

EGOISM IN MODERN LOVE

By

SUZAN DIX JARVIS

Bachelor of Arts

Oklahoma State University

Stillwater, Oklahoma

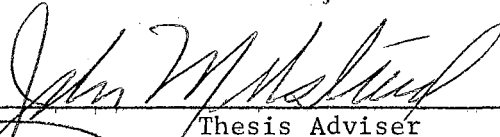
1967

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate College
of the Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
May, 1970

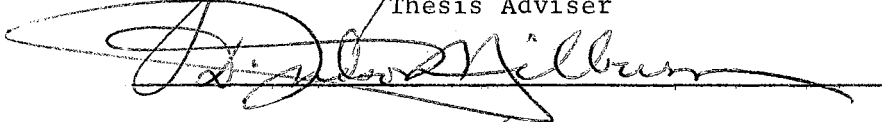
OKLAHOMA
STATE UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY
OCT 12 1970

EGOISM IN MODERN LOVE

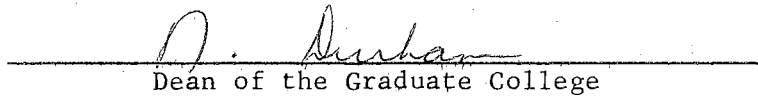
Thesis Approved:



Thesis Adviser







Dean of the Graduate College

762362

PREFACE

George Meredith is remembered mainly for his novels, but after I have studied Modern Love it is apparent that his gift for creating poetry was considerable. I believe Modern Love is a remarkable poem for three main reasons. First, Meredith treats the subject matter, the failure of a marriage and infidelity, with extraordinary subtlety. Meredith tried to picture the real rather than the ideal. Second, Meredith was able to create, in the husband, a character who is developed with the completeness normally found only in a novel. In a very limited space, Meredith combines key incidents and vivid description with his own insight to create a complex study of a man. Third, Modern Love has been able to withstand the ultimate test for a piece of literature--relevance. Although written in 1862, the poem has meaning for contemporary readers.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to those who have given their assistance and guidance. Dr. John Milstead gave generously of his time and offered helpful criticisms. I also wish to thank Dr. Judson Milburn and Dr. Clinton Keeler for their assistance in evaluating this work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	1
Phase I: Vacillation	7
Phase II: Becoming an Egoist	13
Phase III: Attempt at Reconciliation	18
Conclusion	23
A Selected Bibliography	29

Introduction

Scholars generally consider Modern Love to be George Meredith's poetic masterpiece. However, they do not agree on the meaning of this series of fifty-one poems. Most of the controversy concerns the relationship between the man and the woman who are the main characters. The action of the plot, which falls into three phases, illustrates the nature of their conflict. The initial situation reveals the husband and the wife in a deteriorating relationship. The wife has already taken a lover. She and her husband carry on as usual on the surface, although both realize that they are merely playing roles. The husband calls this game "HIDING THE SKELETON."¹ The second phase begins when the husband decides to take a lover in an attempt to bury himself in forgetfulness. This affair is moderately successful in this purpose; however, it does not eliminate his feelings for his wife. As a result, he finally decides to attempt a reconciliation. The final phase concerns the last meeting of the pair. The effort to settle their differences does not succeed, however, and the woman dies.² This failure is the focus of the scholarly conflict: Why did this attempt fail? Who was at fault?

I will attempt to demonstrate that the cause for the couple's split was the husband's egoism. This interpretation involves the definition of egoism as it is embodied in Meredith's Triad of blood, brain, and spirit. Egoism contributes to the failure of the marriage

in three basic ways. First, the couple is unable to view the past in relation to the future. Second, by placing too much emphasis on the past, they are unable to perceive the need for evolution. They are trapped in the present by the "Dragon" of egoism,³ looking backward for answers. Third, egoism is to blame for sometimes preventing and at other times misdirecting communication which could have saved the marriage. The couple is unable to realize the importance of discussion as a means of resolving their differences.

There are many opinions as to why the marriage described in Modern Love fails. This disagreement is the result of differing approaches to facts from Meredith's life, philosophy gleaned from his other works, and even the critics' personal biases. Basically there are four assessments of the cause for the rift between the husband and the wife. First, some contend that the woman was entirely at fault. An apparent anti-feminist, Constantin Photiades states that the woman's lack of intelligence alienated her husband.⁴ The second position, which is the most common, places the blame on both, but for varying reasons. E. K. Chambers declares that "mutual suspicion kept them apart."⁵ On the other hand, Arthur Symons sees the pair struggling against the blindness of their own passion,⁶ while John Smith, in a recent dissertation, dismisses the problem by attributing it to a lack of maturity.⁷ The third major position exonerates both of the characters and blames the split on something uncontrollable, probably best defined as fate. Lionel Stevenson believes that the two were in a trap of unlike personalities.⁸ Similarly, Jack Lindsay perceives a clash between two ways of life.⁹ Simplifying the whole matter long ago, Richard LeGallienne stated that

they were just not intended for each other.¹⁰

Norman Friedman seems to have the most astute approach to the poem. He charges directly that the husband is at fault because he ultimately sees "his own egoism as a cause of the failure of his marriage."¹¹ Although Friedman's idea that egoism is responsible for the failure seems generally accurate, his inductive procedure is questionable. He describes the husband as a disillusioned, sentimental egoist; this character analysis is not altogether correct for two reasons.

First, Mr. Friedman introduces extraneous issues. For example, after summarizing the Triad he states:

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 staid or disillusioned sensualist (who revels in the body) or a prurient hypocrite.¹²

Such an amplification serves to cloud the issue rather than to clarify it. It merely introduces more terms (cynic, ascetic, prurient hypocrite) which require definition besides the basic ones of blood, brain, and spirit.

Second, Friedman sees the husband as "an Egoist in the throes of purgation" at the outset of the poem, by which he apparently means that the husband is already a confirmed egoist.¹³ I contend that he has not yet reached this point, but exists in a state of vacillation between blood and brain. He is confused rather than sentimental and disillusioned and is not a confirmed egoist such as Sir Willoughby Patterne. Sir Willoughby is "Not even a complete character, but one predominant trait is made the center about which all the incidents of

the book revolve."¹⁴ The husband is certainly not characterized by one trait. "Already established is the husband's keen, and vexed, responsiveness to the wife he loves, despises, pities, and scorns-- each in turn as the story develops."¹⁵

A specific discussion of Modern Love requires a definition of Meredith's concept of egoism. Virtually all Meredith scholars take account of the Triad of blood, brain, and spirit as Lionel Stevenson did in Darwin Among the Poets.

But brain, though the next great acquisition to be striven for, is not glorified in isolation. The three elements, "blood, brain, and spirit," must be united to form a triad. They mark the three great stages of evolution, each emerging out of the previous one, under the guidance of Earth, . . . When the three are parted, there is unbalance and disaster; Earth is the union of them, and the individual who mirrors that union has "true felicity."¹⁶

Most scholars discuss the Triad and its application rather than its origin. Since this concept permeates nearly all of Meredith's works, it would be difficult to present a synthesis here. However, it seems advisable to define the Triad with support from the author himself rather than depend entirely on secondary interpretations.

An explicit statement of the Triad appears in "The Woods of Westermain."¹⁷

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
 Someone sailing will be wrecked.
 (ll. 347-354)

There are two important concepts embodied in this passage. First, the evolutionary structure of the Triad is expressed: the origin of each

element is part of a process. Second, it is clear that all three divisions of the Triad must be present to produce harmony. An imbalance causes disaster.

Earth is the origin of blood, brain, and spirit. Meredith describes the relationship of blood and brain with Earth in "The Woods of Westermain."

Have in Earth their feeding root,
Mind of man and bent of brute.
(ll. 397-398)

The sonnet "Earth's Secret" demonstrates the relationship between spirit and Earth. "For Earth, that gives the milk, the spirit gives." (l. 14) Earth serves not only as the fountainhead of blood, brain, and spirit, but as their unity. Again, from "The Woods of Westermain,"

Earth that Triad is: she hides
Joy from him who that divides;
(ll. 357-358)

Not only does man owe his origin to Earth, she will punish him if he dissolves his union with her.

Without a progression from blood to brain and then from brain to spirit, man cannot attain wisdom. Meredith stresses the importance of change in a passage from "The Woods of Westermain."

Then you touch the nerve of Change,
Then of Earth you have the clue;
Then her two-sexed meanings melt
Through you, wed the thought and felt.
Sameness locks no scurfy pond
Here from 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;
(ll. 193-202)

There is also a definition of both blood and brain here. Brain is

identified with "thought" and blood with "felt." This explanation of the first two evolutionary phases is typical of those found elsewhere in Meredith's works. Blood becomes synonymous with passion and sensuality, brain with reason and philosophy. The meaning of spirit, however, is more illusive. The sonnet "Grace and Love" provides some insight concerning spirit.

To harmony so vivid that through sight
I hear, I have her heavenliness to fold
Beyond the senses, where such love as mine,
Such grace as hers, would the strange Fates withhold
Their starry more from her and me, unite.
(ll. 10-14)

In the first part of this passage Meredith is saying that spirit transcends both sense and reason since it is not perceivable through blood or brain. The last lines describe spiritual love as overcoming even the barriers Fate imposes. Again from "The Woods of Westermain":

Look with spirit past the sense,
Spirit shines in permanence.
(ll. 301-302)

Spirit, being eternal, enables one to perceive blood and brain in perspective.

Achieving spirit and reaching a state of wisdom are the same action. In the sonnet "Discipline of Wisdom," Meredith states,

So following her [Wisdom], your hewing may attain
The right to speak unto the mute, and shun
That sly temptation of the illumined brain,
Deliveries oracular, self-spun.
(ll. 9-12)

These first two lines describe wisdom as enabling one to speak to the mute. The last two lines, however, explain the opposite state, egoism. Although egoism may result from an excess of either blood or brain, an excess of spirit is not possible. Spirit is a distinct

state. Once the individual reaches the last evolutionary phase, which is a balance of the three elements, he has achieved the condition of wisdom.

The First Phase: Vacillation

The first phase of the poem describes the husband's confusion. He wants to change, but is unable to see the past in proper perspective. Because of this failure, the husband is moving toward bondage to egoism. However, he is not committed to any course of action, and it is this chaotic state of mind which underscores this section. B. Ifor Evans comments: "Meredith's setting for the analysis of love is realistic and modern, and his purpose is to discover every mood in the lover from pettiness and jealousy to passion."¹⁸ Although Evans is discussing the poem as a whole, his statement is particularly applicable to the first phase.

The initial situation is one of dissatisfaction; both the husband and the wife realize that something has gone wrong. In the first poem, the narrator describes them as ". . . moveless, looking through their dead black years." (I, l. 10) However, they do not attempt to verbalize their discontent. The husband seems to feel that the change in their relationship took place without his knowledge. "The hour has struck, though I heard not the bell!" (II, l. 16) Even though he doesn't really understand the nature of their problem, he does not completely despair. As they continue to co-exist in the daily routine of their lives, he begins to question, "Where came the cleft between us? whose the fault?" (VIII, l. 4)

The husband, then, is in a state of vacillation. He seems almost shocked to find himself in his present situation. "I must have slept, since now I wake." (X, ll. 5) When he does recognize the change, he tries to perceive a reason for it. Unwilling to accept defeat he complains: "The wretch condemned, who has not been arraigned, / Chafes at his sentence" (X, ll. 2-3) This confusion and chaos is the dominant mood of the first phase of the poem.

The narrator provides an important piece of foreshadowing in poems IV and V. He comments on the action of the story and outlines the problems the husband is unable to recognize.

Cold as a mountain in its star-pitched tent,
 Stood high Philosophy, less friend than foe:
 Whom self-caged Passion, from its prison-bars,
 Is always watching with a wondering hate.
 (IV, ll. 7-10)

Relating this excerpt to the earlier discussion of blood, brain, and spirit, we can see that "Passion" (blood) and "Philosophy" (brain) are not united. Evolution has not taken place. The narrator goes on to say that it will be difficult to bring harmony to the relationship.

Not till the fire is dying in the grate,
 Look we for any kinship with the stars.
 Oh, wisdom never comes when it is gold,
 (IV, ll. 11-13)

The relationship has not evolved and the couple has waited until the last possible moment to try to save themselves. However, he also admits that it is not too late to change.

. . . yet it may come to pass
 That a changed eye finds such familiar sights
 More keenly tempting than new loveliness.
 (V, ll. 7-9)

Furthermore, an underlying cause for egoism has been a failure to look to the future.

. . . Love's inmost sacredness
 Called to him, 'Come!'--In his restraining start,
 Eyes nurtured to be looked at scarce could see
 A wave of the great waves of Destiny
 Convulsed at a checked impulse of the heart,
 (V, ll. 11-16)

There are two basic points in the narrator's foreshadowing comments which are essential to the understanding of the first phase of the poem. First, the couple is caged by passion; evolution from blood to brain is not taking place. Second, change is necessary, but they are directing their attention backward rather than forward.

It is clear that blood is now very much a part of the relationship. Even with the great strain of the problems, the husband is still physically attracted to his wife.

That long-shanked dapper Cupid with frisked curls
 Can make known women torturingly fair;
 The gold-eyed serpent dwelling in rich hair
 Awakes beneath his magic whisks and twirls.
 His art can take the eyes from out my head,
 Until I see with eyes of other men;
 (VII, ll. 5-10)

Her attraction here is strongly physical. He sees her in highly sensual imagery. In poem IX his sexual need almost overpowers him. He becomes a "wild beast" and she seems to him a "devilish malignant witch." "Had he not teeth to rend, and hunger too?" (IX, l.5) She tempts his blood and he cannot control his response. Trapped by blood, there is no evolution taking place. They are unable to bridge the gap between blood and brain.

Probably the main reason for the failure to progress is the husband's attitude toward the past. Norman Kelvin recognized this

problem: "The tragedy was caused, also, by . . . holding on to the past instead of embracing the present and future."¹⁹ Near the first the husband realizes that he claims " . . . a phantom-woman in the Past." (III, l. 15) What he does not realize is that the problem results from an inability to look to the future, keeping the past in proper perspective. His ignorance on this point is further emphasized in his view of nature.

What's this, when Nature swears there is no change
To challenge eyesight? . . . (XI, ll. 9-10)

Although nature does not seem to change, the concept of evolution is deeply embedded there. His mistake is that he expects visible change. Since he cannot see the need for change in nature, he cannot see the same need in himself. " . . . the husband in Modern Love . . . fails to understand the order behind Nature's apparent disorder"²⁰ However, he does realize that he cannot forget the past.

. . . but the whole
Of life is mixed: the mocking Past will stay:
And if I drink oblivion of a day,
So shorten I the stature of my soul,
(XII, ll. 13-16)

He senses that spirit cannot be achieved unless he learns to live with the past. Finally, he realizes that attitude toward the past must be one of "fondness" without much "retrospection." However, he is dubious about his ability to take on Nature's attitude.

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, ll. 11-16)

The husband knows that his attachment to the blood phase of the relationship is very strong. Breaking away from the grasp of passion is not easy for a man.

Even though the love is based on blood, in the couple's early days together the husband seemed to sense the need for alteration. One night as they sat talking, he uttered an idea that must have been almost instinctive.

". . . Ah, yes!
Love dies!" I said: I never thought it less.
(XVI, 11, 9-10)

Even though neither of them really saw the true significance of this statement, it did affect them. He felt, somehow, it was true. She feared its implications. Their failure to grasp the idea that love as they knew it then could not last was instrumental in bringing them to the present state. Even as the husband reflects on the scene, he remembers the "taste" of her tears and the "sound" of her sobs. He is still prevented by his emotions from achieving a feeling for the past.

Because of his attitude toward the past, the husband is unable to look to the future. In the first poem, the couple is looking back on their unhappiness rather than forward to their salvation. Poem XXVI explicates the problem.

Love ere he bleeds, the eagle in high skies,
Has earth beneath his wings: . . .
.
But when the arrow strikes him, there's a change.
.
A subtle serpent then has Love become.
I had the eagle in my bosom erst;
Henceforward with the serpent I am cursed.

The first two lines describe the happy days of early love when passion

(the eagle) brings fulfillment. However, when change is introduced, the husband automatically considers it evil. The return to earth is thought to signal an end to love, when, in fact, it is necessary. Brain, the second stage of evolution, has its roots in earth just as blood did. Instead of progressing smoothly from blood to brain, the man is confused and does not move at all. This same situation is experienced by Richard in The Ordeal of Richard Feverel.

His appearance first as a boy, then as a young lover, and finally as a husband and father have mistakenly given the impression that each ordeal marks an advance over the previous one. But Richard does not grow; he duplicates himself.²¹

Because the husband has accepted the change as evil, he rejects the one tool which might help to solve his problem--communication. Although the conflict rages within, the couple pretends that all is well, even when they are alone. In his confusion, the husband rejects opportunities which could alleviate his misery. At one point he states: "My breast will open for thee at a sign!" (VIII, 1.7) Yet he later realizes that she wishes to speak and he gives her no encouragement.

She will not speak. I will not ask. We are
League-sundered by the silent gulf between.
(XXXI, ll. 13-14)

In a later poem, he dreams that a "banished angel" comes to him, but in reality he will not bend to his wife. He rejects her, but claims he will forgive her. This ambivalence is clearly stated in poem XXIV.

. . . Oh! I do but wait a sign!
Pluck out the eyes of pride! thy mouth to mine!
Never! though I die thirsting. Go thy ways!
(XXIV, ll. 14-16)

The truth of the matter is that "With intentional cruelty he thwarted

his wife every time she tried to reach an understanding with him."²²
 This rejection is an early hint of egoism. However, he is not yet wholly committed to self. Regardless of the lack of communication and the apparent lack of love, a bond does remain. "Her lost moist hand clings mortally to mine." (XXI, l. 16)

The husband's confusion in this section of the poem is also apparent by his variations in blaming his wife. Initially he blames her completely for their problems.

Look, woman, in the West. There wilt thou see
 An amber cradle near the sun's decline:
 Within it, featured even in death divine,
 Is lying a dead infant, slain by thee.
 (XI, ll. 13-16)

Later he softens, remembering some of his former loves, and speaks in a more forgiving tone.

If for those times I must ask charity,
 Have I not any charity to give?
 (XX, ll. 15-16)

But finally he returns to his original fervor as he claims he may pardon her (which he has not tried to do) but she, ultimately,
 " . . . must bear all the venom of his [the serpent's] tooth."
 (XXVI, l. 16)

Phase Two: Becoming an Egoist

Condemning his wife, the husband is unable to accept a lesson he discussed earlier; Nature maintains a healthy attitude toward the past. She offers " . . . here, a seed-bag--there, an urn." (XIII, l. 8) I. H. Buchen discusses this passage:

Nature is pictured as ministering to her kingdom with a seed-bag in one hand and an urn in the other. None of her "children" are favored; each receives both the seed-bag and the urn, Nature's dualistic gift. The husband, however, rejects such indiscriminating and degrading dispensations. He prefers Good over Evil, the seed-bag over the urn²⁹

Instead of accepting Nature's laws, he decides to "taste forgetfulness" by taking a mistress. By this act he becomes an egoist. No longer is he searching for an answer. He has demonstrated that he understands the proper attitude he should assume. Now he is rejecting a reconciliation with his wife as an answer to his problem.

At the outset he admits to his new mistress:

O Lady, once I gave love: now I take!
 Lady, I must be flattered. Shouldst thou wake
 The passion of a demon, be not afraid.
 (XXVII, ll. 14-16)

The husband remains in a state of blood. Since his wife is no longer the object of his passion, he makes a deliberate attempt to exclude her by transferring his desires to another.

It is here that the word "sentiment" is first mentioned. One of Norman Friedman's basic contentions is that the husband is a sentimentalist about his past with his wife. He further asserts that because the husband is a sentimentalist, he is also an egoist.²⁴ There are some disagreements, in the first place, on a definition of the terms "sentiment" and "sentimentality." G. M. Hammerton recognized this problem.

Assuredly there is no abstraction Meredith has warred against more valiantly than "sentiment" or "sentimentality." But it is a moot question whether author and reader are ever quite clear as between them on the exact shades of meaning that is to be given to the word "sentiment."²⁵

Another assessment of this problem attempts to clarify the ambiguity.

. . . I would except against his using the word "sentiment," where what he really describes is sentimentality. Sentiment is not a passion, it does not imply any deep or strong feelings²⁶

False emotion is also an aspect of sentimentality. As Lionel Stevenson describes it,

In Meredith's view they were victims of the new malady of the middle class--sentimentality. In revulsion from the crudities of their forebearers they had cultivated artificial etiquette and "fine shades" as a substitute for emotions.²⁷

This artificiality is a factor which was not present in the earlier relationship between husband and wife. However, the husband's intentions in taking a mistress point directly to the falseness of sentimentality.

I must be flattered. The imperious
Desire speaks out. Lady, I am content
To play with you the game of Sentiment
(XXVIII, ll. 1-3)

Although it is true that sentimentality is a characteristic of egoism, it does not apply to the husband's attitude toward his marriage. His fault is not that he had false emotions in his past relationship with his wife. On the contrary, because there were true, sincere bonds, the husband finds it difficult to view the past in proper perspective and focus his attention on the future. He does not become an egoist (and does not embrace sentimentality) until he takes a mistress. Further evidence that the husband is an egoist at this point is revealed when he admits that he ". . . must shine/ Envied" (XXVIII, ll. 7-8) He also asks his new mistress to ". . . do homage unto me alone. (XXVIII, l. 16)

It soon becomes apparent that the feelings of passion at the first of his marriage are not equaled by his feeling for his mistress.

Confused, he asks:

Am I failing? For no longer can I cast
 A glory round about this head of gold.

 A kiss is but a kiss now! And no wave
 Of a great flood that whirls me to the sea.
 (XXIX)

He realizes that pure passion can no longer satisfy him with any woman. ". . . Something more than earth/ I cry for still . . . ," (XXIX, ll. 5-6) But rather than try to discover what else might fulfill him, he resigns himself to blood once again. ". . . we'll sit contentedly,/ And eat our pot of honey on the grave." (XXIX, ll. 15-16) This image shows that passion, though it does have some desirability, will ultimately bring about the death of love. But as in his first love, the husband does not look past passion for any answers.

The progression of this affair is the key to the poem. In purposely choosing another blood relationship, the husband labels himself an egoist. Earlier, he had not really committed himself to any course of action. Even though he realizes this time that he is unable to derive any real satisfaction from passion, he remains trapped in his second relationship by the same thing that doomed his first.

There is a difference between his two entanglements. Although it is not apparent at first, the husband does form a different kind of relationship with his mistress, namely intellectual communication. He discovers that she has more to offer than blood.

Small flattery! Yet she has the rare gift
 To beauty, Common Sense. I am approved.
 It is not half so nice as being loved,
 And yet I do prefer it. What's my drift?
 (XXXI, ll. 13-16)

His new love turns out to be quite the opposite of the old. Rather than losing himself in passion, he discovers a new facet of love quite by accident. With his mistress he finds a fusion of blood and brain.

Full faith I have she holds that rare gift
 To beauty, Common Sense. To see her lie
 With her fair visage an inverted sky
 Bloom-covered, while the underlids uplift,
 Would almost wreck the faith; but when her mouth
 (Can it kiss sweetly? sweetly!) would address
 The inner me that thirsts for her no less,
 And has so long been languishing in drouth,
 I feel that I am matched; that I am man!
 (XXXII, ll. 1-9)

The man craves her conversation more than anything else. He feels fulfilled as he never did in his blood relationship with his wife; however, he is not satisfied even now.

One restless corner of my heart or head,
 That holds a dying something never dead,
 Still frets, though Nature giveth all she can.
 (XXXII, ll. 9-11)

Nature has given him both blood and brain, but he considers them as separate. Until he understands that blood and brain must be combined in order to produce spirit, he will not be fulfilled.

Meanwhile he still spends some time with his wife. Their state of affairs is not altered, however. On the surface, they exchange words. Underneath their ". . . chain on silence clanks." (XXIV, l. 3) When the wife once again attempts to speak, he ignores her.

I am not melted, and make no pretence.
 With commonplace I freeze her, tongue and sense.
 (XXXIV ll. 14-15)

He rejects communication with his wife, the same thing he craves so from his lover. He will not share with his wife what he has learned about brain. Having become an egoist since taking a mistress, he thinks only of his own comfort and will not help another. "Save her?"

What for? To act this wedded lie!" (XXXV, l.16)

Phase III: Attempt at Reconciliation

In the third phase, the poem describes the attempted reunion of the husband and wife. Such an attempt first becomes important to the husband when he observes his wife and mistress together in poem XXXVI. As they talk he uses his new-found brain power to analyze them. He plays them against each other, listening to their evaluations of one another. It is clear in poem XXXVII that he really has not made a decision between the two women. He is unable to determine whether he is really free of his wife when he asks, "Our tragedy, is it alive or dead?" (XXXVII, l. 16) Immediately the mistress offers to give him up to his wife. Faced with this possibility he declares he is through with his wife.

You know me that I never can renew
The bond that woman broke: What would you have?
(XXXVIII, ll. 10-11)

But seeing his wife with her lover, he becomes jealous.

How many a thing which we cast to the ground,
When others pick it up becomes a gem!
(XLI, ll. 1-2)

This admission is closer to the truth than he may imagine. The fact is that he cannot bear to part with either his mistress or his wife. "That is the perfect egoist, who was utterly unconscious of giving vent to the grossest selfishness."²⁸

The wife is the first to try to bring about a reconciliation. The husband labels this attempt as "fleshly indifference horrible," which describes what he interprets as her willingness to surrender herself physically, with indifference to any other level of

communication. Actually he judges her unfairly. She is a sensitive person and is emotionally involved with her husband. Therefore her advances are not completely physical. Since his relationship with his mistress, the husband finds mere passion repulsive. As he once rejected brain, he now rejects blood.

They think that dignity of soul may come,
Perchance with dignity of body. Base!
(XLIII, ll. 3-4)

This is the result of his brain-based egoism which causes him to make an overly rational distinction between blood and brain as well as passion and emotion. He cannot see that his wife's attitude toward him is a combination of passion and emotion.

After this episode, the husband surmises that their failure to communicate comes because pity has replaced love. The husband says he pities his wife because she tried to win him back with "unblest kisses."

She for the Temple's [Love's] worship has paid price,
And takes the coin of Pity as a cheat.
(XLIV, ll. 10-11)

This pity is actually a result of his egoism-diseased brain. The wife's attempt at reunion through blood was sincere, but the husband, as a result of his egoism, rejects all blood ties. He blames her for using passion to win him back, but he is at fault since he does not try to communicate with her as he did with his mistress. Still not wishing to save her, he does not really try for reconciliation.

"'Tis morning: but no morning can restore/ What we have forfeited" (XLIII, ll. 12-13) The wife realizes that her husband pities her and she is unable to accept pity as a substitute for the love she wants.

Never, she cries, shall Pity soothe Love's thirst,
 Or foul hypocrisy for truth atone!
 (XLIV, ll. 15-16)

In poems XLVI-XLVIII, the husband and wife finally attempt to communicate. For the first time, they discuss their problems. At first they do not speak, but walk together enjoying their present harmony.

We had not to look back on summer joys,
 Or forward to a summer to bright dye:
 (XLVII, ll. 3-4)

They do not look to the past or to the future. Then, instead of viewing the past in relation to the future, they place too much emphasis on the past. In poem XLVIII, the husband and wife begin to examine their past.

Our inmost hearts had opened, each to each.
 We drank the pure daylight of honest speech.
 Alas! that was the fatal draught, I fear.
 (XLVIII, ll. 6-8)

It is the "fatal draught" because the couple does not focus their precious conversation on the future, but on the past. Thus they do not attempt to evolve, but merely to recreate.

For when of my lost Lady came the word,
 This woman, O this agony of flesh!
 Jealous devotion bade her break the mesh,
 That I might seek that other like a bird,
 I do adore the nobleness! despise
 The act! She has gone forth, I know not where.
 (XLVIII ll. 9-14)

When the wife flees, the husband believes that she wants to free him to return to his mistress. He sees this as a tribute to himself; his egoism causes him to "adore the nobleness" of her flight. It pleases him, no doubt, to think that his wife is willing to sacrifice her own happiness for his. He experiences the same feeling when his

mistress wishes to let him go back to his wife.

Although this assessment is probably partly correct, there is more to her flight than jealousy. The improper emphasis on the past stirs the wife's latent jealousy and causes her to see that a re-establishment of their old bonds is not possible. In a moment of intense insight she is able to see a cycle beginning again.

She believed his old love had returned,
Which was her exultation, and her scourge.
(XLIX, ll. 3-4)

In other words, she feels that he is willing to return to their old relationship. This is what she has wanted, but now she realizes it is impossible. Lionel Stevenson describes Clara Middleton in The Egoist as experiencing this same

. . . grim exploration of the horrors in incompatibility the nightmare sense of frustration felt by a woman caught in the respectable trap of matrimony and realizing that a lifetime under this yoke would literally be a fate worse than death.²⁹

Unable to face returning to the past, the wife knows her husband is not looking to the future. She does not communicate her misgivings to him and he does not perceive a change in her.

She took his hand, and walked with him, and seemed
The wife he sought, though shadow-like and dry.
She had one terror, lest her heart should sigh,
And tell her loudly she no longer dreamed.
(XLIX, ll. 5-8)

She chooses death over living in terror.

The wife's death plays an important part in demonstrating the egoism of the husband. He manipulates the events leading to her final despair. To begin with, he makes her the object of pity produced by his egoism. This situation deeply embitters her. When communication is finally established, he directs the conversation backward rather

than forward. Again his egoism prevents him from evolving properly. Finally he seeks a re-establishment of old ties. Realizing that this plan is disastrous, the wife despairs completely. The important point is that her husband is actually responsible for her state of mind and therefore her death. It is his egoism which is at fault.

The egoist also ultimately destroys himself. Examples from The Ordeal of Richard Feverel and The Egoist clarify this point.

"Like his father, Richard [Feverel] is at times possessed by egoism, especially in his thoughtless cruelty . . . to Lucy."³⁰ At the end instead of returning to Lucy at once, Richard goes to fight a duel over another woman. His resulting wound, coupled with their long separation, brings about Lucy's fatal illness. Richard's egoism forces him to leave Lucy and thus brings about her death. As a result of his wife's death, part of Richard dies too. "Have you noticed the expression in the eyes of blind men? That is just how Richard looks, as he lies there silent in his bed--striving to image her on his brain."³¹

Siegfried Sassoon comments on the similar example of Sir Willoughby Patterne.

It is the climax of the comic drama of the suicide. "Through very love of self himself he slew." For this is the tragedy of egoism in all its personifications. Egoists commit suicide by their behavior towards those whose love and admiration they hungrily covet, and whom they desire to dominate. And Meredith makes us fully aware of the purgatory they inflict on themselves and others.³²

Sir Willoughby lost the complete admiration of Laetitia. He killed the ideal she had of him, and she knew him for what he was. Therefore Willoughby kills part of himself, for the egoist by nature depends on worship of others to survive. Alone, the egoist is not alive.

By forcing his wife to her death, the husband destroys the part of him which depended on her worship. Also, he experiences some sort of revelation: ". . . and he knew all." (XLIX, l. 16) It is possible that he does achieve spirit and thus gains insight into the proper perspective of blood and brain. In this case, the husband becomes aware of the causes and effects of his egoism. But the exact fate of the husband is not discussed. It is enough to know that his revelation comes too late.

Conclusion

The poem Modern Love, although composed of fifty-one short poems, is a unit. Some editors print certain poems with the idea that each has its own inherent meaning. However, in order to preserve Meredith's intended purpose, each poem must remain part of the entire sequence.

Poem L functions as a synthesis of the other fifty poems. ". . . Meredith ends, drawing together the varied meanings which have never really been separable" ³³ Through a series of paradoxes and contradictions, this last poem provides a summary analysis of the complex story of Modern Love.

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,

To throw that faint thin line upon the shore!

The first line of poem L contains a personification of Love, acting both as the creator and destroyer of the relationship. This ambivalence is reflected in the poem in that the couple's physical love is responsible for their inability to save their marriage. Thus, ironically, their love brought about the end of their attachment.

A contradiction in the second line is the idea of a "union" existing between an "ever-diverse" pair. Actually, a complete union never takes place although both the husband and wife seem to be trying. They are "ever-diverse" because they cannot communicate, and their love has not been fulfilled in terms of the Triad.

In lines 3 and 4, two apparently inconsistent images, the falcons and the confined flitting of a bat, are applicable since the couple is trapped by egoism. As falcons, they had the potential to soar. However, in their incompleteness they can only make flitting movements which imply both individual weakness and an absence of coherent relationship. The husband and wife are similar to soaring falcons with energy and independence in the early part of their relationship. When egoism captures them, they "flit" from each other to lovers and back again to no avail. Their efforts accomplish no movement, no evolution.

Two stages of their abortive love relationship appear in lines 5-8. First, there is a description of the early happiness of the couple in the blood stage of development. They enjoy this state for a limited time "beneath the singing sky of May." (L, l. 5) From their time of bliss they "fed not" on the future positively; they did not evolve. Embracing a negative view of the future, each desired

"the buried day."

The "deep questioning" in lines 9 and 10 is the "fatal knife." Until near the end of the poem, it seemed that intellectual communication, or questioning, might save the marriage; however, this type of communication proves fatal. This paradox can be explained by examining the attitude of the couple when they finally attempt to communicate. Rather than discussing the future, they focus their attention on the past. In their eagerness to resolve their conflict, they seek a return to old "certainties" rather than searching out new ties. Thus a "dusty" answer repays their effort.

Egoism itself is paradoxical. On the one hand, Meredith sees egoism as timeless; it will exist as long as man does. Also, it may be "dark" or unperceived. The image of the ocean at midnight refers to the eternal character of egoism as well as its latent power. On the other hand, egoism does have destructive potential. The "ramping hosts of warrior horse" provides a war image reminiscent of the love battle just fought. As "ramping" suggests the springing of a wild beast, egoism is capable of overt destructiveness once it has power over the individual. This potential becomes a reality for the husband and wife in Modern Love.

The "faint thin line" of the last line of the poem is another reference to a characteristic of egoism. As the husband notes in poem XIII, it is very difficult for a man to achieve the harmony of blood and brain which produces spirit. The point of balance is "faint" and "thin." The shore represents life free from egoism, and the waves of the ocean echo the turbulent confusion experienced by one battling egoism.

Wisdom is the missing element in the failure of the marriage. The husband is unable to achieve a balance of blood, brain, and spirit, and his resulting egoism dooms his attempt at reconciliation.

FOOTNOTES

¹ George Meredith, The Poetical Works of George Meredith, ed. G. M. Trevelyan (New York, 1930), p. 140. All future references to George Meredith's poetry will be to this edition; therefore, only line numbers will be given parenthetically in the text. References to Modern Love will include both poem and line numbers.

² The way in which the wife dies is ambiguous. Some scholars say she takes poison, but this is not explicitly stated in the poem. The important point, as all critics agree, is that her death seems to be a result of the failure of the marriage.

³ The "Dragon" is a symbol of egoism in "The Woods of Westermain."

⁴ George Meredith: His Life, Genius, and Teaching, tr. Arthur Price (New York, 1913), p. 235.

⁵ A Sheaf of Studies (London, 1942), p. 74.

⁶ Figures of Several Centuries (London, 1916), p. 143.

⁷ Hiding the Skeleton (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1966), p. 78.

⁸ The Ordeal of George Meredith (New York, 1953), p. 104.

⁹ George Meredith: His Life and Work (London, 1956), p. 87.

¹⁰ George Meredith: Some Characteristics (New York, 1890) p. 110.

¹¹ "The Jangled Harp: Symbolic Structure in Modern Love," Modern Language Quarterly, XVIII (March, 1957), 13.

¹² Ibid., p. 12.

¹³ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁴ Paul Elmer More, Shelburne Essays, Second Series (New York, 1967), p. 162.

¹⁵ Norman Kelvin, A Troubled Eden: Nature and Society in the Works of George Meredith (Stanford, 1961), p. 29.

¹⁶ (New York, 1963), pp. 227-8.

¹⁷ Lionel Stevenson states that at the age of 23 Meredith had a latent idea of his evolutionary philosophy. Also, Stevenson comments that the "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn," published with Modern Love in 1862, contained many elements of his later philosophy.

¹⁸ English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century (New York, 1966), p. 194.

¹⁹ Kelvin, p. 35.

²⁰ Irving H. Buchen, "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel: Science Versus Nature," Journal of English Literary History, XXIX (March, 1962), 54.

²¹ Ibid., p. 65.

²² Stevenson, Ordeal, p. 104.

²³ Buchen, p. 54.

²⁴ Friedman, p. 13.

²⁵ George Meredith, His Life and Art in Anecdote and Criticism. (Edinburgh, 1911), p. 307.

²⁶ Flora Shaw, "A Word with Mr. George Meredith," Atlantic Monthly, 59 (June, 1887), 854.

²⁷ Stevenson, Ordeal, p. 133.

²⁸ J. Gordon Eaker, "Meredith's Human Comedy," Nineteenth Century Fiction, V (March, 1951), 236.

²⁹ Stevenson, Ordeal, p. 226.

³⁰ Walter P. Wright, Art and Substance in George Meredith: A Study in Narrative (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1953), p. 157.

³¹ George Meredith, The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, ed. William H. Marshal (New York, 1948), p. 147.

³² Meredith (New York, 1948), p. 147.

³³ Kelvin, p. 35.

A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bibliographies

- Bateson, F. W., ed. The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1941.
- Buckley, Jerome Hamilton, ed. Victorian Poets and Prose Writers. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966.
- Faverty, Frederic Everett, ed. The Victorian Poets: A Guide to Research. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956.
- Stevenson, Lionel, ed. Victorian Fiction: A Guide to Research. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964.
- Watson, George, ed. The Concise Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature 600-1950. Cambridge: The University Press, 1958.
- Wright, Austin, ed. Bibliographies of Studies in Victorian Literature for the Ten Years 1945-1954. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956.

Criticism

Books

- Bailey, Elmer Jones. The Novels of George Meredith: A Study. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907.
- Baker, Ernest A. The History of the English Novel. New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1950. 10 Vols.
- Beach, Joseph Warren. The Comic Spirit in George Meredith, An Interpretation. New York: Russell and Russell, 1963.
- _____. The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century Poetry. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1966.
- Booth, Thornton Y. Mastering the Event: Commitment to Fact in George Meredith's Fiction. Logan: Utah State University Press, 1967.

- Chambers, Sir E. K. A Sheaf of Studies. London: Oxford University Press, 1942.
- Crees, James Harold Edward. George Meredith: A Study of his Works and Personality. New York: Haskell House, 1967.
- Crum, Ralph B. Scientific Thought in Poetry. New York: Columbia University Press, 1931.
- Curle, Richard H. P. Aspects of George Meredith. New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1908.
- Day Lewis, Cecil. Introduction to his edition of Modern Love. London: Hart-David, 1948.
- Dobree, Bonamy. "George Meredith." The English Novelists. Ed. Derek Verschoyle. London: Chatto and Windus, 1936.
- Elton, Oliver. Modern Studies. London: Edward Arnold, 1907.
- Evans, Sir B. Ifor. English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century. New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1966.
- Figgis, Darrell. Studies and Appreciations. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1912.
- Hammerton, John Alexander. George Meredith, His Life and Art in Anecdote and Criticism. Edinburgh: J. Grant, 1911.
- Hearn, Lafcadio. Pre-Raphaelite and Other Poets. New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1922.
- Kelvin, Norman. A Troubled Eden: Nature and Society in the Works of George Meredith. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961.
- LeGallienne, Richard. George Meredith: Some Characteristics. New York: United States Book Co., 1890.
- Lindsay, Jack. George Meredith: His Life and Work. London: Bodley Head, 1956.
- Meredith, George. The Egoist. Ed. George Woodcock. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968.
- _____. The Ordeal of Richard Feverel. Ed. William H. Marshall. New York: Washington Square Press, 1966.
- _____. The Poetical Works of George Meredith. Ed. G. M. Trevelyan. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930.
- Moffatt, James. George Meredith: An Introduction to His Novels. New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909.

- More, Paul Elmer. Shelburne Essays, Second Series. New York: Phaeton Press, 1967.
- Photiadis, Constantin. George Meredith: His Life, Genius, and Teaching. Tr. Arthur Price. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913.
- Priestly, J. B. George Meredith. London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1926.
- Santos, Isabel A. "A Critical Study of George Meredith's Modern Love." (unpub. M. S. Thesis, Fordham University, 1951).
- Sassoon, Siegfried. Meredith. New York: Viking Press, 1948.
- Smith, John Henry. Hiding the Skeleton: Imagry in Feverel and Modern Love. Lincoln: Nebraska Wesleyan University Press, 1966.
- Stevenson, Lionel. Darwin Among The Poets. New York: Russell and Russell, 1963.
- _____. The Ordeal of George Meredith: A Biography. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953.
- Symons, Arthur. Figure of Several Centuries. London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1916.
- Wright, Walter Francis. Art and Substance in George Meredith: A Study in Narrative. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953.

Articles

- Brogan, Howard O. "Fiction and Philosophy in the Education of Tom Jones, Tristram Shandy, and Richard Feverel." College English, XIV (November, 1952), 144-49.
- Buchen, Irving H. "Science, Society, and Individuality: The Egoist." University Review, XXX (March, 1965), 185-92.
- _____. "The Egoists in The Egoist: The Sensualists and the Ascetics." Nineteenth Century Fiction, XIX (December, 1964), 255-69.
- _____. "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel: Science Versus Nature." Journal of English Literary History, XXIX (March, 1962), 47-66.
- Cunliff, J. W. "Modern Thought in Meredith's Poems." Publication of the Modern Language Association, XXVII (1912), 1-25.

- Eaker, J. Gordon. "Meredith's Human Comedy." Nineteenth Century Fiction, V (March, 1951), 253-72.
- Edwards, P. D. "Education and Nature in Tom Jones and The Ordeal of Richard Feverel." Modern Language Review, LXIII (January, 1968), 23-32.
- Ekeberg, Gladys W. "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel as a Tragedy." College English, VII (April, 1946), 387-93.
- Friedman, Norman. "The Jangled Harp: Symbolic Structure in Modern Love." Modern Language Quarterly, XVIII (March, 1957), 9-26.
- Going, William J. "A Note on 'My Lady' of Modern Love." Modern Language Quarterly, VII (September, 1946), 311-14.
- Hudson, Richard B. "The Meaning of Egoism in George Meredith's The Egoist." Trollopian, III (December, 1948), 163-76.
- Hill, Charles J. "Theme and Image in The Egoist." University of Kansas City Review, XX (Summer, 1954), 281-85.
- Monroe, Harriet. "Meredith as a Poet." Poetry, XXXII (July, 1928), 210-16.
- Morris, J. W. "Inherent Principles of Order in Richard Feverel." Publication of the Modern Language Association, LXXVIII, pt. 2 (September, 1963), 333-40.
- Mueller, William R. "Theological Dualism and the 'System' in Richard Feverel." Journal of English Literary History, XVIII (June, 1951), 138-54.
- Poston, L. "Dramatic Reference and Structure in The Ordeal of Richard Feverel." Studies in English Literature, VI (Autumn, 1966), 743-52.
- Shaw, Flora. "A Word with Mr. George Meredith." Atlantic Monthly, 59 (June, 1887), 854-5.
- Williams, I. M. "Organic Structure of The Ordeal of Richard Feverel." Review of English Studies, XVIII (February, 1967), 16-29.

VITA

Z

Suzan Dix Jarvis

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: EGOISM IN MODERN LOVE

Major Field: English

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, December 3, 1945,
the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Pate.

Education: Graduated from Jesse H. Jones High School, Houston
Texas, in May, 1963; received the Bachelor of Arts degree
from Oklahoma State University in 1967, with a major in
Humanities; completed requirements for the Master of Arts
degree at Oklahoma State University in May, 1970.

Professional Experience: Graduate teaching assistant, English
Department, Oklahoma State University, 1967-1970.