of the ground of all reality must
finally view both natural and moral evil as occasions for the possibility for an increment of value—as, ultimately, finite grounds for the greater realization and manifestation of ontological beneficence either in or out of time. But the poetry of Meredith’s early period does not often reflect such a view. Different poetic treatments of evil in this early period are suggestive of the incomplete quality of his early theistic poetic world view. Three such poems are London by Lamplight, The Shipwreck of Idomeneus, and Requiem—all of the 1851 volume.

London by Lamplight is Meredith’s most extensive treatment of the romantic cliché that the city corrupts and dissipates spiritual values which are more readily realized and sustained in a rural environment closer to nature (the theme also appears in poems published in periodicals in this period: Invitation to the Country in 1851 and Over the Hills in 1859).

In London by Lamplight, far from seeing evil as a ground for good in any meaningful sense, the speaker reacts to the moral evil associated with the city with an almost despairing resignation. In the dramatic situation of the poem the speaker observes a group of prostitutes under a streetlamp on a London night listening to the obscene ballads of a street singer. The speaker speculates about the contrast between their present lives and their supposed rural upbringing, about the cause of their downfall, and about the chances of redeeming both them and the urban conditions that led to their degradation.
The structure of the poem is organized around a series of contrasts between the present urban evil and the past rural purity—contrasts followed by speculations about the chances for correcting the undesirable situation. The rural-urban contrast between the virginal and the violated is quite explicit:

Those violated forms have been
The pride of many a flowering green;
And still the virgin bosom heaves
With daisy meads and dewy leaves.

But stygian darkness reigns within
The river of death from the fountains of sin;
And one prophetic water rolls
Its gal-lit surface for their souls. (43)

As sociological analysis the poem is no deeper than it is as social criticism. Man in his urban role as city creator and dweller is responsible:

Those stiffened limbs, that swollen face,—
Pollution's last and best embrace,
Will call, as such a picture can,
For retribution upon man. (44)

Redemption of the women might be possible if they could return to a rural environment:

I think that Nature would have power
To graft again her blighted flower
Upon the broken stem, renew
Some portion of its early hue. (45)

But the first step in the direction of any redemption depends on an honest and realistic appraisal of the extent of the problem. The speaker knows the evil is ever-present
and apparent when men will take the time to see it as he has on

This night! when from the paths of men
Grey error steams as from a fen;
As o'er this flaring City wreathes
The black cloud vapour that it breathes! (46)

Something about life in the city keeps men from taking effective "morning" steps to correct the evil that is apparent at night:

Morn! when the fate of all mankind
Hangs poised in doubt, and man is blind.
His duties of the day will seem
The fact of life, and mine the dream.

The speaker sees no hope for his dream ("Regeneration to the young,/Reverberation of the truth,/And virtuous culture unto youth!") because men in their blindness take their materialistic duties of the day to be the realities and relegate the affirmation and social sustenance of spiritual value to the status of dream. Whatever else London by Lamplight may be, it certainly is not "boisterous Victorian optimism." To the extent that the poem represents an encounter with moral evil that despairs of solution in a modern urban context, it is indicative of its place in the early stage of Meredith's developing poetic world view.24 His mature poetry goes further in an attempt to account for such evil in non-despairing terms.

Another early and tentative probe into the problem of evil is seen in The Shipwreck of Idomeneus. The poem is a dramatic presentation of human anguish attendant on
the seemingly blind destruction of value in a universe
supposed to be founded on beneficence. Trevelyman's note
to the poem explains the source:

When the Greeks sailed to their homes after the sack
of Troy, Poseidon, the sea-god, was wroth, and sent
a tempest to scatter them. Idomeneus of Crete vow-
ed to Poseidon to sacrifice whatever he should first
meet on his landing, if the god would grant him
safe return. The storm abated, but the person he
met on landing was his own son. He sacrificed him;
and the Cretans in anger drove Idomeneus into
exile. (590)

Within this framework Meredith has made a poetic presenta-
tion of all the elements necessary for the treatment of
the problem of natural evil—that is, of the existence of
the gratuitous destruction of value in a universe supposedly
grounded on and sustained by a transcendent principle of
beneficence. In Meredith's adaptation of the legend, Zeus
is the transcendent principle of beneficence—the "supreme
Deity" which alone can hear "the cry of agonized humanity"
(68). He represents "inviolate Authority"(70) in the uni-
verse, "instant grace," and "immortal mercy"(71). Idom-
eneus's chance encounter with his son at just the wrong
time is the occasion for the gratuitous sacrifice of value.
The history of theodicy contains various ways of dealing with
this kind of situation. Often some kind of affirmation is
made either that the situation is actually an occasion for
an increment of value in the universe which the finitude
of man's intellect prevents his understanding or that the
situation provides for the increase of man's spiritual or
moral stamina. The speaker in The Shipwreck of Idomeneus
concludes on the affirmation that such resolutions to the problem are beyond poetic comprehension or representation. The action of the poem ends just before Idomeneus reaches Crete, and the speaker (an omniscient narrator) concludes with apostrophes to Idomeneus and to his son which raise questions about the final meaning of their coming travails:

O Father! who art thou,
Thus doomed to lose the star of thy last days?
It may be the sole flower of thy life,
And that of all who now look up to thee!

And O thou Sacrifice, foredoomed by Zeus;
Even now the dark inexorable deed
Is dealing its relentless stroke, and vain
Are prayers, and tears, and struggles, and despair!
The mother's tears, the nation's stormful grief,
The people's indignation and revenge! (74)

Who are, what are these beings about to undergo destruction?
What do they represent and what is the meaning of this sacrifice of value?

Oh! whosoever ye are the Muse says not
And sees not, but the Gods look down on
both.(my italics). (74)

The gods are silent. The muse does not comprehend and therefore cannot say what the situation means; thus the poem cannot say, and it ends on a note of despair about the seeming vanity of human values. The final note is one of fatalistic resignation to a world in which the ontological status of evil and its relation to value are left in doubt. The Shipwreck of Idomeneus, like London by Lamplight, reflects an early negative inconclusiveness in the treatment
of the problem of evil.

The early poem that reflects the most despairing reaction to the loss of value—as this loss occurs in death—is the very un-Meredithian poem Requiem in the 1851 volume. The strong contrast of Requiem with the early poems which celebrate the joyous recognition of the recurrence of value in the cycle of nature (poems such as The Death of Winter) is suggestive of the tentative quality of the early view of evil. Requiem is a grim poem about the death of a young woman, and there is no joy in recurrence here:

The Summer that brightens, the Winter that whitens,
The world and its voices, the sea and the sky,
The bloom of creation, the tie of relation,
All—all is a blank to thine ear and thine eye.(19)

There is even present in the poem the suggestion that the universe was hostile to the positive qualities the woman had:

Thou cam' st to us sighing, and singing and dying,
How could it be otherwise, fair as thou wert?(19)

But the most un-Meredithian feature about the poem is its denial that there is some kind of significant relation between the woman and nature (Earth, he would say later), even in death:

The tree that is rootless must ever be fruitless;
And thou art alone in thy death and thy birth;
No last loving token of wedded love broken,
No sign of thy singleness, sweetness and worth;
Lost as the flower that is drowned in the shower,
Fall'n like a snowflake to melt in the earth.(19)
That the woman is rootless, fruitless, alone, and with no sweetness or worth reflects a sense of isolation from the natural order which is unusual in Meredith's first and quite alien to his last period of poetic activity. Meredith's later people do not die like snowflakes—they die more like trees: they leave seeds and are absorbed back into the natural order, and they do leave signs of their "singleness, sweetness and worth." Requiem provides a hint both of how far in 1851 Meredith's poetic vision had yet to develop and of one of the paths this development would follow. It is a path through a period in which his world view would be marked by a more pessimistic and humanistic orientation.

Toward the end of what I have called Meredith's first poetic period, several poems published in periodicals anticipate the movement toward the humanism of the second period. Three such poems are Autumn Evensong (1859), The Meeting (1860), and By the Réseau (1861).

**The Movement Toward Humanism**

The two basic tenets of philosophical theism that have been described are 1) that the ground of source of all physical and spiritual reality is metaphysically transcendent to and prior to man and nature, and 2) that this transcendent ground manifests itself immanently in man and nature because of its constitutive relation to them.

The humanist world view, on the other hand, is one of
strict immanence. It denies any transcendent constitutive ground of reality. For humanism, there is no spirit other than the human spirit, and there is no spirituality in nature except as it is provided by humanity. Nor does the humanist world view affirm a necessary or fundamentally ongoing unity between man and nature. Although man has valuable ties with nature, he has "passed" nature, in Arnold's phrase, spiritually; and nature has become an arena for the human creation and sustenance of spiritual value. This is the sort of orientation that developed in the poetic world view of Meredith's middle period, and evidences of a movement in this direction began to appear late in his first period. The effect of this evidence is somewhat cumulative. Some of the poems reflecting the transition cannot be said to be absolutely predicated on a particular world view, but the particular conformations of imagery and symbolism that appear in them are suggestive of the change.

Such a suggestive poem is the short descriptive piece published in *Once a Week* in December, 1859—*Autumn Evensong*. The poem is a description involving the recurrent Meredithian symbols, the southwest wind and the woods:

**Autumn Evensong**

The long cloud edged with streaming grey
Soars from the West;
The red leaf mounts with it away,
Showing the nest
A blot among the branches bare:
There is a cry of outcasts in the air.
Swift little breezes, darting chill,
Pant down the lake;
A crow flies from the yellow hill
And in its wake
A baffled line of laboring rooks:
Steel-surfaced to the light the river looks.

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

Pale the rain-rutted roadways shine
In the green light
Behind the cedar and the pine:
Come, thundering night!
Blacken broad earth with hoards of storm:
For me yon valley-cottage beckons warm. (92)

Contrasts between this storm and that of South-West Wind in the Woodland (1851) are immediately apparent. The earlier storm moved from silence through violent discord to harmony; its violence was productive of a "harsh delight" on the part of the woods and resulted in the woods thrilling "with mighty melodies sublime" and in "organ harmony"(25). In Autumn Evensong the sound of the woods in the storm is "a cry of outcasts," and the negative effects of the storm are stressed. There is almost no suggestion of any constructive effects of the wind on the woods. Negative connotations, suggestive of conflict, of elements of the diction are apparent. The nest is a "blot" in the bare branches; the line of rooks is "baffled;" the river is inhospitable "steel-surfaced;" the light "mournfully" glimmers into darkness; the clouds were "grey" and the breezes were "darting chill." In the earlier poem
the storm's production of harmony was analogous to the "voice of nature" that was abroad that night, filling the air with "balm," and suggesting the beneficence of trans-scendence operating through nature to man. In Autumn Evensong, instead of any hint of beneficence, there is only the contrast, emphasized in the last line, between the hostile environment of the world of nature in the wood-land storm and the humanly sustained and oriented values symbolized by the warmly beckoning valley cottage. The shift in the treatment of these basic symbols and images is suggestive of a world view drifting toward humanism, and this drift is more obvious in two still later poems of the first period. One of these repeats the theme of hostility between man and nature, and the other suggests the basic humanist tenet that the ground and source of value is in man and not in transcendence or in nature.

The Meeting was first published in Once a Week in September, 1860, and was reprinted in the Modern Love volume of 1862 and in the Edition Deluxe of 1896 (as was Autumn Evensong). The environment in which the encounter central to The Meeting occurs is similar to that of the encounter of Hardy's Neutral Tones:

The Meeting

The old coach-road through a common of furze,  
With knolls of pine, ran white;  
Berries of autumn, with thistles, and burrs,  
And spider-threads, droop'd in the light.
The light in a thin blue veil peered sick;
   The sheep grazed close and still;
The smoke of a farm by a yellow rick
   Curled lazily under a hill.

No fly shook the round of the silver net;
   No insect the swift bird chased;
Only two travellers moved and met
   Across that hazy waste.

One was a girl with a babe that thrave,
   Her ruin and her bliss;
One was a youth with a lawless love,
   Who clasped it the more for this.

The girl for her babe hummed prayerful speech;
   The youth for his love did pray;
Each cast a wistful look on each,
   And either went their way. (102-103)

The meeting of moral and social outcasts dramatized in
this poem takes place in one of the most hostile natural environments presented in Meredith's early poetry. The isolation central to *The Meeting* is not just that of man from nature as it was in *Autumn Evensong*; here the youth and the girl are cut off, not only from society and nature, but from each other as well. Meredith's poems often describe two kinds of autumns: one is the season of harvest, a time of storing seed and of joyful anticipation of the recurrence of value in the cycle of nature; the other is a negative autumn like that of *The Meeting*—a time of the loss of value gained in the spring and summer, a time of withering and dying. This latter autumn is most often the kind marked in the landscape by frost—such as that in this poem which made "the old coach road" run "white." Not only is the season harsh: vegetative nature is re-
presented in this poem by hostile plants like the spiny evergreen furze, and thistles and burrs are even more inhospitable bushes. Animal nature, represented by the spider, the sheep, the fly, the insect, and the bird, is essentially indifferent to the youth and the girl: the sheep were grazing "close" to one another and were "still," and there was a noticeable lack of other usual animal activity. The Housman-like use of the ballad stanza obscures some of the complexity of The Meeting. The excessive and annoying repetition of "s" and "z" sounds in the first three stanzas—in words like "furze," "gazed," "lazily," "hazy," "knolls," "burrs," "sick," "sheep," "still," "smoke," "shook," "silver," "insect," "chased," "travelers," "across," and "waste"—provide an auditory intensification of the hostile environment described. In this environment the very light of day "in a thin blue veil peered sick," and the youth and the girl meet in a "hazy waste"—an appropriate meeting-place for two who must have lost, if they ever had, the capacity to establish significant communion with another person. It cannot be determined from the context of the poem whether the girl with the illegitimate baby is the object of the youth's "lawless love." She probably was not, since there is no reason presented in the poem for why a youth, who "clasped" his lawless love all the more because it was lawless, would be praying for this love and at the next moment would walk away from its object without a word. But it really does not
matter. What is dramatized in their meeting is the isolated self-interest of each. The youth is concerned only with his "lawless love," and the girl is thinking only of her "babe," which was "her ruin and her bliss" and is an extension of herself to which her own self-interest would instinctively apply. The girl and the youth are shown as isolated from nature, from society, and from each other:

Each cast a wistful look on each
And either went their way. (103)

With the exception of Modern Love (and perhaps I Chafe at Darkness) in the middle period and Requiem in the first, this impressionistic rendition of the theme of unresolved isolation is almost unique in Meredith's poetry. The alienation of man and nature, which is basic to the poem, provides another indication of the movement toward a humanistic bias late in Meredith's first period.

The poem of the late first period which most clearly delineates this growing humanist emphasis is By the Rosanna. The publication history of this poem is interesting as evidence that Meredith's poetic world view was developing, around 1861, away from a theistic orientation toward an emphasis on humanism which was not compatible with his final naturalistic world view. By the Rosanna was published in Once a Week in October of 1861 and was reprinted in full in the Modern Love volume of 1862. A comment in a letter of March 24, 1862, regarding the preparation of the Modern
Love volume is suggestive of how the poet's outlook was moving away from the basic outlook of the 1851 volume and toward that reflected in By the Rosanna:

My book hangs a little. I am sick of the sight of it. A council of friends say that the Rosanna poem must be published, as embodying something of me! Of the old volume nothing will appear (my italics). 25

After the 1862 volume, however, By the Rosanna was never again reprinted in its entirety during the poet's lifetime. The first twenty lines only were reprinted in the Edition Deluxe of 1896; but after 1862, the whole poem was not reprinted until after Meredith's death. The suppression of this poem (and of several others to be discussed throughout this study) is indicative of some shifts in Meredith's world view. The humanist emphasis of most of this long poem was probably too strong to accord with the naturalistic bias of the final poetic vision.

By the Rosanna is addressed to Meredith's long-time friend, F. M. Maxse, who in the poem is humorously called the "Arcadian dreamer," an unrealistic romantic seeker of wisdom and truth. This is a fairly common character in the later poems; he is the learner who is enlightened by a sage-like character, which rôle the speaker assumes in this poem. The poem is a humorous monologue—a lecture to the "Arcadian dreamer," who has been trying with little success, to find in nature the ultimate ground of spirit and value. In a letter of November 13, 1861, shortly after its magazine
publication, Meredith wrote:

Apropos of the "Rosanna," it was written from the Tyrol to a friend, and was simply a piece of friendly play. Which should not have been published, you add? Perhaps not, but it pleased my friend, and the short passage of description was a literal transcript of the scene. Moreover, though the style is open to blame, there is an idea running through the verses, which, while I was rallying my friend, I conceived to have some point for a larger audience. 26

The "literal transcript of the scene" was the only part of the poem reprinted after 1862 in Meredith's lifetime.

The point "for the larger audience" was that the ontological ground of spirit and value is not available in nature alone, but has its source in humanity.

The setting in which the lecture takes place--by the Rosanna River in the Tyrolean Alps--is an appropriate one in Meredith's landscape for the attainment of insight into life. Insight and understanding often come about on mountains, and the river in this poem is very straightforwardly understood as symbolic of the course of life. The first twenty lines of the poem (the "literal transcript of the scene") describe the scene:

The old grey Alp has caught the cloud,
And the torrent river sings aloud;
The glacier-green Rosanna sings
An organ song of its upper springs.
Foaming under the tiers of pine,
I see it dash down the dark ravine,
And it tumbles the rocks in boisterous play,
With an earnest will to find its way,
Sharp it throws out an emerald shoulder,
And, thundering ever of the mountain,
Slaps in sport some giant boulder,
And tops it in a silver fountain.
A chain of foam from end to end,
And a solitude so deep, my friend,
You may forget that man abides
Beyond the great mute mountain-sides.
Yet to me, in this high-walled solitude
Of river and rock and forest rude,
The roaring voice through the long white chain
Is the voice of the world of bubble and brain. (107)

The speaker in *By the Rosanna* is not lecturing about something he has known for a long time. He, too, has achieved insight on the mountain, and the lecture represents the content of that insight. In the "deep solitude" of the mountain landscape the speaker comes to understand that "The roaring voice of the long white chain/Is the voice of the world of bubble and brain"(107), and this "world of bubble and brain" is Meredith's image for man's workaday busy activities in his social and natural environment. A letter to F. M. Maxse of July 26, 1861, from Meran, South Tyrol, near the Rosanna, gives unusually extensive information about the genesis of the poem. An echo of the "bubble and brain" image is present in Meredith's comment:

I wish you were with me or I with you: for my companion's a dear old boy, but we don't get on quite as travellers. And not only for that reason, but for many reasons, I want to see you, and shake your hand, and hear about your bubbles and the life you go through.27

And in the same letter, he wrote:
The Rosanna, by the way, put me in mind of you—
nay, sang of you with a mountain voice, somehow,  
I don't know how. Perhaps because it is both  
hearty and gallant, subtle, and sea-green. You  
ever saw so lovely a brawling torrent. Clear,  
ide-cold, foaming. You shall have the verses  
it inspired.  

The speaker in the poem says that he finds this voice "of  
bubble and brain" in the alpine isolation "where he (had)  
sought it least" and that  

. . . if I translate the sound  
Now thundering in my ears around,  
'Tis London rushing down a hill,  
Life, or London; which you will! (107)  

The speaker's reading of the alpine scene differs from  
that of the Arcadian dreamer, who has sought such isolated  
spots in an attempt to find spiritual truth—to "raise  
the Nymph/Wherever Nature sits alone"(108). And the  
speaker knows a secret—he knows why the Arcadian dreamer's  
quest to find the ground of spirit and value solely in  
Nature has been in vain. The spirit of Nature, he says,  

Dances, and gleams, now under the wave,  
Now on a fern-branch, or fox-glove bell;  
Thro' a wreath of the bramble she eyes me grave;  
She has a secret she will not tell.  

But if I follow her more and more,  
If I hold her sacred to each lone spot  
She'll tell me—what I knew before;  
For the secret is, that she can't be caught! (109)  

In order to get a perspective on the real relationship  
between the world of nature and the ground of spirit and
value, one must see that any spiritual values that are experienced in or symbolized by the world of nature actually have their ultimate source in the human spirit. This is the argument of *By the Rosanna*, and this fact probably accounts for why the poem was reprinted in full in the only volume of verse to be published during Meredith's middle period and for why most of it was suppressed during his last period. Meredith's humorous presentation of this argument is that the Nymph—the spirit of nature—must be introduced and wedded to the "short-neck'd, many caped, London cabman"(109), who symbolizes the human spirit. In stanzas of a Mind of sardonic, playful, Byronic seriousness, the speaker says that the idea that nature's "heart comes out of the human heart"(110) is a

Tremendous Thought, which I scarce dare blab, man!
The soul she yet lacks—the illumination Immortal!—it strikes me like inspiration,
She must get her that soul by wedding the cabman! (110)

The effect of this wedding will not be a one-sided gain. The cabman will benefit too: the idea of nature in this poem is not that she is something totally inert and without positive relation to man:

She is ready to meet the grim cabman half-way! Now! and where better than here, where with thunder
Of waters, she might bathe his clay,
And enter him by the gate of wonder?
It takes him doubtless long to peel,  
Who wears at least a dozen capes  
Yet if but once she makes him feel,  
The Man comes of his multiform shapes.

To make him feel, friend, is not easy.  
I once did nourish that ambition:  
But there he goes, purple, and greasy, and  
Wheesy,  
And waits a greater and truer magician! (lll)

Man may gain a sense of wonder, increased sensitivity, and  
a greater awareness of his true human qualities (as he  
throws off his capes) as a result of understanding his true  
relation to nature, along with the contribution of his  
humanity to this relation. The net result of having achieved this insight, the speaker says to the Arcadian dreamer,  
should not be to "fright" or destroy  

The delicate spirit with which you adore  
Dame Nature in long haunts embraced. (lll)

The speaker claims to have shown such delicate spirits the  
way to accord themselves with reality: "I have shown  
(them) the way to live and last"(lll)! The poem concludes  
on the assertion that the mountain and the torrent had  
gained an additional symbolic dimension in the speaker's  
eyes and would function in the future to recall the insight  
into the nature of value and the nature of man that the  
speaker had achieved and revealed to his friend:  

I give them my meaning here, and they  
Will give me theirs when far away.  
And the snowy points, and the ash-pale peaks,  
Will bring a trembling to my cheeks,  
The leap of the white-fleck'd, clear light green--
Sudden the length of its course be seen,
As, swift it launches an emerald shoulder,
And, thundering ever of the mountain,
Slaps in sport some giant boulder,
And tops it in a silver fountain. (112)

A shift in philosophic emphasis away from theism and
toward humanism appears in the difference between the early
mountain poem Swathed Round in Mist (1851) and By the Rosanna.
In the same letter to Maxse quoted above (of July 26, 1861) in which he talks about the composition of verses
inspired by the Rosanna, Meredith provides additional in-
sight into his shift away from the theistic bias of the
eyearly poems like Swathed Round in Mist, South-West Wind in
the Woodland, and the Pastorals:

My first sight of the Alps has raised odd feel-
ings. Here at last seems something more than
earth, and visible, if not tangible. They have
the whiteness, the silence, the beauty and mys-
tery of thoughts seldom unveiled within us, but
which conquer Earth when once they are. In fact
they have made my creed tremble.--Only for a time.
They have merely dazzled me with a group of sym-
bols. Our great error has been (the error of
all religion, as I fancy) to raise a spiritual
system in antagonism to Nature. What though
yonder Alp does touch the Heavens? It it a re-
buke to us below? In you and me there may be
lofty virgin points, pure from what we call
fleshliness.29

The mountain of Swathed Round in Mist (1851) had been
specifically stated to be a symbol of "something more
than earth." In 1861, the sight of the Alps made the
poet's developing creed tremble for a moment back in the
direction of transcendence and theism. But Meredith at this time had not yet achieved his fully mature "naturalistic" outlook. In the light of the full content of By the Rosanna, written at about the same time as this letter, Meredith's often quoted comment about the error of raising spiritual systems in antagonism to nature should be seen as a movement toward, but not as an initial statement of his final naturalism. Before he reached this position, the humanistic emphasis of By the Rosanna and other late first period poems was first to undergo much more amplification in major poems published between 1862 and 1881.30
Notes to Chapter Two

1 As indicated in Bibliography and Various Readings, XXVII, Memorial Edition (London, 1911) of Meredith's works.

2 Elements of both approaches are found in the studies of Trevelyan (Poetry and Philosophy) and Kelvin.


4 Hough, pp. 2-3.


6 Sassoon, p. 11.

7 All dates in parentheses following poem titles are dates of first publication.

8 All references to Meredith's poems will be to G. M. Trevelyan's edition of The Poetical Works of George Meredith (London, 1912) unless otherwise noted. Trevelyan's is the most complete single volume edition of the poems that is available. Unfortunately, Trevelyan did not number the lines of the poems; thus numbers in parentheses at the end of quotations indicate page numbers in this edition.

9 Beach, p. 471.

10 Dover Beach, 1. 19.

11 In the later poems the southwest wind becomes a principle of violent energy, rejuvenation, and recurrence in an immanent universe. Here, although the violence of its operation is stressed, the wind is symbolic primarily of a spiritual principle in the universe which is transcendent and constitutive of value. In the later poems (The Woods of Wastermain, for example) the woods are an area of endeavor, a dangerous arena of potential triumph or disaster. Here they function as the passive recipients of transcendence-based value.


It is interesting that Meredith continued to reprint this particular poem in unaltered form throughout his lifetime. Probably because the poem can be read on the literal level as an early exercise involving two of his favorite symbols—-and possibly because the poem's theism and transcendence become genuinely apparent only at the level of symbol and analogue—the poem was not thought to clash so significantly with his mature, more naturalistic world view that it had to be altered or suppressed, as were some of the other productions of his first two periods—poems such as By the Rosanna, Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn, The Orchard and the Heath, and In the Woods, which will be discussed in this and other chapters.

Beach, p. 477.

Beach, pp. 470-499, 607-608. The poems are The Test of Manhood (1901), Appreciation (1883), The Woods of W esternmain (1885), A Faith on Trial (1888), The Question Whither (1888), Earth and Man (1888), Sense and Spirit (1883), Earth's Secret (1883), and The Thrush in February (1885).

Beach, p. 477; Stevenson, p. 223.

In The Ordeal of George Meredith (New York, 1953), p. 40, Stevenson makes an undocumented reference to the comment of The Guardian, a Church of England weekly, on Meredith's 1851 volume. The critic is said to have written: "He must, however, mend his morals and taste. Coarse sensuality is no proof of power, and passionateness and vigour may be attained without impurity." The critic then went on to single out The Rape of Aurora and Daphne, Meredith's treatment of the course of young love in terms of the Daphne myth, as "studied and amplified voluptuousness."


Mont Blanc, ll. 96-100.

Mont Blanc, ll. 139-141.

To mention only a few of the middle and later poems in which mountains are important: By the Rosanna (1861), Section IV of Modern Love (1862), The Day of the Daughter of Hades (1883), A Faith on Trial (1888), The Sage Enamoured, and the Honest Lady (1892), Ode to Youth in Memory (1892),
Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History (1898), and On Como (1908).

According to Carl H. Ketcham in "Meredith and the Willis," Victorian Poetry, I (November 1963), 241-248, Meredith's Phantasy (1861) is another early excursion into the problem of moral evil, although on much more of an allegorical level of symbolism and allegory. Ketcham argues effectively that the source of the poem was the popular ballet, Giselle ou les Willis, and he speculates about possible biographical bases for the poem. Ketcham says that the dreamer of the poem who turned away in his dream from his "village lily" toward sensual self-indulgence with the demonic women (the "Willis" of the ballet) was seeking his own self-interest in a way similar to that of many Meredithian sentimentalists such as Sir Austin Feverel or Lord Fleetwood. Phantasy, says Ketcham, in his allegorical reading of the poem, "may be viewed as the story of a sentimentalist's repentance, his return to honesty of feeling, 'the powers that Nature gave me' (stanza 26). The same terms that characterize the artificial world as Meredith saw it in 'Phantasy'--evil, unnatural, unchecked, self-destructive--characterize the sentimentalist and his desires; the combination of physical attraction and lovelessness was the story of Meredith's domestic tragedy. For each level of meaning he found vivid objective expression in the imagery of Giselle."


26Letter to the Rev. Augustus Jessop of November 13, 1861, in Letters, I, p. 44.


28Letters, I, p. 31.

29Letters, I, p. 33.

30If the use of casual philosophic comments in letters which are not in any sense critical documents about the poems were appropriate in this study, some of Meredith's non-critical letters could certainly be used to support the idea that there was a shift toward humanism in the middle period. In a letter to the Rev. Augustus Jessop of Sept. 20, 1864 (Letters, I, p. 157), Meredith makes another expression of the humanist idea that man, and not transcendence or some spiritual principle in nature, must provide order, shape, and meaning to reality: "Does not all science (the mammoth balloon, to wit) tell us that when we forsake earth, we reach up to a frosty, imical Inane? For my part I love and cling to earth, as the one piece of
God's handiwork which we possess. I admit that we can refashion; but of earth must be the material." In the letters as in the poems, however, there are isolated expressions throughout Meredith's career which could be taken in support of various philosophical orientations. Since Meredith was not a systematic philosopher, and since letters are not items, usually, of systematic philosophy, the letters—if they are approached at all—should be approached as the poems; that is, with the idea of determining the dominant features of the world view of different periods. This study makes only a limited use of Meredith's letters. If a study seeks to determine the world view expressed in all of Meredith's extant writings, then all the letters would be a basic source for that study. Such is not the purpose of this dissertation, which attempts to describe the development of the poetic vision—of the world of the poems. When the letters have to do with the poems, then they become important critical documents, and as such are important source material for this study—but only then. Non-critical letters are, in the strictest sense, beside the point of this study, their main value being that they serve to show that the world view of the poems did not develop in a vacuum. But then it is obvious that no world view could develop in a vacuum. Detailed consideration of non-critical letters (as well as of novels or details of biography) is beyond the scope of this study, although it is tempting to use them in interpreting particularly difficult passages. In Darwin among the Poets Lionel Stevenson mentions Meredith's "particularly cryptic symbolism" and proceeds to get at his world view mainly (and "preferably," he says) "through his informal comments in letters and conversations" (pp. 196-197). A world view can probably be derived in this way, and it would probably resemble that of the poetry, although it would not be identical with Meredith's poetic vision. Meredith's letters do provide aid in interpretation of the poems—they do contain unique critical comments—but a basic condition of an approach to Meredith's poetic world view is to work with all the dimensions of the poems, including their cryptic symbolism.
CHAPTER III

The Middle Period—Publication 1862–1881

PART ONE: Transition, Humanism, and Pessimism in Two Major Poems

Writing of Modern Love (1862), Norman Kelvin comments in A Troubled Eden: Nature and Society in the Works of George Meredith:

Through her instruments, passion and transiency, nature causes man to suffer. Nowhere else in Meredith's work is nature, "our only visible friend," depicted as so inherent a source of tragedy.

This comment about the major poem of Meredith's middle period of publication applies significantly to almost all the poems of this time of transition in his poetic development. This is a period in which the poetic world view moves away from a view of reality in terms of the theistic god—man—nature triad toward an emphasis on the immanence of all reality. The immanence of the middle period, however, is not for the most part the same as that of the naturalistic world view of the later poems. The middle poems suggest a position of immanence affirming categories of reality of man and nature, along with a realization of the alienation and antagonism between the two which is more characteristic of Victorian humanism in an Arnoldian vein. Meredith's at this period is a humanism that almost despairs at the prospect of an ethically dualistic world
which makes no final claim for the ontological status of any principle of beneficence. The treatment of the concept of evil in the middle poetry especially demonstrates the pessimistic dimension of this humanistic outlook.

Such a preliminary description of the world view of the middle poems does not assert that humanism here was any more systematic than theism was earlier. Speaking in terms of philosophic emphasis or tendency is necessary when describing the world view of Meredith's early, middle, or even late poems; it is especially necessary regarding the poems published between 1862 and 1881, because this is a period of transition from a theistic to a naturalistic emphasis. This period—which includes what Basil Willey has called "the classic decade of Victorian rationalism" (1867-1877) in which Meredith was one of a number of liberal thinkers in an "atmosphere that pulsed with the excitement of applying the principles of Evolution to all things in heaven and on earth"—was one in which Meredith's mature outlook was taking shape; and it did so by finally overcoming the pessimistic humanism of the middle poems and reaching a kind of reconciliation of man, nature, and beneficence in a world view on immanence.

The transitional quality of the 1862-1881 period appears in its major poems. Certain poems published early in the middle period reflect the theistic bias of the first period: Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn (1862) in its original form has sections that come closer to the affirmation
of theism and transcendence of *Swathed Round in Mist* (1851) than any other poem of this period. The humanist emphasis of the middle period and the pessimism linked to it are implicit and explicit in *I Chafe at Darkness* (1862), *Modern Love* (1862), *Martin's Puzzle* (1865), *The Orchard and the Heath* (1868), the original version of *In the Woods* (1870), and *A Ballad of Past Meridian* (1876). Late in this middle period, poems are published that begin to reflect very clearly the movement toward the mature naturalism—poems like *Love in the Valley* (1878) and *The Lark Ascending* (1881), which were included in the first published volume of Meredith's last period, *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of the Earth* (1883). The movement is also clearly suggested by certain post-1883 revisions of poems humanistic in bias and pessimistic in mood originally published in the middle period: *The Orchard and the Heath* (1868) and *In the Woods* (1870) are the main examples.

"Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn: A Link to the Earlier and the Later Poems"

Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn, first published in the *Modern Love* volume of 1862, is an important indication of the transitional nature of the 1862-1881 period in three ways: first, in its original version, the poem has links to Meredith's earlier theistic bias; second, in theme, symbol, and mood the poem modifies earlier treatments of similar material and anticipates later developments; and third, revisions of the poem and subsequent publication
or suppression suggest that a basic shift in world view has occurred in Meredith's poetry.

Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn (1862) is one of Meredith's many poems about the importance of man's joyfully accepting the recurrence of value in the cycle of nature. Both earlier and later poems—such as The Death of Winter (1851), The Wild Rose and the Snowdrop (1851), The Day of the Daughter of Hades (1883), and Seed-Time (1888)—make the exhortation of Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn for man to learn from Nature "to kiss the season and shun regrets" (176). The Ode differs from the earlier poems (and is more like the later ones) on this subject in that it is much more explicit about the philosophical framework within which this exhortation is made. It is this framework which specifically suggests the transitional quality of the poem, a work which critics have been much more prone to see as pointing forward—instead of forward and backwards—in terms of Meredith's world view. The poem, to be sure, explores topics and themes that Meredith develops more fully later. Lionel Stevenson has written that the poem is one "wherein may be found seminally many elements of his later philosophy," and Trevelyan had said earlier that the first part of the poem "is highly illustrative of Mr. Meredith's style, as the latter part of the poem is of his thought." These two comments suggest why the poem is both interesting—as evidence of development in Meredith's world view—and poetically faulty. It is
interesting because it does contain "many elements of his later philosophy," although they are considerably mixed up with elements of his earlier one. The mixture present in the poem of categories of reality of naturalism and theism flaws the thematic unity of the poem, which also revives problems Meredith had had earlier in _Angelic Love_ (1851) and _Twilight Music_ (1851) with an artificially sensuous tone and a philosophically serious theme. The original version of the poem is an unintegrated presentation of ideas about "Great Mother Nature," "Earth, the mother of all," physical nature (represented by the wind and the woods), man (represented by "I," the speaker or narrator), God (presented in a way in which He might be considered a kind of immanent moral goal), and God the Father (related to Earth the mother)—who from a position of transcendence "beckons us on to a brighter birth" (586). Part of the reason that the original version of _Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn_ was never reprinted in Meredith's lifetime probably was that the creator of _Modern Love_ became increasingly aware of these problems of tone and unity, which were only partially solved by the elimination of the two stanzas most emphatic about transcendence. Stevenson's assumption that the poet's commending the poem "to his friend Maxse's attention in no less than three letters" is evidence of his "preference for this poem" is not necessarily justified. Maxse, it should be remembered, was the "Arcadian dreamer" whose tendencies toward philosophical transcendence were playfully rebuked in _By the Rosanna_ in 1861. Meredith's
awareness of these tendencies of Maxse's may have been what prompted the poet to write to his friend that "one poem, new to you (Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn), will please you better than all--please you-(italics mine) specially" and that the poem would "if I mistake not, catch hold of you." If Meredith ever did have any partiality for the poem, it was relatively short-lived, as subsequent publication history shows.

Themes and images of the earlier and later poetry are so mixed in Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn that the best approach to it is to start at the beginning of the original version and mention these as they appear; this approach will also establish the context of the "theistic" elements that were later eliminated. The poem is a long irregular ode of some 253 four, three, and two stress lines and nineteen stanzas. Structurally the poem is organized into four parts, alternately emphasizing description of the natural landscape and philosophic reflection. The dramatic situation of the first section (172-74) is reminiscent of that of South-West Wind in the Woodland (1851). Nature in a state of silent anticipation awaits the inspiration of the stormy south-west wind:

Fair Mother Earth lay on her back last night, 
To gaze her fill on Autumn's sunset skies, 
When at a waving of the fallen light 
Sprang realms of rosy fruitage o'er her eyes. 
A lustrous heavenly orchard hung the West, 
Wherein the blood of Eden bloomed again: 
Red were the myriad cherub-mouts that pressed, 
Among the clusters, rich with song, full fain, 
But dumb, because that overmastering spell 
Of rapture held them dumb: then, here and there, 
A golden harp lost strings; a crimson shell
Burnt grey; and sheaves of lustre fell to air.
The illimitable eagerness of hue
Bronzed, and the beamy winged bloom that flew
'Mid those bunched fruits and thronging figures
failed.
A green-edged lake of saffron touched the blue,
With isles of fireless purples lying through:
And Fancy on that lake to seek lost treasures
sailed.

Not long the silence followed:
The voice that issues from thy breast,
O glorious South-west,
Along the gloom-horizon holla'd;
Warning the valleys with a mellow rear
Through flapping wings; then sharp the woodland
bore
A shudder and a noise of hands:
A thousand horns from some far vale
In ambush sounding on the gale. (172-173)

The situation is a common one in much of the later poetry—a joyous autumn-time scattering of seed, a scattering necessary in the regenerative processes of nature; but the "rosy fruitage" of "lustrous heavenly orchard(s)" and the "cherub-mouths" pressing "among the clusters" of "bunched fruits" clearly recall the "golden-fruited vine" that was "grape laden with full bunches of young wine" (17) to which "angelic love" was compared in 1851. In 1851 in South-West Wind in the Woodland, the wind functioned as a symbol of transcendence providing value by entering immanently into relation with the woods. In Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn (1862), however, the south-west wind assumes the role it has in most of Meredith's middle and later poems and becomes a positive and necessary (although violent) part of the immanence of nature.

The wind and the woods interact in Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn to reflect what seem to be, at least early in
the poem, the self-regenerating energies of Earth in the scattering of seed. The speaker, "I, who love old hymning night,/And know the Dryad voices well"(173), who enters the dramatic situation as observer toward the end of the first section, observes the almost sexual attack of the wind on the woods: "and here,/Like frail white-bodied girls in fear,/The birches swung from shrieks to sighs"(174). And he sees the woods' reaction to this attack as positive—as an occasion for their realizing some value, however transient it may be. The speaker says that he

Discerned them as their leaves took flight,
Like souls to wander after death:
Great armies in imperial dyes,
And mad to tread the air and rise,
The savage freedom of the skies
To taste before they rot.(173-174)

In the first reflective section of the poem (174-175), the speaker makes more explicit this positive reaction of the woods to the violence of the wind. The mournful sound of the pines in the wind turns out to be "not mournfulness/
For melancholy, but Joy's excess"(174). And the speaker sees in the scene the immanence and unity of all spiritual and physical reality, as he asks and answers his own rhetorical question:

Could I be sole there not to see
The life within the life awake;
The spirit bursting from the tree,
And rising from the troubled lake?
Pour, let the wines of Heaven pour!
The Golden Harp is struck once more
And all its music is for me!
Pour, let the wines of Heaven pour!
And, ho, for a night of Pagan glee!(174)
The speaker calls for man to accept his physical and spiritual roles in the immanence of Nature, and he speaks against the narrow view of reality which argues for the separation of man and nature:

For once, good souls, we'll not pretend
To be aught better than her who bore us,
And is our only visible friend.
Hark to her laughter! who laughs like this,
Can she be dead, or rooted in pain?
She has been slain by the narrow brain,
But for us who love her, she lives again.
Can she die? O, take her kiss!(175)

The second descriptive section of the poem (175–176) presents the wind and the woods in the "night of Pagan glee," which is described in terms of a sylvan orgy by satyrs and nymphs. The section ends with the speaker's call for Earth's/Nature's blessing:

Away, for the cymbals clash aloft
In the circles of pine, on the moss-floor soft.
The nymphs of the woodland are gathering there.
They huddle the leaves, and trample, and toss;
They swing in the branches, they roll in the moss,
They blow the seed on the air.
Back to back they stand and blow
The winged seed on the cradling air,
A fountain of leaves over bosom and back.
The pipe of the Faun comes on their track,
And the weltering alleys overflow
With musical shrieks and wind-wedded hair.
The riotous companies melt to a pair.
Bless them, mother of kindness!(175-176)

The last reflective section (176-end) of the poem, which is the longest section, begins as the speaker sees transiency of his life in the image of a brief glimpse of the light of a star seen through a parting in scudding
clouds at night, "Shining a moment, and mixed/With the onward-hurrying stream"(176). He calls on Earth/Nature to teach him to accept and rejoice in his rôle in the immanent scheme of things:

Great Mother Nature! teach me, like thee,
To kiss the season and shun regrets.
And am I more than the mother who bore,
Mock me not with thy harmony!
Teach me to blot regrets,
Great Mother! me inspire
With faith that forward sets
But feeds the living fire,
Faith that never frets
For vagueness in the form.
In life, O keep me warm!
For, what is human grief?
And what do men desire?
Teach me to feel myself the tree,
And not the withered leaf.
Fixed am I and await the dark to-be.
And O, green bounteous Earth!
Bacchante Mother! stern to those
Who live not in thy heart of mirth;
Death shall I shrink from, loving thee?
Into the breast that gives the rose
Shall I with shuddering fall?(176)

Earth the mother of all,
Moves on her stedfast way,
Gathering, flinging, sowing.
Mortals, we live in her day,
She in her children is growing.

She can lead us, only she,
Unto God's footstool, whither she reaches:
Loved, enjoyed, her gifts must be,
Reverenced the truths she teaches,
Ere a man may hope that he
Ever can attain the glee
Of things without a destiny!(177)

If Meredith had ended the poem here, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to describe Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn as a transitional poem pointing back to theistic transcendence as well as forward to naturalism. So far,
the poem's emphasis is that of straight naturalistic immanence, and as such it anticipates later, more detailed expressions of the same ideas in *Earth and Man* (1883), *The Woods of Westermain* (1883), and *A Faith on Trial* (1888). If *Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn* had ended on the note of glee "Of things without a destiny"(177), the unresolved clash between the restrained theme of naturalistic acceptance and the Keatsian sensuousness of the early sections would be the only holdover from the early poems. If the poem had ended here, it would have to be seen as a remarkable and uniquely straightforward expression in a poem published before *The Lark Ascending* (1881)\textsuperscript{10} of many basic themes of Meredith's later poems. Present are the theme of the joyful acceptance of the transience of human personality ("Into the breast that gives the rose,/Shall I with shuddering fall?"), the idea that Earth is "growing"(177) spiritually in her human children (this is the idea expressed in *Appreciation* [1883] that "Earth was not Earth before her sons appeared"), and an expression of a concept of God as that immanent principle of perfection, as yet unrealized, toward which Earth "reaches" (177)—a concept of God as what Trevelyan understood as a principle of "ethical progress"\textsuperscript{11} and what Beach interpreted as the highest ideal of a "cultivated moral sense."\textsuperscript{12} Siegfried Sassoon is correct in suggesting that much of what Meredith had to say in *Earth and Man* (1883) had been said before in *Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn* (1862).\textsuperscript{13} The trouble with the poem is that Meredith also had many
other things to say in the poem which conflicted seriously with the framework of naturalistic immanence which was so well expressed in the first parts of the poem.

These "other things" point backward to the concepts of transcendence expressed in early poems like Swathed Round in Mist (1851). The original version of Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn in 1862 contained three stanzas which immediately followed the line, "Of things without a destiny" (177). These stanzas were later removed from the poem and were never reprinted during Meredith's lifetime:

Hark to her laughter! And would you wonder
To hear amazing laughter thunder
From one who contemplateth man? --
Knowing the plan!
The great procession of the Comedy
Passes before her. Let the curtain down!
For she must laugh to shake her starry crown,
To mark the strange perversions that are we;
Who hoist our shoulders confident of wings,
When we have named her Ashes, dug her ditch;
Who do regard her as a damned witch,
Fair to the eye, but full of foulest things.
Break off our antics to stand forth, white-eyed,
And fondly hope for our Creator's smile.
By telling him that his prime work is vile,
Whom, through our noses, we've renounced, denied.

Good friends of mine, who love her,
And would not see her bleeding:
The light that is above her (my italics),
From eyesight is receding,
As ever we grow older,
And blood is waxing colder.
But grasp in spirit tightly,
That she is no pretender,
While still the eye sees brightly, --
Then darkness knows her splendour,
And coldness feels her glory.
As in yon cloud-scud hoary,
From gloom to gloom swift winging,
The sunset beams have found me:
I hear the sunset singing
In this blank roar around me!
Friends! we are ye in the warmth of our blood,
And swift as the tides upon which we are borne:
There's a long blue rift in the speeding scud,
That shews like a boat on a sea forlorn,
With stars to man it! That boat is ours,
And we are the mariners on the great flood
Of the shifting slopes and the drifting flowers,
That oar unresting towards the morn!
And are we the children of Heaven and earth,
We'll be true to the mother with whom we are,
So to be worthy of Him who afar,
Beckons us on to a brighter birth (my italics).

(585-6)

Lionel Stevenson has correctly commented that these suppressed stanzas "satirized the idea that God's favor is to be won by reviling Nature and suspecting all natural beauty as a delusion and a snare."

The second eliminated stanza is much more important in its effect on the philosophic framework of the poem, for in it Meredith is dramatizing certain categories of reality that clash with the immanence and naturalism presented earlier. There is a "light that is above" Earth which man may help her approach if he directs his spiritual energies properly as one of the "mariners on the great flood/Of the shifting slopes and the drifting flowers,/That oar unresting towards the morn"!

The "light" toward which man may help Earth move is specifically said to be "above" her. The "light" is external to Earth; it is not a light immanently within Nature that man will progressively help to reveal. Furthermore, if man makes the right kind of mariner, if he is the right kind of child of "Heaven and earth", then he will not only remain "true to the Mother" with whom he exists in this Life--"with whom we are"; he will also "be worthy of
Him who afar, Beckons us on to a brighter birth" (586). This "Him" appears also in the poem as external to nature and man, and He beckons to a "brighter" birth than the one man had on earth. The "Him" is not only external, "above," and "afar" from man and Nature; He also makes for a "brighter" condition of life. There is a suggestion of transcendence here that is reminiscent of

. . . the awful power
With which the secret of all things
That stoops from heaven to garment earth,
Can speak to any human soul (60)

of Swathed Round in Mist (1851). It may be possible to read "God's footstool, whither she (Nature/Earth) reaches" (177) as an image of Nature's movement toward an immanent ideal goal. This could be, and probably is, the use of a term ("God") which is vaguely and conventionally one of transcendence to signify that which is highest in a context of philosophical immanence. However, in the case of a "Him" who is the father of Earth's children, who is "above" and "afar" from man and Nature, and who is superior ("brighter") to them, a suggestion of theistic transcendence is based on poetic rhetoric far too explicit to be seen merely as some special configuration of immanence.

After this excursion into transcendence, the poem returns in its conclusion to its basic theme of the need for kissing the season and shunning regrets. A genuine insight into man's proper relation to Earth will lead him to see that what seems to be a loss of value in the cyclic
order of nature is actually a condition for the greater increase of value in the universe. This is why Earth cannot experience loss:

She knows not loss:
She feels but her need,
Who the winged seed
With the leaf doth toss.

And may not man 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 you stripped Autumn, shivering grey,
Earth knows no desolation.
She smells regeneration
In the moist breath of decay.(177)

Can men attain to this immediate harmonious union with Earth? Meredith doesn't say; he ends the ode with a description of the death of one who had attained it—a "wild western war-chief" who sinks "calm to the end" and "yields/His numbered breaths to exultation/In the proud anticipation"(177) of his union with Earth. Can men other than western-war-chiefs—modern men in a relationship, say, of modern love—attain to this "rapture of being," this spiritual unity with Earth? The tenor of Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn is that the answer is affirmative, but the poem makes this affirmation in much more tentative terms than those of later works like A Faith on Trial (1888). The idea in this poem seems to be that man must strive to reconcile his temporal and transient values to the birth-life-death-
regeneration natural cycle (which is no respecter of individuals or of personality) in and from which they arose. The original version of the poem--the 1862 version--seems to suggest that if a man is successful in this reconciliation, he will achieve a complex status: he will "attain the glee/Of things without a destiny" (177) and he will "be worthy of Him who afar/Beckons us on to a brighter birth" (586). The uniqueness of this status suggests the basic problem of the poem: it is self-contradictory. One cannot both be without a destiny and have the destiny of a brighter birth; one cannot afford the same ontological status to immanence and transcendence, to naturalism and theism in a single consistent world view; neither can a single consistent poem reflect both of these biases. The later revision of Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn suggests that Meredith became aware of this.

Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn (1862), then, points in two directions. Much of the poem is suggestive of later naturalism, but one section definitely points back to theism; and elements of theme, image, and symbolism suggest both the earlier and the later poetry. In terms of world view, the poem is somewhere between the transcendence and theism of Swathed Round in Mist (1851) and Earth and Man (1883)---and probably closer to the latter. The poem is not, however, a synthesis of the two extremes; it represents more of an uneasy coexistence of them. Even in its revised form Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn was
reprinted only twice in Meredith's lifetime. It appeared in The Complete Limited Edition Deluxe of Meredith's Works in 1896,\textsuperscript{15} and in 1906 Trevelyan reprinted it in an appendix to The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith, prefaced by the comment: "It is a very great pleasure to me to be permitted by Mr. Meredith and his publishers to reprint this now famous Ode, at present only obtainable in the edition of 1862 and in the Limited Collected Edition of his works (vol. iii of Poems)."\textsuperscript{16} Trevelyan did include them in a note in The Poetical Works in 1912 after the poet's death.\textsuperscript{17} Meredith had had several chances to reprint the poem, but he did not take them. It is absent from The Selected Poems of George Meredith of 1897 (which were the author's selections) and from The Nature Poems of George Meredith of 1898.\textsuperscript{18}

Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn is important in this study for two main reasons: first, the lack of thematic unity in the original version suggests the shifting, developing quality of the world view of the middle period; second, the revision and subsequent publication of the poem provide strong evidence of the shift from an early theistic to a late naturalistic bias. The poem does not, however, reflect the dominant humanistic bias of the poems of the 1862-1881 period. The categories of reality operative in Ode to The Spirit of Earth in Autumn--Earth, man, God, nature--are presented in theistic and naturalistic orientations; only in the slight hesitancy of the poem to affirm absolutely
that man can actually attain a rapturous unity with Earth is there a hint of the possibility of a division between the ends of man and nature. Such a division of ends—even an antagonism between them—is the basic theme explored by the main body of poems published between 1862 and 1881.

**Humanism and Pessimism in**

"*Modern Love*

One of the most accurate general statements that can be made about Meredith's overall body of poetry is that it is optimistic. It calls for a full living of life—a total acceptance of all that the changing processes of Nature offer. His friend John Morley saw Meredith's message as "Live with the world. No cloister. No languor. Play your part. Fill the day. Ponder well and loiter not. Let laughter brace you. Exist in everyday communion with Nature." Morley said of Meredith that "to love this deep companionship of the large refreshing natural world brought unspeakable fullness of being to him, as it was one of his most priceless lessons to men of disposition more prosaic than his own." Meredith's poems generally corroborate Morley's judgment of Meredith the man. A chronological reading, however, of the poems, according to dates of original publication, leads to a number of interesting observations about the poems published between 1862 and 1881. The vast majority of these poems are darker in mood and tone than those which preceded and followed them. Poems reflecting the buoyant optimism and the joyful acceptance of Nature
of the earlier and later periods—poems like Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn (1862)—are rare until the end of this period. If any of Meredith's poetry reflects "a dark night of the soul?" it is that of this period. Many of these poems suggest an indifference or hostility between man and nature as well as a kind of existential despair which grows with man's growing awareness of this indifference and hostility. Repeated themes of social injustice, frustrated love affairs, the enduring taint of moral evil, sorrow at parting, and alienation from nature and society complement the humanistic pessimism prevalent in the poetry of this period.

Such motifs are the dominant ones in the 1862 volume, Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside, with Poems and Ballads, in which were collected several poems published previously in magazines including, it will be recalled, the incipiently humanistic By the Rosanna in its as yet unrevised form, along with the two versions of man alienated from nature in Autumn Evensong and The Meeting. I Chafe at Darkness (1862), one of the better short poems of the volume, is an early representative of the lyric treatment of themes of isolation and alienation—a treatment which appears throughout the middle period, and especially in its major poem, Modern Love. In fact, I Chafe at Darkness would have served well in 1862 as a preface to Modern Love, as The Promise in Disturbance did in 1892.
I Chafe at Darkness

I chafe at darkness in the night,
   But when 'tis light,
Hope shuts her eyes; the clouds are pale;
The fields stretch cold into a distance hard:
   I wish again to draw the veil
   Thousand-starred.

Am I of them whose blooms are shed,
   Whose fruits are spent,
Who from dead eyes see Life half dead;--
Because desire is feeble discontent?
   Ah, no! desire and hope should die,
   Thus were I.

But in me something clipped of wing
   Within its ring
Frets; for I have lost what made
The dawn-breeze magic, and the twilight beam
   A hand with tidings o'er the glade
   Waving seem. (180-181)

The speaker finds himself in a vacillating state that is
doubly damned: he must either be in darkness or in light,
and both conditions are intolerable to him. He "chafe(s)"
at the isolation night imposes on him, an isolation sym-
bolized by the "darkness" in which he cannot see to esta-
blish a meaningful relationship with his world. With the
coming of the light, he encounters a different kind of
sightlessness and realizes that such communion was impos-
sible anyway ("Hope shuts her eyes") in an environment
hostile to his spirit (which is linked to "hope" and "de-
sire" in this poem)—one in which "clouds are pale" and
"the fields stretch cold into a distance hard." The speaker
prefers the night; in this spiritual winter he wishes "again
to draw the veil/Thousand starred"—a veil which at least
momentarily, even though chafingly, prevents his active and immediate realization of his alienation and lets "hope" open her eyes again. The "hard," "pale," "cold" natural landscape suggests an even more poignant isolation than did the white "hazy waste" of The Meeting, because in the earlier poem the suggestion did not appear that the characters possessed a potential for spiritual communion that was being blocked and frustrated. The speaker of I Chafe at Darkness does see in his condition a tragic waste and loss of spiritual potential. He says that he does have this potential—that he is not one of those "who from dead eyes see Life half dead;--/Because desire is feeble discontent." He sees evidence of this potential in his having a recurrent "desire and hope" to overcome his alienation, and he says that this desire and hope would have been long dead if he had been one who was absolutely incapable of recovering what he had lost—one "who from dead eyes see(s) Life half dead." The frustration of blocked potential only partly accounts for the speaker's despair. The poem is a miniature expression of some of the central concerns of Coleridge's Dejection Ode. Meredith's speaker's complaint that

in me something clipped of wing
Within its ring
Frets; for I have lost what made
The dawn-breeze magic, and the twilight beam
A hand with tidings o'er the glade
Waving seem

echoes the sense of loss in
My genial spirits fail;
And what can these avail
To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?
It were a vain endeavor,
Though I should gaze forever
On that green light that lingers in the west:

I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.
O lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live. 21

The dejection and despair of *I Chafe at Darkness* is nearly complete. The image of the speaker’s spiritual capacity for communion as a chained, clipped-winged bird does not suggest much chance of his recovering his version of "the glory and the dream." The broad areas of meaning defined by such symbols as "darkness," "light," and "something clipped of wing" mean that the theme of the poem lacks specificity. It is difficult to say very much in detail about the alienation, isolation, or communion it suggests or implies; however, elements of mood, tone, and theme of this lyric have counterparts throughout all but the very latest years of Meredith’s middle period. Furthermore, the alienation, despair, and isolation suggested in *I Chafe at Darkness* link it thematically to the major poem of this period, which is also the work for which Meredith is most famous.

*Modern Love* (1862) has attracted more critical attention than any other of Meredith’s poems and almost as much as all the others combined. Biographical critics and critical biographers have mined the vein of parallels, similarities, and differences between the events of the poem and those of
Meredith's first unsuccessful marriage almost to exhaustion. That the poem "grew out of," as Lionel Stevenson says, the death of Meredith's first wife, who had abandoned him and their young son and run away with a painter to Italy some three years earlier there is no doubt; and the plethora of critical speculations about what is meant for the poem to grow out of such an experience began with Meredith's question in a letter in 1864, "Why did I write it?--Who can account for pressure?" and continues still. One of the better modern pieces of criticism, which relates such biographical matters to wider critical concerns of theme and form is C. Day Lewis's 1948 introduction to an edition of Modern Love.

The poem is a series of fifty sections or irregular "sonnets" of sixteen lines each which present a "passionate monodrama" telling the story, in Day Lewis's wording, "of a marriage which has failed, of the two partners' failure to find emotional release from one another, from the mortar-main of their former love, in illicit relationships, and of their final reconciliation which also fails because it is but 'a lifeless vow To rob a living passion.'" The wife mistakenly attributes this failure to the husband's supposed continuing desire for his mistress and commits suicide. Meredith has combined in the form of Modern Love the action and story detail of the long narrative poem, the intensely personal authenticity of the dramatic monologue, and the quality of lyric meditation associated with the traditional
sonnet sequence.\textsuperscript{26} It is a poem of deep psychological insight and emotional complexity: anger, frustration, desire, tenderness, cynicism, despair, and intellectual concern are interwoven in the portrayal of the disintegration of a marriage. A large part of the complexity of \textit{Modern Love} is thematic. Part of the difficulty in arriving at an adequate statement of the theme of the poem stems from the fact that the approach the speaker takes to the central situation is more descriptive than normative. What were the main causes of the disintegration of the marriage is central to the theme of the poem, and the speaker\textsuperscript{27} is concerned to describe them, but he is quite explicit about refusing, finally, to establish blame on either member of the relationship:

\begin{quote}
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.\textsuperscript{(XLIII,152)}\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

This refusal to establish blame has encouraged critics to see a number of different aspects of the marriage as central manifestations of what was "false within." E. K. Chambers in 1897 understood the breakup of the marriage as a function of an "intolerable burden on the wife's conscience, . . . nothing else than her initial sin of bodily unfaithfulness" which she could not confess and expiate.\textsuperscript{29} Lionel Stevenson described the conflict by saying that "the man was egotistically wrapped up in his own concerns; the woman . . . was controlled by the primitive emotionalism that was the heritage of her sex."\textsuperscript{30} C. Day Lewis wrote of a lack of
emotional equality between the sexes: "the difficult ideal of a new relationship between man and woman, based on equal emotional rights, may be thought to have contributed to the disaster of the marriage which produced this poem." He sees the result of this emotional inequality to be the retardation by one of the "spiritual growth" of the other—in this case, of the husband by the wife. Norman Kelvin writes of the basic cause as a "dark, irrational passion which has no name, but whose motive is destruction"—a passion which is the person-to-person correlate of the necessity of the individual to battle for a place in society. Norman Friedman echoes Day Lewis in suggesting that a lack of temperamental "sympathy" between the wife and a husband who "plotted to be worthy of the world" is basic to the problem. Meredith in 1864 had written in a letter that "'Modern Love' as a dissection of the sentimental passion of these days, could only be apprehended by the few who would read it many times." Recalling that sentimentalism is a form of egoism for Meredith—and that both are forms of self-aggrandizement at the expense of others—one may infer something of what Meredith may have thought was a basic cause of the breakup of the marriage and was central to the theme of the poem.

Modern Love defines a wide area of meaning which does not necessarily exclude any of these interpretations; however, the further exploration of them is not the purpose here. What is important for this study about the presentation of
theme in Modern Love is that it is made within a framework which is philosophically humanistic and emotionally pessimistic. This ideal and emotional framework establishes and demonstrates a poetic world view, a mood, and a tone which are operative in most of the poems published before 1882.

Humanism and Pessimism in "Modern Love." The philosophic world view of Modern Love is implicitly (in symbol and image) and explicitly (in rhetoric and theme) humanistic because it emphasizes 1) a basic ontological distinction between man and nature, while not affirming any metaphysical reality different from and constitutive of them, 2) the ethical neutrality of nature and the ethical dualism of human experience, and 3) an antagonism between the "ends" of nature and human values and goals. All these emphases imply man's essential spiritual alienation in the universe. The world view is pessimistic because of the prospect of man's extensive isolation from his fellows—an isolation dramatized in the frailty and transience of the marriage relationship. This discussion of Modern Love will discuss first the poem's humanistic and then its pessimistic dimensions. It will suggest that Modern Love shows that the poetic world view of 1862 only slightly anticipates that of the later poetry, but before proceeding to these matters, the extent to which this approach is a departure from recent criticism of the poem should be noted. The following comments are an elaboration on the point made in Chapter I
that modern criticism has tended to take poems published from 1862 onward as expressions of Meredith's mature outlook. This is especially the case with Modern Love. Norman Friedman's is an example of this critical viewpoint. He writes:

The key moral ideas informing this action [that of Modern Love] derive from the Meredithian "triad," for he regards man's mature as triple: Spirit (or soul) emerging from the creative union of Blood (body) and Brain (mind). This harmony is called Wisdom; its absence is Egoism, which takes four coordinate forms, each connoting an excessive striving after Spirit or Blood or Brain alone, and each finding itself therefore paradoxically reversed, "singularly doomed/To what [it] execrates and writhe to shun" (p. 245). Thus, the cynic (who denies the soul) is a frustrated sentimentalist (who abhors the body and neglects the mind) or an idealist turned inside out; while the "pinched" ascetic (who denies the body) is a sated or disillusioned sensualist (who revels in the body) or a prurient hypocrite. These are pejorative terms in Meredith's vocabulary, and they comprise his dictionary of moral cowardice; the unwillingness to reconcile oneself with the apparent ambiguity of Nature on the one hand, and one's own ambivalence on the other. 36

Friedman's use of Earth and Man (1883) in the above quotation to define the "key moral ideas informing" a poem published twenty-one years earlier illustrates a fairly standard critical tendency to overlook the developing nature of the "ideas" of the 1862-1881 period. The ideas of the world view of Modern Love are developing toward those of the later poetry, but they are not yet identical with them by any means. The argument of this study is that Modern Love does not express or rely on a world view that sees the good life
in terms of a harmony of blood, brain, and spirit that is significantly available to man. Part of the problem of failing to see the developing quality of the ideas of Modern Love is that Meredith uses here some of the terminology of the later poems—in phrases like "More brain, O Lord, more brain!"(XLVII, 154)—and it is obvious to anyone that a person would have to use his brain to avoid the snares of excessive sensualism or sentimentalism; but the notion of the Meredithian "triad," as it is developed in later poems, appears only in a very embryonic form in Modern Love.

Friedman's description of the harmonious triad of the later poetry cites Earth and Man (1883); a better poem is a better-known expression of the triad. Passages from The Woods of Westerman, also of 1883, can be used to show how Modern Love springs from a significantly different world view. The Woods of Westerman affirms that an adequate understanding of man's role in the universe—of his proper relation to Earth—means that he will joyfully accept Earth's dictates regarding the creative union of blood, brain, and spirit:

Blood and brain and spirit, three
(say the deepest gnomes of Earth),
Join for true felicity.
Are they parted, then expect
Some one sailing will be wrecked;
Separate hunting are they sped,
Saan the morsel coveted.
Earth that Triad is: she hides
Joy from him who that divides;
Showers it when the three are one
Glassing her in union.
Earth your haven, Earth your helm,
You command a double realm;
Labouring here to pay your debt,
Till your little sun shall set;
Leaving her the future task:
Loving her too well to ask. (201-202)

The triad's "true felicity" is not guaranteed to man in The Woods of Westermain, but it is shown to be available to man if he makes in the enchanted woods the right kind of spiritual endeavors and related his goals properly to those of Earth. Incidentally, the term "Earth" does not appear in Modern Love either as a synonym for "Nature"--which does appear--or as a symbol for the immanent ontological ground of being it represents in the later poetry; the word "earth" appears only four times in the poem: twice (IV, XXIX) it refers to the grave, and twice (XI, XLVII) it simply indicates physical landscape.

An ex post facto imposition of the norms implicit in The Woods of Westermain (1883) and Earth and Man (1883) on a poem published twenty-one years earlier (and there is no reason to think that the two published in 1883 were written much before 1881 or 1882--see note 10 above) is a dangerous if not doubtful critical practice. A few brief examples will illustrate the point that Modern Love does not affirm the possibility of the triadic harmony of the later poems. In The Woods of Westermain sensual pleasures were held to be conducive to spiritual achievement if they were related properly to spirit and brain:

Pleasures that through blood run sane,
Quickening spirit from the brain. (201)
Modern Love does not suggest that such triadic harmony is so readily available:

Not till the fire is dying in the grate
Look we for any kindship with the stars.
Oh, wisdom never comes when it is gold,
And the great price we pay for it full worth:
We have it only when we are half earth,
Little avails that coinage to the old!(IV,135)

The possibility of a harmony of blood, brain, and spirit in the full vigor of a man's life is simply denied here. Spiritual insight ("kinship with the stars"--stars are usually rather straightforward symbols for spiritual ideals of purity and truth in the middle and late poems, as will be discussed further in this chapter) is divorced from sensuous or passionate activity. As long as there is "fire" in the "grate" there is no chance for blood and spirit to be harmonized, regardless of mediation by brain: wisdom comes only when man is half-way in the grave ("half earth"). One cannot judge an early poem like Modern Love by the norms of the world view of the later poems when such norms are explicitly ruled out by the rhetoric of the earlier work.37 Neither does Modern Love express agreement with the joyful acceptance voiced in The Woods of Westerman of "labouring" until one's "little sun shall set" and loving Earth "too much to ask" questions about Her purposes. Man cannot joyfully accept the sacrifice or loss of value in the earlier poem, and the total context of the often quoted passage about "our only visible friend" makes this clear:

'I play for Seasons; not Eternities!'
Says Nature, laughing on her way. 'So must
All those whose stake is nothing more than dust!'
And lo, she wins, and of her harmonies
She is full sure! Upon her dying rose
She drops a look of fondness, and goes by,
Scarce any retrospection in her eye;
For she the laws of growth most deeply knows,
Whose hands bear, here, a seed-bag—there, an urn.
Pledged she herself to aught, 'twould mark her end!
This lesson of our only visible friend
Can we not teach our foolish hearts to learn?
Yes! Yes!—but, oh, our human rose is fair
Surpassingly! Lose calmly Love's great bliss,
When the renewed for ever of a kiss
Whirls life within the shower of loosened hair!
(XIII,138-39)

The basic contrast of this section is between Nature and humanity: Nature "wins" and goes "laughing on her way;" man must face the loss of "Love's great bliss." Man is in rational and emotional turmoil, but "of her (my italics) harmonies" Nature "is full sure!" Nature looks on "her dying rose" and goes by with "scarce any retrospection;" man laments the loss of the surpassing fairness of "our human rose." Nature is said to be a "visible friend" she is also a stern friend who teaches a lesson about death and recurrence of all things. But the lesson about recurrence symbolized by Nature's "seed-bag" highlights distinction between natural and human value. Certain human values—such as those that inhere in a marriage—depend on certain particular conformations of reality which can grow but which cannot, by their very natures, recur. And particularity, on which some certain human values depend, is not valued by Nature: "Pledged she herself to aught (my italics), 'twould mark her end." The lesson Nature teaches marks the rational-emotional dichotomy of the section. Rationally, the speaker
sees a way out of his distress only if he can accept the transcience and impermanence of all particular aspects of reality, including the particular physical and social contexts in which he finds value. His rhetorical question is given its obvious rational answer rather frantically:

This lesson of our only visible friend
Can we not teach our foolish hearts to learn?
Yes! Yes!

But the emotional response to the proposed acceptance of Nature's harmonies is anything but joyful:

--but, oh, our human rose is fair
Surpassingly!

Applied to the speaker's marriage, the "lesson of our only visible friend" tells him to get a new string for his bow; it counsels that the values inherent in one love can die and can recur in another. The lesson is that one should

Lose calmly Love's great bliss,
When the renewed for ever of a kiss
Whirls: life within the shower of loosened hair!

The trouble with following such counsel is that it means equating with Nature's "dying rose" our "human rose," placing both on one value level, and effectively negating the surpassing fairness of the latter. But a basic part of the fairness of "our human rose"--a basic part of the integrity and tragedy of being human--turns out in Modern Love to lie in the fact that the speaker finds that he could not finally abandon the particular value context of his marriage and
could not finally find a "renewed for ever" in a new kiss. There is something to be said for human roses in that only they can have tragedies, and in Modern Love Meredith seems to have been quite aware of this.

There is clearly present in section XIII some concern for the idea of acceptance, an idea that begins to receive full development some twenty years later; but in Modern Love the humanistic implications of the portrayal of the differences between the ends of Nature and those of humanity suggest that the idea of acceptance was not at all well-integrated into a world view. This is a world view which in 1862 repeatedly made normative and qualitative distinctions between man and Nature—distinctions which were to have no acknowledged ontological basis in the world view of the poetry after 1883. Another example of such distinctions appears in section XXXII of Modern Love. At this point in the description of the speaker's relationship to his Lady (his mistress), in whom his interest was at least as spiritual as it was physical, he feels (mistakenly, as it turns out) that he has achieved genuine spiritual communion:

but when her mouth
(Can it kiss sweetly? sweetly!) would address
The inner me that thirsts for her no less,
And has so long been languishing in drouth,
I feel that I am matched; that I am man!(XXXII,147)

This heightened awareness of his humanity creates an awareness of an alienation in terms of value between himself and Nature that strikes a humanistic note:
One restless corner of my heart or head,
That holds a dying something never dead,
Still frets, though Nature giveth all she can. (XXXII, 147)

The world view of Modern Love, then, differs from that of the later poetry because it 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 reaction to change instead of one of joyful acceptance, and because it implies a basic normative difference between man and Nature. It is to a more specific consideration of the humanism and the pessimism in the world view of the middle period as they appear in Modern Love that this discussion now returns.

Humanism in "Modern Love." The humanistic bias of Modern Love is most explicit in the more reflective or philosophic sections of the poem. The first of these is section XIII already quoted (beginning "I play for Seasons"). It has been noted that the section calls to mind some basic distinctions of the humanist outlook. Man's time is linear and finite; Nature's is cyclical and infinite. Human values are transient; natural facts are recurrent. Man's ultimate aim is to preserve, sustain, and deepen his values; Nature requires finally the loss of value as a precondition of its recurrence. Nature's "lesson" applied to the speaker's human condition calls on him to find a "renewed forever" in a new love. The speaker is in fact later driven by frustration, pain, and despair to attempt to find "distraction" and
spiritual communion in just such a relationship (XXVII). The attempt is finally a failure for a number of reasons, one of which is intimated at the beginning of section XVI in the rejection of the "cure" of Nature's "lesson" as it applied to his marriage:

What soul would bargain for a cure that brings
Contempt the nobler agony to kill?
Rather let me bear on the bitter ill,
And strike this rusty bosom with new strings!
It seems there is another veering fit,
Since on a gold-haired lady's eyeballs pure
I looked with little prospect of a cure,
The while her mouth's red bow loosed shafts of wit.
Just heaven! can it be true that jealousy
Has decked the woman thus? and does her head
Swim somewhat for possessions forfeited?
Madam, you teach me many things that be.
I open an old book, and there I find
That 'Women still may love whom they deceive.'
Such love I prize not, madam: by your leave,
The game you play at is not to my mind.(XIV,139)

The wife's jealousy of the speaker's conversation with the "lady" (this is her first appearance in the poem; she reappears when the establishment of the liaison is described at XXVII) is incomprehensible to him. He had looked on the lady "with little prospect of a cure" for his soul's sickness because such a cure would mean he was affirming values expressed in terms of Nature's rose rather than in terms of "our human rose." That is, accepting the "cure" of nature's lesson of recurrence would be a way of invoking self-contempt "to kill" the "nobler agony" of trying to maintain human values in a hostile context. Nature's way was too easy: "Rather let me bear on the bitter ill," even though it will
mean "striking this rusty bosom with new strings." To say that the speaker rejects Nature's lesson of recurrence is not to say that he envisions human values as static. The husband finally realizes that the values of the marriage died partly because they were not deepened and made to grow and develop ("But they fed not on the advancing hours;/Their hearts held cravings for the buried day" [L,155]). A tension exists in Modern Love between the need to learn Nature's lesson of change and that to make the "nobler" endeavor of sustaining "our human rose." The problem of whether it is possible to do this in a context of natural recurrence is central to the poem.

The modified titanism implicit in the "nobler agony" phrase of section XIV is echoed in section XX:

I am not of those miserable males
Who sniff at vice and, daring not to snap,
Do therefore hope for heaven. I take the hap
Of all my deeds. The wind that fills my sails
Propels; but I am helmsman. Am I wrecked,
I know the devil has sufficient weight
To bear: I lay it not on him, or fate.
Besides, he's damned. That man I do suspect
A coward, who would burden the poor deuce
With what ensues from his own slipperiness. (XX,142)

It is worth remembering here that Modern Love shares certain qualities with the dramatic monologue and that the husband's claim to be the captain of his fate is often balanced elsewhere in the poem by a chastened view of his spiritual powers. But the lines do reflect a humanistic refusal to find some source external to man—either transcendent ("the
poor deuce" of whom he says "Besides, he's damned"—one of
the few funny lines in Modern Love or immanent ("the wind
that fills my sails")—of man's spiritual weal or woe.

In section XXIII the humanistic theme of the alienation
of man from nature is seen as complementary to the pessimis-
tic theme of the isolation of man from man:

'Tis Christmas weather, and a country house
Receives us: rooms are full: we can but get
An attic-crib. Such lovers will not fret
At that, it is half-said. The great carouse
Knocks hard upon the midnight's hollow door.
But when I knock at hers, I see the pit.
Why did I come here in that dullard fit?
I enter, and lie couched upon the floor.
Passing, I caught the coverlet's quick beat:—
Come, Shame, burn into my soul! and Pride, and Pain—
Foul demons that have tortured me, enchain!
Out in the freezing darkness the lambs bleat.
The small bird stiffens in the low starlight.
I know not how, but shuddering as I slept,
I dreamed a banished angel to me crept:
My feet were nourished on her breasts all night.
(XXIII,143)

The dramatic situation of this section is clear. The unfor-
tunate stranding of the "ever-diverse" pair in a room alone
together for an entire night occurs before the husband takes
his Lady as mistress, at a time when his anger, desire, dis-
gust, and frustration are at their highest points. The hus-
band suddenly sees the spiritual depths to which he can fall
by yielding to his purely sensual impulses, and yet this
realization does not relieve his sexual anguish or his spirit-
ual isolation—an isolation which is paralleled by the con-
trast between man's tortured burning and nature's freezing
darkness outside. The husband's dream provides a strange,
illusionary, and temporary resolution of his torment. The account of the resolution is a rather surrealistic balancing of the themes and images in terms of which the torment had been described. In the dream the husband is physically "nourished" (neither burned nor frozen) by the semi-sexual ministrations of a being that was neither angel, demon, or human. The nourishment was not apt to relieve spiritual sterility or sexual anguish, but it was one which avoided the perils of the pit: it was an unhappy compromise at best.

In a grim portrayal of the natural and spiritual environment of their relationship—in what he describes as a "sonnet" to his Lady's eyes—the husband gives a bitter, sardonic account of man's relation to nature which details further the alienation of human and natural ends:

What are we first? First, animals; and next Intelligences at a leap; on whom Pale lies the distant shadow of the tomb, And all that draweth on the tomb for text. Into which state comes Love, the crowning sun: Beneath whose light the shadow loses form. We are the lords of life, and life is warm. Intelligence and instinct now are one. But nature says: 'My children most they seem When they least know me: therefore I decree That they shall suffer.' Swift doth young Love flee, And we stand wakened, shivering from our dream. Then if we study Nature we are wise. Thus do the few who live but with the day: The scientific animals are they.—Lady, this is my sonnet to your eyes. (XXX, 146)

The last line suggests that the sonnet is an example of what the husband later called his "strange love-talk"(XXXIII, 148) to his Lady. It is strange love-talk because it is indicative of the husband's seeking intellectual and spiritual
communion as much as sexual release in the liaison. The sonnet describes men as intelligent, self-conscious beings aware of their roots in mature ("First, animals") and of the transience of their physical and spiritual values ("on whom/Pale lies the distant shadow of the tomb,/And all that draweth on the tomb for text"). It specifies further that man has a propensity for living in a dream in which men are seen to be harmoniously related to nature and to each other at all levels of instinct and intelligence and in which "Love"—rather vaguely symbolized by the "sun"—functions as a positive personal and social cohesive force which creates and sustains a natural and ethical monistic world. This world is one in which human values are realized and human finitude somehow ceases to be a cause for concern as the "shadow of the tomb" loses form beneath the light of "Love." The relations between nature and man in this dream are remarkably like those presented some twenty years later (when Meredith's poetic vision took ideas of natural beneficence much more seriously and literally) between man and Earth in the poem Earth and Man of 1883 in which it was of Earth:

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

Fair fountains of the dark
Daily she waves him, that his inner dream
May clasp amid the glooms a springing beam,
A quivering lark:
This life and her to know
For Spirit: with awakenedess of glee
To feel stern joy her origin: not he
The child of woe.(244)

Nature in section XXX of Modern Love, however, suddenly awakens man from the deep dream of such peace: nature decrees that her children shall suffer, and they "stand wakened," not to "glee," but "shivering from (their) dreams." Man is nature's child because he arose immanently in the natural order in the processes of evolution, but normatively he has evolved into a hostile environment, and his actual (and not dreaming) alienation from nature is effectively suggested in the image of nature's decree of human suffering and arousal of man to pain. The final lines of the sonnet are the speaker's ironic comment on what it means in the world of reality to be in harmony with nature: "Then if we study Nature we are wise./Thus do the few who live but with the day:/The scientific animals are they.--" The dream was false and man stands shivering in its absence. If man was "wise," he would learn to accept absolutely nature's decree of change as do the few "who live but with the day." And what are these? "The scientific animals are they:" not "intelligences;" and in the contrast of "they" of the last part of the sonnet with the "we" of the first part there is a hint that "they" are not quite fully human. "They" are those whose perfect alignment with nature and recurrence has made them rationally safe but spiritually poor. The ironic tone of the last part of the sonnet suggests that it is somehow
better to shiver humanly in a universe hostile to human values than to join the "scientific animals."

Modern Love's emphasis on the normative disparity of man and nature illustrates the philosophically humanistic bias which is one of the two major focuses of the world view of the middle period. Pessimism is the other major focus, and it too finds expression in Modern Love, partly as a reaction to the alienation of man and nature, but mostly as a reaction to isolation between people—an isolation depicted in the breakdown of the marriage. Pessimism has both rational and emotional dimensions. It is an emotional reaction to a rational appraisal of human experience. The term is a general one, but it can be used to refer to the reactions of frustration, regret, despair, cynicism, and anger that compose the mood and tone of Modern Love. The pessimism of the poem has bases in three of the poetic components of the work: its point of view, its theme of isolation, and its systems of imagery.

Pessimism and Point of View. Traditionally the point of view of Modern Love has been described as shifting between that of an omniscient narrator and that of the husband as protagonist of the poem. Trevelyan's notes to the poem in his 1912 edition of The Poetical Works of George Meredith probably did a great deal to establish and solidify this account of the point of view. In these notes he distinguishes between lines supposed to be spoken by "the poet" and those by "the husband." Trevelyan claimed a certain authority for
his notes in his "records and memories of conversations in former years with the poet himself," but there is no indication that his poet-husband division of the narration was Meredith's idea of the point of view of the poem. Most critical opinion after Trevelyan has followed his lead concerning point of view in Modern Love. Norman Friedman's account is fairly typical:

There is an omniscient narrator who speaks in I-IX and XLIX-L, and there is an occasional moment of actual dialogue (e.g., IX, XXV), but most of the poem (X-XLVIII) is spoken by the husband as both protagonist and commentator. Although he sometimes narrates directly and comments upon the action . . . most of the time he is shown responding privately, either just before or just after a scene, by means of interior monologues . . .

The poem certainly can be read as narration partly by omniscient narrator and partly by husband, but doing so creates at least two difficulties which are seldom critically considered. First, it means arguing either that the omniscient narrator sometimes speaks in the first person (as Friedman, according to the above quote, would have him do in III--although this is to say that the omniscient narrator affirms his desire for the unfaithful wife) or that there are some very sudden shifts in point of view in the poem--sometimes even in the middle of a line--as in sections III and IX (Trevelyan said that this was what happened in these two stanzas). The second difficulty is that the two-narrator interpretation tends to oversimplify important aspects of the complexity of mood and tone in the poem.
An unelaborated hint by Graham Hough suggests a more effective reading: "I have been betrayed into using the word dramatic about the poem, meaning that it is fully embodied in a fictional character who speaks in his own person." It seems to be more enlightening to see Modern Love as a narration, from a point in time considerably behind the events described, in both third and first person by one persona—the husband. There is no real reason to assume more than one narrator in Modern Love. There is nothing in the poem stated in the third person which would not have been available to the husband's consciousness (even the argument that omniscient third person narration is present would have to acknowledge that the content of the third person passages is systematically limited to things the husband could report, know, infer, see, or feel). The only sections of Modern Love that are pure third person narration are I, II, V, XLIX, and L. The rest are first person or a shifting mixture of first and third person narration. The mixing of first and third person narration in a single stanza provides an interesting structural or organizational parallel to the emotional complexity of the mood of the poem. It is not uncommon for a person who has to reveal a painful or degrading episode about himself to attempt to mitigate his disturbance by beginning such a story in third person, and lapsing unexpectedly into first person as he warms to the emotional intensity of his narration. Such a pattern appears in Modern Love. Meredith’s
persona begins behind a facade of third person objectivity in the first two sections which describe the alienation of the wedded pair from one another and the poisoned beauty of the unfaithful wife. This facade of objectivity breaks down in the middle of the third section:

This was the woman; what now of the man?  
But pass him. If he comes beneath a heel,  
He shall be crushed until he cannot feel,  
Or, being callous, haply till he can.  
But he is nothing:—nothing? Only mark  
The rich light striking out from her on him!  
Ha! what a sense it is when her eyes swim  
Across the man she singles, leaving dark  
All else! Lord God, who mad'st the thing so fair,  
See that I am drawn to her even now!(III,134)

The clash of desire with jealousy and disgust produces an emotional eruption in the first person. The speaker returns to calm, reflective third person narration in the fourth section, but this calm is repeatedly interrupted by passionate first person outbursts through section IX:

It chanced his lips did meet her forehead cool.  
She had no blush, but slanted down her eye.

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
The love is here; it has but changed its aim.  
O bitter barren woman! What's the name?  
Behold me striking the world's coward stroke!  

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
--Beneath the surface this, while by the fire  
They sat, she laughing at the quiet joke.(VI,136)

Yet it was plain she struggled, and that salt  
Of righteous feeling made her pitiful.  
Poor twisting worm, so queenly beautiful!  

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .  
I do not know myself without thee more:  
In this unholy battle I grow base:(VII,136-37)
He felt the wild beast in him betweenwhiles
So masterfully rude, that he would grieve
To see the helpless delicate thing receive
His guardianship through certain dark defiles.
Had he not teeth to rend, and hunger too?

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Here thy shape
To squeeze like an intoxicating grape—
I might, and yet thou goest safe, supreme. (IX, 137)

Throughout the emotionally exhausting middle section of the poem the husband continues in the first person, and only after violent emotional purging is he able to return to third person objectivity in the last two sections, which describe the wife's death and the speaker's final comments on the marriage. The resumption of the third person, along with its attendant calmness, is appropriate to the thematic emphasis of the final stanza. The point of view utilized in the poem is particularly effective in conveying the pessimistic reaction to isolation for two reasons. First, the use of a single persona—the husband—to begin and end the poem in the calm objectivity of the third person provides a kind of unifying mood of despairing isolatedness to the poem. Second, the husband's movement from relatively dispassionate third person narration to emotionally violent and painful first person, returning to grimly reflective third person for the ending provides a convincingly similar structural parallel to an actual experience of recounting an emotional disaster by a speaker who is not without responsibility for it.

Pessimism and the Theme of Isolation. Pessimism in Modern Love has its most explicit statement in the theme of isolation found primarily in sections dealing with the progressive
disintegration of the marriage. The narrative form of the poem reflects a series of unsuccessful attempts to overcome the isolation imposed on the wedded couple by their long-standing spiritual incompatibility and by the wife's adultery. Isolation appears in the poem as an almost inevitable part of the human condition, and not much prospect of man's evading it is envisioned. After an initial account of the estranged and fragmented marriage and the wife's infidelity (I-IX), the husband gives a rather superficial and one-sided account of the early causes of the breakdown (X); this is followed by the husband's failing attempt to overcome his pride, reconcile himself to his wife, and forgive her (XI-XXVI). Sections XXVII-XL describe the husband's unsuccessful attempt to find communion with a blonde-haired mistress. Throughout these last two sections, the husband has become increasingly aware of the egoism, pride, and vanity in his own character that have contributed to the disintegration of his marriage, and although he comes to recognize the mixed nature of the character-based causes for it, the attempted reconciliation on first a physical (XLI-XLIII) and then a spiritual (XLIV-XLIX) basis fails finally because of a fatal lack of communication and understanding—a lack which leads to the wife's suicide. The concluding section (L) sums up the effects of their isolated state and is suggestive of its inevitability.

Certain events in these doomed attempts to overcome isolation are especially illustrative of the pervasive
pessimism of Modern Love. The husband's first analysis of the causes of the failure of the marriage (X, 137) is a somewhat general and external approach to the problem. The basic cause is said to be an early spiritual incompatibility. The husband says that he "plotted to be worthy of the world" and "dreamt of loyal life"—that he sought to live according to the laws of "hard life," not according to the "moods" of romantic love. This was not, he says, his wife's early goal:

Oh, had I with my darling helped to mince
The facts of life, you still had seen me go
With hindward feather and with forward toe,
Her much-adored delightful Fairy Prince!(X, 137)

Had he been able to be her kind of man and live thus superficially, the disaster would have been avoided. It soon becomes apparent that this self-justifying explanation is not completely adequate.

The section of the poem (XI-XXVI) describing the husband's early futile attempt to reconcile himself with his wife and forgive her show him falling into a state of extreme despondency unmodified or mitigated (as are his final judgments) by an awareness of his own faults or by significant insights into the causes of the failure:

No state is enviable. To the luck alone
Of some few favoured men I would put claim,
I bleed, but her who woul'd I will not blame.
Have I not felt her heart as "twere my own
Beat thro' me? could I hurt her? heaven and hell!
But I could hurt her cruelly! Can I let
My Love's old time-piece to another set,
Swear it can't stop, and must for ever swell?
Sure, that's one way Love drifts into the mart
Where goat-legged buyers throng. I see not plain:--
My meaning is, it must not be again.
Great God! the maddest gambler throws his heart.
If any state be enviable on earth,
'Tis yon born idiot's, who, as days go by,
Still rubs his hands before him, like a fly,
In a queer sort of meditative mirth. (XIX, 141)

The husband rages at his wife in his frustration and despair
at her having created a delimma from which he sees no escape.
He has earlier said that "filthiness of body is most vile,/
But faithlessness of heart I do hold worse" (VII, 136), and
he fears that the dilemma is pushing him toward both. The
wife's infidelity has created a situation with which he cannot live and has also made it impossible for him to establish a new love which he could believe to be eternally and infinitely increasing. The husband at this point has not realized that the failure of the marriage is due in large part to its being based on just such a falsely sentimental conception of love. At this point, however, he does not know the conception to be false, and he correctly estimates that starting a new relation (with a mistress) on a basis of an affirmation of conditions in which he could not believe would be a "faithlessness of heart" which could lead to a cycle of purely physical liaisons: "Sure, that's one way Love drifts into the mart/Where goat-legged buyers throng."
The gamble simple is not worth it: "it must not be again."
The husband's pessimism finds its most despairing expression as he concludes that if the human condition actually forces such alternatives on him, it would be better to be out of it and into the non-cognizant, non-human, insect-like "queer
meditative mirth" of the idiot. The husband is isolated not only from his wife and, because of her, from other women; he is held apart by his very humanity from the idiot's mindless animal peace.

Partly out of a desperate need for distraction from the wife's sustained adultery and partly for revenge, but mostly in an attempt to find spiritual communion with another person, the husband establishes (XXVII-XL) what turns out to be a temporary liaison with "My Lady." The speaker is seeking spiritual fullfilment at least as much as (if not more than) sexual release. He wants the Lady's mouth--"Can it kiss sweetly? sweetly!"--to address "the inner me that thirsts for her no less/And has so long been languishing in the drouth" (XXXII,147) as well as his sensuality. But the attempt is doomed from the start. The husband soon begins to realize the fact of his crippled spirit:

Am I failing? For no longer can I cast
A glory round about this head of gold.
Glory she wears, but springing from the mould;
Not like the consecration of the Past!

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,146)

The husband is like the speaker of I Chafe at Darkness (1862)
in whom

something clipped of wing
Within its ring
Frets; for I have lost what made
The dawn-breeze magic, and the twilight beam
A hand with tidings o'er the glade
Waving seem.(181)

But he determines to try to salvage what little he can from his relationship with his Lady:

But, as you will! We'll sit contentedly
And eat our pot of honey on the grave.(XXIX,146)

But it will not work. He finds that regardless of the beauty, common sense, and wit of the Lady—and regardless of my Lady's ("the bride of every sense") yielding "in her noblest mood" (XXXIX,150), he is spiritually unable to make a commitment. At the very moment when he thinks that he and the Lady have achieved significant spiritual union ("I feel thy song, my fairest friend!/True harmony within can apprehend/Dumb harmony without" [XXXIX,150]), he sees his wife walking hand-in-hand with her lover. He suddenly realizes that

Helplessly afloat,
I know not what I do, whereto I strive.
The dread that my old love may be alive
Has seized my nursling new love the the throat.(XL,151)

The last part of the poem (XLI-XLIX) describes how the husband and wife make a final attempt to save the marriage, but this effort to overcome their isolation is doomed too:

We two have taken up a lifeless vow
To rob a living passion: dust for fire!(XLI,151)

Everything they try in this reconciliation fails to bring them together. They go through the motions of "fresh nuptials," but sex fails to reconcile them:
If I the death of Love had deeply planned,
I never could have made it half so sure,
As by the unblest kisses which upbraid
The full-waked sense; or failing that, degrade!

(XLII,152)

A purely physical relationship with no spiritual reference is still "filthiness of body" and "faithlessness of heart."
Next, the husband tries to establish a relation to his wife based on pity for her sin and her travails, but the wife rejects this absolutely. "It is," as the husband had said (XXXV,148), "no vulgar nature" he had wived:

She sees through simulation to the bone:
What's best in her impels her to the worst:
Never, she cries, shall Pity soothe Love's thirst,
Or foul hypocrisy for truth alone!(XLIV,153)

The final failing attempt to establish some kind of communion is initiated by the husband in an effort at absolute honesty and candor. The husband mistakenly thinks that they both have become so reconciled--or at least accustomed--to their sexual drouth and their desert communion that their spirits have begun to transcend these privations; he thinks that in perfect honesty and openness they can come together again on a new plane. The husband makes this mistake on one calm summer evening when "in the largeness of the evening earth/
Our spirits grew as we went side by side." (XLVII,154). They told each other everything of their respective liaisons:

I looked for peace, and thought it near.
Our inmost hearts had opened each to each.
We drank the pure daylight of honest speech.(XLVIII,154)
The husband soon realized the seriousness of his mistaken judgment:

Alas! that was the fatal draught, I fear.
For when of my lost Lady came the word,
This woman, O this agony of flesh!
Jealous devotion bade her break the mesh,
That I might seek that other like a bird. (XLVIII, 154)

The wife has not understood that the husband's spirit has "grown" and she mistakenly thinks that he still wants his Lady. A true sentimentalist to the end, she throws her life away in futile and false heroics, unnecessarily attempting to free her husband for his lover. It is a final ironic comment on the total isolation of these two that after all the emotional purgation that led up to the attempt at total honesty, their intellectual and spiritual separation was still so complete that it led to the ultimate separation of death.

The husband finds no one to blame for the isolation that ended so devastatingly:

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, 152)

No individual can be blamed because the tragic isolation springs from within the human condition— from "what is false within." A deep awareness of what it means for there to be falseness within is the foundation of the pessimism of Modern Love. While no one can be blamed, the ways in which the falseness within manifested itself in the disintegrating
marriage can be described, as the speaker does in the final section, which functions to unify the isolation and pessimism basic to the theme and mood of the poem as a close reading will show.

Thus piteously Love closed what he begat:
The union of this ever-diverse pair!
These two were rapid falcons in a snare,
Condemned to do the flitting of the bat.
Lovers beneath the singing 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.
Then each applied to each that fatal knife,
Deep questioning, which probes to endless dole.
Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
When hot for certainties in this our life!--
In tragic hints here see what evermore
Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,
Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,
To throw that faint thin line upon the shore!(L,155)

Critics have interpreted this section of Modern Love with greater variety than they have any other. Recent major criticism has been divided: one group of critics, Lionel Stevenson in 1953, Norman Friedman in 1957, and Norman Kelvin in 1961, has seen the ending of the poem as a qualifiedly optimistic prescription of how to avoid the suffering described in the body of the work. C. Day Lewis (in 1947, 1948, and 1954) described the ending in more pessimistic terms; he sees the last section as an account of man's fragile human relationships in a context of hostile forces which man only dimly understands. The reading of the last section in this study is closer to that of Day Lewis, but the more optimistic reading (and objections to it) needs to be described. Stevenson's understanding of the "wider application" of the
conclusion is that "unless there can be a fuller development of intelligence and mastery over the senses, Meredith believed, society is doomed to endless repetition of this needless tragedy." Kelvin's reading is close to that of Friedman; Kelvin sees the "faint thin line" that appears on the shore as a positive sign that those who battle successfully to "balance blood, brain, and spirit" can find peace and happiness in this life; he says that when we return to the fact that the poem is about the failure of a marriage, we see that the reason for the failure is that the husband and wife have not battled their way to the "shore." Still caught up in a conflict within themselves, they have turned their "dark" passions outward upon each other . . . and have approached each other as barbarian aggressors. 

Norman Friedman, whose argument that the key ideas informing Modern Love were those expressed in poems published in 1883 has already been discussed, remarks in his detailed study of the imagery of the poem that it "seems to represent Meredith's symbolic descent without much indication of an upward turn or rebirth." Friedman does believe, however, that there are hints in Modern Love of such an upward turn, and he does describe the conclusion of the poem in optimistic terms as a hint that man does have a significant chance to avoid the interpersonal disaster the poem describes. Friedman feels that the "faint thin line" that is thrown upon the shore represents the possible results of fighting one's way through blood to brain and spirit. Friedman finds support
for this limited optimism in a poem published exactly thirty
years after *Modern Love*. *Ode to Youth in Memory* (1892) has
contain "a similar cluster of images" to those of the last
lines of section L. Friedman cites these lines:

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a ditty thin
As note of hedgrow bird in ear of eve,
Or wave at ebb, the shallow catching rays
On a transparent sheet, where curves a glass
To truer heavens than when the breaker neighs
Loud at the plunge for bubbly wreck in roar.
Solidity and bulk and martial brass,
Once tyrants of the senses, faintly score
A mark on pebbled sand or fluid slime
While present in the spirit, vital there,
Are things that seemed the phantoms of their time;
Eternal as the recurrent cloud, as air
Imperative, refreshful as dawn-dew.(407)
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Friedman correctly interprets the faintly scored mark on the
pebbled sand as a symbol of an achieved harmony of blood,
brain, and spirit:

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The crash and roar of the ramping waves of youth-
ful experience upon the shore of the heart repre-
sent the suffering and turmoil of fighting one's
way through Blood (the senses) to Brain and Spirit
(which appeared as phantoms to youth).47
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This is another example of the use of part of the poetic world
view of Meredith's later poetry to explain something in a much
earlier poem. In 1892 the poetic world view was strenuously
oriented around concepts of the beneficence of Earth and op-
timism at the prospect of man's acceptance of it. It is not
surprising that Meredith should use an image similar to the
"faint thin line" in an optimistic context in 1892. But this
does not mean that he used the image optimistically thirty
years earlier. As a matter of fact, Meredith had repeated a
a very similar image in the *Modern Love* volume of 1863 in
a negative context in the alba-like lament By Morning Twilight:

Night, like a dying mother,
Eyes her young offspring, Day,
The birds are dreamily piping.
And 0, my love, my darling!
The night is life ebb'd away:

Away beyond our reach!
A sea that has cast us pale on the beach;
Weeds with the weeds and the pebbles
That hear the lone tamarisk rooted in sand
Sway
With the song of the sea to the land.(169-70)

Here night is linked to life and the sea; and the lover in the dawn, bereft of his sweetheart's company, is compared to weeds left on the beach by an ebbing tide. For whatever it is worth as evidence—and it probably is not worth very much—By Morning Twilight suggests that the image of trash or marks left on a beach by a retreating tide was used in 1862 more as a negative, pessimistic, or gloomy image than as a positive one. The point being made is that is is no more justifiable to use a poem published thirty years later to explain the relations of image, tone, and theme in section L than it was to use poems published twenty years later to try to establish the "key moral ideas informing" Modern Love as a whole. Such procedure would be justifiable only if it were clearly demonstrated that the world view of the poetry was completely homogeneous from 1862 to 1892. In the studies just discussed, the procedure rests on assumption and not on demonstration.48 Finally, it cannot be shown that the image
of residue left on a beach by waves or tides is a consistently positive one even in the later poetry. In *A Faith on Trial* (1888) the speaker's feeling of aimless, painful spiritual isolation at the impending death of his wife is portrayed in just such an image. The italics are mine:

I walked to observe, not to feel,
Not to fancy, if simple of eye
One may be among images reaped
For a shift of the glance, as grain:
Profitless froth you espy
Ashore after billows have leaped.
I fled nothing, nothing pursued:
The changeful visible face
Of our Mother I sought for my food;
Crumbs by the way to sustain,
Her sentence I know past grace.
Myself I had lost of us twain,
Once bound in mirroring thought. (349-50)

C. Day Lewis's comments on the qualified pessimism of the conclusion do not seek justification so far afield. He sees section I more as descriptive of the causes of the agony. These "causes" are described in the conclusion as three: an incompatibility of temperament ("the union of this ever-diverse pair"), the error of not recognizing that human relationships must grow and cannot remain static ("They fed not on the advancing hours"), and the excessive use of the "fatal knife" of intellectual analyzing and probing of the marriage—the failure to realize, as Day Lewis remarks, that "self-conscious analysis, 'that fatal knife, Deep questioning,' cuts both ways and is a terribly risky instrument to use upon the living tissue of a relationship so rooted in instinct." 49 These three factors contributed to the "deepest cause of the
agony," the "demoralizing, paralysing effect of a bond created, and then abandoned by love." Day Lewis objected to the distracting quality of the "simile within the simile" of the last two lines of the last section, but his explanation of them indicates the qualified pessimism he sees there:

What is it that 'evermore moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force'? Is it death? Is it the truth which the poet has just declared to be so elusive for the soul 'hot for certainties in this our life'? Is it not something that subsumes both—the circumambient Unknown whose volume of mystery presses upon the mortal heart and breaking there, leaves only a 'faint thin line' of experience by which its force may be felt, its nature dimly understood?

That such dark, eternal, and hostile forces should have the painfully negligible result of only dim understanding signifies the pessimism which is important to Modern Love as a whole and especially to the ending.

Remembering the husband's refusal to judge—"I see no sin"—and the reason for it ("We are betrayed by what is false within") makes it difficult to see section L as offering any other than a pessimistic estimate of the chances that the kind of agony of Modern Love can be avoided. The three factors presented in L that led to the disaster originated either in what was "false within" or in external forces of time, chance, and circumstance, and over neither of these types of forces is significant human control suggested. The main emphasis of Modern Love seems to be more descriptive
than normative or prescriptive. Section I makes no suggestion that the couple was able to make any positive contributions toward sustaining their relationship; they and their union are initially pictured as acted upon: they are "condemned" by the "snare" of circumstance and their own internal emotional composition. As lovers, "they wandered once; clear as the dew on flowers"--a substance totally at the mercy of external forces and one of which the transience is inevitable. Something false within moved their hearts to hold "cravings for the buried day" and to probe the marriage "to endless dole" or grief in an impossible quest for certainty. Could they have done otherwise and can their agony be a meaningful exemplum to others? The last four lines offer little prospect of an affirmative answer:

In tragic hints here see what evermore
Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,
Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,
To throw that faint thin line upon the shore!

An adequate interpretation of these lines demands a careful understanding of the rhetoric of the passage and of the literal referent of the "faint thin line" of the basic image. The passage is a "tragic hint" about the human condition, and if tragedy is thought of as a doomed struggle to affirm human values--a struggle with an attendant sense of an agonizing waste of the protagonist's potential which cannot be realized, the pessimistic implications of the passage are intimated early by the phrase. The rhetoric of the passage must be
clear; we are invited to see what moves to throw the line on the shore. What it is that does the moving was called by Day Lewis the "circumambient Unknown"—probably as good a phrase as any for that combination of environment, heredity, chance, circumstance, and instinct which moves man from within and without. How this force (or set of forces) moves is expressed by two adverbial modifiers: it moves with a "force" like that of the "midnight ocean"—a force which must remain finally inscrutable to man. The power with which this combination of internal and external forces moves is more than eternal and inscrutable, it is also hostile, "like ramping hosts of warrior horse." The effect of this inscrutable, eternal, and hostile movement is to "throw that faint thin line upon the shore." This central image makes use of the temporary mark and insignificant line of spume, foam, and small bits of trash that are left behind as a wave recedes from its farthest point of encroachment upon a beach. Such a "line" represents the minor, transient, essentially valueless results available to the human understanding of the forces that shape human life to such a great degree. "Our human rose" may be "fair surpassingly," but it is also somehow "false within" and largely under the power of inimical forces without; it has little chance to bloom in the world of Modern Love.

Pessimism and Imagery. The most extensive study of the imagery of Modern Love has been made by Norman Friedman in 1957. His paper is a detailed analysis of the links among
the components of what he sees as six systems of images: sentimentalism is expressed in "time-torpor-game-sun-wing" imagery, "the husband's disillusionment" in "murder-knife-wound-blood" imagery, sensualism in "snare-bat-cage-pit-beast" imagery, the "whole poem shrouded" in "midnight-tomb-ghost-skeleton-grave-shadow" imagery, the view of the wife in "snake-venom-poison" imagery, and the husband's final wisdom in "music-wave-horse-mark-on-shore" imagery. Other recent and briefer studies of the imagery of Modern Love are those by Elizabeth Cox Wright and Norman Kelvin. The purpose here is not to criticize these studies; it is to supplement them by showing how Modern Love makes special use of certain images and symbols drawn from the natural landscape to present the pessimism basic to the mood of the poem. Modern Love is not finally a "nature" poem in the sense that others--like Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn and In the Woods--are; still elements of symbolic landscape, which figure more heavily in other poems, do function to develop the poem's pessimism and sense of alienation. With the exception of Friedman's discussion of the sun, elements of symbolic landscape in Modern Love have received almost no critical attention. This landscape is important in the poem because it indicates something about the relation of Modern Love to earlier and later works; it is also a means of reflecting in the poem the humanism and the pessimism of the world view of Meredith's middle period.
The Mountain. The mountain appears only once, early in the poem. In section IV the husband describes how his desolation of spirit has rendered it impossible for him to "warm" or "magnify" any "other joys of life;" neither does he find any consolation in philosophy:

Cold as a mountain in its star pitched tent,  
Stood high Philosophy, less friend than foe.  
(IV,134-35)

The mountain in Meredith's poetry is usually a habitat for sage characters and (temporarily) for those receiving their instructions. It is a place for gaining renewed spiritual insight and a place for rejuvenating appreciation for spiritual values—as it was in By the Rosanna (1861) and was to be in many later poems. The husband in Modern Love, however, sees himself as specifically alienated from the mountain. The spiritual insight or "high Philosophy" with which the mountain is expectedly linked is envisioned in inimical terms—the frigid and distant ("in its star-pitched tent") qualities of the mountain are stressed. The description of philosophy as foe is an ironic comment on the husband's inability to gain perspective on his progressively failing marriage and anticipates the minimal effectiveness of the insights he finally achieves on it.

The Sun and Star. The sun in Meredith's symbolic landscape often functions very simply as a strong force or power which inspires or constitutes growth in something else. Norman Friedman overstates his case about the infernal function of Meredith's sun symbol: "Normally a paradisal symbol of
the Ideal (cf. its use in Dante's *Paradiso*), the sun in Meredith's poetry serves nevertheless infernally as a vehicle of excessive idealism. The fact is that the sun in Meredith's poetry is at least as often a positive symbol constitutive of good as it is an infernal one. Friedman does correctly note the use of the sun infernally in certain metaphors in late poems. In *Ode to the Comic Spirit* (1892) egoism is called "our slavish self's infernal sun" (396) and in *The Empty Purse* (1892) a demagogue is described as to his followers "the sun of their system a father of flies!" (447). Sometimes, however, the sun functions as a kind of ideal principle of order or law standing above Earth and in positive relation to Her. The sun is called Earth's "lord" (182) in *The Star Sirius* (1883), and *Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn* (1862) had mentioned in a very positive context "the light that is above her" (585). The positive symbolic relation of the sun to earth and to man in *Pastoral VI* (1851) has already been discussed in Chapter II, and *Pastoral IV* (1851) has the speaker, "as a tree whose wintry twigs/Drink in the sun with fibrous joy," waking "unto the dawn" and "leaving" his griefs "to drowse." (51). And the sun is not always infernal in the later poems. In *The Lark Ascending* (1881) the lark's song is compared to the positive reaction of earth "at sight of sun" as the lark sends up "the spiral stair,/ a song of light" (221). In *The Day of the Daughter of Hades* (1883) the daughter, who represents the proper attitude of man to Earth and life "in sunlight craved to bask" (213) and she sings a song "of the glory of Light" (214).
The sun symbol functions both infernally and positively in Modern Love, and both functions reflect the failure of the characters to achieve significant communion with one another. The husband speaks of himself in terms of an infernal sun symbol as "the God of such a grand sunflower" as his Lady—a God who feels "the promptings of Satanic power, / While you do homage unto me alone" (XXVII,145). A positive function of the sun symbol appears in section X, in which the sun's light symbolizes the necessary environment for the husband's urge toward "loyal Life;" but Love's "deep woods"—"Love's jealous woods" curl "about the sun" and block its light from the husband. The lines

Love's jealous woods about the sun are curled; 
At least, the sun far brighter there did beam(X,137)

suggest that the shadows created by the trees of Love curled about and limited the sunlight getting through to the forest floor, the contrast of shadow and sun accounting for the sun's seeming brighter shining there.

The star symbol in Modern Love receives a negative modification which enables it to suggest the pessimism of the poem. Most of Meredith's stars represent some kind of ideal goal toward which man should strive. The speaker of The Star Sirius (1883) calls on the star:

Be thou my star, and thou in me be seen 
To show what source divine is, and prevails. (182)
In *Sorrows and Joys*, a somewhat obscure poem published in 1850, stars are held to be symbols of lessons to be learned from one's past sorrows: "Bury thy sorrows, and they shall rise/As souls to the immortal skies,/And there look down like mother's eyes." Through the stars man is said to be "wedded to the skies,/And watched by ever-loving eyes,/And warned by yearning sympathies" (56-57). *Meditation under Stars* (1888) speaks of the stars as "sisters" to Earth, sisters that have in them "the fire... whereof we are born" (366). *Modern Love*, however, reveals its place in Meredith's more humanistic and pessimistic middle period in its treatment of the star symbol. Here stars represent either an impossible or a corrupted ideal. As impossible ideals they formed the "tent" of the mountain of "high Philosophy," which was said to be "less friend than foe" in section IV. Stars represent spoiled, fallen, or infernalized ideals in other sections. The wife is called a "star with lurid beams" that "seemed to crown/The pit of infamy" in section II (134); at another point a lock of hair that recalls to him one of the husband's past indiscretions is said to be "like some aged star" that "gleam(s) luridly" (XX, 142).

**The Sea.** The ocean symbol and images related to it do more to depict the pessimism of *Modern Love* than any other item of the symbolic landscape. In this landscape the sea is an area of restless, directionless movement. It is associated with wasted potential, sterility, and frustration.
In a number of poems after 1862 the negative use of the sea symbol is apparent. The hun's scourging of the earth in *The Nuptials of Attila* (1879) is described in images of desert and sea: "Beneath his foot/Leagues are deserts charred and mute;/Where he passed, there passed a sea"(291). The sonnet *My Theme* says that a "love of Earth" results in an "uplifting" of the soul in spite of the opposition of "ruinous floods"(189). *Ode to Youth in Memory* (1892) affirms that the good life must have direction and must be "more than empty echo of a call,/Or shadow of a shade, or swing of tides"(408). An 1888 poem, *Hard Weather*, describes sensuality sought for its own sake as "a barren" sea and as "tides" whose "flow deludes, whose ebb derides"(319). In *The Sage Enamoured and the Honest Lady* (1892) the person who adequately reconciles sense to spirit feels a "spur/For fruitfullest advancement" and seeks to "Help to the steering of our social ark/Over the barbarous waters"(390). The same poem implies that the proper relation of man and woman is like that of the earth and sun and quite unlike those of ocean waves: "Then shall those noblest of earth and sun/Inmix unlike to waves on savage sea"(390).

*Modern Love* was the first of Meredith's poems in which this negative potential of the sea symbol and related images began to be realized (its necessarily inimical quality in *The Shipwreck of Idomeneus* [1851] should be overlooked). The only partially positive sea symbol in *Modern Love* appears in section XXIX in which the husband describes his burned out emotional capacity: "a kiss is but a kiss
now! And no wave/Of a great flood that whirls me to the
sea"(XXIX, 146). But even when a kiss had this power,
it was one based in a sensual emotionalism which overwhelmed,
momentarily, the speaker's rationality, and doing so, it
could not be entirely good. Most of the sea symbols and
images in the poem are less equivocal. On two occasions
the lost joy of the past is described in terms of shipwreck.
In XVI the husband recalls "our old shipwrecked days"(140)
of happy youth, and when he tries to find consolation in "all other joys of
life" that had availed before, he finds that "they had
suffered shipwreck with the ship,/And gazed upon him sallow
from the storm"(IV, 134). After the husband's sight of
his wife and her lover (XXXIX) had destroyed the chance
he thought he had at communion with his Lady, his renewed
isolation is described in terms of an eternally restless
stormy sea:

Terrible Love, I ween,
Has might, even dead, half sighing to upheave
The lightless seas of selfishness amain:
Seas that in a man's heart have no rain to:
To fall and still them. (XL, 150-51)

The husband's attempt at spiritual fulfilment with the
lady is blocked by the egoism, jealousy, and "selfishness"
that the sight of the adulterers called up. These things
that were "false within" the husband are imaged in eternally
troubled, "lightless" seas which are more than man can con-
trol: he finds that "helplessly afloat, I know not what
I do, Wkereto I strive" (XL, 151). Earlier, before the husband's attempt to find communion with his Lady, he had described the absolute alienation between himself and his wife ("She will not speak. I will not ask") as: "We are/League-sundered by the silent gulf between" (XXII, 143), a phrase recalling the absolute severing function of Arnold's "unplum'd, salt, estranging sea." The darkest, most desponding use of the sea symbol to suggest spiritual fragmentation and despair appears at section XLIII, the description of the morning after the attempt at "fresh nuptials":

Mark where the pressing wind shoots javelin-like
Its skeleton shadow on the broad-backed wave!
Here is a fitting spot to dig Love's grave;
Here where the ponderous breakers plunge and strike,
And dart their hissing tongues high up the sand:
In hearing of the ocean, and in sight
Of those ribbed wind-streaks running into white. (XLIII, 152)

The purely physical coupling and the "unblest kisses" without the sanction of spiritual communion have led the husband toward the idea that "filthiness of body" and "faithlessness of heart" are inevitable parts of the human condition, that they are parts of "what is false within" that betrays man's better efforts. The despair, anguish, and frustration attending this idea are forcefully presented in the images that describe the "fitting spot to dig Love's
grave" by the symbolic sea. This seascape draws on connotations of loss and pain which have been suggested by earlier uses of the symbol. The death-like sterility of the situation is marked by the "skeleton shadow" of the wind on the wave; and the husband's as yet unresolved hostility at his spiritual "degrading" is paralleled by the hostility of the environment in which the ocean sends "hissing tongues high up the sand" (the "hissing tongues" are a link to the recurrent snake imagery of the poem—in I, VII, VIII, XXVI, XXXII, XXXIII, and XXXIV—which Norman Friedman describes so extensively and which is an important means of presenting the betrayed, devious, and poisoned nature of the marriage58). The idea of Love's grave beside the sea is a tragically ironic anticipation of the wife's death beside the sea (XLIX) and of the pitifully minimal increase of understanding represented by the "faint thin line"(L). The linking of the basic realization of the poem,

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,152)

with this particular location is an important example of how symbolic landscape functions in Meredith's poetry to present ideas and emotions basic to his world view.

Modern Love is the major poetic embodiment of the
humanistic and pessimistic bias of the world view of the middle period. How this world view found expression in other poems of this transition period and how it moves in the direction of the mature naturalism is the subject of the next chapter.
Notes to Chapter III

1 Kelvin, p. 32.

2 Basil Willey, More Nineteenth Century Studies: A Group of Honest Doubters (New York, 1956), p. 277. Willey recalls Meredith's relationship with John Morley, publisher of The Fortnightly Review at this time, and says that "that Review aimed as Morley says, (Willey is quoting Morley's Recollections, I (New York, 1917), p. 105) at 'the diffusion and encouragement of rationalistic standards in things spiritual and temporal alike.' Its unity 'was in fact the spirit of liberalism in its most many-sided sense.' Many-sided indeed, for it numbered amongst its contributors at this time Arnold, Swinburne, Meredith, D. G. Rossetti, Bagehot, Huxley, Pater, Lewes, Harrison, Dicey, Leslie Stephen, Tyndall, W. K. Clifford, Trollope, Mark Pattison, and F. W. H. Myers—to mention only some of the best known."

3 Darwin, p. 194.

4 Trevelyan, Poetry and Philosophy, p. 228.

5 Darwin, pp. 194–95.


8 In Trevelyan's edition of The Poetical Works. There may be twenty stanzas here. Trevelyan's marking of stanza divisions left much to be desired. It is impossible to tell, for example, whether there is a stanza division between the bottom of page 176 and the top of page 177. In 1906 in The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith, Trevelyan had reprinted Meredith's revision of the poem (from which 45 lines comprising three stanzas were omitted) in twenty stanzas. Graham Hough, in his 1962 edition of selected poems, apparently followed Trevelyan's stanza division of The Poetical Works. The original version of the poem—in Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside, with Poems and Ballads (London, 1862), pp. 190–204—was divided into 24 stanzas.

9 Trevelyan's note to the earlier poem in The Poetical Works makes this suggestion (p. 579).

10 As late as 1879, Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn remained the primary published expression of many themes and ideas—such as that of the joyful acceptance of the
transience of human value experiences in the natural cycle—that were to become basic in Meredith's mature naturalism, although in Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn, as this study indicates, these themes and ideas were not unmixed with others. There is no reason to assume that any of the poems which are usually considered the first poetically consistent expressions of this naturalism—poems like The Woods of Westermain, Earth and Man, and The Day of the Daughter of Hades (all of the 1883 volume)—were written much before 1881 or 1882. Between the Modern Love volume of 1862 and Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of the Earth of 1883, Meredith published a number of important poems in periodicals such as Macmillan's Magazine and The Fortnightly Review. Some of the more important of these poems are The Orchard and the Heath (1868), In the Woods (1870), A Ballad of Past Meridian (1876), Love In the Valley (second version, 1876), and The Lark Ascending (1881). In view of the close relationship Meredith had with the editorial staff of The Fortnightly Review between 1862 and 1882 (see note 2 above and Lionel Stevenson's The Ordeal of George Meredith (pp. 166, 171, and passim), which points out that Meredith was actually acting editor of The Fortnightly Review in Morley's absence in 1867), he probably would have published poems like The Woods of Westermain, Earth and Man, and The Day of the Daughter of Hades in magazines if they had been composed much before 1882. There is no reason to imply, as Stevenson does in Darwin among the Poets, that the composition of these particular poems was spread out over the dozen years following 1871: "By 1871 he had definitely determined to make poetry the vehicle for his theory of man and nature... accordingly, during the next dozen years he wrote the poems which gave specific form to his philosophy, notably The Woods of Westermain, Earth and Man, and a number of sonnets, the group being collected in 1883 as Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of the Earth"(p. 195).

11Trevelyan, Poetry and Philosophy, p. 121.

12Beach, p. 477.

13Sassoon, p. 170.

14Stevenson, Darwin, p. 220.

15Bibliography and Various Readings, pp. 309-369, and passim.


17Trevelyan, Poetical Works, pp. 585-586.

18Bibliography and Various Readings, pp. 335-337, and passim; M. B. Forman, Meredithiana (Edinburgh, 1924), pp. 2-8.
19Morley, Recollections, I, p. 38.
20Morley, p. 39.
21Dejection: An Ode, 11. 39-44.
22Stevenson, Ordeal, p. 103.
25Day Lewis, p. viii.
26Graham Hough discusses the difference between Modern Love and the traditional sonnet sequence in some detail in his introduction to his edition of The Selected Poems, pp. 8-9.
27As this chapter indicates, I believe there is just one speaker in Modern Love.
28In references to Modern Love, section numbers are included.
29E. K. Chambers, "Meredith's Modern Love," A Sheaf of Studies (London, 1942), p. 82. This essay was originally published in 1897.
30Stevenson, Ordeal, p. 104.
31Day Lewis, p. xiv.
32Day Lewis, p. xix.
33Kelvin, p. 28. See also note 54 below.
36Friedman, p. 12. See also Stevenson, Darwin, pp. 194-195; Ordeal, pp. 104-106.
37If the argument is raised against this reading that Section IV represents only the limited wisdom of the husband-speaker as it is reflected early in the poem and therefore is not acceptable evidence of the world view of the poem as a whole, there are two answers: 1) The objection presupposed that Modern Love can be read strictly as a dramatic monologue—a presupposition I accept—and if this
is so, then the speaker begins the monologue from a va-
tage point behind the events of the poem in time. There-
fore the comments of IV represent something of his resultant
wisdom from the experience and can be seen as part of the
world view; 2) even if we assume (overlooking many diffi-
culties) that the speaker could know something at the end of
the poem he didn't know at the beginning, it turns out that
his judgment in XLVII pretty well vindicates that of IV;
by the time the speaker achieves the wisdom of the end of the
poem, the fire in the grate is nearly dead. As he says in
XLVII, "the hour became her husband and my bride (my italics)"
not exactly the image of a passionate marriage partner.

38 Trevelyan, "Preface," Poetical Works. There is no
direct evidence that Meredith was the source of Trevel-
yan's "husband-poet" understanding of the point of view as
dual, but if he was, Trevelyan might well have hesitated
to adopt it completely. Meredith's reticence to allow
details of his private life to be scrutinized publicly
(especially details of his family background) is well
known. The idea that there was just one narrator in Mod-
ern Love might have provided too strong a suggestion that
the poem was autobiographical for the poet's taste—a
taste which was partly responsible for the somewhat dras-
tic understatement of his account of his first wife's
death in a letter to his friend William Hardman of Oct.
19, 1861: "When I entered the world again, I found that
one had quitit who bore my name: and this filled my
mind with melancholy recollections which I rarely give way
to" (Letters, I, p. 42).

39 See Stevenson, Darwin, p. 104; Kelvin, pp. 25-26;
and Day Lewis, p. viii. Day Lewis mostly avoids discussion
of point of view, but does say that "the situation is seen
primarily through the eyes of the husband" and thus tacitly
adopts the two-narrator reading.

40 Friedman, p. 12.

41 Trevelyan, Poetical Works, p. 582.

42 Hough, p. 9.

43 In addition to those discussed later in this chapter,
see Richard Le Gallienne, George Meredith: Some Character-
istics (London, 1900), pp. 112, 132; G. M. Trevelyan,
Poetry and Philosophy, pp. 32-35; M. Sturge Henderson,
George Meredith: Novelist, Poet, Reformer (New York, 1908),
pp. 4-5, 62; Richard H. F. Curle, Aspects of George Mer-
edith (London, 1908), p. 196; and J. B. Priestly, George
Meredith (London, 1926), Chapter IV.

44 Stevenson, Ordeal, p. 105.

Friedman, p. 24.


It is the argument of this study that such a demonstration of homogeneity of world view is impossible.

Day Lewis, p. xx.

Day Lewis, pp. xviii-xix. See also the same author's—"George Meredith and Responsibility" in Notable Images of Virtue (Toronto, 1954), pp. 36-40 (as cited by Kelvin, p. 28).


Friedman, p. 13.


Kelvin, pp. 25-27, 31, 33, 35. Kelvin's treatment of imagery in Modern Love is the briefest of the three. His concern is to show how the marriage is a microcosm of the battleground on which man struggles to gain a place in his social structure and of which society-at-large is the macrocosm. Consequently, Kelvin is most interested in battle and warfare images in the poem. Sometimes his analysis is a bit strained—as, for example, is his claim that the "sword that severs all" of I (133) is a "war" image (p. 25). The sword is of course a tool of war, but in this section it is part of the marriage tomy sculptured effigy image and a tool of death or suicide. Not all violence can be related to war.

except for the brief references to such symbols in Hildegarde Littman's early work on metaphor in Meredith's poetry. Her Das Dichterische Bild in der Lyrik George Merediths und Thomas Hardy's (Bern, 1938) did pioneer work in the description of Meredith's use of metaphor and image. Miss Littman was concerned with all types of Meredith's images, and her work is more than mere classification; but she makes very clear that she is strictly limiting her discussion of Meredith's world view. The account of the world view to which she very briefly (of necessity) relates each of the many types of images she describes is that of Trevelyan in Poetry and Philosophy—a work which considers no poems earlier than those of Meredith's 1862 volume and relies most extensively on poems published after 1882. Although not concerned
with the development of Meredith's poetic vision, Miss Littman's work is a useful document in Meredith criticism.

56 Friedman, p. 16.

57 Matthew Arnold, To Marguerite--Continued, l. 24.

58 See Friedman, pp. 21-22 and passim.
Chapter IV

The Middle Period--Publication 1862-1881

PART TWO: Minor Poems, The Concept of Evil, and the Movement toward Naturalism

The pessimism of mood and tone and the humanistic framework of ideas which marked many of the important poems in the 1862 volume, Modern Love, and Poems of the English Roadside, with Poems and Ballads (Modern Love, I Chafe at Darkness, By Morning Twilight, The Meeting, By the Rosanna, and Autumn Evensong), appeared also in poems published in magazines throughout the rest of the middle period--Meredith's next volume of poetry did not come out until 1883. It was only as this transition period neared its end that poems began to appear which reflected a philosophic reconciliation of man and nature and a turn away from pessimism. The primary emphases of the poems published in the 60's and 70's are those of I Chafe at Darkness and Modern Love, although the humanism and pessimism of the poems of this period is often in a tension with a muted optimism and a tentative hopefulness that the man-nature alienation can be resolved. This optimism and hopefulness finally prevails in the world view of the mature poetry, but only after extensive poetic exploration of what for Meredith were the darker aspects of human experience in the poems of the 60's and 70's. The purpose of this chapter is to continue the description of this exploration and to show how it ends in
poems (c. 1880) which are anticipations of the optimistic naturalism of the final period.

**Pessimism and Humanism in Minor**

**Poems of the Middle Period**

*A Mark in Time*, an irregular sonnet published in *The Fortnightly Review* in April of 1870, is a grimly ironic reminder of a point made in *Modern Love*—that human values are things of finitude and transience:

I see a fair young couple in a wood,
And as they go, one bends to take a flower,
That so may be embalmed their happy hour,
And in another day, a kindred mood,
Haply together, or in solitude,
Recovered what the teeth of Time devour,
The joy, the bloom, and the illusive power,
Wherewith by their young blood they are endued
To move all enviable, framed in May,
And of an aspect sisterly with Truth:
Yet seek they with Time's laughing things to wed:
Who will be prompted on some pallid day
to lift the hueless flower and show that dead,
Even such, and by this token, is their youth.(181)

The "wood" in which the speaker sees the "fair young couple" is an example of Meredith's tamer woods—a place of order, peace, and repose. In this case, however (as often in *Modern Love*), the values found in the peaceful landscape are tentative and impermanent. The young couple make the mistake of thinking that the flower they pick will be a symbol of the values of their youthful love and that it will aid them in vicariously reliving their "happy hour" in the future. They mistakenly fail to realize that the flower will actually become a symbol of the death of their youth,
the very basis of the "happy hour." The speaker sees them as mistaken, but not as complete sentimental fools: he attributes to them an awareness even in their youth that the "teeth of Time" do devour "the joy, the bloom, and the illusive power" of youth. Their mistake lies in what they expect the "token" to do in the future—to become a means of recovering, at least partially, the days of their "young blood." The speaker suggests that those who think that the values of a particular time and place can be retained or maintained—who seek to "wed" with "Time's laughing things"—simply do not understand the basic principle of transience operative in the universe. What is thought to be a symbol of certain values turns out to be a token that the very foundation of those values is dead and gone. The basic pessimism of this judgment on the impermanence of specific forms of value is revealed by certain items of diction which imply a questioning of the very reality of the values themselves. The "embalming" of the "happy hour" suggests as much that the hour is dead as soon as it has passed as that it can be preserved. The "power" of these values of youthful love is "illusive," and the relation of them with "Truth" is only tentatively affirmed in their "sisterly" aspect. The last four lines imply that there are "laughing" things and unlaughing ones in time, and that the attempt to "wed" or affirm only the laughing ones is futile. "Pallid days" do follow "happy hours," the symbolic re-collection of which functions ironically to replace the
illusion of the permanence of value with the fact of change.
Making a "mark in time" may be another form of the errors
(described in section L of Modern Love) of not feeding
"on the advancing hours" and of having "cravings for the
buried day." Certainly a refusal to recognize change can
result in more disappointment than would an honest and open
acknowledgment of it. But there is no suggestion in the
poem that any human values can be meaningfully sustained or
made to grow. Youth dies; the values of youth die; and
the attempt to recall them will only recall the fact of
youth's death. The message of this sonnet is not that of
the later poems that the acceptance of Earth's law of change
is a cause for joy--there is no indication of this in A
Mark in Time. The poem seems to be a grimly Stoic des-
criptive account of the alternation of "happy hours" and
"pallid days," of a contrast between "laughing things"
and the death of youth in human experience--a description
of the fragmented and impermanent nature of what man desires
in the universe. The wisdom of the poem is not that there
is great value to be realized in an acceptance of the ab-
solute status of change in the universe; the wisdom seems
to be that value realization itself is an impermanent thing
that rests on shifting bases in human life.

The pessimism of A Mark in Time is even more marked in
A Ballad of Past Meredian, published in June, 1876, in The
Fortnightly Review:
I

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!

II

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,
O Life, how naked and how hard when known!

III

Life said, As thou has 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.(205)

"What is false within" man appears variously in this poem. Death, for example, counters the accusation that he is a bearer of bitter gifts by drawing on the traditional symbol of death as a reaper or gatherer, pointing out that he just "gathers" and that those flowers of humanity (our human roses?) that he gathers and that he shows the speaker ("he reached me flowers as from a withered bough") were bitter before he got them. Neither will Life be reproached for the "sword-hacked and iron-stained" hard nakedness of its "shape of stone." "As thou has carved me, such am I," is Life's answer to the speaker. The bitterness of Death's harvest and the ugliness of Life's shape both indicate something false within humanity. The poem ends in an evening cacophony--composed of notes of "bitter" Death and "hard" Life (the "Inwound notes" of which are sounded
by the speaker) and of those of "memory" which has the
grating tones of the nightjar—providing a symbolic counter-
part to the thematic misanthropy of the poem. The pessimism
of this surrealistic serenade extends to the temporal dimen-
sions of human experience: a negative estimate of the past
represented by the nightjar notes of memory, the present
suggested by the speaker's notes of Life and Death, and the
future denoted by the sounds of a somewhat unpromising
"hope." The symbolic cacophony is modulated only by the
notes of the "woodlark in night's sky"—the voice of "sight-
less" hope which seems to offer little prospect of a cure
in the future. It is hope that is blind, and hence direction-
less, sounding its isolated note against a background of
discord as night's blackness falls. A Ballad of Past Mer-
dian is one of the most complete expressions of pessimism
in the middle period.

Miscellaneous Poems, 1862-1881

The poetry of the middle period continues to include
the variety of types and themes that was noted in the early
period. All of the poems published between 1862 and 1881
appeared either in the Modern Love volume of 1862 or later
in magazines. In addition to the title poem and the other
works originally published in 1862 and already discussed (I
Chafe at Darkness, By Morning Twilight, and Ode to the Spirit
of Earth in Autumn), the 1862 volume reprinted certain poems
of the first period which anticipated the mood and world
view of the transition poems; these included *Autumn Evening Song* (1859), *The Meeting* (1860), and *By the Rosanna* (1861).

The darker, gloomier, more pessimistic side of human experience received various kinds of poetic treatment in the 1862 volume. It includes a number of despairing or sad lyrics about separated lovers such as *A Roar through the Tall Twin Elm-trees* and the Arabian exercise *Shemseelnihar*. It contains a relatively long narrative poem, *Margaret's Bridal Eve*, about a young bride who dies of a broken heart in the face of her groom's rage after she has told him of her earlier sexual experiences. There are at least two poems that are positive in mood: *The Young Usurper* describes the joy that a baby brings into a marriage; *Marian* is a brief description of an ideal English girl ("Soft and loving is her soul,/Swift and lofty soaring;/Mixing with its dove-like dole/Passionate adoring" [169]). These two are notable exceptions to the grim mood and tone of the volume. The treatment of the Cassandra myth picks up this mood and tone in the poem by that name, as do the thinly Browningesque dramatic monologues, *Grandfather Bridgeman*, *The Old Chartist*, and *The Beggar's Soliloquy*. The first of these deals with the domestic pain caused by the heroic death of a soldier-grandson, and the latter two are concerned with the travails of certain representatives of the lower classes in a society run by the basically indifferent power structure described later in *Lines to a Friend Visiting America*. 
The mood and tone of the 1862 volume continues to find expression in a number of poems published in magazines throughout the middle period, although the degree of the negativity of this mood and tone varies greatly from poem to poem, as a brief description of these works (with which this chapter is not going to deal later) published in magazines from 1863 to 1881 will suggest. Most of these poems were reprinted in a compendium of many of Meredith's least successful poems, *Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life*, in 1887. *Phaethon* (*The Fortnightly Review*, September, 1868) is Meredith's treatment of the myth of the sun god's son's mismanagement of the chariot of the sun and his subsequent death. It was a metrical exercise "Attempted in the Galliambic Measure" (as the rest of the title indicates) which Meredith thought to be "to some degree servicable to narrative verse" and which he described as "one of the exercises of a writer which readers may be invited to share."² *Sonnet to----* (*The Fortnightly Review*, June, 1867), later reprinted as *To J. M.*, is Meredith's implicit praise of his friend John Morley for his steering a liberal humanistic way between the extremes of dogmatic fideistic theistic orthodoxy and the view of human society as organized rapacity reflecting only the animal practice of the survival of the fittest. *Lines to a Friend Visiting America* (*The Fortnightly Review*, December, 1867) is a rather pessimistic work of social criticism which attacks the titular aristocracy and the industrial interests forming
a large part of the power structure as worshippers of Mammon unconcerned with social justice and freedom. Aneurin's Harp (The Fortnightly Review, September, 1868) is a use of part of the ancient Welsh bard's Gododin to convey a warning to the English nation to avoid, in the words of Trevelyan's note, letting "wealth do to us what the 'me-thatlin beaker' did to the drunken Britons of old--unfit us for the competition and strife of modern nations."  

France, December, 1870 (The Fortnightly Review, January, 1871) is Meredith's account of how France fell away from allegiance to the spiritual values that had prompted the 1789 revolution to the level of seeking irrational conquest and national vanity under Napoleon III--a falling away that led to the disastrous defeat at the hands of the Prussians in December, 1870. The poem later formed a part of the Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History published in 1898. The Song of Theodolinda (Cornhill Magazine, Sept. 1, 1872) is a rendering of the legend of the iron crown of Lombardy which describes the painful overcoming of the sin of spiritual pride by the Christian Queen Theodolinda by the ordeal of having a white hot nail from the true cross laid on her breast and then hammered into part of her crown. A Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt (The Fortnightly Review, August, 1876) is a humorous treatment of what was a serious subject to Meredith, 4 a debate favoring women's rights. The Nuptials of Attila (New Quarterly Magazine, January, 1879) is a version of the legend of the death on his wedding night--
during which his bride lost her mind—of Attila the Hun.  

To a Friend Recently Lost (Cornhill Magazine, October, 1880) anticipates an element of the view of death taken in the later poems, saying that the friend surely is "one with the white host,/Spirits whose memory is our vital air,/Through the great love of Earth they had" (568). These poems, while they reflect some of the darker aspects of theme and mood of the middle period, do not suggest any particular philosophic orientation. Poems which did, in this period, most effectively relate dominant elements of theme, mood, and world view are those which treat of the concept of evil.

The Concept of Evil in the Middle Poems

Poems which deal with the concept of evil are particularly useful in a study of the transitional and developing nature of the world view of the middle period for three reasons. First, they usually indicate something of the alienation between man and nature (often something of the hostility between them regarding value) which is a mark of the humanism of this period; second, they give expression to the pessimism that often attends the recognition of this alienation; and third, as these poems sometimes try to resolve the alienation, they anticipate the account of evil in the final world view.

Three types of critical approaches to the concept of evil in the middle period are used in this study. The first is to examine poems which describe the problem but do not
make a significant attempt to resolve it; *Modern Love* (1862) is the main example. The second approach is to analyze poems that do make such an attempt: *Martin's Puzzle* (1865) and *The Orchard and the Heath* (1868) are examples. The third approach is to examine poems which in their original form of publication treat the problem of evil mainly according to the dominant humanistic and pessimistic bias of the period, but which have these elements significantly modified by additions to, revisions of, and suppressions of the original text in subsequent publication. *Modern Love* (1862), *The Orchard and the Heath* (1868), and *In the Woods* (1870) are the major poems of the period that received this treatment.

*Description of the problem in "Modern Love."* Humanistic world views which emphasize the separation of man and nature in matters of value and which make no claims for the ontological status of a principle of beneficence in the universe seldom have a great deal to say about a "problem" of the existence of evil. Such world views are often dualistic, recognizing natural evil—or the fortuitous destruction of value or value potential—to be as much a fact in the universe as is the possibility of value realization. There is no need to explain evil or to reconcile it to good if neither is given metaphysical priority over the other. In such outlooks moral evil, the turning of the will from a greater to a lesser value, is as much a reality as moral good, and there is no need for trying to reconcile moral evil to some
ground of value outside of man. For the humanist, values are human facts, not natural ones, and the ability to affirm these values in a hostile or indifferent natural environment, even when they run counter to purely physical or natural ends, is the definitive feature of humanity. The dominant humanistic emphases of Meredith's middle period are never expressed in the rigid consistency of a carefully developed philosophy. The philosophical orientation of works like Modern Love emerges in a poetic, and not in a strictly logical, world view—although the two dimensions certainly are not mutually exclusive. Aspects of the humanist reaction to evil are, however, important parts of the theme of Modern Love, as was discussed in Chapter III. A brief recapitulation of some of the points made in that chapter will clarify this. The poem is mostly a description of how value and value potential were destroyed—that, of how evil manifested itself—in a given relationship. In the husband's refusal to establish blame ("I see no sin") the poem comes close to reducing moral to natural evil. There is little suggestion that what happened could have been helped.

"What is false within" is a fact of human nature, just as the alienation of man and Nature is a fact of human experience: the treatment of evil in Modern Love is much more descriptive than normative. The selfishness, sentimentality, and egoism in both husband and wife are presented with considerable objectivity and clarity, but whatever moral prescriptions the poem contains are quite muted. The idea that
"more brain" might have helped prevent the disaster is present, but there is no moral blame attached to a lack of brain. Even the final account in section I of what "caused" the division (holding "cravings for a buried day," "deep questioning . . . to endless dole") is made in a poetic context which is more descriptive than prescriptive (see pp. 124-131). The view of man in Modern Love is not that he is totally in the grip of external forces. Man is capable, within limits, of sustaining spiritual values, but evil in Modern Love takes the form of internal determinants and external circumstances which are almost overwhelmingly powerful in inducing man to participate in the destruction of value. The poem can be seen as a presentation of some of the ways that moral and natural evil manifest themselves in concrete interpersonal situations. Evil is treated as a fact of experience, and the poem makes little attempt to justify its presence in the universe or to relate it to any broader positive purposes of nature to find a resolution to the "problem" of evil, as do certain other poems of the middle period.

**Two tentative attempts at resolution.** The tendency in Modern Love to allow the implicit hostility between man and nature in matters of value to go unresolved did not continue throughout the middle period: several poems here constitute tentative efforts to resolve this alienation. These poetic wrestlings with the problem of evil sometimes anticipate later developments in Meredith's world view, sometimes reflect the humanistic bias of the middle period, and
sometimes do both.

**Martin's Puzzle** (*The Fortnightly Review*, June, 1865) is one of these tentative resolutions. The poem is a dramatic monologue by Martin, an elderly village cobbler, in which he seeks to understand the unmerited suffering of a child, "poor little Molly," who was crippled by being run down by a cart and later pushed down a stairway, neither accident being her fault and both being either entirely fortuitous or caused by the stupidity or maliciousness of someone else. Martin's puzzle is an old one: if there is a just Providence, how is Molly's unmerited suffering possible? Is there a significant relation between justice and virtue in the universe? Martin considers and questions a number of traditional replies to such questions. He rejects as "Tea doctrine, not savouring of God" the idea that Molly suffers as a punishment for sin:

> When poor little Molly wants 'chastening,' why next
> The Archangel Michael might taste of the rod. (III, 178)

Martin says that he is not "irreligious" but that he is something of a rationalist: "I look on this sphere/As a place where a man should think like a man"(IV, 179); that is, he cannot abide a pure acceptance of items of belief on faith alone: "Question I must"(IX, 180)! Martin is tempted to say that suffering like Molly's is all a matter of chance—that the universe doesn't contain "fair dealing" and there is no relation between justice and virtue ("Do bullets in
battle the wicked select? [VI, 179], but he is unable to think that God or the universe is quite so indifferent to the career of value in the world. Whenever he begins to think that "it's all chance—work," something keeps him from adopting this viewpoint:

And, yet, in her eyes,  
She holds a fixed something by which I am checked.

Yonder riband of sunshine aslope on the wall,  
If you eye it a minute'll have the same look:  
So kind! and so merciful! God of us all!  
It's the very same lesson we get from the Book.  
(VI–VII, 179)

Something about what he sees as the "kind" and "merciful" aspects of human and natural reality lead him to hope that justice and virtue do have some mutual ground of reality in the universe and to question further. Martin next considers the argument that suffering is a trial for the righteous—that "Some must toil, and some perish, for others below" (VII, 179)---but something about the basic inequity of such a situation leads him to reject this explanation of natural evil. In stanza VIII Martin approaches the idea that perhaps the human view of evil is actually only one of a partial dimension of God's infinite good:

She's the victim of fools: that seems nearer the mark.  
On earth there are engines and numerous fools.  
Why the Lord can permit them, we're still in the dark;  
He does, and in some sort of way they're His tools.  
It's a roundabout way, with respect let me add,  
If Molly goes crippled that we may be taught:  
But, perhaps, it's the only way, though it's so bad;  
In that case we'll bow down our heads,—as we ought. (VIII, 180)
Martin is almost able to think that the suffering of some may be God's tool for making goodness more pervasive in the universe, but he says he cannot quite achieve the level of fideism required to accept this:

But the worst of me is, that when I bow my head,
I perceive a thought wriggling away in the dust,
And I follow its tracks, quite forgetful, instead
Of humble acceptance: for, question I must!
Here's a creature made carefully—carefully made!
Put together with craft, and then stamped on, and why?
The answer seems nowhere: it's discord that's played.
The sky's a blue dish!—an implacable sky!(IX, 180)

The idea of purposeful marring of a carefully made object of value offends Martin's rationality and leads him to questioning anew. The echoes of the Rubiáyát in his despairing answer ("it's discord that's played./The sky's a blue dish!—an implacable sky!") are about as far as Martin goes in the direction of the infernal or blasphemy, but in this despair he does find a hint ("discord") of an approach to the problem that does satisfy him:

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.(X, 180)

Martin suggests that he might be satisfied with the idea that a given discord can be part of a larger harmony, that good and evil may both be parts of one great, grand harmonious scheme. At this point the fact that the poem is a
dramatic monologue needs to be remembered. The "ultimate harmony" idea may satisfy Martin, but should it satisfy the reader? And exactly how does it fit into the world view of the middle period? Precise answers to such questions are neither possible nor necessary for certain difficulties in Martin's answer to his puzzle to be noted. The obvious nature of these difficulties might indicate that Martin did not necessarily solve the problem of evil for Meredith's middle period. In the first place, in IX Martin has simply translated the "Christian" idea of VIII that man's idea of evil is simply a limited view of God's divine plan into more naturalistic or pantheistic terms. If God's damaging one of his "carefully made" creatures was sufficient cause for Martin in IX to reject the whole account of evil as man's partial view of God's good, then the existence of a "single false note" should (if Martin is logically consistent, which he isn't) lead him to judge the "one immense organ" as out of key and discordant. In the second place, Martin's "answer" evades the problem that caused the puzzle to begin with. This was the problem of whether there was some significant relationship between virtue and justice in the universe which could be related to Molly's situation. Martin had claimed to be concerned about this: "What I ask is, Why persecute such a poor dear,/If there's a Law above all?"(VI, 179). Specifically, his puzzle was caused by concern for whether there was any justice in Molly's particular case of suffering, not by concern for whether suffering in general could be part of justice in general. His final
praise to the universe because of its harmony says nothing about the disparity of virtue and justice in Molly's case. What Martin has done is to evade, by praising the universe, his original problem by effectively denying that it exists. Is Molly's suffering somehow less real because it is claimed to be a discordant part of a larger harmony? Does evil cease to be evil when it is seen to be part of a larger good? In order to affirm that his universe is the ethically monistic harmony he envisions, Martin would have to answer these questions in the affirmative, and in so doing he would deny the reality of the very suffering that had raised the problem. In order to maintain his idea of the universe, Martin would have to say that discord does not mean "non-harmony" and is ultimately unreal. He would have to affirm that ultimately discord is a form of harmony—that is, that discord and non-discord are ultimately the same—and that evil is a form of good. He would have to say that Molly's suffering is actually unreal because it is part of ultimate non-suffering. Martin's logical evasion of the problem of evil is as old as theodicy, and it does not affect the existential conflict of virtue and justice that gave rise to it.

A different kind of poem of the middle period which treats in much more specific form some of the philosophic problems of Martin's Puzzle is the long narrative lyric, The Orchard and the Heath, first published in Macmillan's Magazine in February, 1868. The Orchard and the Heath
is a long work of 31 five-line stanzas which deals with problems of the ontological ground of virtue and justice in the universe and problems of natural and moral evil in basically humanistic terms. This, along with a number of problems of diction, vagueness of symbol, and internal consistency, probably accounts for why most of the poem was severely suppressed in Meredith's lifetime. After its magazine publication in 1868, only the first eleven stanzas were ever reprinted before the poet's death, and these are purely descriptive. Trevelyan did not include the suppressed section (stanzas 12-31) in The Poetical Works (1912), although it is in the Bibliography and Various Readings volume of the Memorial Edition of 1911. This suppression will be discussed further presently. As mentioned, the poem has a number of difficulties, but it is interesting as a middle period treatment of the problem of evil in categories that are essentially those of philosophical humanism.

The first eleven stanzas of the poem use setting and mood to establish the basic contrasts between two types of relationships between man and the universe—types which are important in the presentation of the concept of evil. Stanzas one through four describe the first type—that maintained with the children of the orchard:

1

I chanced upon an early walk to spy
A troop of children through an orchard gate:
The boughs hung low, the grass was high;
They had but to lift hands or wait
For fruits to fill them; fruits were all their sky.

2

They shouted, running on from tree to tree,
And played the game the wind plays, on and round.
'Twas visible invisible glee
Pursuing; and a fountain's sound
Of Laughter spouted, pattering fresh on me.

3

I could have watched them till the daylight fled,
Their pretty bower made such a light of day.
A small one tumbling sang, 'Oh! head!
The rest to comfort her straightway
Seized on a branch and thumped down apples red.

4

The tiny creature flashing through green grass,
And laughing with her feet and eyes among
Fresh apples, while a little lass
Over as o'er breeze-ripples hung:
That sight I saw, and passed as aliens pass. (238)

The speaker sees the children in the orchard in a benign
morning environment, in total harmony with their world.
They are one with their natural surroundings: their game
is "the game the wind plays . . . visible invisible glee,"
and they in their bower supplement the light of day (stanza
3). Their wants are immediately and bountifully supplied
(stanza 1), and any occasional pains are immediately com-
 pensated by social kindness and natural benefits (stanza 3).
This is the scene which the speaker "passed as aliens pass."
The speaker is more spiritually at home with the gypsy
children he encounters next. They represent the other
kind of relationship between man and the universe:

5

My footpath left the pleasant farms and lanes,
Soft cottage-smoke, straight cocks a-crow, gay flowers;
Beyond the wheel-ruts of the wains,
Across a heath I walked for hours,
And met its rival tenants, sun and rains.

6

Still in my view mile-distant firs appeared,
When, under a patched channel-bank enriched
With foxglove whose late bells dropped seared,
Behold, a family had pitched
Their camp, and labouring the low tent upreared.

7

Here, too, were many children, quick to scan
A new thing coming; swarthy cheeks, white teeth;
In many-coloured rags they ran,
Like iron runlets of the heath.
Dispersed lay broth-pot, sticks, and drinking-can.

8

Three girls, with shoulders like a boat at sea
Tipped sideways by the wave (their clothing slid
From either ridge unequally),
Lean, swift and voluble, bestrid
A starting-point, unfrocked to the bent knee.

9

They raced; their brothers yelled them on, and broke
In act to follow, but as one they snuffed
Wood-fumes, and by the fire that spoke
Of provender its pale flame puffed,
And rolled athwart dwarf furzes grey-blue smoke.

10

Soon on the dark edge of a ruddier gleam,
The mother-pot perusing, all, stretched flat,
Paused for its bubbling-up supreme:
A dog upright in circle sat,
And oft his nose went with the flying steam.

The environment of the heath is more hostile, although not uninhabitable. The gypsy children are "rival tenants" (as was the speaker) there to the searing sun and the cold rain. Their home is a "labouring" low tent near a channel-bank.
poorly "enriched" with seared foxglove blossoms, and it contrasts vividly with the "pleasant farms," "soft cottage smoke," and "gay flowers" (stanza 5) of the homes of the orchard children. There are other contrasts: the gypsies seem to be more vigorous (stanza 9) and things are not automatically provided for them; they have to be concerned about and do some work for (stanza 9) their supper. The night, in contrast to the morning orchard scene, grows dark and cold as they watch the steam and smoke rise from their cooking fire near the dwarf furzes (the thorny evergreen mentioned in The Meeting [1869]) of the heath. The speaker turns to leave and sees two things: the sunset and the tent of the gypsies:

11

I turned and looked in heaven awhile, where now
The moor-faced sunset broaden'd with red light;
Threw high aloft a golden bough,
And seemed the desert of the night
Far down with mellow orchards to endow. (239)

12

My pace is quick on foot, till as a lyre
The wind sings in my ears, and homeward bent,
I heard an ever-lifting quire
Of children by that smoky tent,
Who praised the union of the pot with fire. 8

But orchards are not for the gypsy children. The illusory ones of stanza 11 created by the sunset are replaced in stanza 12 (which begins the section Meredith suppressed after 1868) by the hard reality of the "smoky tent." The speaker casually thinks that the gypsies must be more "loved
of Heaven" since they are obviously "less blest of Earth"
than the orchard children. He then pursues some of the
implications of this contrast:

13

More loved of Heaven, I thought them, though less
fair,
Less blest of Earth, than those who played at morn
Like sun-spots in the scented square;
To pleasant narrow spaces born
Unknowing other fruits bloom otherwhere.

14

But is there love in Heaven which turns aside
From Heaven's good laws to flatter want or grief?
Blind pity, and self-pity, and Pride,
Clamour for it to bribe belief.
Let earth know better lest her woes abide.

15

Few men dare think what many have dared say--
That Heaven can entertain elective love,
And narrow to our yea and nay
The august great concords rolled above.
I felt them, and went reverent on my way.

16

Yet fancy (the quick flutter of young thought
Above the flower, sensation) would not rest.
From hues and lights of evening brought
Rich symbols to make manifest
What recompense is for the houseless wrought.

17

Sweet recompense! thereat the ascetics aim.
Self-exiled from the orchard-bounds, they purge
Poor flesh of lusts which bring them shame,
And with the rigour of the scourge
Transfuse them to their souls in keener flame.

18

Surely I know the houseless little ones;
My spirit is among them all its days:
Like them, 'tis of the changing suns;
Subsists, like them, on waifs and strays,
Well chastened by the wild wherein it runs.
So that we find sufficient we can sleep,
Considering recompense scarce fit for dreams.
No hushing songs of lambs and sheep,
No highway trot of harness'd teams,
Lull us: we rock upon a tuneless deep.

We cannot cherish, like the folded throng,
Belief in sustenance, as frail as breath:
Our faith is in our hunger; strong,
Therefore, and constant is our faith:
A roaming force 'twixt morn and evensong.

The use of the terms "Heaven" and "Earth" should be noted carefully in this poem since it is somewhat different from what might be expected. Earth seems simply to be physical nature here; it provides the bounty of the orchard. Heaven does not seem to refer necessarily to transcendence; it seems more likely that the term is a rather vague symbol for an ontological ground of reality which is somehow external to man and earth and yet in a very indifferent relation to them regarding value. The ontological ground of reality indicated by "Heaven" may be immanent or it may be transcendent. The poem is not specific about this; about all that can be said is that the term refers to an ontological ground of reality which is beyond man and which is not some conformation of "earth" (almost always with a lower case e in this poem). The contrast between "Heaven" and "earth" is made more explicit in stanzas 22 and 23 below.

The speaker raises the question in stanzas 13-20 about what the contrast between the orchard and the heath indicates about the basic status of justice and beneficence in the universe. The speaker says that there is no ultimate relationship between virtue and justice or between want and
blessedness. Only "blind pity, and self-pity, and pride" think that there is "love in Heaven which turns aside" its "good laws," which finally are indifferent to the individual's welfare, to "flatter grief and want"(stanza 14). It is a mistake to think that "Heaven can entertain elective love"(stanza 15); still, the speaker recalls the sunset's illusory "orchards" in stanza 16 and wonders, if there is no "elective" love, "what recompense is for the houseless wrought"(stanza 16). He decides that whatever recompense there is for the houseless is not abundant—-that what spiritual gypsies in want and grief gain from their hard life on a cosmic heath is a hard recompense. It is not the recompense of the ascetic—-this is ironically rejected (stanza 17). What the speaker's spiritual comrades gain from their hardships is a kind of spiritual strength, resiliency, and self-dependence that enables them to survive in a hostile or indifferent spiritual environment. These spiritual gypsies are not what Meredith was later to call "children of Beneficence [who] are in its being sharers"(339). The only recompense these roamers "'twixt morn and evensong" gain is knowledge that their human resources are the only ground of spiritual value that is available to them. But cannot the question be raised of whether the human spirit (as ground of all spiritual value) bears some relation to something more ultimate and metaphysically lasting? This is the concern of the rest of the poem:
But we divide; no likeness is complete:
For when it comes to seeing, they are blind.
This is the mystery I meet
At every corner of the mind;--
Twice cursed are they whom earth doth illentreat.

Ere yon sky orchards drop their golden key,
'Tis recognition Heaven demands, I know.
Shall earth, then bid its chosen see,
And seeing grasp the fruits that grow
In Heaven as well as earth? How may this be?

My light of Heaven answers: 'Eye for fruits
Have many: they are plucked by favour'd hands.
Is such a craving of the brutes
The recognition Heaven demands?
Am I the Tree which has in earth its roots?

Those fruits are gifts of heritage, not mine.
The virtues garden in some lines of men,
And eminent and large they shine
As captains of the host, till when
Much flattered flesh has drugged the soul divine.

For of the fruits enjoyed new seed should spring;
And of their vantage station men shall make
A place of sacrifice, and cling
To sacrifice for man's dear sake,
Or perish: 'tis the choice of sage and king.

In raising his kind of questions, the speaker has severed some of his spiritual ties with the gypsy children: "But we divide; no likeness is complete;/For when it comes to seeing, they are blind"(stanza 21). The speaker goes on to consider his mystery: it is one that is involved in the question of the relation of the human spirit to some
more ultimate ground of value, and it is a form of the problem of evil. If "Heaven" is indifferent to the individual's realization of values (and if the human spirit is the only source of spiritual value for man), then indeed "twice cursed" are the men "whom earth doth ill-en-treat:" cursed once at being ill-treated; cursed again at finding no reason or explanation for such treatment in an indifferent "Heaven." This is the problem or "mystery" that the speaker tries to resolve. Providing the "recognition" as a ground of value that "Heaven demands" takes the form of a fairly humanistic account of concepts of natural and moral evil. The speaker's "light of Heaven" (I suppose this means his understanding of the nature of Heaven) repeats its impartiality bordering on indifference regarding the individual's welfare or grief. "Heaven" is essentially dualistic regarding the natural evil that may befall man: some men get more "fruits" than others--fruits "are pluck-ed by favour'd (since eëlective love" has been denied, "favour'd" must mean lucky or fortunate)hands"(stanza 23). Some men suffer; some do not--"heaven" makes no ontological claim for beneficence in this poem. Spiritual as well as physical values that can be realized by man are "gifts of heritage"--not of Heaven. Man has the potential to enhance or to debase the values he receives in his human heritage: they are either enhanced as they are passed on ("For of the fruits enjoyed new seed should spring") in the service of humanity ("for man's dear sake") or they are
debased—-they go to seed and "perish" (stanza 25). The idea here is that the career of human values in the universe is never static: they are either continually enhanced in the progress of society or they are lost; but as far as "heaven" (as a ground of reality and value beyond the human spirit) is concerned, the individuals involved in this social picture are like waves on an undifferentiated ocean: The "light of heaven still speaks:

26

'You waves of life go rolling o'er and o'er;
And some will toss the uppermost foam, and fall;
And here and there the sky will pour
Illuminating rays, but all
Are one great ocean rolling without shore.

27

'Never till men rejoice in being one
Shall any of them hold a perfect heart.
Nearer to me shall gather none
That from their fellows climb apart.
An evil is a common evil done.

28

'Make strength your weapon, purity your mark;
Keep shrewd with hunger, as an edge of steel.
An army marching in the dark
Are men; but forward, while they reel,
Still they bear forward some faint rescuing spark.

29

'By service they must live who would have sight:
The children of the Orchard and the Heath
In equal destinies unite,
Serving or fattening beneath;
But thank them best that trim in thee my light.'

30

A crown of darkness on the yellow west,
Where day and night took hands in union brief,
And sat in sober splendour pressed:
I clasped as one full harvest sheaf
The thought of the poor children I thanked best.

Far back I saw the flames of scanty wood
Upon the closing shadows cower low.
The meal was done, and it was good;
And now to huddling sleep they go.
May food supply them! They have given me food.

Finally, Heaven does not distinguish, as the speaker had done, between the children of the orchard and those of the heath: Heaven says that the two unite in "equal" destinies. The speaker's questions of whether there was some ultimate parallel between beneficence and justice and of whether there was an ontological sanction beyond the human spirit for value are answered essentially in the negative—an answer which confirmed the speaker's humanistic assertions of stanzas 19 and 20. Heaven is largely absolved from having to deal with the problem of evil by the denial that Heaven is a metaphysical foundation of an ethically monistic universe in which values are conceived to relate to individual persons. The poem concludes on the speaker's affirmation that his recognition of his spiritual affinity with the gypsy children of the heath had led him to achieve his insight into the nature of the career of spiritual value in a basically indifferent universe.

A number of things about The Orchard and the Heath indicate its place in Meredith's transition period. First, the affirmation that spiritual values have their ground in the human spirit and that any ontological reality beyond
this (if there be such) is largely indifferent to human value is suggestive of a humanist orientation. Second, the tentative, probing quality of the poem's statement of theme is an indication that this theme is not a fully developed one. For example, it is difficult to square the indifference of "Heaven" to human welfare (stanzas 14 and 15) and human value (stanza 24) at the individual level with the idea that man's approaching "nearer to" Heaven (stanza 27) is good in itself: if Heaven is finally indifferent to human value, why should an individual's approaching heaven be good? Third, there is a quality of vagueness in the basic "fruit" symbol of stanzas 22-25 that hints that the referent of the symbol is not fully thought out; it seems to refer to almost anything considered "good" in human terms. Fourth, there is an excessive vagueness attached to the basic Heaven-earth terminology. The use of "Heaven" as a term for a metaphysical reality beyond the human spirit involves the symbol in connotations of transcendence from which Meredith only incompletely escaped, as stanza 27 testifies. The humanist bias of the value theory implicit in the poem, along with its problems of connotation in its major metaphysical symbol, possibly accounts for the suppression of the poem in later periods which were more specifically oriented around philosophical naturalism. The suppression of the last two-thirds of this poem is one example of a kind of modification wrought on several poems of the middle period. Additions to and revisions of other middle period
poems were means of bringing both their treatment of the concept of evil and their philosophic implications more into line with the naturalism of Meredith's final poetic world view.

*Modifications and revisions in two important middle poems: "Modern Love" and "In the Woods."* One of the major concerns of Meredith's mature naturalism is to account for a principle of beneficence which he held to be a basic attribute of "Earth"—his final symbol for the immanent ground of all being. Evil in such a world view had to be understood as some kind of occasion for a greater increase or possibility of good. If the important poems of Meredith's poetic canon were to reflect this naturalistic affirmation of beneficence, certain earlier poems which had strong theistic or humanistic biases, some of which were heavily pessimistic, and some that were dualistic or inconclusive regarding the ultimate status of good and evil in the universe had to be suppressed or revised. This study has described the effects of such revision or suppression on *By the Rosanna* in the period c.1850 to 1861, and on *Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn* and *The Orchard and the Heath* of the 1862-1881 period. Two other modifications of middle poems indicate development and change as Meredith's poetic vision approaches its mature expression. The first of these is quite well known: it is the addition of *The Promise in Disturbance* (1892) as a prefatory sonnet to *Modern Love* (1862). The second has never been critically discussed in
detail; this is the later creation of three poems from parts of *In the Woods* (1870) and the suppression of the rest of the original version.

Later revisions of the text of *Modern Love* (1862) were minor and generally unimportant. Meredith seems to have contented himself that the addition of *The Promise in Disturbance* as a preface would be adequate indication that there had been a modification of the elements of theme and mood in the poem that did not accord with his mature outlook:

How low when angels fall their black descent,  
Our primal thunder tells: known is the pain  
Of music, that nigh throning wisdom went,  
And one false note cast wailful to the insane.  
Now seems the language heard of Love as rain  
To make a mire where fruitfulness was meant.  
The golden harp gives out a jangled strain,  
Too like revolt from heaven's Omnipotent.  
But listen in the thought; so may there come  
Conception of a newly-added chord,  
Commanding space beyond where ear has home.  
In labour of the trouble at its fount,  
Leads Life to an intelligible Lord  
The rebel discords up the sacred mount. (133)

*The Promise in Disturbance* is another use of the "partial discord—ultimate harmony" idea expressed in *Martin's Puzzle*, although the idea is presented in a more complex form here. Martin's speculation had been that Molly's suffering was a discord which itself was immediately and constantly a part of a larger harmony. In *The Promise in Disturbance*, however, the evil of the rain of Love making a "mire where fruitfulness was meant" and of causing the "golden harp" of love to give out "a jangled strain" is not portrayed so much as a component part of overall good or har-
mony as it is a condition leading to (or from which is made) a "newly-added chord" which modulates the "jangled strain." The "conception of the newly-added chord" will come not from the evil itself. It will come from "the thought" that "Life" leads the "rebel discords" from their "trouble" in youth ("at Life's fount") "up the sacred mount" to spiritual insight (to "an intelligible Lord"). The mountain is here again a place of spiritual rejuvenation and insight--this time a place for finding the "newly-added chord." The idea here is more that evil, when properly understood and related to the rest of one's experiences, can be a ground or a condition for the future attainment of good than that every particular evil is a misunderstood component of present good. The Promise in Disturbance was added to Modern Love in a new edition of the poem in 1892. It is a late work, and its outlook on evil is that of the mature naturalism, although it is necessarily a summary statement of it. Adding the poem to Modern Love as a preface does little to modify the humanism and pessimism of the larger work, although it does suggest a development in the poetic world view away from these elements. Reading the appended upward turn of The Promise in Disturbance in relation to the despairing humanism of Modern Love is reminiscent of what T. S. Eliot said about Tennyson's In Memoriam, that its statement of belief was a weak thing--that the strength of the poem lay in the quality of its despair and doubt.11
The poem of the middle period which was the object of one of Meredith's most extensive programs of modification and revision was *In the Woods* (*The Fortnightly Review*, August, 1870). In its original form the poem's place in Meredith's transition period is indicated by the affinities it has both with the pessimism and humanism of poems of the middle period like *Modern Love* and *A Ballad of Past Meridian* and with thematic elements of the later naturalism of acceptance and beneficence. Revision and subsequent publication of parts of the poem and suppression of the rest provide clear indications of the shift away from the world view of the middle period after 1881. The complete text of *In the Woods* was never reproduced in Meredith's lifetime;¹² it is presented here with poems later taken from it collated along side:

**In the Woods** (1870)

I

Hill-sides are dark,  
And hill-tops reach the star  
And down is the lark  
And I from my mark  
Am far.

Unlighted I foot the ways.  
I know that a dawn is before me,  
And behind me many days;  
Not what is o'er me.

II

I am in deep woods,  
Between two twilights.

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

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

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

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

    I am in deep woods
    Between the two twilights:

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

III

Take up thy song from woods and fields
Whilst thou hast heart, and living yields
    Delight: let that expire--
Let thy delight in living die,
Take thou thy song from afar and sky,
    And join the silent quire.

IV

With the butterfly roaming abroad
On the sunny March day,
The pine-cones opened and blew
Winged seeds, and aloft they flew
Butterfly-like in the ray,
    And hung to the breeze:
Spinning they fell to the sod.
Ask you my rhyme
Which shall be trees?
They have had their time.

V

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

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

VI

Hawk or shrike has done this deed
Of downy feathers, a cruel sight.
Sweet sentimentalist, intercede
With Providence: it is not right!

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

Whimper of Sympathy (1887)

Hawk or shrike has done this deed
Of downy feathers: rueful sight!
Sweet Sentimentalist, invite
Your bosom's Power to intercede.

So hard it seems that one must bleed
Because another needs will bite!
All round we find cold Nature slight
The feelings of the totter-knee'd
O it were pleasant with you
To fly from this struggle
of foes,
The shambles, the charnel,
the wrinkle:
To be housed in the drop of
dew
That hangs on the cheek of
the rose,
And lives the life of a
twinkle.

O it were pleasant with you
To fly from this tussle of
foes,
The shambles, the charnel
the wrinkle!
To dwell in yon dribble of
dew
On the cheek of your sov-
eriegn rose,
And life the young life of
a twinkle. (285)

VII

Sweet as Eden is the air
And Eden—sweet the ray
No Paradise is lost for them
That foot by branching root
and stem,
And lighty with the woodland
share
The change of night and day.

Woodland Peace (1888)

Here all things say
'We know not,' even as I.
'We brood, we strive to sky,
We gaze upon decay,
We wot of life through death.
We are patient: what is dumb
We question not nor ask
The hidden to unmask,
The distant to draw near.'

Sweet as Eden is the air,
And Eden—sweet the ray.

Here all say,
We serve her, even as I:
We brood, we strive to sky,
We gaze upon decay,
We wot of life through death,
How each feeds each we spy;
And is a tangle round,
Are patient; what is dumb
We question not, nor ask
The silent to give sound,
The hidden to unmask,
The distant to draw near.

And this the woodland saith:
'I know not hope nor fear:
I take whate'er shall come;
I raise my head to all things
fair,
From foul I turn away.'
Sweet as Eden is the air,
And Eden—sweet the ray.

And this the woodland saith:
I knaw not hope nor fear;
I take whate'er may come;
I raise my head to aspects
fair,
From foul I turn away.

Sweet as Eden is the air,
And Eden—sweet the ray.

(338)

VIII

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

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

For the sake of life,
For that life is dear,
The lust after life
Cling to it fast.
For the sake of life,
For that life is fair,
The lover of life
Fling it broadcast.

The lover of life knows his labour
divine,
And therein is at peace.
The lust after life craves a touch
and a sign
That life shall increase.

The lust after life in the chills
of its lust
Claims a passport of death.
The lover of life sees the flame
in our dust
And a gift in our breath.

IX

A wind aways the pines,
And below
Not a breath of wild air:
All still as the mosses that
glow
On the flooring and over the
lines
Of the roots here and there.

Dirge in the Woods (1888)

A wind aways the pines,
And below
Not a breath of wild air;
Still as the mosses that
glow
On the flooring and over the
lines
Of the roots here and there.
The pine-tree drops its dead:
They are quiet as under the sea.
Overhead, overhead,
Rushes life in a race,
As the clouds the clouds chase:
And we go,
And we drop like the fruits of the tree,
Even we,
Even so.

The pine-tree drops its dead:
They are quiet, as under the sea.
Overhead, overhead
Rushes life in a race,
As the clouds the clouds chase;
And we go,
And we drop like the fruits of the tree,
Even we,
Even so. (342)

The approach of this study to In the Woods (1870) is to examine it as an expression of the world view of the middle period and to consider how revisions and suppression of parts of the poem suggest development away from this world view in the direction of the naturalism of the last period. If In the Woods is considered a single work of art, it can be read as a loosely unified series of lyrics which attempt to describe an attitude an intelligent humanist can achieve toward his relation to the universe which is at once honest, realistic, and peaceful. This interpretation sees the poem as having two main divisions: the first two sections establish the speaker's humanistic view of reality; the remaining sections account for what it means for a man to find some kind of satisfactory relation to this reality. This is to read the poem as suggesting that a humanist, as the speaker describes himself to be in sections I and II, does have a chance of achieving a kind of stoic reconciliation to his natural and metaphysical environment that is not all bad, although it means modifying his outlook to acknowledge, accept,
and even find a kind of resigned comfort in parallels between the transience and finitude of man's values and nature's things. This is the nature of man's endeavor in the symbolic woods of this poem.

Sections I and II establish the speaker's humanist orientation. His spiritual isolation in the universe and his alienation from nature are mainly presented in terms of the pervasive light-dark symbolism of the first two sections. "Unlighted" by anything external to himself, the speaker foots his way, lost (far "from my mark") in the grim, silent ("down is the lark") darkness of his symbolic woods. The blackness of the speaker's state of being in I is made to seem even darker by the implied contrast between it and the brightness of the two "dawns" of non-being which are behind and before man:

I know that a dawn is before me,  
And behind me many days;  
Not what is o'er me.(I)\textsuperscript{13}

In I and II the speaker is a humanist strictly following Arnold's injunction, "Live by thy light, and earth will live by hers!"\textsuperscript{14} That the human spirit is the only ground of spiritual value available to man is stressed as the speaker three times mentions "the light I have within" as the sole ground and guiding principle of whatever value he may realize in life; the speaker relies solely on his human light: "for I know that the paths are dark/Between the two twilights"(II). The natural environment which
symbolizes the universe in which the speaker must proceed according to this inner light is not just indifferent; it is hostile and it induces pessimism: whatever "dawn" may be coming is referred to rather gloomily as a "twilight" five times in II. It is an environment of "weeds" and "wrinkled bark," and in its "unfraternal" and "thin" air the speaker goes "forlorn,/ Unloved, unresting, bare,/ Between two twilights"(II). The normative dualism of this universe is apparent. Evil has as much reality (if not more) as any principle of good. Another element of the speaker's humanism is that not only is nature denied as a possible ground of value beyond man; the idea that there is some kind of supernatural, transcendent, and beneficent ground of value and reality is also rejected. Seeking this kind of transcendence is equated with looking for "spells/ And mouthing of magic for charms"(II) or with denying one's humanity and entering a "chrysalis" of "simple prayer"(II). In the last five lines of section II the speaker compares the sound of the wind through his symbolic woods to

the voice of Time, as slow,
The voice of Life, as grave,
The voice of Death, as still,

and the comparison of the woodland sounds to these voices suggests that there does exist something to be learned from nature. In fact, sections III and IV deal with themes specifically related to time, life, and death, and sections V through IX are elaborations of things that can be learned
from nature about these three. Another reason for thinking that the last five lines of II anticipate some kind of elaboration, application, or modification of what has gone before in II is that these last five lines stand clearly apart from the carefully balanced and tightly unified structure of the rest of II. The unified first part of II begins and ends with the same two lines, "I am in deep woods; / Between two twilights," and three of the four stanzas in between end on the tag, "Between two twilights;" all four are tightly related thematically as humanistic expressions rejecting both physical nature and transience as grounds of human values. Sections III through IX can be seen as an attempt to modify the humanism of I and II by adapting it to a more positive idea of nature. This is not to say that the early humanist bias of the poem is completely rejected in the later sections: there is, for example, an ongoing awareness of the ontological dualism of good and evil in much of the latter part of the poem (in sections V, VI, and VII, as will be mentioned). Furthermore, except for certain implications in VIII, there is nothing in sections III-IX which would affirm that the ground of value lay anywhere other than in the human spirit. The harsher, more despairing components of the humanistic orientation of I and II are, however, definitely modified by emphases first on resignation to or acceptance of the transience of value, and second on a kind of incipient beneficence tentatively attributed to nature. The message of sections
III-IX to the humanist is that he is, after all, a part—physically, at least—of nature and that he can learn from her. He can learn from "woods and fields" that "living," at least temporarily, "yields delight" (III), and he can learn from the "winged seeds" (described, possibly, by the voices of Time, Life, and Death as suggested at the end of II) not to expect too much in the way of permanence from the values of his existence:

Ask you my rhyme
Which shall be trees?
They have had their time. (IV)

Section V is another rejection of transcendence as a source of "love" or beneficence, while it moves toward an anticipation of a naturalistic version of the green earth's "love" for man. Here a sun-earth contrast is used to symbolize a contrast of transcendence and immanence. The "love" associated with transcendence turned out to be more transitory than substantial and had "of spirit none" (V). If there is something outside of man which stands in a relation of love or beneficence to him, it will be immanent and "rooted in" the "green earth" whereof "we grow." But the green earth said "nothing of love" to man—"it simply gave him "warnings" and "lessons" of what it means to live in a dangerous, normatively dualistic universe. Being thus taught is as close as man can come to being loved by the green earth. The implication of V is that nothing else is possible and this is what "love" means: "Was love farther to seek" (V)? Section V approaches Meredith's later idea
of Earth's beneficence, but men are not quite "children of Beneficence" yet; Earth's teaching the hard facts of life is not quite the same as her showering "joy" on him who follows her dictates as does in *The Woods of Westermain* (1883). The "green earth" of *V* is not yet seen as she whose "desires are those/For happiness, for lastingness, for light" and who "kindles in his haunting night/The hoped dawn-rose"(*Earth and Man*, 244).

Sections I–V form most of the suppressed part of *In the Woods* (section VIII was also suppressed and will be discussed presently). The humanistic bias of most of the informing ideas of these sections is quite contrary to that of Meredith's final naturalism. The denial that beneficence has some basic status in reality, the idea that nature is ultimately indifferent and often hostile to human values, and the idea that the human spirit is the sole ground of spiritual values all found explicit and forceful expression in sections I–V. The grimly austere humanism of these sections constitutes a poetic denial of the later naturalism which envisioned Earth as the immanent, beneficent ontological base of all reality. It seems quite feasible that they were removed from the poetic canon in the interests of thematic consistency. Norman Kelvin has sought to correct any false impressions that the first two sections of *In the Woods* may tend to create about Meredith's poetry by writing:

Yet we know that Meredith does not believe life meaningless and that elsewhere he expresses his
faith that "beneficence" exists. Actually he succeeds (in later poems) in reconciling the grimness of "In the Woods" with his belief in life's larger purpose.16

Kelvin goes on to demonstrate Meredith's faith in beneficence by reference to poems like Seed-Time, published some eighteen years after In the Woods in 1888. He is of course correct that 1883 poems do demonstrate the faith in Earth's beneficence that is basic to Meredith's mature world view. The point being made here, however, is that sections I-V of In the Woods (1870) are not parts of the mature world view and that the suppression of these sections is evidence that the very doubt in beneficence expressed in them was repudiated as Meredith's poetic world view developed after 1870.

Sections VI, VII, and IX of In the Woods, which were modified to create later poems do not necessarily or explicitly reflect any particular world view or philosophic orientation. They could reflect humanism or naturalism. Differences, however, between the initial and later published forms of these sections do provide hints of some changes between the middle and the late world view: the later versions are much more suggestive of naturalism than were the earlier ones. Section VI draws back sharply from the benignity imputed to the natural world in the discussion "love" in V to affirm the necessity of recognizing that certain aspects of nature are indeed "red in tooth and claw." Section VI ironically repudiates the "sentimentalist" view of nature's processes as the benevolent function of a
transcendent "Providence." It does not recognize any principle of beneficence operative in nature, and it calls on the misguided sentimentalist to "witness how" innocence is in fact "torn" and how the strong do "tower and govern." The emphasis of Whimper of Sympathy (1887) is different. There is less emphasis on the cruelty and savagery of nature and more on the error of the sentimentalist. The "cruel" sight of 1870 becomes the "rueful" one of 1887. In 1887 there is an implicit justification for the violence of nature; the sentimentalist is upbraided for thinking that

So hard it seems that one must bleed
Because another needs will bite

when such is simply a part of the order of nature. In Whimper of Sympathy nature's violence is not expressed in terms of a factual statement of the tearing of the innocent; this idea is replaced by the assertion that nature "slights the feelings of the totter-knee'd" sentimentalist--a "cruelty" of nature it is much easier to be in favor of. While there is no direct affirmation in the 1887 poem of nature's beneficence, natural violence is pictured more as a necessary condition of life which must be understood, rather than a hostile condition to be endured.

In the total context of In the Woods (1870), section VII is an affirmation of the wisdom of the humanist's (or anyone's) copying nature's acceptance of things that cannot be changed. The humanist is called on to realize that the only "Eden" that man can ever have is the one of the green
earth. The speaker finds a kind of "brotherhood of the damned" with nature as he shares its lack of knowledge of why's and wherefore's, its striving, its brooding, and its acceptance of finitude. These ideas are implicit in what "all things say . . . even as I." After this affirmation of what all things (woods and man) say, the woodland speaks on alone, announcing both its basic acceptance of temporal change and its recognition that the universe is dualistic in terms of good and evil: "I raise my head to all things fair, /From foul I turn away." The implicit truth of the woodland is that things fair and foul share equally in reality. Woodland Peace (1888) effects only minor changes in the text of section VII, but these changes do indicate a movement toward a stronger emphasis on the beneficence and basic goodness of nature. Instead of "all things" affirming their basic agnosticism about matters of fact and value ("Here all things say/We know not,' even as I") the inhabitants of the peaceful woods of 1888 know something about the need for service: "Here all say,/We serve her, even as I." In serving, there is an implicit relationship established between man and nature where there was only a gloomy parallelism in 1870. In 1870 the "woodland" saw the universe as normatively dualistic: there were in fact things both foul and fair. In 1888 the woodland says it turns toward "aspects" fair and away from foul "aspects," implying the possibility at least that foul and fair are aspects of one beneficent ontological reality. That this
reality might be beneficent in the 1888 poem is suggested by another change. In 1870 "all things" were "patient"—but no reason was suggested for their patience and there was nothing else they could be. In 1888 they understand something of the beneficent operations of nature: "How each feeds each we spy," and they are "patient" if they encounter a seeming evil—a "tangle"—in the expectation that they will finally see how "each feeds each" in that particular instance. It is over stating the case to say that the movement from section VII (1870) to Woodland Peace (1888) is one from agnosticism to faith and from ontological normative dualism to a possible ethical monism, but the differences in the two poems do indicate a shift of emphasis of this sort to some extent.

Except for punctuation and indentation, Dirge in the Woods (1888) is the same as section IX. In the original version of In the Woods, section IX is the most explicit statement of the theme of acceptance of human finitude and transience in Earth's immanent ontology, and as such, it is the clearest anticipation in the poem of Meredith's later world view. It is not necessary, however, that Dirge in the Woods or section IX be read only as a naturalistic utterance. In the total context of In the Woods, the conclusion could be seen as a statement of sad resignation as much as it could one of acceptance. Section IX's anticipation of this later theme becomes clear, however, when it is examined in relation to a later statement of acceptance.
such as the conclusion of *The Thrush in February* (1885):

For love we Earth, then serve we all;  
Her mystic secret then is ours;  
We fall, or view our treasures fall,  
Uncloaked, as beholds her flowers  

Earth, from a night of frosty wreck,  
Enrobéd in morning's mounted fire,  
When lowly, with a broken neck,  
The crocus lays her cheek to mire.(331)

The peaceful calm of the mood of *Dirge in the Woods* clearly has affinities with that of this later poem.

The emphasis on acceptance, especially in sections III, IV, VII, and IX, is one of the main ways that the humanistic transition poem *In the Woods* anticipates Meredith's later period. There are two other ways. One of these is the affirmation in section VIII that the proper relation for man to establish with life--one which will allow for a joyful acceptance of the fact of the transience of life's values--is one of "love" and not of "lust." It is difficult to understand why Meredith suppressed section VIII after 1870. The idea that "love" of life means accepting it as a part of Earth's system of recurrence expressed in the contrast of

For the sake of life,  
For that life is dear,  
The lust after life  
Cling to it fast.  
For the sake of life,  
For that life is fair,  
The lover of life  
Flings it broadcast

is one Meredith was to repeat often in his later poetry.
The cry for permanence is a cry of "lust" after life. It is the unrealistic cry of a "blood-oriented" person and is an egoistic refusal to accept one's place in Earth's beneficent scheme: it is a "passport of death" (section VIII). A very similar idea appears in A Faith on Trial (1888):

Cry we for permanence fast,  
Permanence hangs by the grave;  
Sits on the grave green-grassèd—  
On the roll of the heaved grave-mound.  
By Death, as by Life, are we fed;  
The two are one spring. (355)

Section VIII is in fairly obvious conflict with section II. Claiming that recurrence (seeing the "flame" of future life in "our dust") is a good thing and a condition for the perpetuation of value runs counter to the idea of II that man's only ground of value is "nought but the light" within the individual. Section VIII's joyful acceptance of one's place in the recurrence of Earth's processes is another clear anticipation of later themes.

The final way that In the Woods anticipates the mature naturalism appears in the hint of a principle of beneficence in nature at the end of section V:

Then looked I on the green earth we are rooted in,  
Whereof we grow,  
And nothing of love it said,  
But gave me warnings of sin,  
And lessons of patience let fall,  
And told how pain was bred,  
And wherefore I was weak,  
And of good and evil at strife,  
And the struggle upward of all,  
And my choice of the glory of life;  
Was love farther to seek? (V)
It was indicated earlier that Meredith is here moving toward the idea of beneficence as an ontological attribute of Earth. The green earth's "love" is a hard thing as expressed in the lessons taught in the warnings given about pain, sin, strife, and struggle in the universe. It is only a small step from this estimate of the green earth's rugged "love" to the idea of Earth and Man (1883) that

. . . on him, her chief
Expression, her great word of life, looks she;
Twii-minded of him, as the waxing tree,
Or dated leaf.(245)

Earth's "twi-mindedness" of man—her tendency to let man suffer for his own ultimate spiritual welfare—is a common theme in Meredith's last period. Sense and Spirit (1883) reconciles Earth's twi-mindedness of man with Her beneficence (Earth and Man attempts this, too, as is discussed in Chapter V), and in this poem man's proper understanding of the "life" of Earth provides him with a kind of Meredithian equivalent of the idea that "Nature never did betray the heart that loved her":

Seeing she lives, and of her joy of life
Creatively has given us blood and breath
For endless war and never wound unhealed,
The gloomy Wheretofore of our battle-field
Solves in the Spirit, wrought of her through strife
To read her own and trust her down to death. (182)

The realistically grim lesson learned from the green earth in section V of In the Woods anticipates the later idea of
beneficence always tempered with trial. 17

The Movement toward Naturalism

at the End of the Middle Period

Certain poems published in magazines late in the middle period are the first complete works that can be understood as tentative expressions of Meredith's mature naturalism. These poems are Love in the Valley (1878—a revision of the original shorter 1851 version) and The Lark Ascending (1881). His mature naturalistic world view apparently began to take shape in the later 1870's, and his concept of Earth as the immanent ground of value and ideas related to this appeared with considerable consistency in poems after 1878. Love in the Valley (Macmillan's Magazine, October, 1878) is one of Meredith's most successful lyrics. Norman Kelvin has noted that the poem escapes the usual tendency of the later poems to be didactic and that the poem "describes a girl in terms of nature imagery and movement, and describes nature—particularly the qualities of the four seasons as they change—in terms of feminine beauty, using tones and images that connote tenderness, loveliness, and sensuality." 18 Love in the Valley is an expansion of one of the better love lyrics of the 1851 volume, but it is not a very explicit statement of the late world view. The work is still basically a love poem and represents a use of some of the later ideas about Earth in imagery describing the love relationship. An example is the basic
comparison of the consummation of the love affair to a harvest of Earth:

Green-yellow bursts from the cope the laughing yaffle;
    Sharp as a sickle is the edge of shade and shine:
Earth in her heart laughs looking at the heavens,
    Thinking of the harvest: I look and think of mine,(234)

and

Soon will she lie like a white-frost sunrise.
    Yellow oats and brown wheat, barley pale as rye,
Long since your sheaves have yielded to the thresher,
    Felt the girdle loosened, seen the tresses fly.(236)

Because the later ideas about Earth function in this poem mainly in its imagery, it is only an indirect expression of the mature world view. A more explicit statement anticipating it is The Lark Ascending (The Fortnightly Review, May, 1881).

The basic metaphor of The Lark Ascending involves the embodiment in the song of the lark of the voice of Earth, which appears in this poem as the immanent ground of all value and reality. The first section of the poem describes the flight of the lark and his song and establishes the role of the song as mediator between earth and the human spirit:

He rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound,
Of many links without a break,
In churrup, whistle, slur, and shake
All interwoven and spreading wide,
Like water dimples down a tide
Where ripple ripple overcurls
And eddy into eddy whirls;
A press of hurried notes that run
So fleet they scarce are more than one,
Yet changeingly the trills repeat
And linger ringing while they fleet,
Sweet to the quick o' the ear, and dear
To her beyond the handmaid ear,
Who sits beside our inner springs,
Too often dry for this he brings,
Which seems the very jet of earth
At sight of sun, her music's mirth,
As up he wings the spiral stair,
A song of light, and pierces air
With fountain ardour, fountain play,
To reach the shining tops of day,
And drink in everything discerned
An ecstasy to music turned,
Impelled by what his happy bill
Disperses; drinking, showering still,
Unthinking, save that he may give
His voice the outlet, there to live
Renewed in endless notes of glee,
So thirsty of his voice is he,
For all to hear and all to know
That he is joy, awake, aglow,
The tumult of the heart to hear
Through pureness filtered crystal-clear,
And know the pleasure sprinkled bright
By simple singing of delight,
Shrill, irrespective, unrestrained,
Rapt, ringing, on the jet sustained (221)
Without a break, without a fall,
Sweet-silver, sheer lyrical,
Perennial, quavering up the chord,
Like myriad dews of sunny sward
That trembling into fulness shine,
And sparkle dropping argentine;
Such wooing as the ear receives
Erst zephyr caught in choric leaves
Of aspens when their chattering stirs
Is flushed to white with shivers wte;
And such the water-spirit's chime
On mountain heights in morning's prime,
Too freshly sweet to seem excess,
Too animate to need a stress;
But wider over many heads
The starry voice ascending spreads,
Awakening, as it waxes thin,
The best in us to him akin;
And every face to watch him raised
Puts on the light of children praised,
So rich our human pleasure ripes
When sweetness on sincerity pipes,
Though nought be promised for the seas,
But only a soft-ruffling breeze
Sweep glittering on a still content,
Serenity in ravishment. (222)

The song of the lark is more than just sensory pleasure to man; it has a value beyond this: it is "sweet to the quick o' the ear" but it is also "dear to her beyond the handmaid ear"—the human spirit—which understands that the song can break the spiritual drouth of man's "inner springs."

The lark's song can do this because of its affinities with earth—affinities expressed in the symbolic equivalence of the song to a fountain springing from earth. The fountain or spring is often in the landscape of Meredith's later poems a symbol for the upwelling of the spiritual energy and Beneficence of Earth. The Song "seems the very jet of earth" which renews man's spiritual energies by a showering of joy. The joy of the lark's song ("he is joy, awake, aglow") is grounded in its link to Earth in the fountain image: the voice of the lark was also said to be "her [Earth's] music's mirth" when the song was compared to earth's fountain. The song of the lark as the mediator between the human spirit and earth (which is the origin of joy) functions further to awaken in man an awareness of his unity with nature. The song awakens "The best in us to him akin," and the kinship, as the next stanza explicitly states, extends to earth, the joy of which was the foundation of the lark's song:

For singing till his heaven fills,
'Tis love of earth that he instills
And ever winging up and up,
Our valley is his golden cup,
And he the wine that overflows
To lift us with him as he goes:
The woods and brooks, the sheep and kine,
He is, the hills, the human line,
The meadows green, the fallows brown,
The dreams of labour in the town;
He sings the sap, the quickened veins;
The wedding song of sun and rains
He is, the dance of children, thanks
Of sowers, shout of primrose-banks, (222)
And eye of violet's while they breathe;
All these the circling song will breathe,
And you shall hear the herb and tree,
The better heart of men shall see,
Shall feel celestially, as long
As you crave nothing save the song. (223)

The lark is the voice of earth instilling love of earth in
man. That Earth is the constitutive ground of all value
and reality is suggested as the poetic surrogate of Earth,
the lark, is described as a symbol of all the joyful mani-
festations of this basic reality: woods, brooks, animals,
humans, cities—all of animate and inanimate existence. In
the last two sections of the poem the voice of earth oper-
ating through the song of the lark suggests some aspects
of the good life available to the "hearers" linked together
by the song; these are some of the more explicit expressions
of Meredith's mature world view in the poem:

Was never voice of ours could say
Our inmost in the sweetest way,
Like yonder voice aloft, and link
All hearers in the song they drink.
Our wisdom speaks from failing blood,
Our passion is too full in flood,
We want the key of his wild note
Of truthful in a tuneful throat,
The song seraphically free
Of taint of personality,
So pure that it salutes the suns
The voice of one for millions,
In whom the millions rejoice
For giving their one spirit voice.

Yet men have we, whom we revere,
Now names, and men still housing here,
Whose lives, by many a battle-dint
Defaced, and grinding wheels on flint,
Yield substance, though they sing not, sweet
For song our highest heaven to greet:
Whom heavenly singing gives us new,
Enspheres them brilliant in our blue,
From firmest base to farthest leap,
Because their love of Earth is deep,
And they are warriors in accord
With life to serve, and pass reward,
So touching purest and so heard
In the brain's reflex of you bird:
Wherefore their soul in me, or mine,
Through self-forgetfulness divine,
In them, that song aloft maintains,
To fill the sky and thrill the plains (223)
With showerings drawn from human stores
As he to silence nearer soars,
Extends the world at wings and dome,
More spacious making more our home,
Till lost on his aerial rings
In light, and then the fancy sings. (224)

The Lark Ascending anticipates the blood-brain-spirit triad of The Woods of Wastermain and other late poems. Because their wisdom is without vigor (it "speaks from failing blood") or because their passion overrules a proper balance of the triad, most men lack "the key" of the song which is free from the "taint of personality" (personality is a bad word for Meredith, usually a synonym for "egoism"). The "voice aloft" as a surrogate for Earth serves, however, as a spiritual rallying point or an exemplum in which the "millions" who are seeking the stage of "spirit" can see some hope and can thereby "rejoice." The last section of the poem suggests still further hope for the
"millions:" some extraordinary men--sage-like characters--do in fact achieve the level of "spirit" and do become "substance . . . sweet for song." The link between these few who achieve a balance of blood-brain-spirit and Earth is made explicit in a poetic expression that anticipates "Earth that triad is" of The Woods of Westermain: the notables of history have achieved spirit "because their love of Earth is deep,/And they are warriors in accord/With life to serve and pass reward." In a poem published two years later (1883), Shakespeare was said to be one of these sage-like characters who was close to Earth: "Thy greatest knew thee, Mother Earth; unsoured/He knew thy sons . . ." (The Spirit of Shakespeare, 1883). Man's best self, as embodied in these sages, is known by the hearers of the song "in the brain's reflex of yon bird," which enables them to understand the symbolic function of the song as affirming principles dear to Earth. In The Lark Ascending these include the concepts that Earth is the beneficent ground and source of spiritual value and that "spirit" is achieved by abjuring egoism, balancing the triad, and serving others. Not every element of Meredith's mature world view is present here: there is, for example, no special emphasis placed on concepts of unquestioning acceptance of the grimmer side of Earth's processes of recurrence. The Lark Ascending is, however, the earliest explicit poetic statement in a work of definite
thematic unity of a number of important elements of the poet's final naturalistic position.

The Lark Ascending marks the close of Meredith's middle period. The humanism and pessimism that had dominated the world view of the poems for some twenty years disappeared rapidly and completely in the late 1870's. These elements were replaced by a uniquely optimistic naturalism which functioned as a philosophic foundation for Meredith's poetic vision until his death in 1909. The next chapter studies this final poetic vision.
Notes to Chapter IV

1 A Mark in Time was later reprinted under the title Time and Sentiment. See Bibliography and Various Readings, p. 313.

2"Meredith's own note" to this poem is cited by Trevelyan in Poetical Works, p. 596.

3Trevelyan, Poetical Works, p. 606.

4See M. Sturge Henderson, George Meredith, Novelist, Poet, Reformer (N. Y., 1907), pp. 156, 254.

5The Nuptials of Attila is certainly about the disastrous effects of putting the wrong kinds of ideas about marriage and human relations into practice. Attila is a supremely infernal egoist--a kind of Willoughby Patterne turned psychopath. The poem also seems to be, mainly because of its extensive use of symbolic landscape (which can be an effective device for portraying both character and relations between characters), susceptible to an allegorical reading which can be only briefly suggested here. This reading would see the poem as an early account of the wrong way for man (Attila) to relate to Earth (Ildico, the bride) and of the results of establishing such a relationship. Ildico is repeatedly described in terms of nature and the accoutrements of Earth: "See the green tree all in leaf;/See the green tree stripped of bark!/Make the bed for Attila"(289)! She is "Rich in bloom;/Shyer than the forest doe"(288). Attila is seen to pass like a "sea"(291), as has already been noted in the discussion of the sea imagery in Modern Love in Chapter III. And "Earth" is specifically said to be "the prey of Attila"(290-291), and is hated as is an "abject slave"(299). The directionless futility of his leaderless doomed army after Attila's death is described in terms of an appropriate symbolic landscape: a frozen scene of icebergs on a winter ocean.

6The publication history of The Orchard and the Heath is similar to that of By the Rosanna described in Chapter I.

7pp. 291-94. Trevelyan probably looked on such a poem as The Orchard and the Heath as a serious aberration in 1868 in Meredith's philosophy of naturalism which he had been at pains to describe in The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith in 1906.

8Stanzas 12 through 31 are in Bibliography and Various Readings, pp. 291-94. I know of no other place where they are reprinted.
Bibliography and Various Readings, pp. 284-85.

Norman Friedman (pp. 25-26 makes a fairly detailed comparison of The Promise in Disturbance and Martin's Puzzle. He does not, however, discuss the greater complexity of the use of the discord-harmony metaphor in the later poem.


In the Woods (1870) is available in its original form only in Bibliography and Various Readings (pp. 273-78) and in Hough's edition of selected works (pp. 58-63). Trevelyan prints the balance of the poem not included in the three poems later taken from it, but a full reading of the poem is not available in his edition of The Poetical Works. He numbers the stanzas differently and he does not note all the changes of the original text in the derivative poems.

Roman numbers in parentheses following quotes from In the Woods refer to section numbers in the poem as reproduced here and as printed in Bibliography and Various Readings, pp. 273-78.


The statement is in The Woods of Westerman (1883):

Earth that Triad is: she hides
Joy from him who that divides;
Showers it when the three are one
Glassing her in union. (202)

Kelvin, p. 136. Kelvin's comment on the quality of In the Woods is accurate: "In both tone and structure this poem is expressive of its own central idea, which is a way of saying that it is a very good poem" (p. 138).

See also Hard Weather (1888):

So shall her blows be shrewdly met,
Be luminously read the scene
Where Life is at her grindstone set,
That she may give us edgeing keen,
String us for battle, till as play
The common strokes of fortune shower.
Such meaning in a dagger-day
Our wits may clasp to wax in power. (320)
18 Kelvin, p. 130.

19 See Hard Weather (1888), A Night of Frost in May (1892), and Alternation (1901).
Chapter V  Meredithian Naturalism

The Final Period, 1883-1909

Previous references in this study to the "naturalism" of Meredith's mature poetic vision have, because they were usually made for purposes of contrast, done little to describe its complexity or its comprehensiveness. The considerable latitude of interpretive comment the mature poetry has inspired is testimony to this complexity. While all commentators on the poems published after 1883 agree in recognizing the obvious details of its world view--such as the "triad," the affirmation of Earth's beneficence, and the need for the joyful acceptance of change--and while most of them describe the basic immanence of its philosophic framework, critical reaction has varied greatly. It ranges (as will be discussed in detail later) all the way from the idea that Meredith was the laureate of "scientific" Darwinism,¹ through arguments that his was basically a philosophically consistent naturalism,² to affirmations that it included something of an un-naturalistic spiritualism,³ and even to arguments (old and new) that Meredith's "naturalism" contained an idea of God as existing on a different level of reality apart from that of Earth.⁴ However the mature world view may have been interpreted, most critics have justifiably disregarded the chronology of individual poems in the last period, since the poems published after 1883 reveal a striking homogeneity of
outlook. The idea of beneficence in *The Woods of Westermain* and *Earth and Man* (1883) is essentially the same as that in *A Reading of Life* (1901); ideas of recurrence and of Earth's concern for numbers instead of individuals are the same in *A Thrush in February* (1885) and *The Empty Purse* (1892). And while Meredith's total delineation of the concept of Earth may involve his naturalism in certain logical and philosophic difficulties, they are difficulties which appear in poems published throughout all of this final period. Another indication of the settled quality of the mature poetic world view is the fact that—in contrast to the treatment given several important long poems of his earlier periods—no poem published after 1883, either in a volume or in a magazine, was suppressed or significantly revised during Meredith's remaining years. Poems published in magazines were consistently reprinted in the next volume of verse to come out during the final period.  
Meredith published seven volumes of poetry between 1883 and his death. The best (and best known) poems of this period are contained in three of them: *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of the Earth* (1883), *A Reading of Earth* (1888), and *A Reading of Life* (1901). *Ballads and Poems of the Tragic Life* (1887) is a collection of narrative poems, many of which had been published originally in magazines, dealing with presumably edifying or otherwise interesting tragic careers. Certain pieces of minor social criticism, such as *Aneurin's Harp* (1868) were also included. *Modern Love,
a Reprint, to Which is Added the Sage Enamoured, and the Honest Lady (1892) was the volume in which The Promise in Disturbance was added as a preface to Modern Love (1862). It further balances the humanism and pessimism of the early poem with poetic expressions of Meredith's mature outlook as applied to marriage. Poems, The Empty Purse (1892) is a heavily didactic volume notable mainly because it contains Meredith's verse essay, Ode to the Comic Spirit. Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History (1898) is an examination of the history of French social problems made in terms of the poet's philosophy of Earth.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine poems of Meredith's final period to show how they present a world view which understands man not as alienated from Nature, but as having the potential for genuine accord with the universe. The procedure here will be 1) to describe the central features of Meredith's mature "naturalism," to show how this world view is presented in major poems of the last period, and to describe the major types of critical interpretations of this world view; and 2) to suggest some of the special qualifications that the term "naturalistic" must receive when it is used to describe Meredith's final poetic vision.

The World View of the Final Period

The poetic world view of Meredith's maturity can be broadly described as a naturalism with pantheistic overtones.
This world view places a heavy stress on immanence. It envisions only one basic kind of reality. Everything that exists—physical or spiritual—is a development of that one reality, and all forms of existence possess a link with one another because they spring from one ontological base and are confirmations that have arisen in time from that single reality, which Meredith called "Earth." Earth is not static: this single basic reality is always changing and developing in a temporal spiral of recurrence. The particular conformations of this one reality—inanimate objects, plants, animals, man, spirit—are products of this change and development which occurs according to certain immanent patterns, which, when discerned, are called "laws." One of these immanent patterns of development is the "law" of evolution, the latest product of which is man who, in achieving self-consciousness, rationality (Meredith called these "brain"), and volition, has become capable of envisioning and sustaining values which transcend his immediate selfish interest—that is, he has become capable of "spiritual" activity. Survival of the fittest according to natural selection is one of Earth's patterns for plant and animal nature, but by virtue of his rationality and will, man can perceive and pursue the larger patterns of Earth's ongoing processes, and nothing else in nature has this potential. Man alone can orient himself counter to Earth's larger patterns or can align himself with them. Man alone can produce a
spiritual equivalent to Earth's natural laws. From Earth's cycles of recurrence and change he can learn the wisdom and peace of accepting his transience and finitude; from Earth's greater concern for numbers instead of for the welfare of the individual, he can see the need of seeking service for others; he can see in man's work a spiritualized counterpart to the struggle for survival in nature. Man is both animal and spiritual: in Meredith's view of man, the animal instinct for self-preservation takes the form of urgings of "blood"--of "egoism" or self-aggrandizement at the expense of others. Man can use his rationality (his "brain") to temper and direct the vitality of "blood" in the pursuit of accord with Earth's laws. Man as the final product of Earth--her "son" as Meredith called him--is most fully human when he is using "brain" to control and direct "blood" to put his life in accord with these larger patterns of Earth. This is what it means to say that "Earth that traid is"(202) as Meredith does in The Woods of Wesser- main. Man's self-consciousness, rationality, and will render him capable of moral evil, which in this world view is a turning away from human accord with Earth's basic processes. Moral evil involves the seeking of permanence for individuality rather than accepting the fact of change and seeking the service of others. Evil is also involved in any tendency toward dilettantism--either aesthetic or intellectual--which turns spiritual energies away from attention to socially useful work.
The world view described so far is a poetic interpretation of certain factual matter readily available to any observer who understands nature in terms of immanence. It might be faulted by some better trained philosophical naturalists as poor biology or poor anthropology, but the features so far described depend on no assumptions about the natural order (that is, about Earth) which are not subject to the same kind of verification—by the same rational, empirical, or scientific means—as the factual matter. Some other features of Meredith's mature poetic vision are more of the order of unverifiable assumptions than interpretations of factual matter, and they create certain problems of consistency in the poetic vision. Meredith's idea that Earth is beneficent and purposive is a case in point. The poems raise difficulty in explaining why a single ontological reality developing according to its own immanent patterns should be good or bad, and they do not explain this; they usually simply affirm or presuppose beneficence. The denial of the ethical neutrality of nature is implicit in the idea that Earth is purposive for man's good, but the idea that a natural process like evolution could be any more or less beneficent or purposive than, say, gravity, is affirmed rather than explained in the poems of this period. Other features of the mature poetic vision that are hard to reconcile with naturalism and immanence are the ideas of law and God. Certain poetic treatments of these ideas tend to move beyond, by
implication at least, the idea that there is only one (and that one immanent) ground of being. Law apprehended as an immanent pattern of Earth's processes and God seen as an ideal or moral perfection are legitimate tenets of philosophical naturalism, and they do often appear in the poems of the last period in this way, but the occasional function of these terms to suggest the possibility of categories of reality beyond and independent of Earth is an indication that the immanence of the final vision was not an absolutely settled matter.

Meredith's poetic world view after 1883 was a predominantly naturalistic framework which attempted to account for many of the central concerns of the intellectual heritage of his culture: service to others, the dignity of work, the need for courage, a belief in progress, and a joyful acceptance of life on all its terms marked this poetic endeavor, which, if it fell short of final naturalistic consistency, still achieved a thematic and philosophic richness.

Some Major Poems of Meredith's Final Period

The broad outlines so far described of the mature world view are developed in great detail in the longer poems of the final period. Two major pronouncements of this naturalism appeared in the 1883 volume, Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of the Earth, The Woods of Westermain and Earth and Man.
The Woods of Westermain (1883) has been considered for years a rich source for ideas about Meredith's world view but only a limited poetic success. Critics from Trevelyan to Kelvin have praised the work for its philosophy more than for its poetry. Trevelyan in The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith described the poem as a collection of "ethical proverbs, a poetical Pilgrim's Scrip, . . . loosely held together by continual reference to the allegory of the woods." Kelvin's criticism of the poem as containing "many important aspects of Meredith's conception of Nature" while being poorly organized and overly didactic reiterates the consensus of critical opinion, both older and more recent. Patricia Crunden's recent informative study of the poem reviews the earlier criticism and, while acknowledging that "obscurity in syntax and boldness of metaphor mar a good many lines," argues for the poetic success of the poem by describing how its metaphoric structure creates "in the mind of the reader the very habit of mind the poem advocates" and "enacts the attitude towards nature" that the poem recommends. Miss Crunden notes that the poem is the first in the 1883 volume, so that the opening lines, "Enter these enchanted woods,/You who dare" serve to invite the reader to the world of the entire volume.

She might also have said that The Woods of Westermain serves as an overture to the poetic world view of Meredith's entire final period, since Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of
the Earth is the first volume published in that period and since the poem is an early expression of many ideas that remained basically unchanged throughout it. The opening two lines establish the basic metaphor of the poem—the comparison of man's career in the universe to life in an enchanted woods—which is kept before the reader by being repeated at the end of each section of the poem. The first section stresses both the positive and the negative potential of this symbolic woods:

Enter these enchanted woods,
You who dare.
Nothing harms beneath the leaves
More than waves a swimmer cleaves
Toss your heart up with the lark,
Foot at peace with mouse and worm,
Fair you fare.
Only at a dread of dark
Quaver, and they quit their form:
Thousand eyeballs under hoods
Have you by the hair.
Enter these enchanted woods,
You who dare.(193)

The first three lines contain a warning. There is no more danger in these woods than in swimming in waves, but this is to say that there is some real danger: as continual effort is required to keep from drowning, so man in Westermain must continually strive in the right way if he is to avoid disaster. The basic theme of the poem is announced in section I in the assertion that the woods afford the possibility of faring "fair" if one establishes the right relation with them, but that the slightest intrusion of "dread" brings on disaster. Man must accept and affirm to
the fullest his role in Earth's order. Section II makes
the warning of I much more explicit:

Here the snake across your path
Stretches in his golden bath:
Mossy-footed squirrels leap
Soft as winnowing plumes of Sleep:
Yaffles on a chuckle skim
Low to laugh from branches dim:
Up the pine, where sits the star,
Rattles deep the moth-winged jar
Each has business of his own;
But should you distrust a tone,
Then beware.
Shudder all the haunted roods,
All the eyeballs under hoods
Shroud you in their glare.
Enter these enchanted woods,
You who dare.(193)

Man must accept both the fair and the fell in the enchanted
woods. Man must accept and find relation to all of Earth's
bounty. Disaster awaits him who "distrusts" her voice,
whether heard in the joyful laughter of the "yaffle" or
in the ominous, discordant "rattles deep" of the nightjar.
With the warning thus initially reiterated, the poem pro-
ceeds in sections III and IV to define with increasing
specificity man's relation to Earth and to show what man
must learn in order to survive as a fully human being in
these woods. Not dreading and not distrusting Earth--
accepting without preconceptions or reservations all of
Her processes--are necessary conditions for this kind of
learning. Section III shows that the man who thus accepts
Earth can learn of her in the woods of Westermain:

You of any well that springs
May unfold the heaven of things;
Have it homely and within,  
And thereof its likeness win,  
Will you so in soul's desire: (194)

If a man does bring his total sensitivity—if he wills in his "soul's desire"—to make the "heaven of things" truly his own (to "have it homely and within"), he will achieve a measure of spiritual peace and understanding:

Granaries you will have a store  
Past the world of woe and bliss;  
Sharing still its bliss and woe;  
Harness to its hungers, no.  
On the throne Success usurps  
You shall seat the joy you feel  
Where a race of water chirps,  
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Or, where old-eyed oxen chew  
Speculation with the cud,  
Read their pool of vision through,  
Back to hours when mind was mud;  
Nigh the knot, which did untwine  
Timelessly to drowsy suns;  
Seeing Earth a slimy spine,  
Heaven a space for winging tons.  
Farther, deeper, may you read,  
Have you sight for things afield,  
Where peeps she, the Nurse of seed,  
Cloaked, but in the peep revealed;  
Showing a kind face and sweet:  
Look you with the soul you see't. (194-95)

The claim of these lines is that accepting Earth on her own terms is a means not only of achieving spiritual peace ("harnessed to its hungers, no"), but also of comprehending man's emergence from Earth in the evolutionary process. Furthermore, a "Farther, deeper" reading of Earth as she appears to those who have "sight for things afield" leads to an understanding of her beneficence (a view of the "kind face and sweet" of the "Nurse of seed").
Apparently this beneficence is not obvious to everyone. One must have achieved a certain level of spirituality in order to be able to look "with the soul" and see it. The idea is implicit here that knowledge of Earth's beneficence requires a special kind of perception. The aspects, other than beneficence, of the "Nurse of seed" are developed further in IV, but it is implied in III that a spiritual unity can be established between man and nature which makes it possible for man to understand the basic unity of all reality, provided that he sees "with the soul." What the soul discovers in its vision is a kind of discordia concors: Earth's being the single ontological ground of all physical and spiritual reality means that what seem to be conflicts of opposing forces in nature are actually parts of a deeper unity sustaining both. The poem illustrates this idea by suggesting that as evolutionary theory and ancient pagan myths can be seen as different, though not necessarily contradictory, accounts of Earth's development (195), so it can be seen in other areas that Earth may sustain "opposing grandeurs in Her beneficent processes. Meredith's next image of this discordia concors is that of the sun and moon on opposite horizons of an evening landscape:

You have seen the huntress moon
Radiantly facing dawn,
Dusky meads between them strewn
Glimmering like downy awn;
Argent Westward glows the hunt,
East the blush about to climb;  
One another fair they front,  
Transient, yet outshine the time;  
Even as deilight off the rose  
In the mind a jewel grows.  

Patricia Crunden says of this image "when the opposing  
grandeurs of sun and moon unite, they give rise to a kind  
of beauty that is more lasting than either. The resulting  
beauty is more than the sum of its parts."12 This actual  
unity of seeming conflict is another of the larger patterns  
of Earth from which man can learn to order his life in  
harmony with Her, and this particular pattern demonstrates  
what man can understand as love. If man understands Earth’s  
song of discordia concors, he will arrive at an idea of  
truly spiritual love:

Drink the sense the notes infuse,  
You a larger self will find:  
Sweetest fellowship ensure  
With creatures of your kind.  
Ay, and Love, if Love it be  
Flaming over I and ME,  
Love meet they who do not shove  
Cravings in the van of Love.  

The "larger" spiritual "self" is available only to those  
who learn from Earth to love in a way that transcends  
fleshly, selfish, egoistic craving and seeks the weal of  
the loved one. This kind of love is a means of following  
the example of Earth to direct the energies of blood to  
the service of spirit; in such an environment of spiritual  
love,
Here her splendid beast she [Earth] leads
Silken-leashed and decked with weeds
Wild as he, but breathing faint
Sweetness of unfelt constraint.
Love, the great volcano, flings
Fires of lower Earth to sky;
Love, the sole permitted, sings
Sovereignly of Me and I.(197)

The controlled and positively directed primitive energies
of the beast and volcano are natural analogues for the
discordia concors of love at the human level. The discussion of love in section III is that section's main contribution to the poem. Certain ideas, however, presented here, such as that of Earth's spiritual dimension, man's link to this spiritual dimension, and of Earth's beneficence are elaborated more fully in the final part of the poem.

The main theme of the poem, that man must accept and
affirm totally his role as a member of the immanent order
of Earth, is presented in IV in the detailed account of
how man is to understand that role. The first requirement
is that he assert and exercise his distinctively human
capacity for distinguishing between higher and lower
courses of action and actively pursue the higher. The
image presenting this idea at the beginning of section IV
is the contrast of light and darkness:

You must love the light so well
That no darkness will seem fell.
Love it so you could accost
Fellowly a livid ghost.
Whish! the phantom wips away,
Owns him smoke the cocks of day.
In your breast the light must burn
Fed of you, like corn in quern
Ever plumping while the wheel
Speeds the mill and drains the meal.
Light to light sees little strange,
Only features heavenly new;
Then you touch the nerve of Change,
Then of Earth you have the clue;
Then her two-sexed meanings melt
Through you, wed the thought and felt.
Sameness locks no scurvy pond
Here for Custom, crazy-fond:
Change is on the wing to bud
Rose in brain from rose in blood.
Wisdom throbbing shall you see
Central in complexity.(198)

Light and darkness are equally real as potential parts of man's experience. What is affirmed in the opening lines of this section is that man's moral career can have genuine significance if it is founded on an honest and realistic acknowledgment that the universe provides opportunity for spiritual progress or degradation. The man who pursues and sustains the "light" of spiritual improvement (Meredith's image is that of feeding corn into a mill to produce the more valuable meal) is establishing in his life a parallel to Earth's larger pattern of change:
"Then you touch the nerve of Change/Then of Earth you have the clue"(198). The clue is that Earth's pattern of change is essentially a progressive one ("Change is on the wing to bud/Rose is brain from rose in blood") toward greater complexity." In man, this pattern works out in the wed-
ding of "the thought and felt"--the reconciliation of sensuality and rationality for a higher goal of "wisdom."
That Earth's pattern of change finds expression in
man does not guarantee his progress from blood to brain
and beyond to spirit. Man is still a creature of wrong-
turning will and fleshly or selfish temptations:

From her pasture 'mid the beasts
Rise to her ethereal feasts,
Not, though lightnings track your wit
Starward, scorning them you quit:
For be sure the bravest wing
Freens it in our common spring,
Thenoe along the vault to soar,
You with others, gathering more,
Glad of more, till you reject
Your proud title of elect,
Perilous even here while few
Roam the arched greenwood with you.
    Need that snare.
Muffled by his cavern-cowl
Squats the scaly Dragon-fowl,
Who was lord ere light you drank,
And lest blood of knightly rank
Stream, let not your fair princess
Stray: he holds the leagues in stress,
    Watches keenly there.
Oft has he been riven; slain
Is no force in Westermain.(198)

Man is always in danger that he may be snared by the
"scaly Dragon Fowl," egoism, into "scorning" his origins
in Earth and forgetting that "to soar" to spiritual heights
requires preening one's wings "in our common spring" of
Earth. Eternal vigilance against egoism is indeed the
price of spiritual progress, for egoism always recurs too
("slain/Is no force in Westermain") and is always to be
overcome by the use of brain to re-direct the primitive
energies of blood toward spiritual goals. Only as man con-
tinues to harmonize himself with Earth's pattern of evolu-
tionary progress and approaches a permanent or final
achievement of spirit does egoism become transformed into a servant, losing its potential to become a master. At that time

Change will strip his armour off;
Make of him who was all maw,
Inly only thrilling-shrewd,
Such a servant as none saw
Through his days of dragonhood.(199)

Section IV reflects alternating emphases on the possibilities of man's moral improvement or his regression. The idea that change is budding "rose in brain from rose in blood" and that this culminates in the central "complexity" of "wisdom"(198) was followed by the discussion of the dangers of the "snare" of egoism and blood (198). The next idea, that blood can be made the servant of brain (199), is expanded to a vision of the possibility of man at the level of spirit following Earth's principle of change to higher levels:

Change, the strongest son of Life,
Has the Spirit here to wife.
Lo, their young of vivid breed
Bear the lights that onward speed,
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Out of sight of Earth's blue crown,
Whither, in her central space,
Spouts the Fount and Lure o' the chase.
Fount unresting, Lure divine!(199)

The vision of moral progress is followed by a warning that man does not easily embrace the lesson of Earth regarding change, especially as he sees the transience of individual forms of beauty and value. Man is warned that only Earth,
the ground of spirit and change, is permanent and that the desire for permanence of the particular is a desire of the senses:

Look with spirit past the sense,
Spirit shines in permanence.
That is She, the view of whom
Is the dust within the tomb,
Is the inner blush above,
Look to loathe, or look to love;
Think her Lump, or know her Flame;
Dread her scourge, or read her aim;
Shoot your hungers from their nerve;
Or, in her example, serve. (200-201)

The passage just quoted does two things: first, it suggests that man can direct himself toward alienation from or communion with Earth; second, it serves to introduce the last section of the poem which spells out the details of how man can positively relate to Earth's spirituality ("flame"), her beneficent purpose ("aim"), and her concern for numbers ("in her example, serve"). This last section of the poem (201-205) begins with one of Meredith's rare excursions into epistemology in a difficult attempt to account for how man is aware of a spiritual principle in Earth and of his own spiritual links to it:

Some have found her sitting grave;
Laughing, some; on, browed with sweat,
Hurling dust of fool and knave
In a hissing smithy's jet.
More it were not well to speak;
Burn to see, you need but seek.
Once beheld she gives the key
Airing every doorway, she;
Little can you stop or steer
Ere of her you are the seer,
On the surface she will witch,
Rendering Beauty yours, but gaze
Under, and the soul is rich
Past computing, past amaze.
Then is courage that endures
Even her awful tremble yours.
Then, the reflex of that Fount
Spied below, will Reason mount
Lordly and a quenchless force,
Lighting Pain to its mad source,
Scaring Fear till Fear escapes,
Shot through all its phantom shapes.

Then your spirit will perceive
Fleshly seed of fleshly sins;
Where the passions interweave,
How the serpent tangle spins
Of the sense of Earth misprised,
Brainlessly unrecognized;
She being Spirit in her Clods,
Footway to the God of Gods. (201)

Whether one's experience of Earth has been "grave," joyful
("laughing") or painful, one can, under certain conditions,
become aware of a spiritual dimension in Earth. If man
"burn(s) to see" Earth's spirituality, he "need(s) but seek," and Earth, "once beheld," will give him the "key"
to this vision—after which he practically inevitably
becomes Earth's "seer" (the "burning to see" which is a
condition of encountering Earth's soul recalls the seeing
"with the soul" [195] which resulted in an immediate under-
standing of Earth's beneficence in III). Such a seer
appreciates both the surface beauty of Earth and the spirit
beneath it which is "rich/Past computing, past amaze."
Man's "Reason," reflecting on Earth's spirituality ("that
Fount/Spied below"), enables him to achieve an awareness of
Earth as the ontological base of all spirit ("She being
Spirit in her Clods"), including his own. Man's awareness
of his link to earth in spirit leads to his reading in Earth all the elements of Meredith's mature naturalism which have been mentioned previously in this study. His learning that Earth is the spiritual ground of all reality shows him that Earth sponsors the "true felicity" and joy of the balanced triad in which brain subordinates blood to the ends of spirit:

Pleasures that through blood run sane,  
Quickened spirit from the brain.  
Each of each in sequent birth,  
Blood and brain and spirit, three  
(Say the deepest gnomes of Earth),  
Join for true felicity.  
Are they parted, then expect  
Some one sailing will be wrecked:  
Separate hunting are they sped,  
Scan the morsel coveted.  
Earth that Triad is: she hides  
Joy from him who that divides;  
Showers it when the three are one  
Glassing her in union.(201-202)

Creating and maintaining human equivalents for Earth's larger patterns is man's means of "glassing her" in spirituality. Knowledge that Earth sustains spirit leads man to a joyful acceptance of his present role in Earth's ("Leaving her the future task:/Loving her too well to ask" [202]) immanent order; some of the details of this role are spelled out in the next lines:

Life, the chisel, axe and sword,  
Wield who have her depths explored:  
Life, the dream, shall be their robe,  
Large as air about the globe;  
Life, the question, hear its cry  
Echoed with concordant Why;
Life, the small self-dragon ramped,
Thrill for service to be stamped.
Ay, and over every height
Life for them shall wave a wand:
That, the last where sits affright,
Homely shows the stream beyond.
Love the light and be its lynx,
You; will track her and attain;
Read her as no cruel Sphinx
In the woods of Westermain.(202)

This description of man's rôle reaffirms what was earlier called the basic theme of the poem. It is a rôle demanding acceptance of change, even of death as a condition of renewed life ("Homely shows the stream beyond"), pursuit of one's work as a means of serving others ("Thrill for service to be stamped"), and affirming the beneficence ("Read her as no cruel Sphinx") of Earth, which is man's origin, sustenance, and home. The poem ends in a vision of spiritual progress in which allegiance to Earth may let man "ascend to heights unmatched" (203), followed by a repeated warning of the dangers of denying Spirit by seeking fleshly egoistic ends in the changing woods.

In addition to being an important early statement of many features of Meredithian naturalism, The Woods of Westermain is also an expression of certain aspects of the world view which were problems in this "naturalism" throughout the entire final period and which were to lead to a rather large disparity of critical interpretation. The idea that Earth is beneficent and purposive defines one of these problem areas; the other is related to the question of the nature of Earth's spirituality. That these
two areas are difficult as suggested in The Woods of West-
ermain by the fact that awareness of both of them requires
a special kind of perception. Regarding beneficence, it
is said in section III that

Farther, deeper, may you read,
Have you sight for things afield,
Where peeps she, the Nurse of seed,
Cloaked, but in the peep revealed;
Showing a kind face and sweet:
Look you with the soul you see 't.(195)

Can just anyone look "with the soul?" Or is this a special
kind of intuition? Earth's kindness and sweetness are here
linked to spirit or soul and are "revealed" only to those
who can utilize spiritual vision. And in IV Earth's
spiritual element--the "soul" said to be "rich past com-
puting"--is beheld only by those who "burn to see"(201).
What does it mean to have to "burn to see" or to see "with
the soul" to comprehend Earth's beneficent spirituality?
Does it mean simply recognizing that man's spirit has its
ultimate source and point of origin in the immanent natural
order of Earth, which had, before man appeared, only the
bare potential for spirit? If so, this seems to be a
rather straightforward naturalistic idea of the origin of
spirit, and comprehending it should not require "burning"
or special vision. Or is something else hinted at by the
need for special perception? Is the poem suggesting that
man's spirit is complemented and sustained from moment to
moment by a co-existent, ongoing spirituality in Earth?
Is Trevelyan right when he says of The Woods of Westermain (my italics):

"She" throughout this poem, as in so many others, means our Mother Earth (Nature), conceived as a spirit somehow present in the woods and the sky and wild animals, and in the body and mind of man? (588)13

The answers to these questions are important because they affect the very nature of Meredith's world view as naturalism. The idea of a monistic, beneficent, ongoing spiritual reality prior to man which manifests itself in and is constitutive of all physical and spiritual reality is not exactly expected from the "laureate" of scientific Darwinism. (The extent to which Meredith's poetic vision incorporates such an idea of spirituality is the extent of the inaccuracy of this tag so often critically applied to him). Regardless of what name would be applied to such a spiritual ontological base of reality--Earth, Nature, God, or whatever--the spiritual reality so envisioned is functioning much like a theistic deity or a Hegelian Absolute, and the naturalism that held such a view would be a rather specially qualified "naturalism." Of course, Meredith does not explicitly say all this in The Woods of Westermain, but parts of his later poetry are subject to some such interpretation, and such an idea does form one pole of a tension in his world view regarding the spirituality of Earth. The other pole of this tension is the idea expressed in poems like the sonnet Appreciation (1883)
in which Meredith says "Earth was not Earth before her sons appeared" (185), and which have led critics like Joseph Warren Beach to comment about Meredith's idea of spirituality that it is "doubtful whether Meredith's 'spirituality' signifies anything more than a cultivated moral sense" and that

Obviously this (spirituality) is not present in nature before the arrival of man; for Meredith asserts over and over again that 'spirit' or 'soul' is man's contribution to the natural process. . . . The only sense in which Meredith assumes a spiritual element in nature is this: nature actually involves the evolution of man, who is a creature capable of some measure of altruism; and this altruistic tendency has actually developed in man as a result of his dealings with his environment in accordance with the 'laws'--that is, the observed behavior--of the natural world. In this sense then, Earth--as we review her history--has actually borne certain flowers of spirit.14

Beach is correct that several of Meredith's poems contain the idea that spirituality appears with man. He cites the line from Appreciation (1883) already quoted, and he might have mentioned Nature and Life (1888) in which the speaker exhorts man to

Breath which is the spirit's bath
In the old Beginnings find,
And endow them with a mind,
Seed for seedling, swathe for swathe.
That gives Nature to us, this
Give we her, and so we kiss. (341)

But there is another emphasis--at least as strong--in Meredith's late poems regarding the spiritual principle of Earth which describes Earth as having more than just a
spiritual potential prior to man—as having an ongoing spirituality which existed before man. The sonnet Sense and Spirit (1883) describes such an ongoing spirituality in Earth, which true felicity requires man to understand:

Till we conceive her living we go distraught,
At best but circle-windsails of a mill.
Seeing she lives, and of her joy of life
Creatively has given us blood and breath
For endless war and never wound unhealed,
The gloomy Wherefore of our battle-field
Solves in the Spirit, wrought of her through strife,
To read her own and trust her down to death. (182)

Until man achieves the level of spirit which enables him to understand that of Earth ("to read her own"), he cannot achieve the real happiness of trusting in her beneficence. Also in Earth's Secret (1883) the idea is presented that close attention to nature—to Earth's larger patterns or laws expressed there—can lead man to an understanding that spirit, as well as physical life, is founded in Earth: "For Earth, that gives the milk [that which sustains physical life], the spirit gives" (183). This last quoted line could be a statement of Earth simply as potential for spirit; but the idea that Earth's spirit is an ongoing thing, co-existant with man's and even sustaining it is made so explicit as not to require further comment in the sonnet My Theme (1883)—italics are mine:

Of me and of my theme think what thou wilt:
The song of gladness one straight bolt can check.
But I have never stood at Fortune's beck:
Were she and her light crew to run afloat
At my poor holding little would be spilt;
Small were the praise for singing o'er that wreck.
Who courts her dooms to strife his bended neck; 
He grasps a blade, not always by the hilt. 
Nathless she strikes at random, can be fell 
With other than those votaries she deals 
The black or brilliant from her thunder-rift. 
I say but that this love of Earth reveals 
A soul beside our own to quicken, quell, 
Irradiate, and through ruinous floods uplift. (189)

The point being made here is that it is not entirely as obvious as Beach said that Meredith's final world view conceived of no spirit present in nature before the arrival of man. The tension in the final poetry between the idea that spirituality depends upon man and that Earth has always had an ongoing spirituality which created, sustains, and directs man's spirit appears in another important poem of the 1883 volume. Earth and Man is a less poetically successful work than The Woods of Westermain, but it is a much more straightforward rendition of the complexities of Meredith's final world view.

Earth and Man is a work of forty-four four line stanzas utilizing the basic image of Earth the Mother to portray man's emergence from Earth and the details of his relationship to Her. The first half of the poem is what Bonamy Dobrée called a "transformation of the universal law [of evolution] discovered by science" into poetic terms--it is an account of the evolutionary process as "a series of steps from earth to mind, and thence to spirit."15 Stanzas I through VII suggest man's rise through the natural order in time, according to the principle of the survival of the fittest ("For he is in the lists/Contentious
with the elements, whose dower/First sprang him; for swift
vultures to devour/If he desists [III,240], beyond the
level of the "lusty animal" to that of self-consciousness
and mind, at which he takes up "that old task/Of reading
what he is and whence he came"(VII,240) and whither he will
go. Stanzas VIII through XXII describe how the attempt to
answer these basic questions leads man, who has achieved
here the level of brain, but not spirit, into several
errors. He attempts to make permanent the particular
values associated with self, and in doing this he misreads
Earth's "cherishing of her best-endowed" as a "wanton's
choice"(XV,242) and not as a basic part of that very pro-
cess which has impelled man to the level of brain (XVI,242).
In turning his back on Earth in his quest for permanence
("He will not read her good,/Or wise, but with the passion
self obscures" [XVII,242]), man turns to false religions
of transcendence and superstition(VIII, XI, XX, XXI, 241-42).
The last half of the poem presents the kind of understanding
of Earth Man must have if he is to achieve the level of
spirit. This part of Earth and Man expresses many features
of the mature world view and reflects both sides of the
tension between the two ways Earth's spirituality is envi-
sioned in Meredith's later poems. It is quoted at length:

XXIII

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

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

XXV

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

XXVI

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

XXVII

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

XXVIII

She hears him, and can hear
With glory in his gains by work achieved:
With grief for grief that is the unperceived
In her so near.

XXIX

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

XXX

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

XXXI

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

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

XXXIII

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

XXXIV

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

XXXV

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

XXXVI

That captain of the scorned;
The coveter of life in soul and shell,
That fratricide, the theif, the infidel,
The hoofed and horned;--

XXXVII

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

XXXVIII

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

XXXIX

Whence looks he on a land
Whereon his labour is a carven page;
And forth from heritage to heritage
Nought writ on sand.
XL

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

XLI

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

XLII

Then in him time shall run
As in the hour that to young sunlight crows;
And—'If thou hast good faith it can repose.'
She tells her son.

XLIV

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

The idea that spirituality appears with man is asserted in 
XXIV-XXVII. Spirituality is expressed in man in "work that 
lights the shapeless and the dun," "order," "high discourse," 
"decency," and "language." Even though he may be "blind" 
to Earth as the single ultimate reality, his "spelling at 
her laws" is a contribution to spirit. But man in these 
stanzas is contributive to spirit, not solely constitutive 
of it. To say in XXIX that Earth's "essence is the spur" 
which makes man (however much in error his methods may be) 
try to sustain spiritual values might be read as an asser-
tion that Earth contains the bare potential for spirit.
But to claim that Earth has beneficent purposes for man 
which have the final goal of leading man
This life and her to know
For Spirit (XXXIII, 244)

is to say a great deal more about Earth's spiritual principle than that it is mere potential. There is a great deal of difference in the claims of stanzas XXX-XXXIII about the ultimate ground of spirituality and the idea expressed in the sonnet Appreciation (1883); the italics are mine:

Earth was not Earth before her sons appeared,
Nor Beauty Beauty ere young Love was born:
And thou when I lay hidden wast as morn
At city-windows, touching eyelids blearèd;
To none by her fresh wingedness endeared;
Unwelcome unto revellers outworn.
I the last echoes of Diana's horn
In woodland heard, and saw thee come, and cheered.
No longer was thou then mere light, fair soul!
And more than simple duty moved thy feet.
New colours rose in thee, from fear, from shame,
From hope effused: though not less pure a scroll
May men read on the heart I taught to beat:
That change in thee, if not thyself, I claim. (185)

The speaker's claim here that man and man alone is responsible for the movement from brain ("mere light") to spirit ("the heart I taught to beat") is a far remove from the idea in Earth and Man that Earth is a "Spirit" (XXXIII, 244) which has beneficent plans ("desires" and "inner dreams") for man's spiritual progress and welfare (XXI-XXII).

The presentation of concepts of beneficence, spirituality, and purposiveness in Earth and Man demonstrates a basic difficulty in Meredith's "philosophic" poetry: an inadequate epistemological dimension. Meredith never really
accounts for how it is possible to know that Earth is beneficent, for example. Beneficence and spirituality are more claimed and affirmed than accounted for; the closest he comes to accounting for them is the implication that some kind of special perception is required to comprehend them—as in The Woods of Wethermain (195, 201). A similar kind of special perception is hinted at in sections XXXVII and XXXVIII of Earth and Man. The chief aspiration for man in the poem is, in Beach's words, "the dominance of mind over the senses;" but the poem does not depict man as having completely achieved the stage of spirit yet. Mother Earth is pictured in XXVIII as grieving that her son has approached so near an understanding of her spirituality and beneficence without realizing them (243). Still, the hope is held out that he will achieve this perception, which is described as another kind of "burning" to "see with the soul:" to achieve this perception he must be "passed" by "fire" as "vapour to the sun," which will reume him, after which the "horrid pall" of self will be lifted and he will hear Earth's spiritual voice (XXXVII-XXXVIII). Again, this special perception results in a kind of immediate intuitive experience of spirit.

Meredith also creates problems for his philosophic poetry of "naturalism" in comments on the "just Lord" in stanza XLII. It is certainly true that the terms "God" and "lord" appear in many poems as purely honorific terms for a principle of moral perfection—as many critics note.
Beach and Trevelyan insist on this kind of reading. But, as will be suggested presently, there is anything but critical unanimity on this point. The problems raised by the idea of a "just Lord" which Earth can view but man cannot in stanza XLII are closely related to those of spirituality. If man is the increment of spirit in Earth (and Earth and Man certainly does not say that he alone is) as Professor Beach would have it, why must man wait until he has made sufficient use of Earth's gifts to understand Her spirituality before he could view or comprehend an ideal of spirit? If Earth's spirituality stands between and mediates between man's spirit and the comprehension of an ideal spiritual Goal, then Earth's spirit must be nearer this goal than man's. And if this is the case, then a claim is being made (or implied) that Earth might well have been Earth before her sons appeared. The argument here is not that Meredith was trying to imply this idea at the end of Earth and Man (the poem may contain it, however). It seems doubtful that the poet himself pursued the implications of stanza XLII too far. Beach says that Meredith's "want of philosophical training" may have led him into the pitfalls in the use of "terms deeply tinged with religious and philosophical assumptions which he did not share." Of course, everyone falls into this kind of pitfall to some extent, and there is no doubt truth in what Beach says; however, one must be careful not to obscure a genuine eclectic quality in Meredith's final poetic vision by
arguing that any reference to "un-naturalistic" topics is purely honorific or simply a language problem. That Meredith's final world view was struggling to make some inclusion of or reconciliation with several such "un-naturalistic" topics is apparent in two long poems which are basic expressions of the mature poetic creed: *A Faith on Trial* (1888) and *A Reading of Life* (1901).

*A Faith on Trial* (1888) is a long autobiographical poem based on the ordeal of the poet's wife's death from cancer in 1885. The poem is a triumphant expression of the mature world view in the face of grief and despair. It has three movements: the first (stanzas 1 through 5; 345-50) presents the depths of the speaker's despair in contrast to the budding springtime environment in which it occurs. The second movement (stanzas 6 through 12; 350-56) described the husband's spiritual rejuvenation which enables him to accept his wife's death and come through his ordeal. The third (stanzas 13 and 14; 357-61) is a recapitulation of what can be learned about man's relation to Earth from such an ordeal.

The first movement portrays the beautiful spring landscape which the husband's grief prevents him from realizing:

On the morning of May,  
Ere the children had entered my gate  
With their wreaths and mechanical lay,  
A metal ding-dong of the date!  
I mounted our hill, bearing heart  
That had little of life save its weight:  
The crowned Shadow poising dart  
Hung over her: she, my own,
My good companion, mate,
Pulse of me: she who had shown
Fortitude quiet as Earth's
At the shedding of leaves. And around
The sky was in garlands of cloud,
Winning scents from unnumbered new births,
Pointed buds, where the woods were browned
By a mouldered beechen shroud;(345)

The implicit message of the natural pattern of renewed life
coming from death ("buds" emerging from "a mouldered beechen shroud") is lost on the speaker in his grief, but the
landscape does lead him to acknowledge that the ability
to sorrow distinguishes man from nature:

Weak out of sheath downy leaves
Of the beech quivered lucid as dew,
Their radiance asking, who grieves;
For nought of sorrow they knew:
No space to the dread wrestle vowed,
No chamber in shadow of night (346)

The spring landscape calls up a vision of his wife's home-
land in Normandy and their courtship there, but the vision
is a source of pain in its contrast of past joy and present
despair, and the vision, no more than the spring landscape
brings him peace:

I saw, unsighting: her heart
I saw, and the home of her love
There printed, mournfully rent:
Her ebbing adieu, her adieu,
And the stride of the Shadow athwart.
For one of our Autumns there!....
Straight as the flight of a dove
We went, swift winging we went,
We trod solid ground, we breathed air,
The heavens were unbroken. Break they,
The word of the world is adieu:
Her word: and the torrents are round,
The jawed wolf-waters of prey.
We stand upon isles, who stand:
A shadow before us, and back,
A phantom the habited land.
We may cry to the Sunderer, spare
That dearest! he loosens his pack.
Arrows we breathe, not air.
The memories tenderly bound
To us are a drifting crew,
Amid grey-gapped waters for ground.
Alone do we stand, each one,
Till rootless as they we strew
Those deeps of the corse-like stare
At a foreign and stony sun.
Eyes had I but for the scene
Of my circle, what neighbourly grew.
If haply no finger lay out
To the figures of days that had been,
I gathered my herb, and endured.(345-48)

The husband in his pain violates the "naturalistic" ethic announced in The Woods of Westermain and Earth and Man, sinning against Earth in two ways. First he seeks permanence for individual or particular forms of value ("We may cry to the Sunderer, spare/That dearest!") and wishes to deny change ("For one of our autumns there!"). Second, he implicitly denies the beneficence of Earth by saying that man's terribly ensiled isolation is enforced by an obviously very hostile natural environment ("the jawed wolf-waters of prey;" "arrows we breathe, not air"). It is an environment "endured" by the husband, not joyfully accepted. The reason given for this misreading of Earth is grief: the spring landscape does contain

A free-hearted harmony large,
With meaning for man, for brute,
When the primitive forces are brimmed.(348)

But it is lost on the speaker in his grief:
Grief heard them, and stepped her way on.
She has but a narrow embrace.
Distrustful of hearing she passed. (348-49)

The first movement contains two anticipations of the speaker's redemption from his "sins against Earth" which foreshadow the coming insights of the second movement. The first anticipation of the speaker's encounter with one of the two arboreal symbols that function to unify imagery and theme in the first two movements, the yew tree:

But sight holds a soberer space.
Colourless dogwood low
Curled up a twisted root,
Nigh yellow-green mosses, to flush
Redder than sun upon rocks,
When the creeper clematis-shoot
Shall climb, cap his branches, and show,
Beside veteran green of the box,
At close of the year's maple blush,
A bleeding greybeard is he,
Now hale in the leafage lush.
Our parasites paint us. Hard by,
A wet yew-trunk flashed the peel
Of our naked forefathers in fight;
With stains of the fray sweating free;
And him came no parasite nigh:
Firm on the hard knotted knee,
He stood in the crown of his dun;
Earth's toughest to stay her wheel:
Under whom the full day is night;
Whom the century-tempests call son,
Having striven to rend him in vain. (349)

The speaker's disparaging of the deceptive lushness and beauty of the dogwood disguised by the clematis and his preference for the sturdy yew anticipates his coming acceptance of his spiritual burden: the yew is at once the tree of death and the wood of strength, resiliency, and struggle; and the speaker sees it as symbolic of
strength and staying power in the face of adversity (it suggests to him the strength and courage he associates with ancient embattled Britons). The second anticipation of the speaker’s redemption appears as he is in the very depths of his pessimism in the italicized lines below of the passage that concludes the first movement:

I walked to observe, not to feel,
Not to fancy, if simple of eye
One may be among images reaped
For a shift of the glance, as grain:
Profitless froth you espy
Ashore after billows have leaped.
I fled nothing, nothing pursued:
The changeful visible face
Of our Mother I sought for my food;
Crumbs by the way to sustain.
Her sentence I knew past grace.
Myself I had lost of us twain,
Once bound in mirroring thought.
She had flung me to dust in her wake;
And I, as your convict drags
His chain, by the scourge untaught,
Bore life for a goad, without aim.
I champed the sensations that make
Of a ruffled philosophy rags.
For them was no meaning too blunt,
Nor aspect too cutting of steel.
This Earth of the beautiful breasts,
Shining up in all colours aflame
To them had visage of hags:
A Mother, of aches and: jests:
Soulless, heading a hunt
Aimless except for the meal.
Hope, with the star on her front;
Fear, with an eye in the heel;
Our links to a Mother of grace;
They were dead on the nerve, and dead
For the nature divided in three;
Gone out of heart, out of brain,
Out of soul: I had in their place
The calm of an empty room.
We were joined but by that thin thread,
My disciplined habit to see.
And those conjure images, those,
The puppets of loss or gain;
Not he who is bare to him doom;  
For whom never semblance plays  
To bewitch, overcloud, illumine.  
The dusty mote-images rose;  
Sheer film of the surface awag:  
They sank as they rose: their pain  
Declaring them mine of old days. (349-50)

The passage echoes the despair of *I Chafe at Darkness*  
(1862):

... for I have lost what made  
The dawn-breeze magic, and the twilight beam  
A hand with tidings o'er the glade  
Waving seem(181)

and is another Meredithian version of Coleridge's separa-
tion from nature's grandeurs in the *Dejection Ode*:

I see them all so excellently fair;  
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are.  

But even in the depths of despair, even when his spirit is  
blinded by "sensations that make/Of a ruffled philosophy  
rags" and when Earth seems to have lost all spirituality  
and is read in tooth and claw (seems to be "a Mother of  
abhes and jests:/Soulless, heading a hunt/Aimless except  
for the meal:"), the speaker still has one link to Earth  
and her laws: his "disciplined habit to see." It is this  
which provides the possibility of redemption. The speak-
er's ultimate resource is that practice that named the  
volume in which *A Faith on Trial* appears, *A Reading of  
Earth*. The husband's "disciplined habit to see" is re-
warded by a moment of spiritual rejuvenation which begins  
the second movement of the poem:
Now gazed I where, sole upon gloom,
As flower-bush in sun-specked crag,
Up the spine of the double combe
With yew-boughs heavily cloaked,
A young apparition shown:
Known, yet wonderful, white
Surpassingly; doubtfully known,
For it struck as the birth of Light:
Even Day from the dark unyoked.
It waved like a pilgrim flag
O'er processional penitents flown
When of old they broke rounding yon spine:
O the pure wild-cherry in bloom!(350-51)

The "known," yet "doubtfully known" cherry bough which strikes "as the birth of Light" is about as close as Meredithian naturalism comes to an expression of special revelation. It is revelation partly dependent on a "disciplined habit to see," but its happening is not accounted for in detail in the poem. The encounter with the cherry bough is another occasion of "special perception" which reveals to man the qualities of Earth that are not directly or empirically observable. The cherry bough, we learn in the next stanza, had long-standing positive associations for the speaker and his wife—they had "hailed it pure of pure; our beacon yearly" (351), and the speaker had long ago in youth seen the cherry tree as a token of Earth's spirituality:

She, the white cherry, a tree,
Earth-rooted, tangibly wood,
Yet a presence throbbing alive;
Nor she in our language dumb:
A spirit born of a tree;
Because earth-rooted alive.(352)
In his grief he had fallen from union with Earth ("Once bound in mirroring thought"[350]), and the encounter with the "pure wild cherry in bloom"(351) is both redemptive and revelatory:

... .strange
When it strikes to within is the known;
Richer than newness revealed.
There was needed darkness like mine.(351)

What is revealed to the husband by the bough is that his darkness was actually a positive occasion for the increase of light. He gains a deeper knowledge of the nature of Earth’s beneficence than he had had in his youth. What he learns in his maturity is that the cherry bough he saw as revelation is actually grafted to one of the yew branches forming the combe against which the cherry bough was seen:

She [here, the cherry bough] beckoned, I
gazed, unaware
How a shaft of the blossoming tree
Was shot from the yew-wood’s core.
I stood to the touch of a key
Turned in a fast-shut door.(352)

The link of the cherry and the yew is a symbolic foreshadowing of a deeper knowledge of Earth’s beneficence made explicit in the rest of the poem—that death and life are parts of one reality and that death is a condition for the recurrence of ever greater spiritual value in the future according to Earth’s immanent law of change. The revelation has unlocked the door that was fast-shut on the
husband's spirit, and allows him to accept without question Earth's processes and to make "readings of Earth" that do
draw thence,
Then a concord deeper than cries
Of the Whither whose echo is Whence,
To jar unanswered.(353)

Such "readings of Earth" gave the husband a wisdom that allowed him to achieve "peace within"(353) just before his wife died and enabled him to account for her death in terms of his philosophy of Earth. The reconciliation of the fact of the wife's death to this philosophy provides for the husband's coming through his faith's ordeal and was the occasion for several realizations or affirmations which are described in detail. Man must achieve a harmony within his being which is in harmony with Earth's larger patterns or laws:

But this in myself did I know,
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
That natures at interflow
With all of their past and the now,
Are chords to the Nature without,
Orbs to the greater whole.(353)

This harmony within means a subordination of blood to brain in familiar Meredithian terms:

First then, nor utterly then
Till our lord of sensations at war,
The rebel, the heart, yields place
The brain, each prompting the soul.
Thus our dear Earth we embrace
For the mild, her strength to men.(353)
Man must realize that Earth has no sympathy for "flesh in revolt at her laws"(354) and that the desire for personal immortality is just such a revolt: it is a "cry of unfaith," a desire "of the flesh in afright," and a "sensual dream"(354). Man must have the strength to accept Earth’s "harsh wisdom" regarding life and death:

Of Earth are we stripped or crowned.  
The fleeting Present we crave,  
Barter our best to wed,  
In hope of a cushioned bower,  
What is it but Future and Past  
Like wind and tide at a wave!  
Idea of the senses, bred  
For the senses to snap and devour:  
Thin as the shell of a sound  
In delivery, withered in light.  
Cry we for permanence fast,  
Permanence hangs by the grave;  
Sits on the grave green-grass’d,  
On the roll of the heaved grave-mound.  
By Death, as by Life, are we fed  
The two are one spring; our bond  
With the numbers; with whom to unite  
Here feathers wings for beyond:  
Only they can waft us in flight.  
For they are Reality’s flower.  
Of them, and the contact with them,  
Issues Earth’s dearest daughter, the firm  
In footing, the stately of stem;  
Unshaken though elements lour;  
A warrior heart unquelled,  
Mirror of Earth, and guide  
To the Holies from sense withheld:  
Reason, man’s germinant fruit.  
She wrestles with out old worm  
Self in the narrow and wide:  
Relentless quencher of lies,  
With laughter she pierces the brute;  
And hear we her laughter peal,  
’Tis Light in us dancing to scour  
The loathed recess of his dens;  
Scatter his monstrous bed,  
And hound him to harrow and plough.  
She is the world’s one prize;  
Our champion, rightfully hear;  
The vessel whose piloted prow,
Though Folly froth round, hiss and hoot,
Leaves legible print at the keel.
Nor least is the service she does,
That service to her may cleanse
The well of the Sorrows in us;
For a common delight will drain
The rank individual fens
Of a wound refusing to heal
While the old worm slavers its root. (355-56)

Man must realize that permanence for the individual is impossible. Only by Earth's pattern of recurrence, which involves both life and death and operates in terms of "numbers" of men and not individuals, has spiritual progress been possible at all. Life and death have been the conditions of the progress by which man has risen to the level of Reason or brain ("Earth's dearest daughter"--"man's germinant fruit") which, by mastering "our old worm self," achieves spirit and the possibility of further progress. Therefore man must realize that only by his total acceptance of Earth's pattern of spiritual progress through recurrence can spirit be achieved and "Sorrows" cleansed. It is this total acceptance of Earth that allowed the husband to welcome the blow of earth and to come through his trial:

I bowed as a leaf in rain;
As a tree when the leaf is shed
To winds in the season at wane:
And when from my soul I said,
May the worm be trampled: smite,
Sacred Reality! power
Filled me to front it aright.
I had come of my faith's ordeal. (356)

The third movement of the poem is a set of two recapitulations of the philosophy of Earth presented thus far--one by
the speaker (357-58) and one in an imagined voice of
Earth (358-61). Little is added in these recapitulations,
with the exception of the discussion of mankind's possi-
ble spiritual progress and its relation to a concept of
God at the end of the latter one. In this final "speech;"
Earth exhorts man:

'Numbers in council, awake
'To love more than things of my lap,
'Love me; and to let the types break,
'Men be grass, rocks rivers, all flow;
'All save the dream sink alike
'To the source of my vital in sap;
'Their battle, their loss, their ache,
'For my pledge of vitality know.
'The dream is the thought in the ghost;
'The thought sent flying for food;
'Eyeless, but spring of an aim
'Supernal of Reason, to find
'The great Over-Reason we name
'Benevolence: mind seeking Mind.
'Dream of the blossom of Good,
'In its waver and current and curve,
'With the hopes of my offspring ensnared!
'Soon to be seen of a host
'The flag of the Master I serve!
'And life in them doubled on Life,
'As flame upon flame, to behold,
'High over Time-tumbled sea,
'The bliss of his headship of strife,
'Him through handmaiden me.(360-61)

The passage recalls the mention of the "just Lord" at the
end of Earth and Man. The ending of A Faith on Trial is
quite enigmatic as a statement of philosophical naturalism.
The Emersonian transcendentalist echoes of "The great Over-
Reason we name/Benevolence" may be a way of honorifically
describing an ongoing process of ethical progress, although
this seems to be strange honorific language coming from a
poet whose "system" is hailed as immanent and naturalistic. The idea that change is a "pledge" of Earth's "vitality" is understandable in Meredith's system of ideas. But if the lines

The dream is the thought in the ghost;  
The thought sent flying for food

are a suggestion that there is present to human spirituality (the "ghost") some kind of a goal of spiritual, ethical, or moral progress ("the dream"), then how can the "thought" of this "dream" be "sprung of an aim/Supernal of Reason," if spirit has, as Meredith has said many times, part of its origin in Reason or brain? Spirit and spiritual goals should be at least partly comprehensible by brain—not supernal to it. The answer to the question might be that the "aim/Supernal of Reason" might be one revealed by the "Master" Earth claims to serve as "handmaiden." Here again Meredith is getting his naturalistic orientation into great deal of trouble by dramatizing categories of reality external to and beyond Earth, if he really takes seriously the idea of Earth as the single ontological reality in an immanent universe. The argument that Meredith is envisioning some reality different from and external to Earth which is "served" by Earth's sponsoring the growth of spirit would be difficult to substantiate in Meredith's overall poetic vision, but it is impossible to deny the assertion that an idea of some reality
"beyond" Earth is related to the area of meaning defined by the ending of *A Faith on Trial*. Probably the most that can be said about this ending is that it is an attempt to formulate an idea of God as a vision of an ideal ethical principle that is at once within and beyond Earth. The attempt was made much more satisfactorily in naturalistic terms in a long poem which was Meredith's last full-scale presentation of his world view, *A Reading of Life* (1901).

*A Reading of Life* is the title poem of the last volume of verse Meredith published. It is a collection of four philosophical lyrics utilizing the mythic distinction between Artemis and Aphrodite to affirm the necessity of reconciling blood and brain to achieve spirit. Artemis, the virgin goddess of the chase is the representative of brain; the case for blood is presented by the followers of Aphrodite. The first poem in the series, *The Vital Choice*, outlines the necessary balance:

I

Or shall we run with Artemis
Or yield the breast to Aphrodite?
Both are mighty;
Both give bliss;
Each can torture if derided;
Each claims worship undivided,
In her wake would have us wallow.

II

Youth must offer on bent knees
Homage unto one or other;
Earth, the mother,
This decrees;
And unto the pallid Scyther
Either points us shun we either,
Shun or too devoutly follow. (529)

How man is to fulfill properly this decree of Earth is developed in the following three poems. *With the Huntress* (Artemis) and *With the Persuader* (Aphrodite) present the positive and negative sides of man's aligning himself with one or the other of these two. The function of the Huntress (brain) is to "tame the rude" in man and nature: "Beast and beast in manhood (to) tame" and to free man from the "bondage" of flesh (530). Brain, however, to be fully effective must employ and direct the energies of blood which are described in *With the Persuader*. The poem is a fairly extensive account of how blood and brain are to be properly balanced, especially in male-female relationships.

The final lyric, *The Test of Manhood*, is the longest of the group, depicting how manhood means the achieving of spirit through the right kind of integration of blood and brain. The poem expresses implicitly or explicitly most of the features of the mature world view found in the other late poems already discussed in this chapter, and these features do not need to be repeated. The treatment of the idea of God is the most interesting feature of *The Test of Manhood* because it approaches the concept in a much less enigmatic or semi-mystical way than did the other later poems discussed. After a rapid poetic rendition of the
history of religion from pagan mythology through Medieval Christianity (541-542), which were, the speaker says, Earth's means of spiritually chastening man and getting him ready to understand the truth of naturalism, mankind's approach to a naturalistic vision of God as the ideal goal of an ever-developing ethical spirituality is described:

Under the low-browed tempest's eye of ire,
That ere it lightened smote a coward heart,
Earth nerved her chastened son to hail athwart
All ventures perilous his shrouded Sire;
A stranger still, religiously divined;
Not yet with understanding read aright.
But when the mind, the cherishable mind,
The multitude's grave shepherd, took full flight, (542)
Himself as mirror raised among his kind
He saw, and first of brotherhood had sight:
Knew that his force to fly, his will to see,
His heart enlarged beyond its ribbed domain,
Had come of many a grip in mastery,
Which held conjoined the hostile rival twain,
And of his bosom made him lord, to keep
The starry roof of his unruffled frame
Awake to earth, to heaven, and plumb the deep
Below, above, aye with a wistful aim.

The mastering mind in him, by tempests blown,
By traitor inmates baited, upward burned;
Perforce of growth, the Master mind discerned,
The Great Unseen, nowise the Dark Unknown.
To whom unwittingly did he aspire
In wilderness, where bitter was his need:
To whom in blindness, as an earthly seed
For light and air, he struck through crimson mire.
But not ere he upheld a forehead lamp,
And viewed an army, once the seeming doomed,
All choral in its fruitful garden camp,
The spiritual the palpable illumed.

This gift of penetration and embrace,
His prize from tidal battles lost or won,
Reveals the scheme to animate his race:
How that it is a warfare but begun;
Unending; with no Power to interpose;
No prayer, save for strength to deep his ground,
Heard of the Highest; never battle's close,
The victory complete and victor crowned:
Nor solace in defeat, save from that sense
Of strength well spent, which is the strength
renewed.
In manhood must he find his competence;
In his clear mind the spiritual food:
God being there while he his fight maintains;
Throughout his mind the Master Mind being there,
While he rejects the suicide despair;
Accepts the spur of explicable pains; (543)
Obedient to Nature, not her slave:
Her lord, if to her rigid laws he bows;
Her dust, if with his conscience he plays knave,
And bids the Passions on the Pleasures browse:—
Whence Evil in a world unread before;
That mystery to simple springs resolved.
His God the Known, diviner to adore,
Shows Nature's savage riddles kindly solved.(544)

God is not to be "religiously divined" by, presumably,
special revelation, but is to be "with understanding read
aright" when mind takes its "full flight" and spirituality
is achieved by man's holding "conjoined the rival twain"
of brain and blood. In its growth ("Perforce of growth")
man's mind perceived the "Master Mind" toward which man
had been aspiring previously, though "unwittingly." The
poem is careful to avoid the description of God as of a
different order of reality than that of man's spirit. God
here is not some transcendent Power which can "interpose"
in man's affairs. He is an ever-heightening ideal spirit-
ual goal posited by man's ongoing effort to affirm and de-
velop his spiritual dimension: God is "there while he (man)
his fight maintains." This is a view of God, in the words
of a contemporary humanist philosopher, not as perfection,
but as "perfectibility." In an outlook like that of The
Test of Manhood,
God's perfection must be dynamic: it is not the alleged terminus of perfectibility, but its cosmic cause, its heart and soul. . . . Man's idea of god is his gesture towards the dizzy utmost of value, the infinite reach and endless span of it. . . . In God is no stagnant plenitude but plenitude of ideal activity, no dull placidity but ever-heroic redemption of the world from the hazard of settling back.21

The view of God in this poem as an ongoing ideal of spiritual activity avoids many of the ambiguities of poems like Earth and Man and A Faith on Trial. The poem does not, however, resolve other problems that have been noted in Meredith's "naturalistic" view of reality. These problems involve the nature of Earth's beneficence, purposiveness, and spirituality; they have led to considerable latitude of critical interpretation.

The Quality of Meredithian Naturalism

The complexity of the poetic vision that replaced the humanistic emphasis that was dominant in Meredith's poetry from 1862 to 1881 is perhaps best indicated by a description of some of the major varieties of critical reaction to it. This reaction has ranged all the way from Henry W. Wells's description of Meredith as the "laureate of Darwinism, science, and rationalism"22 to a recent argument by Professor Hoxie N. Fairchild that the poetic world view of the mature Meredith was not that of a philosophical naturalist at all.23 Other major interpretations fall some-
where between these extremes. The views of Joseph Warren Beach have been mentioned earlier at several points. He saw Meredith as a fairly consistent philosophical naturalist who passed "beyond the range of ordinary scientific assumptions" only in his notions of "Nature's aim, her design, or goal" and her beneficence. Beach read all of Meredith's references to God as purely honorific or "figurative expressions for the spiritual ideal toward which man tends." He insisted that for Meredith, while man's rationality and thought had no other source than Earth, Earth had only the potential for spirit, and that spirit "obviously . . . is not present in nature before the arrival of man." Beach's comments on Earth's spirituality (or lack of it) were in reply to Lionel Stevenson's argument five years earlier in *Darwin among the Poets* that Meredith saw "spirit interpenetrating every part of" the "living entity" that is Earth. Stevenson argued that Meredith's poetic world view was definitely founded on "the current scientific concept of physical evolution" except for his "assumption that nature possesses a spiritual element," but Stevenson was emphatic about the importance of this spiritual element: "Fundamental . . . in his creed is the perception of the spiritual as existing through all nature, accessible by anyone who approaches her lovingly." Stevenson and Beach were affirming what seem to be opposite sides of the tension in Meredith's view of spirituality described earlier in the discussion of *Earth and Man*, and Professor
Stevenson had much more to go on in Meredith's poetry than Beach gave him credit for. Beach cited only the sonnet _Appreciation_, while saying that Meredith "asserted over and over again that 'spirit' or 'soul' is man's contribution to the natural process."^30 It was suggested earlier that the contention for which Stevenson argued has at least as much or possibly more support in the poetry than that of Beach.^31 Professor Stevenson does not make clear in _Darwin among the Poets_ whether he would be in complete agreement with Beach's assertion that "God" for Meredith was a figurative expression for an ideal goal; Stevenson seems to be more aware of the conflicting tendencies in some of Meredith's ideas as he says that "Only through close communion with Nature can man develop his own spiritual qualities or perceive the existence of any larger spiritual entity."^32 Although he is not specific about it, Stevenson probably conceived of this larger spiritual entity as a part of the immanence of Earth. He says later that "Man, having been evolved in the same manner as the rest of the universe, must regard Earth with love and trust, as the visible symbol of the creative power or deity."^33

The critical emphasis of G. M. Trevelyan, working much earlier than either Beach or Stevenson, seems to lie somewhere between the two. His idea that Meredith saw spirituality pervading all of nature has already been cited;^34 he was uncompromising in seeing the idea of God in Meredith's thought as an immanent principle of "ethical progress."^35
More recent critics have broadened the range of critical interpretations. Patricia Crunden, while recognizing Meredith's "stress on immanence," goes beyond Stevenson to make the poet sound like an apostle of Emersonian correspondence in saying that Meredith insisted "that the realms of nature and of spirit were inseparable" and that he was "convinced" that "a larger reality lay behind the surface appearance of Nature."36 Meredith's concept of God has received recent attention, also. Ifor Evans makes Meredith sound like a theist trying to establish contact with a transcendent hidden God:

Behind Earth there lies some Lord of Earth, but man, a cross of brute and spirit nourished by Earth, can only gain contact with this reality by the disciplined life that Earth exacts.37

Norman Kelvin, ignoring the warnings of Beach and Trevelyan, insists that God for Meredith is of a different order of reality, above and beyond Earth, and that "Earth ... is but a representative--or a representation (of God)--after all, albeit one more readily apprehended by man than is God directly.38 Finally, Professor H. N. Fairchild has recently argued that Meredith's claim for the beneficent spirituality of Earth removes him from the ranks of philosophical naturalists. He sees Meredith's poetic vision as basically that of "a romantic who longs to believe in personal infinitude and whose most ambitious poems seek corroboration of that belief in external nature."39
Meredith's attempt to reconcile "man's loftiest aspirations with the kind of science represented by Darwin, Huxley, and Tyndall" is simply a failure because he cannot account in this attempted reconciliation for the beneficence he claims to find in Earth. Fairchild says that Meredith has taken human spiritual values and imposed them on Earth, claiming then that they were Earth's in the first place: "the good truth about nature cannot come alive for us unless we enter the forest affirming that nature is good." Fairchild says that Meredith "was able to preserve a romantic type of naturalism for his contemporaries and for many later poets by cloaking it in a realistic toughness which obscured its fundamentally nonscientific character." Fairchild is making what seems to be an accurate and generally valid criticism of Meredithian naturalism, although he may be placing undue stress on what he sees as its claim for scientific or "realistic" toughness. The idea of Earth's beneficence was not part of a "scientific" system but of a poetic vision, and there was never an explicit or even an implicit claim in this poetry that the idea of beneficence was subject to the same kind of verification that a "scientific" observation or theory could have. Of course, Fairchild's criticism is supported by the fact that it was never admitted or made explicit in Meredith's poetic vision that the idea of Earth's beneficence was purely an item of
faith. Fairchild's comments correctly suggest that ideas of beneficence, purpose, and spirituality are the problem areas of Meredith's naturalism, and this study will conclude with some comments on how these concepts had a special qualifying effect on Meredith's naturalistic poetic vision.

Meredith's mature poetic world view had its background in two earlier stages of development which undoubtedly continued to influence the later poetry. The first of these was a period in which the poems reflected a variety of philosophic emphases, important among which was a theistic one which envisioned a transcendent reality beyond man and nature and which was constitutive of all reality. The early world view was replaced during a transition period from about 1860 to 1880 by an outlook that was at once one of immanence, humanism, and pessimism. By 1883 this darker outlook had been supplanted by the mature poetic vision which claimed a reconciliation of man and nature through man's establishing spiritual counterparts in his life for the larger patterns or laws of what was seen as the single ontological reality, Earth. Most of the features of this mature world view (such ideas as those concerning service to others, egoism, and work) can be described as inferences from what Beach and others refer to as "ordinary scientific facts and assumptions." Problems arise in Meredith's naturalism with those parts of the world view that cannot be understood as such inferences: ideas of beneficence, purpose, and spirituality. If it is
true that certain features of the final poetic vision are human equivalents to Earth's larger patterns or laws, then the question of what patterns concepts of beneficence and purpose are analogues can be raised. The special status in the world view of these concepts is indicated by the likely answer to this question that there are no patterns analogous to them. There is in a purely empirical account of nature at least as much evidence of the fortuitous destruction of value as of "beneficent" regard for it, and if nature has purpose, it is as much "purpose" to destroy as to sustain its evolutionary products. Ideas of purpose and beneficence must have some other point of origin. It is difficult to account precisely for how these concepts arrived in Meredith's "naturalism." Beach comments that the concept of evolution "is associated in Meredith, as in so many of the Victorian poets, with that of spiritual progress."\(^43\) The common, though erroneous, idea that evolution moves always in the direction of increasing complexity may have contributed to Meredith's affirmation of Earth's beneficent teleology, although it is no doubt correct, as Beach again notes, that "the notion that nature is beneficent is Meredith's heritage from the age of Thomson and Wordsworth" which derived the idea from "teleological views of natural theology."\(^44\) The idea of Earth's beneficence can also be seen as a fundamental expression of Meredith's "Everlasting Yea" to the universe. Earth is the immanent ground of all possibility of experience; and
Meredith would affirm experience to be finally worth having, even if it includes potential and real disaster. If life is good, then the foundation of life is good also. The affirmation of beneficent purpose in the universe is an act of faith, not subject to verification by empirical or logical means. This probably accounts for why Meredith's poetry seems hesitant to enter areas of epistemology and to suggest a special kind of perception as necessary for comprehending beneficence.

The other basic problem besetting Meredith's mature outlook is that of accounting for the spiritual principle in Earth. The problem is simply stated as whether or not Earth has a spirituality that is more than mere potential prior to man. It arises because Meredith's poems most often mix and never make adequate distinction between empirical and metaphysical attributes of Earth, and these two represent different emphases in the treatment of the concept of Earth in the final period. The empirical emphasis is more purely naturalistic: all things are from Earth, and Earth from the beginning must have had a potential for spirit; but spirit comes into being only in humanity. The metaphysical emphasis is more pantheistic: all things are Earth and are particular conformations of this basic ontological monistic reality; therefore, both physical and spiritual dimensions of Earth are ultimately co-eternal. Both of these emphases appear at times in a single poem about Earth; Meredith never adequately distinguishes
between them, and what is much more of a difficulty in his "philosophical" poetry, he never differentiates between the different ways that man must have of knowing, if he is to encounter both empirical and metaphysical truth.

In Meredith's mature world view the analogues inferred from Earth's larger patterns and the empirical and the metaphysical approaches to the concept of Earth merge to produce a poetic vision which tries to incorporate most of the spiritual values of its cultural heritage, with the notable exception of a concern for personal immortality, into a "naturalistic" framework. This results in a "naturalism" which envisions a monistic, spiritual, beneficent, purposive ontological reality manifesting itself in history. To insist that this is an immanent reality is not to deny the fact that it functions very much like a partially "naturalized" transformation of the transcendent God of theism. Other areas of the mature world view suggest a similar transformation of theism; even Meredith's repeated rejections of any doubts about Earth's ultimate beneficence are remarkably like the popular ideas of theodicy of his theistic cultural background. Moral evil is a misdirection of the will away from Earth's larger patterns, but natural evil is ultimately unreal. The seeming fortuitous destruction of value in the natural order is, in the final world view, understood in terms of Martin's answer to his puzzle. Natural "evil" is actually discord which
will ultimately be transformed by ontological harmony. Repeatedly in the later poems, calamitous events are treated as occasions for the ultimate increase of good in Earth's beneficent scheme. The problem of beneficence points up this poetry's other major philosophic difficulty besides the mixing of empiricism and metaphysics. This is its basic epistemological deficiency. Meredith's poetry never really deals with the question of how it is possible to know of things like Earth's beneficence and spirituality—things which it treats as poetic truths. The closest Meredith comes to such epistemological concerns is his limited description of special occasions of intuitive perceptions of these truths in The Woods of Westermain, Earth and Man, and A Faith on Trial. Of course, poets are seldom systematic philosophers, and even more seldom do they seem to be epistemologists, but neither do poets always deal with such subject matter and make the claims about the universe that Meredith did. This almost total absence of an attempt to account for how it is possible to know is a fundamental difference between the philosophical poetry of Meredith and that of, say, Wordsworth, who did try to provide an epistemological framework for his poetic assertions of truth, or that of a poet like Hopkins, whose language of faith had such a framework already built into it.

It is easy, however (and something of a vogue recently regarding Meredith), to take critical potshots at a complex view of reality. Schopenhauer once commented on how much
easier it is to point out the faults and errors in the
work of a great mind than to give a distinct and full ex-
position of its value. Just how great was Meredith's mind
is not an issue to be raised here, but it does need to be
noted that Meredith was undertaking a complex poetic pro-
gram in trying to reconcile man to his universe, accounting
for his scientific and intellectual concerns as well as
for his deepest spiritual longings. This has been one of
the ongoing labors of the modern poet, and it is a task by
no means finished. The basic strength of Meredith's verse
is that he did incorporate so many of the concerns of his
cultural heritage into a poetic world view based on, but
not bounded by, philosophic naturalism. Graham Rough has
written that many thinkers at the turn of the century valued
Meredith's poetry for two things they found in it: he says
that these admirers of Meredith had

... discovered something else in Meredith's
poetry which made obscurities and harshness
almost irrelevant. They had discovered two
things, in fact: a power of psychological
analysis and a frankness in reporting its
results that were new to English nineteenth
century poetry; and an attitude to nature
that seemed tough, vigorous, and enduring
to a generation for whom the Wordsworthian
consolations were no longer possible. 46

It is possible to see that not all features of Meredith's
mature poetic vision were "tough" or based on scientific
evidence, and that Professor Fairchild is correct that
Meredith does not finally succeed in "reconciling Man's
loftiest aspirations to the findings of natural science." 47
If Meredith failed in accomplishing this, he was in good poetic company in both the attempt and the failure. He would probably be gratified that his attempt has been to some extent critically appreciated, since such efforts were for him the highest expression of humanity:

 God being there while he his fight maintains. (543)
Notes to Chapter V

1 Henry W. Wells, New Poets from Old: A Study in Literary Genetics (N. Y., 1940), pp. 86-89.

2 Beach, pp. 470-502.

3 Stevenson, Darwin, pp. 183-236.


5 Bibliography and Various Readings, pp. 317-369; 259-302.

6 Trevelyan, Poetry and Philosophy, p. 143.

7 Kelvin, p. 128.


10 Grunden, p. 269.

11 Grunden, p. 266.

12 Grunden, p. 276. This discussion of the poem's use of the concept of discordia concors in section III of The Woods of Westermain is considerably indebted to Grunden's article.

13 Trevelyan, Poetical Works, p. 588. Trevelyan's note goes on to say that "the fullest exposition of the theme will be found in the poem 'Earth and Man."

14 Beach, pp. 477-478.


16 Joseph Warren Beach, The Comic Spirit in George Meredith: An Interpretation (N. Y., 1963), p. 192. This work was originally published in 1911.

17 Beach, Concept, p. 479.

18 Trevelyan, Poetry and Philosophy, p. 121.

19 Beach, Concept, P. 479.


22 Wells, p. 87.


26 Beach, *Concept*, pp. 475, 477.


30 Beach, *Concept*, p. 477.

31 See discussions of *My Theme, Sense and Spirit*, and *Earth's Secret* above which support Stevenson's argument.


33 Stevenson, *Darwin*, p. 221.

34 Trevelyan, *Prestidigitation*, p. 588.

35 Trevelyan, *Poetry and Philosophy*, p. 121.

36 Crunden, p. 268.

37 Evans, p. 198.

38 Kelvin, p. 162. Kelvin refused to consider that the "just Lord" of XLII of *Earth and Man* may be an honorific expression: "In 'Earth and Man' Meredith refers to Earth's 'just Lord,' and it would be as wrong to say that this reference represents an intellectual lapse on Meredith's part as it would, probably, to say that it represents a momentary upsurge of traditional belief. However, no twisting and turning of the meaning, whatever the state of his mind and feelings when he wrote the words, can change the fact that Meredith makes explicit reference to God" (p. 162). Kelvin does not acknowledge that he is identifying Meredith's final vision in strong theistic terms.
39 Fairchild, p. 71.
40 Fairchild, p. 74.
41 Fairchild, p. 77.
42 Beach, Concept, p. 485.
43 Beach, Concept, p. 473.
44 Beach, Concept, p. 485.

45 Evil is seen as a ground of good in poems throughout the entire final period: 1883: Melampus (227); 1888: Hard Weather (320), A Faith on Trial (351); 1892: The Promise in Disturbance; 1901: The Test of Manhood (544).

46 Hough, p. 5.
47 Fairchild, p. 76.
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