TENDENCIES TOWARD REALISM
IN
MEREDITH'S NOVELS

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PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to show that in spirit and technique the tendencies toward realism in George Meredith's novels are identified more closely with those found in the new realism which has evolved in the field of the English novel since the middle of the nineteenth century than with the realism of the older Victorian novelists. Chronologically, Meredith's work is placed with that of George Eliot, Makepeace Thackeray, and Charles Dickens; but careful consideration of the realistic tendencies in these novels shows that Meredith's technique and spirit are different. Although his work antedates by many years the work of George Gissing, John Galsworthy, Joseph Conrad, and others of the group of new realists, close analysis reveals striking similarities in the field of realism. That these similarities are not obscure or accidental on Meredith's part may be clearly seen: first, through an observation of his ideas about realism as found in his letters, lectures, and criticisms; and second, through an analytical study of some of the examples of realism found in his novels.

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INTRODUCTION

Although what is called modern realism does not appear in England in its complete form before the work of George Gissing, whose first novel, Workers in the Dawn, was published in 1880, yet George Meredith, who published his first novel, The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, in 1859, reveals new tendencies which distinguish his work from that of earlier generations and even from that of his English contemporaries. The most marked of these tendencies is that of the new realism.

To say that Meredith's novels introduce tendencies toward the new realism does not imply that realism is something new. The spirit or core of realism is no new thing. MacDowall in his Realism: A Study in Art and Thought says:

> At the bottom of realism in all of its variations, seems to be the sense of actual existence; an acute awareness of it, and a vision of things under that form. It is a thoroughly natural feeling, and is, in fact, the primitive attitude of man.[1]

MacDowall traces this spirit of realism through the earliest Greek literature to modern times. He says that it becomes rarer in the literature which has followed the Greek, but that Chaucer is an interesting example of it in the transition from the Middle Ages. MacDowall calls Zola a naturalist and says that Flaubert, Tolstoy, and Gorki show the true realism. He quotes Henry James in what has become one of the best known statements on the value of modern realism:

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[1] Arthur MacDowall, Realism: A Study in Art and Thought (London, Constable and Company, Ltd., 1918), pp. 2-3.

> A change has come over our general receptive sensibility, an appetite for a closer notation, a sharper specification for the signs of life, of consciousness, of the human scene and the human subject in general than the three or four generations before us had been at all moved to insist upon.[2]

There are, even in criticism, many existing mistaken ideas concerning realism. Realism never appears the same in the works of two different generations any more than it appears the same in the works of two different authors because, even though the core of it is a "sense of existence," ideas expressed through the agency of the human mind must necessarily be colored by the thought and emotions of that mind; and thought and emotions are influenced by physical and social trends which vary and change from time to time. If the literary works of the nineteenth century were culled for realism excluding works of all other periods and a definition or explanation then made of the term, that term would be narrowed in its meaning to represent only a contemporary thinking and technique. Realism in literature is more than a technique, more than an idea, more than a definition; it is an artistic result of a mind keenly alive, sensitive, and aware of the existence of things. New thought, new technique, and new spirit may enhance and distinguish the literature of different periods; but the core of realism remains unchanged. George Meredith exhibits a new spirit and a new technique; and with his works has begun the infiltration into the English novel of those new tendencies, appearing now in one form and now in another, which comprise the new realism. He suggests and employs in tentative form many of the qualities of this new realism which later writers use profusely and in pronounced form.

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[2] Ibid., p. 23.

The realism which distinguishes Meredith's work from that of earlier novelists is a realism which is more finished, more impersonal, more courageous, and more intellectual. It is less colored by prejudices, by memory, and by education and habit of the mind. It is a realism that looks at things instead of ideas of them; it attempts to awake in the reader a consciousness of his own inner life; it gives a faithful portrayal of what is around him and in him; it takes it to be the business of the artist to represent life by choosing significant details, not merely the accumulation of all details; and it strives to reveal life as it really is with no facts, as De Maupassant says, which are not "irrefragable and invariable."

The realistic tendencies which appear in the English novelists following Meredith have come largely as a result of a prolonged scientific interest in life and of influences from the continent. Many of Meredith's contemporaries on the continent have developed the technique and spirit which have come to characterize the new realism. The novels of Russia and France are notably representative in the nineteenth century of this spirit and technique, which have slowly influenced[3] the English novel and given it the flavor of the new realism. Meredith's letters show that he was acquainted with these continental contemporaries, and his works reveal evidence of their influence.

The scientific interests of the nineteenth century gave novelists the desire for objectivity and impersonal presentations, the determination to throw open new fields, and the inclination to use contemporary subjects. Science enabled man to look within himself. Old barriers, superstitions, and taboos were broken down, and many things were seen in a different and new light. Man's knowledge increased as he studied sociology, anthropology, psychology, and other newly developed fields. This scientific interest in the French took the form of a scientific and impersonal probing for truth and a presentation of truth in the same manner. With this search for truth subjects have entered the novel which have heretofore been banned, among them the degraded and debauched phases of human life. Flaubert says that writers are to understand the feelings of others and to recognize that no side of human life is too mean or too narrow for presentation. Meredith did not make the mistake that some of the French writers did and that some writers make today in thinking that mere presentation of life is enough and that realism consists in the accumulation of many details; neither did he choose to exalt the baser subjects, as is plainly shown in the following passage from a letter to Captain Maxse in 1865:

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[3] The Englishmen's thorough dislike for the French naturalistic movement was expressed when the English publisher, Henry Vizetelly, published Zola's La Terre (1888). Vizetelly was sentenced to three months in prison.

> I strive by study of humanity to represent it;[4] not its morbid action. I have a tendency to do that which I repress; for in delineating it there is no gain. In all my truly very faulty works there is this aim. Much of my strength lies in painting morbid emotion and exceptional positions but my conscience will not let me so waste my time. My love is for epocal subjects; not for cobwebs in a putrid corner; though I know the fascination of unraveling them.[5]

Although Meredith's work does not show the Russian influence to a marked degree, yet it does show that he was acquainted with his Russian contemporaries; and, since these Russian influences have developed the realism of Gissing, James, Conrad, and Galsworthy and must therefore be considered an essential element of modern realism in the English novel, it is necessary that this influence at least be mentioned here. The Russians have developed to the highest degree the psychological novel, with its use of the subconscious and its presentation of the complexity of the human mind. Their use of superfluous detail, of sharper specifications of the signs of life, of sensuousness, and of immediacy of sensation gradually has become apparent, appreciated, and inducted into the English novel; and all of these are seen in Meredith.

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[4] In some of the quotations throughout this study I have underlined certain words and phrases for the purpose of emphasis.

[5] William Maxse Meredith, Letters of George Meredith (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), I, 219.

Meredith's work marks a distinct break in English realism. George Eliot, the most noted English contemporary of Meredith, employs a realism that identifies her with her predecessors. While the works of Eliot and other English contemporaries in this respect look backward and fall within the realm of the older realism, Meredith's realistic tendencies antedate and anticipate the future realists.

CHAPTER I

A discussion of Meredith's realism must necessarily take into account the fact that many critics have regarded him as no realist and have neglected to uncover and bring to light those tendencies which place him as the forerunner of the modern realist. Some critics have drawn their conclusions because of a too narrow understanding of the term "realism"; others have evidently expressed themselves without a complete and thorough knowledge of Meredith's life, works, and ideas. But there are others who knowing Meredith and understanding the meaning of realism still fail to observe these tendencies because of Meredith's style. An explanation will be made of a few of these things which have rendered his works unique and somewhat difficult of classification.

In MacDowall's Realism: A Study in Art and Thought one can trace the development of realism, and through his comprehensive and logical criticism understand how fallacies and misunderstandings regarding its characteristics have developed. MacDowall states that Flaubert's Madame Bovary is a fresh and signal example of the realistic form which has appeared and disappeared since the days of the cave-men. About this time, however, in the French novels in general, realism was absorbed by naturalism, and Zola became the noisy exponent of the new movement which developed. The labels at this point become confusing because many critics have used the terms realism and naturalism indifferently. It is due chiefly to this confusion that modern critics doubt Meredith's realism. Certainly Meredith is not a naturalist whose aims and interests lie outside the realms of art, but a realist, in that his aim is to represent that which actually exists. I quote below an excerpt from MacDowall which helps to clarify these terms:

> To say, in anticipation, that *realism is a genuinely artistic form, while the aims and interests of naturalism lie outside art, may seem to be begging the question, but that is where the essence of the distinction lies*.
>
> Both types aim at representing what exists; but naturalism insists that this should be cut to a certain pattern, while realism is, or should be prepared for its possible manifestations.[1]

Meredith's theory of a union of idealism and realism has caused confusion. In a letter written in 1864 to the Reverend Augustus Jessup is a clear statement of this theory:

> Between realism and idealism there is no natural conflict. This completes that. Realism is the basis of good composition; *it implies study*, *observation*, *artistic power*, and (in those who can do more) humility. Little writers should be realistic. They would then at least do solid work. They afflict the world because they attempt that which is given to none but the noble to achieve. A great genius must necessarily employ ideal means, for a vast conception cannot be placed bodily before the eye, and remains to be suggested. Idealism is as an atmosphere whose effects of

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[1] MacDowall, *op*. *cit*., p. 23.

> grandeur are wrought out through a series of illusions, that are illusions to the sense within us only when divorced from the groundwork of the real. Need there be exclusion, the one of the other? The artist is incomplete who does this. Men to whom I bow my head (Shakespeare, Goethe, and in their way Moliere and Cervantes) are realists au fond. But they have the broad arms of idealism at command. They give us earth but it is earth with an atmosphere.[2]

One cannot read this direct statement of Meredith's without realizing that he uses the term realism in its modern sense. Though in his work his idealistic tendencies may seem at times to obscure his realism, he has deliberately founded his work in realism and realized its necessity. A close study of this blend causes one to think somewhat as Mr. Le Gallienne does:

> Mr. Meredith is a realist, but a realist who uses metaphor.[3] He is a realist as all great artists have been, not after the modern pattern of those "whom the world imagines to be at nature's depths because they are impudent enough to explore its muddy shallows," but after the manner of the poets. His is that imaginative realism which after much unhappy experience of another kind, we are again coming to recognize as not simply the only realism but the only art.[4]

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[2] William Maxse Meredith, op. cit., I, 156.

[3] For instance, Meredith says in the twenty-third chapter of The Ordeal of Richard Feverel: "There are ideas language is too gross for, and shape too arbitrary, which come to us and have a definite influence upon us, and yet we cannot fasten all the flimsy things and make them visible and distinct to ourselves, much less to others." He says, also, in chapter thirteen in One of Our Conquerors: "It is the excelling merit of similes and metaphors to spring us to vault over gaps and thickets and dreary places. But as the visits of the immortals, we must be ready to receive them."

[4] Richard Le Gallienne, George Meredith Some Characteristics (London, Chapman and Hall, 1890), p. 11.

Meredith is a poet as well as a novelist, and he employs a lyrical quality in his novels, an innovation which has helped to render him not only different but difficult for many to accept as a realist. Mr. Le Gallienne remarks of Meredith's characteristics, "Rare twins, the eye of the naturalist and the voice of the poet."

Meredith's use of the "concentrated presentment" and the "pitch above the common human" has caused difficulties to his readers and misunderstanding among his critics. In 1910 Meredith wrote to La Novelle Revue Francaise:

> My method has been to prepare my readers for a crucial exhibition of the personnae and then to give the scene in the fullest of their blood and brain under stress of fiery situation. . . . Concerning style thought is tough and dealing with thought produces toughness. Or when strong emotion is in tide against the active mind there is perforce confusion. . . . In the Egoist there is a concentrated presentment in the design and you will find a "pitch" considerably above our common human; and purposely, for only in such a manner could so much be shown.[5]

Meredith uses the narrative only to prepare the reader for the crucial scene. Through all of the narration there are passages where emotions and motives and purposes are all flashed on together. Months are sometimes covered in a few sentences, but in spite of this "concentrated presentment" the reader gets a clear idea of what is going on. For instance in Sandra Belloni Meredith uses only twenty words to explain and justify the passing away of Sandra's maidenly simplicity. "It was a quality going and a quality coming, nor will we, if you please, lament a law of growth." And then in The Egoist Meredith writes:

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[5] Constantin Photiades, George Meredith His Life, Genius and Teachings; rendered into English by Arthur Price (London, Constable and Company, Ltd., 1913), pp. 180-182.

> "You are cold my love! You shivered," said Sir Willoughby Patterne, as he walked across the park one morning with his betrothed, Clara Middleton, then in the throes of her first effort to break off her engagement.
>
> "I am not cold," said Clara, "someone I suppose was walking over my grave." The gulf of a caress hove in view like an enormous billow hollowing under the curled ridge. She stooped to a buttercup; the monster swept by.[6]

One is made to feel that Clara loathes the attentions of Sir Willoughby and that these few lines express not only her thinking but also her subconscious reaction. This passage is an example of Meredith's "concentrated presentment," and it is surely subtle realism. Clara was a sensitive girl, beginning to dread the attentions of her betrothed; and a threatened caress would appear to her a menace and, in her imagination, a horrible monster. This passage says much in a few words and at the same time deals with thought and subconsciousness. Many such passages can be found in Meredith's novels. It is therefore easy to understand that some readers do not "drink deep" enough to realize that rather than employing romantic imagination and "high flown" terms Meredith is consciously depicting thought and emotion in a realistic, though to be sure a subtle, way.

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[6] George Meredith, The Egoist (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), p. 129.

Another impediment to the ready perception of realism in Meredith's work is subject matter. In most of his work Meredith in some ways portrays the ego. One critic has said:

> Mr. Meredith is the Harvey of the ego. Not simply to tell us, but by his dreadful lightening to make us see the vampire in all of us, see with what horrid channels connected, by what almost imperceptible arteries, self circulates through every corner of our being.[7]

One has only to reflect upon his own feelings and habits to realize how realistically the ego is pictured. In The Egoist Meredith has run the full gamut of the ego's reactions. This subject of the ego together with the spirit of comedy which Meredith portrays has caused no little quandary concerning realistic treatment. But as surely as Gissing has portrayed realistically the conditions of Grub Street, Meredith has portrayed realistically that spirit of egoism which for the most part runs rampant in human lives and that spirit of comedy which is ever present though sometimes invisible. Aside from the ego and the spirit of comedy Meredith delights in picturing the complexities of the human mind and emotions. He delves into a mind and pictures the tumult and strife there existing, and it is naturally difficult for the critic to spread this conflict under his microscope and determine the degree or class of realism.

The following passage from Mr. Le Gallienne concerning Meredith is interesting in its defense of Meredith's style, and dramatic presentation:

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[7] Le Gallienne, op. cit., p. 14.

> There is more meaning in our little fingers nowadays than in the whole strong right arm of the men of old time, we lift an eyebrow where our ancestor would have committed manslaughter. Is picturesque sentiment to be forever the only language of love, Union Jack heroism the only garb of courage? Has selfishness no other form than cannibalism, or cruelty no subtler form than noisy violence or coarse malignity? Why, therein lies the limitation of the stage, of necessity always more or less restricted to the obvious, the presentation of such life as may be expressed by outward and visible sign; and does all, does the finest life, always find such expression? Is there no drama but that labeled "act and deed"? Surely thought is the most dramatic of all things. . . . Sir Willoughby Patterne, of Patterne Hall, is a more subtle individual than characters preceding him and Mr. Meredith has given us a drama of nerves. By and by there will be others more subtle than he, and then, maybe we shall need a stronger lens. . . . Even though the Egoist were written in "good plain Saxon" it would have no greater appeal for the general. Surely not; for though to some of us there is presented an unmistakably living man (and the greatest master cannot do more than to make his creations live) and a story much like tragedy beneath its "comedy in narrative," he is a man who, could they even be made to understand him, could not possibly interest them; and it is a tragedy which they would not appreciate, because there are not four deaths in the fifth act.[8]

The real difficulty in many appraisals of Meredith's work comes from the fact that the critic approaches his task with a too narrow understanding of realism; however, Meredith's union of realism and idealism, his employment of lyrical qualities, his use of the "concentrated presentment," and his unusual subject matter and presentation of complexities of the mind and emotions, although rendering his novels unique and distinct, have served somewhat to confuse his readers and critics and to make a close analytical study necessary in order that his realistic tendencies may be identified and placed in the class to which they rightfully belong. These tendencies are similar to those of the newer realism which followed him; and a comparison of Meredith with George Eliot, his contemporary who belongs with Richardson, Fielding, Jane Austin, and Thackeray in the field of older realism, and who stands as the last of this group, places him beyond question with the novelists of the new realism.

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[8] Ibid., pp. 156-157.

CHAPTER II

The distinction between Meredith's realism and that of his contemporaries and predecessors is marked. This distinction can be seen through a comparative study of Meredith and Eliot. George Eliot is selected for this study because she is not only Meredith's contemporary, but also a representative novelist of the older school of realists. Though her realism is more fully matured than that of her predecessors, in spirit and technique it must be classed with theirs rather than with that of Meredith and of those who followed him.

Meredith like the newer realists is more impersonal and objective in his treatment of character and incident in the novel. Eliot has made no attempt at objectivity. In the following excerpts from letters to John Blackwood in 1857 Eliot's intentions are stated plainly:

> My artistic bent is directed not at all to the presentation of imminently irreproachable characters, but the presentation of mixed human beings, in such a way as to call forth tolerant judgment, pity, and sympathy.[1]

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[1] J. W. Cross, George Eliot's Life As Related in Her Letters and Journals (Edinburgh and London, William Blackwood and Sons, 1910), I, 349.

> I should like not to be offensive. I should like to touch every heart among my readers with nothing but loving humour, with tenderness, and with belief in goodness.[2]

In a letter to Lady Ulrica Duncombe in 1901 Meredith says:

> I preach for the mind's acceptance of reality in all of its forms.[3]

And again to W. E. Henley in 1888 Meredith writes:

> No realism frightens me. At its worst I take it as a correction of the flimsy, to which our literature has a constant tendency to recur.[4]

Mr. Le Gallienne says:

> Meredith is our first scientific student of human nature and has all the student's high scorn of sentimental shrinking from diagnosis. When he has to detail or describe he is as accurate as a naturalist.[5]

In the Introduction to Pierre and Jean[6], De Maupassant gives a complete and comprehensive essay on modern realism. I quote from him because he is without doubt a realist in the modern sense, and to measure Meredith by his standards shows Meredith's position more clearly:

> To achieve the effect he (the novelist) aims at--that is to say, the sense of simple reality, and to point the artistic lesson he attempts to

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[2] Ibid., p. 372.

[3] William Maxse Meredith, op. cit., II, 518.

[4] Ibid., II, 412.

[5] Le Gallienne, op. cit., p. 70.

[6] De Maupassant attached this essay to the second edition of Pierre and Jean published in 1887; however, renditions appear in translations of other editions.

> draw from it--that is to say, a revelation of what his contemporary man is before his very eyes, he must bring forward no facts that are not irrefragible and invariable.[7]

George Eliot contends that

> We want to be taught _to feel_ not for the heroic artisan or the sentimental peasant, but for the peasant in all of his coarse apathy, and the artisan in all his suspicious selfishness.[8]

Meredith and the newer realists attempt to present a scene as they see it, to reproduce an incident exactly as it has happened, or to portray a character as he is, good or bad. They do not attempt to teach us to _feel_ or to see certain good qualities and overlook the bad ones.

Meredith and the new realists have a scientific attitude toward their subject while Eliot and the older realists have more of a sentimental attitude. Meredith says, "The art of writing novels is to present a picture of life." Eliot agrees in this, and she is truthful in her presentations; but in her mind she has a purpose and a belief that she wants to inject into her truthful picture. She feels that she should make her readers sympathize with her characters; that is, the reader should see that the character has good traits which are worth commending and compensating. The following passage from _Adam_ _Bede_ brings this characteristic trait into relief:

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[7] De Maupassant, _Pierre and Jean_ (New York, P. F. Collier and Son, 1902), pp. XLIX-L.

[8] George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," _Westminster Review_.

> These fellow mortals everyone must be accepted as they are; you can neither straighten their noses nor brighten their wit nor rectify their dispositions; and it is these people amongst whom your life is passed--that it is needful you should _tolerate_, _pity_, and _love_; it is these more or less _stupid_, _ugly_, _inconsistent_ people whose movements of goodness you should be able to admire for whom you should _cherish_ all possible _hope_, all possible patience. And I would not, even if I had the choice, be the clever novelist who could create a world so much better than this, in which we get up in the morning to do our daily work, that you would be likely to turn a harder, colder eye on the dusty streets and the common green fields--on the real breathing men and women who can be chilled by your indifference or injured by your prejudice; who can be cheered and helped onward by your fellow feeling, your forbearance, your outspoken brave justice.
>
> It is for this rare precious quality of truthfulness that I delight in many Dutch paintings which lofty-minded people despise. I find a source of _delicious sympathy_ in the faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence which has been the fate of so many more of my fellow-mortals than a life of pomp or absolute indigence of tragic suffering or world stirring actions.
>
> All honor and reverence to the divine beauty of form . . . but let us love that other beauty the which lives in no secret proportion but in a secret of deep _human sympathy_.[9]

Eliot clings to illusions, and she prefers facts that have been softened and mellowed by time to the sharper realities of contemporary life which Meredith and later writers insist upon. The use of "softened fact," imperfectly known details, and "essential truths" in not characteristic of the new realism. The following statements explain Eliot's position regarding this use:

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[9] George Eliot, _Adam Bede_ (London, J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1928), pp. 172-174.

> At present my mind works with most freedom in my remotest past, and then there are many strata to work through before I can begin to use, artistically, any material I may gather in the present. . . . the materials in Adam Bede are a combination from imperfectly known and widely sundered elements.[10]

> Dempster's vices have their natural evolution in deeper and deeper moral deterioration (though not without softening touches) and death from intemperance. Everything is softened from the fact, so far as art is permitted to soften and yet remain essentially true.[11]

That Meredith preferred contemporary subject material is shown in the letter excerpts which follow. In a letter to Reverend Jessup in 1861 Meredith says:

> My jugglers, beggars, etc., I have met on the road, and have idealized them but slightly. I desire to strike the poetic spark out of absolute human clay. And in so doing I have the fancy that I am doing solid work--better than a carol in mid air.[12]

And again in 1870 in a letter to Captain Maxse:

> I have just finished the history of the inextinguishable Sir Harry Firebrand of the Beacon, knight errant of the nineteenth century, in which mirror you may look and see my dear Fred and his loving friend.[13]

The public has identified the character of Diana Warwick with Mrs. Norton Sheridan's granddaughter, Mrs. Norton, who was famous in 1840 for her spirit, her beauty, and her much discussed Platonic relations with the Prime Minister Lord Melbourne.

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[10] J. W. Cross, op. cit., I, 495.

[11] Ibid., I, 371.

[12] William Maxse Meredith, op. cit., I, 45.

[13] Ibid., I, 220.

In a letter to Robert Louis Stevenson, Meredith says, "Diana of the Crossways is partly modeled on Mrs. Norton . . . . I think she lives."[14]

The fact that throughout Eliot's novels numerous little "preachments" are found concerning her ideas and theories and that a careful perusal of Meredith's work reveals only a few such digressions tells us that her method and tendencies are different from his. Eliot stops in the middle of a scene to explain how people should act under given circumstances; Meredith simply pictures the action and scenes and allows the reader to draw conclusions. There is very little theorizing in Meredith's works. One example is found in Sandra Belloni. I quote it to show that even in this rare digression Meredith seems to apologize for forsaking his art to record events:

> The philosopher maintains that a story should not always flow, or at least not to a given measure. When we are knapsack on back, he says, we come to eminences where a swing of our journey past and in advance is desirable, as is a distinct pause in any business, here and there. He points proudly to the fact that our people in this comedy move themselves--are moved from their own impulsions, and that no arbitrary hand has posted them to bring about any event and heap the catastrophe. In vain I tell him that he is making tatters of the puppet's golden robe, illusion; that he is smoking the blood of their warm humanity out of them. He promises that when he is in Italy he will retire altogether; for there is a field of action, battles and conspiracies, nerve and muscle, where life fights for plain issue, and he can but sum results. Let us, he entreats, be true to time and place. In our garden, England, the gardener, Time, is playing all

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[14] Ibid., II, 353.

> sorts of delicate freaks in the lines and traceries of the flow of life, and shall we note them. If we are to understand our species, and mark the progress of civilization at all we must.[15]

An examination of Eliot's characterization and that of Meredith's reveals distinct differences in realistic tendencies. Eliot's characters are "true to type"; that is, their actions can all be accounted for and predicted; they all run true to form while Meredith's are strange, shifting, unpredictable, and complex-minded. Meredith's characters seem to be the result of much study and research and then a faithful portrayal. Eliot's characters are vividly portrayed; some of them will live forever, but it is not this vivid portrayal of which I speak. In thinking of Sandra Belloni and Maggie Tulliver, one can get this difference in the method of portrayal. Readers love Maggie and follow her to her tragic end with a deep sympathy for her, just as Eliot would have them do. They know that one of Maggie's disposition set in her environment must come to some tragic end. From the beginning the emphasis of the story interest is placed not upon Maggie's individual thinking nor problem solving nor mental growth; it is a story about a girl with an unusual and unconventional disposition and personality caught in an unflexible social environment. Readers know all about Maggie's disposition, her looks, her family, her likes and dislikes, but they never get into her mind and thinking. They know what Eliot says she thinks and what

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[15] George Meredith, Sandra Belloni (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), II, 185.

Eliot predicts will come of such thinking, but they never feel and think with Maggie. They "sympathize" with her as Eliot would have them. Though Sandra Belloni is not so well known as Maggie and will never be as widely known or loved, she lives and grows with Meredith's novel. Readers actually struggle to help her solve her problems; they are never left in the dark about certain decisions and made to feel that these decisions must be in order for the story to end right.

Dinah in _Adam Bede_ is a silhouette compared with Diana in _Diana of the Crossways_. One reads "about" Dinah; he lives inside Diana's mind throughout the novel. Meredith obtains this result by realistic dramatic presentation not by narration explaining the why of things. A comparison of Richard Feverel and one of Eliot's boys shows that Richard acts, and by his actions and speech his complexity of mind is revealed. Tom Tulliver in _The Mill on the Floss_ is only a stage prop in comparison with Richard.

It is not that Meredith's characters are all intellectuals. His galaxy of characters runs the full gamut. Wilfrid Pole and Merthyr Ford are widely different in intellectual ability, but one follows each man's thinking throughout _Sandra Belloni_. The clear-cut characterization of Silas Marner compared with that of Adrian Harley in _The Ordeal of Richard Feverel_ further shows this vast difference in technique. Silas is planned and penned from start to finish. The reader feels that Silas could not have acted in any other way while the reader wonders from chapter to chapter just what Adrian will think of next. Meredith gives to his character a new dimension; and though all his portrayals are not so vivid as Eliot's and his characters may not always interpret life as well, yet they all breathe of reality and unbiased presentation.

In the matter of narration and organization Eliot follows the older group and Meredith the newer. Eliot's plots are perfectly formed and carried out. When one has finished Silas Marner, he feels that he has finished with all characters and incidents, and he has the same attitude toward Eliot's other novels; though as in The Mill on the Floss the reader may be sad that it had to have a tragic ending, he feels that it was necessary and the only ending. But Meredith's characters are still living and growing when his novels end. Using a famous expression of Zola's, one can say Meredith gives us only a "slice" of life. He does not attempt to "round out their little lives" as does Eliot. He strives to portray truthfully and realistically incidents of a lifetime which are interesting, unusual, or typical; he scientifically portrays characters acting normally under circumstances created by the incidents.

Eliot and the older realists allow comment and generalities to dim the sense impressions. Meredith and the later novelists employ a method by which they are able to establish a more definite sense of actuality. Their descriptions give the reader an illusion of reality by bringing into immediate relief certain sense impressions. A reader has the illusion that he can not only see the characters in action but also feel and think as they do because he catches the sense impressions that they are experiencing. This technique is accomplished largely by the author's suggestion of the sense impressions which are made on the characters at the border realm of their consciousness. The detailing of these borderline sensations is a technique borrowed from the Russians and used more and more from Meredith on, a technique which Eliot and her predecessors never caught. Even when sense impressions are brought out by the older realists, these impressions are dimmed by comments or by general-phrase descriptions. The following passages are examples of the use of Meredith's technique:

> He read it, sitting in the Richford Library alone, while the great rhododendron bloomed outside, above the sunny shaven sward looking like a monstrous tropic bird alighted to brood an hour in full sunlight.[16]
>
> He dismissed the night-watchers from the room, and remained with her alone, till the sense of death oppressed him, and then the shock sent him to the window to look for sky and stars. Behind a low broad pine, hung with frosty mist, he heard a bell-wether of the flock in the silent fold. Death in life it sounded.[17]
>
> A pale shadowy blue center of light among the clouds told where the moon was. Rain had ceased, and the refreshed earth smelt all of flowers, as if each breeze going by held a nosegay to their nostrils.[18]

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[16] _Ibid._, p. 308.

[17] Meredith, _The Ordeal of Richard Feverel_ (New York, Modern Library, 1927), p. 534.

[18] Meredith, _Sandra Belloni_, II, 295.

A comparison of these passages from Meredith with the following from Eliot's novels reveals not only the vast difference in technique but also the difference in the sense impression made upon the reader:

> It was a still afternoon--the golden light was lingering languidly among the upper boughs, only glancing down here and there on the purple pathway and its edge of faintly sprinkled moss; an afternoon in which destiny disguises her cold awful face behind a hazy radiant veil, encloses us in warm downy wings and poisons us with violet scented breath.[19]
>
> He caught the sound of jocose talk and ringing laughter from behind the hedges. The jocose talk of haymakers is best at a distance; like those clumsy bells round the cows' necks, it has rather a coarse sound when it comes close and may even grate on your ears painfully; but heard from far off it mingles very prettily with the other joyous sounds of nature.[20]

Meredith has used a subtle dramatic presentation, which Eliot has used to some extent but with less realistic effect. Mr. Le Gallienne says:

> Is there no drama but that labeled "act and deed"? Surely thought is the most dramatic of all things. . . . George Eliot knew the drama of thought and gave it to us in some types, but must "victorious analysis" stop with her or them? There are subtler individualities than Tito, and shall we not welcome their drama? Sir Willoughby Patterne of Patterne Hall is one such, and Mr. Meredith has given us his drama of nerves. By and by there will be others more subtle than he, and then, maybe we shall need a stronger lens.[21]

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[19] Eliot, Adam Bede, p. 127.

[20] *Ibid*., pp. 201-202.

[21] Le Gallienne, *op*. *cit*., p. 157.

The passages given below from Meredith and Eliot, respectively, illustrate their difference in presentation:

> He had drunk of the questioning cup, that which denieth peace to us and projects us on the missionary search of the how, the wherefore, and the why not, ever afterward. He questions his justification and yours, for gratifying taste in an ill-regulated world of wrong-doing, suffering, sin and bounties unrighteously dispersed.[22]

> But what were guineas to him who saw no vista beyond countless days of weaving? It is heedless for him to ask that, for it was pleasant for him to feel them in his palm and look at their bright faces which were all his own; it was another element of life like the weaving and satisfaction of hunger subsisting quite aloof from the life of belief and love from which he had been cut off.[23]

In George Eliot's treatment of nature, too, may be seen how completely she belonged with the older school of realists. To the man of today and to the newer realists nature is a force actual and terrible outside his own life. It has energy and influence of its own, and it has the power to harm man. Great storms on land and sea, great floods, droughts, and cyclones play their part in the modern novel in a realistic way. In Meredith's novels nature is a force influencing man's life, an outside unpredictable force. In George Eliot's works nature is a background for human life. She describes the fields, rivers, flowers, and forests only as they are necessary to give a setting for her story. These nature scenes are dear to her characters because they have lived long with them; and though she goes far beyond Fielding, Thackeray, and others of the older school in the power of her description, she still belongs to that older school; the difference is one of degree and not of kind. She never gives nature an identity all its own as do Meredith and the newer realists. The flood scene in the Mill on the Floss and the great storm in the German forest in The Ordeal of Richard Feverel contrast clearly Eliot's and Meredith's views and methods of treatment. To Meredith and in turn to his character, Richard Feverel, the storm in the German forest is not only an uncontrollable force, but it is something that has power and influence over him so much so that his mental point of view is completely reversed; and he changes his mind about certain plans of action.

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[22] George Meredith, Beauchamp's Career (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), p. 218.

[23] George Eliot, Silas Marner, The Weaver of Raveloe (New York, Charles E. Merrill Company, 1908), p. 52.

> . . . . And the difference lies in that fact that, while most other poets have sung of nature in the abstract, have moralized, sentimentalized, transcendentalized her, Mr. Meredith has cared more to sing her as she is in the concrete. His predecessors have, in the main, sung the spirit of nature; he sings her body which is earth, as well--"this earth of the beautiful breasts."[24]

Although George Eliot was thoroughly familiar with the scientific teachings of her day and a firm believer in Darwin's theory of heredity, her use of family, racial, and social heredity differs from that of Meredith and the later realists in that she presents well-ordered and "rounded-out" lives. The reader does not find the chaos and unsettled questioning which appear in the modern realists. Daniel Deronda presents a Jew with the same social heredity as Alan in The Tragic Comedians; however, Meredith in his portrayal leaves the problem unanswered as it remains today while Eliot "finishes it off" for her readers because she believes a just finishing is deserved. By this I do not wish to imply that Meredith's faith in man and his ultimate victory over evil is less than Eliot's; nor is his a more scientific and common-sense point of view. Eliot realizes that life is complex and undetermined, yet she writes her novels to impress her readers and give them faith and assurance. Meredith writes to picture life as it actually is and leaves the reader to draw his own conclusions.

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[24] Le Gallienne, op. cit., p. 130.

Thus differences appearing in Eliot's and Meredith's spirit and technique give evidence that their realism is different. They differ in the way they present their material. Meredith is impersonal and objective in his handling; Eliot attempts to impress us with the good qualities of her characters so that we may sympathize with them. Meredith uses contemporary sources for subject material; Eliot leans heavily on the past. Meredith differs from Eliot in characterization in that he dramatically pictures life as it is, and she tells us about her characters. In the technique of narration Meredith uses sharp "specifications of the signs of life," as Henry James terms it, while Eliot allows comment and general descriptions to dim the sense impressions and destroy the illusion of reality. These two authors differ in their attitude toward nature: Meredith believes that nature is an outside uncontrollable force with an identity all of its own; Eliot considers nature only a cherished background for her characters. In their treatment of the theory of heredity Meredith presents its complexity without reserve; Eliot clouds its seriousness because she wishes to teach tolerance and pity. In all of these differences may be seen the line of divergence from the older realism to the new. Eliot is the last of the older school and Meredith the first of the new. Eliot's realism is far superior in many ways to that of her predecessors, and Meredith's is only a beginning toward the new; but the distinction between the two authors is great enough that Eliot may be said to stand facing the past in realism and Meredith the future.

CHAPTER III

Like the novelists of the new realism Meredith uses contemporary material. He depicts characters and conditions existing in his own day and age, and he refrains from all moralizing. The following passage from _Beauchamp's Career_ states clearly his aim and purpose for this novel. He says that he is "undisturbed by any moralizing" and that he paints "what _is_, not that which _I imagine_." He pledges also to use contemporary subjects "_this day, this hour, this life_," and he promises to give us "_men, and the ideas of men_":

> _I give you the position of the country undisturbed by any moralizing of mine_. The youth I introduce to you will rarely let us escape from it; for the reason that he was born with so extreme and passionate a love for his country, that he thought all things else of mean importance in comparison: and our union is one in which following the counsel of a sage and seer, _I must try to paint for you what is, not that which I imagine. This day, this hour, this life and even politics_, the centre and throbbing heart of it (enough, when unburlesqued, to blow the down off the gossamer-stump of fiction at a single breath, I have heard tell), must be treated of: _men, and the ideas of men_, which are--it is policy to be emphatic upon truisms--are actually the motives of men in a greater degree than their appetites: _these are my theme_; and may it be my fortune to keep them at blood heat, and myself as calm as a statute of Memnon in prostrate Egypt.[1]

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[1] Meredith, _Beauchamp's Career_, pp. 6-7.

In the Prelude to The Egoist Meredith again emphasizes his intention to portray contemporary characters and scenes.

> You may as well know him (Sir Willoughby) out of hand, as a gentleman of our time and country, of wealth and station; a not flexible figure, do what we may with him . . . . a gentleman of family and property, an idol of a decorous land that admires the concrete.[2]

All of Meredith's novels do not have such undisputable assertions as to their contemporary theme; but a study of any of them will show that the conditions, habits, events, and characters are those of his time. His characters are representative of contemporary men, their motives and impulses and contemporary customs and habits. The Tragic Comedians is a story of the last episode in the life of Ferdinand Lassalle, the German Jewish socialist who was born in 1825. Lassalle is a champion of the working classes and a great figure in society. In 1864 he meets Helene von Donniges in Switzerland. She is the daughter of the Bavarian envoy at Geneva. Earlier than this meeting Lassalle and Helene von Donniges have acknowledged a sincere attraction for each other. Helene's father refuses to give her in marriage to Lassalle and compels her to marry another man. Lassalle challenges the husband and the father to a duel. The husband accepts the challenge, and on August 31, 1864, Lassalle is killed. Meredith records these events; he neither adds nor invents. Sandra Belloni and Vittoria are novels based upon the revolutionary struggles in Italy which were of great interest and common concern at the time Meredith traveled in that country. When Diana of the Crossways was published in 1885, the character, Diana Warwick, so closely resembled Mrs. Norton Sheridan's granddaughter that Meredith was forced to publish an explanation and apology. This contemporary character was famous about the middle of the nineteenth century for her spirit, her beauty, and her much discussed Platonic relations with Prime Minister Lord Melbourne. At the time of Robert Peele's adherence to the cause of Free Trade, she was accused of having sold to The Times a secret of state entrusted to her by a friend, an episode closely paralleled with Diana's exposure of a state secret. Although Meredith's purpose in this portrayal was not biographical, he advantageously uses the incidents to show contemporary motives and impulses. In all of Meredith's novels contemporary themes and characters are predominant, and the essence of nineteenth century thinking is unmistakably shown.

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[2] Meredith, The Egoist, p. 4.

Meredith's realism gives directly and plainly the sense of human suffering, humiliation, degradation, and exaltation. In this respect his realism is similar to that of the newer realists, who do not picture these human emotions with the sentiment which is found in the realism of George Eliot and others of the older school. Meredith's treatment of the scene in Evan Harrington where Evan finds the disgraced girl on the road to the inn is an example of this realistic treatment. The entire scene, from her discovery to Evan's reception at the supper table at the inn when he tells her story, presents an entirely different treatment from similar scenes in the older novels. For instance, Hetty's suffering in Adam Bede seems to come indirectly to us; and though the reader knows that she has suffered and grants that Eliot truthfully portrays this suffering, there is that in the treatment which clothes it with a mist of glamour. After reading about Hetty, the reader thinks that it must have been an interesting and odd England in those times; after reading about Evan's protege, he immediately brings his thoughts to bear upon girls who live near him today and who are suffering from similar misfortunes; so different are the methods of portrayal. The scene in Dahlia's apartment in London when Edward comes home to find his meal of cold soggy potatoes and mutton chops covered with a layer of cold grease waiting for him on a small table set for one, while Dahlia lies prostrate in mental anguish refusing to uncover her reddened eyes, is wholly realistic in the modern sense. Dahlia and Edward have had a sincere and deep affection for one another and have been happy, but in this scene in Rhoda Fleming and others developing around it Meredith pictures a love being killed gradually by poverty and ill-fortune. There is no sentimental covering of the real here; life is seen stripped of all physical comforts. While reading this scene, one does not have the feeling that poverty and distress will work miracles in re-enforcing never-dying love; he sees that through hardships and discomforts love is dying. The reader is not merely told this fact, and he is not given any hope of something better to take its place. He faces the stark reality. A comparison of this depiction of love in the midst of poverty with a similar instance in Gissing's New Grub Street, where Reardon struggles to retain the love and admiration of Amy while he toils and fights a losing battle with poverty, shows the similarity of treatment; and even a casual reading of the two scenes produces a similar consciousness of the relentless influence of poverty on human conduct. It would be difficult to find a more realistic scene in fiction than the one portrayed in Diana of the Crossways in the instance of Diana's grief over the loss of her lover, Percy Dacier, just at the time that she is freed by the death of her husband. Her devoted friend, Emma, finds her stretched lifeless on a bed in a cold dark room. Meredith pictures in an unforgettable way Diana's gradual return to the world about her. Step by step the reader sees and feels Diana's mental anguish and despair from the time that Emma's warm friendly hand clasps hers until at last she swallows warm food. Meredith makes him see the miserable physical conditions and actually feel the mental anguish and disturbance. In The Egoist Clara Middleton is portrayed as she literally falls out of love with Sir Willoughby. Meredith portrays this process of two weeks' duration, showing Clara's intense mental anguish as she tries to reconcile her mind to accept Sir Willoughby. Clara's need and desire for love are equal to her distrust and hatred of Willoughby; the causes of these passions can not be exactly understood by her, but the reader is able to follow her thinking, feel her emotions, and through her actions understand the impulses behind them. The entire episode of Mrs. Mount's relationship with Richard in The Ordeal of Richard Feverel is a true-to-life presentation of conflicting emotions. In the depiction of the gay enchantress, Mrs. Mount, Meredith gives to his readers a picture of the proverbial "bad woman." Her home, her mode of living, her means of livelihood, her charm, and her attraction for Richard are clearly set forth. One passage in which Meredith reveals her "enchanting power" is given below.

> Though this lady never expressed an idea, Richard was not mistaken in her cleverness. She could make evenings pass gaily, and one was not the fellow to the other. She could make you forget she was a woman, and then bring the fact startingly home to you. She could read men with one quiver of her half-closed eyelashes. She could catch the coming mood in a man and fit herself to it. What does a woman want with ideas, who can do thus much? Keenness of perception, conformity, delicacy of handling, these be all the qualities necessary to parasites?[3]

Richard has been trained, sheltered, protected, and guided. He knows that he is superior in all ways to Mrs. Mount, but it is not difficult for the reader to understand his acceptance of a questionable relationship because

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[3] Meredith, The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, p. 482.

Meredith vividly portrays Richard's reasoning. To act as though he thinks himself better than she and to refuse to see her would show to the world that he is afraid and consequently not stronger but weaker than she. His intention is to make use of his superiority and reform her. The conflicting emotions and the doubts which arise in his mind, as Adrian explains to him that Mrs. Mount's manner is open, free, and fair and that she wishes no reformation, are shown. Meredith vividly depicts the brief but intense fits of anguish which come over Richard as he thinks of Lucy; he shows these fits of anxiety growing more desperate as Richard sinks deeper into the quagmire; and at last in the magnificent storm scene in the German forest he pictures Richard's triumph over himself. Many similar illustrations could be related from Meredith's novels. One other outstanding example of modern portrayal is found in the episode of Mrs. Berry in The Ordeal of Richard Feverel. Mrs. Berry, who in realistically frank language is often compared with the nurse in Romeo and Juliet, is Richard's old nurse. She is one of the few persons who have chanced to see through Sir Austin Feverel's hypocrisy and is consequently sent from the Feverel home. She is one of the most outstanding of Meredith's characters. From the time that she meets Richard in London just before his marriage until she is forced by Adriam to return to the Feverel home as the nurse for Lucy's baby, she is a character that would be at home even in a naturalistic novel. In this respect an illuminating glimpse of Mrs.

Berry is shown in the scene at Mrs. Berry's home following the marriage of Richard and Lucy, where Lucy is crying because Richard has lost her ring and has given her Mrs. Berry's, while Richard is endeavoring to make everything seem right and to make everybody feel good. Ripton Thompson is drinking too much wine; all through the scene one feels the nervous agitation of Mrs. Berry, who is trying to finish the affair before they are detected. A thoughtful reading of Meredith's novels leaves in the reader's consciousness many clear conceptions of human suffering, humiliation, degradation, and exaltation.

Meredith's success in rendering to his readers a sharper sense of actuality and an "immediacy of sensation" is due in part to his use of sensuous imagery and vivid figurative language and in part to his ability to color a scene with the emotion of the person beholding it. The following passages will show Meredith's use of sensuous imagery. They show how decidedly he succeeds in rendering that "immediacy of sensation" and those vivid sense impressions which the novelists of the newer realism strive to render. After Clara in The Egoist has decided that "This house is a cage, and the world--my brain is a cage, until I can win my prospect of freedom."[4] Meredith pictures her seated in a window and comments thus:

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[4] Meredith, The Egoist, p. 204.

> She had gone through her crises in the anticipation of it. That is how quick natures will often be cold and hard, or not much moved, when the positive crisis arrives, and why it is that they are prepared for astonishing leaps over the gradations which should render their conduct comprehensible to us, if not excusable. She watched the blackbird throw up his head stiff, and peek to right and left, dangling the worm each side of his orange beak. Speckle-breasted thrushes were at work, and a wagtail that ran as with Clara's own little steps. Thrush and blackbird flew to the nest. They had wings. The lovely morning breathed of sweet earth into her open window and made it painful, in the dense twitter, chirp, cheep, and song of the air, to resist the innocent intoxication of the air.[5]

In The Ordeal of Richard Feverel after Clare dies and Richard arrives to pay his last respects, Meredith says:

> He dismissed the night-watchers from the room, and remained with her alone, till the sense of death oppressed him, and then the shock took him to the window to look for sky and stars. Behind a low broad pine, hung with frosty mist, he heard a bell-wether of the flock in the silent fold. Death in life it sounded.[6]

Meredith's novels are enriched throughout with similar vivid sense impressions. Example after example can be quoted, but only one other will be shown here. This one is a selection from the vivid scene of the storm in the German forest, which has influenced Richard to return to his duties:

> An oppressive slumber hung about the forest-branches. In the dells and on the heights was the same dead heat. Here where the brook tinkled it was no cool-lipped sound but metallic, and without the spirit of water. Yonder in a space of moonlight on lush grass, the beams were as white fire to sight and feeling. No haze spread around. The valleys were clear to the shadows of their verges, the distances sharply distinct; and with the colours

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[5] Ibid., p. 205.

[6] Meredith, The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, p. 534.

> of the day but slightly softened. Richard beheld a roe moving across a slope of sward far out of rifle-mark. The breathless silence was significant, yet the moon shone in a broad blue Heaven. Tongue out of mouth trotted the little dog after him; crouched panting when he started afresh. Now and then a large white night-moth flitted through the dusk of the forest.[7]

In The Egoist Meredith says that Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson has the power to concentrate a truthful description into one meaningful and picturesque phrase. The picturesque phrases throughout Meredith's novels enhance his realism. He says that the purpose of a figure is to "wing imagination with a word." The following passages illustrate Meredith's use of the significant phrase and his power to "wing imagination with a word":

> But he desired Clara Middleton manfully enough at an intimation of rivalry to be jealous; in a minute the foreigner had him, he was flame: flaming verdigris.[8]

Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson pronounces Clara "a dainty rogue in porcelain"[9]:

> Powder was in the look to make a warhorse breathe high and shiver for the signal.[10]

> He mentioned Lady Busshe's present, to gratify spleen by preparing the ground for dissension, and prudently acquiesced in her anticipated slipperiness.[11]

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[7] Ibid., p. 555.

[8] Meredith, The Egoist, p. 230.

[9] Ibid., p. 235.

[10] Ibid., p. 40.

[11] Ibid., p. 301.

> Dr. Middleton, Laetitia and the ladies, Eleanor and Isabel, joining them in the hall found two figures linked together in a shadowy indication of halves that have fallen apart and hang on the last thread of junction.[12]

> The boy raised a shout and scampered away to Sir Willoughby, at the appearance of whom Clara felt herself nipped and curling inward.[13]

> The suspicion she had nursed sprang out of her arms a muscular fact on the spot.[14]

Another means that Meredith uses to gain immediacy of sensation is to color scenes with the emotions of the persons seeing them. In The Ordeal of Richard Feverel Meredith presents Richard experiencing at the same time a turbulent mental storm and a turbulent natural, physical storm. His mind is racing wildly, and Meredith writes:

> When he again pursued his course with his face set to the Rhine, a huge mountain appeared to rise sheer over him, and he had it in his mind to scale it. He got no nearer to the base of it for all his vigorous outstepping. The ground began to dip; he lost sight of the sky. Then heavy thunder-drops struck his cheek, the leaves were singing, the earth breathed, it was black before him and behind. All at once the thunder spoke.[15]

A little later when his mind becomes calmer, this description appears:

> Then there was a pause; and the lightning seemed as the eye to Heaven, and the thunder as a tongue to Heaven, each alternately addressing him; filling him with awful rapture. Alone there--sole human creature among the grandeurs and mysteries

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[12] Ibid., p. 304.

[13] Ibid., p. 253.

[14] Ibid., p. 328.

[15] Meredith, The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, p. 556.

> of storm--he felt the representative of his kind, and his spirit rose, and marched, and exulted, let it be glory, let it be ruin! Lower down the lightened abysses of air rolled the wrathful crash; then white thrusts of light were darted from the sky, and great curving ferns, seen steadfast in pallor a second, were supernaturally agitated, and vanished.[16]

Richard finds a tiny leveret and tries to soothe it from fright by putting it in one hand in his breast:

> The rain was now steady; from every tree a fountain poured. So cool and easy had his mind become that he was speculating on what kind of shelter the birds could find, and how the butterflies and moths saved their coloured wings from washing. Folded close they might hang under a leaf he thought. Lovingly he looked into the dripping darkness of the coverts on each side, as one of their children.[17]

In The Egoist Clara's father has just spoken disparagingly of Vernon Whitford whom she admires:

> Clara's bosom heaved. The speechless insurrection threatened her eyes.
>
> A South-west shower lashed the window-panes and suggested to Dr. Middleton shuddering visions of the channel-passage on board a steamer.[18]

Later on in the same novel Clara has run away. Suspicion of an unconventional association with De Craye is brooding in the minds of some of the members of the household. Others are censuring her for impetuosity. Sir Willoughby is jealous of De Craye and afraid of his position with Clara. No one knows certainly that Clara has run away, but she is suspected and cannot be found:

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[16] Ibid., p. 556.

[17] Ibid., p. 557.

[18] Meredith, The Egoist, p. 179.

> The throwing open of the hall-doors for the gentleman presented a framed picture of a deluge. All the young-leaved trees were steely black, without a gradation of green, drooping and pouring, and the song of rain had become an inveterate hiss.
>
> The ladies beholding it exclaimed against Clara, so dark are trivial errors when circumstances frown. She must be mad to tempt such weather: she was very giddy; she was never at rest.[19]

Vernon loves Clara but has scarcely dared think so since she is bound to Sir Willoughby. As he walks through the rain toward the station, however, realizing that she is running from Willoughby, his heart is gladdened. Meredith presents Vernon's emotions and colors the scenes with these emotions:

> Vernon's happy recklessness was dashed by fears for Miss Middleton. Apart from those fears, he had the pleasure of a gull wheeling among foam-streaks of the wave. A milder rain descended; the country expanded darkly defined underneath the moving curtain; the clouds were as he liked to see them, scaling; but their skirts dragged.
>
> Dropping to the road, he had better foothold than on the slippery field-path, and he ran. His principal hope was that Clara would have missed her way. Another pelting of rain agitated him on her behalf.[20]

Meredith's treatment of nature shows a decided similarity to that of the newer realists. In the following passage from Lord Jim by Joseph Conrad, the tone of the scene is colored by the emotion of the character in question. This passage resembles many of Meredith's:

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[19] Ibid., p. 261.

[20] Ibid., p. 266.

> A marvelous stillness pervaded the world, and the stars, together with the serenity of their rays, seemed *to shed upon the earth the assurance of everlasting security*. The young moon recurved, and shining low in the west, was like a slender shaving thrown up from a bar of gold, and the Arabian Sea. . . .
>
> *Jim on the bridge was penetrated by the great certitude of unbounded safety and peace that could be read on the silent aspect of nature* like the certitude of fostering love upon the placid tenderness of a mother's face.[21]

A study of Meredith's treatment of nature will reveal the fact that not only his technique and power of presentation differ from those of the older novelists, but that his personal feeling about nature differs from theirs. Meredith, like the newer realists, gives to nature a personality. In his novels rain, wind, storms, and other elements of nature have a direct influence upon human conduct and behavior. Three passages quoted from Conrad, Meredith, and Eliot respectively will serve to show Meredith's relationship in this respect to the new realists:

> It was dusk of a winter's day. The gale had freshened since noon, stopping traffic on the river and now blew with the strength of a hurricane in fitful bursts that boomed like salvoes of great guns firing over the ocean. The rain slanted in sheets that flicked and subsided, and between whiles Jim had threatening glimpses of the tumbling tide, the small craft jumbled and tossing along the shore, the motionless buildings in the driving mist, the broad ferryboats pitching ponderously at anchor, the vast landing stages heaving up and down and smothered in sprays. The next gust seemed to blow all this away. *There was a fierce purpose in the gale, a furious earnestness in the screech of*

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[21] Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (New York, Modern Library, 1931), p. 17.

> *the wind, in the brutal tumult of earth and sky, that seemed directed at him, and made him hold his breath in awe*. He stood still. It seemed to him he was whirled around.[22]

The following passage illustrates Meredith's technique of presentation and his view of nature. The rich lyrical quality does not destroy the realistic coloring or the accents on his view of nature:

> Rain was universal; a thick robe of it swept from hill to hill; thunder rumbled remote, and between the ruffled roars the downpour pressed on the land with a great noise of eager gobbling, much like that of the swine's trough fresh filled, as though a vast assembly of the hungered had seated themselves clamorously and fallen to on meats and drinks in a silence, save of the chaps. A rapid walker poetically and humourously minded gathers multitudes of images on his way. *And rain, the heaviest you can meet, is a lively companion* when the resolute pacer scorns discomfort of wet clothes and squealing boots. *South-western rain-clouds, too, are never long sullen*: they enfold and will have the earth in a good strong glut of the kissing overflow; then, as a hawk with feathers on his beak of the bird of his claw lifts head, they rise and take veiled feature in long climbing watery lines: at any moment they may break the veil and show soft upper cloud, show sun on it, show sky, green near the verge they spring from, of the green of grass in early dew; or along a traveling sweep that rolls asunder over head, heaven's laughter of purest blue among titanic white shoulders; it may mean fair smiling for awhile, or be the lightest interlude; but the watery lines and the drifting, the chasing, the upsoaring, all in a shadowy fingering of form, and the animation of the leaves of the trees pointing them on, the bending of the tree-tops, the snapping of branches, and the hurrahings of the stubborn hedge at wrestle with the flaws, yielding but a leaf at most, and that on a fling, make a glory of contest and wildness without aid or colour to inflame the man who is at home with them from old association on road, health and mountain. . . .

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[22] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

> with what steps of a nervous dancing master it would be thine to play the hunted rat of the elements. . . . The taking of rain and sun alike befits one of our climate, and he would have the secret of a strengthening intoxication must court the clouds of the South-west with a lover's blood.[23]

A reading of the two passages above discloses a general similarity. Each author treats nature as an actual, living, surging force. Each thinks of nature and treats it in terms of the feeling and emotions of the character beholding it. In contrast the following shows a difference:

> In the second week of September Maggie was again sitting in her lonely room, battling with the old shadowy enemies that were slain and rising again. It was past midnight and the rain was beating heavily against the window driven with fitful force in the rushing low moan. . . . For the day after Lucy's visit, there had been a sudden change in the weather: the heat and drought had given way to cold variable winds, and heavy falls of rain at intervals; and she had been forbidden to risk the contemplated journey until the weather had become more settled.[24]

A diligent search has been made throughout Eliot's novels, and not only is this instance of the flood typical but the best scene found which gives opportunity for emotional coloring. If Eliot had believed as Meredith did concerning nature, this scene could not have been presented without betraying this belief. One can readily see how comparatively lifeless and colorless this powerful flood appears under Eliot's pen as compared with the storm in The Ordeal of Richard Feverel under Meredith's.

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[23] Meredith, The Egoist, pp. 263-264.

[24] Eliot, The Mill on the Floss (London, Dutton and Company, 1927), p. 534.

Though the use of "superfluous detail" is not fully developed in Meredith's novels, he does use this modern technique, which the Russian realist has brought to perfection. This technique is one in which the novelist narrates outstanding unconscious activities carried on by a character while under a severe mental strain or while experiencing unusual emotions; he presents those sensations which appear on the borderline of consciousness in such a way that the reader feels that his own sense of hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, or touching is stimulated. Earlier story tellers have failed to observe or record these activities and sensations, which when given add much to the realistic quality of the presentation. The example given below will illustrate Meredith's use of "superfluous detail." Clara Middleton has decided that her only escape from Sir Willoughby and the web of her engagement is to run away. She is at the railway station and ready to leave when her respected friend, Vernon Whitford, finds her and attempts to make her see not only the futility of such procedure but the ignominy of it. He has apparently succeeded in making her feel that though he disapproves he thinks no less of her; however, the following passage gives an unconscious action which serves its purpose in rendering Whitford's subconscious thinking perceptible to the reader:

> She raised the glass to him. She was happier and hoped for some little harshness and kindness mixed that she might carry away to travel with and think over.

> *He turned the glass as she had given it to his lips, turned it round in putting it to his lips*: a scarce perceptible maneuvre, but that she had given it expressly on one side.[25]

Meredith represents Clara as perceiving this unconscious action, and the reader sees that the full import of its significance strikes her consciousness. He continues:

> It may be hoped that it was not done by design. Done even accidently, without a taint of contrivance, but *it was an affliction to see, and coiled through her, causing her to shrink and redden*.[26]

Vernon leaves the station after promising her that he will not betray her intentions. Clara waits for the whistle of the train and reflects on her friend's advice. Then follows a very good example of Meredith's use of "superfluous detail":

> *She bit at her glove; she glanced at the concentrated eyes of the publican's family portraits, all looking as one; she noticed the empty tumbler, and went round to it and touched it, and the silly spoon in it*.[27]

Clara finds herself traveling back to Willoughby in Flitch's fly in company with Colonel De Craye, not quite certain that she really approves her own actions. Meredith says:

> Clara leaned forward to gaze at the hedgeways in the neighborhood of the Hall, strangely renewing their familiarity with her. . . . She thanked her feminine mask for not showing how nerveless and languid she was.
>
> *Involuntarily she sighed*.

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[25] Meredith, *The Egoist*, p. 272.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 278.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 283.

> "There is a train at three," said De Craye with splendid promptitude.
>
> "Yes, and one at five," replied Clara.[28]

Another example is found farther on in the story when Sir Willoughby's honor is tensely under strain:

> "Why should we be prying into the domestic affairs of the Dales!" Willoughby interjected, and *drew out his watch*, merely for diversion; he was on tiptoe to learn whether Vernon was as well instructed as Clara, and hung to the view that it could not be, while drenching in the sensation that he was.[29]

In Chapter XLVI of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* Richard is in the German forest just after learning that he is the father of a son. The pangs of conscience are struggling against a powerful desire to go home:

> On a barren corner of the wooded highland looking inland stood gray topless ruins set in nettles and rank grassblades. *Richard mechanically sat down on the crumbling flints to rest, and listened to the panting of the dog. Sprinkled at his feet were emerald lights: hundreds of glow-worms studded the dark dry ground.*
>
> *He sat and eyed them, thinking not at all.* His energies were expended in action. *He sat as a part of the ruins*, and the moon turned his shadow westward from the South.[30]

Meredith's characters are alive, changing, and uncertain in outline. The characters in the older novels are clear-cut and vivid; but they seem to stand transfixed in their sphere while Meredith's, like the later ones portrayed by the new realists, are fluid and seem to live on after they have been transplanted from the author's mind to the reader's. A comparison of Thackeray's Beatrix Esmond with Meredith's Renee Croisnell shows this difference. After one has closed the book of Henry Esmond, he feels that he knows Beatrix thoroughly; she shall never die in his memory. But after finishing Beauchamp's Career, one is still in a state of mind to wonder just what reactions and developments she will experience in the future. Renee is portrayed as a growing and changing person throughout the novel. The reader sees a character clearly drawn, he feels her charm, and he knows her strength; but the life that is forever unfolding to her is influencing her, and he feels her inner life developing and changing. There is no sense of a culmination of activities or developments. It is not difficult for him to believe that the poised woman of the world who comes to Nevil in his illness is the same sensitive girl the reader has known in Venice, because the reader has been on the inside of her mind and has seen her develop into the person she now is. At the end of Henry Esmond Beatrix Esmond is the same person grown older. An analysis of all of Meredith's characters shows a similar portrayal; a contrast with characters of the older realism shows the same contrasting sense of fixity and fluidity; a comparison with characters of the newer realists reveals similar growing or changing aspects. Richard Feverel's slowly disintegrating character is portrayed as realistically as Reardon's rapid degradation in The New Grub Street. The difference is one of causes and degree, not one of the process of portrayal. When Meredith's novel covers only a short unit of time as in The Tragic Comedians, he effectively renders the same sense of fluidity of character and personality. Alvin is a most distinct individual, but he is unpredictable; the power of his mind is revealed by conversation and by a rendition of the thoughts which accompany the spoken word as he experiences various emotions and problems. In Rhoda Fleming, Dahlia, Edward, Rhoda, or any character in the book reveals the same powerful and realistic portrayal.

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[28] *Ibid.*, p. 285.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 451.

[30] Meredith, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, p. 557.

Meredith accomplishes this realistic portrayal not merely because he makes a scientific and thorough study of human nature, but because he makes use of techniques little used by earlier English novelists. Perhaps the technique most directly responsible for rendering his novels realistic in the modern sense is his use of the dramatic scene rather than narration. He seldom narrates and then only to lead up to the "crucial scene." His use of "concentrated presentment" and a "pitch above the common human" enables him to glide over circumstances scarcely essential and portray powerfully the "crucial scenes." In The Egoist is a good example of concentrated presentment. The first three short chapters cover three and one-half years, giving all of the circumstances which are necessary as a background for the presentation of the crucial scenes of the next three weeks. Sir Willoughby is introduced and stamped an egoist.

Constantia Durham, Laetitia Dale, and several other characters are introduced and portrayed.

Meredith's skillful transition from one scene to the next serves to avoid a break in illusion and thus adds to the quality of realism. The following excerpt is an example of a transition. In The Ordeal of Richard Feverel when the Foreys are jesting about the wedding ring Clare has found, she suddenly bursts into tears. Meredith effects the transition to Richard's wedding as follows:

> Did the poor mocked-at heart divine what might then be enacting? Perhaps dimly as we say: that is without eyes--At an altar stand, two fair young creatures, ready with their oaths.[31]

Meredith's realism resembles that of the novelists who are admittedly followers of the new realism. He uses contemporary subject material. His presentations give plainly and directly the sense of human suffering, humiliation, degradation, and exaltation. Through the use of sensuous imagery, figurative language, and scenes colored by the emotions of the person beholding them he renders an "immediacy of sensation" to his readers. His treatment of nature is similar to that of the newer realists. He makes use of "superfluous detail" in many instances; and though this technique is not fully developed in his novels, it helps to give his scenes a sense of actuality found only in the novels of the new realism. He presents the mental and emotional conflicts of his characters in such a way that the reader sees their inner lives. By "concentrated presentment" in the form of scenes rather than narration and by the use of skillful transition from one scene to the next, Meredith succeeds in rendering a sense of realism matched only by that of the newer realists.

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[31] Ibid., p. 342.

The tendencies toward realism in Meredith's novels are not obscure; neither are they accidental. His realistic tendencies show direct contrasts to George Eliot's; and since her realism is wholly representative of that of the older realists, Meredith is not to be classed with the older school of realists. Meredith's familiarity with the new realism and his admiration for it are shown in his own testimonies; in his novels he uses many of the techniques developed by the newer realists. After reading scenes from his novels, the reader feels the same sense of actuality which he feels after reading like scenes from the newer realists; therefore, one may logically conclude that Meredith's tendencies toward realism are similar in technique and spirit to the realistic tendencies of the novelists who followed him, the novelists who are generally termed the novelists of the new realism.

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