

Moving through uncertainty with George Meredith

by

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Contents	page
Abstract	4
Introduction	5
Chapter One: <i>Weltanschauung</i>	22
Chapter Two: Wellbeing	52
Chapter Three: Movement	81
Chapter Four: Uncertainty	111
Chapter Five: Diversions	142
Conclusion: Continuum	172
Bibliography	185

Abstract

In his life and writing George Meredith demonstrates a stoic determination to strive to move forward with optimism, expressing in his poem 'The Woods of Westermain' his belief in moving toward physical, mental and spiritual harmony to achieve a sense of wellbeing. Analysis of Meredith's correspondence and work reveals his philosophy that the self-respect to be gained from being at ease with oneself and the earth results in respect for others and for the natural world. Meredith's contribution to literature, recognised by many of his contemporaries towards the end of the nineteenth century, is acknowledged by a minority of scholars in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. J B Priestley suggests that to appreciate the complexity of Meredith's work, it is necessary to attempt to understand the man himself. This thesis uses biographical material alongside analysis of selected poems and eight of Meredith's thirteen novels to highlight links between themes in his writing and his personal philosophy. Researching how Meredith makes connections between health and fitness, gender roles and relationships, the developing form of the novel, and the activity of reading, the thesis focuses on the significance of mental and physical movement in Meredith's writing. Exploration of his novels shows how he expresses unconventional views of women and relationships with subtlety, using poetic techniques in prose in a move towards a new form of fiction. In response to life's challenges to his philosophy Meredith refers to the life cycle of the natural world, accepting that death is the only certainty and stating that it is futile for an individual to desire or seek permanence. Investigating the apparent paradox of accepting impermanence while striving to move forwards, the thesis shows how Meredith demonstrates that uncertainty allows opportunities for experimentation, Progress may be achieved by non-linear movement - moving 'toward' if not always 'forward'.

Introduction

In a letter written at a time of personal difficulties, George Meredith told his oldest friend Frederick Maxse: 'The soul's one road is forward' (*The Letters of George Meredith*, ed. Cline, 1970, p.744). The sentence, which is succinct for a writer who was criticised for his verbose and obscure style, encapsulates Meredith's outlook on life, his determination to look ahead and strive to move forward. His positive view of movement as a means of progress is best described by the German term *Weltanschauung*, used in Jones' biography *The Amazing Victorian* (1999, p.122), which is defined in *Collins' English Dictionary* as 'a personal philosophy of human life and the universe'. Meredith's *Weltanschauung* is expressed in his poem 'The Woods of Westermain' as 'Blood and brain and spirit, three . . . Join for true felicity' (*Poetical Works*, 1912, pp.201, 202). These lines summarise his philosophy of striving towards a sense of wellbeing, achieved by physical, mental and spiritual harmony. Meredith's vitality and love of life is conveyed in his physical and mental energy, described by Banerjee as his 'zest for movement' (2012, p.25). An optimistic outlook, due to temperament and determination, enabled him to look ahead to the future, and his love of Nature, evident in his poetic writing, is said by a cousin Stuart Ellis to have been 'innate' (*George Meredith*, 1920, p.47).

The expression of his philosophy in poetry and novels is a means of communication for Meredith, not to impose his views but to stimulate reflection and thought in his readers, to enable a better understanding of ourselves and others. Sharing his beliefs in writing is Meredith's way of contributing to contemporary debates, and the inclusion of philosophy in fiction is one of his strategies to develop the form of the nineteenth-century novel. Communication of his ideas and knowledge is important to Meredith. Reminiscing in 1908 about their friendship, Comyns Carr states that 'Meredith could walk and talk after a fashion that I have known in no one else' (quoted in Hammerton, 1909, p.110). Meredith suggests that the self-respect to be gained from being at ease with oneself, in a close relationship with the earth, results in respect for others and for the natural world; and that improved understanding leads to a better civilisation. As he wrote in a letter in 1887 to George Pierce Baker, professor of English at Harvard and Yale: 'Close knowledge of our fellows, discernment of the laws of existence, these lead to great civilization' (Cline, p. 876).

Born in 1828, Meredith grew up in an age of transition when, as stated by John Stuart Mill 'mankind has outgrown old institutions, not yet acquired new ones' ('The Spirit of the

Age', 1831). The uncertainty and anxiety created by rapid social, political and philosophical changes during the second half of the nineteenth century is summarised by historian G M Young as 'the swirl and wreckage of new ideas and old beliefs' (quoted in Keating, 1989, p.1). Gilmour refers to the sense of 'drifting' on the current rather than 'controlling' it, reflected in the literature of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and described by J A Froude in 1882: 'We have lived through a period of change – change spiritual, change moral, social and political. The foundations of our most serious convictions have been broken up' (Gilmour, 1986, p.149). During the period from 1870 to 1895, in which Meredith wrote eight of his thirteen novels, attitudes towards a changing society tended to be pessimistic, with the growing awareness that social and intellectual problems had not been solved and perhaps were insoluble. In a letter to his grandson in 1886, Tennyson wrote: 'All ages are ages of transition, but this is an awful moment of transition' (Gilmour, 1986, p.155). Some acknowledgement of the acceptance of doubt is evident in the terms Naturalism, Aestheticism and Impressionism and Aestheticism, first used in the period 1868 to 1882. Gilmour notes that Agnosticism coined by T H Huxley in 1869 represents the 'new intellectual respectability of the state of "half-belief" which had so agonized earlier thinkers' (Gilmour, 1986, pp.150,151).

Faced with challenges to his optimistic *Weltanschauung*, Meredith is unusual in acknowledging his own doubts. While recognising the natural human desire for stability, Meredith accepts uncertainty as inevitable, and his belief in the need to accept impermanence is expressed in his poem 'A Faith on Trial'. During the course of a walk, the poet is reminded of the natural cycle of life which informs his philosophy. Signs of the new growth of spring eventually re-affirm his belief that death is the only certainty, that future generations will ensure the succession of life, and that it is futile for an individual to desire or seek permanence. Acknowledging in his writing the difficulties of achieving harmony as an individual, and in relationships with others, Meredith demonstrates the potential for alternatives by means of compromise, without providing solutions. For Meredith the response to uncertainty is important, not 'drifting' but striving to move forwards through transitional stages as part of the process of development. The opportunity to learn from experience - even failure - is recognised in Meredith's *The Shaving of Shagpat* (1856) subtitled 'An Arabian Entertainment', in the voice of the 'poet' who says that 'Every failure is a step advanced' (p.201). Meredith's belief in the potential for development during a period of uncertainty is demonstrated by his determination to experiment, to discover new ways of writing and reading.

The consistent expression of his *Weltanschauung*, striving to look ahead and to move forward, demonstrates Meredith's strength of character and stoicism. In this thesis the adjective 'stoic' is used to convey the resolute determination with which Meredith responded to challenges and uncertainty. At the time of his letter to Maxse stating that 'The soul's one road is forward', Meredith aged fifty-nine was disabled by spinal disease, and his second wife was terminally ill. His optimistic outlook was noted in a letter to Hardy by Edmund Gosse, who observed an 'almost flighty . . . cheerfulness' in Meredith despite being immobilised by a broken ankle. Gosse admitted 'some irrational' resentment, remarking: 'What a curious thing temperament is' (quoted in Thwaite, 1984, p.402). In 1908 just a year before his death, Meredith wrote of the 'failure of the legs, and that, to the happy walker I was, you can understand to be rather serious. But my cheerful outlook on life remains; it is my religion' (Cline, p.1635). Basing his philosophy on the natural cycle of life, and an acceptance of impermanence, Meredith shows a belief in making the best use of faculties and circumstances. The fortitude which Meredith demonstrates in working through challenges can be seen as a means of development by learning from experience, whereas the 'dogged endurance' of his character Sir Purcell Barrett in *Sandra Belloni* is noted by the narrator as 'our lowest philosophy', as being unhealthy and preventing movement (p.559). In his life and writing, Meredith reconciles the apparent paradox of accepting uncertainty and doubt while striving for forward movement, showing the potential for progress through uncertainty by moving 'toward' if not always 'forward'.

Meredith's writing career spanned more than fifty years, from the publication of his first work titled *Poems* in 1851, to the last collection *A Reading of Life, with other Poems* published in 1901. His first prose was *The Shaving of Shagpat* (1856), thirteen complete full-length novels were published between 1859 and 1895, and the unfinished *Celt and Saxon* was published posthumously in 1910. Reference to contemporary reviews shows the mixed response by nineteenth-century readers to Meredith's work, as critics reacted to his experimental style with admiration, hostility or confusion. In 1867 his novel *Vittoria* was described by an unnamed critic in the *Saturday Review* as having 'the unmistakable fault of being hard to read' although 'often so clever as to be on the verge of genius' (in Williams, 1971, p.148). Henry James writes in a letter to Gosse that he experienced 'a critical rage, an artistic fury' when reading the 'unspeakable *Lord Ormont*' (in Williams, 1971, p.406), although he commends Meredith's 'wit' and refers to him as 'a man of genius' in unsigned reviews in the American journals *Cosmopolitan* and *Literary World* (in Williams, 1971, pp. 407, 408, 411). George Gissing writes in letters to his brother in 1885 that Meredith's

writing is ‘too difficult for the British public’ although his work is ‘unspeakably above the best of any living writer’ (in Williams, 1971, pp.523, 524). Awarded the Order of Merit for services to literature in 1905, and respected by many of his contemporaries, Meredith did not achieve commercial success. His work was omitted from the literary canon which included Dickens, Eliot and Hardy, mostly because of his challenging style of writing, and the suggestion to include the study of Meredith as part of the Cambridge English syllabus in 1960 was met with controversy. Disputes and discussion in the *Delta*, a poetry magazine produced by the University of Cambridge, and in the *Times Literary Supplement* are referenced by Shaheen (*George Meredith*, 1981, p.1, and note 1, p.123).

In the decade following his death in 1909, the ‘[I]dolization’ of Meredith was common, and was ‘exemplified by J A Hammerton’ as Margaret Harris suggests (‘Meredith Now, and Again’ in *Yearbook of English Studies*, 2019, p.177) although Meredith’s work was rejected with others of his generation in the post-war reaction against Victorian literature. Biographical studies and critical analyses of his writing were produced by a small number of enthusiasts during the twentieth century, affirming the prediction of Virginia Woolf in 1932 that he would be ‘forgotten and discovered and again discovered and forgotten . . . his work must inevitably be disputed and discussed’ (‘The Novels of George Meredith’ in *The Second Common Reader*, 1932). Ongoing interest was evident in the 1971 publications *Meredith: The Critical Heritage* edited by Ioan Williams, and *Meredith Now* by Ian Fletcher, a collection of critical essays to which Meredith scholars were invited to contribute. Acknowledging that ‘Meredith is the most irritating novelist of the nineteenth century’ David Howard states that ‘if we ignore that capacity to irritate we are inventing a safe Meredith to argue about’ (Fletcher, 1971, p.131). The perception of Meredith as ‘unsafe’ or uncertain is the result of the ambiguity and obscurity which caused mixed critical response. Fletcher’s suggestion in his preface that most of his contributors would propose Meredith as a ‘major if flawed artist’ (p.vii) recognises the efforts of twentieth-century scholars to analyse and interpret Meredith’s writing in contrast to the dismissive reactions of many of his contemporaries. Describing the ‘polarity of hostility and admiration’ as ‘self-perpetuating’ Barbara Hardy sought in her essay ‘*Lord Ormont and his Aminta* and *The Amazing Marriage*’ to show the ‘good and bad in Meredith’ in contrast to the ‘all-or-nothing judgments’ (Fletcher, 1971, pp.295, 296). Meredith himself praised a critic for ‘retaining balance’ in reviewing the Pre-Raphaelites, neither ‘belabouring’ them with ‘scornful abuse . . . or heaping unwarranted praise upon them’ (Mitchell, ‘George Meredith (and Margaret Oliphant) among the Pre-Raphaelites’ in *Yearbook of English Studies*, 2019, p.100).

Signs of renewed scholarly interest were indicated in a report on the first International Conference on George Meredith in July 2015 when speakers focused on his position in the Victorian context, his relationship with contemporaries, and his influence in the twentieth century. Meredith's representations of Victorian masculinity were considered by Jenkins and Crossley, and stylistic connections between Meredith and Wilde were noted by O'Toole. Margaret Harris concluded that Meredith was emerging as a more substantial figure, and that papers presented at the Conference could reinvigorate scholarship. The *Yearbook of English Studies* for 2019 is a volume dedicated to the 'still neglected figures of Margaret Oliphant and George Meredith' (Hiscock, 'Foreword, p.vi). In the chapter 'Meredith Now, and Again' Harris shows how the ideas expressed in essays in *Meredith Now* were developed during the 1970s in scholars' analysis of his texts from new critical perspectives and contemporary themes. Situating Meredith in the scientific and intellectual context of the late nineteenth century his work was re-interpreted in psychological and feminist readings. Tracing Meredith's fluctuating reputation, Harris notes the impact of new critical approaches and the thematic focus of studies since 1971 in contrast to the contemporary critics who rejected Meredith's work because of obscurity and uncertainty. Referring to the 'sustained scholarly inquiry' of recent decades, Rebecca Mitchell suggests that recent researchers have 'moved well beyond arguing' that Meredith's writing justifies 'serious critical engagement . . . choosing instead to engage' with lesser-known work or aspects of his writing (*Yearbook of English Studies*, 2019, p.7).

Meredith's subversion of gender stereotypes and his innovative use of language continue to inspire research in the twenty-first century. In the 2019 *Yearbook of English Studies*, Crossley's analysis of *Rhoda Fleming* continues the discourse on gender depiction and alternative sexualities, identified by Jenkins in the article 'Was Ever Hero in This Fashion Won?' (2006), and considered in papers by Crossley and Jenkins at the 2015 Conference. This thesis highlights how Meredith conveys flexible gender roles and unconventional relationships, in his novels from 1859 to 1895, to demonstrate the potential for movement away from stereotypical roles towards achieving greater harmony within the individual and in interaction with others. Meredith's links to literary modernism have been discussed by scholars since 1960. His influence on twentieth-century writers D H Lawrence and James Joyce has been demonstrated by R C Stevenson in his book *The Experimental Impulse in George Meredith's Fiction* (2004), and O'Toole considers Meredith's influence on Wilde in the essay 'Writing in Lightning' (*Yearbook of English Studies*, 2019). This thesis

demonstrates the influence of Meredith's experimentation as being part of the process of continuum in the development of the novel form.

The aim of the thesis is to show how Meredith's *Weltanschauung*, evident in his life and work, anticipates issues of concern in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with regard to holistic wellbeing, society's perception of women and flexible gender roles, and dealing with uncertainty. With reference to the nineteenth-century context, the thesis shows how Meredith engages in his letters and fiction with debates about health and fitness, how he challenges social expectations of gender roles and relationships, and how he attempts to develop the form of the novel by innovative writing. Focusing on movement as being significant to Meredith's wellbeing, and representing the progress of his characters as they move through stages of life, the thesis demonstrates Meredith's belief that the restriction of movement, causing stagnation of development, is unhealthy for an individual, and for the form of the novel. Noting Meredith's empathy and ability to express the emotions of his characters, the thesis highlights his identification of conflicts and concerns which are relevant to twenty-first readers facing life's challenges, and attempting to understand themselves and interact with others.

Meredith's *Weltanschauung*, based on optimism and the natural cycle of life, enables his acceptance of uncertainty. The thesis shows how Meredith strives for wellbeing when confronted with personal challenges and physical restriction, and suggests that he is unusual in regarding the uncertainty of the age as positive, offering the potential for experimentation and a means of moving forwards. Analysing Meredith's settings which depict liminal stages of uncertainty, in which his characters are poised on the threshold of movement, the thesis argues that Meredith deliberately creates uncertainty to stimulate thought and debate, anticipating a participatory role for his readers. Reflecting on his characters' journeys, the thesis demonstrates Meredith's understanding of non-linear progress, that challenges, even apparent failures, represent an opportunity for learning and development. In the context of the nineteenth century when novel reading was often denigrated as superficial, Meredith recognises that the means of reading a challenging novel is by effort and perseverance. Having identified his combination of philosophy and narrative intended to stimulate a process of thought, the thesis concurs with readers who view his fiction as a riddle, or puzzle to be solved, and shows novel-reading as an activity.

Reference is made in the thesis to correspondence, biographies, and memoirs to indicate the early establishment of Meredith's *Weltanschauung*, and to make links between the philosophy expressed in his life, and in writing. The significance of considering the man

in conjunction with his work was recognised in the criticism titled *George Meredith* by J B Priestley who argued that ‘a complete understanding of [Meredith’s] work is not possible unless some attempt is made to understand the man himself’ (1926, p.52), that readers could enjoy his ‘rich and complex’ work only ‘once we have grasped the attitude of mind underlying it’ (p.60). Little information was available to contemporary critics as Meredith was evasive concerning his private life which he deemed irrelevant to his work. A different reading experience was possible for those who had corresponded or conversed with Meredith, and who were inclined to engage more positively. The publication of letters and recollections after his death in 1909 enabled new interpretations of the complexity of the man and his writing. A reader participating in one of Meredith’s novels with an awareness of the writer’s character has a sense of walking and talking with Meredith. The challenge of reading his novels - acknowledged by Meredith himself as difficult - is comparable to his invitations to friends to walk with him. The experience will not be easy, and physical or mental exertion will be required, but the effort will result in a shared learning experience.

Correspondence and contemporary memoirs reveal Meredith’s physical and mental energy, his passion for walking, enthusiasm for talking, and his love of the natural world on which his philosophy is based. Meredith ‘lived at every hour of day and night with all the sounds and shades of nature open to his sensitive perception’, and his ‘exhortation’ to ‘Exist in everyday communion with Nature’ is recalled in John Morley’s 1917 *Recollections* (quoted in L Stevenson, 1953, pp.115, 116). Recognising the benefits for the wellbeing of mind and body of walking in the natural world, Meredith studied botany, birds and people, describing himself as ‘an associate with owls and night-jars, tramps and tinkers, who teach me nature and talk human nature to me’ (Cline, p.231). Close observational skills provided material for his writing and stimulated his imagination when his mobility was restricted. Noted by Justin M’Carthy for his ‘love of all manner of bodily exercise’ (quoted in Haley, 1978, p.227), Meredith demonstrated his awareness of the equal importance of physical and mental fitness. During the last forty-two years of his life at Flint Cottage in Surrey, he spent most days - and many nights - reading and writing in his garden chalet, and continued to communicate with others, engaging in debates in conversation, in correspondence, and in fiction.

In this thesis, life events are considered relevant only to indicate Meredith’s stoic optimism in facing challenges to his philosophy, and correspondence reveals the grief, ill-health and disability which he concealed in life. Of particular interest is the first biography in 1920 by Meredith’s second cousin S M Ellis, the appreciation of his life and work in 1948 by

Siegfried Sassoon, and the full-length biography by Lionel Stevenson of 1953, also the twenty-first century biographies by Jacqueline Banerjee and Mervyn Jones. An edited collection of 767 letters was published by his son William soon after Meredith's death 'first and foremost for his friends' (Preface) and in 1970 C L Cline, believing Meredith to be 'deserving of an edition of his letters', published a collection as complete and accurate as possible of more than 2600 letters 'for the convenience of anyone interested' (Cline, pp. xxxv, xxxiv). Although Meredith asserted that he usually wrote 'blunt letters, to shield myself from the memoir or biography few can now escape' (Cline, p.1357), his attitude to life and a sense of fun is evident in his correspondence to friends and is confirmed by William Hardman's contemporary memoirs recalling and quoting from Meredith's 'original and laughter-provoking letters' (Ellis, ed. *The Letters and Memoirs of Sir William Hardman*, 1923, p.46). Visitors and acquaintances depict the exuberant persona of a strong determined character.

Although the original intention for this thesis was to focus on Meredith's *Weltanschauung* as expressed in his fiction, it became apparent during the first year of research that it would be important to include analysis of his poetry in which the origins of Meredith's natural philosophy relating to life and nature are expressed. Contemporary critics who reviewed Meredith's books at the time of publication made few connections between his poetry and his novels, and during an interview just six months before his death with Constantin Photiadès, Meredith expressed astonishment that 'Mr X has separated my poetry from my prose'. Photiadès quotes Meredith as saying that his 'thought unites itself spontaneously to prose and poetry, even as my flesh to my brain and my soul' (1913, p. 9). 'Mr X' is identified by Beer as G M Trevelyan whose book *The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith* was published in 1907 in which he predicted that when Meredith's work is judged by 'a distant posterity, novels and poems will be taken into account together' (*Poetry and Philosophy*, 1907, p.4).

Despite Meredith's astonishment that his poetry and prose were considered separately, Trevelyan's analysis demonstrates clearly that Meredith's 'philosophy and ethics, which inspire and illuminate his novels are expressed more fully and in more exact terms in his poems' (*Poetry and Philosophy*, 1907, p.2). The essence of his philosophy concerning man's relationship with nature is evident in 'South-West Wind in the Woodland' written in 1851 before he began writing fiction, and is relevant to the study of his expression of philosophy in fiction. *The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith* remains useful as a contemporary interpretation, and although Harris states that Trevelyan's book has been 'long

since set aside as simplistic' she acknowledges his 'deep and extensive knowledge' of Meredith's writing in both prose and verse ('Meredith Now, and Again' in *Yearbook of English Studies*, 2019, pp.185,177). Trevelyan's book is referenced in the comprehensive collection of 1978 by Phyllis Bartlett, which includes previously unpublished poetry, and is considered by Rebecca Mitchell as 'one of the earliest and still most important book-length treatments of Meredith's verse' (*Yearbook of English Studies*, 2019, p.87). Acknowledging the difficulty of interpretation, Trevelyan identifies the strengths and weaknesses of Meredith's poetry, accepting the obscure passages while appreciating his imagination and 'novelist's insight into character and emotion' (*Poetry and Philosophy*, 1907, p.4). All poetry quotations in this thesis refer to Trevelyan's 1912 complete edition of Meredith's poems in one volume, with notes which he was asked to provide, intended as 'purely explanatory, and in no sense critical or appreciative' (Preface, *The Poetical Works of George Meredith*, 1912).

Close reference to passages from eight of Meredith's thirteen novels shows how his *Weltanschauung* is applied to fictional characters. The novels represent the span of Meredith's fifty-year career of writing fiction, and analysis shows how the origins of his philosophy expressed in his early poetry, and in his writing from 1859 to 1876, are developed in his novels of 1879 to 1895. R C Stevenson has noted that Meredith and D H Lawrence 'are "modern" in their emphasis on the importance of a state of becoming rather than of static being' (2004, pp.194, 195). This thesis shows Meredith's emphasis on the psychological development of his characters in response to change and uncertainty, expressed in terms of movement. The novels selected demonstrate his characters moving through stages of their lives, whether forward, backward, or through a stage of liminality, in their relationship to the natural world. The thesis demonstrates Meredith's understanding that moving forward is rarely a linear progression. Analysis of chapters from selected novels in which characters are depicted moving through the stages of life will be used to address the question: How are settings depicting spatial and temporal liminality used to convey the paradox of accepting uncertainty while striving to move forwards?

Expansion of the railways and industrialisation of cities contributed to the rapid social changes of the first half of the nineteenth century into which Meredith was born. Early Victorians viewed society's move towards democracy with enthusiasm or a sense of helplessness, either welcoming progress or looking back with nostalgia. Concern for the effect on communities and individuals, and inequalities in society caused by the speed of change, was expressed in a variety of fictional genres in the mid-nineteenth century, with the

term ‘Condition of England Question’, coined by Carlyle in 1839, being applied to novels which considered the benefits and challenges of progress. The effect of industrialisation on workers and communities is depicted by Dickens in *Hard Times* (1854), and ambivalence about the building of the railway is evident in *Dombey and Son* (1846-1848), as the transformation to prosperity is achieved by the painful process of a neighbourhood’s destruction. By the mid-century, philosophical debates in response to the publication of Darwin’s theory in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) challenged established views about religion, and John Stuart Mill’s book *On the Subjection of Women* (1869) led to controversy concerning women’s roles in marriage and society.

Writing in 1926, Priestley notes Meredith’s forward-looking outlook, stating that ‘he looks forward to our own century, which arrived when he was past seventy. He is still ahead of most of our contemporaries’ (p.62). Priestley observes that at the ‘present time, when Meredith is in danger of serious neglect . . . it is precisely *his* ideas that are slowly permeating the mass of cultivated opinion. Half the new ideas of last year can be found . . . in some little lyric or other that Meredith wrote fifty or sixty years ago’ (1926, pp.62, 63). Looking back only to learn from experience, Meredith stated to an unnamed interviewer at the age of seventy-four that he continued to ‘look on life with a young man’s eye’ having ‘always hoped I should not grow old as some do . . . living backwards’ (quoted in Hammerton, 1909, p.39). Meredith’s views of progress and change are intentionally expressed in fiction rather than by engagement in public debate. His response when invited to a dinner by the Omar Khayyám Club in August 1895 was that ‘he had never made a public speech in his life’ (L Stevenson, 1953, p.319).

The topic of health is considered to have occupied Victorian minds more than religion or politics (Haley, 1978, p.3), and the benefit of fitness was recognised in the 1860s following the Crimean war, in which poor health was a contributory factor to the death rate of casualties. As medical knowledge increased during the nineteenth century, books were published with the aim of improving public health, making links between physical, mental and moral wellbeing. Publications were written with the apparent authority of physicians, but medical science offered no certainty of cure, or unanimous opinions, and conflicting views were expressed. Although social pressure was increasingly recognised as contributing to female ‘hysteria’, influential men specializing in nervous disorders continued to perceive women as the ‘weaker sex’. Henry Maudsley’s 1874 essay on ‘Sex in Mind and Education’ and Charles Taylor’s 1879 paper on ‘Emotional Prodigality’ (quoted in Appignanesi, 2008, pp.123, 132) warned against excessive mental activity for women, stating that any diversion

from the role of wife and mother was likely to cause emotional disturbance. Books and novels published by Silas Weir Mitchell in the last quarter of the nineteenth century depicted negative images of women suffering from exhaustion of the nervous system (neurasthenia), and promoted enforced rest as a cure. These views were challenged by John Stuart Mill and others, who claimed that restricted activity was more likely to cause mental depression. In addition to science-based medical publications, books and family magazines shared information to a wider readership, offering practical advice on the treatment of disease, raising public awareness of the need to maintain health, and encouraging self-help.

In *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859) Meredith shares his own experience of dyspepsia to comment on attitudes and assumptions about ill-health, and conveys his understanding of the effects of physical illness on mental wellbeing, that an imbalance between body and mind results in dis-ease and a lack of harmony. In his later fiction *The Egoist* (1879) and *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* (1894), focussing on women's mobility, Meredith emphasises the unhealthy aspect of egoism, portraying male characters with good physical health who are limited by restricted mental attitudes, unwilling or unable to move forward. Depicting the effect on self, and on others, Meredith suggests that the restriction of women is an unnatural state, and that depression, perceived by others as 'hysteria', is a physical symptom of mental distress. Movement as progress is significant in his characters' development, and the simultaneous physical and mental journey of Richard Feverel is echoed by that of Carinthia, depicted as 'a new idea of women', in his last completed novel *The Amazing Marriage*. Although the spinal disability which restricted Meredith's movement is not referenced in his fiction, his own experience of physical limitation enables an understanding of the effect of enforced restriction experienced by female characters. Suggesting the potential for movement in other ways, he shows how female characters with a physical weakness function as a stabilising influence, and have a valuable role in providing wisdom.

Publications promoting the benefits of health and exercise during the second half of the nineteenth century encourage physical activity for men and women, giving advice on diet and exercise to prepare girls for motherhood, while focusing on masculine sports to build boys' physical strength. The expectation that women should conform to ideals of feminine appearance and clothing during physical activity is made clear in articles in 'The Girls' Own Paper', published by the Religious Tract Society. Prejudice against girls' participation in sports considered to be unfeminine persisted to the end of the nineteenth century and beyond. Stereotypical images of masculinity, and women as the weaker sex, were reinforced by the

opinions of some medical experts asserting that the moral and physical strength deemed necessary for childbirth could be depleted by excessive physical exercise, or mental activity. Maudsley suggested in 'Sex in Mind and Education' that intellectual work might cause a young woman's reproductive system to fail (quoted in Appignanesi, 2008, p.124). In contrast to society's expectations, John Stuart Mill expressed his philosophy in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) advocating freedom of movement for physical health and mental wellbeing. Asserting that the submissive role of women in marriage and society is perceived as 'natural' only because it is customary, Mill states that subordination limits a woman's ability to fulfil her potential.

Challenging the socially constructed perception of women, which restricts activity and thought, Meredith expresses support for women's independence and the freedom of natural behaviour. The New Woman fiction of the 1890s is anticipated in the novels of the second half of the nineteenth century, by Meredith and by Thomas Hardy. Portraying young girls approaching womanhood, on the threshold of moving from the freedom of childhood to the restriction of becoming a wife, both Meredith and Hardy use poetic techniques in prose to depict female sensuality, and to express unconventional attitudes to marriages. Their contrasting outlooks on life are apparent in the outcomes for their heroines. The endings of Meredith's novels are ambiguous but optimistic, whereas Hardy demonstrates the view expressed by Jude in *Jude the Obscure* that 'the woman mostly gets the worst of it in the long run!' (1896, p.373). Meredith's relentless cheerfulness and optimism in the face of adversity was observed by Gosse and attributed to 'temperament' (in Thwaite, 1984, p.402). Hardy's reputation for pessimism was 'a charge he rejected' according to his biographer Claire Tomalin (2006, caption to photo 33), although his novels are undeniably bleak. This thesis considers: How does the metaphor of movement express Meredith's stoic optimism as distinct from the pessimistic response to change of other nineteenth-century writers such as Thomas Hardy?

Different genres of fiction in the second half of the nineteenth century reflect the need for individuals to adjust to the rapid and complex changes of the early Victorian period. The increasing popularity of fictional biographies, with *Vanity Fair*, *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Dombey and Son* all published in 1847, indicates the importance of re-defining identity in response to social change, and the search for self is explored in the *Bildungsroman* form, depicting an individual's development. The context in which Meredith was working is apparent in publications and lectures by critics and writers, debating the significance of realism and imagination in novels, and the 'Art of Fiction'. Attempts were made to classify

books and readers, with distinctions made between intellectual fiction requiring philosophical thought, and reading for pleasure. Sensation novels of the 1860s, and the New Woman fiction of the 1890s, were criticised as posing a threat to the Victorian domestic ideal, and concerns were raised for the physiological effect of excitement on susceptible women, and for the depiction of female sexuality. Twentieth-century opinion in contrast to contemporary views has been expressed by Flint, who notes a positive effect of sensation novels, which encourage an 'active, rather than passive, role as readers' (1993, p.283). Flint suggests that moral questions are posed 'rather than a dictating of the answers' and that the 'ability to read literature carefully is equated . . . with the ability to read life' (1993, p.293).

The description of Meredith as a writer who is 'wholly *sui generis*', whose work cannot be categorised (Brownell, 1901, p.234), reflects Meredith's intention to experiment as a novelist. Meredith's awareness of the risk of innovation is evident in brief debates in his novel *Sandra Belloni* (1864), referring to the inclusion of philosophy in fiction and poetry in prose. Acknowledging that innovation would be unpopular with critics and the reading public, Meredith believes that experimentation is necessary to develop the form of the novel. His statement in a letter dated January 1858: 'Everything I do is an Experiment' (Cline, p.32) shows his intention at the start of his writing career, and his contribution to the public debate about the form of the novel is evident in his fiction. In *Diana of The Crossways*, published in 1885, the narrator states that 'if we do not speedily embrace Philosophy in fiction, the Art is doomed to extinction' (p.16). Acknowledging the lack of plot and action in his novels, Meredith focuses on his characters, confirming in a first-person statement in *Beauchamp's Career* that it is 'the clock-work of the brain that they are directed to set in motion' (p.461). Writing to Jessopp with reference to *Harry Richmond*, Meredith states that his intention is 'to show you the action of minds as well as of fortunes - of here and there men and women vitally animated by their brains at different periods of their lives' (Cline, p.451).

The active reflection expected from his readers, female and male, represents a 'healthy' response to reading, as being 'nourishing to brains' (*Diana of The Crossways*, p.15). The sense of confusion caused by the expectation of a reader's participatory role is evident as an unnamed critic in the *Saturday Review* of May 1891 compares reading *One of Our Conquerors* to solving a puzzle (in Williams, p.355). Referring to Meredith's 'cryptic style' L Stevenson states that 'Reading becomes a continuous process of solving riddles' (1953, p.293), and R C Stevenson concludes in 2004 that Meredith's fiction is 'very much alive today . . . precisely because he is a riddling storyteller' (p.189). Identifying the continuing relevance of his views in the twenty-first century, the thesis addresses the

question: How are readers invited to respond at a personal level to the challenges and uncertainties of Meredith's novels?

The need for the effort required by readers of Meredith's novels is recognised by George Gissing in 1885, who recommends *Diana of the Crossways* to his brother as being 'right glorious . . . but, mind you, to be read twice, if need be, thrice' (in Williams, 1971, p.523), and by Lionel Johnson in 1891, who stated that 'Read three or four times, [*One of our Conquerors*] grows upon the reader, the apparent confusion disappears' (in Williams, 1971, p.361). As Meredith's biographer Lionel Stevenson states: 'Few readers, however, were likely to read it three or four times' (1953, p.294) and Barbara Hardy notes that 'Even to read one novel properly . . . involves considerable investment of time and mental energy' ('*Lord Ormont and his Aminta* and *The Amazing Marriage*' in *Meredith Now*, 1971, p.295). The reward for effort in persevering with reading a challenging novel is emphasised by Meredith in *Beauchamp's Career* (1876). Attempting to 'master' the writing of Carlyle, Nevil Beauchamp had 'gone at it again and again, getting nibbles of golden meaning by instalments, as with a solitary pick in a very dark mine' (p.19). The effect of mental effort on the reader is described by critics in terms associated with physical exercise, and the physiological effect of reading, expressed in contemporary reviews, reflects the nineteenth-century pre-occupation with digestion.

Reference to correspondence and biographical accounts in Chapter One shows the derivation of Meredith's holistic philosophy, how his *Weltanschauung* is developed from an assimilation of contemporary ideas, combined with his innate love of nature and optimistic temperament. Focus on four of his novels from 1859 to 1876 shows Meredith's stated intention to develop the form of the novel by means of experimenting with content and style. Analysis of chapter XLII from *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, Meredith's first full-length novel published in 1859, demonstrates how he conveys his philosophy in fiction. Richard is depicted as moving towards a sense of wellbeing, making simultaneous mental and physical progress in a close relationship with nature. In this novel and in *Beauchamp's Career* (1876) the *Bildungsroman* form is adapted by Meredith's subversion of a conventional outcome. In *Harry Richmond* (1871) the linear narrative is complicated by fantasy and ambiguity. Meredith's intentional inclusion of philosophy in fiction, his anticipation of New Woman fiction, and his use of poetry in prose is shown in analysis of *Sandra Belloni* (1864). Acknowledging the conflict for a writer who anticipates that innovation will be unpopular, and the effort required of the reader, Meredith expresses determination to move towards a new form of novel.

Meredith's expression of his philosophy of wellbeing is considered in Chapter Two, with reference to contemporary publications to show nineteenth-century views on health. Sharing his beliefs and knowledge in letters to friends and in his fiction, Meredith contributes to debates on physical fitness, and challenges contemporary perceptions of masculine strength and feminine weakness in his depictions of stereotypical heroes with outdated attitudes. Reference to passages from *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* reveals his understanding of the links between physical and mental wellbeing, using his own experience of illness. Analysis of passages from *The Egoist* (1879) and *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* (1894) shows how Meredith questions the perceptions of 'health' and 'hysteria' by the medical profession and in family magazines. Asserting that egoism and introspection are unhealthy for inhibiting the development of self, he demonstrates the effect of restriction by men on the mental health of women. Reference to correspondence and memoirs shows the importance of communication to Meredith, and narrative strategies confirm his anticipation of a participatory relationship with his readers. Contemporary reviews by critics and the reading public, indicating the negative response which Meredith anticipated, are considered as representing a restricted attitude and lack of willingness to engage with innovation. Nineteenth-century publications on health make links between the functions of stomach and brain, and Meredith conveys fiction as needing digestion by the reader, to provide nourishment for the brain.

Chapter Three focuses on movement in Meredith's life and writing, showing how his model of the New Woman is developed in his later fiction in terms of increased mobility. Reference is made to medical publications and magazines, indicating contemporary perceptions of physical activity for women, and analysis of passages from *The Egoist* (1879) and *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* (1894) shows Meredith's depiction of healthy, feminine girls behaving in a natural manner. Comparison with Thomas Hardy's fiction of the same period suggests similarities of content and style, representing a move towards a new form of novel. Mental activity as well as physical movement is conveyed by Meredith's use of active verbs, as female characters are shown moving through stages of 'becoming'. The narrative strategy of reported thought informs the reader of the heroine's mental process which can result in a physical response. This Chapter considers Meredith's understanding of the equal significance of mental and physical activity for health and wellbeing. Despite his increasing physical disability, Meredith remained mentally active, and shows in correspondence and fiction the value of interdependence to counteract imbalance and 'dis-ease'. Critical reviews of Meredith's work reveal the physiological effect of reading a novel intended to stimulate a

reader's thought and reflection. Whether the response is favourable or critical, nineteenth-century readers convey the experience of reading Meredith's writing as being comparable to physical exercise.

Meredith's acknowledgement of doubt and uncertainty is considered in Chapter Four, in the context of mixed response to the uncertainty of change expressed by writers of the second half of the nineteenth century. Reference is made to the poems in which Meredith expresses acceptance of insoluble questions and a state of impermanence as part of a natural cycle of renewal. The 'curious contradiction' of the man who conceals his origins but uses autobiographical facts in his fiction, noted by Priestley (1927, p.2), is investigated by Richard Cronin in his 2019 book *George Meredith: The Life and Writing of an Alteregoist*, with reference to Meredith's depiction of his background in the early *Bildungsroman* novels. This Chapter suggests that the narrative strategy of alteregoism conveys Meredith's own inconsistencies and uncertainty in the characterisation of Diana in his later novel *Diana of The Crossways* (1885). Analysis of scenes from four of the selected novels - *Harry Richmond*, *Sandra Belloni*, *Beauchamp's Career*, and *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* - shows how Meredith depicts the experience of uncertainty, using settings of spatial and temporal liminality in which characters are poised on a threshold during stages of 'becoming'. The Chapter suggests that the destabilising effect of variable pace and fragmented narrative, identified by Dames, Henry and others, and Meredith's use of multiple voices, deliberately creates uncertainty to stimulate reflection.

Chapter Five considers the apparent paradox of the acceptance of uncertainty while striving to move forward, showing how Meredith conveys the understanding that progress is rarely linear. From the uncertainty of liminal space and place, he suggests the potential for a positive outcome by means of non-linear movement - moving 'toward' if not 'forward'. Meredith's stoic optimism in response to the challenges experienced in his own life is apparent in correspondence and contemporary recollections. The possibility of moving through uncertainty is conveyed in the journeys of his heroines in the novels from 1879 to 1895. Comparison with Hardy's fiction shows that, despite contrasting outcomes for their heroines, Meredith and Hardy demonstrate an understanding of the inevitable conflicts and uncertainty of changing gender roles and relationships. This Chapter reflects on the stages of development of Clara in *The Egoist*, and the female title characters of *Diana of The Crossways*, and *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, showing Meredith's belief in the benefits of the natural world, and the support of others, in improving mental health. Analysis of *The Amazing Marriage* (1895) considers how the heroine of Meredith's last novel moves towards

a state of wellbeing by learning from experience, and by means of self-help using effort and intellect. As Meredith focuses on his characters' journeys, in stages of 'becoming' and 'moving toward', his readers are encouraged to reflect with optimism beyond the end of his novels. Anticipating a participatory role by the reader, using effort and intellect, Meredith emphasises novel-reading as an active process.

Chapter One: *Weltanschauung*

Chapter One shows the derivation of Meredith's *Weltanschauung*, arguing that the consistent expression of stoic optimism in his life and writing career is not because of a lack of movement or refusal to change but because, from the mid-nineteenth century, Meredith was already looking ahead to the twentieth century. His philosophy represents an assimilation of ideas at a time of change and challenge to established views, and is based on the natural cycle of life. A sense of holistic wellbeing which is still being sought in the twenty-first century was expressed by Meredith in his poem 'The Woods of Westermain' as 'blood and brain and spirit . . . Join for true felicity' (p.201). Striving for harmony of body, mind and soul in close relationship with the earth was seen by Meredith as the means of achieving this 'felicity', and movement is significant in his life and writing. Walking, considered by Meredith to be important for physical and mental health, is used in fiction as a metaphor for progress, and the expression of his *Weltanschauung* is shown in analysis of a passage from his first novel, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, published in 1859. Reference is made in this Chapter to four of Meredith's six novels, published between 1859 and 1876, to show his intention to develop the form of the novel in the mid-Victorian period. Analysis of passages from *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859), *Harry Richmond* (1871) and *Beauchamp's Career* (1876) shows how readers anticipating stereotypical characterisation and traditional endings are challenged by Meredith's adaptation of the *Bildungsroman* form. Extracts from *Sandra Belloni* published in 1864 show Meredith's anticipation of New Woman fiction of the later Victorian period, and his early use of poetic technique in prose. Readers are challenged to engage with the expression of philosophy in fiction, although Meredith was aware that the effort required in reading innovative fiction was unlikely to find approval with critics or the reading public. Meredith's belief was in regeneration as in the natural world, not degeneration, and this Chapter argues that he contributed to the development of the novel, not to its destruction as some contemporary critics claimed.

That Meredith's *Weltanschauung* remained unchanged throughout his long life is an indication of his strong character and determination. His resolute belief in looking ahead to the future was maintained despite the uncertainty and difficulties of his childhood, and the challenges of his failed marriage and ill-health during later life. The instability of his early years was not mentioned by Meredith, but has been documented in biographies by Ellis and L Stevenson written after his death. Material which was obviously autobiographical was used

in Meredith's novels as shown by Cronin in his 2019 book *George Meredith: The Life and Writing of a Alteregoist*. Following the death of his mother when George was five and a half years old, he was separated from his father at the age of eleven to live with relatives after his father's re-marriage. His aloof 'patronising way' recalled by a school-friend, resulting in the nickname 'Gentleman Georgy' (Ellis, *George Meredith*, 1920, p.45) may be seen as the adoption of a persona as a means of self-protection of a solitary and sensitive child. Responding to life's challenges with mental and physical stoicism, Meredith accepted uncertainty as part of the process of development. His determination not to look back was perhaps partly constructed as a defence mechanism in an effort, like Dickens, to conceal his humble origins. Like one of his characters, Meredith had the ability to 'shut the past behind a brazen gate' (*Rhoda Fleming*, p.122).

From the ages of fourteen to sixteen, he was educated in the Rhineland at the Moravian school at Neuwied, which was unquestionably significant in the formation of Meredith's *Weltanschauung*. As Henry Morley recalled in an article in 1854, the Moravian Brethren taught the boys courage but gentleness, tolerance and respect - qualities which would be advocated for men in Meredith's novels. Imagination was stimulated at the Neuwied school, every pupil was encouraged to be open-minded and 'trained to become a thinker and a student for himself thereafter' (quoted in L Stevenson, 1953, p.13). Although rejecting orthodox religion, Meredith recognised the values of respect and kindness taught by the Moravian Brethren, and aged about sixteen he stated in a letter to a schoolmate that 'true fellowship is not to be had without Christianity; not the name but the practice of it' (Cline, p.1). His belief that psychological study of behaviour would enable understanding is expressed in a letter to George Pierce Baker stating that 'Close knowledge of our fellows . . . lead[s] to great civilization' (Cline, p.876), and his view of civilised society, defined in terms of humanity and social interaction, is applicable in any century. As noted by Priestley, Meredith insists that 'man should concentrate upon the human society he is helping to build up' (1927, p.112), and Aminta's perception of Matthew Weyburn in *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* (1894) might be applied to Meredith himself: 'His was the larger view . . . Matthew Weyburn believed in the bettering of the world' (p.232). Meredith's emphasis in fiction on the significance of values and attitudes convey his philosophy that respect for oneself and the natural world enables understanding of others, and contributes to the improvement of collective behaviour. His psychological analysis anticipated studies by Freud, who thought Meredith 'the most penetrating psychologist of all the English novelists' (Dennis, 2000, p.42).

Expressing criticism of gossip concerning Lord Palmerston, Meredith wrote that rumour should be stopped: 'We are a moral people, and it does not become us . . . We are determined to believe nothing before it is proved' (quoted in Hammerton, 1909, p.15). He asserted in a letter: 'I do not minister to gossip' (Cline, p.1314) and highlights the detrimental effect of society gossip on Diana in *Diana of the Crossways* (1885) and Nataly in *One of Our Conquerors* (1891). Some informal recollections suggest that Meredith's attitude towards his friends was not always consistent with his philosophy, which is noted by Cronin as a human failing. Letters to friends were 'often gossipy', and Meredith 'repudiated gossip, and he practised it, which is not a very rare inconsistency' (Cronin, 2019, pp.23, 24). The distinction between 'gossip of the countryside' and 'real talk' is made by Alice Butcher, recalling that Meredith was invited to Pixholme, the home of her relatives Dr and Mrs Gordon, to meet with 'various scientific and literary men' (1919, p.7). Meredith's enthusiasm for learning from contemporary schools of thought, medicine and science, resulted in an assimilation of ideas with evidence of connections to Goethe, Darwin and John Stuart Mill.

A knowledge of German culture and language acquired at the Neuwied school enabled Meredith's appreciation of the writing of Goethe, which is recorded in a letter written in 1849 when Meredith was only 21, sending a book of Goethe's poetry in German to the writer R H Horne. Thirteen years later in a letter to his son's headmaster, Meredith stated that Shakespeare and Goethe were 'men to whom I bow my head' (Cline, p.161) and when asked towards the end of his life about his 'reading of the formative kind' he included 'the noble Goethe, the most enduring' (Cline, p.1556). Correspondence reveals that he felt 'ennobled' by the spirit of Goethe (Cline, p.539) and that re-reading of Eckermann's *Conversations of Goethe* was 'always interesting and instructive to me' (Cline, p. 709). Cline notes that this 'was one of GM's favourite books' (note, p.709). Respect for Meredith's knowledge of Goethe, whom he referred to as 'poet and sage' is evident (Cline, p.1523) and he responded with constructive comments to Marmaduke Teesdale for his translation of Goethe's work, which was sent to Meredith for criticism. A mutual admiration of Goethe led to a friendship between Meredith and Lady Ulrica Duncombe and discussions were conducted in correspondence and during her visits to Flint Cottage. Responding to her question in a letter, Meredith replied that he had never written of Goethe, because Carlyle who 'held the field . . . commended the study of Goethe to me constantly, and wrote better of him than I should have done' (Cline, p.1417).

Living within the Christian ethos of the Moravian community, Meredith 'had a spasm of religion which lasted about six weeks . . . But never since have I swallowed the Christian fable' (L Stevenson, 1953, p.14). The dogmatic teaching of the Christian church was rejected as restrictive by Meredith, who is quoted as saying that 'Parsondom has always been against progress; they treat Christianity, not as a religion, but as an institution' (Ellis, *George Meredith*, 1920, p.53). The concept of God and Heaven as taught by Christianity was perceived by Meredith as an invented solution to unanswerable questions. Meredith's concept of 'God' was derived from 'the synthesis of various ideologies which he embrace[d]. Idealism, pantheism, evolution, positivism and the religion of humanity' as Georg Roppen suggests (1956, p.277) and Meredith uses various terms for his 'God' in poetry including 'the Master mind . . . the Great Unseen' as figurative expressions to depict the spiritual ideal. He stated in a letter that he had written 'always with the perception that there is no life but of the spirit' stressing the significance of the 'flourishing of the spirit' (Cline, p.910).

As a critical thinker opposed to the dogma of orthodox religion, expressed by ridicule of the clergy in his novels, Meredith expected change to be brought about by thinkers not activists, as he wrote in a letter in 1866: 'let Philosophy sap the structure and work its way' (Cline, p.326). Meredith's support for Darwin's theory of evolution is stated in a letter in which, having witnessed the 'tussle' between T.H. Huxley and anti-Darwinian Richard Owen in 1862, Meredith concluded that 'thinking men all side with [Huxley]' (Cline, p.165). He was described during his lifetime by as an 'evolutionary philosopher' by Lafcadio Hearn (Banerjee, 2012, p.2, note 4, p.101), and the theme of striving for higher evolution, in Meredith's collection of poetry titled *A Reading of Earth*, contrasts to Hardy's 'twilight view of life' evident in 'Overlooking the River Stour' and 'To Outer Nature' (*The Works of Thomas Hardy*, 1994, pp.452, 54). The 'vista into the future . . . wholly absent in Hardy' predominates in Swinburne and Meredith (Roppen, 1956, p.297) and is described in Meredith's poem 'The Thrush in February' as 'The rapture of the forward view' (p.328).

Having rejected the dogmatic teaching of the church, Meredith was also 'wary of more rigid systems of philosophy, such as Auguste Comte's Positivism to which friends like G H Lewes and Leslie Stephen were more drawn' according to Banerjee, Meredith's most recent biographer (2012, p.2), although his interest in Comte's philosophy is evident, being proposed by Meredith as the topic of conversation for 'evening talks' with his friend Maxse (Cline, p. 347). Like Goethe, Meredith's philosophical thinking represents a reasoned approach based on scientific knowledge combined with studies of the natural world and is based on the regeneration of life. The poem of 1851 'South-West Wind in the Woodland'

written when Meredith was aged 21, depicts the energy of nature and man's relationship with the earth. A civilised society could be achieved only after an individual has acquired self-respect in relationship with nature, and learned respect in relationship with others, as noted by Priestley: 'Meredith first stresses the community of Man and Nature, and then the community of Man and Man . . . one of the first of those modern thinkers who throw the emphasis forward' (1927, p.112). His philosophy is summarised by Trevelyan as: 'Each is to help himself, and also to clear a foot of pathway for his companion, and for those who are to follow' (*Poetry and Philosophy*, 1907, p.124).

In a letter to Maxse dated 1862, Meredith stated: 'Read John Mill on 'Liberty' the other day; and recommend it to you. It's a splendid protest against the tyranny society is beginning to exercise; very noble and brave' (Cline, p.139). John Morley recalled Meredith's reaction to Mill's book *The Subjection of Women* which Morley gave him, stating that Meredith 'eagerly seized the book, fell to devouring it in settled silence, and could not be torn from it all day' (Morley, *Recollections*, Vol I, 1917, p.47). Like Mill, Meredith was critical of the assumption of women's submissive role, stating his long-held view in a letter: 'Since I began to reflect I have been oppressed by the injustice done to women, the constraint put upon their natural aptitudes and their faculties, generally much to the degradation of the race' (Cline, p.1513). Believing that 'women of the independent mind are needed for any sensible degree of progress' Meredith reasoned that they would educate their daughters who would 'not be instructed at the start to think themselves naturally inferior to men' (Cline, p.1513). Meredith's own view is evident in the proposal of co-education as being 'the only way for [boys and girls] to learn to know and to respect one another' in *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* (p.151). At the celebration of Meredith's eightieth birthday, he is reported as insisting that women 'should be given the use of intellectual weapons . . . I like to see the combative spirit in men and women . . . but let us also be kind' (quoted in Hammerton, 1909, p.49). He considered the move towards physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing as being equally important for women as for men.

During his education at Neuwied, Meredith's innate love of nature was encouraged by lessons in natural history and botany. His deep relationship with the natural world is expressed in the third 'Pastoral', in his first collection titled *Poems* (1851): 'A thing of Nature am I now' (p.50), and his knowledge was recognised by William Sharp, recalling the opinion of Grant Allen who was himself a 'specialist'. Allen stated that Meredith knew the 'intimate facts of countryside life as very few of us do . . . not in the terms of an ornithologist and botanist' but learning from detailed observation (Sharp, 1904, p.2). According to Allen,

Meredith knew a bird by its song, its life cycle and habitat, and had the ability to convey his knowledge poetically, of the wild cherry tree for example, in fiction and in poetry. The expression of joy experienced in the natural world, based on close observation, was depicted by both Meredith and Wordsworth. Meredith's interest extended to the study of human nature, and his sensitive perception of character is evident in the first-person monologues of his poems 'Juggling Jerry' and 'The Beggar's Soliloquy'. In fiction, his understanding of human behaviour contributes to the animation of his characters, and his observational skills are apparent in his poetic descriptions of settings in the natural world.

Like Wordsworth, Meredith celebrates the beauty of nature in lyrical poetry, which is also a means of expressing the philosophy of an individual's relationship with the natural world. Wordsworth asserts that his inspiration originates in heaven not from earth, believing that man is from heaven: 'we come / From God, who is our home' and is earth's 'foster-child' ('Ode on the Intimations of Immortality', in Gardner, 1972, pp. 509, 510). For Meredith, man's flesh and spirit is derived from Earth, the Mother 'who bore us' ('The Spirit of Earth in Autumn', p.175) and his poem 'Earth and Man' is described by Trevelyan as the 'fullest expression of Meredith's doctrine of Earth our Mother and her relation to us' (1912, note 1, p.591). Gazing on 'her great venture, Man' Earth listens and provides nourishment but man is required to respond. She 'will soothe his need, / Not his desire' (pp.240, 241). Matthew Arnold expresses the belief that it is foolish to believe that man can live in harmony with Nature, that 'Nature is cruel . . . Nature is fickle . . . Nature and man can never be fast friends' in his poem 'In harmony with Nature' (available on the National Poetry Foundation website). By contrast, Meredith, like Swinburne, believes in the benevolent force of Nature. While accepting that nature is 'red in tooth and claw' Meredith does not share Tennyson's view of nature as alien and hostile, or Hardy's pessimistic outlook. Asserting that Nature is 'no cruel Sphinx' in 'The Woods of Westermain' (p.202), but that man is part of a natural world, Meredith is unusual in accepting that life and death are as much a part of reality as beauty.

Meredith's relationship with nature informs his philosophy that, being part of the natural world, an individual can learn from the earth. Referring to 'Earth, the mother of all' Meredith asserts that 'She can lead us, only she / unto God's footstool . . . the truths she teaches' must be 'reverenced' ('The Spirit of Earth in Autumn', p.177). Meredith's use of 'God' in relation to 'Earth' has been analysed by Beach, Kelvin and others, and Jones makes a useful comparison to Gandhi's use of 'God' as a term for 'a beneficent force offering guidance in human life' but not a personal deity (1999, pp.125, 126). Kelvin suggests that

Meredith's 'religious yearnings' were at the heart of his search for a substitute system, which he never discovered or created, but significantly Kelvin notes Meredith as 'striving' on his journey (1961, p.154) indicating Meredith's desire for forward movement, in spite of the difficulty of expressing new ideas. Earth's 'truths' are to be learned by observing and reflecting on the natural world: 'Great Mother Nature! . . . Teach me to feel myself the tree' ('The Spirit of Earth in Autumn', p.176) and Meredith expresses a strong sense of affinity with plants, animals and trees because we all share life on earth. The perception of mankind as part of the natural world and our dependence on the earth for growth is expressed in Meredith's letter to his son: 'We grow to good as surely as the plant grows to the light' (Cline, p.466). Reflection on the natural world in order to learn about the earth and ourselves is the theme of his poem 'The Woods of Westermain' using the image of gazing into the eyes of oxen, conveying that in the eyes of the oxen it is possible to 'read the characteristic of those primitive forms of life out of which we have been evolved' as stated by Trevelyan (*Poetry and Philosophy*, 1907, p.81). The song of the lark instils 'love of earth' as 'never voice of ours could say' and 'The Lark Ascending' expresses reverence for men whose 'love of Earth is deep' (pp.222, 223).

Meredith uses the word 'Spirit' to depict the natural energy of the life force within living beings derived from the earth, as expressed in 'A Faith on Trial': 'from flesh unto spirit man grows / Even here on the sod under sun' (p. 357). His assertion in a letter to John Morley in 1878 that 'in this life there is no life save in spirit' (Cline, p.557) is repeated ten years later to Mary Rebecca Foster Gilman, stating that he had written always with this perception, and that 'the way to spiritual life lies in the complete unfolding of the creature not in the nipping of his passions . . . To the flourishing of the spirit, then, through the healthy exercise of the senses' (Cline, p.910). Meredith suggests that spiritual growth is as important as physical and intellectual development, and emphasises the importance of a close relationship with nature, stating that 'Our great error has been . . . to raise a spiritual system in antagonism to Nature' (Cline, p.93). Nourishment of the spirit is shown to be an interactive process of growth by responding to Mother Earth and learning from the natural world. Meredith shows the significant connection between an individual's inner being and the natural world in 'The Woods of Westermain', in which the reader is encouraged to 'Look you with the soul' (p.195). The philosophy expressed in his poem 'Earth and Man' that mankind must 'attain to the spiritual through the natural, not through the supernatural', noted by Trevelyan (*Poetical Works*, 1912, p.591) is conveyed in Meredith's fictional characters. Those who acquire or develop a close relationship with nature display the same zest for life

as Meredith himself, in contrast to the ‘spiritless’ individuals who demonstrate an indifferent or hostile response to their natural surroundings.

Meredith recognised the importance of places where nature can heal and give strength to body and soul, expressing a view of nature similar to that of the nineteenth-century naturalist and philosopher John Muir. The writings of ecological thinkers led to the development of the ecotherapy movement at the end of the twentieth century, and the healing power of nature is confirmed by twenty-first century research from the University of Exeter stating that two hours a week spent in the natural environment has a positive effect on physical health and mental wellbeing. Studies show benefits in the treatment of heart disease, diabetes and stress, particularly for those suffering from depression or Alzheimer’s disease - and for their carers. The sensory stimulants of the natural world in all weathers are shown to improve mood, and the concept of *shinrin-yoku* ‘forest bathing’ has been popular in Japan and China since the 1980s as being beneficial for body and mind. Scientific study shows that pine trees stimulate pheromones and alleviate depression, and in her 2018 book *The Wild Remedy: How Nature Mends Us*, Emma Mitchell’s diaries show her experience of nature, not as a cure but as a means of managing her depression. Being in the natural world provides nourishment for the spirit and the certainty of life’s natural cycle allows for optimism. Ongoing research suggests the benefits of experiencing the sights and sounds of nature by means of virtual reality when unable to access the countryside.

Meredith makes links between the enjoyment of nature, and the development of physical and intellectual faculties, to achieve a sense of holistic wellbeing. The interpretation of *mens sana in corpore sano* as applied to men in Victorian society required physical strength and control of impure thought according to Christian principles. For Meredith, mental growth was considered as important for an individual as physical development, believing that the brain should be nourished and exercised in the same way as the body, not restricted by conforming to society’s perception of healthy mind or to religious dogma. Making the best use of potential - for women and men - was of greater concern for Meredith than seeking to attain ‘heaven’ or to save one’s own soul as expressed by contemporaries with religious convictions such as Matthew Arnold and Charles Kingsley, and of more importance than society’s perception of success or achievement. Meredith’s awareness of the delicate balance between body, mind and spirit and the ‘dis-ease’ without harmony is evident in Meredith’s notebook entry asserting that ‘Most of the world are walking astride the borderline of Sanity’ (quoted by Shuttleworth in ‘Diseases of City life and *One of Our Conquerors*’, *Yearbook of English Studies*, 2019, p.109). His philosophy reflects his interest in

contemporary scientific and medical research which demonstrated connections between mental and bodily disorders.

The significance of the balance of body, mind and spirit required for health had been recognised in Ayurvedic medicine, practised in India 5,000 years ago, and treatment of the whole person was emphasised as an approach to life by the Ancient Greeks and Egyptians, the healing power of nature stressed by Hippocrates. The link between physical and mental health and natural remedies was made in Thomas Webster's 1844 *Encyclopaedia of Domestic Economy* in which exercise, including reading aloud, was deemed 'absolutely necessary to preserve the health', and the use of willow bark was recommended as a drug, later developed as Aspirin (quoted in Picard, 2006, pp.237, 238). The term 'holistic' as applied to the consideration of health of the whole person was first used in 1926, recognised in medical treatments in the 1970s, and in the twenty-first century, links between physical and mental health and nature are being supported by scientific evidence. The 'Wheel of Well-being' developed as a logo in 2008 as part of ongoing research by the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust is featured in a magazine in 2020 emphasising the benefits of nature for physical and mental health and wellbeing ('Wilder Kent', Kent Wildlife Trust, Winter 2020). The six divisions of the Wheel show body, mind and spirit balanced with interaction between people, places and the planet, to achieve a 'harmony' which was envisaged by Meredith in the nineteenth century.

A comment by Meredith on the link between physical and mental health was recorded in an interview in 1904 when he spoke of 'the joy in a healthy body, causing an increased lucidity of the mind' (quoted in Hammerton, 1909, p.64) and he wrote in a letter to Maxse that the best exercise 'in the world is fencing, which . . . tightens muscles, occupies brain, better than anything' (Cline, p.201). Stimulation of the body would lead to an active brain he believed, stating that he 'made new blood' by aid of throwing 'the Beetle' which increased his 'thirst for work' (Cline, p.247). In his poem 'The Night-Walk', recalling a walk with a companion when young, the poet recalls the joy of physical movement combined with the pleasure of intellectual conversation: 'a pride of legs in motion kept / Our spirits to the task' (p.525). 'Seed time' expresses the need for mental and physical strength to 'master the blood' and combat the desire for 'a day of long light' when surrounded by decay of autumn, and to focus on the promise of 'our season of seed . . . the springing To-be' (p.318). The appreciation of a moment of spiritual calm during a night walk is depicted in 'Winter Heavens' as feeling 'the soul's haven' although the poem also describes the endless activity

of the universe as the stars 'leap' and fir-trees seem like 'hives with swarms outrushing' expressing awareness of the earth's natural energy (p.369).

Believing that that an imbalance between blood and brain results in dis-ease, a lack of ease or harmony within the body, Meredith emphasises in his life, and in his fiction, the importance of the development of physical, intellectual and emotional faculties for women as well as men. His son Arthur is encouraged to develop his own thoughts and philosophy, and has the opportunity to develop at boarding school as Meredith did at Neuwied. Wishing to 'instil good healthy habits of mind and body' in his son, Meredith writes 'simple words of advice' which are given in the same tone as in letters to friends, with no intention of 'preaching' or 'lecturing' (Cline, pp.80, 429). In a letter to Arthur, Meredith wrote: 'If your mind honestly rejects [belief in religion] you must call on your mind to supply its place from your own resources' (Cline, p.466).

The need for mental movement to progress through difficulty, or in response to imposed change, is expressed in Meredith's poetry collections *A Reading of Earth* and *A Reading of Life*. Not subscribing to Christian dogma or Puritan principles, Meredith advocates self-control instead of self-denial. As individuals facing 'Pain and Pleasure on each hand' ('The Thrush in February', p.330) we are required to use mental faculties to reflect during indecision in order to take physical action, and Meredith acknowledges the difficulty of maintaining a balance between self-denial and self-indulgence: 'Or shall we run with Artemis / Or yield the breast to Aphrodite?' ('The Vital Choice', p.529). The practice of self-discipline, not self-denial, represents a balance of blood and brain and Meredith suggests the possibility of transformation, that the energy of the impulse may be turned to good. The belief that the primitive instinct of man ('blood') should be transformed to 'brain and spirit' is conveyed in 'A Faith on Trial' as: 'Having mastered sensation . . . Grown to the flower of brain' (pp.357,358). Using the metaphor of a Dragon-fowl in 'The Woods of Westermain' it is considered possible to 'forge him curbs, / Put his fangs to uses, tame, / Teach him'. In contrast to his contemporaries who believed that man's animal instincts should be subdued, Meredith considered that this primitive part of man's nature should be converted: 'see how spirit comes to light, / Through conquest of the inner beast' (pp.198, 320). The move from primitive behaviour towards a higher evolution would contribute to man's understanding of the meaning of life, as depicted in 'Hymn to Colour': 'This way have men come out of brutishness / To spell the letters of the sky and read / A reflex upon earth else meaningless' (p.364, XIII).

The physical and mental benefits of walking were acknowledged by Hippocrates as the ‘best medicine’ and recognised by writers and intellectuals of the nineteenth century. The benefits of walking are also confirmed by twenty-first century research as demonstrated by Professor Shane O’Mara in his 2019 book *In Praise of Walking*. Studies show that walking can alleviate the effects of arthritis and diabetes and depression, and the process of ageing can be reversed. Research carried out by the University of Cambridge in 2023 suggests that a brisk daily walk of eleven minutes can lower the risk of cardiovascular disease and some cancers, preventing one in ten early deaths. Elderly walkers experience an improved sense of wellbeing in comparison to those who are less active. The practise of imaginary or virtual walking, for those with restricted mobility, shows the value of interdependence between faculties.

Meredith’s habit of regular walking was encouraged at the Neuwied school, and the annual Whitsuntide event is recalled by Henry Morley as a ‘long - perhaps, week-long - ramble from hill to hill and town to town’ with donkeys, and in country-carts and boats. Morley remembers the boys being ‘proudest and best pleased when we were afoot . . . How intense was our enjoyment of these walks!’ and their preference for sleeping outdoors wherever they stopped, rather than for spending a night in a town hotel which they ‘hated’ (quoted in L Stevenson, 1953, p.14). Employed as an articled clerk in London at the age of eighteen, Meredith would go on walks to satisfy his need for movement and enthusiasm for exercise, and enjoy the countryside. His characteristic walking pace is recorded by F C Burnand, describing Meredith’s ‘most serviceable laced boots, which evidently meant business in pedestrianism’ and stating that ‘he never merely walked, never lounged; he strode, he took giant strides’ (quoted in Sassoon, 1948, p.55). Following the move to Mickleham with his second wife in 1868, Meredith would climb Box Hill every day, and L Stevenson records that ‘Meredith’s sinewy figure, striding along lanes or up hill slopes . . . was as familiar a sight to his neighbors [sic] as the natural features of the landscape’ (L Stevenson, 1953, p.212). He walked long distances in all weathers, over hills, mountains and through woodland, and during his first visit to the Alps Meredith wrote: ‘I can do 30 miles *per diem* under this sun, without knocking up’ (Cline, p.93).

Recalling ‘long rambles’ with Meredith, Comyns Carr noted that the ‘active exercise in which he delighted seemed to steady and concentrate those intellectual forces that sometimes ran riot when [Meredith] felt himself called upon to dominate the mixed assembly of a dinner table’ (quoted in L Stevenson, 1953, p.219). Carr’s comment shows that Meredith experienced a greater sense of ease in the countryside than in a social setting, and

that walking enabled mental concentration. The walking-club known as “The Sunday Tramps”, which was started in 1879 and organised by Leslie Stephen, to which Meredith belonged, consisted of members ‘picked for their intellectual interests as well as for pedestrian endurance’ with Box Hill ‘chosen as their rendezvous’ (L Stevenson, 1953, p.235). Communication was maintained with these friends, and his home at Box Hill remained a focus for discussions between the group, even when Meredith was physically unable to join in their walks.

Links between physical and mental activity created by the rhythm of walking are evident in the poetry of Wordsworth, in fiction by Dickens, and in essays by Thoreau, Stephen and Trevelyan. Meredith communicates the physical benefit and stimulation of imagination while walking which he experienced himself. He describes the effect of a walk in a letter to Bonaparte Wyse, stating: ‘I marched me to the vale of Mickleham . . . The walk has made of me a new man. I am now bathed anew in the Pierian fount. I cannot prose. I took Keats with me, to read the last lines of *Endymion* on the spot of composition’ (Cline, p.76). The physical exercise combined with mental stimulation inspired him to write his own poetry. Meredith makes the link between walking as physical movement and mental readjustment in ‘A Faith on Trial’ as the poet sets out on his usual morning walk but is facing his wife’s imminent death. Recalling walks shared with his wife and absorbed in his grief, he fails to appreciate the beauty of nature around him but with the progression of the walk and the poem, he is moved to renewed appreciation of the natural world. The sight of the ‘Known, yet wonderful . . . pure wild-cherry in bloom . . . the white wild cherry’ represents the turning point of the poem (pp.350, 351) as its familiar beauty has the power to restore his faith in the acceptance of Life and Death a part of Reality. On his walk, the poet learns that it is unrealistic to crave permanence and to seek answers to questions which are beyond our understanding.

An invitation to walk with Meredith assumed mental and physical exertion by his companions as evident in a letter to Arthur Cecil who was advised to ‘prepare to tramp, fair or foul’ (Cline, p.448). In correspondence from Austria in 1861, at the age of thirty-three, Meredith describes his companion Wyse as ‘thoroughly kind and good’ but tells Maxse that ‘Wyse does not walk in rain . . . when there’s a chance of nightfall . . . in the heat; and he’s not the best hand at getting up in the morning’ (Cline, p. 92). The pace of their progress from Innsbruck to Landeck, a distance of approximately 46 miles in three days, and from Landeck to Meran, approximately 80 miles in three and a quarter days, was less than satisfactory for Meredith, who considered that ‘we did not come at a great rate . . . dear old Wyse isn’t at all

the right sort of companion' (Cline, p.97). Alice Butcher recalls her experience aged thirteen of walking with Meredith, who was then thirty-nine years of age: 'He started to walk very fast up the steep grass incline of Box Hill . . . I shall never forget his conversation that morning. If we had over-strained the powers of our body climbing so fast up the hill, he certainly strained the powers of our minds as he poured forth the most wonderful prose hymn to Nature, Life and . . . Duty' (Alice, Lady Butcher, 1919, pp.2-3).

Characters are portrayed on stages of their journeys through life in Meredith's fiction and walking represents progress, expressing movement forward, or toward a new place or state of mind. Recognising Meredith's influence on D H Lawrence, R C Stevenson notes that Rupert Birkin in *Women in Love* 'seems to move toward something like a Meredithian balance of blood, brain, and spirit' and concludes that both writers 'are "modern" in their emphasis on the importance of a state of becoming rather than of static being' (2004, pp.194, 195). Meredith, writing fifty years before Lawrence, was innovative in showing characters 'becoming', and he anticipates an imaginative response from readers by applying characters' experiences to their own journeys.

Meredith's characters are frequently depicted as continuing to walk even if the destination is unclear. From Meredith's earliest prose Shibli Bagarag maintains momentum on his quest as he 'stepped briskly toward' his next challenge (*The Shaving of Shagpat*, p.110) and in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, Mrs Berry expresses her down-to-earth philosophy as: 'I think it's al'ays the plan in a dielemmer to pray God and walk forward' (p.400). In the same way that Meredith confronts grief during 'A Faith on Trial', his character of Redworth copes with disappointment by walking at a 'pace to melt icicles' (*Diana of The Crossways*, p.56) and Vernon's reason for a walk of nine and a half hours is: 'I had to walk off my temper' (*The Egoist*, p. 84). Meredith's strong walkers emphasise the beneficial effect of the natural world in contrast to the static enclosed world of society. Vernon is at ease in nature and is compared to 'the resolute pacer' who 'scorns discomfort of wet clothes and squealing boots' whereas Sir Willoughby is the self-centred egoist who 'intended to sit down on his estates . . . Pedestrianism was a sour business to Willoughby' (*The Egoist*, p. 32).

The expression of Meredith's *Weltanschauung* of moving toward a state of wellbeing is evident in his first novel *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* in which he depicts Richard's simultaneous physical and mental progress in a close relationship with nature. Richard's upbringing has been controlled by his father's application of a 'System' with the intention of nurturing the son he perceives as a 'living Tree' (p.81). Sir Austin's misguided attempt to

develop Richard's physical strength while preserving his moral innocence limits his son's freedom to learn, and 'ordeals' for Richard are inevitable. His relationships with women are affected by Richard's lack of understanding and sensitivity, which is shown as contributing to his cousin Clare's suicide. Neglecting his wife, Richard makes an error of judgement in an adulterous affair with Bella Mount, and his failure to learn is emphasised by the wisdom and experience of his old nursemaid Mrs Berry. Lacking spiritual development, Richard avoids confronting emotional difficulties by fleeing to Germany. Letters from his father are 'burnt unread' (p.419), and Richard has destroyed letters from wife Lucy, his aunt, and his cousin Adrian Harley because of his misguided sense of honour. Nearing the end of the novel while Richard is in Germany news of his son's birth is brought to him in person by his cousin Austin Wentworth, and Richard's response represents a change to the indifference he has shown until this point. The depiction of his walk through the forest in chapter XLII is the subject for analysis and comment below, symbolising Richard's rite of passage from man to father and his closer relationship with nature, and emphasising for the reader a significant stage of Richard's development.

With the awakening of Richard's senses, a return to his wife and child would seem to be a satisfactory conclusion to the novel, but the expectation of a happy ending is overturned by Meredith. On Richard's journey home, a letter from Bella reveals the scheme by her husband Lord Mountfalcon for Bella to 'keep [Richard] in town' while he himself attempted to 'carry [Lucy] off if he could not seduce her' (pp.430, 431). Although Mountfalcon insists he is 'perfectly guiltless' the two men consider it a matter of honour to fight a duel (p.433). Reunited with Lucy and his son, Richard experiences conflict between his perception of honour and love for his wife and child. Putting pride before his recently learned concern for his wife, he fights the duel and while recovering from his wounds he receives the news that Lucy has died from brain fever. The final chapter of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* is in the form of a letter from Sir Austin's close friend Lady Blandish to Austin Wentworth in which she concludes that as a result of the tragic consequences 'Richard will never be what he promised' (p.455).

Chapter XLII titled 'Nature Speaks', representing Richard's achievement of harmony, is described by Trevelyan as 'one of Mr. Meredith's finest pictures of spiritual recovery by contact with the forces of Nature' (*Poetry and Philosophy*, 1907, p.48). Anticipation of the effect on Richard of news of his son's birth is signalled to the reader by the narrator: 'Nature is taking him to her bosom. She will speak presently' (p.423). Meredith conveys in this chapter Richard's changing thought processes and growing awareness of an affinity with the

natural world while walking through the forest at night in a storm. The setting, weather and time of day are described in naturalistic sensory terms interspersed with reported thoughts and emotions to depict Richard's progress towards harmony of body and mind and spirit, walking to a new state of mind. Repetition of 'father' and 'child' emphasises the importance of the next generation as part of life's continuing process, and the narrator observes that 'though he knew it not, he was striking the key-notes of Nature. But he did know of a singular harmony that suddenly burst over his whole being'. His response is physical as he 'pierced into the forest. His walk was rapid' (p.423). While walking, Richard becomes aware of the effect of his behaviour, fearing that he 'dared never see his child' as he becomes 'utterly bare to his sin'. His sense of guilt leads to a 'troubled mind' as he struggles with conflicting emotions of joy at the birth of his son and sorrow for his dead cousin Clare (p.423).

The change to Richard's 'whole being' is dramatic, affecting his identity and attitude, and the impulse to move forward is strong. 'It was impossible for Richard to return . . . He must advance, and on he footed . . . thinking not at all. His energies were expended in action' (p.424). Feeling himself to be the 'sole human creature among the grandeurs and mysteries of storm', Richard's 'vigorous outstepping' is matched by his rising spirit which 'marched, and exulted' until he is stopped by sensory awareness of the natural world. Descriptions of the scents and feel of flowers, the sights and sounds of the storm, indicate his deepening relationship with nature. Consideration of the fate of birds and butterflies in stormy weather is reminiscent of Shakespeare's character King Lear, whose growing awareness and concern for others is experienced during a storm.

Richard's dawning realisation of affinity with animals is highlighted by the presence of a little dog accompanying him on his walk, and by the discovery of a tiny leveret. Holding it to his body he experiences a 'strange sensation . . . purely physical . . . all through his blood' and his reaction to the rough texture of the leveret's small tongue licking his hand indicates Richard's heightened awareness: 'his heart was touched'. The 'gentle scraping continued . . . as on he walked . . . Human tongue could not have said so much just then' (p.426). His response to this living creature, as a metaphor for his son, indicates Richard's spiritual development and suggests to the reader the possibility that he will begin to form closer relationships with his family. Intimate contact with the natural world results in mental ease for Richard, whose mind becomes 'so cool and easy', and at the first signs of dawn he is 'walking hurriedly . . . Impelled as a man who feels a revelation mounting obscurely to his brain'. The suddenness of his apparent transformation is described dramatically: 'Vivid as

lightning the Spirit of Life illumined him'. He has a 'sense of purification' feeling his child's cry in his heart, seeing his wife and son in his mind, leading him 'a blind and tottering man'. Looking out 'from his trance on the breathing world' Richard emerges in 'warm fresh sunlight . . . on the edge of the forest' (pp.426, 427). The walk, and his closer relationship with nature, symbolises Richard's rite of passage toward maturity as a father, indicating a significant stage of his development. As Richard anticipates a family reunion, the reader expects a traditional outcome, but tragedy follows and the remaining three chapters lead to the novel's inconclusive ending.

Readers anticipating the conventional *Bildungsroman* form of novel expected a conventional conclusion, with the hero's discovery of self and acceptance into society as an adult, following the progress from obedient child through the uncertainty of youth. Contemporary readers of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* might understand a father's desire to direct his son's moral growth in the context of Herbert Spencer's 1858 essay in the 'British Quarterly Review' 'contending that parents ought to let their children feel the true consequences of their conduct' (Moffatt, 1909, p.93) and expect a positive outcome. Meredith subverts the conventional ending for Richard to emphasise the long-lasting damage caused by Sir Austin Feverel's restrictive 'System' as Richard's learning experience is tested. The optimism of chapter XLII 'Nature Speaks' is followed by tragedy, representing the consequence of failing to reflect and learn from an enlightened state of mind - by father and son. Justin M'Carthy notes in the *Westminster Review* the reader's feeling of 'pain and surprise' at the ending, which he interprets as an artistic defect, since the 'whole construction does lead us to expect a harmonious and dramatic conclusion'. He recognises Meredith's understanding of human behaviour however, conceding that the ending is 'strictly in keeping with a recognition of the possibilities and even the daily chances of life' (in Williams, 1971, p.127).

The struggle faced by Richard, following his apparent transformation in the forest, is recounted by the narrator in chapter XLIV titled 'The Last Scene', when Richard is reunited with Lucy and his son, but is aware of his impending duel. Lucy sees that he is 'wrenched with agony . . . the tears bursting out of his eyes . . . He drew his breath painfully', and Meredith emphasises the contrast of emotions as the sleeping baby in his 'cosy position' stirs 'a grasping tenderness' in Richard (pp.446, 447, 448). In the peaceful setting, as Lucy 'began to hum and buzz sweet baby-language', the conflict between Richard's love for his wife and child and his perception of honour is indicated as 'two natures warred in his bosom' (pp.448, 449). Richard 'wavers' during a period of uncertainty expressed by a series of questions in

his mind. At the sight of ‘tears streaming hot from his face’ his wife ‘ marvelled at such excess of emotion’ (p.449) which represents the release of feelings suppressed by his upbringing, but Richard puts pride before his recently learned concern for his wife, believing that ‘he would be dishonoured if he did not go’ to fight the duel (p.450).

Struggling with conflicting emotions, Richard continues to put pride before consideration for others, and Lady Blandish’s conclusion in the letter to Austin Wentworth which forms the final chapter of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* is that as a result of the tragic consequences ‘Richard will never be what he promised’ (p.455). His failure to achieve the destiny planned by his father is perceived by Lady Blandish to be a result of Sir Austin’s behaviour, stating that when Richard was ‘lying all but dead, and [his father] was still unconvinced of the folly he had been guilty of . . . he deceived himself in the belief that he was acting righteously’ in controlling Richard’s life (p.452). Writing in her letter that she is ‘sick . . . of theories, and Systems’, Lady Blandish voices a challenge to the unthinking acceptance of ‘Science’, informing Wentworth that the doctors forbade Lucy to see Richard, telling her that ‘it would endanger his life’. Lady Blandish expresses respect for Mrs Berry stating that: ‘I really believe she has *twice* the sense of any of us - Science and all’ (p.452).

Meredith’s subversion of the conventional ending of the *Bildungsroman* form is one of the ways in which he contributes to the move towards a new form of novel in the second half of the nineteenth century. His adaptation of the *Bildungsroman* form in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* represents a challenge to the contemporary interpretation of *mens sana in corpore sano*. Strict control of a boy’s physical and mental development by his father is satirised in Meredith’s depiction of Sir Austin Feverel’s well-intentioned but repressive ‘System’, and Richard is humiliated at being ‘requested by his father to submit to medical examination like a boor enlisting for a soldier’ (p.9). The approach of puberty and sexual awareness is perceived by Sir Austin as a time of potential corruption of man by woman, termed the ‘Apple-Disease’, and the reader is faced with the question of double standards as ‘Lord Heddon vehemently preached wild oats’ asserting that a boy is ‘all the better for a little racketing when he’s green . . . He’ll never be a man if he hasn’t played at the old game one time in his life’ (p.121).

In his understanding of psychological behaviour, Meredith shows empathy for Richard and his difficulty in dealing with the reality of life, depicting his innocent love for Lucy as his ‘first woman’ and the inevitable conflict with his father. The repression of emotion results in Richard’s inability to relate to women, shown in his lack of care for Lucy and Clare, and his naivety in an adulterous relationship with Bella. Lacking the necessary

life skills Richard is unable to face reality. Realising his ‘stupid scorn of [Clare’s] meek affection’ (p.402) and sensing some responsibility for her suicide, he feels ‘not worthy’ to go to his wife but flees to the continent. The abruptness of the statement ‘he went forth’ (p.406) represents determined movement but Richard is running in the wrong direction, rather than progressing by remaining to make amends. He continues to evade reality by destroying letters from family while away and has not yet ‘learnt as much about himself’ as the reader has (Banerjee, 2012, p.46). Lady Blandish expresses the hope that ‘perhaps when [Sir Austin] thinks, his mind will be clearer, but what he has done cannot be undone’ (p.454) and Meredith offers hope for the future of Richard and his son beyond the novel’s tragic ending if he reflects, learns and makes an active response. Lady Blandish’s respect for Mrs Berry’s ‘sense’ reminds the reader of her humble philosophy to keep walking forward in times of uncertainty, in contrast to Sir Austin’s restrictive ‘System’ which prevents father and son from moving on.

The conclusions of Meredith’s novels are ambiguous, outcomes for title characters are doubtful, and issues raised are unresolved. As in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, the traditional ending of the *Bildungsroman* genre is subverted by Meredith in his later novel *Beauchamp’s Career* published in 1876. The reader follows the progress of Nevil Beauchamp, noted in the Introduction to this thesis as an enthusiastic reader of Carlyle, who is ‘despatched to sea’ aged fourteen despite his wish ‘to remain at school and learn’ (p.17). From a naval career as Commander, Nevil becomes a political candidate, and the reader is made aware of his emotional uncertainty in personal relationships. Although the novel ends with the marriages of Nevil, and his uncle Everard, Meredith denies his readers the anticipated happy outcomes. Nevil’s wife has a son, but a boy born to Everard dies, and Nevil himself is drowned while attempting to rescue two boys from the sea. Although the book ends with the conclusion of Nevil’s life, readers are encouraged to reflect beyond the novel’s ending on the future for his widow and son.

Beauchamp’s Career concludes with chapter LVI titled ‘The Last of Nevil Beauchamp’, and conveys the finality of the tragic death of the title character. The boy whom Nevil has saved from drowning is regarded by Nevil’s uncle, and Dr Shrapnel, as an ‘abashed little creature’ which is ‘what we have in exchange for Beauchamp!’ Their thoughts, although not spoken, are ‘visible in the blank stare at one another of the two men who loved Beauchamp, after they had examined the insignificant bit of mudbank life remaining in this world in the place of him’ (p.527). The novel’s closing sentences convey the view that Nevil’s life has been sacrificed for a less worthy individual, although the

narrator offers the reader a sense of Nevil's movement towards personal wellbeing, and hope for the future of his son. The resolution of Nevil's emotional uncertainty, demonstrated in his relationships with Renée and family friend Cecilia Halkett, is indicated in his marriage to Jenny Denham, ward of the radical Dr Shrapnel who influences Nevil's political career. The reader is informed that marriage to Jenny has 'taught' Nevil 'the joys of colour and sweet companionship, simple delights, a sister mind', and having learned to distinguish reality from romance, and the need for compromise, Nevil 'drank of a happiness that neither Renée nor Cecilia had promised' (p.520). In his thoughts, he acknowledges that Jenny is 'a peerless wife' and Nevil 'could speculate with good hope of Jenny's child' (p.524). Reflecting beyond the end of the novel and with Meredith's philosophy in mind, the reader can interpret the ending as offering the hope of a new generation even after tragedy, as in the natural world.

Harry Richmond, published in 1871 between *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* and *Beauchamp's Career*, recounts Harry's development from childhood to maturity, as he learns from difficulties and diversions, and ends with his impending marriage. The *Bildungsroman* form is adapted by Meredith's inclusion of fantasy, and the reader is made aware, with Harry, that he must continue on his journey of learning. *Harry Richmond* is Meredith's only novel using a first-person narrator, except for the first chapter which records the experience of the small boy in a third-person account. The battle for Harry's affection is apparent from the first chapter titled 'I am a Subject of Contention' as his father Roy Richmond snatches the child by night from Riversley, the home of his grandfather, Squire Beltham. The contrasting characters of his father and grandfather are evident in the melodramatic scene and Harry recognises his own conflicting emotions. Travels in London and Europe with his father give Harry 'A Taste of Grandeur' (chapter IV) but Roy Richmond is a fantasist with no financial stability and abandons Harry, who experiences his own adventures. After a period at school, Harry returns to Riversley, no longer a child but not yet a man. The pursuit of his father leads to the discovery that Roy Richmond is in a debtor's prison which contributes to Harry's growing realisation of the truth. The naivety and pride of his younger self is recognised by the older wiser Harry as narrator, who recognises that his love for his father affected his acceptance of reality. Aged twenty-one he experiences his first love for the German Princess Otilia, unaware that an arranged marriage is another of his father's schemes to acquire status and money.

Harry's retrospective account records his gradual process of learning from experience, recognising that his own obstinacy affected decisions made by his younger self. He has

forfeited his inheritance of Riversley because of his refusal to comply with his grandfather's condition that he marry his second cousin Janet Ilchester. When Janet inherits Riversley, Roy Richmond is refused entry according to Squire Beltham's wishes. Still driven by loyalty and love for his father, although he has begun to perceive him with pity as a tragic figure, Harry goes 'drifting' until he finally faces the reality of the wider world. Recognising his foolishness in refusing to be Janet's 'yokefellow' Harry returns to England to find that Janet is engaged to be married (p.540) and acknowledges the worth of a woman 'well lost' (p.552). Harry's perception of some progress towards finding his own identity is evident in the final chapter titled 'Conclusion'. Reflecting on his role as the narrator of his own story, he concludes that although he has matured, he still has lessons to learn. The sudden drowning of Janet's fiancé enables Harry and Janet to plan marriage and the novel ends with the dramatic death of Roy Richmond in a fire at Riversley. The last sentence is abrupt: 'He was never seen again' and conveys the finality of his father's death and the end of Harry's childhood (p.569).

The first-person retrospective narration in *Harry Richmond* recounts Harry's progress as a linear development. His process of learning is presented as a series of events demonstrating the 'gradual changes of the growing Harry, in his manner of regarding his father and the world' as Meredith explained it (Cline, p.453). Banerjee refers to the 'inbuilt impetus' of the *Bildungsroman* form which enables Meredith to 'carry [the reader] along with him . . . and involve us in the growth of [Harry's] inner life' (p.53), and Meredith's use of fantasy depicts the diversions which Harry faces. A lack of stability resulting from a tug of war for the boy's affection between his father and grandfather is clear from the first chapter in Harry's reflection that he was 'a kind of shuttle cock flying between two battledores' (p.22). Scene changes depict the moves from his family home to London, to Europe and back, to boarding school and an escape for a 'free life on the road' with gypsies, before the 'world began rolling another way' as he is returned to his grandfather. The effect on Harry is that he was 'more of a man than most boys of my age, and more of a child' (p.85).

Harry's growing awareness and determined response to uncertainty is indicated during a physical pursuit of his father in chapter XI 'The Great Fog and the Fire at Midnight', but this episode represents only a stage in his development. Becoming aware of his father's scheming character during an episode with a Welsh heiress in Bath in chapters XX and XXI, Harry's acceptance of reality is limited and his understanding is only partial. The older and wiser Harry narrating his story states that as his twenty-first birthday approached the 'vitality of the delusion I cherished was . . . partly extinct; not so the love' (p.214) and recognises that

obstinacy, increased by his grandfather's contempt, influenced his decision to join his father and reject the sensible choice of marriage to Janet and inheritance of his grandfather's estate. The importance of facing reality and learning from experience is acknowledged at the moment when Harry, recovering from illness, recognises his father's 'downright unreason' and perceives him with pity as 'a tragic spectacle . . . he clearly could not learn from misfortune . . . I chafed at his unteachable spirit, surely one of the most tragical things in life'' (p.449). Harry's boyhood ends with his father's dramatic death in a fire, announced to the reader in the abrupt final sentence of the novel: 'He was never seen again' (p. 569).

The conclusion, showing Harry's perception of progress and forthcoming marriage, is a typical ending for a *Bildungsroman* novel, but readers' expectations are challenged by Meredith's adaptation of the form. The style used to depict adventures, and to represent Roy Richmond's distance from reality, is reminiscent of Meredith's first prose *The Shaving of Shagpat*, subtitled 'An Arabian Entertainment'. Harry's early experiences of the world, influenced by the fantasy of his father-figure, are represented as events in 'other-worldly' settings and his first encounter with the German Princess Otilia is recalled by Harry as his younger self perceived it, as a fairytale romance in fairytale scenery. The use of fantasy and farce functions as a diversion, complicating the reader's interpretation of Harry's progress in the real world. The technique of an older narrator reflecting on experiences recalled from memory is used in *Harry Richmond* as in *Jane Eyre*, requiring the reader's judgement of the narrator's interpretation. Assertions by critics that Jane Eyre relinquished her independence by marriage to Rochester are countered by claims that her choice was her own, made as a result of her growth of character. The endings of both novels are ambiguous and there is no clear guidance for the reader if, as Flint suggests, the purpose of the *Bildungsroman* 'as a mode of narration' is that the 'reader's growth in knowledge is made to parallel that of the protagonist' (p.296).

In the last chapter of *Harry Richmond*, titled 'Conclusion', Harry is still young and about to embark on another stage of his life's journey as a married man. His story continues in the imagination of the reader, reflecting on the situations and emotions recalled and interpreted by the title character. Harry's assessment of himself in the narrator's role in the last chapter suggests his understanding that he has more to learn about himself and his relationship with the world. He describes his older self as the 'pleasant narrator in the first person' concluding that he 'stand[s] somewhere between' the happy bubbling fool and the philosopher who has come to know himself and his relations toward the universe' (p.560). Although the reader feels uncertain whether Harry has developed sufficient strength of

character to continue learning from his experience, Meredith conveys optimism at the end of the novel. Harry is apparently more successful than Richard Feverel in the struggle to escape paternal influence, and has the potential for further growth, having discovered his own values in the wider world, not an unattainable fairytale. He demonstrates maturity in his realisation of Janet's worth, and the conflicting influences of Harry's father and grandfather are replaced by the stabilising influence of his future wife. Free from his father's physical presence, Harry has the opportunity to continuing learning from Janet's wisdom, as well as from experience. The character of Harry is an early indication of Meredith's model of a new kind of man developed in his later novels.

Meredith's adaptation of the *Bildungsroman* form began with *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* by subverting reader expectations, and it was at this early stage in his career that he stated in a letter to an acquaintance, the artist Eyre Crowe, that all his work was 'an Experiment, and till it's done, I never know whether 'tis worth a farthing' (Cline, p.32). Referring to Meredith's novels of the 1860s as 'experiments [which] contributed towards the further development of his fiction', Shaheen notes that continual development of his fiction was 'especially typical' of Meredith (1981, pp.3,4). His willingness to experiment represents not only a means of developing his own writing but also his positive attempt to progress the 'novelist's Art', and the reason he was as Woolf said 'at great pains to destroy the conventional form of novel'. Without him, Woolf asserts, the novel 'might have expired' (1928, 'The Novels of George Meredith'). The uncertainty caused by experimentation is recognised by Jenkins in the 2011 article 'Stamped on Hot Wax', in which Jenkins refers to twenty-first century studies by Henry and R C Stevenson to consider Meredith's 'own authorial uncertainties' (p.525). While completing the novel *Rhoda Fleming* in 1865, Meredith acknowledges his 'uncertain workmanship' in a letter to Jessopp (Cline, p.302), and states in a letter to Maxse: 'I don't at all know what to think of the work' (Cline, p.305). The 'stylistic incongruities' of Meredith's writing are, as Stevenson asserts, 'symptoms of Meredith's wish to write a new form of novel combined with his uncertainty about exactly what that form was or how to go about achieving it' (2004, p.41). This thesis investigates how Meredith's uncertainty concerning the goal or outcome of his experimental writing is represented in the novels which end in ambiguity or without conclusion, and which reflect his view of the uncertainty of life. Inspired by the impetus for movement which is part of his *Weltanschauung*, Meredith regards the uncertainty of the age as providing the potential for experimentation and a means of moving forward.

Four novels by Meredith were published between *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* and *Harry Richmond*, one of which was *Sandra Belloni*. Originally titled *Emilia in England*, the novel was re-named in 1886 ‘for no apparent reason’ according to L Stevenson (1953, p.264), and indicates Meredith’s early experimentation in developing the form of the novel.

Inclusion of philosophy in fiction as a means of moving novel-reading beyond entertainment is debated in *Sandra Belloni*; the character of Emilia anticipates the heroines of the New Woman novels of the later Victorian period; and Meredith uses poetic techniques in prose as an innovative means of expression. He had been working on the novel, published in 1864, for at least three years before. The first mention found by Cline is in a letter dated 1861 when Meredith declared to Bonaparte Wyse that he was ‘temporarily tired of my *Emilia*’, having written two chapters (Cline, p.75).

The title character of *Sandra Belloni* is known in the novel as Emilia, her full name being given as Emilia Alessandra Belloni. Identified by her singing voice Emilia also composes music and is depicted as belonging to the natural world, a girl who ‘longed for woods and meadows’ (p.51). Portrayed at the beginning of the novel as young girl alone in England, Emilia is by nature ‘energetic and ardent’ as Banerjee suggests (2012, p.52). Meredith’s character is a passionate seventeen-year-old who has left home and her mother to escape her father rather than be ‘sold’ into marriage. She is offered a home with the Pole family, at the suggestion of the three sisters described as ‘sentimentalists’ who see themselves as patrons, ‘very ambitious damsels aiming so high no one could see it’ (p.5). The contrast is emphasised between the socially ambitious Pole sisters and Emilia, characterised as ‘the voice of the woods’ (p.10) who is equally happy singing for villagers as in society gatherings. The reader feels for the naïve Emilia facing choices and challenges as she experiences love and rejection for the first time, then uncertainty and despair at the loss of her singing voice. By nature an active and decisive girl seeking independence, Emilia is driven by ambition and love of singing until brought to the point of suicide when alone in London and separated from the natural world, when she acknowledges a need of help from others. The return of her voice is celebrated in the penultimate chapter when Emilia’s voice is heard again in the woods in moonlight, and the final chapter in the form of a letter is titled ‘Emilia’s Good-bye’. The announcement that she has gone to study music in Milan concludes *Emilia in England*. The story of her time in Italy is continued in *Vittoria*, which was published three years later and is Meredith’s only sequel to a novel.

In Meredith’s letter to Jessop in March 1864, two weeks before the proposed publication of *Emilia in England*, he describes the novel as having ‘no plot, albeit a current

series of events: but being based on character and continuous development, it is not unlikely to miss a striking success' (Cline, p.247). His anticipation of a negative reaction by readers is evident in his letter to Maxse before publication of *Emilia in England* in April: 'What will the British P[ublic] say to a Finis that holds aloft no nuptial torch? All she does, at the conclusion, is to leave England' (Cline, p.248). In a subsequent letter Meredith stated that he was 'at a loss to imagine . . . what the public will make of 3 volumes without a climax of incident . . . the climax being all in a development of character' (Cline, p.249). Leaving England, Emilia has overcome challenges and despair and looks ahead to 'three years of growing and studying' and the achievement of her ambition as an opera singer (p.609). The depiction of a conventionally happy ending is combined with realism as Emilia recognises the restrictions of her commitment to her career: 'For three years I am a prisoner . . . I am not to write, not to receive letters' (pp.607, 610). Meredith emphasises the irony of a girl whose voice is her reason for living being prevented from communication, to depict the conflict for a woman seeking professional and personal happiness. He continues to explore this theme in later novels which also end in ambiguity, subverting the traditional conclusion.

Meredith's adaptation of the *Bildungsroman* form and inclusion of philosophy in fiction were his intentional means of developing the form of the novel. Sensation novels of the 1860s and 1870s, as well as romance and adventure genres, were popular with the reading public seeking escapism in an age of change and uncertainty, although discredited by critics. Fiction was 'associated exclusively with relaxation and entertainment' and was considered as 'hardly likely to encourage strenuous thought' (*Saturday Review*, 1873, quoted in Dennis, 2000, p.52). Meredith contributed to the growth of the intellectual novel, which began with George Eliot and continued with Henry James, representing the move away from novel-reading as entertainment, which was significant in the development of the novel form during the latter part of the nineteenth century, now acknowledged as its greatest phase.

The inclusion of philosophy in fiction was intended by Meredith to develop the form of fiction by stimulating an active process of thought in the reader. With some intellectual effort, readers might learn about themselves and others, and respond by moving forward in their own lives. Novel-reading, not merely instructive or entertaining, could contribute to an individual's process of growth. Defending his use of philosophy in fiction in *Diana of The Crossways*, Meredith stresses the importance of the 'brainstuff of fiction' as being 'nourishing to brains' (*Diana of The Crossways*, p.15), and acknowledging the difficulty of his writing style for readers, Meredith stated in his letter to George Pierce Baker that 'thought is tough, and dealing with thought produces toughness' (Cline, p.876). In the concluding

paragraph of *The Amazing Marriage* the reader is compared to an infant, whose interest will flag ‘unless we have a perpetual whipping of the tender part of the reader’s mind’. This statement is attributed to Dame Gossip but Meredith’s voice is apparent in the final sentence asking the reader’s patience while philosophy ‘block[s] the course along a road inviting to traffic of the most animated kind’ (*The Amazing Marriage*, p.511).

The challenge which Meredith presents to readers to respond to his innovative writing is acknowledged in his anticipation of negative response by his contemporaries. Correspondence reveals his awareness that the experimental form and style of his expression of philosophy in fiction was unlikely to find approval with critics or the reading public. The conflict between Meredith’s belief in the importance of ‘brainstuff’ in fiction and his hope for a relationship with readers is indicated by the ‘debates’ in his novels between ‘the philosopher’ representing intellectual fiction and the narrator, standing for the ‘sentimentalism’ expected by the reading public. As early as 1864 in *Sandra Belloni* Meredith set out his relationship with ‘the Philosopher’ in a digression titled ‘A chapter interrupted by the Philosopher’. Stating that ‘We are indeed in a sort of partnership’ the narrator explains that ‘my Philosopher’s object - his *purpose*’ is to ‘plant in the reader’s path’ an alternative to the ‘critical dictum, that a novel is to give us copious sugar and no cane’. Apparent disagreement with the interventions of the Philosopher is expressed by the narrator as author, saying that ‘all I wish is that it were good for my market’, and as reader stating that ‘I myself as a reader consider concomitant cane an adulteration of the qualities of sugar’ (p.528). The ‘garrulous’ Philosopher is said to be ‘blind to the fact that the public detest him’ and the narrator concludes that ‘it is useless for me to tell him that he is not popular and destroys my chance’ (p.483). The Philosopher must be permitted ‘to come forward occasionally’, he cannot be denied ‘the privilege he stipulated’ in the writer’s conception of the performance for ‘that acute and honourable minority which consents to be thwacked with aphorisms and sentences and a fantastic delivery of the verities’ (p.528). Meredith’s awareness of the lack of popularity of philosophy in fiction is expressed as the conflict between ‘the philosopher’ and the narrator who adds in an aside ‘I would keep him back if I could’ (p.62).

The relationship, conveyed as a struggle between Philosopher and writer represents a change to the role of novelist defined by Eliot as ‘teacher or influencer of the public mind’ (in Dennis, 2000, p.53). The same technique of ‘conflict’ between two ‘characters’ in *Sandra Belloni* is used in Meredith’s last novel *The Amazing Marriage* as a dialogue between the novelist and ‘Dame Gossip’. Rather than telling a story to educate readers, the writer is

showing, and encouraging readers to think and learn for themselves. In contrast to the traditional happy ending of the novel with a moral purpose Meredith leaves questions unanswered without closure. Unlike Thackeray whose concluding sentence of *Vanity Fair* is addressed to his readers 'Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out' (1848, p.951), Meredith intends his readers to reflect further on the future of his characters beyond the novel's end. The view expressed by Ellis that 'if ever a novel with a purpose called for a sequel it was *Richard Feverel*' (*George Meredith*, 1920, p.96) shows that Meredith's intention of further thought by the reader was unexpected.

The character of Emilia is the forerunner of the heroines portrayed by Meredith in his novels 1879 to 1895 which anticipate the New Woman fiction of the 1890s. Emilia's backstory is revealed in her own words to Wilfrid Pole, stating that when she left home 'I did not know where I was going, but only that I could not stop' (p.50). Her perception of the restriction of marriage was learned from her mother: 'You do not belong to yourself: you are tied down. You are a slave, a drudge; mustn't dream, mustn't think! . . . By-and-by, I suppose it will happen. Not yet!' (p.49). The expression of marriage as slavery anticipates the view expressed in John Stuart Mill's essay *On the Subjection of Women* which Meredith supported and used as a theme in his later novels. Emilia is proactive, confronting Wilfrid's father Mr Pole in the alien environment of his City counting-house, in chapter XXXIV titled 'Emilia makes a move'. Convinced that Wilfrid loves her, she speaks 'with decisive fervour' (p.240) and Mr Pole 'read power in her: the capacity to concentrate all animal and mental vigour into one feeling – this being the power of the soul' (pp.262,263). Mr Pole claims to understand a woman's desire for love, assessing Emilia as 'a useful little woman' and advising her to 'get a husband'. He fails to understand her equal passion for singing and determination to use her talent to become independent when she states with 'leaping ardour' in her eyes: 'I shall make money come, in time . . . I shall win a name' (p.241). A strong and determined young woman striving for independence, Emilia is vulnerable to social pressure, facing the challenge of achieving personal and professional happiness. Described as 'half man . . . not what man has made of your sex; and . . . brave of heart' (p.408), Emilia is an early version of Carinthia, the androgynous heroine of Meredith's last complete novel *The Amazing Marriage* published in 1895.

Meredith's use of poetic technique in prose in *Sandra Belloni* represents an innovative means of expression, which is developed in the later fiction of Meredith and Hardy. Reviewing *Sandra Belloni* in the *Saturday Review* in 1864, Mrs Hardman finds that readers will be 'cheered . . . by coming upon many passages written in excellent English, upon some

poetical and some playful touches' (in Williams, 1971, p.115). The unnamed reviewer of *Vittoria* (the sequel to *Sandra Belloni*) in the *Saturday Review* who states that the novel is 'hard to read' notes 'the curious nature of Mr Meredith's style. It gives the impression of prose striving to be poetry' (in Williams, 1971, p.148). In the first paragraph of *Sandra Belloni*, Emilia is introduced to the reader at the same time as the Pole family, in sensory terms depicting her close relationship with nature. She is described as 'a voice in the neighbouring fir wood' at night, her 'richly toned' voice thought to be 'an opera-singer or a spirit' having an 'unearthly sweetness' (p.1). The representation of the Pole sisters is typical of Meredith's means of characterisation, as a 'type' in preference to physical description. They are depicted as having 'vast pretensions' and the narrator states that 'it would be unfair to sketch their portraits' (p.6). Meredith contrasts the social aspirations of the Pole sisters, with the sense of wellbeing experienced by Emilia, at ease in the natural world, and without pretension. Emilia takes pleasure in singing, whether for 'a body of five-and-twenty stout young fellows, prize-winners, wrestlers, boxers and toppers' in an 'atmosphere of pipes and beer and boozy heads' (pp.89, 95) or for Lady Gosstre 'who led the society of the district' (p.23).

Meredith emphasises the importance of the natural world for a sense of wellbeing for Emilia, and the heroines of his later fiction. The recovery of Emilia's voice takes place in the beauty of a wood on a frosty May night, recalling the first chapter when she was introduced as 'the voice of the woods' (p.10). She is depicted as being at home in a natural setting and her mental and physical distress is emphasised by an unfamiliar urban setting. The time and place to demonstrate the return of her voice is staged by Emilia, selecting a woodland clearing, spotlighted by the moon, following the song of many nightingales, creating the impression of 'nature prelude the divine human voice' (p.594). The magical spirit of the place in chapter LVIII titled 'Frost on the May Night' is repeated in Meredith's poem 'Night of Frost in May' when the poet describes the 'magic' of a personal experience hearing the song of nightingales in the woods. Emilia's plan for the future as a singer is revealed in terms of natural growth: 'I hope to be growing; I fly like a seed to Italy . . . I am changing' (p.609).

Recognising the risk of experimenting with innovative styles of writing, Meredith uses a debate between two characters in *Sandra Belloni* to voice the view that 'in prose we owe everything to the licence our poets have taken in the teeth of critics' (p.64). The narrator in *Diana of the Crossways* refers to a 'great modern writer' [Thackeray] who presented 'thoughtful women, thinking men' but 'dared not animate them, flesh though they were, with

the fires of positive brainstuff' (pp.15,16). Meredith 'dares' to animate his characters using poetic language and techniques in an impressionistic way intending that readers will identify with their emotions. The fascination for Meredith is attributed by Symons in 1897 to the 'attraction of those qualities which go to make great poetry, coming to us in the disguise of prose and the novel, affecting us in spite of ourselves' (in Williams, 1971, p.463) and Woolf discovers a liking for Meredith's 'effort to escape plain prose' compared to 'the pale little fiction I'm used to' (quoted in Bartlett, *George Meredith*, 1963, p. 21). Meredith's understanding of the reason that his writing was appreciated by few readers is evident in his letters. Referring to *Beauchamp's Career* he wrote that 'it will only appeal (so I fear) to them that have a taste for me; it won't catch the gudgeon World' (Cline, p.478) and he concluded from 'the general attack' that his 'playfulness' of the first sentence of *One of Our Conquerors* was 'antipathetic to our present taste' (Cline, p.1029).

Meredith's innovative fiction received conflicting critical responses, as noted in the Introduction to this thesis, and evident in the reviews of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. An unsigned reviewer in the *Saturday Review* pronounced that it was 'entirely a man's book' (in Williams, 1971, p.75), and by contrast a review by Samuel Lucas refuted the charge of 'impurity', concluding that it was a novel 'which may be read by men and women with perfect impunity' (in Williams, 1971, p.84). An unsigned review in *The Critic* concluded that *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* 'has great merits and great defects, and we believe that these are very evenly balanced' (in Williams, 1971, p.67). The confusion expressed by many reviewers reflects the expectation of the reading public that fiction could be characterised by genre and function. In an article of 1864 Justin M'Carthy asserts that the 'grand requisite of the popular novel of our day undoubtedly is that it shall require no thought or trouble of any kind' (in Williams, 1971, p.125). Noting that *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* had failed 'to arrest the attention of a public only craving for easy entertainment', M'Carthy observes that Meredith's novels 'are not bought at a railway station to beguile a journey, or carried in the hand down to the seaside to while away the tedium of a semi-fashionable autumnal holiday. They are not amusing' (in Williams, 1971, p.125). Reviewing *Sandra Belloni* in the *Saturday Review*, Mrs Hardman found Meredith's novel 'not in the least amusing' and acknowledged the market preference for 'adventure and love-making' rather than 'analysis' (in Williams, 1971, p.125).

Meredith's intention to stimulate the reader's reflection by the expression of philosophy in fiction is acknowledged by an anonymous critic in the *Saturday Review*. Stating that there is 'much thought embodied in' *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, the critic

asserts that the book 'is distinguished from the ordinary novel of the day by having something in it' (in Williams, 1971, pp.71, 72). Recognising the possibility of a reader learning 'a lesson' from fiction, the critic states that the 'doctrine of self-culture has not been accepted in England' (in Williams, 1971, p.74) although Samuel Smiles' book *Self-Help* published in 1859 was a popular book promoting the ideals of responsibility for the individual. Despite her criticism of *Sandra Belloni* as 'not amusing', Mrs Hardman judged the book to be 'in its way, very well worth reading, and has more in it than most novels that delight the reader' (in Williams, 1971, p.114). As Meredith himself anticipated, innovation and originality were not appreciated by a reading public expecting a book to be classified as entertaining or informative. An 'original writer', as Samuel Lucas described him in an article in *The Times*, Meredith 'belongs to a class of fictionists who are more rare than welcome - more honoured than popular' (in Williams, 1971, pp.77, 78). Meredith's originality was noted as a 'disadvantage' by an unnamed reviewer in *The Westminster Review*, as well as the 'subtlety of expression, and a delicate indication of modes of thought and feeling, which demand an amount of attention not willingly given' except to authors who have already achieved public approval (in Williams, 1971, p.119).

Meredith was stoic in his beliefs in the face of criticism of *Sandra Belloni*, writing to William Hardman: 'I foresee that I shall get knocks on the head from the reviews . . . but courage!' (Cline, p.252). Ellis quotes Meredith as saying that he had discovered at the start of his career that 'nothing upset the critics so much as anything that was out of the common' (*George Meredith*, 1920, p.287) but he was not prepared to compromise his beliefs to achieve popularity. His determination to include philosophy in fiction with the intention of saving the Art which he perceived as 'doomed to extinction' (*Diana of The Crossways*, p.16) implies criticism of the popular novels requiring little effort by readers. In a letter to his son's headmaster, Meredith expressed disappointment that Arthur lacked promise, that he 'ought to have a thirst for history, by this time; but the appetite in him seems to be for sensation novels' (Cline, p.308) and he was aware that the 'brainstuff' in his own novels would not be appreciated by readers of who were 'impatient for blood and glory' (*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, p.189). Gissing notes the distinction between 'good' and 'popular' work in his praise for Meredith's writing which he thought 'too difficult for the British public' (in Williams, 1971, p.523).

Meredith's 'Stoic habit of taking hostile opinion smilingly', as a means of dealing with critical reviews and limited appreciation by readers (Cline, p.1013), reveals a similar commitment to his belief in defence of art as William Blake's statement in a 1799 letter to

Revd Dr Trusler: 'That which can be made Explicit to the idiot is not worth my care'. The strength of his conviction is evident in Meredith's persistence although he was aware that his innovation was unlikely to be popular with critics or the reading public. His attempts at development were perceived as destruction as illustrated in the 1894 'Punch' cartoon 'Meredith destroying literary form', and as Woolf states, he was 'at great pains to destroy the conventional form of the novel . . . he has destroyed all the usual staircases by which we have learnt to climb' (1928, 'The Novels of George Meredith'). Meredith's understanding of destruction as a means of development is derived from his philosophy based on the natural world. He recognised that even the devastation of a storm can bring about positive change.

Chapter Two: Wellbeing

Reference to contemporary publications shows the public preoccupation with health, and the move in the second half of the nineteenth century toward shared knowledge and individual responsibility for fitness. Books and magazines increased understanding, promoting the benefit of health and methods of achieving it, although there could be no certainty of cure or improvement in the treatment of disease. The assumption that men were naturally strong, and that women as the weaker sex were prone to nervous disease and ‘hysteria’, persisted, causing debates among the medical profession and intellectuals relating to the mental health of women. Sharing with friends his experience of attempts to improve his own health, Meredith uses his fiction to communicate his knowledge of the effects of physical illness on mental wellbeing. The expression of his philosophy of wellbeing in novels was Meredith’s means of contributing to contemporary debates on health, and like John Stuart Mill, he asserts that the restriction of women can result in depression, which was interpreted as ‘hysteria’. Analysis of *The Egoist* and *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* shows how Meredith questions society’s perception of ‘health’, showing that egoism of the stereotypical hero, and consequent restriction of a submissive woman, is unhealthy. This Chapter demonstrates how Meredith uses narrative strategies to communicate with readers, with the expectation of a participatory relationship. Reference is made to the literary reviews which make connections between the functions of stomach and brain, and which reflect the language of publications on health. Similar links are apparent in Meredith’s view of fiction as nourishment for the brain, and the need for the digestion of words.

Considering the question of whether ‘the British race is improving or degenerating’ and the causes of probable degeneration, Charles Kingsley expressed the opinion that the ‘science of health . . . ought to be taught . . . in every school, college and university’. Addressing not only statesmen and medical men but ‘every father and mother in these isles . . . of every class’ he emphasised the importance of exerting moral influence (‘The Science of Health’, 1872). Public health was the subject of B W Richardson’s presidential address to the Social Science Association, the purpose of the Assembly being ‘to study together and to exchange knowledge and thought on works of every-day life’ making the link between physical health and ‘mental serenity and mental development’ (*Hygeia: A City of Health*, 1876). A series of ‘original essays contributed to *Health*’ were reprinted in physiologist Andrew Wilson’s book *Health for the People* ‘in the hope that, in a collected and readily

accessible form, they may serve as a means of stimulating an increased interest in topics relating to the preservation of individual and public health' (Preface, 1886).

Increasing scientific knowledge enabled rapid advances in medical treatments, and proprietary medicines sold on the streets and through press advertisements enabled self-medication. Visits to the seaside or mountains became increasingly popular for the beneficial effect of fresh air and alternative treatments linking mental and physical faculties were investigated in the writings of intellectuals such as G H Lewes and Darwin, Huxley, Eliot and Carlyle. Alexander Bain proposed that physiological and psychological processes were connected, an idea which had originated at the time of Hippocrates, and the quest for health and fitness was explored by writers including Tennyson and Ruskin.

Books published during the nineteenth century indicate the sharing of information as medical knowledge increased. Publications by (mostly male) physicians, written with the apparent authority of medicine and science, focused on physical symptoms and health of the body, responding to epidemics of cholera, measles and tuberculosis, aiming to treat and cure in an effort to eradicate disease. Despite the discoveries of anaesthesia in the 1840s, by dentist William Morton and obstetrician James Simpson, and antiseptics by Joseph Lister in the 1860s, medical science offered no certainty of cure, or unanimous opinion. Picard notes some resistance by the medical establishment to the use of chloroform because 'women were *meant* to suffer pain in childbirth . . . the Bible said so' and that 'opponents . . . on religious grounds had to admit defeat' when the use of anaesthesia in childbirth was endorsed by Queen Victoria and the daughter of the Archbishop of Canterbury (Picard, 2006, p.230). Although single use of bandages and instruments was recommended in the 1862 *Year Book of Medicine, Surgery and Other Allied Sciences* 'a few old-fashioned surgeons clung to their conviction that some post-operative infection was simply a normal part of wound recovery' (Picard, 2006, p.228). Professional opinions changed gradually as, following Lister's work in pioneering antiseptic surgery, statistics showed a fall in post-operative fatalities.

The conflict caused by differing medical views at this period is represented in Eliot's *Middlemarch*, published in 1871-2 but set in the 1830s. In chapter XXVI, the effect of Mr Wrench's 'parcels' with 'black and drastic contents . . . was not alleviating to poor Fred [Vincy]', and his mother with no thought of 'medical etiquette' calls in the new doctor Mr Lydgate ([1871-2], 1996, p.243). Convinced that Fred has typhoid fever and 'had taken just the wrong medicine' Lydgate prescribes treatment for Fred and is subsequently 'installed as medical attendant on the Vincys' (pp.244, 247). Mr Wrench takes offence, having the 'sense that a younger man . . . considered him in need of instruction' and says that Lydgate 'paraded

flighty, foreign notions, which would not wear' (p.246). Public interest is evident as 'the event was a subject of general conversation in Middlemarch' (p.247).

William Lovett's 1851 book *Elementary Anatomy and Physiology, for Schools and Private Instruction; with Lessons on Diet, Intoxicating Drinks, Tobacco, and Disease*, intended 'to impart to children some knowledge of their own physical, mental and moral nature', was controversial because of the explicit teaching of anatomy (Preface, p.vii). The book informs and instructs, and Lovett links moral and physical health, advocating temperance, diet, exercise and repeating that 'excess' leads to physical derangement and mental illness. The reader is asked to consider 'How can I lessen the dominion of evil and extend the empire of goodness?' which recalls attitudes dating back to the seventeenth century when life and death, health or disease were linked to religious teachings of sin and salvation. Lovett states that this is a question '*for individual solution*' (Introduction, p.xii) and publications during the second half of the nineteenth century focused on public health and individual responsibility. In his 1859 book *Self-Help*, the Scottish journalist Samuel Smiles notes the 'spirit of self-help' as a feature of the English character, and states that the 'chief object' of his book is to 'stimulate youths . . . to rely upon their own efforts in life' (Preface, [1859], 2002, *Self-Help*).

In addition to the science-based medical books, publications offered practical advice on the treatment of disease. Florence Nightingale's *Notes on Nursing* published in 1859 remained in print for more than ten years, and Mrs Beeton's 1861 *Book of Household Management* included advice on first aid and care of the sick. Books and family magazines circulated information to a wider readership in the second half of the nineteenth century, raising public awareness of the need to maintain health, and encouraging self-help. Articles in *Cassell's Family Magazine* advised on dealing with accidents in the home and care for invalids; and 'The Girls' Own Paper' (1881 - 1901), published weekly with the intention of educating girls approaching womanhood, was read by women of all ages. Monthly articles by doctor Gordon Stables writing as 'Medicus' in 'The Girls' Own Paper' were written in a conversational style, repeating practical advice on diet to avoid digestive disorder, and advocating the benefits of the natural world for girls to take fresh air and appropriate exercise. In the 1892 *Book of Hygiene*, one of a series in *The Victoria Library for Gentlemen* Dr Kate Mitchell declares her intention to write plainly of the 'general laws' to be observed for 'physical, mental and moral health' ('Prefatory', p.v). Noting that 'manuals of information are multiplied by the dozen, and are read with intelligence and attention by ever-increasing numbers' she states that 'in this latter end of the nineteenth century, we are

directing our attention more and more to the perfecting of human beings themselves' (1892, pp.1, 8).

Meredith's philosophy of striving towards harmony of body, mind and spirit is concerned less with the achievement of 'perfection' than with the best use of faculties and circumstances. His correspondence with close friends reveals the combination of exercise and diet, natural remedies and traditional medicine, which he used in his efforts to improve his own health. His advice based on experience indicates his agreement with the principle of individual responsibility for health promoted in Lovett's 1851 book. Taking responsibility for maintaining fitness was learned by Meredith at the school in Neuwied. Henry Morley's article reports that the boys 'were not milksops. We braved peril in many of our sports' (quoted in L Stevenson, 1953, p.13) and Meredith's natural physical energy is evident in his enthusiasm for exercise. His physical endurance during a wrestling bout is recalled by Henry Mayers Hyndman, who states that Meredith 'wore me down by sheer endurance . . . he was always in training' (L Stevenson, 1953, p.127). In a letter to Maxse, Meredith writes that 'throwing the beetle - a huge mallet weighing 18 or 19 pounds - and catching the handle, performing wondrous tricks therewith' is his 'best solitary exercise'. He considers boxing to be 'good', if 'a little brutal' (Cline, p.201). As noted in Chapter One, Meredith recommends fencing and throwing the beetle, as exercises which improve mental and physical wellbeing.

Advice on exercise and diet is offered by Meredith in letters to friends as a means of increasing knowledge by sharing his own experiences, although Meredith's advice to others - whether concerning diet or writing - was inconsistent. He expressed the opinion to Maxse that 'no healthy person ever takes to vegetable diet, excluding meat' adding that 'some people may make themselves more clean and sound if they do so' (Cline, p.203). Ellis refers to Hyndman's recollection from a few years later when Meredith 'persuaded himself' that a vegetarian diet was 'the right sort of food to give the highest development to body and mind' (*George Meredith*, 1920, p.247). Although the advice seems inconsistent, Meredith was prompted to try different methods of treatment in an effort to ease his own digestive problems, and the trial of vegetarianism indicates his willingness to experiment. His interest in new research into health, alongside natural remedies and traditional medicine, is recorded in a letter in which he recommends the reading of work by Lewes and Bain, who both focus on links between physiological and psychological health (Cline, p.578). The 'Experimental Impulse' detected by Richard C Stevenson in Meredith's approach to writing fiction is also evident in his attitude to health and fitness.

An appreciation of the benefit to health of the natural world is conveyed to Maxse in Meredith's poetic description of the Surrey countryside. He writes that, rising at half past five, he 'enjoyed the tonic morning air immensely, yet more the fresh loveliness of the downs and fields, the velvet shadows, sharp and thin, and the exquisite sky' (Cline, p.489). Visitors were invited to share his delight in the surroundings of his home. In a letter to Arthur Cecil dated July 1871 he stated: 'I want you to come to walk you over these hills' (Cline, p.448) and to Dante Rossetti he wrote 'how delightful it would be to me to stroll and have talks with you' (Cline, p. 458). Even when unable to walk himself Meredith would send visitors to see the trees of Druids' Grove, writing to William Watson in 1892 'I want you to see the old yews of Norbury. Just below them was a favourite beech-walk of Wordsworth's' (Cline, p.1079). The benefits of sea breezes and bathing were noted by Meredith on visits to the Kent and Sussex coasts and described in letters. Writing from Eastbourne, he told William Hardman: 'This salt-water fetches me round, Tuck. It's the next best to Mountain air' (Cline, p.426). His failing health was said to be improved by spending Christmas week in 1881 in Brighton which 'served me well. The air blew in from sea, and I was on pier or parade all the hours of light' (Cline, p.648) and in 1884 he visited Ramsgate 'whither I go for bracing air' (Cline, p.747).

Recollections by the many visitors welcomed to Flint Cottage all refer to Meredith's joy in talking and reading aloud, showing that intellectual communication was equally important as physical activity to his sense of wellbeing. As noted in Chapter One, his first meeting with the young Alice Butcher was remembered for Meredith's intense conversation and speed of walking, and their talks continued during a friendship of forty-one years. Alice recalls that he spoke his poetry aloud 'to illustrate his arguments, knowing that I was beginning to appreciate them, and partly to understand their meaning' (1919, p.112). Meredith's enjoyment of intellectual conversation with women as well as men is evident in his correspondence with Lady Ulrica Duncombe and their discussions about Goethe, referenced in Chapter One. Recording Meredith's weekly 'duties as one of the "gentleman readers"' to an elderly widow which lasted for 'more than fifteen years', Lionel Stevenson quotes the widow's niece who states that Mrs Wood preferred Molière to Meredith's own work even when Meredith offered to explain his meaning (1953, p.234). He 'enjoyed reading plays or poetry in a dramatic and expressive manner, and Mrs Wood was a well-educated woman with whom he could have interesting literary conversations' (Jones, 1999, p.87) and Cline states that Meredith 'derived both pleasure and stimulation' from their meetings (1970,

p.1726). The respect and affection which he felt for the 'dear Lady of Eltham' is apparent from references in Meredith's letters (Cline, p.1635).

L Stevenson refers to visitors of later years as the 'pilgrims to Box Hill' who admired and respected Meredith but felt no 'genuine intimacy . . . the effect of a consummate theatrical performance . . . not so much consorting with a friend as they were appreciating a unique work of art' (1953, p.237). The perception of 'performance' indicates Meredith's intention to communicate strongly-held views and stimulate others to think rather than the compulsion to act for an audience. Unlike Dickens who was 'at his best as a Public Entertainer' performing his characters for audience reaction (Callow, 2012, p.284), Meredith consented to attend a meeting of the Omar Khayyám Club aged 67 only 'on condition that he should not be asked to speak'. L Stevenson records that at the event Meredith was obliged to respond spontaneously to Edward Clodd's tribute, with a few sentences which 'sounded more natural and sincere than his usual conversational style' (1953, p.319). Adams notes that Meredith was 'not commonly given to delivering lectures' and that his only delivery of a lecture in 1877 'On the Idea of Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit' and the subsequent publication of an essay 'showed the importance he attached to [the topic]' (in Norton ed. *The Egoist*, 1979, p.431).

The adoption of an apparent 'persona' dominating conversation during visits and at small social gatherings, with occasional insensitive remarks, could be attributed to the combination of Meredith's natural exuberance and a shyness, recognised by his friend and son's tutor Janet Duff Gordon. She wrote that his shyness 'took the form of asserting himself rather loudly, and trying to be epigrammatic and witty' (quoted in Ellis, *George Meredith*, 1920, p.164). Hyndman notes Meredith's ability to talk at times 'without effort or artifice' while at other times he 'deliberately cultivated artificiality' (quoted in Jones, 1999, p.239). The perception of Meredith's 'performance' or 'exhibition' in later years as his conversations became monologues may have been highlighted by his attempt to conceal his increasing deafness. On a visit by Desmond MacCarthy in 1901 'Meredith talked and MacCarthy listened for two hours' (Jones, 1999, p.231). Meredith shows a determination to communicate and stimulate thought in others, expressing opinions to friends and visitors even if unable to hear their response, and in fiction although not 'hearing' a reader's response.

Alice Butcher recalls that he was 'amused' by her family's games of 'play-acting' and 'would contribute many suggestions and criticisms, but he could never be persuaded to act himself' although walking or in the garden he would 'start a kind of comic dialogue' representing both actors (1919, p.9). Remembering Meredith's contribution to her

‘Shakespeare Readings’ deemed by her parents to be ‘a good educational exercise’ (p.18), Butcher repeats that Meredith was ‘an admirable coach . . . a quite admirable coach’ (pp.20, 28). She reveals that although he had a ‘beautiful speaking voice . . . it must be recorded that he was not himself a good reader’, being focused on vocal technique and the interpretation of Shakespeare’s words (pp.28, 29). Affection and respect are evident in Butcher’s memory of Meredith, stating how she ‘love[d] to recall the great intellectual pleasure it was to read with him, also the very great fun, for no one has ever brought out the jocund drollery of Shakespeare’s plays as he used to do’ (1919, p.30).

In conversation and in fiction, Meredith’s intention was to provoke discussion. The technique of using dialogue to represent differing points of view, evident in the poem cycle ‘Modern Love’ and ‘The Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt’, is also used in Meredith’s novels. Referring to ‘long arguments’ with Meredith, Hardman recalls that on a ‘raw, inclement January day, we stopped a long time at a stile, seated on the top of which he lectured me . . . on his views of the future destinies of the human race’. Hardman states it was possible to ‘like him immensely, and disagree with him constantly’ (Ellis, ed. *A Mid-Victorian Pepys*, 1923, p.87). The intimate relationship with Hardman is representative of Meredith’s close friendship with a small circle of friends, demonstrating his sense of fun and enthusiasm for engaging with discussions on life and literature. As a reader for the publishers Chapman and Hall from 1860 to 1893 he responded with constructive criticism, although not always the right decision, committing ‘an error of commercial judgement by turning down Mrs [Henry] Wood’s *East Lynne* in the 1860s’ (Banerjee, 2012, p.18). Nor did he always follow his own advice, as noted by Thomas Hardy: ‘He gave me no end of good advice, most of which, I am bound to say, he did not follow himself’ (quoted in Jones, 1999, p.221).

Communication became increasingly important to Meredith as ataxia restricted his ability to walk, and his characteristic stoicism is evident in an account of his health given in response to a friend’s enquiry. The letter ended: ‘Alas! I have talked of the writer most wearisomely, but you command me for a letter, and there is nothing else to be talked of’ (Cline, pp.714, 715). By this time in 1883 Meredith was experiencing physical disability attributed by the doctor ‘to a congestion of the lower spinal chord’. Meredith wrote: ‘I can’t work much, can’t walk much, must not be bothered at all, and I diet rigorously. Warm sea-baths followed by cold sea-water douches have done some service’ (Cline, p.711). A ‘prescription in diet’ from Cotter Morison was effective, ‘from the first day miraculously’ allowing Meredith to continue work on *Diana of The Crossways*, ‘working at a splendid pace’ (Cline, p.719). Although he was unable to walk as before, mental activity in the form

of progress on his current novel was apparently some consolation to Meredith who wrote to Cotter Morison: 'I can't walk much . . . That I can work, is the point' (Cline, p.719). Nevertheless the restriction of movement was frustrating for a keen walker only fifty-five years old, deprived of physical exercise and the mental benefit of walking of stimulating imagination and creativity, noted in Chapter One.

Accounts of ill-health, related with humour and stoicism, reveal Meredith's efforts at self-medication. Telling R L Stevenson in a letter that he 'had but the song of a frog . . . A kind of suppressed influenza seems to have been the cause', Meredith refers to his 'customary specific of hard exercise, with which I generally sweat out all attacks' (Cline, p.569). Suffering from 'catarrh of the stomach', later diagnosed as whooping-cough, he describes his symptoms dramatically to Cotter Morison. The 'hangman has you by the throat each ten or twenty minutes . . . And to be waked up at night by a seizure, is akin to the dark archangel's intimation to you to prepare for immediate flight' (Cline, p.570).

Aged thirty-two, Meredith refers to having been 'struck down by illness' and being 'knocked down again by the old illness', described as 'horridly dispiriting' (Cline, pp.58, 62). The illness was not specified, but a doctor's diagnosis the following year is that 'the "knot of the nerves" is irritated and has long been so' (Cline, p.85). Towards the end of his life in conversation with the critic Marcel Schwob, Meredith said 'I was born with a bad stomach' (quoted in L Stevenson, 1953, p.317). The cause of his illness as a digestive disorder is mentioned in a letter written by William Hardman in 1862 recording that Meredith, then aged thirty-four, 'has taken lately to felling trees and sawing up logs of wood, as a healthy exercise, to promote the circulation and improve his digestion. With the latter object in view he has also adopted a wet compress on his stomach, and has found great benefit from it' (Ellis, ed. *A Mid-Victorian Pepys*, 1923, pp.206, 207). In his fifties Meredith continued to suffer from the illness, by then diagnosed as bradypepsy, and experiment with self-treatment. In 1881 he wrote: 'For a year digestion has been bad. I have had to discard Bacchus. By dint of exercise and ascetic fare, I am coming round' (Cline, p.615) and two years later 'I get some benefit from a recently imposed milk and fruit diet, meat and wine temporarily abjured' (Cline, p.704).

The effect of physical illness on mental wellbeing, and his ability to write, is mentioned by Meredith during the conversation with Schwob in which he referred to his 'bad stomach'. Meredith says that 'They claim that the brain gets tired. Don't believe it. The brain never gets tired. It is the stomach that conquers one' (quoted in L Stevenson, 1953, p.317). Experiencing the return of dyspeptic symptoms which affect his writing, Meredith

makes the link between stomach and brain, telling Maxse: 'Digestion is very queer with me; I cannot work long at a stretch just now, and that troubles me' (Cline, p.589). In a letter to Bonapart Wyse, he writes that the 'malady, as of old, is bradypepsy influenced by the nervous excitement of composition continued too long' (Cline, p.612). Meredith records the doctor's treatment for the 'knot of the nerves' stating: 'I must not smoke, I must not work' (Cline, p.85) and his doctor 'interdicts writing . . . the seat of the malady is the pen' (Cline, p.657). The pain of facial neuralgia which Dickens experienced at times of stress was also associated with the 'tension of writing' (Kaplan, 1988, p.424) and twentieth-century studies suggest that the source of illness suffered by Carlyle and Darwin was probably physiological. Meredith's symptoms seemed to improve with rest, whereas Dickens refused to take advice, since restriction of intellectual creativity could result in dis-ease and depression, as recognised by the medical profession at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Frustration at the conflict between physical health and mental wellbeing is expressed to Meredith's son in a letter saying that: 'My digestion is entirely deranged, and still I have to write - and for a public that does not care for my work'. Referring to his 'weak' stomach Meredith tells Arthur that it is 'a form of weakness that incessant literary composition does not agree with' (Cline, p.627). To his son's headmaster, Meredith writes that he has been 'very ill, the nerves prostrate. I think I am recovering, at the cost of abstention from work' (Cline, p.662). The medical view of the effects of mental strain was affirmed a decade later by Mitchell who states that 'cramming' for examinations results in 'feverish activity of the mind, languor and depression of the body . . . impaired digestion' (1892, p.76). The 'benefit' of physical exercise and self-treatment mentioned in Hardman's letter is described in terms of his ability to continue writing in Meredith's letter: 'In consequence of the sweating and action of Compress, the stomach, where Emilia resides, is becoming an agreeable tenement, and I'm glad to say her features are improving' (Cline, p.173).

The growing interest in physiological systems (neural, respiratory and digestive) contributing to the 'whole' man is reflected in publications which focus on the interaction between the digestive system and brain. The degree of public interest is evident in the popularity of books which emphasised the importance of a healthy stomach. Edward Jukes asserted that science was overcoming prejudice, confirming the advantages of 'lavements' in preventing and curing disease of the digestive organs, in his book *On Indigestion and Costiveness*, in which he promoted the use of the stomach-pump, his own invention ('Introduction', 1831, pp. 1-5). Jukes was gratified by the 'almost unprecedented rapidity' of

sales of his book which was published in a fifth edition in 1836 (Preface to second edition, p.vii). *Memoirs of a Stomach* published in 1853 was written with humour in autobiographical form as the personified stomach describes the effect of poor diet on health. The short book by barrister and author Sydney Whiting was popular and was re-published for three decades. The link between stomach and brain was made by Andrew Combe, a Scottish physician and phrenologist, who concluded that since the sensation of hunger and thirst was experienced in the brain, 'appetite' was comparable to the senses of 'seeing, hearing, feeling' (*The Physiology of Digestion*, 1836, p.13). Combe expressed the concept of health and wholeness in order for growth in *The Principles of Physiology Applied to the Preservation of Health, and to the Improvement of Physical and Mental Education* in 1852. Interest in physiology increased during the second half of the nineteenth century as knowledge accumulated. Meredith recommended the writings of G H Lewes and Alexander Bain for the study of 'Mental Philosophy' emphasising that his correspondent should 'read them' (Cline, p.578). Bain published *Mind and Body: The theory of their relation* in 1873 and founded 'Mind' the first journal devoted to psychology in 1876.

The significance of digestion was highlighted in popular publications aimed at general readers. The writer of an article titled 'Your Digestion' asserts that 'ugly, awkward dispositions . . . spring from indigestion' and as in *Memoirs of a Stomach* the digestion is personified to warn against eating and drinking too much. The writer continues by saying that 'digestion affects temper . . . and temper affects digestion' (*Cassell's Family Magazine*, 1875). A later article attributed to 'A Family Doctor' advises on 'Indigestion – its causes and cure' stating that 'indigestion or dyspepsia is the commonest of all diseases, "the prevailing malady of civilised life"' and recommends diet, exercise and medicines 'from the pharmacopœia' (*Cassell's Family Magazine*, 1879). In her *Book of Hygiene*, Kate Mitchell stated that during 'the years of childhood and adolescence, there are two organs of paramount importance in the system, the lungs and the stomach. Upon their proper health and working, the rest of the organs, structures, and tissues of the body are dependent' (1892, p.93).

Meredith uses his own experience of ill health to share knowledge of treatments in letters to friends, and to convey awareness of physical symptoms on mental wellbeing in fiction. The character of Hippias Feverel had the 'ill luck to have strong appetites and a weak stomach' and is characterised as 'the Dyspepsy' in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (pp.5,180). When his symptoms ease, Hippias experiences 'ineffable relief to find himself looking out upon the world of mortals instead of into the black phantasmal abysses of his own complicated frightful structure' (p.180). Meredith communicates understanding of the

unhealthy introspection caused by physical disease, and makes the link between brain and internal organs. Hippias attempts 'to convey a glimpse of what hellish sufferings his had been' explaining to others: "My mind doesn't so much seem to haunt itself, now . . . I feel as if I had come above ground" (p.180). Medical opinion emphasised the importance of diet and exercise for a healthy stomach, and Meredith's narrator acknowledges that 'strong appetites' contribute to Hippias' suffering. The implication is that he is at fault for failing to take responsibility for his health, although a 'weak' stomach, as in Meredith's experience, could be the result of a physiological problem, having no medical cure or treatment at that time.

Different characters represent contrasting attitudes towards disease, implying personal blame for ill health or expressing sympathy for sufferers. 'People said' that Sir Austin 'only retained his boozing dyspeptic brother Hippias at Raynham in order to exhibit to his son the woeful retribution nature wreaked upon a life of indulgence' although the narrator refers to 'poor Hippias' stating that this 'was unjust' (p.74). Referring to the 'poor Dyspepsy' the narrator repeats that 'he is the one who never gets sympathy, or experiences compassion' (p.180). Picard notes that 'consumption' (also known as tuberculosis) 'had overtones of . . . a sinful way of life' (2006, p.233) and the view of suffering as a consequence of behaviour, to be accepted stoically, is expressed by the character of Adrian Harley, perceived ironically as 'the wise youth', who states that "when our Nemesis takes lodging in the stomach, it's best to act the Spartan, smile hard, and be silent" (p.181). His nephew Richard 'alone was decently kind to Hippias' sharing physical exercise and mental stimulation with him, but Hippias soon experiences a recurrence of symptoms and 'went underground again' (p.181). Referring to "the doctors!" . . . with vehement scepticism' Hippias asserts that "No man of sense believes in medicine for chronic disorder . . . They advertise a great many cures for indigestion . . . I see no reason why there should be no cure for such a disease" (p.181). The sense of Meredith's pragmatic acceptance is combined with an optimistic interest in medical research as Hippias ponders the possibilities 'if we could by any means appropriate to our use some of the extraordinary digestive power that a boa constrictor has in his gastric juices' (p.182).

The nineteenth-century perception of health is questioned by Meredith in his fiction, in relation to gender stereotypes. The concept of Muscular Christianity, a term associated with Kingsley's writings, emphasised physical strength to denote masculinity, and social opinion valued the importance of health, wealth and status. Men in a position of power assumed authority over others, and women as the weaker sex were expected to conform to the

role of Coventry Patmore's 'Angel in the House'. The movement towards greater freedom and independence is recorded in *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England* by Perkin, who refers to the significant achievement of legal rights, while noting the difficulty in changing society's perception of women's status and roles. Perkin states that 'the emancipation of women, in marriage as in life in general, is more than a question of law or theory. It can only stem from the attitudes and behaviour of men and women themselves' (1989, p.8). Changes occurred only gradually. The expression of long-held views of women as inferior to men persisted in publications, suggesting that any change to the model of femininity could affect a woman's health, and was a potential threat to the structure of society. Meredith challenges gender stereotypes as being unhealthy for oneself and for others. Analysis of passages from *The Egoist* (1879) and *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* (1894) demonstrates how Meredith depicts the model of the hero as egoistic and unhealthy, introspective and inactive. The egoist's development is shown to be limited by his restricted outlook, and lack of engagement with others or the natural world. Using enclosed indoor space as a metaphor to emphasize restriction of place and attitude, Meredith shows that the effect of egotistical behaviour imposed on women causes dis-ease and depression. He expresses criticism of those who condone or perpetuate outdated attitudes.

As Eliot expresses in *Middlemarch* the need to emerge from the 'moral stupidity' into which we are all born (1872, p.198) so Meredith stresses repeatedly the need for individuals to progress beyond egoism, to move from a primitive to a civilised state, and towards a better civilization. He is critical of the selfishness of egoism noted by Wilt as 'unhealthy' (1975, p.8) for restricting the development of the individual and others. Meredith warns of the danger of egoism in his poem 'The Woods of Westermain' described by Bartlett as 'an allegory in which Self, an inflated belief in the importance of one's personality, is the Dragon in the woods of life' (*The Poems of George Meredith*, Vol I, introduction, p. xxxiv). In his fictional characters Meredith shows the cold indifference of egoists whose restricted outlook limits their interaction with others, in contrast to the warm vitality of characters with body, mind and spirit moving toward harmony, and in close relationship with the natural world. Readers are challenged to consider the effects and consequences of egoism and the persistence of outdated attitudes, as depicted in Meredith's representations of stereotypical heroes.

The character of Mr Tinman in Meredith's short story 'The House on the Beach' published in 1877 can be seen as a forerunner of the title characters of *The Egoist* (1879) and *Lord Ormont and His Aminta* (1894). Meredith shows in the characterisation of Mr Tinman

how single-minded obsession with reaching a personal goal can lead to condescension and disregard for others. Tinman is described as ‘bursting merely to do like the rest of his countrymen, and rise above them to shake them class by class as the dust from his heels’ and aspiring to be addressed as esquire, because ‘once an esquire, you are off the ground in England and on the ladder’ (‘The House on the Beach’ in *The Tale of Chloe and other Stories*, pp.70,71). Tinman’s pretentiousness, symbolised by a suit which was acquired for an imaginary meeting with the Queen, is recognised when he is seen preening himself in his ‘Court suit’ in front of a hired cheval-glass, practising his bow as preparation to fulfil his fantasy. A bribe fails to conceal his secret ambition, and gossip results in ridicule not respect for Tinman. The revelation of his vindictive behaviour towards others in his effort to climb the social scale is revealed, and he is left at the end of the story with nothing but the suit representing his fantasy. The pathos of character indicates Meredith’s critique of pretentiousness, not the man himself, and readers are moved to confront themselves in their own mirrors.

Showing that introspective egoism restricts the development of the individual, Meredith demonstrates that egoistic attitudes have an unhealthy effect on others, and that the limitation of women’s mental and physical activity contributes to a feeling of depression. The view Meredith conveyed in fiction is in contrast to the opinions expressed by medical men who continued to perceive women as the ‘weaker sex’, stating that any diversion from the role as wife and mother was likely to cause emotional disturbance, and recommending enforced rest as treatment for nervous exhaustion. Psychiatrist Henry Maudsley who was influential in the second half of the nineteenth century continued to subscribe to the belief of the hereditary nature of mental illness and considered ‘hysterics’ as ‘morally degenerate’ (Appignanesi, 2008, p.111). During the 1870s the medical profession was warning against excessive mental activity for women, prescribing a ‘rest cure’ for treatment of mental distress. Dr Charles Taylor who treated Alice, the sister of Henry James, wrote in 1879 ‘give me the little woman who has not been “educated” too much’ (Appignanesi, 2008, p.132).

John Stuart Mill asserted in *The Subjection of Women* that female ‘hysterics’ could be attributed to the ‘mere overflow of energy run to waste’ (1869, p.198). Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, who combined a successful career in medicine with family life, responded to her male colleagues by stating that the ‘break-down of nervous and physical health seems . . . to be distinctly traceable to want of adequate mental interest and education in the years immediately succeeding school life. Thousands of young women . . . become gradually languid and feeble under the depressing influence of dulness [sic]’ (1874, quoted in

Appignanesi, 2008, p.126). Meredith conveys empathy in fiction for women whose languid state of mind represents a physical symptom of mental distress, caused by an unnaturally restricted life. According to his philosophy the imbalance of blood and brain which causes 'dis-ease', a lack of ease or harmony within the body, results in depression perceived as 'hysteria'. Meredith's representations of stereotypical heroes in *The Egoist* (1879) and *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* (1894) demonstrate the unhealthy effects of egoism restricting movement and growth, and challenge the assumption that a woman should conform to society's expectation of gender ideals.

The title character of *The Egoist* is Sir Willoughby Patterne, perceived by his family and society as a successful man, whose outdated attitudes reveal his failure to move from a 'primitive' state. At the beginning of the novel Sir Willoughby is seeking a wife with health and beauty to reflect his own position and enhance Patterne Hall. Having been jilted by Constantia Durham he has selected Clara Middleton in preference to the delicate Laetitia Dale. The novel focuses on eighteen-year-old Clara, who is inexperienced and vulnerable to his 'whirlwind wooing of her' and to pressure from her widowed father, the scholarly Dr Middleton (p.44). The reader follows Clara's reported thought processes during the novel's short time span of a few weeks, learning with Clara of the restricted life expected of Sir Willoughby's future wife. Meredith depicts her growing awareness and struggle to extricate herself from her engagement, and Clara's mental growth which enables physical action. The character of Vernon Whitford in *The Egoist* is described as 'a new kind of thing' and is Meredith's alternative model to the stereotypical hero. A widowed scholar living on a meagre income, Vernon is employed as estate manager by his cousin Sir Willoughby who treats him with derision, but Vernon is portrayed as a perceptive caring man who shows respect for Clara. As a physically active man at home in the natural world, Vernon is well matched to Clara, and *The Egoist* concludes in an apparently conventional ending, with their plans for marriage and travel.

Sir Willoughby Patterne 'the egoist' is perceived by his household and immediate social circle as a man with health, wealth and status, which entitles him to assume superiority and exert authority over others, especially women. The reader becomes aware with Clara that his attitudes are inherited and outdated, and the narrator's assessment is that he 'has become the civilised Egoist; primitive still' (p.477). Sir Willoughby 'ruled arrogantly in the world of women' (p.20) and the effect of his control over the household, which includes his mother and two aunts, is quickly noticed by Clara. The house 'seemed to wear, as it were, a cap of iron. Sir Willoughby not merely ruled, he throned' (p.93). A visit from his relative

Lieutenant Patterne is rejected on the grounds of unsuitable appearance ‘decidedly not bearing the stamp of the gentleman . . . and his acute instinct advised [Sir Willoughby] swiftly of the absurdity of introducing to his friends a heavy unpresentable senior . . . as a member of his family!’ (p.9). The reader learns that because Sir Willoughby ‘declined to house the son of such a father’ twelve-year-old Crossjay lives with Laetitia Dale (p.33). Vernon pays for Crossjay’s upkeep and takes responsibility for his education with Laetitia. Sir Willoughby repeatedly refers dismissively to his cousin as ‘old Vernon’ stating that if Vernon leaves to pursue a writing career in London ‘he offends me . . . if he offends me, he is extinct . . . as if he had never been’ (p.105).

The ‘three mighty qualifications for a Patterne bride’ are perceived by society as money, health and beauty (p.17) and the narrator’s report of Sir Willoughby’s ‘deliberations’ uses food metaphors to convey his perception of a wife as a commodity. Although he had ‘never seen so beautiful a girl as Constantia Durham . . . She had been nibbled at, all but eaten up’ and Sir Willoughby wished for a wife to ‘come to him out of an egg-shell’ (pp.20, 21). Clara Middleton is ‘the true ideal, fresh-gathered morning fruit in a basket’ (p.45) and is considered ‘fitted to be his wife . . . his companion picture’ her features ‘were treated as the mirror of himself’ (pp.48,52). In a reflective aside the narrator comments on outdated expectations and assumptions stating that Sir Willoughby, like ‘thousands of civilised males’ required ‘to be dealt with by his betrothed as an original savage’ (p.130). The narrator states that ‘strange and awful though it be to hear, women perceive this requirement of them’ and accept that to keep her partner ‘in awe and hold him enchained, there are things she must never do, dare never say, must not think’ (p.131). Sir Willoughby’s assumption is that ‘my wife will be in natural harmony with me’ having no opinion or identity of her own (p.119).

Having made his choice of a girl to reflect and complement his own image, Sir Willoughby assumes complete control over his prospective wife as a prized object. ‘He had won Miss Middleton’s hand; he believed he had captured her heart; but he was not so certain of his possession of her soul, and he went after it’ (p.51). In his desire to ‘shape her character to the feminine of his own’ Sir Willoughby wants Clara ‘simply to be material in his hands for him to mould her’ (p.52). The obsessive desire for control is emphasised by his repeated assertion that Clara is to be ‘mine beyond death . . . you are mine, my Clara - utterly mine’ (pp.57,67) and Meredith hints at the potential consequence of mental and physical cruelty. In response to Clara’s attempts to break her engagement, the narrator reports Sir Willoughby’s thought that the ‘capricious creature probably wanted a whipping to bring her to the understanding of the principle called mastery, which is in man’ (p.268). His means of

‘administering’ that mastery could be to apply ‘any kind of scourge’ by patronising, ridiculing or making Clara jealous, concluding that first ‘she would have to be humbled’ (p.269).

The effect of Sir Willoughby’s controlling attitude on his maiden aunts is noted by Clara who wonders ‘whether inclination or Sir Willoughby had disciplined their individuality out of them and made them his shadows, his echoes’ (p.88). The narrator informs the reader that ‘as yet she had not experienced the power in him which could threaten and wrestle to subject the members of his household to the state of satellites’ (p.88). Meredith emphasises the submissiveness of Sir Willoughby’s aunts in the sisters’ pattern of dialogue as they speak alternately, finishing each other’s sentences, ‘two echoes of one another in worship of a family idol’ (p.291) and the narrator observes that young women are ‘trained to cowardice . . . trained to please man’s taste’ with the result that they regard themselves as they are perceived (p.296).

Sir Willoughby’s intentional attempt at mastery by patronising Clara is evident in his attitude. He ‘condescended’ to her, being ‘convinced that he must do and say more to reach down to her female intelligence’ (pp.75,78) and speaks ‘soothingly’ as he anticipates that ‘Whenever the little brain is in doubt, perplexed, undecided which course to adopt, she will come to me, will she not?’ (p.126). His assumption of her inferiority is perceived by Clara as degrading, as he leads her around the flower-beds ‘too much as if he were giving a convalescent an airing’ (p.70) and the narrator’s comments support her view. When Sir Willoughby ‘poured a little runlet of half-laughter over her head, of the sound assumed by genial compassion’ the narrator identifies with Clara’s emotion, stating that it is ‘irritating to hear that when we imagine we have spoken to the point’ (p.75). Ignoring her views, Sir Willoughby ‘laughed triumphantly, and silenced her by manly smothering’ (p.118).

Clara’s observation to Sir Willoughby that ‘we do not often agree’ is dismissed with his response ‘When you are a little older!’ which is described by the narrator as an ‘irritating answer’ (p.118). His failure to respond to Clara’s pleas for release demonstrates Sir Willoughby’s continuing lack of understanding. Displeased by the judgement of ‘his admirer, Mrs Mountstuart Jenkinson’ of Clara as a ‘dainty rogue in porcelain’ Sir Willoughby declares that “‘Rogue and mistress of Patterne do not go together”” (pp.45, 49). The metaphor of ‘porcelain’ is pleasing to him, implying static beauty and an ability to be ‘moulded’ but ‘rogue’ implies an imperfection. He remains ‘unilluminated’ by their discussion of her meaning, stating: ‘I am persuaded I shall never comprehend it!’(p.50). Although he ‘by no means disapproved of a physical liveliness that promised him health in

his mate' (pp.104, 105) Clara's 'roguish' vitality conflicts with his stated intention to 'control and direct [her] volatility' (pp.127). Sir Willoughby has no understanding of Clara as a person, her features reflect only himself 'instead of serving for an introduction to the within' (p.52). Clara becomes aware of the 'deep cleft' between them because 'he did not know her' and realises that his pride 'would debar him from understanding her desire to be released' (pp.72,116). Puzzled by Clara's distress, Sir Willoughby concludes during a sleepless night that 'There was no reading either of her or the mystery' (p.171).

The egoistic focus on self which prevents understanding of others is recognised in Clara's realisation that Sir Willoughby's good qualities 'were drenched in his first person singular' (p.115). Although he is a physically healthy man, Sir Willoughby's mental attitude is shown to be unhealthy as he repeatedly fails to respond to Clara's words and gestures. Aged only thirty-two, his ability to learn and develop is restricted by inflexibility and egoism, and Clara observes that 'his emphasis on I and me, lent him the seeming of an old man spotted with decaying youth' (p.115). Conceiving the idea of marriage, 'not to a man of heart, but to an obelisk lettered all over with hieroglyphics', Clara becomes aware that her fiancé is an 'immoveable stone-man' who would not release her from her betrothal because the 'petrification of egoism would . . . refuse the petition' (p.116). The narrator informs that Sir Willoughby is 'a man who lived backwards almost as intensely as in the present' (p.38) and in his own words Willoughby tells Laetitia: 'I dread changes' (p.164). Sir Willoughby's introspective character is emphasised by the limited environment of his laboratory, house and enclosed gardens, demonstrating Meredith's use of indoor spaces to represent physical restriction and stagnation.

The effect on Clara is evident in the vocabulary used in the reflections of Sir Willoughby's friend, Colonel de Craye, who indicates that despite her attempts to rebel Clara is succumbing to the 'petrification' which she has identified in her fiancé. De Craye notes that he 'freeze[s] her lovely girlishness' and that 'so sprightly a girl would soon be deadened by a man like Willoughby' (pp.258, 260). The narrator has shared with the reader that Clara is 'in the luxury of passivity' experiencing 'the brood of fatalism' and is 'suffused . . . with languor' (pp.238, 241). A sign that she is already 'deadened' is observed by de Craye when Clara fails to respond to 'a compliment on her approaching marriage. An allusion to it killed her smiling' (p.260). Following her unsuccessful attempt to escape Patterne Hall and her reluctant decision to return, Clara's 'sensation of languor swept over her' (p.334).

The unhealthy effect of restrictive control is emphasised by Meredith's imagery in Clara's visualisation of 'the scene ensuing upon her petition for release, and the being

dragged round the walls of his egoism, and having her head knocked against the corners, alarmed her with sensations of sickness' (p.116). Clara's physical symptoms indicate her mental distress, and she visualises the unhealthy prospect of a 'placable life' with Sir Willoughby as 'a horror of swampy flatness!' seeing in her imagination a 'dead heaven over an unvarying level earth' (p.132). A lecture by her father Dr Middleton is delivered in private and not reported to the reader but when Sir Willoughby enters 'Clara was weeping' and her father's 'mane of silvery hair was in a state bearing witness to the vehemence of the sermon' (p.497). Following her father's lecture: 'Her head whirled. She had been severely flagellated and weakened' and her ability to reason is limited by the collusion between her father and her fiancé. The 'pair in presence paralyzed her . . . heart and mind became divided' and she feels herself 'drowning' with respect for her father (pp.506, 507). Dismissive of Clara's mental state of mind as a passing mood of 'hysteria', her father assumes later: 'The vapours, we may trust have dispersed?' (p.530).

Meredith highlights collusion between Sir Willoughby and Clara's father Dr Middleton to show the perpetuation of inherited attitudes. Her father omits to consult Clara before accepting the invitation to stay at Patterne Hall, his lack of his awareness evident in the afterthought that 'it appeared, when he did speak to her, that it should have been done' (p.62). Clara senses that her 'petition for release' from Sir Willoughby would result in 'the miserable bewilderment of her father' and that neither man would be willing to consider her point of view (p.116). Unsure whether her father would be 'an ally or a judge' Clara is aware that 'he would not try to understand her case' (p.171). Dr Middleton, like Sir Willoughby, listens to Clara without understanding, talking 'magisterially to smother and overbear the something disagreeable prefigured in her appearance' (p.214). He is described by the narrator as 'a keen reader of facts and no reader of persons' (p.225). Both men assume that the authority and responsibility for Clara will pass from father to fiancé as she is handed over like a possession. Dr Middleton's reported thoughts anticipate a husband as 'her proper custodian, justly relieving a father' and he tells Clara that 'your subjection is my enfranchisement' (p.225). Meredith conveys the sense of a bond between men sharing inherited views in chapter XX in which her father and her fiancé discuss Clara's future over 'An Aged and a Great Wine'.

The egoistical Sir Willoughby is one of Meredith's male characters created as a 'type' to challenge the stereotypical fictional hero. Having little regard for others or for nature, Sir Willoughby is unable to form relationships and is perceived as isolated. Emphasising the thin line between 'civilised' and 'primitive' behaviour, Meredith makes readers aware of their

own vulnerability. Wilt refers to the narrative strategy in which ‘the author and reader meet the same sort of temptation as the characters . . . to self-worship’ (1975, p.9). Feeling a certain empathy for the egoist and less likely to dismiss him with contempt, readers face the discomfort of reflecting on their own behaviour. Ridicule of Sir Willoughby’s behaviour is countered by the pathos of his humiliating isolation, and the reader experiences a conflicting response as for Meredith’s character of Mr Tinman, and Shakespeare’s Malvolio.

Emphasising the restricted outlook of the hero in his later novel *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, published in 1894, Meredith highlights the abuse of authority by men in a position of power, an issue which would be identified and highlighted in a social movement and awareness campaign during the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

The characters of Matthew Weyburn and Aminta Farrell are introduced in the first paragraph of Meredith’s novel *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* as schoolchildren passing on enforced Sunday walks. Their developing friendship which includes a shared respect for the military hero Lord Ormont is ended abruptly when Aminta is withdrawn from school. The character of Lord Ormont is revealed to the reader as another of Meredith’s stereotypical heroes, with the information that public opinion is divided concerning the man’s attitude in interacting with other people. Although respected for his courage, Lord Ormont is criticised for his arrogant assumption, endorsed by his admirers, that his reputation as a hero entitles him to treat others - particularly women - as inferiors. Matthew and Aminta meet by chance some years later when Matthew, employed as a secretary to Lord Ormont, discovers that Aminta is now Lady Ormont and has changed significantly from a lively schoolgirl to a submissive wife lacking identity. The renewal of her friendship with Matthew is depicted alongside Aminta’s growing awareness that the restriction of her marriage is equivalent to slavery and that Lord Ormont’s domination has destroyed her self-esteem. The realisation enables Aminta to become assertive and take action. Having left her loveless marriage she joins Matthew to establish a successful school in Switzerland, although Aminta does not achieve the equal relationship teaching alongside Matthew which she anticipated, her role being restricted to ‘school-house-keeper’.

Lord Ormont, perceived nationally as heroic for his achievements as a cavalry leader, receives unquestioning respect according to status, irrespective of his personal morality. As a role model for schoolboys Lord Ormont is described as Matthew Weyburn’s ‘object of worship . . . And, somehow, the sacrifice of an enormous number of women to Lord Ormont’s glory seemed natural’. He is ‘a first-rate military hero and commander . . . they are only women’ (p.13). Like Sir Willoughby Patterne in *The Egoist*, Lord Ormont is portrayed

as a stereotypical hero and equally admired by women, whose views are represented by the schoolgirl Aminta and Lord Ormont's sister, Lady Charlotte. His sister expresses tolerance of Lord Ormont's 'funny pride . . . at the never having been caught by one among the many he made captive' and his boast to her that 'no woman had been created fit for him' (p.34). Interviewing Matthew for the position of secretary to Lord Ormont, she defends her brother by emphasising his lack of hypocrisy, asserting that he is accused of immorality 'because he makes no pretence to be better than the men of his class' (p.53). Thinking of her brother as a 'naturally enamoured old warrior' (p.213), Lady Charlotte claims susceptibility to female beauty as an excuse for men's immoral behaviour. Meredith highlights the persistence of this attitude repeatedly in his novels, emphasising that it is outdated.

The narrator reveals that public opinion is divided, that there has been criticism of 'a too prompt military hand' (p.23). Lord Ormont is acknowledged as a courageous leader and his 'high-handed treatment' of people is 'justified' by some (p.25). A lack of respect in dealing with others is dismissed by his apologists, and his 'temper' is accepted as 'an element of a character proved heroic' (p.27). Meredith shows the detrimental effect of his military style of interaction in close relationships. The oppressiveness of marriage anticipated by Clara in *The Egoist* is experienced in reality by Aminta, when Lord Ormont demands deference and obedience in private as well as in public. His wife is denied the use of the title of 'Lady Ormont' and refused access to his estate at Steignton, and the reference to his being a 'practised reader of women' expressed in Lady Charlotte's thoughts is ironic to readers who are made aware of his character (p.40). The narrator confirms later that 'Like many of his class and kind, he was thoroughly acquainted with the physical woman' (p.299) but shows that like Sir Willoughby, Lord Ormont is unable to empathise with women's feelings.

Self-awareness is expressed by Lord Ormont only towards the end of the novel, as he acknowledges his failures to understand his wife. He has not recognised the significance of his refusal to allow access to his family home as a denial of Aminta's identity, and why she remains dissatisfied despite having 'every luxury' (p.248). Unable to comprehend Aminta's refusal of a visit to Paris instead of Steignton, Lord Ormont has made no attempt at understanding, despite noting her distress, 'as he was offering agreeable things he chose to not understand how he was to be compassionate' (p.143). With increasing awareness Aminta realises how 'his inherited ideas of [women] so quaintly minimized and reduced to pretty insect or tricky reptile' (p.226). The assumption that a husband replaces a father in exerting authority over a woman, noted in analysis of *The Egoist*, persists as Lord Ormont attempts to be 'benevolently marital, to the extent of paternal' (p.321). Lord Ormont eventually realises

that his conduct towards Aminta was influenced by anger and resentment at the 'shameful ingratitude of his countryman to the soldier who did it eminent service' (p.355) and admits to his sister that the 'lady who is my wife has had to suffer for what you call my country's treatment of me . . . I give her the rest of my time' (p.388). His sense of repentance comes too late following Aminta's bid for independence, and receiving his wife's letter ending their marriage, he is seen by Lady Charlotte as a 'bleeding giant' (p.392).

Perceived from a distance by the schoolboy Matthew, Lord Ormont is introduced in the first chapter of the novel as a hero to be respected, but Matthew's admiration for the military man is affected by his perception of Lord Ormont's behaviour in a domestic setting and he experiences a 'detachment from his old hero' (p.137). Lord Ormont's character as a husband is revealed to the reader as observed by the adult Matthew when employed as his secretary. In reported thoughts he observes that Lord Ormont married Aminta 'apparently not more than partly pledging himself to the bond' (p.118), and Matthew concludes that Lord Ormont 'was a splendid military hero . . . but had no understanding of how to treat a woman, or belief in her having equal life with him on earth' (p.137). When Lord Ormont burns thirty-seven pages of manuscript memoirs on which he and Matthew have been working, Matthew deems it an 'abhorrent' waste of time and work and makes comparison to Aminta as 'a priceless manuscript cast to the flames' (pp.136,138). It seems to Matthew that Lord Ormont's 'old-world eye upon women' has resulted in injustice and harshness to his wife (p.314). He is perceived by Matthew as Aminta's 'possessor' (p.192) and later as 'a possessor who forfeited her by undervaluing her', partly justifying Matthew's own relationship with Aminta, as he expresses the view that 'in a better-ordered world: she belonged to the man who could help her to grow and to do her work' (p.335).

Aminta's aunt considers Lord Ormont to be 'an extinguisher . . . an unreadable sphinx' (p.102) and the effect of his attitude on his wife is depicted in chapter VI 'In a Mood of Languor'. In conversation with her aunt, Aminta aged twenty-five speaks 'in languor' and her mood is emphasised as she yawns and expresses tiredness. Stating that 'I am supposed to have everything a woman can require' (p.96), Aminta recognises that Lord Ormont's expectation of obedience has caused her to become submissive, restricting her ability to feel as well as to move. The narrator acknowledges that low self-esteem and denial of identity can result in an unhealthy state of mind, reflecting on Aminta's 'languor past delivery in sighs . . . She could have heard without a regret that the heart was to cease beating'. Her mood is neither of 'downright misery' nor is she one of 'the unhappy' but her state of mind is expressed abruptly: 'She felt nothing' (p.102). Aminta's 'languor' is repeated, the narrator

states that the ‘blow to her pride of station and womanhood struck on numbed sensations’ and concludes with empathy that ‘having smothered a good part of herself’ Aminta is ‘accountably languid’ (pp.102, 104). The reader is told that the condition of languor alternates ‘with fire in Aminta’ (p.104), hinting at the potential for her to make an active response to her depressed state. Meredith conveys Aminta’s understanding that her husband’s ‘treatment had detached her from any belief in love on his part’ (p.106) that she had been ‘paralyzed by her masterful lord’ (p.206). The effect of repression in marriage, anticipated by Clara, is evident in Aminta’s languid state, but not recognised by Lord Ormont who notes approvingly that ‘Hysterics were not in her family’ (p.290). Aminta finally recognises for herself the effect of ‘his massive selfishness and icy inaccessibility to emotion’ (p.344).

The outdated and unchanging view of Lord Ormont is evident in his thinking, in which he justifies to himself his treatment of Aminta, that women ‘cannot comprehend magnanimity . . . no woman is ever satisfied’ (pp.247, 249). In his view Aminta ‘was pitifully woman-like in her increase of dissatisfaction . . . women are happier enslaved’ and Lord Ormont ‘meant to vanquish her with . . . dominating patience’ (p. 323). Comments by the narrator imply criticism of Lord Ormont’s outdated attitudes, with repetition of contemptuous references to ‘my lord’s’ behaviour, noting his concern to demonstrate ‘proof that his . . . prolonged study of [women’s] tricks, manoeuvrings and out-wittings of them, had not emasculated him’ (p.324). Envisaging a more useful life for herself Aminta thinks that ‘Husbands exist who refuse the right of breathing to their puppet wives’ (p.345) and imagining a different future with Matthew, Aminta learns that ‘his was the larger view. Her lord’s view appeared similar to that of her aunt’s “throned Ottoman Turk on his divan”’ and whereas Matthew ‘believed in the bettering of the world; Lord Ormont had no belief like it’ (p.232). Referring to his ‘infamous repute for morals’ the narrator notes that ‘in those days the aristocrat still claimed licence’, an ironic comment repeated in Meredith’s novels to demonstrate the persistence of outdated attitudes and assumptions (p.28).

Some empathy for men facing the difficulty of moving on from long-established inherited attitudes is evident in *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* in the understanding conveyed between Matthew and the (male) narrator. The statement that Matthew ‘struck down upon his man’s nature - the bad in us, when beauty of woman is viewed’ indicates the need to change attitudes inherited from ‘our imperishable ancient father’ (pp.73, 74).

Acknowledging to himself that his use of sarcasm towards women masks ignorance Lord

Ormont nevertheless thinks it a 'virtue' because it 'allied him with all previous generations on the male side' (p.172).

Meredith is critical of those who perceive the stereotypical hero as being worthy of unquestioning esteem, simply because of status, and who thereby condone or perpetuate outdated attitudes. In *The Egoist* the narrator compares Laetitia's submissiveness in the presence of Sir Willoughby to 'the ecstasy of the devotee of Juggernaut', observing that 'we need not marvel that a conservative sex should assist to keep them in their lofty places. What were there otherwise to look up to?' The adulation of Sir Willoughby is questioned as the narrator continues by stating that 'it is worth while for here and there a woman to be burnt, so long as a woman's general adoration of an ideal young man shall be preserved' (p.22). In *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* Meredith depicts the mental cruelty of attitudes which are socially sanctioned by a patriarchal society. The narrator is critical of the 'gossip world' reporting that 'the strenuous few who knew and liked' Aminta while some patronised and 'Against her was . . . the terrible aggregate social woman, of man's creation . . . conceived in the fear of men, shaped to gratify them' (pp.210, 211). Lady Charlotte's supporters are encouraged 'to discharge celestial bolts and sulphur on the head of an impudent, underbred, ambitious young slut, whose arts had bewitched a distinguished nobleman' (p.212). The exaggerated language and inaccurate perception of Aminta denote the attempt by the 'social woman' to protect Lord Ormont's reputation and preserve his status, perpetuating the image of the hero. The paragraph begins 'In those days' implying that this behaviour is outdated and the 'social women' are summarised as 'Professional Puritans, born conservatives, malicious tattlers' (p.212). The habit of social gossiping is highlighted as outdated and harmful by Meredith in *Diana of the Crossways*.

The characters Sir Willoughby Patterne and Lord Ormont value the physical health of a wife while remaining unaware of her mental wellbeing. In accordance with the opinion of local society that a wife to complement Sir Willoughby must have money, health and beauty, the 'three mighty qualifications for a Patterne bride' (p.17), Sir Willoughby judges that since Clara is 'young, healthy, handsome; she was therefore fitted to be his wife, the mother of his children' (p.48). The 'health' of a prospective wife is assessed by her physical beauty and an ability to provide an heir. Asking if she has been 'well . . . not a hint of illness?' Sir Willoughby insists that his bride 'must have her health' (pp.70, 71). His refusal to listen, and use of language which belittles Clara, indicate a lack of respect for her intellect and the restriction of her development as an individual. Aminta is viewed as a possession by Lord Ormont, who admires her prowess as a strong swimmer and is 'proud of her bearing on

horseback. She rode well and looked well' (p.162). Her physical health is important to him, having married his 'very handsome young wife . . . adding to his physical glory' (p.247) but he ignores her state of mind.

The metaphor of place is used by Meredith to represent the restricted development of self and others in *The Egoist* and in *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, showing that a house can be perceived as a status symbol representing security and identity or a place of confinement. Sir Willoughby tells Clara that 'they 'cannot enjoy the sense of security for their love unless they fence away the world' (p.53) believing that 'Two that love must have their substance in isolation' (p.75). Clara questions his expectation that as his wife she will be awaiting him as he returns from the hunt, 'I am to be always at home?' (p.72) and as she grows in awareness Patterne Hall is as oppressive as a prison in her mind: 'she was caged . . . a person entrapped . . . she had committed herself to a life-long imprisonment' (pp.110,111). Sir Willoughby imagines Patterne Hall as 'a fortress, impregnable to tongues. He would have divine security' (p.464). His 'policy' is that 'every thread should be used to attach her to her residence at the Hall until he could . . . overwhelm her' (p.272). His plan to apply emotional pressure by persuading Clara's father to buy a house nearby is imagined in terms of physical restriction: 'the neighbourhood would be a chain upon Clara' (p.273). In *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* the house at Steignton represents Lord Ormont's family and his identity, and by denying access to Aminta he denies her status and identity as his wife. Steignton is symbolic as Aminta becomes self-aware, asking 'Am I never to see Steignton?' (p.144) and resolving that 'she must look on Steignton' (p.223). Her arrival at the house is considered by her husband as trespass on his territory and he feels 'common anger . . . at Aminta's pursuit of him right into Steignton' (p.251).

Meredith's metaphorical use of houses represents egoistic social ambition regardless of the feelings of others. In his novel *Sandra Belloni*, the personification of houses represents the inhabitants' aspiration to socialise with the upper class: 'Brookfield knew itself a student at Richford'. A visit by the Pole sisters of Brookfield to Lady Gosstre at Richford 'had the usual effect on the ladies, who were now looking to other heights from that level' (pp. 86, 116). The house named Besworth is a symbol of the sisters' 'desire to change their residence' for social reasons, and their snobbishness is confirmed in their view of Mrs Chump as their guest, whose Irish brogue would make them a 'laughing stock to the neighbourhood' (*Sandra Belloni*, p.121). In *One of Our Conquerors*, Victor's reason for purchasing Lakelands is ostensibly for fresh air and water, walks and rides, and to 'get back to primal innocence', but also for 'a certain influence one has in the country socially' (p.24).

Victor perceives Lakelands as the achievement of his dream, unaware that for Nataly the ‘big new house, among a new society’ represents a source of anxiety, that ‘once more they were to run the same round of alarms . . . with perpetual apprehensions of having to leave it’ (*One of Our Conquerors*, pp.45, 54, 53).

The opinions communicated in Meredith’s correspondence and conversation for further reflection by friends and visitors are expressed in his poetry and fiction for readers’ participation providing ‘nourishment for the brain’ by encouraging active thought and reflection. The reader’s response contributes to a shared experience with the writer which has the potential for mutual benefits. For Meredith the response of readers was important, not only for praise or commercial success, but as an acknowledgement of the writer’s effort. His response to the ‘scroll of parchment’ received for his seventieth birthday expresses that appreciation: ‘The recognition, that I have always worked honestly to my best, coming from men and women of highest distinction, touches me deeply’ (Cline, p.1290). A letter and essay on Meredith’s work by Guy Carlton gave him ‘the pleasure which flatters less than it prompts an author to think that he has written to some purpose’ (Cline, p.1325). Judith Wilt notes that Meredith was equally annoyed by being referred to as ‘the second Shakespeare’ or being banned because of perceived prurience, and that ‘nothing was more personally and aesthetically ridiculous and hateful to Meredith than . . . to be ignored’ (1975, p.53). His apparent contempt for the reading public, referred to as ‘porkers’, seems to be directed at those who were unwilling to participate by responding to his writing.

Active reading becomes a learning experience, and Meredith continued self-education throughout his life reading in original languages, using skills learned at Neuwied. Visiting Flint Cottage, John A Steuart describes the ‘workman’s library’ in Meredith’s chalet, a ‘cosmopolitan’ selection of books ‘classics of all ages and countries . . . French works . . . and more than a tincture of German philosophy’ (quoted in Hammerton, 1909, p.126). His admiration for Shakespeare and Goethe is noted in Chapter One, and his respect for the writing of Molière is evident in ‘An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit’. Meredith’s desire to reach all classes of reader is noted by Wilt and ‘not merely because he wanted to be popular but . . . he looked . . . to education to solve the most human deficiencies . . . poverty of mind and body. He intended his novels to promote that education . . . intended his novels to *be* that education, to turn men into Readers, civilised readers’ (1975, pp.53,54). The occasional intertextuality in his novels, including Carlyle in *Beauchamp’s Career*, and more frequent allusive classical references, have been interpreted as pretentious but may be considered an opportunity for readers to investigate and learn for themselves.

The desire to share his love of nature in writing, as a means of communicating with his readers, is evident in poems written in 1851 when Meredith was aged only 23. 'South-West Wind in the Woodlands' expresses dramatically his fascination with wind and storms, and the reader is invited to join the writer in his enjoyment of nature in Spring in 'Invitation to the Country'. Encouraging to 'come, for the Country awaits . . . longs to bathe thee in her delight, / And take a new joy in thy kindling sight' the poet 'longs' watches' and 'waits' 'wondering' repeating 'come . . . come . . .' (p.89) and the reader is invited to 'hear' the birds, 'cast off' the city (p.89). The sense of being watched and the feeling of hair standing on end is conveyed succinctly by the words 'Thousand eyeballs under hoods / Have you by the hair' in 'The Woods of Westermain' and the use of all senses is encouraged as the reader is urged 'Look you with the soul' (pp.193,195).

Identifying methods used by Meredith 'to intensify his relationship to the reader' Beer notes that interventions by the narrator 'heighten our awareness as readers; they are not moral directives' (1970, p.38). In *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* Sir Austin's 'System' of education is set out by the narrator who states 'How it worked we shall see' (p.8) implying that writer and reader will learn together, although the reader is aware that the outcome has been determined by the writer. In the change to the role of the novelist indicated in Chapter One, the tone of the narrator contrasts with the dominant personalities created by Eliot, Trollope and Thackeray, whose persistent address to his 'dear reader' guides readers to a particular view. Virginia Woolf asserts in 'The Novels of George Meredith' that 'Meredith pays us a supreme compliment to which we as novel readers are little accustomed. We are civilised people, he seems to say, watching the comedy of human relations together' (in *The Second Common Reader*, 1932). Readers are encouraged to think further about the opinions offered by Meredith's narrators and alternative voices, and to feel the conflicting emotions of different characters.

The voice of the narrator is used to highlight shared experience, emotion and humour as a means of affirming the relationship with the reader. The conversational tone as of friends walking and talking together suggests comparison between the narrator and the person of Meredith in real life. His sense of humour is particularly evident in correspondence with William Hardman with frequent reference to 'chaffing' and boyish hilarity, and Meredith's roar of hearty laughter was noted by many friends and visitors. James Sully describing the 'cigars and talk' sessions with The Sunday Tramps refers to the intensity of Meredith's intellectual concentration but also his 'boyish "larkishness"' (L Stevenson, 1953, p.236). His intentional sharing of humour in fiction is confirmed in Meredith's reference to the 'literary

playfulness' of his opening sentence of *One of Our Conquerors*, which was criticised for its length and unnecessary obscurity (Cline, p.1029).

Humorous comments within Meredith's narratives surprise and draw the reader's attention to a particular characteristic, just as his habit of giving nicknames to friends demonstrates humour and indicates close friendship. Hardman is named 'Friar Tuck' with Meredith himself being 'Robin', and Hardman's wife is 'Demitroia' because Hardman's five-year courtship was half the time of the Siege of Troy (noted by Ellis in *A Mid-Victorian Pepys*, 1923, p. 67). The 'Friar' becomes the 'Abbot of Norbiton' on his move to a new home at Norbiton Hall (*The Letters and Memoirs of Sir William Hardman*, 1925, p.223) and the next letter to Hardman from Meredith begins 'My dear Lord Abbot' (Cline, p.289). Following Edward Clodd's 'cunning device to make him break his silence' and speak in public, Meredith described Clodd as the 'most dastardly of deceivers' and referred to him thereafter as 'Sir Reynard' (L Stevenson, 1953, p.319). In fiction, Meredith's characters are given nicknames by others to indicate the perception of a personality 'type' recognisable to the reader and writer. In *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, The Bantam, named by his peers at an early age, is used ironically as the farmworker is described as 'elephantine'. The image depicts his physical build, denotes the function of the character with a classical reference made to the Punic elephant, and the humour of the nickname is shared between reader and narrator.

Meredith's emphasis on reading as nourishment for the mind reflects the nineteenth-century preoccupation with the stomach, and the long-established links between digestion of food and fact. Thomas Cranmer is credited with writing the words of the prayer asking that we may hear the Scriptures, 'read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them' (Collect for the second Sunday in Advent, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1549) and the link between reading and digestion was made in the seventeenth century by Francis Bacon who wrote: 'Read not . . . to believe and take for granted . . . but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested' ('Of Studies', 1625). He continued by stating that 'there is no stonnd or impediment in the wit, but may be brought out by fit studies' in the same way that diseases of the body 'may have appropriate exercises . . . gentle walking for the stomach' ('Of Studies', 1625). The writer of a magazine article in 1875 titled 'Your Digestion' makes the link between 'digestion' of food and fact, hoping that the article is not 'indigestible' to the reader 'by reason of its candour' and referring to the figurative use of 'digestion' as applied to the study of prospectuses and investment information (*Cassell's Family Magazine*, 1875). Meredith makes the connection between

physical and mental digestion, expressing a writer's regret when circumstances do not permit further revision of work, stating that 'We must take our luck and do better next time' and explains that to have 'done more for *Ev[an] Harrington* . . . I should have had to cut him to pieces, put strange herbs to him, and boil him up again' (Cline, p.71).

Meredith's depiction of Nevil's reading habits in *Beauchamp's Career* demonstrates that the intellectual digestion of a book may be a slow process of reflection and re-reading. Analysis of a passage from *Beauchamp's Career*, Meredith's 'political novel' published in 1876, shows Nevil Beauchamp as a careful, active reader. As a boy, Nevil is living with his uncle the Honourable Everard Romfrey and Rosamund Culling, his uncle's friend and housekeeper, who notices 'the peculiarity of the books he selected for his private reading. They were not boys' books, books of adventure and the like. His favourite author was one writing of Heroes' (p.18). To Rosamund, 'the incomprehensible was the abominable, for she had our country's high critical feeling' (p.19). Meredith makes the link with reading as nutrition for the mind in the vocabulary, describing Nevil as 'getting nibbles of golden meaning by instalments'. Nevil says that 'he liked a bone in his mouth', and the observation is made that 'a bone in a boy's mind for him to gnaw and worry, corrects the vagrancies and promotes the healthy activities, whether there be marrow in it or not' (p.19).

The metaphor of digestion is used by Meredith in *The Egoist* to convey the process of acquiring knowledge to move towards individual wellbeing and a better civilization. Linking the body's use of food for growth and the development of the brain, Meredith makes reference to the experience of bradypepsy, which was used in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, as noted above, to express symptoms and attitudes to illness. When the invalid Mr Dale in *The Egoist* expresses regret that he has 'but strength for the slow digestion of facts', Dr Middleton responds that "'For facts, we are bradypeptics to a man . . . We are still in the endeavour to make good blood of the fact of our being'" (*The Egoist*, p.556). The implication is that as individuals, we are all in 'a state of becoming', and time is needed by the brain to convert hearing or reading of facts to knowledge, as time is required for food to be digested by the stomach. Meredith repeats the significance of the 'brainstuff of fiction' as nourishment for the brain in *Diana of The Crossways*, as the narrator asserts that: 'You must feed on something. Matter that is not nourishing to brains can help to constitute nothing but the bodies which are pitched on rubbish heaps' (*Diana of The Crossways*, p.15).

The nineteenth-century preoccupation with health and digestion extends to literary reviews. An unsigned review of Meredith's first novel *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* in the *Critic* describes Meredith's work as 'certainly meat for strong men rather than food for

babes' (in Williams, 1971, p.66). Oliphant uses the French word *gouté* to convey how Meredith 'favourite of the clever' is tasted and appreciated like food 'by those who confer fame' (in Williams, 1971, p.239). The conclusion of an unnamed reviewer of *Sandra Belloni* in the *Examiner* is that 'Soul as well as body must be fed, and with wholesome meat too, not on tipsy cake and kisses' (in Williams, 1971, p.124). This review summarises the philosophy expressed in the novel, and represents Meredith's debate within the book on the conflict between intellectual thought and sentiment. A mixed review of *The Egoist* by Henley, expressing praise and criticism, was pronounced by Meredith to be 'not . . . very digestible' in a letter to James Thomson, as Meredith claims that he 'never paid much heed to the literary judgements of the English'. Although real criticism 'should include reproof', he suggests that for 'an author to hear that he wonderful, but a donkey, is not instructive to him', and states that criticism in England 'gets no farther' than the boy who 'likes this bun, he hates that tart' (Cline, p.583).

The diversity of critical responses to Meredith's work is noted by Priestley, who accepts that 'those who taste and shudder are not without reason', and suggests that 'both parties are in the right'. Priestley suggests that Meredith's poetry 'might be compared to a very rich pudding, containing the most varied and delightful ingredients, that does not make friends with the palate because it has not been properly mixed and cooked' (1927, p.88). A more positive reaction is expressed by Robert Louis Stevenson in a letter to W B Yeats in 1894, referring to the effect of reading stanzas from Meredith's 'Love in the Valley' some ten years previously, which 'made me drunk like wine' (in Williams, 1971, p.522). The metaphor of rich food is used by Meredith in describing to Maxse the effect of reading extracts from *Tannhäuser*, as 'of too much sugar on the palate: something rich, certainly, but of a base richness' (Cline, p.105). Priestley asserts that Meredith's poetry can provide 'meaning in the lines . . . just as there is sustenance in the hay for those able to digest it' (1927, p.88), and James Stuart states the benefit of reading a Meredith novel in small amounts by 'the method of serial publication . . . He is not difficult of piecemeal digestion, but he makes you difficult mouthfuls to gulp whole' (in Williams, 1971, p.391). Garnett, reviewing *Sandra Belloni* in the *Reader*, values the merit of Meredith's novels, stating that to read Meredith 'is to season the feast of literature with an exquisite condiment: to read nobody but Mr Meredith would be like making a dinner of salt' (in Williams, 1971, p.109). As Garnett suggests, a diet of only Meredith's novels would be unpalatable. His novels are perhaps best digested in 'nibbles', in the same way that Nevil reads Carlyle.

Chapter Three: Movement

Meredith's support for women's independence is expressed in terms of mobility, and the heroines of his novels published between 1879 and 1895 are increasingly proactive, demonstrating mental and physical movement. In this Chapter, further analysis from *The Egoist*, and *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, is used in comparison with Thomas Hardy's novels of the same period, to indicate the move towards a new form of novel. Meredith's energy and passion for movement is expressed in his poetry, in which active verbs depict the physical motion of the natural world. The mobility of his heroines in fiction challenges the stereotypical image of women as submissive and passive. Reference is made to contemporary publications which indicate exercise and clothing deemed to be appropriate for women, as compared to John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, which considers the social perception of femininity to be artificial and unnatural. Meredith depicts freedom of behaviour in the outside world in contrast to the enclosed space of buildings and gardens, in which movement and nature are controlled. The physical disability which he experienced in mid-life enables Meredith's understanding of the effect of restriction of movement, and as part of his *Weltanschauung*, he conveys the equal significance of physical and mental movement and the value of interdependence. This Chapter shows how Meredith's use of movement in various ways contributes to a new means of expression in the novel. Mental activity is conveyed by the narrative strategy of reported thought, and minimal movement depicting emotion is a means of Meredith's animation of characters. The stimulation of thought in the reader produces a physiological response equivalent to exercise, with the possibility of a physical reaction, or mental movement of a change in attitude.

Meredith's energy and love of walking, referenced in Chapter One, is emphasised in his letter to Maxse when planning a visit to Austria. Meredith insists that 'walking is the thing I must have, or it will be waste of time and money for me. Up at four a.m., a walk to breakfast, a walk to dinner, a stroll and then early to the couch' (Cline, p.489). His enthusiasm for exercise, noted in Chapter Two, indicates a restless impetus for movement, and he tells John Morley that 'being very busy . . . I work and sleep in my cottage at present . . . There I pace like a shipman before turning in' (Cline, p.539). Meredith's 'nervous, restless habits' are described by Ellis, who recalls that 'humming snatches of song the while he strode about the narrow rooms of the house, or fidgeted with ornaments and furniture - worried his comfort-loving father-in-law' (*George Meredith*, 1920, p.78). When his mobility

was restricted by ataxia, Meredith continued to make his daily visits to Box Hill, whatever the weather, being driven in a bath-chair pulled by Picnic the donkey. The man 'who had loved the motion of legs and the sweep of the winds in the days of active health, now found some compensation in the rapid motion and opposing wind of motoring' (Ellis, *George Meredith*, 1920, p. 313).

Meredith's physical and mental vitality noted by friends is apparent in his early poetry, in which he conveys the movement of the natural world in descriptions of water flowing, wind blowing and clouds flying. Sassoon detects a difference between contemporary poets whose depictions of Nature are 'mainly pictorial . . . held by . . . stillness' and Meredith's 'association with movement' (1948, p.262). Use of the present tense expresses the energy in the renewal of life in Meredith's 'Song: Spring' written in 1851. Buds 'burst and spread / Their downy feathers . . . And the skylark shakes his wings in the rain'. The poet suggests that it is the season for a young man to act, moving towards a new beginning from boy to prospective husband, 'to look for a bride! / Choose . . . woo' (p.55). Autumn is also seen by Meredith as a time of regeneration which provides for spring's re-growth, and in 'Song: Autumn', the poet repeats that it is 'the season to wed thee a bride!' (p.56). In the poem titled 'Song: I would I were the drop of rain', also dating from 1851, the raindrop 'falls into the dancing rill' to 'seek the river' and 'roll beneath the wooded hill'. The energy of 'the river swift' is conveyed as it 'wrestles with the wilful tide' and the poet imagines himself as the river which would 'fling the briny weeds aside . . . Until I came to thee!' (p.64).

Meredith's poetry and novels express 'his own zest for movement, his need to feel exhilarated and swept up in the current of life, and his wish to sweep his readers up into it too' as Banerjee observes (2012, p.25). The reader is invited to share in Meredith's experience of the natural world in the first stanza of 'Invitation to the Country', and the poem continues with the sights and sounds of the countryside. The 'rivulets run with the dead leaves at play, / The leafless elms are alive with the rooks . . . Clear is the cry of the lambs in the fold, / The skylark is singing, and singing, and singing' (p.89). The reader is encouraged to see and hear, to feel and know that 'the bounty of Spring doth dwell / In the winds that blow, in the waters that run, / And in the breast of man as well' (p.90). The dramatic effect of the wind on the forest is described in 'South-West Wind in the Woodland', using the vocabulary of human response to reinforce the link between Nature and man. The speed of the 'great South-West' as it 'drives o'er the earth' is depicted vividly as if the wind is riding 'a fiery steed . . . High soaring and wide sweeping; now, / With sudden fury dashing down /

Full-force on the awaiting woods'. The trees 'rave / And shriek, and shout . . . / And stretch their arms . . . / And bend their stems, and bow their heads . . . and groan' (pp.24, 25).

His use of the metaphor of movement in fiction is recognised by Lionel Johnson, reviewing Meredith's penultimate novel *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, who states that Meredith 'excels in the description of movement' (in Williams, 1971, p.390), and by R C Stevenson who refers to Hillis Miller's term describing Meredith's texts as being 'full of "hidden energy"' (2004, p.22). The experience of reading *Harry Richmond*, expressed by Arthur Symons, is that 'we are fairly swept away and carried along by the racing tide of the narrative . . . pictures flit past' (in Ellis, *George Meredith*, 1920, p.229), although R H Hutton considers *Harry Richmond* to be 'a novel which invites delay rather than prompts rapidity . . . it is very slow reading' (in Williams, 1971, pp.159, 160). The irregular pace of Meredith's narrative is acknowledged by Meredith himself: 'This cursed desire I have haunting me to show the reason for things is a perpetual obstruction to movement'. Although he wants the 'dash of Smollett' his 'principle is to show the events flowing from causes' (Cline, p.57). In this early letter of 1860 to Samuel Lucas, editor of *Once a Week*, Meredith reveals the conflict between the impetus for rapid progress, and his intention to explore in detail the psychology of his characters.

Meredith's use of movement, depicting a physical journey and as a metaphor for progress, is shown in Chapter One in analysis from his first novel *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. Walking is a significant form of mobility for his characters, from his first prose *The Shaving of Shagpat* (1856) to *The Amazing Marriage* (1895) although Meredith himself became physically restricted. His active heroines, developed from the character of Emilia from *Sandra Belloni*, walk and run, swim and ride, and exert agency at a time when, as Dallas stated, the 'life of women cannot well be described as a life of action' (*The Gay Science*, 1866, p.297), and when public opinion concerning the mobility of women was divided. Meredith challenges the social expectation that women should conform to accepted conventions of behaviour and appearance, depicting physical activity, and their mental thought processes as young girls become aware of the restriction of a submissive role.

Physical activity for women was encouraged during the second half of the nineteenth century in publications promoting the benefits of health and exercise. Books and magazines gave advice on diet and exercise to prepare girls for motherhood, while focusing on masculine sports to build boys' physical strength. Stereotypical images of masculinity, and women as the weaker sex, were reinforced by the opinions of some medical experts asserting that the moral and physical strength deemed necessary for childbirth could be depleted by

excessive physical exercise, or mental activity as indicated in Chapter Two. In her book *The Gentlewoman's Book of Hygiene*, Mitchell states that there is 'no reason in the world, excepting the fear of breaking through a conventional barrier, why girls should not learn cricket in childhood, in the same way as their brothers'. She reasons that cricket is not 'in any way conducive towards the formation of unfeminine habits' (1892, p.58). Nevertheless, prejudice against girls' participation in sports considered to be unfeminine persisted to the end of the nineteenth century and beyond.

The expectation that women should conform to ideals of feminine appearance and clothing during physical activity is made clear in late nineteenth-century articles in 'The Girls' Own Paper' by the doctor Gordon Stables, writing as 'Medicus'. Although cycling is approved as one of the 'Useful Pastimes for Health and Pleasure' for girls, he refers to the 'ridiculous phrase' of the 'New Woman' and the 'awful absurdity' of 'rational dress' ('The Girls' Own Paper', 1895). In his article 'Cycling: as a Pastime and for Health' 'Medicus' is critical of the 'new woman who, instead of dressing like a lady fits herself out like a mountebank' ('The Girls' Own Paper', 1896) while conceding later that a girl should ride 'in your very easiest corset . . . health first' ('Health' in 'The Girls Own Paper', 1901). 'Medicus' states that women 'who scull much, or golf or hockey a deal are usually coarse in skin and in features, and far indeed from beautiful' concluding: 'Better to be loved and admired by a true and good man than be "emancipated"' ('Health' in 'The Girls' Own Paper', 1901).

In *The Subjection of Women*, John Stuart Mill proposes that the social perception of women is unnatural, stating that 'What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing - the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others' (1869, p.155). Critical of the assumption of a woman's inferiority caused by mere fact of birth, and the submissive role expected of women in marriage and in society, Mill asserts that 'the wife's position under the common law of England is worse than that of slaves in the laws of many countries' (1869, p.165). It is 'both an injustice to the individuals, and a detriment to society', Mill stated, 'to place barriers in the way of [women] using their faculties for their own benefit and for that of others' (1869, p.151). Believing that 'in a good and a bad sense, the English are farther from a state of nature than any other modern people . . . a product of civilization and discipline', Mill claims that 'rule has to a great degree substituted itself for nature' (1869, p.205). He makes comparison between the development of men and women, referring to a man 'emerging from boyhood' with a sense of freedom from control, and feeling 'twice as much a human being', whereas women are 'schooled into

suppressing' these feelings, being restricted from developing 'in their most natural and healthy direction' (1869, pp.239, 240).

Meredith's recognition of the restriction of women's faculties, and his enthusiasm for Mill's writing, is indicated in Chapter One. In his letter referring to the 'injustice done to women', Meredith wrote: 'I have not studied them more closely than I have men, but with more affection, a deeper interest in their enfranchisement and development' (Cline, p.1513). Striving to achieve one's potential by using all faculties leads to an individual's sense of wellbeing, according to Meredith's *Weltanschauung*, and benefits future generations. In fiction, he expresses criticism of men who consider a wife as a possession, using the metaphor of china, and depicting women in a position of slave in a relationship. The philosophy of John Stuart Mill was also acknowledged by Thomas Hardy, and referenced in his novels. According to Hardy's biographer, Mill was 'an intellectual hero to Hardy by his own account' (Tomalin, 2007, p.75) and an account of hearing Mill speak is recalled (in Millgate, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, 1984). Hardy's character Sue Bridehead in *Jude The Obscure* quotes from Mill's book *On Liberty*, telling Jude of Mill's view of the importance of human beings being able to choose a plan of life and employ all faculties (*Jude The Obscure*, p.244).

Making links between physical movement and mental wellbeing, Meredith advocates the freedom of natural behaviour, in contrast to the socially constructed perception of women, which restricted their movement and thought. Like John Stuart Mill, he recognises that lack of activity and exercise can lead to depression and languor. Mill claimed in *The Subjection of Women* that there was rarely a risk of nervous 'susceptibility' for women 'who in their early years have shared in the healthful physical education and bodily freedom of their brothers' (1869, p.198). Promoting the right for a girl to enjoy the physical activity of pursuits perceived as 'masculine', Meredith suggests that an individual's use of his or her natural abilities contributes to a sense of wellbeing. On a month's holiday with his daughter in Cornwall in August 1887, Meredith refers to 'excellent bathing . . . walks diversified by scalings of crags and vaultings over 3 dozen stone fences per diem' (Cline, p.886). The walks were 'under Leslie Stephen's guidance . . . a leader who allowed who allowed no more privileges to the petticoat than to the breech'. Meredith's daughter and her friend 'were smitten with the fun . . . Both were made manlier – an excellent thing in the education of girls' (Cline, p.891). Analysis from *The Egoist* (1879) and *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, (1894) shows how Meredith questions society's perception of socially acceptable behaviour for women. His heroines enjoy the freedom of movement in the natural world by walking,

running, swimming, and riding with equal strength and ability to boys. Addressing the concerns expressed in contemporary publications, that physically active women exhibit masculine traits, Meredith creates women who display femininity as well as physical strength, and shows that shared activities such as walking or swimming enable a closeness which strengthens the relationships between individuals.

Clara's need for liberty of movement in the natural world is highlighted in *The Egoist*, in contrast to the restriction of place expected by Sir Willoughby. The freedom of outdoor activity contributes to her sense of wellbeing, in the same way that a woodland setting enables Emilia to exercise her singing voice with ease in *Sandra Belloni*, as noted in Chapter One. The narrator states that Clara had 'a spirit with a natural love of liberty, and required the next thing to liberty, spaciousness, if she was to own allegiance' (*The Egoist*, pp.51, 52). Sir Willoughby's attitude affects her 'like a creature threatened with a deprivation of air' (p.52). A lifetime of the restriction of marriage and Patterne Hall is compared to being 'fixed at the mouth of a mine, and to have to descend to it daily . . . to be chilled in subterranean sunlessness' (p.65). Clara's betrothal has the effect of separating her from the natural world, and her sense of being 'a captured woman' is 'palpable as a shot in the breast of a bird'. She must submit 'when she would rather be gazing at flowers' (p.68) and she experiences the 'impatient panic-stricken nerves of a captured wild creature, which cried for help' (p.120). Expressing a preference for 'fields, commons' rather than the 'parks of rich people' Clara exclaims to Laetitia: 'I chafe at restraint; hedges and palings everywhere! . . . these fortifications' (p.183). The value of the natural world is emphasised as Clara, experiencing a sense of peace in her hope of leaving Patterne Hall, thinks that 'if Willoughby would open his heart to nature, he would be relieved of his wretched opinion of the world' (p.217).

Meredith conveys Clara's love of outdoor activity, and depicts the beauty and skill of a girl running, from the viewpoint of Crossjay, who noted that Clara 'was fleet' and exclaimed with the admiration of a twelve-year-old boy: 'You are a runner! . . . And you don't pant a bit!' (p.79). Having invited Crossjay to row her on the lake, it was 'she, however, who took the sculls at the boat-house, for she had been a playfellow with boys' (p.81). A sense of natural freedom is enjoyed by Clara in her play with Crossjay, and the narrator observes that 'she flung herself into it as if her real vitality had been in suspense till she saw the boy' (p.104). The affinity of their relationship is made possible because neither is inhibited by society's conventions. Clara is envious of the greater freedom enjoyed by men, and her thought as Crossjay and Vernon swim and race together is that 'We women are nailed to our sex!' (pp.81, 248).

Sir Willoughby attempts to control Clara's mobility telling her 'you should not walk on the road alone, Clara. You ought to have a companion, always. It is the rule here' (p.204). The perception of women walking alone had scarcely changed since Jane Austen wrote: 'That Elizabeth should have walked three miles so early in the day, in such dirty weather, and by herself, was almost incredible' (*Pride and Prejudice*, [1813] 2004, p.24). In *The Egoist*, Clara's bid for freedom by walking away from the physical and mental restrictions of Patterne Hall, referred to as her 'flight', is perceived as 'mad' behaviour, 'very giddy' and 'wild' by the 'ladies' of the household, who represent society's view of acceptable feminine behaviour (p.311). Meredith's contrasting descriptions of a walk with Sir Willoughby and a 'brisk' stroll with Vernon reveals to Clara, and to the reader, the extent of physical restraint. Sir Willoughby assumes Clara's frailty as the weaker sex, leading her as a 'convalescent', whereas with Vernon, Clara is able to keep pace using her natural movement. Vernon leads 'at a swing of the legs that accelerated young Crossjay's to the double, but she with her short swift equal steps glided along easily' (pp.137,138). Their conversation is animated as they share a walk in the Alps in their imaginations, before a more intimate discussion concerning the obligations of a betrothed girl. Meredith links Clara's freedom of movement and speech as being unconventional. She has recently revealed her feelings to Laetitia in conversation, but that 'a young lady should speak on the subject of the inner holies to a man . . . was incredible to Laetitia' (p.282).

Meredith suggests in *The Egoist* that clothing appropriate to physical activity allows freedom of movement for Clara to enjoy her skills of running and rowing. With Crossjay, it was she 'who took the sculls' to row on the lake, referred to as 'a manly exercise' (p.81), and because 'she had to dress for the dinner-table . . . she landed him with regret' (p.83). Clara's clothing which allows for natural movement reinforces the image of the 'dainty rogue in porcelain', a rebel concealed within the girl who appears to conform to Sir Willoughby's concept of an ideal wife, a girl who may not conform to society's expectation of appropriate behaviour. Hardy shows how the natural shape of a woman's body is concealed beneath the artificial fashions of the period, highlighting in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, the contrasting appearance of Elfride without the 'bundle of white linen' usually worn beneath her dress. Her 'form was singularly attenuated . . . preternaturally thin and flexible . . . She seemed as small as an infant' ([1873], 1994, p.247, 249). The removal of several layers of clothing allows Elfride the freedom to run 'like a hare; or more like a pheasant when . . . it has a mind to fly' ([1873], 1994, p.250).

Contemporary accounts confirm that the clothing of nineteenth-century women limited their ability to exercise, whether for enjoyment or health. Debates referenced by Flanders suggest that the corset was intended to control physical and moral appetites. Picard notes that 1859 was the zenith of crinoline fashion but it was not universally worn, and ‘unnatural constriction could lead to fainting’ (2006, pp.211, 213). Meredith’s friend Hardman on a tour of Switzerland in July and August 1863, wrote of his visit to Chamounix where crinolines are not ‘the thing and ladies wander forth gracefully innocent of that absurdity’ (Ellis, ed. *Letters and Memoirs of Sir William Hardman*, 1925, p.61). Hardman issues ‘a warning . . . in the matter of *crinoline*’ recalling an ‘absurd adventure’ when his wife overbalanced while attempting to rise from a low chair (Ellis, ed. *Letters and Memoirs of Sir William Hardman*, 1925, pp.175, 176). As a footnote to Hardman’s memory that his wife acquitted herself ‘most execrably’ during her first lesson in sculling, Ellis makes reference to the restrictive clothing of 1865, recording that the ‘gallant Mrs Hardman will have the sympathy of every reader in her efforts to scull when the feminine dress of the period is remembered - voluminous skirts over a crinoline, a heavy shawl or tight jacket, and a high bonnet; though perhaps a pork-pie hat was donned for these aquatic sports’ (Ellis, ed. *Letters and Memoirs of Sir William Hardman*, 1925, p.169).

Meredith indicates an awareness of the sense of the physical restraint imposed on women by their clothing, limiting them to spectating not participating in activity. He challenges the social expectation of maintaining stereotypical gender roles, suggesting that girls should enjoy the same freedom of movement as boys. The hope expressed by Mitchell, addressing ‘The Question of Clothes’ in *The Gentlewoman’s Book of Hygiene* is that ‘women will never want to imitate men, either in their dress or in their smoking’. She considers that ‘if we must take to one of them to show our equality, let us choose the tobacco and discard the costume’ (1892, p.142). Her view is echoed by ‘Medicus’, stating the desirability of ‘dressing like a lady’ during exercise (‘Cycling: as a pastime and for health’ in ‘The Girls’ Own Paper’, 1896). The frustration of girls whose physical activity is limited is indicated in Meredith’s description of the ‘young ladies’ at school in *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*. They are described as being envious of the boys ‘all of them happy as larks in air’ during a snow-fight, and although glad to be warm and dry, were not ‘so madly fond of their dress-circle seats to look on at a play they were not allowed even to desire to share’ (p.17). The narrator notes that girls, restricted by convention and clothing, have a sense of being unable to breathe, while boys behave naturally, as free as birds in the sky, and suggests that ‘the

difference between themselves and the boys must have been something like the tight band - call it corset - over the chest, trying to lift and stretch for draughts of air' (p.17).

During the marriage in which she is repressed by her husband, Aminta experiences freedom of movement while riding and swimming. Her natural physical abilities are noted by Lady Charlotte, who hears the report that Aminta 'sat her horse the perfect Amazon' (p.39) and by Lord Ormont observing that swimming 'was a gift she had from nature' (p.293). Her husband watches, admiring her skills without participating, and the contrasting relationship between Aminta and Matthew is apparent as the couple share in swimming together, experiencing physical and mental harmony. Their conversation in the water is stopped 'for the pleasure of the body to be savoured in the mind' (p.373). Her strength as a swimmer gives Aminta a sense of pride and worth, as Matthew's 'comrade in salt water' (p. 374), and she recalls with pleasure the swim 'when she had been privileged to cast away sex with the push from earth, as few men will believe that women, beautiful women, ever wish to do' (pp.374, 376).

Swimming is shown by Meredith to be a natural physical activity which allows Aminta freedom of movement, in contrast to nineteenth-century bathing customs and attitudes. William Hardman wrote in 1863 that '*The Bathing Question* is one of those subjects that come under consideration every year in the season' referring to the 'preposterous exhibition' of the bather which 'condemn[s] the Briton rushing into his native sea to feel, instead of the vigorous hugs of Neptune, a clammy clutch from shoulder to knee' asking 'let us have none of your damp, unpleasant, clinging garments' (Ellis, ed. *Letters and Memoirs of Sir William Hardman*, 1925, p.80). With his usual humour, Meredith wrote to Hardman in 1870, describing his experience of bathing in Eastbourne: 'you see half a dozen fat men at a time scampering out of the machines a mile away to hide their middle nakedness posterior' (Cline, p.426).

Recognising the challenge for women who resist conforming to a submissive role, Meredith involves the reader in the process described by R C Stevenson as 'a painful re-education' which his heroines must undergo (2004, p.36). Growing awareness of the restriction of social expectation is learned by Clara and conveyed to the reader in *The Egoist*, as she discovers the limitation to house and grounds imposed by Sir Willoughby. Observation of her fiancé in conversation with Vernon Whitford provides Clara with contrasting views of the two men, as Vernon responds to Sir Willoughby's 'derisive laugh' with dignity and reason. Vernon's calm resistance to the assumption of authority is shown to be an encouragement to the 'rebel Clara, delighting in his banter', and teaches her to 'review'

Sir Willoughby by comparison with others (p.114). Increasingly resentful at being restricted in thought and movement, Clara nevertheless feels a sense of duty to her father and her fiancé, and is anxious to 'strangle the rebelliousness which had been communicated from her mind to her blood' (p.117). Meredith conveys the conflict between activity and passivity in her brain, as Clara feels 'the contempt of the brain feverishly quickened and fine-pointed, for the brain chewing the cud in the happy pastures of unawakedness' (p.119). She has learned to distinguish between active choice and passive consent, and she finds increasingly 'the energy of combat now animating her' (p.181).

Meredith depicts the conflict between Clara's sense of duty to conform and submit, and the freedom to express her own identity, as a battle, and reports of her thought processes are conveyed to the reader in chapter XXI 'Clara's Meditations'. The effort of her mental activity is depicted as a physical struggle, and shows how Meredith focuses on the emotional transformation of a character on the threshold of a move forward. During a sleepless night with little physical movement or action, Clara's brain remains active, and Meredith highlights the contrast between the passivity of conforming and the energy required to assert independence, in the vivid description of cold, lifeless material juxtaposed with the heat of mental activity: 'She was in a fever, lying like stone, with her brain burning' (p.237). The narrator's reference to '[q]uick natures' experiencing the 'wrestle' (pp.237, 238) conveys the sense of battle as Clara contemplates the ease of submission, in comparison to the effort of resistance. Although appalled by the realisation of the 'false course she had taken through sophisticated cowardice', her reported thoughts inform the reader that Clara feels 'lost . . . lost . . . vanquished . . . the brood of fatalism'. Her feeling that it 'would be quieter to float', to submit to male domination, is acknowledged by the narrator as 'the luxury of passivity' (p.238). She recognizes her 'plain duty' that she 'must learn to conquer her nature, and submit' (p. 239).

An abrupt change of mood occurs as 'a disembodied thought flew round her . . . the clash of a sharp physical thought' telling Clara that 'she was woman and never could submit'. Although she 'tried to nestle deep away in herself . . . to flee from thinking . . . it was a vain effort' (p.239). Her awareness of 'the difference!' repeated in her mind 'the cruel fate, the defencelessness of women' (p.239) recalls Laetitia's observation of Clara's expression of wider ideas concerning the subjection of women, and Meredith's vivid imagery depicts Clara's passionate rejection of submission in terms of feverish movement. Her thoughts 'pursued her, strung her to wild horses' backs, tossed her on savage wastes' and her mental activity, described as 'the fire of a brain burning high and kindling everything' (p.239)

produces alternating thoughts of self-doubt and determination. The pace of reading increases with a series of question marks, dashes and exclamations which convey Clara's confusion. All her senses are active as, in the space of a minute in her mind, Clara 'reviewed . . . recollected - heard Willoughby's voice . . . through a series of intensely vivid pictures' and 'cried aloud' (p.240). The narrator identifies with Clara and the reader in the use of 'we' to express the difficulty of rational thought when 'the brain is raging like a pine-torch' (p.240).

Unable to make a decision, Clara perceives herself as weak, 'only waiting to be misled' and the idea 'suffused her with languor; for then the battle would be over and she a happy weed of the sea' (p.241). The reader is invited to identify with the experience of mental turmoil as the narrator describes the sleeplessness of '[p]oor troubled bodies waking up in the night to behold visually the spectre cast forth from the perplexed machinery inside them, stare at it for a space' (p.241). After her battle of thoughts and 'a fall of tears' (p.243), Clara is restored by the beauty of the natural world watching a blackbird on the lawn, and is reminded of her sense of belonging in nature. The narrator observes how mental anticipation of a crisis can facilitate action, so that 'astonishing leaps over the gradations' can be achieved when the event occurs in reality (p.244). Following her night meditations, Clara is motivated by the optimism of a new day, and by the possibility of taking physical action. 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' (p.244). The sound of Crossjay's voice is described by the metaphor of 'woodpecker and thrush in one', as Clara hears him chattering incessantly to Vernon, 'walking beside him with a swinging stride off to the lake for their morning swim' (p.246). Observing their sense of wellbeing in the natural world, Clara perceives them as a 'Happy couple!' with 'a freshness and innocence . . . They seemed to Clara made of morning air and clear lake-water' (p. 246). Their vitality encourages Clara to leave her room to join Crossjay and Vernon, and her move away from the house is symbolic. She chooses the freedom of nature in preference to the restriction of society.

Meredith conveys a process of mental thought which galvanizes a woman's movement, described in terms of 'flights' and 'leaps'. Considering how to break off her betrothal, Clara contemplates the possibility of 'Liberty, after her fearful leap over the prison-wall' (p.146) and in chapter XIII titled 'The First Effort After Freedom' her appeal to Sir Willoughby is described as 'her first direct leap for liberty' (p.150). Having pleaded twice with her fiancé and her father, and following the mental struggle of her 'Meditations', Clara makes a physical effort to escape the confines of Patterne Hall and the commitment to her

betrothal, in chapter XXV 'The Flight in Wild Weather'. Her 'scheme of release' is to visit her friend Lucy Darleton, anticipating an optimistic outcome 'if she flew to Lucy' (p.285). Clara's 'Flight' on foot represents her bid for freedom, although it represents only one of many stages of Clara's gradual development. As repeated efforts to reason with Sir Willoughby are ignored, Clara attempts to escape her situation by physical movement.

Journeys by train and carriage depict a 'flight' or 'leap' to freedom in *Sandra Belloni* (1864) and *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* (1894). Railways, as a feature of everyday life by the mid-nineteenth century, represented the changing world in Victorian novels. Increased mobility was approved as progress or criticised as a destructive process, and the perceived link with female agency as depicted in sensation novels was seen as a possible threat to social order. Train journeys implied freedom of movement for women beyond the control of patriarchal authority. Meredith shows the speed of travel as emphasising a woman's move towards independence, with the possibility of a means of improvement. By making the comparison or contrast to the heroine's emotion and state of mind, Meredith conveys the woman's conflict of choice, to conform by staying still, or to move and face the uncertainty of an unknown future.

Chapter XXXVII titled 'Emilia's Flight' in *Sandra Belloni* (1864) reveals that, following the shock of overhearing Wilfrid's denial of love for her, Emilia has disappeared. Her train journey from Devon to London is described in the subsequent chapter, representing her sudden move in response to the event. The speed of the train indicated by the 'rush of the scenery' emphasises the suddenness of the imposed change to her circumstances and the urgency of her flight, which she has chosen rather than 'the horror of being motionless' (p.410). The depression caused by her grief is relieved by glimpsed images of the natural world through the train's window. 'The landscape slipping under her eyes, with flashing grey pools and light silver freshets, little glades, little copses, farms, and meadows . . . would not let her sink, heavy as was the spirit within her, and dead to everything as she desired to be' (p.410). Feeling bereft, Emilia is comforted by the sights of nature, as 'a great strange old oak spread out its arms and seemed to hold the hurrying train a minute'. She thinks of the tree as 'a friend' which could provide 'the shelter and thick darkness she had hoped she might be flying to' (p.410). Her optimism is indicated in the chapter's title 'She Clings to her Voice' and the speed of journey represents forward movement, as she attempts to escape her despair at Wilfrid's rejection, which 'made the world look black to her' (pp.411, 412). Her conflicting emotions are indicated as Emilia feels 'pain when the keen swift wind, and the

flying squares of field and meadow prompted her nature mysteriously to press for healthy action' (p. 412).

Two carriage journeys in *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* (1894) signify the end of Aminta's marriage and the move towards a new beginning, and represent the contrast between her languor and vitality. The narrator's aside referring to the 'fire' in Aminta which alternates with her languid state, noted in Chapter Two, indicates her potential to exert agency (p.104). Like the 'rebel' Clara, in *The Egoist*, Aminta has a natural energy stimulated by growing awareness of unjust treatment, and like Clara, she experiences the conflict of passivity and activity, as Meredith demonstrates the challenge for a woman attempting to escape the restriction of an unhappy marriage. Strength and determination are required to break a legal commitment, and as she recognises languor as 'the sapper of her character', Aminta 'said good-bye to cowardice' (p.215). The decision that she 'must look on Steignton' is the 'sudden result of Aminta's turmoil' and her orders for the journey are 'prompt' (p.223). The conflict is evident: 'she determined eagerly on going, without wanting to go' (p.225). Heightened emotions indicate the urgency of her decision to act to establish her identity, as 'finally shame and anger clinched the subject. To look on Steignton for once was . . . Aminta's . . . sudden resolve' (p.226). Her 'reason for haste was rationally founded on the suddenness of her resolve, which . . . counselled quick movements, lest her inspired obedience to the prompting should as abruptly breathe itself out' (p.226). Aminta's view on the journey, and the movement of the carriage, reflect her depressed state of mind, as the 'dullness of the roads and streets opening away to flat fields combined with the postillion's unvarying jog to sicken her thoughts' (p.228). The visit to Steignton is a symbolic gesture, and 'not perceiving any spot of pleasure ahead, an emotion urged her to turn back' Aminta finds no pleasure in the 'wayside scenes, a sweep of grass, distant hills, cloud in flight' (p.229). Her confused emotions are indicated, as scenes from reality are mixed with dreams of a future with Matthew. Although she 'set herself to look at roadside things, cottage gardens, old housewives in doorways', the sight of 'groups of boys and girls' immediately stimulates her vision of teaching alongside Matthew (p.232).

Lord Ormont, visiting Steignton with his sister and Matthew, and angered by Aminta's arrival, orders her return, and the journey back is a metaphor for Aminta's move towards a different future. Travelling with Matthew as her escort, Aminta leaves both the place and her marriage, and the intimacy of the carriage contributes to the closeness of her relationship with Matthew. She tells him: 'it is long since I have been so happy', and the narrator notes that she 'had come out of her stupefaction' (p.253). The speed of the carriage

mirrors her physical excitement. As the '[s]cenery flew, shifted, returned; again the line of the downs raced', Aminta is 'urged to delirious recklessness in happiness, and she drank the flying scenery as an indication, a likeness, an encouragement' (p.275). On arrival at an Inn for refreshment, 'her wild music of the blood had fallen to stillness with the stopped wheels' (p.275). The narrator relates that, although she is 'avowedly not yet ripe' for rebellion, the 'hypocrisy' of a loveless marriage is 'abominable' (p.338). Her options are clear to Aminta: 'She had to be the hypocrite or else - leap' (p.339). In reported thoughts she concludes: 'Better take the leap than be guilty of double-dealing even on paper!' and the courage required is evident. 'The nature of the leap she did not examine . . . she proposed to herself the "leap" immediately; knowing it must be a leap in the dark' (p.339). In Aminta's judgement 'the leap would at least be honourable, as it assuredly would be unregretted, whatever ensued' (p.340). As Aminta and Matthew commit to a new life together, Matthew as a man of enlightened views tells her 'it is your leap out of prison' (p.384) and Aminta is perceived by the narrator as being 'among the bravest of women' (p.408).

As Meredith focused on women's freedom of movement in his novels during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, his own mobility was increasingly restricted by spinal ataxia. At only fifty-five years of age, he was deprived of physical exercise, and the mental benefits of walking, which stimulated his imagination and creativity. Writing to Jessopp, he stated 'I am lamed' (Cline, p.711) and in a letter to Cotter Morison, he referred to the frustration when, feeling better 'I fall in the old ways and am lamed again' (Cline, p.719). He informed Robert Louis Stevenson in a letter dated March 1884 that he was unable to walk more than a mile, stating bluntly 'I am a cripple' (Cline, p.731). Limited mobility increased an understanding and empathy for women whose movement was restricted, and Meredith's love of the natural world and need for movement made him sensitive to the enclosure of place. Expressing his delight of the Alps, he told Janet Ross 'I can't bear being coop'd long in those mountain-guarded valleys' (Cline, p.113) and his rented house Kingston Lodge was conveyed to Jessopp as having 'no country around - brick, brick, brick' (Cline, p.302). The dislike of the urban Lodge was apparently exacerbated by the January weather described by Meredith as 'deadly', having the effect of 'an iron cap on my brain'. This is the same metaphor used in *The Egoist*, as Cline notes, to describe 'the mental atmosphere of Sir Willoughby's household' experienced by Clara (Cline, p.302)

Meredith's life is perceived by Hammerton as 'lacking in event and movement' (1909, p.44) and Cronin notes that Meredith 'found all the materials that he needed . . . in the events of his first thirty-six years' (2020, Preface, p.x), that 'nothing much happened to him'

in later life (2020, p.10). Aged seventy-nine, referring to the period when his mobility became limited, Meredith told Alice Butcher: 'When I ceased to walk briskly part of my life had ended' (Cline, p.1614). The ability to use the material from events of his early life demonstrates the significance of mental energy, recalled in contemporary recollections by Hardman and Alice, Lady Butcher and biographies by Sassoon and Lionel Stevenson. Banerjee suggests that Meredith 'became more active than ever' after his first wife left him (2012, p.13). In 1864 at the time of Meredith's second marriage, aged thirty-six and with only three of his thirteen novels published, his 'creative powers were very far from exhausted' as Jones notes (1999, p.118). The remaining forty-five years of his life which may be perceived as uneventful provided a stability of relationship and place which was previously lacking in Meredith's life. The solitude of his garden chalet at Flint Cottage in Surrey, allowed him space and time to read and write and Meredith's zest for life, emphasised by Banerjee and Jones, was undiminished. He continued to look to the future with optimism until his death.

Widowed and with limited mobility by his mid-fifties, Meredith spent most days - and many nights - writing and reading in his garden chalet, actively observing, thinking and learning, as a means of understanding other people and the wider world. In a letter to W Morton Fullerton he referred to the chalet 'which is my study, on the borders of the wood above. There I work and sleep, living *en hermite* - though not cynically' (Cline, p.839). Ellis records that even when living a 'restricted, inactive life . . . a confirmed invalid' Meredith 'still found pleasure in studying human nature', that in old age his 'mind did not fail him and his heart remained young' (*George Meredith*, 1920, pp. 311, 313). Visitors acknowledged Meredith's ongoing interest in the role of women in society, and his recognition of the natural succession of generations. At the age of seventy-six, he told W T Stead: 'I take as keen an interest in the movement of life as ever, and I enter into the passions of youth' (L Stevenson, 1953, p.342), and Trevelyan notes that Meredith was energised by the company of young people and hearing of their work ('George Meredith' in *Clio: a Muse and other essays*, 1913, p.100). Marking Meredith's eightieth birthday, the *Telegraph* interviewer noted 'the animation of the countenance' (in Hammerton, 1909, p.48), and the *Times* tribute recorded Meredith as 'still with all the youthfulness of heart and the joy in life and vigorous action' (in Hammerton, 1909, p.54).

Many accounts of meetings with Meredith convey the energy and vitality evident in his keen expressive eyes. Ellis records a description of Meredith by Frank Harris who noted his 'extraordinary variety of ever-changing expression . . . the quick-glancing eyes which

never seemed to rest for a moment on any object, but flitted about curiously like a child's' (*George Meredith*, 1920, p.305). His mental activity was evident to Schwob whose account of a visit notes that 'those wonderful eyes of his . . . were literally intoxicated with thought' (quoted in Sassoon, 1948, p.226). John A Steuart writes that his eyes 'look through man and especially through woman . . . as if humanity . . . were diaphanous . . . but they look humorously, sympathetically' (in Hammerton, 1909, p.68). The link between Meredith's powers of observation and imagination is made by Trevelyan, who recalls Meredith 'watching the esplanade from a seaside-lodging window . . . to him, and to those who heard him talk, it was a peephole on a glorious life. A girl passing on a bicycle set him prophesying the fuller life that was now setting in for women' ('George Meredith' in *Clio: a Muse and other essays*, 1913, p.100). Aged seventy-four, Meredith wrote to thank Wilkinson Sherren, author of the book *Wessex of Romance*, expressing gratitude for the 'stimulation to imagination' for walks which he had not been able to take (Cline, p.1436).

The value of interdependence between physical and mental faculties, as part of Meredith's philosophy, is evident in his own example of compensating for physical disability by using mental activity. Although he shared experiences of health and treatments, Meredith rarely acknowledged the disability and deafness which were obvious to his visitors. He continued to demonstrate vitality, participating in activity vicariously and in imagination when confined, and writing of movement in poetry and fiction. His stoic optimism enabled the appreciation of remaining faculties as expressed in his poem 'The Daughter of Hades', and confirmed in a letter dated 1905 stating that 'the daughter of Hades has intense enjoyment of her one day of light in life, and might read us a lesson' (Cline, p.1512). As he became deaf and no longer able to walk, Meredith sent friends to enjoy places he could no longer visit, and relied on sensory memories, feeling the sounds of nature within him when no longer heard, as expressed in 'Song in the Songless': 'They have no song, the sedges dry, / And still they sing. / It is within my breast they sing' (p.548). A similar experience is expressed by Coleridge in his 1797 poem 'This Lime Tree Bower My Prison' when, physically confined to place and by injury, the narrator shares mental enjoyment with his friends by imagining their journey across the Quantocks.

The strength to be gained from the use of mental faculties is apparent in Meredith's reliance on sensory memories and, like Dorothy Wordsworth on her sickbed, Meredith is aware of the power to control the mind. He states in a letter that 'the thing to do . . . is to rise humorously above one's body' (Cline, p.1593) and conveys this ability in his fictional characters. Preparing to depart to Switzerland for a month, Jenny Denham spends a day

‘botanizing . . . over sand country, marsh and meadow’ which she ‘felt sure she should long for . . . when she was among foreign scenes’ (*Beauchamp’s Career*, pp.279-280). Meredith’s understanding of the therapeutic effect of escaping to different places in the mind is expressed in *Diana of the Crossways* as the title character transports herself ‘at will’ to ‘a spherical realm’ where ‘she was free and safe. Nothing touched her there’ (*Diana of the Crossways*, p.378). Her ‘customary ascent to her planetary kingdom’ provides a calm state of mind, separate from her confused thoughts of reality (p. 380). The benefit of interdependence of an individual’s faculties is evident in the example of Florence Nightingale, using her intellect and experience to write books and reports on nursing care, as a means of active lobbying for change, although confined to bed while suffering a combination of physical disease and depression.

Meredith’s expression of mobility in fiction communicates to the reader an intentional movement towards a new form of novel. During the first half of the nineteenth century the numbers of the reading public increased and the novel grew in popularity, with the depiction of domestic realism and the contrasting ‘sensation’ form. The perceived distinction between novel genres, classified as being for moral guidance or entertainment, is voiced by the young Jessie in Collins’s *The Queen of Hearts* (1859). Receiving a box of books from her elderly guardian, Jessie responds that she is ‘sick to death of novels with an earnest purpose’, asking ‘isn’t it the original intention or purpose . . . of a work of fiction to set out distinctly by telling a story?’ (quoted in Flint, 1993, p.274). The development of different genres reflected the change and uncertainty of the period, as noted by Louis James, who states that the ‘creative tension within mid-Victorian literature comes from a cultural schizophrenia’ (2006, p.2). The reaction against literal realism in the fiction of Thackeray and Trollope is evident in the *Westminster* in 1873, in an article which declared that ‘Our painting is mere photography, and our descriptive writing is mere topography . . . the play and grace of imagination are lost’ (quoted in Dennis, 2000, p.59). Meredith and Hardy are included as contributing to this ‘transitional phase of English fiction’ (Gilmour, 1986, p. 148), and as Dennis asserts, in ‘Hardy - and Meredith, and others - the novel was moving away from exteriority to symbolism and to realism of a different kind’ (2000, p. 60). Meredith’s philosophy of striving to move forward is applied to the development of the novel in the second half of the nineteenth century, as his contribution to debates on the function of the novel and the role of the reader.

An ongoing interest in contemporary literary issues is evident in Meredith’s correspondence and fiction. Specific books were discussed with friends in conversation and

letters, and with correspondents who wrote to comment on his work. The intellectual discussions with Ulrica Duncombe, mentioned in Chapter One, continued until Meredith's death. Letters were exchanged between Meredith and R L Stevenson, whom he met in 1878, and who stayed with Meredith in 1886. Meredith's intention to contribute to the move towards a new form of novel, by including philosophy in fiction, and combining poetry with prose, was indicated in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* and *Sandra Belloni* (1864) as discussed in Chapter One. Reference to the importance of 'Art' to the soul in *Vittoria*, sequel to *Sandra Belloni*, suggests Meredith's early engagement with the 'Art of Fiction' debate. Sandra (previously known as Emilia) is said to have 'a soul that has not a husband - except her Art . . . her soul is above her body . . . Art is her soul's husband' (*Vittoria*, pp.602, 603). Published in 1867, *Vittoria* is contemporary to *The Gay Science* (1866) written by E S Dallas, one of the earliest critics to refer to 'the art of fiction', a term which was used in the debate between Besant, James and R L Stevenson in the 1880s.

Meredith expressed admiration for Besant who gave the Royal Institution lecture 'The Art of Fiction' in 1884 as part of the debate which considered the status of the novel and function of the novelist. In a letter to Edward Clodd in 1893, following Besant's retirement as Chairman of the Committee of the Society of Authors, Meredith stated: 'I respect Besant warmly. I would do him honour in any way possible to me' (Cline, p.1115). Unable to 'testify personally' at a banquet in honour of Sir Walter Besant's knighthood in 1895, Meredith wrote to the Chairman of the Society of Authors, expressing his 'great esteem' for Besant's 'devotion to the interests of his fellow craftsmen. Most heartily do I applaud him' (Cline, p.1199). His testimonial in a letter to 'The Author' 1901, on the 'heavy blow' to the Society of Authors 'in the death of Sir Walter Besant', expressed the 'hope to have something of his energies remaining with us' (Cline, pp.1395, 1396). In 1903, when Meredith was himself President of the Society of Authors, he wrote to *The Times* in support of the proposal for a public memorial to Besant, the founder of the Society (Cline, pp.1485, 1486).

In Besant's Royal Institution lecture 'The Art of Fiction' on 'Sympathy' in 1884, he asserts that 'modern Sympathy includes not only the power to pity the sufferings of others, but also that of understanding their very souls' (*The Art of Fiction*, 1884, p.13). He concludes that there is 'hope for the future' while 'such men as Meredith . . . and Hardy are still at their best' (1884, p.41). Meredith uses narrative strategies as a means of animating his characters and involving the reader. Psychological analysis of reported thoughts is conveyed using his observational skills and imagination, and the potential for mental activity during physical stillness is depicted from his own experience of immobility. Although dyspepsy had

an effect on his mental faculties, as shown in Chapter Two, there is no suggestion that spinal ataxia affected Meredith's ability to write. In all his novels, Meredith's characters demonstrate movement in the physical activity of journeys, and in moving toward a different state of mind. Meredith conveys the idea of mobility when a character is restricted to place, depicting mental reactions and emotions in minimal movements when physical motion is limited. The understanding of a character by others, and by the reader of the novel, is frequently achieved by his descriptions of the movement of their eyes. A look or a glance, even small movements of the eyebrows, are shown to be a means of communicating emotions.

Clara's reactions to Sir Willoughby's oppressive behaviour are conveyed in small physical movements in *The Egoist*. Although she reacts neither in speech nor gesture, the rapid movement of her eyes, conveyed to the reader by the narrator, reveals her increasing frustration. An early sign of rebellion is indicated by the deliberate ending of communication, as 'Clara let her eyes rest on his, and without turning or dropping, shut them' (p.88). The effect of her small movement is 'discomforting' to Sir Willoughby, who considers himself 'very sensitive to the intentions of eyes and tones'. His concern is to regain control over Clara, as members of his household were 'taught that they had to render agreement under sharp scrutiny' (p.88). For him, eyes 'that suddenly closed on their look' signified that he may not 'possess her utterly' (p.88). Clara expresses contempt for Sir Willoughby's complacent lack of understanding of Crossjay, by the look in her eyes 'that regarded him as though he were a small speck, a pin's head, in the circle of their remote contemplation' (p.91). Her increasing resentment at his patronising attitude is evident to the reader in a movement which is invisible to Sir Willoughby, as Clara 'shut her eyes and rolled her eyeballs in a frenzy of unuttered revolt' (p.151). Sir Willoughby's failure to understand Clara is emphasised by the irony of his claim to 'susceptibility' to change, and his professed ability to notice the 'shadow of the tenth of an inch in the customary elevation of an eyelid' (p.164). The growing emotional distance between Sir Willoughby and Clara is emphasised as he retreated to his laboratory and she 'swam away' to walk outside in the natural world (*The Egoist*, p.172).

Eyes and 'looks' convey mutual emotion without speech or physical movement in the opening chapter of *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* (1894). During the first encounter with Matthew, Aminta's dark eyes convey physical attraction combined with the innocence of a schoolgirl. Forbidden to speak, she approaches with 'her eyes half down' and lifts her eyelids as the couple pass with 'a full side-look, like a throb . . . no slyness or boldness . . . You might

think her heart came quietly out . . . The look . . . lasted half a minute, and left a ruffle for a good half-hour' (p.4). Communication is maintained as 'all that [they] were forbidden to write they *looked*' (p.19). When they meet again as adults, the repetition of 'beautiful eyes' and 'large dark eyes' emphasises the effect on Matthew of eyes that a young man 'would labour, fight, die for' (pp.71, 72). Although Aminta has changed since her marriage to Lord Ormont, Matthew recognises 'the eyes which had once charmed him - could again - would always charm' (p.74). Despite Matthew's acknowledgment that the 'moony dreamings over inscrutable beautiful eyes of a married lady' are hopeless (p.87), he is 'moon[ing] over her because she gave him her eyes . . . when a girl . . . His first love was his only true love' (p.91).

The love evident in Aminta's schoolgirl's look is re-kindled during their conversations, and the intensity of the couple's closeness is revealed by the expression of emotion in their eyes. 'Their eyes met. She looked moved at heart behind that deep forest of her chestnut eyes' (p.179). Following the death of Matthew's mother, at which Aminta was present, the couple link hands in mutual grief. The simple statement: 'They looked' recalls the memory of their schooldays 'in each mind' and in that of the reader as their friendship is recovered (p.205). Aminta's eyes are described as 'haunting lights' for Matthew, which cause him to speculate on her feelings and his own (p. 315). Acknowledgement of their closeness, recognised by both characters and by the reader, is affirmed by the narrator stating that '[t]hey were lovers. Divided lovers' and although their '[f]eelings and thoughts were forbidden to speech' as when they were schoolchildren Aminta could 'look tenderly' (p.334). In chapter XXVII 'A Marine Duet' as the couple float on their backs in the sea, Aminta's 'eyelids fell' conveying a sense of ease (p.372). Renewed commitment to their childhood friendship is emphasised by the intimacy of Aminta's look and the use of her schoolgirl nickname: 'She gave him Brownny's eyes' (p.374). On the final page of the novel, having shared their lives for seven years, their physical demonstration of an embrace is restrained by their awareness that Aminta is still married and they communicate their joy by 'rais[ing] eyes on one another' (p.409).

The subtle depiction of sexual attraction by reference to eyes is used by Meredith and Hardy, to convey physical desire experienced by women, often for the first time. Looking 'eyes in eyes' is an intimacy which, Elfrida assumes, would lead to 'lips on lips' in Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* ([1873], p.59) and, confused by her feeling of physical attraction for Stephen Smith, she protests 'you mustn't look into my eyes so' (p.62). Her growing sexual

awareness is evident in a different relationship, when Elfride ‘had a sensation of eyes regarding her . . . she felt a thrill of pleasure, and rebelliously allowed it to exist’ (p.230). The meeting of eyes signifies the development of her relationship with Henry Knight as ‘with supreme eloquence the glance of each told a long-concealed tale of emotion in that short half-moment . . . they ran together and into each other’s arms’ (p.249). In her Freudian reading of *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Wittenberg notes that Hardy is ‘quite explicit in his treatment of the eye as a substitute sexual organ’ and that the eye ‘becomes throughout life . . . one of the important erotogenic zones’ (‘Angles of Vision and Questions of Gender in *Far From the Madding Crowd*’, 1986).

Hardy’s women, in the liminal state between childhood and womanhood, are described by Mallett as being ‘on the threshold of sexual awareness’ (‘Hardy and Sexuality’, 2004, p.182). The depiction of female sexuality was frequently linked to immorality or abnormality in nineteenth-century novels, and the expression of a girl’s sexual desire in Meredith’s *Sandra Belloni* (1864) and Hardy’s *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), is unconventional, challenging contemporary perceptions of the feminine ideal. In the fiction of Meredith and Hardy, sexual attraction experienced by a naïve girl for the first time is shown to be a natural response. The danger of ignorance about body and mind is highlighted in Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. Returning home, pregnant and alone, Tess is described as ‘agonized . . . turning passionately upon her [mother]’ to ask: “‘Why didn’t you tell me there was danger in men-folk? . . . Ladies know . . . because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o’learning in that way, and you did not help me!’” ([1891], 1974, p.117). Tess’s words emphasise the importance of communication, and show fiction as a means of increasing knowledge and enabling discussion. Hardy emphasises the strength of physical and emotional attraction experienced by Grace Melbury in *The Woodlanders* as ‘Fitzpiers when he was present exercised a certain fascination over her . . . an almost psychic influence’ ([1887], 1998, p.158). Fitzpiers ‘acted upon her like a dram, exciting her’ and producing an ‘intoxication . . . in Grace’s brain’ (pp.159, 164).

Topics such as female sexuality, which might cause offence to contemporary readers and critics, required subtlety of expression, and Hardy and Meredith use poetic techniques in prose to convey unconventional subjects. The use of imagery and metaphor in fiction, with references from the natural world, is in contrast to the literal representation of life in the mid-century fiction of Thackeray and Trollope. The characteristics of Impressionist paintings are identified in Hardy’s writing by Paulin, in his book *Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception*, demonstrating ‘The High-School Lawn’ as ‘an impressionist poem in several

ways', the word 'eyed' stressing 'the "direct optical perception" characteristic of Impressionist paintings' (1975, p.34). Paulin notes that Hardy either avoids the objects 'as in "Gray prinked with rose / White tipped with blue"' or specifies parts, such as sleeves, shoes, and frills. 'By concentrating on immediate visual appearances, the shimmering, ephemeral qualities of surfaces, he gives a sense of great freshness and immediacy . . . the poem expresses a passing mood . . . a mere impression of the moment' (1975, pp.34, 35). Trees are perceived as sharing human characteristics in Hardy's novel *The Woodlanders*, as young fir-trees are planted in the earth, and Marty South perceives that the 'soft musical breathing instantly set in which was not to cease night or day till the grown tree should be felled' ([1887], 1998, p.64). Hardy's narrator uses the term 'impression-picture' to describe Mr Percomb's sight of Marty, as the barber focuses on her hair, 'while her face, shoulders, hands, and figure in general, were a blurred mass of unimportant detail, lost in haze and obscurity' ([1887], 1998, p.11).

Poetic imagery and metaphor, with references to the natural world, are evident in Meredith's correspondence. He wrote in a letter to Maxse that the sight and sound of a river in the Tyrol had reminded him of his friend: 'the Rosanna . . . put me in mind of you - nay, sang of you with a mountain voice . . . Perhaps because it is both hearty and gallant' (Cline, pp.91, 92). To Hardman, he conveys the sound and vitality of speech, saying 'I could chatter to you like a summer brook' (Cline, p.427). Even describing ill health, he uses humour in simile telling Cotter Morison: 'I am down, slain with a cold . . . my nose is as the trombe of an elephant challenging his love' (Cline, pp.806, 807). Arata asserts in *The Encyclopedia of Victorian Literature* that 'few novelists have made more extensive use of figurative language than Meredith', and that 'metaphor is central to the complexity of his prose' (2015, Vol III, p.1040). Meredith's inclusion of visual images involves the reader or listener by creating pictures in the mind. The heat of emotion is conveyed by the impressionistic vocabulary of blood, fire and the colour red. Characterisation is achieved not in physical details but in the symbolic description of hair, moustaches and clothing, depicted with humour, to represent character types recognisable to the reader. Meredith's imaginative references to the sights of nature are even used to depict a battle scene in *Vittoria*: 'the white powder-smoke . . . like a huge downy ball, kicked this way and that between the cypresses by invisible giants', and the 'cannon shots; a sullen dull sound, as of a mallet striking upon rotten timber' (p.418). In 'the great red of sunset' as Rinaldo is shot, Vittoria's image is of the silhouette of 'a dead man and towering female figure' against 'an illuminated copper medallion' (*Vittoria*, pp. 438, 439).

Natural imagery frequently conveys sensuality in Meredith's writing. In the first version of his poem 'Love in the Valley' published in 1851 his 'young love' is pictured waking at dawn looking like 'a white water-lily / bursting out of bud . . . clothed from neck to ankle / in her long nightgown' (p.574). Le Gallienne says of Meredith's writing that 'we seem to see matters of spirit and nerve with our very physical eyes' (1905, pp.5,6) describing Meredith as a 'master of the modern impressionist method' (1905, p.49). In Meredith's 1859 novel, natural images convey the intensity of Richard Feverel's first experience of love. Richard has now reached 'The Magnetic Age', defined by his father as 'the Age of violent attractions' (*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, p.83), when 'nature has made us ripe for love' according to the narrator (p.96). The landscape in which Richard is rowing is described with the movement and sounds of the natural world, and Meredith inverts the subjects of two sentences to focus on the sights of the lilies, and of Lucy. 'Above green-flashing plunges of a weir, and shaken by the thunder below, lilies, golden and white, were swaying at anchor among the reeds. Meadow-sweet hung from the banks thick with weed and trailing bramble, and there also hung a daughter of earth' (p.96).

Depicted as part of the natural setting of harmony and peace, and oblivious to Richard's presence, Lucy appears innocent yet sensuous, and Meredith conveys the sexual tension as the young couple become aware of each other. The straw hat shading Lucy's face, 'sometimes nodding, sent forth a light of promising eyes. Across her shoulders, and behind, flowed large loose curls . . . This blooming young person was regaling on dewberries' (p.96). The act of eating fruit, as feminine and erotic, is described by the narrator as 'dainty', noting that 'fastidious youth, which revolts at woman plumping her exquisite proportions on bread-and-butter, and would . . . have her scraggy to have her poetical, can hardly object to dewberries . . . an innocent sister' to the lotus (p.96). Meredith inverts the usual word order to introduce Richard to the scene, following a poetic list of birds. 'The little skylark went up above her, all song . . . the blackbird fluted . . . the kingfisher flashed emerald . . . a bow-winged heron travelled aloft . . . a boat slipped toward her, containing a dreamy youth'. Richard's perception, conveyed to the reader, is of Lucy surrounded by meadows, 'the pastoral summer buzz, the weir-fall's thundering white, amid the breath and beauty of wild flowers, she was a bit of lovely human life in a fair setting; a terrible attraction' (p.96, 97). As 'The Magnetic Youth' is drawn to the 'sweet vision', the atmosphere changes. 'Still and stiller grew nature, as at the meeting of two electric clouds' (p.97). The narrator observes the effect of natural beauty, and the tension caused by his father's restrictive system on Richard, who is 'strung like an arrow . . . could fly fast and far with her' (p.98). When Lucy has left,

the ‘marvellous splendours had sown seeds in him, ready to spring up and bloom . . . and illumine him like fitful summer lightnings’ (p.105).

The physical description of Clara in *The Egoist*, being ‘introduced and critically observed’ by Mrs Mountstuart, emphasises her close association with nature, none of her features ‘pretending to rigid correctness’ (*The Egoist*, p.46). The narrator offers ‘some suggestion of her face’, compared to ‘[a]spens imaged in water, waiting for the breeze’ and her hair is ‘winter-beechwood’ (p.46). Poetic images convey the physical attraction between Clara and Vernon, symbolised by the beauty of the double-blossom wild-cherry, as she observes him sleeping beneath the tree. Looking at the ‘virginal blossom, whiter than summer-cloud on the sky’, Clara reflects that he ‘must be good who loves to lie and sleep beneath the branches of this tree!’ (p.135). Vernon’s affinity with nature corresponds to her own, and Clara is perceived as part of the cherry-tree as Vernon wakes ‘dreamily looking up . . . not quite awakened out of a transient doze, at a fair head circled in dazzling blossom’ (pp.135, 136). Clara’s sensuality in the natural setting is emphasised as Vernon thinks of ‘a young lady’s bending rather low to peep at him asleep . . . the poise of her slender figure, between an air of spying and listening’ and compares her to ‘the Mountain Echo’ (p.136).

Meredith conveys Clara’s natural sensuality by the movement of her clothing, portraying a girl who is feminine as well as physically active. The beauty of ‘her figure and her walking’ is emphasised by her dress, which is ‘cunning to embrace the shape and flutter loose about it in the spirit of a Summer’s day’. Sensuality of movement is conveyed in the comparison to ‘the silver birch in a breeze’ and ‘the glimpse and shine’ of the tree’s trunk amongst the foliage suggest that the shape of Clara’s body is revealed beneath her dress. Her ‘wonderful art of dressing to suit the season and the sky’ suggests that Clara’s clothing is chosen to allow the freedom of her body’s unrestricted movement in the natural world (p.201). As noted by the narrator, it seems ‘as if she wished to compel the spectator to recognise the dainty rogue in porcelain’ (p. 200). Clara wears ‘a fichu of thin white muslin crossed in front on a dress of the same light stuff . . . hues of red rose and green and pale green, ruffled and pouted in the billowy white of the dress ballooning and valleying softly’ (p.201). Her clothing, reflecting the colours and movement of nature, emphasises Clara as being part of the natural world.

Meredith’s use of the verb ‘swimming’ in poetry and fiction, to convey the eroticism of women’s movement as well as physical exercise, is noted by Ellis, who states that for ‘thirty-five years Meredith’s female creations had been “swimming” metaphorically in his works’ (*George Meredith*, 1920, p.293). Ellis asserts that this is ‘surely the most irritating of

his recurrent affected phrases' (1920, p. 293), suggesting that the line 'she swims to me on tears' from the poem 'Love in the Valley' (*Poetical Works*, 1912, p.236) 'suggests anything but a romantic experience and inclines to raise the spectacle of a damp nightmare' (*George Meredith*, 1920, p.293). In his novels, Meredith uses the verb 'swimming' in a domestic setting to depict the sensuous motion of a woman and the expression of her sexuality. Bella Mount's movement towards Richard Feverel conveys the eroticism of her deliberate intent to seduce him. He is woken 'from his musing' by the 'rustle of her dress' as she 'swam wave-like to the sofa. She was at his feet' (*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, p.373). Meredith's frequent use of the sea as an amorous image is noted by Barbara Hardy in her book *The Appropriate Form* (1964, p.91), and the swimming scene shared by Matthew and Aminta in chapter XXVII 'A Marine Duet' in *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* is an emotionally and erotically charged scene. Aminta dives, Matthew 'went after the ball of silver and bubbles, and they came up together. There is no history of events below the surface' (p.375).

Meredith's depiction of characters' physical mobility, and his use of the narrative strategy of reported thought to convey mental processes, contribute to his 'animation' of characters. Making reference to the Art of Fiction debate in *Diana of The Crossways*, published in 1884, Meredith proposes the animation of characters as a means of moving on from Thackeray's fiction. Critical of the 'wooden puppetry' created by contemporary novelists, the narrator of *Diana of The Crossways* refers to a 'great modern writer' [Thackeray] who, 'capable in activity of presenting thoughtful women, thinking men, groaned over his puppetry' (p.15). Recognising the risk of using innovative techniques, the narrator states that this great writer 'dared not animate them, flesh though they were, with the fires of positive brainstuff . . . had he dared he would . . . have raised the Art in dignity on a level with History' (*Diana of The Crossways*, pp.15,16). Meredith's emphasis on the animation of characters, rather than plot or action, by showing mental and physical movement as they move through stages of 'becoming' is evident from his earliest novels. He explains his 'scheme as a workman' in a letter to Jessopp in 1871, stating that: 'It is to show you the action of minds as well as of fortunes - of here and there men and women vitally animated by their brains at different periods of their lives' (Cline, p.451).

Meredith expects active reflection from his readers, stimulated by the physical and mental animation of his characters, which are 'directed' to 'set in motion' the 'clock-work of the brain', as stated in *Beauchamp's Career* (p.461), mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis. Referring to contemporary genres and the effect of novel-reading, the narrator states that 'happy tales of mystery' and 'popular narratives . . . both create a tide-way in the

attentive mind; the mysterious pricking our credulous flesh to creep, the familiar urging our obese imagination to constitutional exercise'. 'My way' the narrator concedes 'is unattractive and difficult' as his 'poor troop of actors' attempt to appeal to the reader's 'conscience residing in thoughtfulness' (*Beauchamp's Career*, p.461). In Oscar Wilde's opinion, Meredith's 'people not merely live, but they live in thought' (quoted in Williams, 1971, p.316). Meredith's ability to reproduce the 'fragmentary effect of real conversation . . . approximating actual human speech more closely than any previous English novelist had done' is noted by L Stevenson (1953, p.226). The realism of dialogue between characters, and Meredith's strategy of reported thought, signifying the move towards stream-of-consciousness in fiction, enable the reader to identify with emotions in particular situations or dilemmas.

Concern for the physiological effect of novel-reading increased in the 1860s with the publication of sensation fiction and 'cheap' novels, perceived by critics as lacking in intellectual content and moral guidance. The stimulation of reading such novels was considered to contribute to the mental activity which was deemed excessive and harmful for women, as mentioned in Chapter Two. Physician E J Tilt advised that emotions stimulated by the habitual indulgence of novels and romances exerted 'a disastrous influence on the nervous system, sufficient to explain that frequency of hysteria' (*On the Preservation of the Health of Women at the Critical Periods of Life*, 1851, p.31). Women were considered to be at risk of developing unrealistic expectations, by identifying with the heroine of a novel, and confusing fiction and reality. The criticism of novel-reading represents a fear of the physiological effect which might challenge the stereotypical ideal of passive femininity. The alarm expressed by Oliphant, in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1867, about women in novels who 'marry their grooms in fits of sensual passion' is 'succinctly overstated' as Flint suggests (1993, p.275), revealing the anxiety of change to long-held attitudes. Referring to Mary Braddon's *Aurora Floyd*, Flint notes that 'it was not the bigamy, distressing though some found it, which most perturbed reviewers, but Aurora's capacity for spontaneous action, and violent anger' (1993, p.276).

Twentieth-century studies suggest that sensation fiction, highlighting women's frustration of restriction and desire for change, was intended to provoke physiological reactions. As Flint observes, novels as 'an outlet for frustration and boredom . . . may be understood retrospectively as a symptom of the malaise behind types of hysteria, rather than as causative in its own right' (1993, p.58). The novels of Braddon and Broughton, noted by Flint, encourage readers 'to enter into an active process of interpretation which invites

recognition of their own active, rather than passive, role' (1993, p.283). Meredith intends his fiction to stimulate thought, as his readers are expected to respond to his expression of philosophy in fiction, to observe and reflect on the thoughts and actions of his characters. Although 'thought is tough' as he acknowledges in his letter referenced in Chapter One, his readers are offered the potential for self-education and growth, as he asserts that 'dealing with thought produces toughness' (Cline, p.876). Reading with the mental effort of thought can be interpreted as an activity equivalent to physical exercise. In an unsigned review of *The Egoist* in *The Saturday Review* the writer notes that a new book by Meredith does not promise a 'gentle stimulus to the imagination . . . unalloyed by intellectual effort' and that the reader should not expect the accustomed experience of novel-reading 'in connection with armchairs, pipes, and slippers' (in Williams, 1971, p.219).

The physiological effect of reading sensation novels is voiced by the character of Jessie in Collins's *The Queen of Hearts*, her increased heart rate and rapid breathing conveying the excitement which was perceived as unhealthy for girls and young women. She states that 'what I want is something that seizes hold of my interest, and makes me forget when it is time to dress for dinner; something that keeps me reading, reading, reading, in a breathless state to find out the end' (quoted in Flint, 1993, p.274). Writing in the *Athenaeum* in 1864 Geraldine Jewsbury links the affective quality of Meredith's *Sandra Belloni* with the vicarious pleasure of sensation novels, finding both 'fatiguing', while recognising that Meredith's style has an effect on the reader's brain rather than the heart. Jewsbury states that our 'sensibilities are fatigued by the strong sensation novels we have daily to encounter' (in Williams, 1971, p.111), and her review is expressed in terms of her own feelings in response to *Sandra Belloni*. She asserts that Emilia's history 'has a humour and pathos which keeps the reader between laughing and crying'. In Jewsbury's opinion, Meredith's description of Emilia's father breaking his violin 'affects the reader like the killing of a living creature', and the 'snares and pitfalls' of Emilia's story 'make the reader tremble' (in Williams, 1971, pp.111, 112). Although the style is considered to be 'brilliant', Jewsbury concludes by depicting the dramatic effect of Meredith's novel, stating that 'it becomes fatiguing after a while; it resembles flint and steel struck together - the succession of sharp blows eliciting sparks' which would be improved if Meredith wrote 'more simply' (in Williams, 1971, p.113).

The language of reviews depicts the physiological effect of reading Meredith's novels in terms of movement throughout his career. An unsigned review of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* in 1859 in the *Leader* concludes that the story, although 'wild, fantastic, and in some

degree enervating, is not without its moral' (in Williams, 1971, p.62). In *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1880, Margaret Oliphant acknowledges the anticipation felt by readers on the publication of a new book by Meredith, stating that 'His works come before us rarely; but when they do come, there is a little tremor of expectation in the air. The critics pull themselves up, the demigods of the newspapers are all on the alert' (in Williams, 1971, p.236). The excitement of critics who appreciated Meredith's work is apparent in reviews of his last novel *The Amazing Marriage*. B Williams asserts in *The Athenaeum* in 1895 that 'Among the few really exciting events in literature is a new novel by Mr Meredith' (in Williams, 1971, p.432), and J A Noble in *The Spectator* in 1896 refers to 'passages in the novel which arrest and startle, which make the intellect tingle with a prickly tingling as of a galvanic current' (in Williams, 1971, p.452).

The physical experience of reading is conveyed in movement within the body which may not be detectable, or in the effect of movement to the surface of the body. Hardy's biographer states that to 'read *Tess* is an emotional experience; to write it must have been an overwhelming one' (Tomalin, 2007, p.225) and that reading '*Jude* is like being hit in the face over and over again' (Tomalin, 2007, p.254). More than thirty years after Jewsbury's response to *Sandra Belloni*, critics express in dramatic physical terms the mental pain of the brain's effort in reading Meredith's work. Reviewing *The Egoist* in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1880, Oliphant states that 'every sentiment contained in [three huge volumes] is beaten to death . . . and the reader's head aches, and his very bones are weary'. The third volume is deemed 'wearisome' and Oliphant concludes that 'to read, and read, and read, till the brain refuses further comprehension . . . is cruel' (in Williams, 1971, pp.237, 238). Reviewing *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* in the *Athenaeum* in 1894, James Stuart states that 'before praise is mentioned there is something to say of the smarting wales [sic: synonym for 'weals'], of the aching bumps on the skull' which follow 'after one has been stung with a whip, or battered on the brain with a quarterstaff' (in Williams, 1971, p.391). Stuart suggests that the intellectual effort is worthwhile and commends the novel in which 'all the characters are bristling with life and the humours of life' and which 'own[s] the essentials of romantic sanity and health' (in Williams, 1971, p.394). In his 1895 review of Meredith's last complete novel *The Amazing Marriage* Edmund Gosse, while acknowledging Meredith as a 'very distinguished and original writer' asserts that his idiosyncratic style has become so extravagant during his long writing career that 'it is difficult to enjoy and sometimes impossible to understand what he writes' (*St. James's Gazette*, 1895, quoted in Williams, p.429). While appreciating Meredith's 'extraordinary gift', Gosse suggests that the reader

‘must be an enthusiast indeed who does not shut his aching eyes and hold his throbbing brows’ (in Williams, 1971, p.430).

The physical and mental responses which Meredith anticipated, and which demonstrate that novel-reading can be a learning experience, are expressed by readers of *The Egoist*. In his book *George Meredith: Some Characteristics*, Le Gallienne records the experience of a very physical reaction to the characterisation of Sir Willoughby, which he describes as ‘our first piercing glimpse into the heart of egoism’. He asks if ‘any honest male ever read this passage without its catching his breath, and making him put down the volume for a moment or two’s thought - to take it up, perchance, a different man’ (1905, p.21). Quoting the phrase in which Sir Willoughby looks deeply into Laetitia’s eyes and sees himself reflected, Le Gallienne says that it has the effect of making one reel ‘sick as from a blow . . . here we first realise *what* this egoism is’ (1905, p.21). A story told by R L Stevenson is recorded in Ellis’ biography which acknowledges the potential for egoism shared by readers and Meredith himself. Confronted by a young friend accusing the writer that ‘Willoughby is me!’ Meredith is said to have responded ‘No, my dear fellow . . . he is all of us’. Stevenson adds that he thought Willoughby ‘an unmanly but a very serviceable exposure of myself’ and Ellis states that ‘we are all egoists, and consequently we can all see some aspects of ourselves in Sir Willoughby Patterne’ (*George Meredith*, 1920, p.258).

References by Jewsbury to Meredith’s style, producing a succession of ‘blows eliciting sparks’, and by Le Gallienne, noting the effect of a ‘blow’, suggests an understanding of Meredith’s writing which occurs to readers gradually, as the result of effort, but with physical force. The character of Vivian in Wilde’s ‘The Decay of Lying: A Dialogue’ declares: ‘Ah! Meredith! Who can define him? His style is chaos illumined by flashes of lightning’ (quoted in Williams, 1971, p.315). Discussing Meredith’s fragmented style in *The Physiology of the Novel*, Dames notes the ‘paradoxical mix of gradual and instantaneous’ in his fiction (2007, p.202). During Clara’s ‘Meditations’ her review of Sir Willoughby occurs ‘all in one flash’ and her immediate response is ‘I cannot! I cannot!’ (*The Egoist*, p.240). Revealing the discovery that she does not love her fiancé to Mrs Mountstuart, Clara states that it happened ‘By degrees: unknown to myself; suddenly’ (p.430). In *Beauchamp’s Career*, the style of Nevil’s favourite author [Carlyle] is ‘incomprehensible’ to Rosamund, and the effect of trying to understand an unfamiliar style or content is conveyed as ‘the whole book producing a kind of electrical agitation in the mind and the joints’ (*Beauchamp’s Career*, p.19). She wonders: ‘Why should he hug a book he owned he could not quite comprehend?’. The reader is informed that had ‘gone at it again and again . . . until

the illumination of an idea struck him' (p.19). For Nevil, the repetitive movement of reading in stages leads gradually to the reward for his effort.

Chapter Four: Uncertainty

Chapter Four considers Meredith's response to the inevitable challenges to his optimistic *Weltanschauung* and his acknowledgement of doubts and uncertainty. Analysis of selected poems from Trevelyan's *The Poetical Works of George Meredith* (1912) shows Meredith's philosophy derived from nature, his acceptance of the inevitability of change and the state of impermanence based on the natural cycle of renewal. His use of the metaphor of wind depicts both movement and lack of agency. Meredith's rejection of the concept of individual immortality and acceptance of uncertainty and insoluble questions, is considered in the context of the second half of the nineteenth century and contemporary responses to rapid social change. In *Diana of The Crossways* Meredith shows how personal and public pressures affect an individual's decisions in times of uncertainty, and can result in mental and physical breakdown. The characterisation of Diana suggests empathy for her apparently inconsistent behaviour and comparisons are made with the character of Meredith himself, with reference to Meredith's use of 'alteregoism' identified by Cronin. Analysis of passages from *Harry Richmond*, *Sandra Belloni*, *Beauchamp's Career* and *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* shows how Meredith uses settings to depict liminality as defined by Reus and Gifford in its spatial and temporal sense, enabling readers to feel and share characters' experience of uncertainty. The confusion for nineteenth-century readers caused by Meredith's creation of uncertainty, his depictions of unconventional relationships and unstable gender, and ambiguous endings, is apparent in contemporary reviews. The erratic pace of Meredith's narratives and use of multiple voices, noted in twenty-first century studies, has a destabilising effect. This Chapter suggests that Meredith deliberately creates ambiguity in fiction to encourage readers to confront uncertainty, to reflect and make their own responses.

The uncertainty and sense of transition during the changes of the first half of the nineteenth century are indicated in writers' responses. The inevitability of progress is expressed in terms of movement in Tennyson's 'Locksley Hall' published in 1842: 'Forward, forward let us range / Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change' (1924, p.123). The impetus of forward motion is conveyed by Charles Kingsley's narrator of *Alton Locke* in 1850 with reference to democratic art, stating 'surely all the age is tending in that direction . . . the great tide sets ever onward, outward, towards that which is common to the many, not that which is exclusive to the few' ([1850], 1895, p.108). Kingsley

and Matthew Arnold reflect doubts concerning established belief systems as the certainties of Christianity are challenged by science. The sense of being 'stranded between two epochs' is expressed in lines from Matthew Arnold's 'Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse' (1855): 'Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born' (in Gilmour, 1986, p.180). The experience of the 1830s is depicted by Thackeray in *The History of Pendennis*, published 1848-50, by the character of Pen attempting to find his way out of his mother's world of domestic security into the wider social world of possibilities and pitfalls. The development of train travel, representing a transitional stage of movement towards greater physical mobility, is noted by Thackeray in the *Roundabout Paper* article titled 'De Juventute': 'We who have lived before railways were made, belong to another world . . . Then was the old world . . . your railroad starts the new era, and we of a certain age belong to the new time and the old one' (quoted in Gilmour, 1986, p.58).

Differing views were expressed in conflicting responses: Thomas Macaulay's portrayal of progress in his 1849 *History of England* was optimistic, whereas Thomas Carlyle's *Past and Present* was critical, predicting the downfall of society. The 'stresses of the claims of the past and present' on novelists of the 1840s has been studied by Kathleen Tillotson, who notes that Dickens 'remains uncommitted, subject at once and in the same novels to the drag of the past and the pull of the present' ([1954], 1983, p.111). Although the benefit of progress was recognised, writers expressed concern for the lack of agency, and a feeling of helplessness in the face of rapid or imposed change. The sense of being swept along by a force which cannot be controlled or understood is evident in Browning's 'Two in the Campagna' 1855: 'Must I go / Still like the thistle-ball, no bar, / Onward, whenever light winds blow' (in Gardner, 1972, p.668). Referring to the spiritual, moral, social and political changes in his lifetime, Froude states in 1882 that 'the disintegration of opinion is so rapid that wise men and foolish are equally ignorant where the close of this waning century will find us. We are embarked in a current which bears us forward independent of our own wills, and indifferent whether we submit or resist' (quoted in Gilmour, 1986, p.149).

In spite of Britain's growing prosperity and influence, a sense of pessimism is apparent during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Expectations of certainty and stability had been raised by the growth of knowledge, encouraging hopes for improvement in health, and of moral guidance in writing. Conflicting scientific, medical and philosophical opinions, however, created further uncertainty, with an awareness that social and intellectual problems had not been solved and perhaps were insoluble. Although the acceptance of doubt was acknowledged by some philosophical thinkers, as mentioned in the Introduction, the

desire for certainty is evident in attempts to maintain existing social structures, and to impose control on nature. Meredith's philosophy of learning from the natural world represents stewardship, not ownership, of the earth and animals. Meredith's opinion of 'rich people' is recorded by Alice Butcher, who recalls hearing him say that 'in many cases the vision of rich people was limited to their personal possessions, and that their mental horizon was bounded by their own park gates' (Butcher, 1919, p.7). This view, expressed by Meredith, is voiced in *The Egoist* by Clara, who disliked the 'restraint' of the 'parks of rich people' (p.183). While recognising the natural human desire for stability, Meredith accepts doubt and uncertainty as inevitable at times of transition in life, caused by natural events, and as result of the attitudes of others. For Meredith, the response to uncertainty is important, not 'drifting' but striving to move forwards through transitional stages, which are part of the process of development and offer the potential for progress.

The need to accept uncertainty is part of Meredith's *Weltanschauung* derived from his understanding of nature. In his poem 'In the Woods', the unpredictable path through life is seen as part of the natural cycle, just as 'winged seeds' are blown by the wind and fly 'hung to the breeze' until nature determines 'Which shall be trees?' or simply return to the earth (*Poetical Works*, 1912, p.343). Meredith's personal experience is expressed in the poem 'A Faith on Trial'. Grieving for his dying wife, the poet faces a challenge to his own beliefs, being unable to appreciate Nature, and identifies with a desire for certainty, but concludes that Earth seems cruel only when 'Cry we for permanence fast, / Permanence hangs by the grave' (p.355). Acceptance of an individual's lack of agency is indicated in his response to the challenge, which is represented in naturalistic terms: 'I bowed as a leaf in rain; / As a tree when the leaf is shed / To winds in the season at wane' (p.356). The comparison between the length of an individual's life and the destiny of a seed is repeated in 'Dirge in Woods', and death is accepted as a natural process: 'we drop like the fruits of the tree, / Even we, / Even so' (p. 342). Two years after the death of his wife, Meredith wrote in a letter that 'Death and Life are really one, each to feed the other; and nature has no unkindness for us when we have comprehended this' (Cline, p.911).

The finality of death is seen as part of life, as is the approach of winter, in Meredith's 'Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn'. The confidence of continuity is expressed in the lines: 'Earth knows no desolation. / She smells regeneration / In the moist breath of decay' (p.177). Death, represented by the darkness and uncertainty of the 'enchanted woods' in 'The Woods of Westermain', is inevitable and may be confronted or feared. An individual has some control of response: 'In yourself may lurk the trap' (p. 204). The desire for

immortality is criticised in confrontational language, as being a wasted opportunity for development, in the poem 'In the Woods': 'The lust after life is life half-dead' (p. 344). Meredith shows that life continues with future generations, making comparison with the life of the thrush: 'Full lasting is the song, though he, / The singer, passes' ('The Thrush in February', p.328). The joy of birdsong in contrast to human concerns and grief is depicted in 'The Lark Ascending' as an ideal state of mind to be sought: 'Was never voice of ours could say / Our inmost in the sweetest way, / Like yonder voice aloft' (p.223). Individuals are considered to be immortalised in the philosophies, influence and encouragement which they pass on to succeeding generations as Meredith explained in a letter: 'our task is to hew and shape, lift, and leave behind us a race having more grip of the elements composing us. Thus at least the mind has an immortality' (Cline, p.911).

At a time when established opinions, attitudes, and philosophies are being challenged, Meredith uses the metaphor of wind to depict movement and the uncertainty of change. Reference to the South-West wind, as an indicator of imminent change in weather, signifies the potential development of a character or situation. The force of the wind and its dramatic effect on the trees in 'South-West Wind in the Woodland' is noted in Chapter Three. The poem conveys the excitement of a storm, and gales which cause damage also represent the possibility of renewal. Imagery is used in Meredith's fiction to depict a writer's success: 'The chief interpreter of public opinion caught the way of the wind and headed the gale. Editions of the book did really run like fires in summer furze' (*Diana of the Crossways*, p.169) and conveys the perception of a character who 'seems to delight in destroying one's peaceful contemplation of life . . . he blows a perpetual gale' (*Beauchamp's Career*, p.173). Reference is made in *Beauchamp's Career* to Carlyle's 'wind-in-the-orchard style . . . all the pages in a breeze' (pp. 18,19) and the metaphor of wind might also be used to describe the erratic pace of Meredith's novels. Alternately being blown in the wind during narrative passages and experiencing the calm of pauses when action is suspended, the reader is required to accept a sense of uncertainty.

Meredith's view of impermanence as contributing to the process of growth is discussed by Norman Kelvin in *A Troubled Eden* (1961), and the potential for natural renewal is expressed in 'South-West Wind in the Woodland'. A similar optimism in the hope of rejuvenation is conveyed in Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind', described as both 'Destroyer and preserver'. The poem describes how dead leaves are 'driven . . . fleeing' from the wild West Wind, and apparently lifeless 'wingèd seeds . . . lie cold . . . / Each like a corpse within its grave, until / Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow'. Addressing the

wind, the poet asks for same effect of the wind's power to 'drive' his own 'dead thoughts over the universe, / . . . to quicken a new birth'. Winter, symbolic of the 'dying year' brings the promise of Spring (in Gardner, 1972, pp.583, 585, 584). By comparison, Hardy's poem 'To Outer Nature' indicates a melancholic nostalgia, as the poet wishes 'O for but a moment / Of that old endowment', and asks nature: 'Why not semipeternal / Thou and I? Our vernal / Brightness keeping, / Time outleaping' (*The Works of Thomas Hardy*, 1994, p.54). Hardy looks back, using the past tense, in his poem 'Overlooking the River Stour'. The repetition of 'Closed were the kingcups' expresses finality, and 'never I turned . . . alack' is repeated to emphasise regret (*The Works of Thomas Hardy*, 1994, p.452). The mood of Hardy's nostalgic poetry is in contrast to Meredith's depiction of nature in motion, and his anticipation of forward movement.

The difficulty of maintaining and practising belief is recognised by Meredith, experiencing 'sensations that make / Of a ruffled philosophy rags' ('A Faith on Trial', p.350). Acknowledging an individual's instinctive fear of uncertainty and desire for security, he shows that effort is required to develop strength of character in accepting impermanence. A letter written by Meredith during his wife's illness expresses his own experience of uncertainty stating that: 'I live on hope . . . a midway station across an abyss . . . my sense of stability takes wing' (Cline, p.742). The possibility that man may not achieve the vision of an ethical ideal is recognised in Meredith's poem 'Earth and Man' as earth regards her 'great venture' doubtfully. Better civilisation may not be attainable in an individual's lifetime, but striving to move forwards will benefit future generations. Courage is necessary to admit doubts and that some questions cannot be answered. Meredith concludes that seeking answers to Whither and Whence is part of life's uncertainty: 'Our questions are a mortal brood, / Our work is everlasting' ('The Question Whither', p.339). Such questions are considered to be futile, being a sign of individual self-seeking for achievement: 'Spirit raves not for a goal . . . yet aspires; / Dreams of a higher than it' ('A Faith on Trial', p.359).

Contemporary accounts which demonstrate the consistent expression of Meredith's *Weltanschauung* also reveal apparent inconsistencies in his professional and personal life. This Chapter suggests that contradictory statements represent Meredith's responses to ongoing uncertainty according to changing circumstances and interaction with others. Ellis states that 'Meredith was the most inconsistent of men' whose 'literary judgements on others were generally applicable to his own faults of style and construction' (*George Meredith*, 1920, p.214). Thomas Hardy notes that Meredith in his role as reader for Chapman & Hall 'gave me no end of good advice, most of which, I am bound to say, he did not follow

himself' (quoted in Jones, 1999, p.221). Meredith's recommendation that Hardy should focus on the novel's plot was intended to achieve critical approval and commercial success. Five years earlier Meredith had shown awareness that the lack of plot in his novel *Sandra Belloni* would not be popular, as shown in Chapter One, but deliberately rejected his own advice to pursue his own innovative style of writing and exploration of character development. Ellis also refers to Meredith's trial of a 'vegetarian regimen he had so stoutly warned Maxse against but a few years earlier' (*George Meredith*, 1920, p.246). The letter from Meredith to Maxse which states that 'no healthy person ever takes to vegetable diet, excluding meat' continues by saying that 'some people may make themselves more clean and sound if they do so' (Cline, p.203). The trial of a vegetarian diet indicates Meredith's willingness to experiment in an effort to ease his own digestive problems and his remarks offer possibilities not certainties.

The challenge to his philosophy which Meredith faced as expressed in 'A Faith on Trial' was caused by love and grief, and emotion influenced his attitude towards the upbringing of his children. Meredith implies criticism of the restrictive 'System' of raising a son in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, and Richard is guarded obsessively as he reaches 'The Magnetic Age: the Age of violent attractions, when to hear mention of love is dangerous' (p.83). Thirteen years after the novel's publication Meredith echoes the same concern for his own son Arthur, aged almost nineteen, in a letter referring to 'the perilous sensual period when the animal appetites most need control and transmutation' (Cline, p.466). It is significant that Meredith states the need for 'transmutation', not repression, of man's primitive instinct to 'brain and spirit', according to his philosophy. Unlike Richard Feverel, Arthur was allowed to go away to school as Meredith himself had done, and letters from father to son emphasise the importance of physical health. His intention is to advise and to communicate the benefit of his experience to his son, repeating: 'Don't imagine me to be lecturing you' (Cline, p.429) and 'Don't think I preach too much' (Cline, p.436). Although he used the metaphor of china in *The Egoist* to criticise the masculine perception of Clara, Meredith is said to have treated his own daughter 'like a precious piece of porcelain' (in L Stevenson, 1953, p.289).

Meredith's awareness of conflict within himself is identified in *The Life and Writing of an Alteregoist* by Cronin, who discusses Meredith's 'need at once to confess and to conceal everything in his life that he was most ashamed of' (2020, p.23). Identifying autobiographical elements in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, *Harry Richmond* and *Evan Harrington*, Cronin states that Meredith is 'the first exponent in the English novel of

“alteregoism” (the coinage is his own): that is, he has the rare ability to write about himself as if he were another person’ (2020, p.xii). Meredith’s humble origins are revealed in these three novels as Dickens used his own story ‘to identify himself as the prototype of . . . Nicholas Nickleby and David Copperfield and Pip in *Great Expectations*’ (2020, p.28). Noting that this technique of alteregoism ‘made it possible for [Meredith] to write *Modern Love* . . . and *The Egoist*’ (2020, p.xii), Cronin makes links between Meredith and the title character of *Diana of the Crossways* as novelists.

In *Diana of the Crossways* Meredith shows how public and personal pressures influence an individual’s decisions, the speed and direction of their progress. The narrator’s empathy for the character of Diana, her failings and inconsistent behaviour, suggests Meredith’s self-awareness, recognition and acknowledgement of his own uncertainties and inconsistencies. Empathy for Diana’s apparently inconsistent behaviour indicates Meredith’s understanding of the development of ‘personality’, and that the search for self is ongoing. He is said to have told editor and critic Robertson Nicoll that: ‘I was one man in youth and another man in middle age . . . I have been six different men, six at least’ (in L Stevenson, 1953, p.350). The character of Diana, as a young girl in intellectual discussions with her close friend Emma Dunstane, ‘was leader . . . the girl’s impassioned rapidity . . . coming swiftly to *some* solution . . . She could not accept a “perhaps” . . . protested a perfect certainty’ of her opinions (*Diana of the Crossways*, pp.39, 40). Meredith shows how changing circumstances and relationships create uncertainty for Diana, influencing her behaviour and attitudes.

In the opening chapter of *Diana of The Crossways* the title character is depicted from various viewpoints by fictitious ‘diarists’ with comments by the narrator, which emphasise Diana’s vulnerability and uncertainty. The alternative person strategy signifies that readers are expected to form their own opinions of the eighteen-year-old Diana, and to reflect on her decisions and actions as she moves through the stages of her life seeking personal and professional identities. Diana is portrayed as a vivacious Irish girl with strong opinions, and her development is depicted over a period of years as a series of physical movements representing a painful process of progression and reversal. Her need for stability is highlighted by the symbolism of The Crossways, the house of her birth which she owns and loves, to which she returns throughout the novel, and which is used metaphorically to convey the situation in which Diana frequently finds herself. While the house is rented to tenants, Diana seeks physical and emotional security at Copsley, the estate belonging to Lady Emma Dunstane who cared for Diana as a child. The strength of Emma’s rational thought and

advice in contrast to her frail physical health is evident throughout the novel, and the character of Tom Redworth, not a traditional 'hero' but a 'friend to women' who is in love with Diana, represents a stabilising influence in the background.

The reasons for Diana's decision to marry Augustus Warwick are unclear even to herself, although marriage provides an escape from the unwanted attentions of men, including Emma's husband Sir Lukin, and enables Diana's return to The Crossways for part of the year. Vulnerable to society gossip as well as to predatory males, Diana becomes the subject of scandal when her husband accuses her of an affair, following her ambiguous relationship with Lord Dannisburgh. Planning to avoid the court case by fleeing England, Diana reverses her decision on the advice of Emma and Redworth, and learns to adopt a public persona as a means of self-protection. Living alone and in need of money Diana embarks on a successful career as a writer, and attempts to establish a position in society as a witty hostess at dinner parties. A friendship with Lord Percy Dacier MP develops quickly, although he is engaged to the heiress Constance Asper, and the emotionally confused Diana is pressured into agreeing to elope to the Continent. On the journey to meet Dacier she receives news of Emma's imminent operation and returns to Copsley to be with her friend. Diana's inconsistent behaviour in betraying Percy Dacier, by selling his confidential political information to a newspaper, results in the subsequent breakdown of her mental and physical health. The conclusion with Diana's recovery and second marriage to Redworth is ambiguous, the traditional ending representing apparent regression and the failure of Diana's hopes for independence.

The character of Diana, although of the same age as Meredith's heroines Clara and Aminta, has experience of a wider social world, and Meredith shows her sense of being continually poised as she moves through stages of her life seeking personal happiness and professional fulfilment. Diana's sense of uncertainty and confusion is conveyed in a letter to Emma referring to the 'wearifulness of constantly wandering, like a leaf off the tree' (p.43). Her ongoing uncertainty is summarised by her statement: 'I am always at crossways' and is emphasised by the symbolism of the house called The Crossways (p.259). The narrator states that even in times of apparent stability Diana 'stood on land, it was true, but she stood on a cliff of the land, the seas below and about her' (p.205). Her emotional confusion is apparent when, contemplating elopement with Percy Dacier, 'in her own mind she could not perceive a stone of solidity anywhere' (p.241). In Diana's comparison of herself to Hecate, the goddess associated with borders, doorways and crossroads, Meredith recognises that Diana eludes

definition and crosses boundaries. She is an 'enigma' to herself and is seen by others as a 'riddle to the world' (pp.109,159).

As a woman in search of identity and stability, Diana's elusiveness is conveyed in the first chapter. Different perceptions of Diana are shown by forms of address indicating roles or status: 'Mrs Warwick' 'Dan Merion's daughter' and later as the authoress 'Antonia' (pp.3, 4). Degrees of intimacy are indicated by names as Emma introduces her at a public Ball, as 'Diana Antonia Merion. Tony to me, Diana to the world' (p.19). In the same way that Meredith uses nicknames, Diana's choice of different names makes a distinction between close friends and acquaintances and is a means of preserving personal boundaries. At the beginning of her relationship with Percy Dacier, she tells him: 'Keep to the formal title with me. We are Mrs Warwick and Mr Dacier' (p.213). When their friendship develops quickly and Percy declares his love, Diana's sense of being 'imprisoned' conveys her emotional uncertainty (p.234). As a means of maintaining distance between them she 'debated as to forbidding that name [Tony]' which is used by Emma, her 'dearest and oldest friend' (p.235).

In the first chapter Diana is perceived by the narrator as 'a creature of the chase' (p.7) and her move from young girl to married woman is made in haste to an unsuitable man, as a means of escape from the sexual advances of predatory males. Meredith demonstrates Diana's vulnerability as an 'unprotected beautiful girl' with references to her early 'experiences' although specific events are not related until later in the novel (p.43). In conversation with Emma, Diana refers to the 'brutal' nature of 'masculine habits', and the narrator makes reference to 'those days' when men used the 'famous ancestral plea' blaming women's beauty for inappropriate behaviour, adding that 'one hears' that these attitudes persist (p.43). Emma uses the metaphor of 'the hunted hare', telling Redworth that as women 'we have something of the hare in us when the hounds are full cry. Our bravest, our best, have an impulse to run' (p. 75). The hunting imagery conveys the 'brutality' perceived by Diana, emphasising the possibility of men's control of women leading to use of physical restraint.

As the subject of public scandal, Diana is hounded by society's press, and Meredith highlights the conflict between the legitimised pursuit of an individual to obtain information, and the effect on a person who is 'hunted' inappropriately. The issue identified by Meredith in his nineteenth-century novels anticipates the dilemma faced by all members of twenty-first century society, as the growth of media interest and surveillance is recognised as potentially causing damage to mental health. Meredith shows how the hostile gossip of the social world forces Diana to adopt the wearing of a mask, despite asserting 'pride in being always myself!'

(p.27). When faced with the prospect of a court case, brought against her by her husband, Diana expresses a preference to leave the country rather than to 'face the world . . . wearing a false grin' (p.71). She claims to 'abhor the part of actress' (p.72) and Diana's struggle as a woman is described with empathy by the narrator, who states that 'in common with her sisterhood, she owned she had worn a sort of mask; the world demands it of them . . . she had never worn it consentingly' (p.99). The injustice of public perception is noted in the assertion that 'English women and men feel toward the quick-witted of their species as to aliens' and that a 'quick-witted woman exerting her wit is both a foreigner and potentially a criminal' (p.103). Diana tells Emma in conversation 'I have discovered that I can be a tigress! . . . Women have to fight' (pp.43, 44). The confusion of being perceived as both prey and aggressor is evident during chapter X 'The Conflict of the Night', when Diana sees herself as 'hare, serpent, tigress' (p.97).

Meredith depicts the nocturnal activity of Diana's mind in terms of violent movement as she struggles to decide whether to act on friends' advice or her own instinct. Facing the court case, Diana is seen by Redworth to be 'beset by battle', and he leaves her alone overnight at The Crossways saying that 'Night is a calm adviser' (pp.89, 95). For Diana, as for Clara in *The Egoist*, the immediate decision of fight or flight represents the struggle for freedom of independence, in contrast to the ease of conforming to society's perception of acceptable behaviour. The narrator expresses empathy, stating that there is 'perpetually the inducement to act the hypocrite before the hypocrite world, unless a woman submits to be the humbly knitting house-wife, unquestioningly worshipful of her lord' (pp.98, 99).

Meredith conveys Diana's mental effort in terms of physical movement and the imagery of battle. Her 'brain was a steam-wheel throughout the night; everything that could be thought of was tossed, nothing grasped' (p.95). Her body is affected by her state of mind, as 'her skin burned . . . [she] cried aloud . . . feeling as a butterfly flown out of a box to stretches of sunny earth beneath spacious heavens' at the prospect of freedom in another country (p.96).

Believing that her freedom will be 'forfeited' if she remains in England her 'wild brain . . . dashed in revolt at the laws of the world when she thought of the forces, natural and social, urging young women to marry and be bound to the end' (p.97). Diana's thoughts are described as 'troops defiling through her head while she did battle with the hypocrite world', the narrator states that a woman's 'brutallest tussle with the world was upon her' and Diana feels that 'she had been compelled to fence' (pp.97, 98). Acknowledging the 'things that women of the world have to combat' she resigns herself to the 'recognition of the state of duel between the sexes' (p.98). Diana's conflict, like that of Clara discussed in Chapter

Three, is depicted in images of active battle, experienced in the stillness of the night. In the morning 'the fight was over', and Diana has made her decision.

Influenced by her friends' advice, Diana decides to attend the trial in court, preparing as if for battle, and adopting the wearing of a mask as a means of defence. Meredith conveys the vulnerability of women in the patriarchal setting of the court, as the narrator states that she and 'the law differed in their interpretation of the dues of wedlock' (p.118). Diana acquires mental strength by imagining 'she had put on proof-armor . . . turning . . . the inward flutterer to steel which supplied her cuirass and shield' in order for the 'necessity to brave society, in the character of honest Defendant' (p.123). Creating for herself the character of a society hostess, Diana uses her wit in recalling or inventing anecdotes which are described as her 'weapons', and is 'perforce the actress of her part' (p.124). The narrator observes that the 'more extended the audience, the greater need for the mask and buskin' noting the influence of the upper middle class which is 'eminently persuasive of public opinion' (pp.125,127). Lady Wathin's 'elevation' in rank enables her 'to trample on those beneath it' (p.197). Empathy is encouraged for Diana's attempt to 'meet the world on equal terms' (p.173) and when Diana is introduced by Percy Dacier to his new bride, her 'noble attitude' observed by Emma is considered as displaying 'dignity . . . in self-mastery' (p.373).

Contemporary reviewers criticised Meredith's portrayal of Diana's inconsistent behaviour with particular reference to her betrayal of Percy Dacier, by selling his confidential political information to a newspaper's editor. Without condemning or fully explaining Diana's betrayal of Dacier's confidence, Meredith shows how emotions and circumstances influence her actions. The restrictions imposed on women by a patriarchal system, and attitudes of men assuming a woman's inferiority, contribute to her reaction. Although her behaviour is not excused, Meredith suggests that the character of Diana deserves respect and understanding, before her failings and poor decisions are condemned. In letters responding to Ulrica Duncombe's criticism, Meredith commends Diana as courageous, in spite of being 'uncertain . . . erratic . . . unbalanced' (Cline, p.1438). He explains Diana's action, which might be interpreted as feminine irrationality, stating that she was 'subject in a crisis to a swoon of the mind . . . alone in the world . . . physically and mentally unaware of the importance of the secret' (Cline, p.1452). The perceptive character of Emma attempts to explain the nature of Diana to Redworth, asserting that Diana is 'one of Shakespeare's women . . . another Hermione! . . . The bravest and best of us at bay in the world need an eye like his, to read deep and not be baffled by inconsistencies' (*Diana of the Crossways*, p.75).

Diana's thought process during her midnight journey to Mr Tonans' office is explained by the narrator who reports the 'tremendous pressure' of her 'crisis', Diana believing that her 'bitter need of money . . . was the material cause of her recklessness . . . the principal, the only cause' (pp.311, 312). Her justification of her 'costly household' and entertainment being for Percy's benefit is debatable, since her poor management of money is evident in an investment which lost money because of Diana's impetuous decision and failure to seek advice. Empathy is felt for Diana in her efforts to establish her role in society, and to earn her living as a writer. Meredith himself worked as publisher's reader, journalist, and reader to an elderly lady to supplement money from his novels, and Diana is reported as thinking 'in flashes . . . wrote . . . laboriously . . . under a sharp necessity for payment' (pp.9,10). Like Meredith, Diana did not write for 'the Public Taste' and the difficult process of writing is described by the narrator describing the 'obstacles to imaginative composition . . . the slow progress of a work' (pp.163, 220, 221). Meredith's own feelings are shared with Diana who had 'the anticipatory sense of [her novel's] failure . . . convinced that the work was doomed to unpopularity, resolved that it should be at least a victory in style . . . composing phrases as baits for the critics to quote' (pp.221, 264).

The sense of repression and injustice perceived by women in a male-dominated world is expressed by Diana in letters to Emma, writing of her growing 'knowledge of men and the secret contempt . . . the best of them entertain for us' (p.72). Her reference to 'unjust laws, which keep the really numerically better-half of the population in a state of slavery' echoes the views of John Stuart Mill and Meredith (p.139). Diana is motivated by a desire for respect since the editor Tonans 'had admonished her rather sneeringly for staleness in her information' and imagines bringing him 'news of such magnitude as to stupefy him!' (p.310). The prospect causes her to tremble with emotion, the meeting 'seemed a duel between herself and Mr Tonans' and Diana anticipates her 'triumph' (p.312). The narrator encourages empathy for Diana, kept waiting for an interview with the editor while 'men passed her, hither and yonder, cursorily noticing the presence of a woman . . . and [she] became an object - a disregarded object' (p.314). Chapter XXXIII is titled 'A Giddy Turn at the Spectral Crossways' suggesting an error of judgement when Diana is 'agitated' (p.309). Later admitting her action to Dacier, she stammers that 'it was a curious giddiness: I can't account for it' (p.324).

Dacier's thoughts are reported to the reader by the narrator, who implies that Dacier is at fault in manipulating Diana's emotion, and misusing his position of power to impress her. His behaviour does not excuse her betrayal, however, and the reader must reflect on the

ambiguity of Diana's inconsistent nature, and Dacier's deliberate inconstancy. His use of 'Tony' 'the secret name, the privileged name' has the effect of 'melting resistance' (p.235) and Diana is flattered by 'his manner of opening his heart in amatory correspondence' by confiding 'important secret matters' (pp.235, 281). Dacier's cynical exploitation of her emotion is deliberate as he notes that she is 'visibly subject to him under the spell of the news he had artfully lengthened out to excite and overbalance her' (p. 305). Persuaded of their mutual love, his reflections concerning the 'secret communicated' to Diana reveal how he 'exulted in the pardonable cunning of the impulse . . . and the dextrous play of his bait on the line' (p.316). Discovering her betrayal, Dacier disregards his 'play of the bait' and blames Diana as being 'just clever enough to hoodwink', referring to her 'dupery' and use of 'her good looks and sparkle . . . to serve her purpose . . . She was guilty, and he condemned her' (p.329). Dacier's reaction is to propose to Constance Asper, and Diana is dismissed as a 'shameless traitor [who] had caught him . . . had wound into his heart to bleed him of all he knew and sell the secrets for money' (p. 335). Judging Diana's behaviour, Dacier's 'wandering reflections all came back in crowds to the judicial Bench of the Black Cap' (p.336), and Diana's crisis of health following her rejection by Dacier is portrayed as being equivalent to death.

Opressive personal relationships are depicted as invisible barriers which affect Diana's health and wellbeing, and which contribute to her mental and physical breakdown. On a Sunday morning spent without her husband in the company of Emma and Lord Dannisburgh, her vivacity is described poetically as 'a spirit leaping and shining like a mountain water'. Her laughter is spontaneous, and her 'delicious chatter . . . sparkle in listening, equally quickened very sense of life' (p.67). The effect of her husband on her natural behaviour is conveyed in terms of death, the ultimate expression of restricted movement. Reports state that his conduct during a game of whist 'killed the bright laugh, shot it dead' (p.6) and Diana's restricted movement is confided to Emma. 'Husband grew to mean to me stifler, lung contractor, iron mask, inquisitor, everything anti-natural . . . an executioner's black cap to me' (p.132). Emma recognises that Percy Dacier would be an equally poor choice as a husband for Diana, noting that 'she had voluntarily, profitlessly, become this man's drudge, and her sprightly fancy, her ready humour and darting look all round in discussion, were rather deadened' (p.297). Diana's loss of vitality is seen as self-sacrifice by Emma, who could visualise no 'possible harmony between them, save at the cost of Tony's . . . performance equivalent to Suttee' (p.372). At Dacier's abrupt departure, the 'pallor and cold of death took her body' (p.328) and Emma finds Diana in a cold dark room

with ‘an appalling likeness to the vaults. So like to the home of death’. Emma distinguishes ‘a dark heap on the bed; she heard no breathing’. Diana’s hand is that of ‘a drowned woman . . . lifeless’ (p.343). The thought ‘flashed’ in Emma’s mind: ‘He has killed her!’ (p.344).

Meredith highlights the uncertainty experienced at all stages of life, especially caused by the effect of other people’s behaviour, by rites of passage and by the imposed change of unexpected circumstances. The emotional state of a character is linked to setting, as noted in Chapter One, in analysis of Richard Feverel’s walk through the forest. In a review by W E Garrett Fisher, in *The Academy* of 1896, he states that the ““intervolving” of the landscape with the mind of a person is peculiarly characteristic of Mr Meredith’ (in Williams, 1971, p. 449). The word ‘intervolved’ is used by Meredith in *Beauchamp’s Career* to describe the effect on men of the two women, Cecilia and Renée, who are compared to ‘a radiant landscape’ or a ‘dewy woodland’ (*Beauchamp’s Career*, p.318). Passages from four of Meredith’s novels have been selected for analysis to show how he highlights emotions experienced by characters who are poised on a threshold, in a state of ambiguity and uncertainty, defined by Arnold van Gennep in his 1909 book *The Rites of Passage* as liminality. Characters are depicted as being separated from society, suspended in time, in settings of liminality ‘used both in its spatial and its temporal sense’, as defined by Reus and Gifford (2013, p.3). Meredith conveys the sense of disorientation as characters move from a familiar space to the alien strangeness of an urban setting, and the emotional transformation in the mystical space of the sea. Analysis shows how the sense of liminality is heightened by time of day, specifically dusk and night, and at particular times of a character’s life. Settings and moods are affected by weather, particularly in storm and fog. Pauses created by Meredith in the narrative allow ‘spaces’ for readers’ reflections.

The confusion of a transitional stage when making choices is represented by crossroads and diverging paths, and frequently depicted in novels and poetry by the metaphor of walking in deep woods. Meredith describes the mystery and potential danger of the unknown in ‘The Woods of Westermain’ with the repeated challenge: ‘Enter these enchanted woods, / You who dare’ (p.193). As Bartlett states, woods are ‘emblematic of life’s experiences . . . frightening to those who fear [Nature], benign to those who do not’ (*George Meredith*, 1963, p.9). In Robert Frost’s poem ‘Stopping by Woods’, the ‘lovely, dark and deep’ woods are perceived as a safe place and the writer moves on with reluctance, although his horse senses the strangeness of lingering in the darkness beyond civilisation ‘between the woods and frozen lake’. Frost seems to express doubt and a sense of regret in his poem ‘The Road Not Taken’, being ‘sorry’ that he is unable to travel both roads, doubting that he would

‘ever come back’ (available on the National Poetry Foundation website). Meredith’s character of Redworth in *Diana of The Crossways* recalls ‘numberless’ missed opportunities when he ‘might’ have declared love for Diana, at various points along his walk through woods ‘near that thorn-bush; on the juniper slope’ (p.56).

A sense of liminality is conveyed in Meredith’s poem ‘In the Woods’, with the repetition of being ‘in deep woods, / Between the two twilights’, and is emphasised by the darkness of paths and hill-sides. The writer is distanced: ‘I from my mark / Am far . . . I know that a dawn is before me, / And behind me many days’. Responsibility for self is emphasised: ‘Whatsoever I am and may be, / . . . I am I, and it is my deed’ (p.342). The poet’s statement: ‘I have made my choice to proceed’ suggests forward movement, and the reader is urged to find delight in living, as part of the activity of the natural world. ‘The lover of life holds life in his hand’ (p.344). The temporal liminality between dusk and dawn, in the darkness of night, increases the sense of uncertainty created by the setting of the woods. Meredith’s ‘Hymn to Colour’ is a contemplation of the secret of life, ‘the mystery of breath’, in crepuscular light as ‘night puts away / her darker veil for grey’. The writer, seeing ‘no sign of life other than mine’, meets Love while walking between Life and Death, and creates the mystical time approaching the ‘land of dawn’ when Life and Death ‘hung web-like’ until his vision fades with daybreak (p.362). It is at night that Meredith’s heroines, Clara and Diana, are overwhelmed by conflicting thoughts, and the sense of uncertainty increased by the darkness is alleviated by mental or physical movement at daybreak.

In settings of landscape identified as liminal spaces, the sense of uncertainty is intensified by Meredith with reference to the effect of the weather. In *Harry Richmond* and *Sandra Belloni*, an urban setting is perceived as an alien environment, inhabited by strange people. For characters Harry and Emilia, lacking knowledge of the unfamiliar London streets, the sense of disorientation is emphasised by fog, their vision limited by an intangible barrier. Harry has learned that his father is ‘in the Bench . . . though what the Bench was exactly, and where it was, I had no idea’ (*Harry Richmond*, p.105). His friend Temple says it is in London and setting off together as if on an adventure they find themselves ‘in yellow fog, then in brown’ (p.112). The reader can identify with the first-person account by Harry who recalls that he ‘throbbed with excitement’ on arrival in London with the hope of finding his father. The city in dense fog had a ‘subterranean atmosphere’ and he discovers that the Bench which he had visualised as ‘a foreign kind of place . . . resembling the Kremlin of Moscow’ was ‘hemmed in by an atmosphere thick as Charon breathed; it might as well be underground’ (p.113). The sense of existing in a liminal space is reinforced by Meredith’s

reference to the ferryman transporting deceased souls across the Styx to the underworld.

Temple attempts to reassure himself and Harry of their location saying 'you know by the size of the station; and besides, there's the fog . . . we're positively in London' (p.113).

Harry admits: 'I certainly wished myself away, though I would not have retreated' and his confusion is conveyed in vivid sensory descriptions of slippery pavements, the colours and smells of old bruised fruits. It seemed that nothing was 'more desolate' as he and Temple 'struggled through an interminable succession of squalid streets' amongst rushing figures who appear to have no faces, with the sensation of being choked by fog (p.114). Alone in the darkness and fog, with no sense of direction, Harry is forced to admit that neither he nor his friend know where they are, or where they are going, as they continue walking 'in a labyrinth of dark streets where no one was astir' (p.115). Setting off at 'a furious pace . . . a sharp pace' indicates their attempt to determine their location and motivate themselves (p.116) as Harry's comparison of himself to Telemachus in search of his father suggests his need for validation. Temple's apprehension is evident in his reference to the people and life at home as he notes that 'It's getting darker and darker, we must be in some dreadful part of London'. The contrast between his 'pleasant home and this foggy solitude gave [Harry] a pang of dismay' and his physical sense of disorientation is increased as he loses track of time (p.117).

The strangeness of the city environment is emphasised by the unfamiliarity of its inhabitants as Harry and Temple find themselves 'in the midst of a thin stream of people, mostly composed of boys and young women, going at double time, hooting and screaming with the delight of loosened animals' (p.117). The people are hurrying to watch a fire and Harry discovers from two girls that the 'immense high wall' nearby is the Bench, and that it is a debtor's prison. The 'saucy girl' of the pair asks for money, talks of fires and corpses and steals Harry's watch; their pocket-handkerchiefs and Temple's penknife are also stolen (p.118). The laughter of the crowd shocks Harry, producing a 'painful impression' on him, and he recalls: 'We were all in a crimson mist, boys smoking, girls laughing and staring, men hallooing, hats and caps flying about, fights going on, people throwing their furniture out of the windows' (p.119). Conveying the overwhelming sensory experience of heat and noise, Meredith shows how immaterial fog and smoke have the physical consequence of enabling theft and allowing escape.

The reader shares Harry's experience as he discovers the unpleasant reality of life in a setting in dramatic contrast to the rural life with his grandfather and the fantasy world created by his father. The 'great wall of the Bench was awful' and their disgust at the theft of their

possessions induced Harry and Temple to ‘disentangle’ themselves from the crowd and they ‘walked away’ (p.119). With hindsight Harry recognises that he remained naïve, unaware at the time ‘how frozen and befogged my mind and senses had become’ in accepting the invitation of a man ‘evidently a sailor . . . to partake of refreshment’ on board his ship’ (p.120). His learning experience in London was just one of the ‘gradual changes’ of Harry’s development, which continues in the following chapter titled ‘We Find Ourselves Bound on a Voyage’.

Meredith depicts the disorientation and isolation of an urban setting in *Sandra Belloni* as Emilia faces crises in her personal life and career. The vivid depiction of the foggy streets of London is in contrast to the mystical setting of moonlit woodland in which Emilia is introduced, characterised as the ‘voice of the woods’ (*Sandra Belloni*, p.10). Her ‘flight’ to London represents her active response to Wilfrid’s deception, as discussed in Chapter Three, her intention being to accept Pericles’ offer as her patron for tuition in Italy. Distress causes her singing voice to emerge as ‘ragged, as if it had been torn through a briar-hedge’ and she leaves abruptly as Pericles ridicules her ambition (p.433). The London fog ‘appeared to have swallowed her’ and Emilia, alone on the streets of the ‘dismally-lighted city . . . fancied she had dropped into an underground kingdom, among a mysterious people . . . seeing her desolation stretch outwardly into endless labyrinths’. The sight of ‘muffled men, few women’ in the thickening fog conveys Emilia’s isolation among strangers and by her gender, as a woman alone on the streets (p.435). The ‘prospect of her desolation . . . moved her to turn back’ to plead with Pericles, whose response is that since she is of no use, she might as well be dead or learn knitting’ (pp.436, 437). Emilia asks: ‘Don’t tell me to go yet’, and the narrator notes that she speaks ‘no longer in a girlish style, but with the grave pleading manner of a woman’, as she begs Pericles to take her to Italy, and have faith in her recovery (p.437). Meredith highlights a young woman’s vulnerability and the potential for a man to abuse his position of power, as Pericles proposes terms of a physical relationship but not marriage. For the second time, her departure from Pericles is abrupt: ‘Emilia quitted the room’ (p.439).

The alien setting of London is associated with death for Emilia, telling Pericles: ‘The streets make me wish to die’ (p.437). She is described as a ‘bereaved creature’ and her sense of isolation increases with dusk ‘deepening the yellow atmosphere’. She is grateful to become anonymous, joining the crowd ‘steadily flowing in one direction’ until, realising that all were heading for the comfort of home, ‘loneliness overwhelmed her. None seemed to go her way’ (p.440). Taking refuge in a city side street, Emilia is ‘quite alone’ and the dead end is symbolic: she has the ‘choice of retracing her steps, or entering a strange street’.

Hesitating, Emilia sees ‘a troop of sheep’ passing, hears their ‘piteous noise’ and thinks of ‘something broken that appeared to be in their throats’. The thought which ‘flashed in her that they were going to be slaughtered’ prompts the uncomfortable comparison with her own ‘broken’ voice and Pericles’ statement that she might as well be dead (p.440). The image of the sheep, driven from countryside into city to be slaughtered, reflects Emilia’s situation, as a girl with an affinity for natural world, who has a sense of impending death in an urban setting. Passing a portrait of the well-known ‘Queen of Song’ in the window of a lighted shop and thinking of that successful career in contrast to her own apparent failure, Emilia ‘found herself on one of the bridges’. Her state of mind is signified by the bridge, as a liminal crossing between two places, and her increasing depression is conveyed as she walks along ‘murmuring “Helpless! Useless!”’ feeling ‘surprise that one like herself should be allowed to live’ (p.441). As she imagines drowning, Emilia seems to become aware of her own mental fragility and hurries back to the streets and the shops which are now dark. Encountering a little Italian boy and a smaller English girl, Emilia finds some comfort in conversation with them in her native language, sharing cakes, laughter and physical contact ‘to her delight and half perplexity’ as they sit together on a doorstep (p.443). Her temporary feeling of security is lost when the children leave, and Emilia asks for shelter with a policeman and his wife, who thought her ‘though reasonable, a trifle insane’ (p.446).

Chapter XL ‘She Tastes Despair’ conveys liminality of space and of Emilia’s state of mind. Meredith depicts her loss of self-esteem, as Emilia experiences ‘great fatigue . . . soothing languor . . . She felt as if floating, for a space’ (p.444). No longer certain of her own identity, she has ‘two distinct visions of herself’. A sense of worthlessness ‘bade her die’, while anger at the injustice of being unfairly treated produces ‘fits of intolerable rage’ (p.444). Emilia’s conflicting emotions represent submission or defiance, and the narrator distinguishes between active and passive despair. Asserting that passion can stimulate motivation, the narrator states that the passive despair which follows ‘has nothing to do with mental action, and is mainly a corruption or degradation of our blood’ (p.444). After a night on the street, Emilia feels fatigue, hunger and the shame of being an outcast, and the narrator states starkly: ‘Passive despair had set in’ (p.449). Seeking the ‘solitude of the wharf’, her brain becomes ‘vacant of a thought’ and Emilia is conscious of nothing except descending the steps to the river, where she crouches for a long time, poised ‘between death and life immoveable’ (pp.450, 451). When her connection to the natural world is eventually re-established, her time spent in London can be seen as a diversion on Emilia’s journey through life, demonstrating that liminal settings can also offer escape or reinvention.

In *Beauchamp's Career* (1876) and *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* (1894) Meredith uses the sea as space to convey the mystical atmosphere of a time of transition, in which couples are isolated in a setting beyond society. Nevil's association with the sea is significant throughout the novel *Beauchamp's Career*. Aged fourteen he was 'despatched to sea . . . unwillingly' but on his return from his first voyage Nevil's 'mobile' features 'shone of sea and spirit' (pp.17, 18). Having become a midshipman, Nevil is recovering from fever in Venice when he meets Renée, the seventeen-year-old sister of Roland de Croisnel, whose life he had saved. Nevil can be compared to the earlier characters of Richard Feverel and Harry Richmond in his eagerness to find love. His conception of love is romantic and sensuous, recalling the voice of the poet from Meredith's early poem 'Love in the Valley' (1851). Alone with Renée for the first time in a gondola Nevil's happiness is described poetically as belonging to 'the avenue of wishes leading to golden mists beyond imagination, and seemed . . . miraculous' (p.44). In a conversation 'originated by Renée for the enlightenment of Nevil and as a future protection to herself' Roland explains to Nevil that in accordance with the French custom, Renée is engaged to the middle-aged Marquis de Rouaillout (*Beauchamp's Career*, p.49). Although she regards Nevil as 'her second brother' (p.46), Renée is aware of being attracted to the courageous and gentle man, of his feelings for her, and of the influence of the romantic city of Venice. Roland hires a fishing boat 'to sail into the gulf at night, and return at dawn, and have sight of Venice rising from the sea' (p.61), and in the chapters VIII 'A Night on the Adriatic', and IX 'Morning at Sea Under the Alps' Meredith conveys the intense emotions and contrasting perceptions of Nevil and Renée.

In chapter VIII, the liminal setting of the sea, emphasised by the darkness of night, highlights the uncertainty of Renée, a seventeen-year-old girl poised between girlhood and womanhood. The reader has been made aware that Renée is emotionally confused by her own behaviour of 'raillery' (p.47) and 'coquetry' in spite of her 'still fresh convent-conscience' (p.48). Telling Nevil of her arranged marriage she 'talked like a woman, to plead the cause of her obedience as a girl', and experiencing the conflict between 'the religious duty of obeying and pleasing her father' and the 'personal inclinations' of her attraction to Nevil, Renée 'did not understand the feelings she struggled with' (pp.54, 57). Aboard the fishing-boat with Roland, Rosamund and Nevil, Renée is 'placid outwardly, in fear of herself, so strange she found it to be borne out to sea by her sailor lover under the eyes of her betrothed' but her emotions indicate her inner turmoil. 'She was conscious of a tumultuous rush of sensations, none of them of a very healthy kind, coming as it were from an unlocked chamber of her bosom, hitherto of unimagined contents' (p.65). The narrator's description

conveys the lack of love in Renée's relationship with the Marquis and the uncertainty caused by her 'unhealthy' sensations. Renée senses the separation from society as Venice apparently sinks into the sea dropping 'lower and lower, breasting the waters, until it was a thin line in air . . . At last the topmost campanile sank'. For her the 'adieu to Venice was her assurance of liberty' although she remains aware that the city, hidden only temporarily, represents a return to 'her tether of bondage' (p.66). For one night, the open sea represents the freedom of spatial and temporal liminality.

Reported thoughts inform the reader of Nevil's continuing failure to accept or understand Renée's sense of duty and commitment to an arranged marriage. During 'aimless walking' in chapter VII, he reasons that she had 'been sold . . . unwooed, without love - the creature of a transaction' that she was 'innocent, she was unaware of the sin residing in a loveless marriage'. Entrusted by her father to act as Renée's 'parade-escort' Nevil's 'heart came out' and he impulsively addresses Renée as 'my beloved for ever' (pp.51, 52). Her brother Roland expresses sympathy but no encouragement, considering Nevil's situation to be 'hopeless'. Nevil responds to Roland's calm acceptance with the 'calm fanaticism of the passion of love' (p.55). In chapter VIII, aboard the fishing boat, Renée's emotional experience is noted by Nevil, who is 'amazed by the sudden exquisite transition' perceiving her tenderness 'in voice, in look, in touch' and their physical closeness sends 'lightnings up his veins'. Nevil realises that 'frankness' is her natural manner but when Renée gives him her hand 'as though it had been his own to claim' he interprets it as a pledge. Lying awake on deck at midnight Nevil 'resolved to save her' from the 'deadly iniquity' of the arranged marriage (p.66).

The mystical atmosphere of the sea in darkness is conveyed in chapter VIII as Renée leans 'over the vessel's rails' with Nevil, 'not separated from him by the breadth of a fluttering riband' (p.65). Their physical closeness is intensified by the dark night, which limits vision and encloses the couple, with a similar effect to being surrounded by fog. The dramatic effect on Nevil, 'lying on the deck at midnight', is shown in the metaphor: 'the starred black night was Renée'. For Renée, who does not share Nevil's certainty of commitment, the emotional experience is inexplicable and confusing. Awake in her cabin, she 'with a heart fluttering open and fearing, felt only that she had lost herself somewhere, and she had . . . nothing but a sense of infinite strangeness, as though she were borne superhumanly through space' (p.66).

In the following chapter Meredith emphasises the sense of mysticism at the liminal time of dawn. A dramatic description of the mountain landscape in vivid colours and shapes

conveys the intensity of emotion when Renée emerges to join Nevil watching the sun rise. The sky appears 'transfigured' and Renée is 'mystically shaken and at his mercy'. She is an 'impressionable' girl and short sentences suggest breathless excitement as Nevil perceives 'the critical instant. She was almost in his grasp'. The scene ends abruptly, but the narrator informs that 'even later in the morning, when she was cooler . . . more than her own strength was needed to resist him. The struggle was hard' (p.68). On the return journey Renée waits 'in suspense' for Venice to re-appear, the city representing the reality of 'a close and stifling chamber, so different from this brilliant boundless region of air, that she sickened with the apprehension; but she knew it must appear and soon' (p.68). The end of the liminal episode is signalled with Nevil's impulsive decision not to land which requires a 'singular council' with Roland and Rosamund. A return to Venice is advised by Roland who recognises Renée's 'bewildered senses . . . the heat of her conflict of feelings', and the 'headlong proceeding advocated by his friend' (p.72). Despite her confusion Renée welcomes her brother's intervention with some relief that she was 'escaping from this hurricane of a youth, who swept her off her feet and wrapt her whole being in a delirium' (p.73).

The sea as a mystical space is the setting for chapter XXVII 'A Marine Duet' as *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* draws towards the 'Conclusion'. Meredith creates an erotically charged atmosphere conveying the deepening friendship between Matthew and Aminta as they swim together. The sights and sounds of nature described in poetic terms depict the sea as a fantasy world where they are free to make a commitment to each other, separated from a society which would not approve of the relationship between Lord Ormont's wife and his secretary. Realistic details of speed and synchronised movements while swimming demonstrate that the couple are well-matched in physical strength as well as love for each other.

The reality of the loveless marriage between Lord Ormont and Aminta has been increasingly recognised by Matthew and Aminta herself, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three. Their friendship has been renewed and strengthened during conversations between themselves and with Matthew's mother. Their swim takes place when Matthew goes for 'a dip' while sailing with friends and noting a bather's tent remarks that 'ladies going into the water half-dressed never have more than half a bath' (*Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, p.368). This 'fair bather' is revealed as 'one of those unenfranchised ladies . . . she waded, she dipped, this one of them could swim. She was making for sea' (p.369). There is little doubt in the mind of Matthew and the reader that this is Aminta, as swimming 'was a gift she had from nature' (p.293) and he experiences a 'fiery envy and desire to be alongside her'. The

confirmation that 'it was she. How could it ever have been any other!' (p.369) could be a report of Matthew's thought, or a comment by the narrator to affirm the reader's expectation of the bather's identity and the reunion of Matthew and Aminta at the novel's end.

Meredith depicts the sea as a space beyond society which allows freedom for a couple to meet, and freedom for a woman to express herself physically and emotionally, in contrast to the settings in London fog in which characters are enclosed and restricted. The liminality of the sea reflects Aminta's situation, poised between her role as Lord Ormont's wife and a different life, having made the decision to leave her husband. Her letter informing Lord Ormont has been posted before her swim, although this is not revealed to Matthew or the reader until later. This information explains her mood of excitement at the beginning of the chapter 'A Marine Duet' as Aminta experiences the mental relief of release from a restrictive marriage and the joy of physical activity. Realising that it was Matthew who has dived from the boat she gave a 'chuckle of delighted surprise, like a blackbird startled' and 'pushed seaward for joy of the effort' (p.370). Meredith conveys her flirtatious mood as she 'exults' in imagining 'an escape up to the moment of capture' before 'yielding' as she floats 'until she heard him near' then 'her stroke was renewed vigorously'. Their mutual attraction is evident as they chase and compete in the water like children, using the nicknames 'Matey' and 'Browny' from their schooldays. For Aminta the swim 'was a holiday; all was new . . . since she took her plunge', a reference to her dive into the sea and to her decision to leave her marriage (p.370).

The sea is perceived by Aminta as a fantasy world: 'she had a sea-mind - had left her earth-mind ashore'. The swim and Matthew's pursuit 'passed up, out of happiness, through the spheres of delirium, into the region where our life is as we would have it be: a home . . . midway' to heaven (p.370). Her sense of freedom is considered as equivalent to having wings and Aminta feels 'drunken of the sea' having 'leapt out of bondage into buoyant waters . . . the dream of the long felicity' (p.370). Meredith's use of metaphor emphasises the mystical atmosphere. Matthew refers to Aminta as a 'sea-nymph . . . their heads were water-flowers that spoke at ease' and the sea is their 'kingdom'. When he says 'They're not waves; they're sighs of the deep' Aminta teases: 'A poet I swim with' (p.371). Referencing the Greek god of the sea, Matthew asks: 'You're prepared for the rites? Old Triton is ready' and their mutual commitment is signified as he takes her hand, Aminta does not pull away, closes her eyes (p.372). Their ceremony of commitment which cannot be performed legally takes place according to 'customs of the sea'. Triton joins their hands, they say "'Browny-Matey,'" and it's done'. Imagery and metaphor depict their sense of freedom and companionship as

Matthew declares: 'We're sea birds. We've said adieu to land' (p.372). Swimming steadily and silently they are 'creatures of the smooth green roller' and Matthew hears the 'water-song of her swimming' (p.374). In a reference to the service of baptism, the reader is told that Aminta felt 'washed pure of the intervening years, new born, by blessing of the sea . . . a swimmer worthy of him, his comrade in salt water' (p.374). Aminta dives, Matthew follows, and the narrator informs that 'they came up together. There is no history of events below the surface' (p.375). Meredith preserves the privacy of the couple's intimate moment and reduces the risk of giving offence to his critics by moving the couple to a different space, beneath the sea and inaccessible to the reader.

Both characters feel a sense of disorientation after the sensual and emotional experience in their 'kingdom' at sea and the narrator conveys Aminta's state of being mentally and physically drained. Swimming back to the shore she 'shook off her briny blindness' and her 'playfulness' is stopped by 'emotion, or exhaustion'. She is 'stunned with what had passed' (p.376) as she returns 'from the sea-nymph to the state of woman' and when dried and dressed and 'decently formal' at breakfast in public 'in each hung the doubt whether land was the dream or sea' (p.377). The reader is left to reflect on the distinction between the socially constructed perception of marriage, and the reality of their loving relationship which is not legally recognised. The uncertainty of their future is acknowledged as Matthew and Aminta leave their idyllic setting, aware that by living together in society as an unmarried couple they risk the hostility of public opinion.

The transitional stages of life portrayed by Meredith convey his philosophy that uncertainty is inevitable, and that it is futile to seek 'permanence'. His acceptance of uncertainty based on the natural cycle of life is applied to society, and contemporary challenges to established ideas offer opportunities for positive growth, towards a new form of novel, and a better civilisation. One aspect of Meredith's 'conception of natural process', as noted by Kelvin, is that 'impermanence of a state of being is the very mark of process itself' (1961, p.139). Identification with his characters' confusion encourages readers' empathy, and his ambiguity requires readers to reflect and apply to their own situations. In order to move towards the equality of relationships based on understanding and tolerance, Meredith challenges the stereotypical roles of submissive women and dominant men, depicting alternative views of marriage, and gender roles. Although he proposes no solutions, Meredith shows the possibility of changing attitudes as a move towards better understanding of others. The creation of ambiguous role models represents an 'experiment', as in his approach to the changing form of novel, in which uncertainty is created deliberately with the expectation of

the reader's intellectual engagement. Meredith uses obscurity and ambiguity in response to a state of impermanence as a means for progress, albeit not by a direct route, but by moving through uncertainty with uncertainty.

The concept of conventional marriage is questioned by Meredith as Aminta learns that authorised relationships do not guarantee happiness: 'there are marriages . . . that don't go on, though Protestant clergymen officiated' (*Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, p.98). Matthew states that in their relationship 'we believe - I with my whole faith, and I may say it of you - that we are not offending Divine law' (p.384). Hardy makes the same distinction in *The Woodlanders*, expressing Grace's belief that although still legally bound to Fitzpiers she is 'not bound to him by any divine law' (*The Woodlanders*, p.307). Having repeatedly conformed to expectation by deferring to her father, Grace finally states that she no longer feels 'morally bound' to her unfaithful husband (p.283). Her realisation is described in Ingham's note as an 'astonishingly unconventional view at a time when, since she was not divorced, she would generally be thought to be morally bound to Fitzpiers' (1998, note 8, p.408). Reference is made in the novel to the Divorce Act of 1857, a 'new law' which would enable 'ill-assorted husbands and wives to part in a way they could not formerly do' (p.282), emphasising a contrast with 'social law' which Giles Winterborne considered 'had negated for ever their opening paradise' (p.304). In Hardy's *Jude The Obscure*, Sue Bridehead seeks to leave an unhappy marriage, telling her husband Richard: "'For a man and woman to live on intimate terms when one feels as I do is adultery . . . however legal'" (*Jude The Obscure*, p.243). Recognising that her attitude is unconventional, and challenges Jude's doctrines and religion, Sue tells him: 'I am certain one ought to be allowed to undo what one has done so ignorantly! I daresay it happens to lots of women; only they submit, and I kick . . . When people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what *will* they say!' (p.236).

Sue expresses frustration that change to women's status would take time, and the tragic outcomes for Hardy's heroines are perceived as pessimistic, but scholars debate the critical assumption that Hardy's female characters have no control. Morgan argues in *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (1988), that although Hardy's women are often defeated, they are not victims, but are active. Sue Bridehead's unconventional views on marriage, and her reference to the philosophy of John Stuart Mill, mentioned in Chapter Three, reveal mental activity, and Jude's description of Sue conveys physical energy. 'There was nothing statuesque in her; all was nervous motion. She was mobile, living' (p.109). Taking action to escape from her unhappy marriage, Sue 'firmly asked [her husband] if she

might leave' to go to Jude (p.251), and becomes 'a fugitive from her lawful home' (p.257). The character of Arabella, also recognising the limits of social conventions, exerts agency to resist being manipulated. Having tricked Jude into marriage, she leaves when the relationship fails, decides to emigrate to Australia with her parents, and takes the initiative by asking Jude to obtain a divorce from her. Following their re-marriage, she is with Jude at the end of his life, and is preparing for her future by flirting with Jude's doctor. Arabella defies convention by flaunting her sexuality, boldly telling her friends: 'I must have him' (p.69), and Jude's first impression is of 'a complete and substantial female animal' (p.59). Lucas notes 'an independence of behaviour and action which is new among Hardy's women' in his analysis of *Far From the Madding Crowd*, and asserts that the character of Bathsheba offers Hardy 'a way of dramatising the nature of social movement, and of how it works through individuals' ('Bathsheba's Uncertainty of Self' [1977] in Regan, 2001, pp.354, 355). Comparisons can be made between Hardy's heroines, demonstrating mental and physical activity and sensuality, and Meredith's active women, who are depicted with increasing physical and emotional mobility. Both writers highlight the potential for women to bring about change, moving towards greater freedom as individuals and within relationships.

Meredith's novels which conclude in marriage as an apparently conventional ending are depicted with deliberate ambiguity to convey his understanding that marriage is not necessarily an ending but the beginning of a new stage of life. Aware that 'marrying Beauchamp was no simple adventure . . . Jenny dropped some tears on her bridal day' (*Beauchamp's Career*, pp.518, 519). The transition from daughter to wife, son to husband is not easy for women or men, and Meredith recognises in his poem cycle 'Modern Love' that feelings change as in the natural world: "I play for Seasons; not Eternities!" / Says Nature, laughing on her way. "So must / All those whose stake is nothing more than dust!" (*Poetical Works*, p.138). Empathy deriving from Meredith's own experience is evident in Diana's description of the failure of her marriage: 'we walked a dozen steps in stupefied unison, and hit upon crossways' (*Diana of the Crossways*, p.131). Diana approaches her second marriage reluctantly as 'a barely willing woman' and her view of the 'return to the wedding yoke' expresses the apprehension which follows a previous experience of being dominated. She remains confused by her own mixed emotions 'surprised by . . . her unprotesting submission; surprised and warmed . . . She left it unexplained' and the future of the marriage remains equally uncertain for the character and the reader (p.409).

Relationships are depicted in Meredith's fiction in which the skills of men and women are balanced according to their talents as John Stuart Mill suggests in *The Subjection of*

Women, so that each can ‘have alternately the pleasure of leading and of being led in the path of development’ ([1869], 2006, p.237). An interdependent relationship between husband and wife as described by Mill in 1869 is portrayed by Meredith in ‘The House on the Beach’, published in 1877, although correspondence indicates that Meredith was working on his short story as early as 1861 (Cline, note 16, p.81). The narrator notes that the ‘union of the two Crickledons, male and female, was an ideal one . . . Each had a profession, each was independent of the other, each supported the fabric. Consequently there was mutual respect’ (in *The Tale of Chloe and Other Stories*, p.134).

Meredith conveys a relationship between man and woman according to their individual strengths and weaknesses in *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*. The dominant character of Lady Charlotte is balanced by a husband who ‘accepted the position into which he naturally fell beside her, and the ideas she imposed on him’ (p.36). Lord Ormont’s sister is caricatured as having masculine traits, but Meredith suggests that there was mutual respect in this unconventional marriage, that ‘they were excellent friends’ (p.37), and shows that the balance of power results in a long successful partnership. Lady Charlotte does not conform to the expectation of a submissive wife, portrayed by in Meredith’s novels by the metaphor of china ornaments, and Meredith challenges the social perception of a strong-minded woman, voiced in *Diana of The Crossways*, by Sir Lukin referring to ‘the thing called a Radical woman . . . with horse teeth, hatchet jaws’ (p.42). The uncertainty of men towards woman in an independent role is expressed in Hardy’s *The Woodlanders*. Grace Melbury has been educated at boarding-school, and her father notes her ‘peculiar situation, as it were in mid-air between two stories of society’ ([1887], 1998, p.216). Her childhood friend Giles Winterborne becomes aware that as a result of her experiences she is ‘a new woman in many ways . . . a creature of more ideas, more dignity, and, above all, more assurance . . . he could not at first decide whether he were pleased or displeased at this. But upon the whole the novelty attracted him’ (p.281).

Meredith demonstrates confusion for women and for men in accepting change to gender roles, and his complex characterisations emphasise the need for changing attitudes and compromise. The nineteenth-century model of masculinity is challenged by Meredith in his creation of male characters demonstrating greater sensitivity. Referring to his writing and his intention on behalf of young women, in a letter to Urica Duncombe, Meredith states: ‘I have tried in my time to . . . humanize their males’ (Cline, p.1439). An alternative to the stereotypical hero is depicted by Meredith in his characterisation of Vernon Whitford in *The Egoist*, repeated in Tom Redworth in *Diana of the Crossways*, and Matthew Weyburn in *Lord*

Ormont and his Aminta. At ease in the natural environment, depicted as walkers and swimmers, and described as a 'friend' to women, these men perform caring roles traditionally associated with women, and the novels' endings suggest them as preferable role models as husbands. Society's perception of an alternative hero is shown as less than favourable. In comparison to Sir Willoughby, Vernon 'seemed a sheepish fellow, without stature abroad . . . a new kind of thing, nondescript, produced in England of late, and not likely to come to much good himself, or do much good to the country' (*The Egoist*, p.28). Meredith's 'friends to women' become the 'heroes' of his novels but are equally ambiguous as the attempts by feminist writers to portray male counterparts to the New Woman. Worthiness and stoic self-control produce dull apparently emotionless men, in spite of the emphasis on physical exercise and strength to indicate masculinity. Attempting to identify a new role for herself as an independent woman, Diana experiences difficulty in accepting Redworth as a husband, telling Emma 'I wanted a hero' (*Diana of The Crossways*, p.400).

Demonstrating in the 2006 article 'Was Ever Hero in This Fashion Won?' that Meredith's novels 'undermine sex and gender conventions within depictions of heterosexual unions', Jenkins notes conflicting perceptions by twentieth-century critics of 'unconventional sexualities' (p.124). Papers presented by Jenkins and Crossley at the 2015 Conference address the topic 'Meredith: Masculinity and Sexuality', and Crossley refers to Jenkins's work in her article 'George Meredith's *Rhoda Fleming*: Sexuality, Submission and Subversion' in the *Yearbook of English Studies* (2019). Crossley shows how this novel indicates a 'non-binary view of gender and sexuality', and notes 'the ambiguity with which Meredith envisions sexual orientation and gender identity' (p.139). Meredith creates uncertainty as he questions conventional stereotypes and presents alternatives, in the portrayal of unconventional relationships, and the depiction of fluid gender roles. Readers are challenged to reconsider preconceived ideas, and to reflect on ways of achieving balance in relationships with others, and the expression of individual identity.

His models of strong but sensitive men, active yet feminine women, reflect Meredith's own ideals, and anticipate the exploration of combined male and female characteristics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In his book *The Intermediate Sex*, Edward Carpenter hoped that 'if modern woman is a little more masculine in some ways . . . the modern man . . . while by no means effeminate, is a little more sensitive . . . than the original John Bull' (1908, p.16). The conflict between new ideals and reality in the search for more equal partnerships is evident in Meredith's own uncertainty. He admired intelligent women but had a life-long appreciation of feminine beauty, and told Maxse 'I can't love a

woman if I do not feel her soul' (Cline, p.105). The portrayal of unstable gender in novels by Meredith, and later by D H Lawrence, caused uncertainty, and Meredith risked criticism by suggesting the eroticism of androgyny. In his first novel, Richard Feverel finds Mrs Mount's 'man-like conversation . . . was a refreshing change on fair lips' and the memory of her 'arrayed like a cavalier' calling herself 'Sir Julius . . . doubled the feminine attraction' (*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, pp.353, 354, 357). In *Sandra Belloni*, the attraction between Wilfrid and Emilia is intensified by her flirtatious manner while wearing his hat. 'He assured her that she looked a charming boy' (*Sandra Belloni*, p.62). Meredith's stereotypical military hero Lord Ormont, having 'a keen appreciation of female beauty', also demonstrates 'one of his wilful likings for . . . a lady with the head of a comely boy . . . a supersensual naughtiness' (*Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, pp.28, 121).

Unconventional characterisations and liminal settings create uncertainty for the reader; multiple voices offer different interpretations, and the variable pace of Meredith's fragmented narrative has a destabilising effect. The tone of Meredith's narrator reporting characters' thoughts and asserting opinions is frequently that of a mature 'man of the world' in the manner of Byron's narrator in *Don Juan*. He assumes that the reader will identify with his comments on characters' emotions and experiences which 'we' share, and guides the reader's response by indicating contempt, ridicule, or empathy. Alternative opinions are presented by use of references to fictitious books or diaries relating backstories, and in realistic dialogue between characters discussing contemporary issues, such as women's role in society and the expansion of the railway. The expression of differing views of the same situation conveyed simultaneously is considered to be in contrast to Hardy who, in Paulin's view, does not convey feelings 'as they are immediately shared by two people' (1975, p.159). Meredith's conflicting voices of elusive narrators and commentators contribute to his 'original way of camouflaging and alleviating the often so overpowering interference of the omniscient Victorian narrator', recognised by Marucci (2019, p.275). The characters of *Vanity Fair* are introduced by Thackeray in the style of a 'ringmaster' and the narrator establishes and maintains a close relationship with his 'friends and companions, addressed directly as 'dear reader'. The authority of an omniscient narrator is affirmed by statements of the 'truth' or 'fact' of the matter. The voice of Meredith's narrator is one among many, which reduces the certainty of authorial influence.

Additional comments are made by 'other voices', often as digressions within the narrative. Meredith's intention to include philosophy in fiction is represented in *Sandra Belloni* by his 'character' of The Philosopher, who also intervenes in *The Amazing Marriage*

(1895). The argumentative relationship created between Philosopher and Narrator is a means of stimulating the reader's thought process. Gillian Beer concludes that the reader 'becomes the arbitrator' in her analysis of the 'skirmishes' in *The Amazing Marriage* between Dame Gossip who 'loves the fabulous' and the Novelist who is concerned with the study of human action and motivation (1970, p.172). Chapter I begins with the entry of Dame Gossip 'as Chorus' reporting the backstory to prompt readers to form an opinion of the characters before they are introduced. The Dame's 'sudden extinction' is announced in Chapter III when her 'time has passed . . . according to the terms of the treaty,' in the same way that Shakespeare's Fool 'disappears' having served his purpose when King Lear has been made aware of his shortcomings. The reader's expectation is subverted as the Dame 'irrupts in breach of convention' in Chapter XIII with the purpose of providing retrospective information, and the final chapter titled 'A Concluding Word by the Dame' indicates a return to 'reality' with the awareness of a 'story' and the reader's role, in the manner of the ending of *Twelfth Night* as the Fool announces that 'our play is done'. The function of Dame similar to a Greek Chorus contributes to the distancing of an authorial narrator and the uncertainty of multiple voices increases the opportunity for a reader's interpretation.

Such interventions and digressions can be criticised as slowing the pace of a narrative. The understanding of reader expectation is expressed by Meredith in *One of our Conquerors* (1891): 'The fair dealing with readers demands of us, that a narrative shall not proceed at slower pace than legs of a man in motion', a contradictory beginning to Chapter II, having opened the first chapter with an obscure sentence, nine lines in length. His reaction to the 'general attack on the first sentence' is conveyed in a letter stating that 'it seems that . . . literary playfulness in description is antipathetic to our present taste' (Cline, p.1029). Meredith is aware that experimentation with form and style would not have popular appeal but persists in writing fiction which would challenge the reader to respond. Contemporary criticism is evident in the 'Punch' cartoon of 1894 in which Meredith is caricatured as a bull in a china shop smashing grammar, syntax and construction. His fragmentary style, considered to be bad form, has been the subject of a recent study and is described as leading to a 'dialogic traffic-jam' not the usual 'frictionless forward-movement of novel-reading'. Meredith 'not only slows reading down but detemporalizes it altogether . . . a series of disconnected flashes of insight or bafflement' (Neil Roberts in Nicholas Dames, 2007, p.168). Symbol and metaphor are typically used by Meredith to invert or divert the reader's expectations as Gillian Beer notes (1970, p.151) and his 'continually restless prose . . . works

against the creation of steady narrative momentum' with a tendency to elliptical and oblique methods (Gilmour, 1986, p.159).

Views expressed by contemporary critics, in response to Meredith's experimentation with form and style, indicate the uncertainty of the nineteenth-century readers who anticipated solutions or guidance from novels. Commending *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* for 'profound observation, humour, passion, and tenderness' in the *Westminster Review* in 1859, the unsigned critic remarks that 'the book offers no solution of any of the difficulties it lays open to us; the nineteenth century struggles through it with but faint glimpses of its goal' (in Williams, 1971, p.85). In an appreciation of Meredith in 1864, Justin M'Carthy asserts that the reader of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* remains 'dissatisfied' and is not 'brought any nearer . . . to the solution of that great social question about the sowing of the wild human oats' (in Williams, 1971, p.128). Having expressed a mixed response to *Sandra Belloni*, as noted in Chapter Three, Mrs Hardman concludes that 'we lay aside [Emilia's] history with a puzzled feeling, sensible that there has been much to admire in what we have read, but doubtful what is the exact drift of the whole' (in Williams, 1971, p.118). After reading *Beauchamp's Career*, Swinburne wrote in a letter to Morley of Meredith's 'subtle genius . . . noble powers . . . visible in almost all parts of his work', but expresses frustration at Meredith's 'lust of epigram and habit of trying to tell a story by means of riddles that hardly excite the curiosity they are certain to baffle!' (quoted in Ellis, *George Meredith*, 1920, p.156).

Responses by nineteenth-century readers indicate the difficulty of accepting insoluble questions, and ambiguous interpretations. Meredith's fiction does not provide the anticipated resolution of a *Bildungsroman* or sensation novel, but requires the reader's active participation. As mentioned in the Introduction, the concept of reading Meredith as 'a continuous process of solving riddles' was noted in L Stevenson's biography (1953, p.293) and Meredith's fiction remains 'very much alive' in the twenty-first century, 'of permanent interest and well worth reading, if not revering - precisely because he is a riddling storyteller' (R C Stevenson, 2004, p.189). Referring to his 'intermittent brilliancy' Virginia Woolf describes the experience of reading Meredith: 'all is effort and agony . . . Then, just as we are about to drop the book 'the 'sudden splendour' of the writing is recognised, and recalled years later ('The Novels of George Meredith' in *The Second Common Reader*, 1932). John Lucas notes that Meredith's poem 'Lucifer in Starlight' 'breeds inevitable questions', which are interpreted but not answered by critical analysis. From his reading of 'Modern Love', Lucas concludes that 'nothing is certain in this poem, nothing simply true . . . The sonnets

contradict each other' (in Fletcher, 1971, pp.18,28). Meredith's writing continues to pose questions for readers, encouraging interpretation and reflection on how we understand ourselves, interact with others, and move through the uncertainty of life.

Chapter Five: Diversions

Chapter Five considers the apparent paradox of the acceptance of uncertainty while striving to move forward. Meredith conveys the understanding that progress is rarely linear and that, from the uncertainty of liminal space and place, there is potential for a positive outcome by means of non-linear movement - moving 'toward' if not 'forward'. As the inevitable challenges of life create pauses and diversions, so progress, whether on a walk, in writing - or reading - may be slow or diversionary, as demonstrated in the journeys of Meredith's heroines in his novels of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. An understanding of the conflicts caused by changing gender roles and relationships is expressed in fiction by Meredith and Hardy. Responding to challenges to his philosophy, Meredith demonstrates stoic optimism, and conveys the potential for growth in moving through uncertainty, as his fictional characters strive to negotiate diversionary stages of their lives. Further analysis from *Diana of The Crossways* shows the significance of the natural world, and the support of others, in restoring mental and physical health following her breakdown. Meredith's philosophy of moving towards a state of improved wellbeing is demonstrated in *The Amazing Marriage*, in which his heroine achieves fulfilment by means of effort and self-help. The journeys of Meredith's characters, depicted as stages of 'becoming' and 'moving toward', are shown to be more important than the destination or resolution. Meredith shows that novel-reading is an active process, requiring application of effort by the reader, and reflection on characters' experiences beyond the end of the novels.

Meredith's philosophy of moving towards a sense of wellbeing, as set out in Chapter One, could be perceived as a linear movement. However, Richard Feverel's apparent progress towards harmony by physical and mental movement forward is shown to represent only a stage of his journey, and he faces further 'ordeals' in the three chapters which follow chapter XLII 'Nature Speaks'. Meredith shows in his poem 'The World's Advance' that forward movement is frequently non-linear. Comparing the world's progress to the 'inebriate's track' (p.186) the poet asserts that movement, however slow or diversionary, represents progress. The poem is summarised by Trevelyan in *The Poetical Works of George Meredith* as demonstrating that 'historically the progress of the world is from side to side but always forwards (zig-zag)' (1912, p.586). Analysis of the poem by Trevelyan, published during Meredith's lifetime, suggests that Meredith's view of the pace of progress is 'lenient' and that 'alternate extravagances in opposite directions may lead at last to wisdom' (*Poetry*

and Philosophy, 1907, p.133). The acceptance of slow progress was difficult for Meredith, as a restless man with a zest for movement, and the challenge of moving forward is evident in the journeys of his characters.

Life journeys are represented as stages in Meredith's novels, and he demonstrates that moving through periods of difficulty and uncertainty can be a painful process of learning and growth. Meredith's characters are portrayed journeying through 'thwackings' and 'ordeals' in his earliest fiction *The Shaving of Shagpat* (1856) and *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859). The reader is made aware, often before the character, of the consequence for those who fail to learn or respond, or those who act 'too late'. Forward movement may be achieved by means of reversing and retracing steps, and the end of the novel does not signify the end of the journey. In Meredith's first prose writing, *The Shaving of Shagpat*, Shibli Bagarag works through a series of challenges with determination and achieves his 'goal' but in concluding the story, the narrator states that 'the mastery of an Event lasteth among men the space of one cycle of years, and after that a fresh Illusion springeth to befool mankind . . . until men are wise, and . . . That is a distant period' (*The Shaving of Shagpat*, p.244, 245).

Depicting stages of uncertainty as settings of spatial and temporal liminality, Meredith shows how physical and / or mental progress, however slow or difficult, is possible by working through obstacles and uncertainty. His characters are frequently poised to move in a different direction, and those who use transitional stages as an opportunity to learn and move forward by their own effort are shown as demonstrating growth and progress. A period of liminality has the positive connotation of a threshold with the potential for beneficial change, and Meredith depicts progress as a learning experience, a process of healing and recovery, even rebirth. Although progress may not be immediately evident, Meredith demonstrates in his novels how stasis, or apparent reversal, can lead to action as mental reflection allows for a change of attitude. While acknowledging the anxiety caused by a state of uncertainty, and the desire to reach a goal or conclusion, Meredith demonstrates the possibility of growth from mistakes, and 'every failure is a step advanced' (*The Shaving of Shagpat*, p.201). Although change may be beyond individual or collective control, each of us has the choice of response within the limits of circumstances, and Meredith suggests that an active response is more likely to bring about progress.

The contrast between his own 'cheerful outlook', and the pessimistic view of change expressed in Thomas Hardy's writing, is noted in the Introduction to this thesis. Meredith's stoic optimism noted by Gosse and others, apparently as part of his temperament and a system of belief which Meredith called his 'religion' (Cline, p.1635) indicates the strong

positive response of a man with deep-seated beliefs which contribute to motivation through difficult times. Meredith's statement that 'The soul's one road is forward' in his letter to Frederick Maxse in 1884 shows stoic optimism in spite of considerable personal challenges (Cline, p.744). By this time, having experienced increasing difficulty of movement because of spinal ataxia, he was able to walk 'not much more than a mile', informing Robert Louis Stevenson bluntly in a letter: 'I am a cripple' (Cline, p.731). Meredith had survived the challenges of his childhood, the desertion and death of his first wife, and his letter to Maxse was written during the terminal illness of his second wife. Stoicism is recommended by Meredith in a letter to Leslie Stephen stating that there is no consolation 'under a deep affliction that can come from without, not from the dearest of friends. What I most wish for you I know you to have, fortitude to meet a crisis, and its greater task, to endure' (Cline, pp.1445, 1446).

Meredith's strength of belief and character is evident in his continuing mental activity when physically restricted, as shown in Chapter Three, although the mental and physical effort required for overcoming challenges is not underestimated. His philosophy is expressed in 'The Woods of Westermain': 'You must love the light so well / That no darkness will seem fell' (p.197). Recognising that this is a 'hard saying', Trevelyan acknowledges that Meredith does not ignore 'painful realities' and like 'Zola, Ibsen or Tolstoi, he goes down into the dark places; but he does not live there always, and he carries his lamp with him' (*Poetry and Philosophy*, 1907, p.163). The effort required to deal with mental disturbance is conveyed in physical terms in Harry Richmond's first person conclusion, advising: 'Carry your fever to the Alps, you of minds diseased: not to sit down in sight of them ruminating, for bodily ease and comfort will trick the soul . . . but mount, rack the limbs, wrestle . . . sweat, earn rest' (p.539).

The heroines of Meredith's later novels, from 1879 to 1895, are shown as moving forward through stages of stasis, reversal and regression. As R C Stevenson notes, Meredith's typical heroine 'must undergo a painful re-education in order to overcome her inherited views of self-effacement' (2004, p.36). Clara struggles to resist an oppressive marriage in *The Egoist*, and Diana protests against the perception of women as 'the verbs passive of the alliance' in *Diana of The Crossways* (p.64). Aminta, who overcomes languor caused by her submissive role, is perceived as 'the bravest of women' in *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* (p. 408), and Carinthia in *The Amazing Marriage* is represented as 'a new idea of women' using her skills and self-help to fulfil her potential (p.80). In the characters of Diana, Aminta and Carinthia, who are seeking the independence of a career as well as personal

happiness, Meredith highlights the difficulties faced by women in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The restricted settings of time and place in *The Egoist* enable focus on the intensity of eighteen-year-old Clara's first experience of relationships with men, and her rapid learning within a few weeks. She is 'astonished at [Sir Willoughby Patterne's] whirlwind wooing of her, and bent to it like a sapling. She begged for time . . . pleaded a desire to see a little of the world before she plighted herself' (*The Egoist*, p.44). As Sir Willoughby applies emotional pressure, Clara - and the reader - quickly become aware of his egoistical attitude towards others, and his assumption of complete possession of his future wife. The beginning of Clara's process of growth is marked by her reasoning as the narrator states: 'Miss Middleton owed it to Sir Willoughby Patterne that she ceased to think like a girl . . . almost from the first' realising she had 'committed herself to a life-long imprisonment' (p.111). Expressing her unease to Vernon Whitford, Clara recognises that her agreement to Willoughby's proposal was 'consent' not 'choice' because she was 'too young, too ignorant to choose', and determines to 'attempt to extricate herself' (p. 181).

The dilemma faced by Clara, to rebel against a life of hypocrisy as a possession to complement Sir Willoughby and Patterne Hall, or to submit to her duty as a daughter and fiancée, is represented by fluctuating emotions of resentment and remorse. The reader is given an early indication that Clara will not conform, by Mrs Mountstuart Jenkinson's comment that Clara is 'a dainty rogue in porcelain' (p.47) although Clara does not perceive herself as a rebel and attempts to 'strangle the rebelliousness' (p.117). Her growing realisation of the need for individuality is evident, as Clara learns that similar restrictions will be imposed on her by a husband as by her father, and her thought reported to the reader is that 'My mind is my own, married or not' (p.88). Her repeated attempts to break off the betrothal to Sir Willoughby are frustrated by the men's refusal to listen, and by her own conflicting thoughts.

Clara's refusal to wear the Patterne Pearls and her first 'Petition for a Release' in chapter XV are signs of her actions as a result of mental movement, and Clara becomes aware of her progress towards maturity as a result of analysing her own thoughts, telling Laetitia 'I have grown years older in a week' (p.187). Unused to listening to 'discursive observations upon the inequality in the relations of the sexes', Laetitia concludes that Clara has 'a dreadful power' to express ideas (p.191). The setting of Patterne Park as they walk and talk together emphasises for Clara the restriction of her liberty which Laetitia, sharing society's admiration for Sir Willoughby's status and property, finds difficult to understand.

Clara's need for freedom is also met with incomprehension by her fiancé and father, as representatives of the patriarchal system united over 'An Aged and Great Wine' (chapter XX). Her request for time away is dismissed with condescension as a female whim, and her father chooses to interpret her attempt to break off the engagement as a 'lover's quarrel' (p.234). Clara takes action, setting off on foot to stay with a friend and her 'Flight in Wild Weather' (chapter XXV) 'constitutes the dramatic climax of the novel', as Anne Wallace states, which leads to Clara being rescued 'both physically and psychologically' (Wallace, 1983, p.212).

Prior to this action of 'flight', chapter XXI 'Clara's Meditations', analysed in Chapter Three, marks a significant turning point, and demonstrates the potential for forward movement from a period of apparent stasis. The pattern of physical action following mental thought is repeated in chapter XXIV when in the 'sanctuary of her chamber' Clara contemplates the visit to her friend as 'her scheme of release' while continuing to struggle with her sense of duty (pp.286, 285). When she wakes to hear Crossjay calling her, 'Then it was that she resolved' that he would escort her to the railway station for her 'flight' to the railway station (p.286). Clara's short-lived escape to freedom and return to Patterne Hall is symbolic of her cyclical thought process, a series of steps forward and back representing her indecision, and the reader follows the development of Clara's awareness and character. Each apparent setback is a learning experience, and it is 'By degrees: unknown to myself; suddenly' that Clara has discovered that she does not love Sir Willoughby (p.430). He has not changed 'but she had grown sensible of being a stronger woman' (p.393).

Meredith depicts Clara's rapid development towards maturity as a result of her own mental effort, but does not underestimate the difficulty of resisting patriarchal authority as Clara attempts to break off her betrothal to Sir Willoughby. Contemplating a 'rebellion' against her father, she recognises that from his viewpoint 'her fault was grave' (p.495) and during their conversation Dr Middleton refers to Clara's 'attempt at an outrageous breach of faith' (p.498). Her ability to face her father and fiancé and tell them in plain language: 'I cannot marry him. I do not love him' (p.504) is evidence of Clara's increased mental strength, but the opposition of the two men together 'paralyzed her . . . heart and mind became divided' (p.506). Aware that Clara wishes to please her father and is 'anxious to perform [her] duty' Dr Middleton tells her 'you will either at once yield your hand to [Sir Willoughby], or you will furnish reasons, and they must be good ones, for withholding it' (pp.509, 511). The expectation of patriarchal authority and the sense of duty which affects a woman's behaviour is expressed in Hardy's *The Woodlanders* by Grace's father when Grace

states that she does not wish to marry Fitzpiers. Her father tells her that “‘There’s a time for a woman to alter her mind; and there’s a time when she can no longer alter it, if she has any right eye to her parents’ honour and the seemliness of things’” (*The Woodlanders*, p.168). Learning that her marriage had been a ‘frightful mistake’ Grace realises that ‘[a]cquiescence in her father’s wishes had been degradation to herself’ (p.209) but continues to act ‘reverently believing in her father’s sound judgement and knowledge, as good girls are wont to do’ (pp.278, 279).

At the conclusion of *The Egoist*, Meredith shows that Clara has learned the potential for exercising agency, but the novel’s ending can be criticised as being weak or ambiguous, as she agrees so quickly to marriage with Vernon. It would seem that Clara, like Sir Willoughby’s previous fiancée, has won her freedom ‘to plunge into wedlock . . . she flies from one dungeon to another’ (*The Egoist*, p.185). Although the ending is conventional, Clara is still young and like the title character of *Harry Richmond*, she must continue to learn from each new experience. Meredith conveys optimism for Clara’s relationship with a ‘new kind’ of man who appreciates her mind as well as her beauty, and encourages her to exercise her own judgement. Her marriage to Vernon is based on friendship and understanding, a shared love of sport and an affinity with nature, and will be a new beginning for the couple. In the concluding paragraph of the novel, Clara has escaped the claustrophobic atmosphere of Patterne Hall, and is experiencing the freedom of the Alps.

Diana of The Crossways, published serially in 1884 and in book form a year later, was written when Meredith’s *Weltanschauung* was being tested, during the terminal illness of his second wife, and his increasing ataxia and deafness. In this novel, Diana is aware of the challenges that she will face as an unconventional woman, stating that ‘We women are the verbs passive, if we take to activity we conjugate a frightful disturbance . . . I have the misfortune to know I was born an active’ (*Diana of The Crossways*, p.64). Her journey towards accepting reality and compromise is slow and erratic, as Diana works through repeated stages of progression and regression. Meredith demonstrates how the restrictions of personal relationships, and society’s expectation of behaviour, affect her behaviour and contribute to the breakdown of Diana’s mental and physical health, as shown in Chapter Four. Meredith’s empathy for his heroine’s uncertainty suggests his identification with her inconsistency and vulnerability. As Cronin states, Meredith ‘succeeded in seeing himself as he was . . . but he found that it was a good deal easier to know himself than to change himself’ (2020, p.17). The reader experiences confused emotions with Meredith’s depiction of Diana’s episodes of self-awareness, which conflict with ongoing self-deception. As Diana

becomes aware of her shortcomings, but apparently fails to learn, it is for readers to consider their own behaviour if faced with similar situations.

The forward and backward stages of Diana's development are represented by her repeated returns to the houses at The Crossways and Copsley, and her reliance on place to provide security is shown to be ill-founded. After her breakdown, Diana discovers how the wider world of Nature enables her recovery, and her friend Emma provides life-giving support, not the physical house at Copsley. Diana's emotional attachment to her birthplace The Crossways, which she owns, is evident as she 'longs to evict the tenants . . . could make a pilgrimage in rain or snow just to doat on the outside of it' (*Diana of The Crossways*, p.27). The house is shown to be symbolic of her hope for the future, when her visit 'pointed to a new direction of the road on that fine spring morning' (p.49). The possibility of being able to spend four months a year at The Crossways is one reason for her marriage to the tenants' nephew Augustus Warwick, as well as being a means of escape from predatory men. Diana's decision is influenced by her sentimental feeling for the house. The choice of husband by this 'brilliant and beautiful girl' is perceived as 'rashness' by her friend Emma Dunstane, who compares Warwick to 'a London house conventionally furnished and decorated by the upholsterer, and empty of inhabitants' (p.61). Emma's home at Copsley is seen by Diana as a place of refuge to which she returns at times of crisis, but her perceived sense of security is challenged when Emma's husband makes a pass at her. Diana is distressed by his betrayal of her friend, and by the effect on her own feeling for Copsley: 'This house, her heart's home, was now a wreck to her: nay, worse, a hostile citadel' (p.47).

In responding to personal and social pressures, Diana is challenged to re-consider her perception of a move to a different place as a new beginning. As a result of unwise friendships formed to escape her unhappy marriage, she is 'served . . . with a process' by her husband (p.71), and she states in a letter to Emma that her intention is to leave England rather than face public scandal. Diana indicates some awareness that flight might be seen as an admission of guilt, claiming that 'it is not cowardice' and that she will 'fly from' Emma reluctantly, while acknowledging that her action will be interpreted as 'running away' (p.72). Emma anticipates the reaction of the social world to 'The flight of Mrs Warwick!' as a 'fatal cry (p.73), and responds in a letter that a move, like Diana's marriage, would be a mistake, telling her: 'You break your Emma's heart. It will be *the second* wrong step' (p.77). Reporting Diana's private thoughts in the chapter 'The Conflict of the Night', discussed in Chapter Four, Meredith depicts mental turmoil during physical stasis, as experienced by

Clara in *The Egoist*, and Diana considers her interpretation of ‘flight’ involving ‘the challenge of consequences, not an evasion of them’ (*Diana of The Crossways*, p.99).

After her night of conflict, Diana is described symbolically looking at the signpost of The Crossways, deciding to ‘follow . . . the road recommended by friends’ despite her own instincts. The direction of the day’s journey, indicated to her maid Danvers from Diana’s viewpoint, is ‘backward to Copsley’ (p.100). Reunited with Emma, she admits: ‘I fled on the instinct’ (p.109). Diana decides to stay and ‘fight [her] battle’ (p.112), having ‘perceived that her step in flight had been urged both by a weak despondency and a blind desperation’ (p.113). The frank acknowledgment of her reasons for flight causes her mental distress, but brings about a sense of calm: ‘Thus did a nature distraught by pain obtain some short lull of repose’. Attempting to face reality, Diana ‘looked in the glass’ and the narrator states that ‘by closely reading herself . . . she gathered an increasing knowledge of our human constitution’ (p.113). She demonstrates strength by leaving her unhappy marriage, and makes a decisive move to London ‘where she could begin to write, earning bread . . . with the pride of independence’ (p.116). This stage of positive development is brief, and Diana continues to consider flight as representing freedom. Having achieved success as an author and a society hostess, she is snubbed by society following the scandal of the trial, and Diana ‘fled to escape the meshes of the terrific net of the marital law’ (p.135).

The reader is made aware that Diana’s use of physical and mental retreat indicates her delusional tendency. Movement between places, and absorption in her writing, represent her means of escape. Diana returns from a voyage in the Mediterranean and summer in South Tyrol, ‘re-awakened’ physically and mentally by the beauty of the natural world (p.144), and the narrator notes her response to her literary success as ‘her immediate and complacent acceptance of the magical change of her fortunes’ (p.170). In a letter to Emma, she says that ‘Incessant writing is my refuge, my solace - escape out of the personal net’ (p.171) and compares her delight in writing to her walks ‘under the dawn at Lugano’ (p.173). Although the letter ‘had every outward show of sincerity in expression’, the narrator states that Diana was ‘deluded’ in thinking herself ‘now spiritually as free’ as she had been while walking in Lugano, and asserts that the letter reveals ‘the writer’s impulse to protest with so resolute a vigour as to delude herself’ (p.173). Diana is able even to ‘hoodwink’ Emma concerning her emotional state of mind, because ‘the assured sensation of her firm footing deceived her own soul’ (p.205).

Her continuing self-deception is revealed by the reported conflict in Diana's mind between 'Mr Debit' and 'Mrs Credit', as the temptation to spend money on material possessions requires her 'to drive her pen the faster' (p.219). She convinces herself that 'by writing only a very little faster she could double her income; counting a broader popularity, treble it' (p.220). Diana avoids facing her financial difficulties by immersing herself in the imagery of her writing: 'Metaphors were her refuge. Metaphorically she could allow her mind to distinguish the struggle she was under' (p.231). The reader makes comparison with Meredith, noted for his use of metaphor, and the narrator indicates the frustration which Meredith himself expressed in his correspondence, describing the reality of the challenging process of writing. Diana 'encountered obstacles to imaginative composition' (p.220), and experiences a 'strange languor . . . scarcely melancholy . . . but a nervelessness' (p.222). Unable to write, facing uncertainty and the continuing hostility of London society gossip, Diana reverts to thoughts of escape by moving to a different place. She had 'an idea of flying straight to her beloved Lugano lake, and there hiding, abandoning her friends . . . living free in spirit' (p.226). Like the character of Richard Feverel, as noted in Chapter One, Diana chooses to flee the country as a means of avoiding reality.

Diana's progress in forward and backward stages is summarised by the narrator, who describes her moment of painful self-awareness, as Diana 'saw the track of her route cleaving the darkness in a demoniacal zig-zag' (p.325). A period of reflection 'in dejection' has enabled Diana's gradual acceptance of reality, in a further stage of positive development. Facing accumulating debts from unfortunate investments and excessive socialising, she realises 'her foolish ambition to have a London house where her light might burn' (p.265). Acceptance of the wisdom of a friend is apparent, as Diana 'advised herself, with Redworth's voice, to quit the house, arrest expenditure'. To 'try for happiness . . . devoting herself . . . purely to literature . . . became almost a decision' (p.265). Diana's action of selling *The Crossways* is positive, but the sale of the house causes a loss of self-esteem: 'When she held *The Crossways* she had at least a bit of solid footing: now gone' (p.311) and her emotions affect her judgement. The questionable decision to leak Dacier's confidential news to the press, depicted in chapter XXXII as 'A giddy turn at the spectral crossways' is discussed in Chapter Four. The reference to her progress as a 'zig-zag' route occurs during the confrontation with Dacier when Diana admits to having betrayed his confidence. Diana attempts denial, still unwilling to face reality, claiming that she meant no harm, was unable to account for her action, 'had not a suspicion of mischief', but seeing herself through Dacier's eyes, she 'read herself insufferably' (p.325). She acknowledges: 'Now I see the folly . . . I

was blind . . . I was insane' (pp.326, 327), but the rejection by Dacier, and increasing awareness of her fallibility, contribute to her mental and physical breakdown.

Diana's recovery is made possible by two months spent at Copsley, where she is healed by nature and by Emma's care. On a visit to The Crossways, now sold but untenanted, her view of the house as her place of personal identity is changed by the discovery that Redworth, as the new owner, has moved her possessions into the house as his means of 'blunt wooing' (p.380). Diana's reaction is that 'The Crossways had been turned into a trap . . . she had no desire to look on the place again' (pp.379, 381), and Emma anticipates that Diana's response to Redworth's proposal will be 'refusal of the yoke' (p.393). Despite her 'tears running over, and her dream of freedom, her visions of romance, drowning' (p.399), Diana recognises reluctantly that marriage to Redworth represents a realistic compromise. Although she perceives marriage as 'going into slavery', she is learning to 'accept life as we have it', as Emma advises (p.402). Stating that Diana's 'return to the wedding-yoke' received her 'sanction of grey-toned reason', the narrator observes Diana's honest self-assessment: 'She was not enamoured: she could say it to herself. She had, however been surprised, both by the man and her unprotesting submission; surprised and warmed, unaccountably warmed' (p.409). Meredith suggests that even an apparent step backwards has the potential to provide a learning experience, with a new mindset or attitude.

At the conclusion of the novel it seems that, despite some success as a writer, Diana is returning to the 'old prison-nest' by conforming to tradition, and is not destined to be one of the 'valiant few [who] would form a vanguard' (pp.11, 12). On her wedding day, Diana sees herself as a 'sober person taking at last a right practical step to please her two best friends', and although recognising the change in herself, Diana remains uncertain. She 'wished to hide it, wished to confide it' (p.412). The uncertainty of an unknown future after an unhappy first marriage, and the near-death experience of her breakdown, is conveyed in Diana's sense of darkness. Meredith suggests a way out of the dark towards hope for Diana, in accordance with his *Weltanschauung* in which, as Trevelyan states, he goes 'into the dark places; but . . . carries his lamp with him' (*Poetry and Philosophy*, 1907, p.163). Diana is able to recall in her mind Emma's care, which has helped her through difficulties and the process of re-birth, and acknowledges her friend's support with the use of metaphor, saying: 'you brought a little boat to sail me past despondency of life and the fear of extinction' (p.423). She has learned to accept the wisdom of Emma's long-standing homily: '*There is nothing the body suffers that the soul may not profit by*', which will influence her in the future, declaring: 'That is Emma's history. With that I sail into the dark'. The reader is informed that for Emma, who

is 'constantly on the dark decline of the unilluminated verge between the two worlds', Diana's words are 'a radiance and a nourishment' (pp.413, 414). Although physically weak, Emma is enlivened by the prospect of Diana's future, and hopes that she 'might live long enough to be a godmother' (p.415). Meredith offers the optimism of a stable relationship for Diana with Redworth, who 'rescues' her on the several occasions when she has been 'at crossways' (p.259), and allows for the possibility of continuing development for Diana in contrast to her restless journey throughout the novel.

During times of physical or mental distress, Diana's health is restored by nature. When she suffers persecution by society's press, her process of emotional healing is enabled by the beauty of the setting of Lugano, as Diana is 're-awakened . . . to the glory of the earth and her share in it' (p.144). Meredith describes poetically the effect of the natural world, as if a wine is 'filling her veins, suffusing her mind, quickening her soul', and the transformation of Diana's mood is conveyed in figurative language: 'A linnet sang in her breast, an eagle lifted her feet . . . she was bird, flower, flowing river' (pp.144, 145). Diana's relationship with nature is renewed following her physical and mental breakdown, as she discovers the joy of walking in all weathers, enjoying fresh air and light. By exercising her 'limbs . . . her ears and eyes', Diana is 'recreated . . . childlike' with a craving for 'positive knowledge' of the natural world (p.364). Her recovery is compared to rebirth after several days of being apparently close to death. The narrator states that her 'love of nature saved her . . . by stupefying her senses to a state like the barely conscious breathing on the verge of sleep', observing 'Thus does Nature restore us, by drugging the brain and making her creature confidently animal for its new growth' (pp.363, 364). Richard Mabey recalls a similar experience of depression, recently defined by Oliver Sacks as vegetative retreat, the body's defence mechanism in response to mental distress, compared to the instinctive reaction of a wounded animal (*Nature Cure*, 2005, p.55).

Meredith emphasises the benefit of interdependence in relationships with others, highlighting the importance of roles played by older women in supporting and teaching the younger generation, especially those without their own mothers. Separated from her husband, Diana demands 'Let me be independent!' (p.117), but learns a need for the support of other people in recovering from her breakdown. Despite physical illness, Emma Dunstane is mentally strong, has wisdom of experience and is observant. Listening as a mental activity is evident in Meredith's characters whose physical mobility is restricted. Emma 'reads [Diana] clearly' (p.94), and her wise advice given in a letter is heeded, although reluctantly, by Diana during her 'Conflict of the Night'. Following a period of distancing, the

interdependent relationship between the two women is conveyed in the description of their reunion. They were 'heart in heart again; the physical weakness of the one, the moral weakness of the other, creating that mutual dependency which makes friendship a pulsating tie' (p.258). During Diana's breakdown when she refuses to eat, Emma encourages her with the smell of 'an appetizing bouillon', and by 'sipping at the spoon' herself (p.345). Diana resists the suggestion that the two could 'feed from one spoon', but Emma, although an invalid herself, has the 'stronger will' and fed Diana 'as a child'. The response is instinctive, 'nature sucked for life' and the release of emotion in 'a gush of tears' indicates Diana's return to life (p.346).

The character of Diana conveys the difficult mental adjustment of recognising an alternative model of a man. Tom Redworth is underestimated by Diana although recognised from the beginning by the perceptive Emma, who helps Diana to face the reality of her false 'superhuman ideal', and to acknowledge Redworth's value as a potential husband (p.399). The necessary adjustment to her preconceived model of a man produces a physical response in Diana. She 'swayed . . . and felt as if alone at sea' as her 'tears ran in streams' and she admits 'I wanted a hero, and the jewelled garb and the feather did not suit him' (pp.399, 400). Acknowledging reality, Emma advises caution and warns against Diana's 'trick of dashing to the other extreme. He has his faults' (p.410). Redworth is described by Emma as 'the one man known to me who can be a friend to women' (p.77) and he represents an alternative to the predatory male perceived by Diana. Redworth listens to Diana at a particular moment of indecision and, like Vernon in *The Egoist*, leaves Diana 'to her feelings - trustier guides than her judgement in this crisis' (p.95). Retaining her idealistic image of a hero, Diana fails to recognise Redworth's love and qualities until the end of the novel, although from their first meeting, she said to Emma 'and said always, that it was he who had first taught her the art of observing' (p.44).

Diana's apparent sacrifice of independence in marriage to Redworth adds to the reader's uncertainty for Diana's future beyond the ending of the novel. As Susan Morgan asserts, Meredith did not find 'a happy resolution to the problem of self-fulfilment at his historical moment' (1989, p.173). Nevertheless, Meredith was innovative in recognising and depicting women's issues in his fiction of the second half of the nineteenth century. His understanding of the personal and social challenges faced by women is evident in Diana's succinct statement that 'Women have to fight' (p.44) which refers to sexual harassment, as well as their role in society. His heroines become mentally and physically stronger as individuals, and Meredith expresses optimism, voiced in the opinion of Diana's lawyer, that

the day will come ‘when women will be encouraged to work at crafts and professions for their independence’ (p.133). Meredith shows awareness that to change attitudes requires courage, and takes time. The difficulty of achieving self-fulfilment and personal happiness, which Meredith anticipated in the nineteenth century, is experienced by women, and by men, in the twenty-first century.

In *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, the narrator’s comment at the end of the book: ‘She was among the bravest of women’ (p.408) indicates Aminta’s courage in acquiring freedom and personal happiness, by responding to lessons learned about herself and relationships with others. In a letter to Ulrica Duncombe, Meredith refers to the world’s future acceptance of ‘women who cut their own way out of a bad early marriage’, suggesting the effort of agency required to improve an unhappy situation (Cline, p.1438). Although Aminta achieves a loving partnership with Matthew, her status in their working relationship remains uncertain, and the ambiguity of the novel’s ending shows that Meredith does not underestimate the challenge of reality. Aminta dreams of a mixed school in which she would teach alongside Matthew, and imagines Matthew telling her: ‘We are equals, the stronger for being equals’ (p.233). Their school described in the final chapter is for boys only, and Aminta says she is ‘fit to be school-housekeeper; for nothing else’ (p.407). The balance of skills is not as Aminta expected, but represents the ‘best kind of equality’ existing between two people ‘so that each can enjoy the luxury of looking up to the other, and can have alternately the pleasure of leading and of being led in the path of development’ as John Stuart Mill asserted (*The Subjection of Women*, 1869, p.237). This view is evident in Matthew’s statement that ‘Things are not equal’ but a man and woman could be complementary and ‘their excellencies . . . make a pretty nearly equal sum in the end’ (p.333). In the strength of their relationship and potential for discussion, Meredith allows for hope of the development of the school, as well as continuing growth for both Aminta and Matthew.

In Meredith’s last novel, *The Amazing Marriage*, the characterisation of Carinthia depicts his most successful portrayal of a heroine seeking a career as well as personal happiness, described as ‘a new idea of women’ (*The Amazing Marriage*, p.80). Meredith shows how Carinthia confronts the challenges identified by the characters of Emilia in *Sandra Belloni*, Diana in *Diana of The Crossways*, and Aminta in *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*. Although the novel *The Amazing Marriage* was published in 1895, Meredith told R L Stevenson in a letter dated 1879 that he was ‘about one quarter through *The Amazing Marriage*’ (Cline p.569), suggesting that the characters of Carinthia and Clara were contemporary in Meredith’s imagination. Carinthia demonstrates Meredith’s philosophy,

continuing to develop throughout the novel, by looking ahead and making the best use of her skills, and by learning from challenging circumstances. Like Aminta, she matures through the experience of ill-treatment by her husband by means of self-help, and Meredith shows how Carinthia builds on her qualities of physical strength, matched by mental stoicism and a willingness to learn, in response to imposed changes. Unfamiliar places provide an opportunity for Carinthia's development, and are used metaphorically to represent her growing independence, and her ability to exert agency. Being at home among people and in the natural world, Carinthia is at ease with herself, and is treated with affection and respect, moving to maturity through the uncertainty of enforced changes to achieve personal fulfilment and a role in society.

Following the death of their parents, Carinthia and her brother Chillon are forced to leave their home in Austria to go to England, a country which is familiar to Chillon but unknown to Carinthia. As a physically active girl in the setting of the mountain-land, and tomboyish in appearance and behaviour, Carinthia is apprehensive about the move but demonstrates a willingness and ability to learn about the unfamiliar country and culture, its language and people. The character of Gower Woodseer 'The Natural Philosopher' is encountered on their journey and appears intermittently throughout the novel making wise observations. In a chance meeting with Woodseer, Lord Fleetwood is intrigued by his description of Carinthia and unobserved, watches admiringly as she climbs a tree. Fleetwood's proposal of marriage to Carinthia at a ball is impulsive, and he abandons her following their wedding in England, disappearing from the narrative and Carinthia's life. The reader follows her steady progress, achieved by her own effort and with the support of friends as she lives and works in the poverty-stricken area of Whitechapel in London. Following the birth of Fleetwood's son, whose conception on the wedding night is revealed much later in the novel, Carinthia spends time on Fleetwood's estate in Wales, where she is befriended by Rebecca and Owain Wythan. Regret and remorse are learned by Lord Fleetwood only after his cruel neglect has destroyed Carinthia's love for him. Her mental and physical strength enables her to reject him and to achieve her ambition to work as a nurse. On the final page of the novel the reader is told of Fleetwood's death and the proposal of marriage to Carinthia by Owain Wythan, now a widower.

An early indication of Carinthia's response to challenge is given, as Meredith depicts the journey of simultaneous physical and mental movement made by a girl, similar to that made by Richard Feverel, as analysed in Chapter One. The reader follows Carinthia's mental progress during the first stage of the journey with her brother towards their new life in

England in chapter V 'A Mountain Walk in Mist and Sunshine'. Meredith shows how Carinthia moves from reluctance and retrospection, becoming self-aware, and learns to look ahead with tentative optimism to the possibilities offered by new opportunities. During a physical walk, Carinthia's move to a new state of mind is depicted by the narrative strategy of reported thought, and in conversation with Chillon. Faced with the reality of leaving their 'old home' Carinthia seeks comfort in sharing memories with her brother, looking back to their childhood by playing an old game, quoting their father's words and speaking in dialect. The narrator invites the reader's empathy, acknowledging the fluctuating emotions of the 'wrench of an immediate division from what we love' (p.38) but suggests that retrospection is unhealthy. When Carinthia shows reluctance asking to 'stay on another day', Chillon is realistic stating that 'it's better to get over the pain at once, if we can't escape it'. He agrees to start the journey with two days' walk as Carinthia suggests, because the speed of driving 'would be like going gladly' (p.39).

Setting out on the journey Carinthia 'walked fast, but scarcely felt that she was moving', held back by clinging to her memory of the past, represented by her mental image of the house which 'came swimming and plunging after her' (pp.44, 43). Her perception of England as a foreign place is influenced by the negative experiences reported by her brother, mother and father, and Carinthia's sense of bereavement is emphasised by mist and dark firtrees. The reader is challenged to consider whether her 'passionate excess of attachment to her buried home' is a denial of reality which 'robbed the future of any colours it might have worn' and affects Carinthia's ability to move forward (p.33). Her physical strength, as a 'capital walker' enables Carinthia to control her emotion and although grief is evident in her face 'she was tearless . . . She did not look back' (p.43).

The sense of isolation and desolation experienced by Carinthia, following the loss of her parents and her home, is emphasised by Meredith's setting of a liminal journey enclosed in mist. As Carinthia sets out with her brother 'to leave the mountain-land for England' (p.33) she feels the bereavement of house, neighbours and mountains, as well as her parents. For Carinthia 'this was a division of her life . . . she felt herself midswing across a gulf that was the grave of one half, without a light of promise for the other' and the prospect of going to England 'enfolded her like a frosty mist' (p.33). Carinthia is portrayed as experiencing the 'double displacement' described by Charlotte Mathieson with reference to *Jane Eyre*, being separated from the past life facing an unknown space ahead (2015, p.46). Meredith's description of Carinthia's sense of being poised echoes his own experience during his wife's terminal illness, when he wrote to Mrs Leslie Stephen 'I live on hope; a condition resembling

a midway station across an abyss' (Cline, p.742). The sense of a liminal state of not belonging, between leaving the past and an unknown future, is conveyed by the narrator in *The Amazing Marriage* as an experience shared with the reader: 'On the morning of a farewell we fluctuate sharply between the very distant and the close and homely' (p.37).

Chillon's prediction that 'they would soon have the mists rising' proves to be correct and the sun is obscured as they prepare to set out on their journey (p.38). The weather and Carinthia's mood are conveyed as 'a phantom ring of mist accompanied her from her first footing outside the house'. Her sense of enclosure and detachment is given a mystical quality with Meredith's use of metaphor: 'The house came swimming and plunging after her, like a spectral ship on big seas' (p.43). Experiencing strong sensory memories of her parents 'chatting, laughing, caressing' which are suddenly 'caught by a vapour that dived away with them' Carinthia questions her own existence (p.43). The 'phantom ring of mist' is repeated, comparing the enclosure of the 'low-sweeping dark spruce-fir' with Carinthia's thoughts 'as close as the shroud' (p.44). As time passes 'the haunted circle widened' to include rocks and treetops, the 'mists shook like a curtain, and partly opened' and as the sun breaks through, Carinthia's mental outlook changes. Looking at it 'was to fancy they had been walking under water and had now risen to the surface. Carinthia's mind stepped out of the chamber of death' (p.44).

The symbolic 'victory' of the sun breaking through the mist acts as a metaphor for a positive change in Carinthia's attitude towards the next stage of her life. Meredith highlights the strength to be derived from the natural world, as the 'different air and scene breathed into her a timid warmth toward the future' (p.44). The change in focus, from grief to positive preparation for the future, is evident as Carinthia seeks to learn about English society, asking her brother 'questions relating to England, and especially the ladies' she would meet (p.44). Walking 'side by side with him' allows for more intimate conversation and her 'ventured' inquiry about English girls encourages Chillon to show her a portrait of a girl, carried in his breast-pocket. Understanding that 'he was an altered brother, and that there were three instead of two', Carinthia realises that the closeness of their relationship, reinforced by the death of their parents, will be changed in the event of Chillon's marriage (p.50). She will need to adapt to a different role as well as a new country.

During the journey, Carinthia confronts the possible alternatives to marriage for herself, as a girl lacking money and conventional beauty. Her brother's thoughts report that a 'confident anticipation of marriage on the part of a portionless girl' is unrealistic, that although Carinthia's features are expressive 'No one could fancy her handsome' (p.38). She

is aware of the ‘current saying, that he should have been the girl and she the boy’, and noting the beauty of the English lady revealed in Chillon’s portrait, Carinthia wonders ‘who would marry me! . . . a plain girl’ (pp.48, 51). Her mother ‘not unkindly, sadly, had counted her poor girl’s chances of winning attention and a husband’ (p.51) and Carinthia assesses that ‘a plain girl should think of work, to earn her independence’. Conceiving a tentative idea of building on her strengths, Carinthia ‘murmured of women being good nurses for wounded soldiers, if they were good walkers to march with the army’. Chillon responds with laughter to her unconventional ambition, her ‘hazy project of earning an independence’, and Carinthia ‘inwardly warned of having talked foolishly . . . held her tongue’ (pp.52, 53). The reader notes the development of her inner strength and self-reliance, as the narrator observes her move towards life in a new society, stating that ‘It was her first taste of life in the world’ (p.53).

Pride and pleasure in her natural physical ability compensate for Carinthia’s lack of beauty and represent her determined character. The brother-sister relationship is strengthened by shared physical skills as well as memories of family and home. Before setting out on the walk, re-enacting a childhood game with her brother as part of their ‘farewell to an old home’, Carinthia ‘caught at her skirts’ to jump ‘a dozen feet or so from the French window to a flower-bed’ using ‘the proper contraction of the legs’ as her father had taught her (p.35). Agreeing to the two days’ walk instead of driving, Chillon acknowledges she is ‘a capital walker . . . a gallant comrade’ (pp.39,40). Becoming aware of her brother’s wish to proceed without delay, Carinthia ‘stepped faster’ to walk beside Chillon as his pace increased (p.50). During a brief drive for the final steep ascent to the village, her body language indicates her increasingly positive mental resolve as she ‘sits straight’ in the car, and the first stage of their journey is completed on foot following Carinthia’s ‘proposal to walk’ (p.53). The second day’s walk is described in terms of energy of movement, in contrast to Carinthia’s reluctance and retrospection as they began the journey. Focus on the physical activity as they ‘pushed on, clambering up, scurrying down, tramping gaily’ has the advantage of limiting Carinthia’s imagination. She was ‘a fine machine, and nothing else; and she was rapidly approaching those ladies!’ (p.64). Perceiving her stamina as a skill to be commended, she asks Chillon to ‘tell them how I walked with you . . . So that they may not think me so ignorant’. Chillon understands her ‘desire to meet the critical English ladies with a towering reputation in one department of human enterprise’ and shows empathy, commending her language skills as well as her physical abilities (p.64).

Carinthia's simultaneous mental and physical progress, evident during the walk, is repeated on the next stage of her journey, in which she makes a dramatic transition from sister to wife. She chooses to walk to the church to be married to Lord Fleetwood, stating that: 'Going on my feet, I feel I continue the mountain walk with my brother when we left our home' (p.145). Carinthia is described as 'suddenly wedded' and the rapid adjustment to her new role is emphasised by the repetition of 'husband' and by the speed of the carriage ride on their honeymoon journey from church to inn (p.149). Having no control over the horses, Carinthia is driven at reckless speed by Lord Fleetwood and the 'humming rush of the pace' is a deliberate test of her courage. Despite the rocking of the coach and the 'steep descents taken . . . without swerve or check' (p.150), Carinthia responds positively to the new experience, making comparison to the challenges she faced while climbing mountains. Now that she is 'in her husband's hands' Carinthia commits herself to the new relationship with optimism, believing that she is 'his comrade whatever chanced . . . Now she had the joy of trusting to her husband' (p.150).

Being willing and able to adapt swiftly, Carinthia demonstrates that unfamiliar places and people offer opportunities to learn. The significance of her much-loved native country, repeatedly referred to as 'the mountain-land' is clear: she was christened Carinthia because she was born 'in that Austrian province' (p.29). The challenge of an enforced physical move from her birthplace to England is evident, but the 'absence of faces' in the empty house 'told her she had no choice, she must go' (p.34). By the time of her marriage, having already come to love the English landscape and the unfamiliar people 'requiring to be studied', Carinthia accepts that her new husband also 'would have to be studied very much . . . His behaviour was instructing her' (p.155). Expressing pride in her skills, Carinthia tells Lord Fleetwood that she 'learnt to read mountain weather' from her parents, that she speaks French, German and some English, stating: 'I learn quickly, I know' (pp.156, 158). The ability to learn and be independent, taught by her parents, represents Meredith's belief in passing experience to the next generation, as expressed in a letter to his son: 'I have passed through the wood, and know which are the paths to take, which to avoid' (Cline, p.436).

Carinthia's marriage to Lord Fleetwood is a test of her determination and optimism, and she demonstrates emotional courage during his ill-treatment of her. Agreeing to accompany him to a boxing match immediately following the wedding ceremony, and unable to comprehend the concept of gambling and prize-fighting, she 'repressed the torture the scene was becoming' (p.171). Abandoned at the honeymoon inn as Fleetwood leaves to attend a Ball, Carinthia is 'more than ever the stunned young woman . . . She said not a word'

(p.176). Bidding her good-bye, with no promise of his return, Fleetwood's thoughts reveal grudging admiration for her stoicism. He observes that she 'stood with a dignity . . . endured meekly, when there was no meekness. Pain breathed out of her, and not a sign of pain was visible' (pp.178,179). Hearing his laughter as he left 'stamped it a cruelty' and the empathy of her maid Madge gives Carinthia 'the excuse to cry' (p.182). The reader is given a hint that Lord Fleetwood returned briefly to his wife for 'romantic devilry . . . more to inflict than enjoy' (p.185), but the next chapter informs that he has left her. With no money, and her husband's whereabouts unknown, Carinthia has walked to Lord Fleetwood's 'big house Esslemont for news of him' and has come to London 'to find him. She had to walk part of the way' (pp.199, 196). In chapter XVIII 'Down Whitechapel Way' Carinthia has been brought by Madge to lodge at her family's greengrocer's shop, where Carinthia meets again Gower Woodseer 'the philosopher', and his father, a preacher. The effect on Carinthia of Fleetwood's treatment is noted by Woodseer, who compares the 'daughter of the mountains' to a 'a soaring bird brought down by the fowler' (p.198). Madge remarks 'how brave she is . . . She has things to bear. Never cries, never frets' (p.199) and Woodseer ponders on Carinthia's 'enforced endurance' (p.209).

In the search for her husband, Carinthia finds herself in an unfamiliar urban setting, similar to that experienced by characters in *Harry Richmond* and *Sandra Belloni*, in passages analysed in Chapter Four. Whitechapel in London is an alien landscape for a girl from the mountain-land of Austria, but the challenge is used as an opportunity by Carinthia to find a role for herself and to help others. Her courage and determination are recognised by Madge stating that although she is 'a stranger to England: she knows nobody in London. She had no place to come to but this poor hole of ours' (p.196). Carinthia is perceived in society as a 'great lady . . . the Countess of Fleetwood' but she is 'not a lady to scorn poor people' (p.196). She makes it 'her business or it was her pleasure to go the rounds beside Mr Woodseer visiting his poor people . . . having only the wish to assist in ministering' (pp.216, 217). Discovering that Carinthia is known 'on London's wagging tongue' as the 'Whitechapel Countess' (p.227) her returning husband perceives that in her new role making 'visitations to pestiferous hovels' Carinthia has 'done injury to his title' (pp. 225, 293). Meredith's 'Dame Gossip' reports that 'Lord Fleetwood and his Whitechapel Countess composed the laugh of London' (p.235).

The reader is informed in a letter to Chillon from his wife that Carinthia is leaving Whitechapel to go to Lord Fleetwood's castle in Wales, and Meredith shows how Carinthia's use of her language skills, acknowledged by her brother, enables her growth as she moves

between different countries and cultures. Encountering Carinthia in Whitechapel, Woodseer notes that her speech 'was not of so halting or foreign an English. She grew rapidly wherever she was planted' (p.217), and Chillon's wife states that Carinthia 'learns daily, very quickly: observes, assimilates; she reads and has her comments' (p.266). The reader is invited to reflect with Carinthia on her arrival in Wales, as she contemplates her journey through life's difficulties thus far. Her experiences cause her to feel like 'an elder daughter' of her father, walking beside her younger self in a 'sisterly' manner. The 'elder daughter had undergone a shipwreck; but . . . had not been worsted . . . Imaginative creatures who are courageous will never be lopped of the hopeful portion of their days by personal misfortune' (p.298). The narrator informs that in Wales, having 'air of the hills and activity for her limbs, she made sunshine for herself' and allows herself no feelings of regret (p.309). Madge repeats the metaphor used by Woodseer, of Carinthia's 're-growth' as in nature, observing that 'her mistress was beginning to strike roots; as she soon did wherever she was planted' (pp.371, 372).

Carinthia's response to place represents her growing independence in her interaction with Lord Fleetwood. 'Dame Gossip' reports that when her husband refuses to meet Carinthia in Whitechapel, she declines the offer of his mansion Esslemont in Kent. Carinthia's move to Lord Fleetwood's castle in Wales is 'a voluntary exile' as Chillon is told in his wife's letter (p.265) and Carinthia's reported thoughts express her contentment in the landscape and among the people. As she faces an enforced move because the miners are in revolt against her husband, the reader is told that Wales is 'the place where she had found some shreds of a home in the thought of being useful' having learned to speak and sing in the people's language (pp.300, 301). Carinthia recognises that Lord Fleetwood treats his mine-workers without respect, observing that whereas her father 'would have been among them,' the men feel Fleetwood's power 'without the chance of making their cry to him heard' (p.301). Although she has no fear of the miners, Carinthia is expected to leave Wales in accordance with her husband's wishes, telling Rebecca Wythan 'I am to go again where I have no friends, and no language to learn, and can be of no use' (p.302). Carinthia refers to Lord Fleetwood's management of his men, saying: 'He speaks to command . . . He will have submission first' (p.302), and refuses to conform to the submissive role which he expects of her. She exerts agency by accepting the offer of hospitality at Owain Wythan's home, and Meredith depicts her stay as a liminal time 'when calamity hung around, with the future an unfooted wilderness, her powers untried, her husband her enemy' (p.319).

Meredith shows how place and space enable Carinthia to assert her independence. In response to Lord Fleetwood's 'formal notification, addressed to the Countess of Fleetwood in the third person, that Esslemont stood ready to receive her' Carinthia sends 'a short letter of reply . . . very baldly stating, that she was unable to leave Wales because of her friend's illness and her part as a nurse. Regrets were unmentioned' (pp.348, 349). Following Rebecca's death, Lord Fleetwood is informed of 'Lady Fleetwood's consent to quit Wales' on her own terms (p.349). Having returned to Esslemont, and determined to move forward, Carinthia resists attempts at reconciliation by the apparently remorseful Lord Fleetwood, defending her space metaphorically and physically. He is 'shut from her eyes' and she makes herself 'foreign' to him (p.386). Although she has 'no right to refuse the entry of the house', she tells him succinctly 'I guard my rooms' (p.388). Sharing a physical space at Esslemont, the 'home of husband and wife was under one roof at last' although Lord Fleetwood and Carinthia are separated by 'the distance she put between them' (p.423). The disconnection between the couple is marked as Carinthia intentionally maintains her privacy of space within the house, and their final parting is marked by Carinthia's dismissive words, with which 'she barred the gates on him' (p.440).

At the end of the novel, the reader anticipates the fulfilment of Carinthia's ambition, conceived during the morning walk from Austria to England. In preparation for nursing work in the Spanish civil war, Carinthia is learning the Spanish language and is reading history reference books for history and travel knowledge. She has researched medical supplies needed and where to procure them and 'had learned to read medical prescriptions for the composition of drugs' (p.498). Yet despite her achievement, she experiences the conflict felt by Meredith's other heroines, confessing to the 'war going on within her' between 'inclinations' or 'luxury', the choice of 'companionship' with her brother going to war or 'submission' to the 'weak young nobleman claiming his husband's rights over her' (p.485). Aware of society's expectation of 'the acquiescence of the woman', Carinthia knows that she would become a 'shred of herself' if she gave up the ambition of 'her career beside her brother' (p.485). Carinthia concludes that she would feel dishonoured as a 'titled doll . . . submissive wife' (p.486). The struggle of overcoming conflict causes tears, even for the 'last of young women for weeping' (p.490).

In Woodseer's description of Carinthia as 'a new idea of women', Meredith depicts a heroine of unconventional beauty, physical strength and mental courage (p.80). The significance of animation of expression is indicated by Chillon, who considers Carinthia's 'expressive' if not attractive features to be 'marvellous in their clear cut of the animating

mind' (p.38). In conversation with Rebecca Wythan, Woodseer asserts that perfect beauty is 'suitable for paintings and statues. Living faces, if they're to show the soul, which is the star on the peak of beauty, must lend themselves to commotion. Nature does it in a breezy tree or over ruffled waters. Repose has never such splendid reach as animation . . . in the living face' (p.313). Woodseer's note-book record of Carinthia as '*A beautiful Gorgon - a haggard Venus*' seems 'impossible' to Fleetwood as it 'fused a woman's face and grand scenery, to make them inseparable' (pp.78,79). Gower Woodseer reflects that Lord Fleetwood should have noticed that she 'carried the promise of growth, a character in expansion, and she had at least natural grace' if not the conventional feminine attributes expected by society (p.257).

Meredith shows how Carinthia achieves forward movement by her own efforts, working through the uncertainty of imposed change and difficulties, by making use of unfamiliar places and situations to learn and develop. Her husband however, like Lord Ormont as described in Chapter Two, is unwilling or unable to attempt to understand his wife's mental wellbeing. Meredith demonstrates how men's resistance to change represents lack of movement, restricting progress towards harmony in relationships. The inability of Lord Ormont and Lord Fleetwood to adapt has the effect of destroying love, and reinforces their wives' determination to take action by leaving their marriages. The men's awareness of their ill-treatment and lack of respect for their wives comes 'too late'. Acknowledging the challenges for men confronted by a 'new idea of women', as for women faced with a different perception of a 'hero', Meredith emphasises the consequence of outdated attitudes. In his recognition and expression of men's fear of emasculation, Meredith anticipates the response to flexible gender roles in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, by some men in positions of power.

From his first sight of Carinthia, Lord Fleetwood experiences a conflicting response to the strong, active woman who is excited by 'a spice of danger' in climbing. Lord Fleetwood watches as she is 'tempted to adventure by a projected forked head of a sturdy blunted and twisted little rock-forest tree pushing horizontally for growth about thirty feet above the lower ground'. He is attracted at first sight by her agility and courage, but 'a shameful spasm of terror seized him at sight of a girl doing what he would have dreaded to attempt' (pp.120, 121). On their honeymoon journey Lord Fleetwood is perturbed by Carinthia's unconventional behaviour. The physicality which he admired in her natural setting is perceived as inappropriate in her new role as his wife. She 'needed no help to mount the coach . . . and he did not visibly wince' when she rejected his arm, and he 'swallowed' the sight of her 'stride from the axle of the wheel to the step higher' which

‘would have been a graceful spectacle on Alpine crags’ (p.147). At the journey ends, before a ladder is brought to help Carinthia to descend from the coach, she has ‘stepped, leaped, and entered the inn’ causing Fleetwood to remark ‘We are very independent’ (p.159). Her physical courage commands respect among local people when she returns to live at Esslemont with her child. Dame Gossip informs the reader that Carinthia ‘soon won a fearful name at Kentish cottage-hearths’ and it was said that she would ‘drive a hole through a robber stopping her on the road, as soon as look at him’ (p.362).

The possibility of learning from women and Nature is proposed to Lord Fleetwood by the character of Gower Woodseer ‘The Philosopher’, recalling Meredith’s own philosophy on learning from the earth and the natural world, as outlined in Chapter One. Lord Fleetwood refuses to attempt to understand, both Woodseer’s philosophy and Carinthia, rejecting Woodseer’s recommendation of ‘a book by an Edinburgh doctor [which] might be serviceable’, and dismissing women as ‘animals’ (p.325). Gower responds that Fleetwood cannot ‘speak that of women and pretend to love Nature’, and states that a woman has the ability to ‘stick [a man] in the soil, and trim and point him to grow . . . Women are in and of Nature’ (pp.325, 326). The expression of Gower Woodseer’s philosophy is quoted by Priestley as ‘unmistakably the voice of Meredith himself’ (1927, p.134), and Meredith’s characters frequently voice the views which are expressed in his own correspondence. Like Woodseer who has ‘studied’ women, Meredith refers to his ‘study of the position and the aims of women’ in a letter dated 1907 (Cline, p.1615). Lord Fleetwood later recalls Woodseer’s words with derision, exclaiming ‘Oh, pish, sir!’ as he repeats to himself that ‘the abusing of woman proves the hating of Nature . . . Women and Nature are close. If it is rather general to hate Nature and maltreat women, we begin to see why the world is a mad world’ (p.363).

Respect for Carinthia’s willingness and ability to learn is expressed eventually, and with reluctance, by Lord Fleetwood. Initially unimpressed by his new wife’s ‘baby English’ (p.156), he receives news of Carinthia from Woodseer, and notes that ‘the creature grows and studies to perfect herself . . . she has a certain power. Her donkey obstinacy in refusing compliance, and her pursuit of “my husband” . . . do not exhibit the ordinary young female’. He is ‘shaken to confess’ that she impresses the people she meets, and grudgingly admits that ‘whatever the rawness of the woman, she has qualities’ (pp.320, 321). Finally meeting her husband in person in Wales, Carinthia looks ‘formidable’ walking towards him ‘sedately; very collectedly erect’, and Lord Fleetwood experiences an ‘incomprehensible fit of shyness’ noting her ‘poised calm bearing . . . mistress of herself’ (pp.331, 332, 333). A period of

reflection marks the beginning of Lord Fleetwood's process of learning as signposted in chapter XXXV, titled: 'In Which Certain Changes May be Discerned'. He observes a 'singular transformation' in Carinthia, 'her aspect was entirely different; her attitude toward him as well' (p.365). Some recognition of his ill-treatment of his wife is apparent when staying at the Royal Sovereign, where he abandoned Carinthia on their wedding night: 'He had no sleep . . . This was the room' (p.391). As he imagines her mental distress, referring to her as 'that most ill-fated of brides', Lord Fleetwood experiences some understanding for her refusal to share her room with him at Esslemont (p.391). Recalling that she 'wore an aspect of the confident fortress, which . . . commands respect', he wonders how 'this miracle of commanding respect' was accomplished after 'such a string of somersaults before the London world' (p.392).

Acknowledging that her character 'emerged beneath obstacles, and overcame ridicule, won suffrages', Lord Fleetwood admits that Carinthia has 'won a reluctant husband's admiration'. He experiences 'what might really be taste for her companionship, or something more alarming . . . thirst for it', but regret and remorse have been learned only after his cruel neglect has destroyed Carinthia's love for him (p.393). Seeking reconciliation with his wife, he asks Woodseer to tell Carinthia that his 'eyes are opened. I respect her' (p.406). Advising her 'to swallow the injury', Lord Fleetwood repeats his respect, concluding 'I don't believe anything higher than respect can be offered to a woman' (p.409). During his visit to Carinthia at Esslemont, he finds that although her 'directness of gaze' is unchanged, 'her easy sedateness was novel, her English almost the tone of the English world'. He assumes that 'some one or something had schooled her', and remains unaware, or unwilling to accept, that Carinthia has grown by her own efforts and willingness to learn (p.424). His attempts at reconciliation are rebuffed, she 'pitied him, and passed along her path elsewhere' (p.464). At the meeting with her husband in the penultimate chapter, Carinthia is perceived by Lord Fleetwood as 'an equal . . . and he, bowing to the visible equality, chafed at a sense of inferiority' (p.492). He indicates ongoing resistance to a strong independent woman, who is perceived as a threat to his self-image of masculinity.

In contrast to men such as Lord Fleetwood, Lord Ormont and Sir Willoughby Patterne, who look without seeing, and hear without listening, Meredith creates alternative role models, who are depicted as being suitable husbands for his heroines. Meredith's evident knowledge of the natural world expressed in his poetry is based on observation, as noted in Chapter One. In his poem 'The Woods of Westermain' looking closely at nature and animals is synonymous with 'reading' to detect the spirit of Earth: 'Look you with the soul

you see 't' (p. 195). Meredith's use of observation and imagination contributed to his understanding of others, as discussed in Chapter Three, and readers are able to identify with the thoughts and emotions of his characters. In his fiction, Meredith depicts men who make the effort to see and listen, in order to 'read' and understand women, indicating a process of learning as part of their own development, and as a move towards interdependent relationships. He shows awareness however, that the unconventional intimacy of close observation by men is unexpected, and can be a challenging experience for women.

The character of Vernon in *The Egoist* indicates to the reader that listening enables understanding of another person, while demonstrating Clara's initial discomfort at his close observation. 'The charm of [Clara's] ready tongue and her voice was to his intelligent understanding wit, natural wit, crystal wit, as opposed to the paste-sparkle of the wit of the town . . . No one had noticed the wit' (p.47). By contrast Sir Willoughby 'lectured her' without understanding Clara's character, and in response to his rhetorical question ' "Do I not know you?"' . . . She held her tongue, knowing that he did not know her' (p.72). Although a 'fairly intelligent man' Sir Willoughby is 'blinded to what was going on within her' by his preconceived ideas of his ideal woman and their relationship (p.132). Failing to understand Clara's 'petition for release' he concludes 'There was no reading either of her or the mystery' (p.171). As Clara becomes aware of Vernon's perceptive nature, in comparison to Sir Willoughby's patronising attitude and inability to understand her, she is uncomfortable in his presence, finding the 'level scrutiny of deep-set eyes unpleasantly penetrating. She had liked his eyes. They became unbearable' (pp.55, 56). Clara is confused by a sense that Vernon 'could help, and moved no hand. He read her case. A scrutiny so penetrating . . . though his eyes did but rest on her a second or two, signified that he read her line by line, and to the end' (p.119). The reader discovers with Clara that Vernon's ability to listen, without advice or instruction, allows her freedom of choice, and she learns to confide in conversation with Vernon in the setting of the natural world, as she does with her close female friend.

The reference to Lord Ormont as a 'practised reader of women' is ironic as noted in Chapter Two (*Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, p.40). He has extensive physical knowledge of women but no mental understanding, and the narrator observes that Lord Ormont 'was a close reader of surfaces'. The transformation which he finally observes in Aminta has happened 'some little way down below the surface he perused' (p.298). His 'old-world eye' on women (p.314) limits his appreciation of Aminta's skills when riding or swimming, as he watches without participating, in contrast to Matthew who interprets Aminta's moods by close observation of her behaviour and her eyes. Like Clara in *The Egoist*, Aminta

experiences discomfort as she becomes aware of the perceptive nature of a sensitive man, and her reaction to Matthew's 'short look' at her is physical. She 'had an inward shiver, mixed of the fascination and repugnance felt by a woman who knows that under one man's eyes her character is naked and anatomized. Her character? - her soul' (p.329). Aminta's thoughts reveal her questions, wondering how he learned 'to read at any moment right to the soul of a woman', was it experience or 'sentimental sympathy' concluding that it was 'because of his being in heart and mind the brother to the sister with women' (p.329). The link between the character of Matthew Weyburn and Meredith himself is clear in Meredith's assertion in a letter that women would discover in him 'one who is much at heart with them' (Cline, p.936).

Listening as a mental activity is evident in Meredith's characters whose physical mobility is restricted. Girls without mothers are supported in intimate relationships with female friends, and Meredith highlights the significance of roles played by older women in guiding the younger generation, and teaching them to think for themselves. Emma Dunstane (in *Diana of The Crossways*) and Rebecca Wythan (in *The Amazing Marriage*) are both invalids, physically weak but mentally strong, who have wisdom of experience and are observant. Emma 'reads [Diana] clearly' (*Diana of The Crossways*, p.94) and her wise advice given in a letter is heeded although reluctantly by Diana. The interdependent relationship between the two women is conveyed in the description of their reunion following a period of distancing. They were 'heart in heart again; the physical weakness of the one, the moral weakness of the other, creating that mutual dependency which makes friendship a pulsating tie' (p.258). Carinthia and Rebecca share a similar relationship in *The Amazing Marriage*. Rebecca listens with a 'sharp invalid's ears' when Carinthia confides in her (*The Amazing Marriage*, p.304), and their close relationship is mutual as Rebecca 'caught a spark of life' from Carinthia when they conversed (p.302). In *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, conversations between Aminta and Matthew Weyburn's dying mother encourage Aminta's thought process, and give strength to the older woman. Mrs Weyburn has 'ideas of her own about men and women . . . and about marriage', which contribute to Aminta's development (*Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, p.204). Her inherited view of the stereotypical military hero is changed to respect for Matthew's ambition as a teacher by reasoned thought, being affected by the opinion of a woman who had 'learned to think he could do more for the world as the schoolmaster' (p.204).

In his earlier novels of 1864 to 1876, Meredith shows how care may be experienced from unexpected sources, and can bring about a change of attitude. A male character in *Sandra Belloni* is depicted in a caring role traditionally associated with women, when Emilia

experiences the state of passive despair, discussed in Chapter Four. Experiencing isolation and desolation, she is on the verge of suicide when she is 'rescued' by Merthyr Powys in the short dramatic chapter XLI 'She is Found' (*Sandra Belloni*, p.453). He provides physical and emotional support, 'enveloped her in a tight hug . . . held her . . . till at the first hotel they reached he managed to get food for her'. Merthyr 'put bread through the window of the cab. Bit by bit he handed her the morsels' (p.454). In *Harry Richmond*, when a severe physical beating is suffered by Harry while crossing the heath alone, he recovers in the care of gypsy women. His father is 'perplexed' that Harry did not seek his family's help, and unfounded prejudice against the gypsies is challenged, as Harry is found to be 'comfortable' in the setting of 'the heath, the tent, the black circle of the broth-pot, and the wild girl' (*Harry Richmond*, p.447). Meredith shows in *Beauchamp's Career* how Rosamund is obliged to reconsider her dislike of Dr Shrapnel, and to apologise for her behaviour towards him. Following Shrapnel's care for Nevil during a period of delirium, she recognises that Nevil's family are 'indebted' to Shrapnel, and that his 'love of Nevil surpasses ours' (*Beauchamp's Career*, p.488).

Meredith's readers, like his characters striving through uncertainty and diversions to make progress, are challenged to engage with his writing in a process of active reading. Introductory chapters to Meredith's novels are frequently considered as 'obstacles', like 'a great dragon folded in the gate to forbid all entrance', as Robert Bridges described 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', chosen as an introduction to the first published volume of poetry by Gerard Manley Hopkins in 1918. Meredith's 'Prelude' to *The Egoist*, referring to Comedy and the Comic Spirit, titled 'A Chapter of Which the Last Page Only is of any Importance', presents the reader with a challenge to engage or to omit, and indicates that the novel may not conform to a conventional form. Contemporary critics responded with hostile criticism because Meredith's innovative style was unfamiliar and his expectation of effort was unexpected. Meredith recognised that the obscurity of his style was the focus for negative responses in a reference to his last book of poems which 'caused everybody to take up the old cudgel "Obscurity" for my incorrigible nob' (quoted in Jones, 1999, p.237). Wilt suggests that the reaction of nineteenth-century readers was intensified by the 'unmistakable sense that it was they, and not the characters in the stories, who were being mercilessly examined and urged and molded [sic] in his works' (1975, p.54). Meredith's intention is not to lecture or criticise the reader but to encourage a participatory role. As noted by Beer, the interventions by Meredith's narrator 'heighten our awareness as readers; they are not moral directives' (1970, p.38).

In the context of mid-nineteenth century debates concerning the function of fiction, and whether a novel was to be read more than once, some critics recognised Meredith's work as a 'riddle', requiring application and re-reading. An unsigned reviewer in 1864, stating in *The Westminster Review* that Meredith's writing is 'anything but easy reading', asserts that *Sandra Belloni* 'cannot be read off and thrown aside, rather will it repay renewed acquaintance, and charm more on second perusal than on the first' (in Williams, 1971, pp.119, 121). Meredith himself acknowledges in a letter to Jessopp in 1862 that his sonnet cycle 'Modern Love' 'could only be apprehended by the few who would read it many times' (Cline, p.160). New interpretations of a challenging piece of writing are made possible if a reader is willing to make an effort, to re-read, and accept that their opinions may be changed. Readers who are willing to engage with the complexity of Meredith's style and recognise reading his fiction as 'a continuous process of solving riddles' (L Stevenson, 1953, p.293) acknowledge the need to read his novels more than once. R L Stevenson, as 'one of those most influential in spreading the name of Meredith among the public', was prepared to make the effort, writing to W E Henley in 1882 that he had 'just re-read for the third and fourth time *The Egoist*. When I shall have read it the sixth or seventh, I begin to see I shall know about it' (in Williams, 1971, p.520).

The sudden revelation of slowly acquired knowledge expressed by Clara as 'By degrees: unknown to myself; suddenly' (*The Egoist*, p.294) becomes apparent, as unexpected connections gradually enable an understanding. In *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* Sir Austin hearing a conversation between his son and a friend 'listened to a language of which he possessed not the key . . . talk that the boys jerked out by fits, and that came as broken links of a chain impossible to connect. But they awoke curiosity'. Gradually Sir Austin begins to 'gather a clue to the dialogue' (*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, p.27). The analysis of Meredith's 'fragmented' style by Dames refers to the need for Meredith's reader to 'twig' the connections to achieve understanding, and points out that 'twig' was one of Meredith's own terms for 'accurate, small scale mental activity' (2007, p.189). Stating the need to 'persevere' to the end of *The Egoist*, an unsigned reviewer in *The Saturday Review* of 1879 warns of 'some hard reading to accomplish. There must be no skipping; the book must be read, not page by page like the ordinary novel, but line by line' (in Williams, 1971, p.222).

More positive responses to Meredith's work were written by those who were acquainted with him and respected the man and his writing. Although they were allowed little biographical information, the experience of reading Meredith was changed by the opportunity to speak to him and gaining some knowledge of his *Weltanschauung*, as Priestley

suggested. Williams notes that, following the ‘rage’ and ‘fury’ expressed in James’ review of *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, when James ‘came to know Meredith, an affectionate though not intimate relationship grew up’. Later, after Meredith’s death, James conveys in a letter to Gosse a greater understanding of Meredith’s character on reading his letters (in Williams, 1971, p.406). Personal connections with Meredith are frequently expressed in physical terms, and Meredith’s evident excitement of communication - in written and spoken words - is conveyed in Schwob’s recollection of his visit. When Meredith came from working in his chalet ‘he showed physical traces of his mental efforts’, his eyes ‘intoxicated with thought’ (quoted in Sassoon, 1948, p.226).

Enthusiasts of Meredith’s work from the nineteenth century to the present day claim the benefits of the experience of active reading, noting the reward for effort while acknowledging the intellectual challenge. J A Noble reviewing *The Amazing Marriage* in ‘The Spectator’ in 1896 states that it is ‘always with a sense of mental confusion and trepidation . . . that we open a new book by Mr George Meredith’. Conceding that there are ‘passages in the novel which . . . make the intellect tingle’ he concludes that ‘the book as a whole is terribly hard reading for the natural man’ (in Williams, 1971, pp.451, 452). An unsigned review of the same novel in ‘The Pall Mall Gazette’ in 1895 states that the ‘obscurity, even distortion of his style is undoubted’ and describes the ‘strength of colour and movement . . . a maze of moving form and influence that the eye and brain strive half in vain to follow’ but asserts that ‘with love and a trifle of patience that following can be done’ (in Williams, 1971, p.441). A similar view is expressed in the twenty-first century by Banerjee, referring to *The Amazing Marriage* in her book *George Meredith*, who asserts that the ‘rewards of reading this highly experimental novel are at least commensurate with the effort required from the reader’ (2012, p.89).

Meredith’s character Nevil Beauchamp persists in his process of reading Carlyle’s writing, struck by the ‘illumination of an idea . . . that there was a great deal more in the book than there was in himself’ (*Beauchamp’s Career*, p.19). In Justin M’Carthy’s early appreciation of Meredith in 1864, he states that ‘those who read steadily through Meredith’s books will find themselves well rewarded for their pains, if they have brains and culture enough in themselves to appreciate brains and culture in their author’ (in Williams, 1971, p.125). Meredith’s expectation however, is not for readers to demonstrate intellectual ability, but to persevere through challenge like Nevil Beauchamp, who proposes that Rosamund’s ‘next present should be ‘the entire list of his beloved Incomprehensible’s published works’ (*Beauchamp’s Career*, p.19). Carlyle is said to be Nevil’s ‘favourite author’, despite the

difficulty of reading the book, and Nevil 'while admitting that he could not quite master it, liked it' (pp.18, 19). This assessment by the narrator could be interpreted as Meredith's anticipation that readers who are prepared to make the effort might learn to appreciate his own work. Readers of Meredith's writing can identify with Nevil and 'his unlikeness to boys and men among his countrymen', and may find that repeated readings result in 'nibbles of golden meaning by instalments' (*Beauchamp's Career*, p.19).

Conclusion: Continuum

In this thesis, study of biographical material and correspondence reveals Meredith's *Weltanschauung* and his stoic determination to look ahead and move forward with optimism. Analysis from selected poems and novels demonstrates how his philosophy of striving toward a state of wellbeing is expressed in his writing, and the thesis highlights the significance of movement in his life and work. The study of Meredith's acceptance of impermanence and insoluble questions results in research to investigate the apparent paradox of striving to move forward while accepting a state of uncertainty. Settings which depict liminality are identified in passages from the chosen novels to show how Meredith demonstrates uncertainty as an opportunity to experiment, and to move toward if not always forward. Using his skills of observation and imagination, and his own experience, Meredith conveys the effect of physical and mental restriction on health and wellbeing. Analysis of his characters' journeys, which are depicted in stages, shows the possibility of development by diversionary routes.

Connections are made between the novels of Meredith and Thomas Hardy, to demonstrate how both men depict their heroines' attempts to move towards independence, and how Meredith and Hardy contribute to a move towards a new form of expression in fiction, using poetic techniques. Conveying an understanding of the injustice of the oppression of women, their contrasting outlooks on life are reflected in the outcomes for their heroines. As Roppen notes, a 'vista into the future' is 'wholly absent in Hardy' (1956, p.297). In his Preface to the 1896 edition of *The Woodlanders*, Hardy states that 'the immortal puzzle - given the man and woman, how to find a basis for their sexual relation - is left where it stood', referring to 'human society during their brief transit through this sorry world' (*The Woodlanders*, p. 368). In contrast to Hardy's view of a 'sorry world', leaving in his fiction 'the immortal puzzle . . . where it stood', Meredith expresses his optimistic outlook, striving for forward movement. Although Meredith provides no solutions to Hardy's 'puzzle', he offers hope in his exploration of alternative gender roles and relationships.

Meredith's strong determination to look ahead and move forward is reflected in analysis of the selected novels. He is repeatedly critical of the 'old days', depicting egoism and preconceived ideals as barriers to progress toward harmony within oneself and in relationships. Portraying masculine behaviour and attitudes as outdated, the narrator refers ironically to 'those days' when 'the famous ancestral plea of "the passion for his charmer"'

had not been altogether socially quashed' (*Diana of The Crossways*, p.43). Although a certain empathy is implied in stating the influence of historical context, Meredith shows the effect of restriction on women, emphasising the need for progress by changing attitudes. The narrator in *Diana of The Crossways* suggests shared knowledge with the reader asserting that if 'in any branch of us we fail in growth, there is, you are aware, an unfailing aboriginal democratic old monster that waits to pull us down; certainly the branch, possibly the tree' (p.15).

Carinthia, the heroine of Meredith's last novel is his most successful depiction of 'a new idea of women', as shown in analysis of *The Amazing Marriage* in Chapter Five. She demonstrates his philosophy of progress by moving forward, making use of her skills, and facing challenges by adapting and changing according to circumstance. Like Meredith himself, Carinthia demonstrates strength of character, using physical and mental abilities, and striving to move toward the best version of self, in a close relationship with nature. The character was developed gradually by Meredith, writing the novel from 1879 until 1895, during which time he completed his three novels featuring the heroines Clara, Diana, and Aminta. Conveying the effort required by Carinthia to combine career and family, Meredith acknowledges the difficulty of achieving and maintaining a sense of wellbeing within oneself. The narrator in *One of Our Conquerors* (1891) identifies with readers, describing a temporary sense of ease experienced by Mrs Victor. Her self-esteem is increased by her 'musical gifts' among friends with whom she felt comfortable, who 'helped her to feel at home with herself and be herself: a rarer condition with us all than is generally supposed' (*One of Our Conquerors*, p.71).

Meredith's intellectual engagement with women, including Ulrica Duncombe, Alice Butcher and Janet Duff Gordon, is revealed in correspondence and in memoirs. He identifies with his female protagonists to demonstrate an understanding and empathy for their role in society and relationships, like Flaubert who expresses in correspondence a strong identification with his character of Madame Bovary. While Meredith is writing *Sandra Belloni*, the character of Emilia is alive in his imagination as he tells Jessopp in a letter: 'I have now a prose damsel crying out to me to have her history completed' (Cline, p.110). In his defence of the character of Diana in his letter to Ulrica Duncombe, mentioned in Chapter Four, Meredith speaks of her as if a friend or acquaintance, repeating 'she was' (Cline, pp.1438-40). Concerning Diana, he writes to the author Dr Anders that 'my critics own that a breathing woman is produced, and I felt that she was in me as I wrote' (Cline, p.1578).

Anticipating his readers to include women as well as men, Meredith acknowledges in a letter that women have ‘much to surmount in the style’ but asserts that women would discover his empathy ‘when they have mastered it and come to the taste’ (Cline, p. 936). Although his comment could be considered as patronising, Meredith is acknowledging that his style is challenging and that greater effort would be required by his female readers with limited access to education. His letter continues with the recognition that women are restricted by ‘nature and the world’ and predicts ‘great and blessed changes for the race when they have achieved independence; for that must come of the exercise of their minds’ (Cline, p. 936). Meredith’s letter, written in 1888, emphasises his long-held view shared with John Stuart Mill on the ‘better and more complete education of women’ (*The Subjection of Women*, 1869, p.224).

Meredith’s expression of his belief in the need to accept impermanence and insoluble questions is not a passive acceptance. Acknowledging that life is difficult, he asserts that mental and physical effort is necessary to move forwards through the uncertainty of transitional stages, and in the poem ‘Hard Weather’ he suggests that a smooth path is not necessarily desirable: ‘Behold the life at ease; it drifts’. During the drama of ‘Bursts from a rending East . . . we are rolled’ as if on a heaving ship, but are made stronger (*Poetical Works*, 1912, pp.320, 318, 319). While expressing empathy in fiction for characters who cling to long-established attitudes, Meredith identifies periods of uncertainty as a means of moving forward. His character of Carinthia demonstrates the possibility of controlling response if not circumstance, and Meredith’s novel anticipates self-help literature of the twenty-first century, as a means of coping with uncertainty. Meredith recognises that the acceptance of uncertainty and ambivalence is part of a gradual process of growth.

An understanding of mental health issues is apparent in Meredith’s fiction. He is included by Jones as one of the writers who lived ‘before the modern understanding of mental illness’ who ‘have shown great intuitive insight’. Jones makes the comparison to Shakespeare, stating that Meredith describes breakdowns ‘with an accuracy that would guide a present-day psychiatrist to a quite confident diagnosis’ (1999, p.49). Linda McDaniel identifies Richmond Roy’s erratic behaviour as a bipolar disorder in her 2015 article ‘The Manic-Depressive Father in George Meredith’s Harry Richmond’. Although not melancholic by nature Meredith demonstrates awareness of a depressed state of mind, caused by ‘natural’ constitution, social pressure, or circumstance. His personal experience of the effect of grief is expressed in poetry in ‘A Faith on Trial’ when the poet sets out on his usual morning walk facing his wife’s imminent death. Failing to appreciate the beauties of nature which he ‘saw

unsighting’, and unmoved by the sounds of foliage, he ‘walked to observe, not to feel, / Not to fancy’ (pp. 347, 349). Life is ‘a goad, without aim’ and he experiences ‘the calm of an empty room’ until, moved by the sight of the wild-cherry, he submits to nature (p.350).

Using his own experience, Meredith makes the connection to depression caused by restriction. Expressing in correspondence the frustration of being physically prevented from the mental activity of writing, he demonstrates awareness that restriction of intellectual creativity could result in dis-ease and depression, as recognised by the medical profession at the beginning of the twentieth century. Following her nervous breakdown in 1887 Charlotte Perkins Gilman was told by ‘a noted specialist in nervous diseases . . . “never to touch pen, brush or pencil again as long as I lived”’. Gilman claimed that the description of her subsequent depression in her novella ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ caused the same ‘great specialist’ to alter his treatment of neurasthenia, as stated in her 1913 account ‘Why I wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper”’ (in Goodman, 1996, p.126). In his fiction, Meredith depicts ‘brain fever’ caused by severe emotional stress in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, and shows how Emilia’s anguish leads to thoughts of suicide in *Sandra Belloni*, discussed in Chapter Four. Emilia’s health crisis is temporary but extreme, caused by loss of self-esteem and identity, as a result of circumstance and emphasised by a sense of isolation. Meredith describes active despair as being associated with passion and movement, and highlights the danger of passive despair. Showing the languor experienced by women to be caused by depression, not hysteria, as discussed in Chapter Two, Meredith demonstrates in his later novels the effect of the submissive role on women, and the potential for a positive reaction, as shown in Chapter Three.

Although seasonal affective disorder was not officially named until the 1980s, and remains a subject of debate as to causes and possible links to depressive illness, Meredith’s apparent awareness of seasonal depression is expressed in the poem ‘Seed-time’. In response to the ‘cry’ to ‘nourish my blood: / O for a day of the long light, one!’ ‘Earth admonishes’ the poet to ‘Master the blood’ with a reminder that Autumn is ‘our season of seed’. The poem conveys the need for mental and physical strength when surrounded by the decay of autumn, and to focus on the promise of spring, ‘the springing To-be’ (p.318). Spring and autumn feature repeatedly in Meredith’s writing as being times of growth and change - and optimism, representing renewal and re-birth. The mental breakdown of Diana in *Diana of The Crossways* is caused by social pressures on an unstable character, as discussed in Chapter Four, and perhaps by the effect of seasonal disorder. The narrator informs of a ‘fatal time to come for [Diana] in the Summer’ and she imagines her ‘recent placid life’ as ‘the pause

before thunder' when she receives from Emma 'a letter of unwonted bright spirits, contrasting strangely with an inexplicable oppression of her own' (*Diana of The Crossways*, p.178). Diana benefits from a sense of wellbeing in the natural world, and from the care of friends who provide the therapy of active listening support. The importance of mental health and wellbeing has been increasingly acknowledged in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In order to raise awareness, the World Health Organisation recognizes World Mental Health Day annually on 10th October, held for the first time in 1992.

Comparisons between the novels of Meredith and Hardy, which give voice to women's frustration of restriction, are discussed in Chapter Three. They portray the difficult reality of life after marriage, challenging the reader's expectation of an idealised ending, and are critical of a society which condemns love outside marriage yet condones a legal relationship which may be restrictive and prevent personal growth, particularly for women. In *Lord Ormont and His Aminta* the equality of an unmarried relationship is depicted in contrast to a loveless marriage, and in *One of Our Conquerors* Meredith shows the contrast between an affectionate common-law marriage and a legal but unequal relationship, conducted for reasons of economy not love. Despite their contrasting outlooks, Meredith and Hardy demonstrated respect for each other. In a letter of 1892 to Frederick Greenwood, Meredith wrote that 'Hardy is one of the few men whose work I can read' (Cline, p.1059). Referring to a recent visit from Hardy, Meredith wrote to Gosse in 1905 that he liked Hardy although he was 'afflicted by his twilight view of life' (Cline, p.1529). The respect was apparently mutual and the 'framed sketch of Thackeray and prints of Tennyson and Meredith' recorded by Tomalin as hanging round the fireplace in Hardy's study (2007, p.339) can still be seen by twenty-first century visitors to Max Gate. Both Meredith and Hardy demonstrate imagination in writing and inconsistencies in life, and the compulsion to think, write - and feel - is evident until the end of their lives.

Meredith shows how conflicting emotions, within an individual or in a relationship, inhibit forward movement, and result in a diversionary route toward wellbeing and a sense of harmony. Accepting that responsibility for the success or failure of a marriage is shared by both partners, he represents the viewpoints of men and women. In the sonnet cycle 'Modern Love' published in 1862, a husband and wife realise how little they understand each other, and the pain of their learning experience is intended to be shared with the reader: 'Can we not teach our foolish hearts to learn?' (p.139). Banerjee asserts that 'Only Shakespeare's Dark Lady sonnets plumb the same depths of emotional, psychological and spiritual turmoil as

“Modern Love” (2012, p.37). While not under-estimating the difficulties to be faced, Meredith shows the benefit of learning to ‘read’ oneself and others, and the different perceptions by characters in his fiction encourage greater understanding of alternative views.

The inner thoughts of Nevil and Renée are reported in addition to dialogue in *Beauchamp’s Career*, allowing the reader to understand the confusion of two young people experiencing first love, and the discrepancy between their expectations based on fantasy or realism. Although Diana’s first husband does not feature as a character in the narrative of *Diana and The Crossways*, she concedes that her perception of a husband as ‘stifler . . . dull as a woollen nightcap over eyes and ears and mouth’ is due to their incompatibility. Having realised that they are ‘naturally antagonistic’ Diana acknowledges that their relationship became ‘tug and tug . . . By resisting, I made him a tyrant; and he, by insisting, made me a rebel’ (*Diana and The Crossways*, pp.132,131). In the novel *The Amazing Marriage* the contrasting views of Carinthia and Lord Fleetwood on the day of their marriage are presented simultaneously to the reader, as dialogue and actions are interspersed with the thoughts and emotions of both characters. Carinthia’s optimism in spite of her husband’s apparently unjust and cruel treatment invites sympathy, but the reasons for Fleetwood’s pessimism explain his behaviour without condoning it.

Acknowledging the challenges for men and women in achieving a mutual understanding, Meredith conveys the difficulty of ‘reading’ a person and of being read by others, as shown in Chapter Five. His acceptance that it is no less difficult to read oneself, and move to a new state of mind, is evident in Meredith’s life and fiction. Cronin observes that in ‘Modern Love’ Meredith shows ‘he had come to understand himself very well’ and that the poem ‘expertly displays his capacity for alarming, excoriating self-knowledge’, but that ‘to change was something else entirely’ (2020, p. 214). The narrator in *Diana of The Crossways* highlights Diana’s inability to change, as she ‘looked in the glass’ but continued to deceive herself (*Diana of The Crossways*, p.113). Meredith demonstrates empathy for the egoistical Sir Willoughby and Mr Tinman, as shown in Chapter Two, and for Lord Ormont, who is restricted by his inherited attitude. Finally realising the consequence of his inability to look at his own behaviour, Lord Ormont learns ‘the habit of reflecting . . . and the rubbing of that unused opaque mirror hanging inside a man of action had helped him piecemeal to perceive bits of his conduct’ which led to the breakdown of his marriage (*Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, p.354).

Meredith's characters move through stages of uncertainty, experiencing challenges and conflicts which create diversions on their journeys, and readers of Meredith's narratives move through stages of understanding. As shown in this thesis, Meredith experiments with the conventional structure of the novel, and the irregular form represents the erratic progress through life as expressed in 'The World's Advance', which is compared to 'the inebriate's track / at night . . . / he plays diversions on the homeward line'. Forward movement is disrupted by challenges but he 'turns not back' (p.186). Meredith's challenging style of writing demands a similar effort by readers to that required of his walking companions, with diversions to be negotiated like unexpected obstacles on a path or trips on a walk. Alice Butcher's recollection of her first 'pantingly difficult' climb up Box Hill with Meredith, quoted in Chapter One, demonstrates his expectation of physical and mental effort, the powers of her mind and body being 'strained' by his very fast pace and his conversation (1919, pp.2,3). For readers who attempt to solve the 'riddles' of Meredith's fiction, by reading a book more than once, and reflecting beyond the novel's conclusion, the experience of novel-reading can be compared to physical exercise, and Meredith's narrative equivalent to a walk.

The link between reading and walking is made by Justin M'Carthy with reference to Meredith's style in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, in his 'early appreciation' of Meredith in 1864. He states that the 'quaintnesses and fantastic eccentricities of the style . . . are quite enough to warn the commonplace novel reader at the very beginning that these paths are rather thorny and tangled for his easy lounging walk' (in Williams, 1971, p.126). The structure of Meredith's narrative is frequently compared to a walk, and both Sassoon and Pritchett use the metaphor of walking with reference to Meredith's style. Writing in 1948 Sassoon asserts that 'Often one feels out of step with him - and out of breath. He strides along, gesticulating vehemently; then he suddenly stops to insist on showing one the view across the valley or to explain the inner workings of a character. He is an uneasy companion in a pilgrimage of six hundred pages' (1948, p.127). V S Pritchett was critical that Meredith 'cannot resist striking an attitude or going off at a tangent, so that in fact his narrative often stands still. He is like a walker, continually stopping to enthuse instead of getting on' (1970, p.41). Meredith's pauses in his narrative create space for the reader, like the walker, to reflect before moving on. He conveys urgency, excitement, or anxiety in narrative by a change of rhythm using short sentences, a series of questions or exclamations.

Rebecca Solnit states that ‘Walking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord’ (2000, p.5). Meredith combined the physical exercise of walking with mental activity, talking with friends, sharing his knowledge of plants and birds, appreciating the weather and scenery. His own writing was shared by reading aloud or expressing ideas as he walked. When alone, he observed people and the natural world, to add to his knowledge and to use as material in his work. Walking also provided the opportunity to think, or to deal with emotional difficulties. Meredith was known to have taken a book with him on occasions, to link a writer to a place and to add to his own experience. Making the link between walking and narrative, Solnit states that ‘To write is to carve a new path through the terrain of the imagination, point out new features on a familiar route. To read is to travel through that terrain with the author as guide . . . to take one somewhere’ (2000, p.72). A footpath unfolds in time as a walker travels, in the same way that a narrative does when it is read or heard. Geoff Nicholson makes the connection between walking and writing with a single step or single word contributing to a ‘thousand-mile journey . . . the million-word manuscript’, observing that there will inevitable ‘missteps and stumbles, journeys into dead ends, the reluctant retracing of your steps’ (2010, p.262). Nicholson concludes that this is a ‘necessary, and not wholly unenjoyable, part of the process. It’s an exploration’ (2010, p.263). For Meredith, the journey in stages of ‘becoming’ is more important than the destination, and experimentation is part of the learning process.

The communication of knowledge during a walk is apparent in an account of the Mardudjara aborigines of Australia, who take part in a male initiation on foot to acquaint others with the ‘geography of distant, hitherto unknown territories’ (quoted in Amato, 2004, p.26). The journey of a narrative is a means of acquiring knowledge in the same way that the tradition of passing on oral stories while walking is regarded as a means of conveying information and learning how to think. Alice Legat refers to the Dene people of North-Western Canada whose younger generation walk with elders and hear their stories, acquiring knowledge. An ‘in-between phase of learning’ follows while ‘walking’ one’s own story, so that inherited wisdom is augmented by experience (in Ingold and Vergunst, 2008, p.37) and the stories are extended and embellished with new interpretations. The metaphor of narrative as a path to understanding is evident in Meredith’s letter of 1887 in which he stated that ‘I think that all right use of life . . . is to pave ways for the firmer footing of those who succeed us; as to my works, I . . . think them of worth only when they point and aid to that end’

(Cline, p.876). Dickens refers to the narrator's role of 'the historian [who] takes the friendly reader by the hand' to 'see' into characters' homes (Chap XXXIII, *The Old Curiosity Shop*) and Meredith shares his experience and knowledge, encouraging readers to think.

In fiction Meredith takes his reader on a journey, communicating the same knowledge and experience which he shared with friends while walking. His use of natural description sets a scene, adding to the atmosphere or conveying heightened emotions. Sensory details are incorporated, inviting his readers to 'see, hear, touch, and smell worlds both ancient and modern' as noted in the twenty-first century edition of his poetry (Mitchell and Benford, 2012, p.251). Meredith's use of natural imagery to depict sensuality is shown in Chapter Three, and characters' emotions are intensified by the beauty of their surroundings. Accompanying the writer and his characters on their journeys Meredith's readers have the opportunity to benefit from the experience by thinking and learning for themselves. Read actively with thought and feeling, Meredith's fiction has the potential to promote self-education. Reward for effort is in the sense of achievement, and in unexpected viewpoints even in the repetition of a walk or the re-reading of a book. Variable scenery and weather, the mental and physical condition of the walker, produce a different experience, in the same way that a reader's perspective changes. Eliot states in *Adam Bede* that 'no story is the same to us after a lapse of time; or rather, we who read it are no longer the same interpreters' (*Adam Bede*, p.455). Reflection on personal experiences and those shared with others, and on characters encountered in fiction, can be seen as part of an ongoing process of moving towards harmony of body, mind and spirit.

Meredith's philosophy of life as a continuum, based on the natural cycle of decay of autumn and renewal of spring, is evident in the form of his narratives which lack conclusive endings. Tim Ingold's anthropological studies refer to the Khanty storytellers of western Siberia, whose stories reached no conclusion, ending only when the listeners all slept, and were 'to be continued' as in life (*Lines*, 2016, p.93). The Khanty word for story has the meaning of 'way' as a path to be followed with no dead end, and Ingold notes that life is lived along paths as well as places (*Lines*, 2016, p.3). Referring to the stories told by the Orochon hunters on their return to camp, Ingold states that the day's experience is recounted in detail but rarely concludes with the death of the prey. Just as the hunters' saddles are inherited, so each generation passes on their predecessors' stories, with the integration of new knowledge and experience.

Although Meredith is not included in the literary canon of nineteenth-century writers, references in books reveal awareness of his work, and convey the effort required in reading Meredith's work. In Conan Doyle's *The Boscombe Valley Mystery*, an allusion by Sherlock Holmes in a comment to Watson implies the superior knowledge of a reader who recognises the reference: "Those are the crucial points upon which the case depends. And now let us talk about George Meredith, if you please, and we shall leave all minor matters until tomorrow" (Doyle, 1981, p.210, first published 1891 in the 'Strand Magazine'). Conan Doyle makes a passing reference to Meredith in his paper on R L Stevenson, asserting that 'Meredith was made to be imitated. His mission is . . . to initiate a completely new method in the art of fiction' (in the *National Review*, January 1890, quoted in Hammerton, 1909, p.332). Reading Meredith's poetry is associated with intellectual snobbery as shown by P G Wodehouse in *Service with a Smile* (1962). The character Lavender Briggs quotes from 'Modern Love' and the Duke's failure to recognise a literary allusion 'aroused her scorn'. Although she 'did not actually call the Duke an ill-read old bohunkus . . . this criticism was implicit in the way she looked at him'. To the Duke, her habit of quoting poetry 'might seem merely another indication of the pottiness which was so marked a feature of the other sex', but he senses an 'unwilling respect' for her, and that 'she had more to say' (2008, p.81).

Admiration for Meredith is conveyed by Flora Thompson in her third-person sequel to *Lark Rise to Candleford*, titled *Heatherley* (1945). She states that she was 'so great an admirer that she could have passed a stiffish examination in the plots and characters of his novels and could, had she had a listener, have quoted most of his simpler poems'. Meredith's novels 'revealed a new world to her, a world where women existed in their own right and not merely . . . as the complement of man' (2005, p.33). Thompson made a 'pious pilgrimage' to Flint Cottage and Box Hill although she 'had not the good fortune to catch a glimpse of her idol' who by then was elderly and infirm (2005, p.34). The name of Antonia White's fictional heroine of her quartet of novels, published 1933 to 1954, was changed to Clara because White's father 'had a great passion for Meredith and a particular passion for Clara Middleton' (introduction to *Beyond the Glass*, 1950).

Quotations from *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* appear as epigraphs in books published in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The first chapter of *Island on the edge of the world: the story of St Kilda* (Maclean, 1972) opens with 'Away with systems! Away with a corrupt world! Let us breathe the air of the Enchanted island' from *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (chapter XIX, p.124). Chapters four and five of the crime novel *Death of a Witch* (2009) by M C Beaton use epigraphs attributed to George Meredith, although they are

aphorisms used by his characters, and do not represent Meredith's views. 'I expect that Woman will be the last thing to be civilised by Man' is an aphorism written by Sir Austin Feverel, and 'Kissing don't last: cookery do!' is an example of the 'matrimonial wisdom' of the homely Mrs Berry (*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, pp. 1, 227). Four lines from the poem 'The Thrush in February' are quoted by Joanna Trollope as a brief prologue to her novel *The Choir* (1988), and Meredith's intellectual activity is acknowledged in 2023, in Sarah Ogilvie's *The Dictionary People*, for his association with The Sunday Tramps who contributed to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Poet and psychogeographer Iain Sinclair makes reference to Meredith and Box Hill in *Edge of the Orison* (1997), although a visitor to Surrey in 2018 finds very little evidence of Meredith's forty years spent at Mickleham. His memorial stone can be seen in the churchyard at Dorking, and the Museum has a modest display board recording his life. Meredith's home at Flint Cottage and his writing Chalet, his favourite walks and special places, are little changed. It is still possible to experience the natural landscape of Surrey in response to his poem 'Invitation to the Country', as he described it in sensory terms - the sounds of water and birds, the feel of wind and rain, the sights and scents of trees and flowers. Box Hill is popular with walkers and cyclists, and is managed sensitively by the National Trust rather than a commercialised 'visitor experience'. Excellent leaflets for 'self-guided' trails are available, one of which, the 'Natural Play Trail' published in 2017, expresses the same philosophy as Meredith 150 years earlier: 'Use all your senses to explore, not just your eyes. Squeeze soft moist decaying wood, scrunch crispy dry leaves, smell rich woodland earth, snap dead sticks, listen out for animals and birds . . . There is no such thing as a life without challenges. We will always encounter obstacles and risks. Overcoming these problems contributes to the person we become . . . if you fall, dust yourself off and get back up again'.

Meredith was stoic in facing challenges to his *Weltanschauung* in his life, and in the expression of his philosophy in his writing. Aware of his own shortcomings, he continued striving to move forward by making the best use of his mental and physical faculties, and using uncertainty as an opportunity for experimentation. Reflection and research in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries show Meredith as a source of inspiration and influence. The musical setting of 'The Lark Ascending' by Ralph Vaughan Williams was inspired by Meredith's poem, and in the essay 'Writing in Lightning' O'Toole considers 'the profound impact of Meredith's thought on Wilde's writing', stating that Wilde's use of 'epigrammatic speech . . . can be traced back to Meredith's earlier experimental fiction' (*Yearbook of*

English Studies, 2019, p.155). O'Toole describes Meredith as 'an important antecedent to Wilde', while concurring with Harris's 'good warning, not to suggest some direct, linear progression from early experiment to eventual perfection' (p.159). Despite Wilde's criticisms of Meredith, O'Toole detects 'an acknowledgement of an intellectual debt and a lineage' (p.162). The value of experimentation without expectation of goal or outcome is recognised in this thesis as Meredith's means of contributing to the development of the novel form in the second half of the nineteenth century. Twenty-first century scholars who continue to research the style and content of Meredith's novels in comparison with other writers are able to demonstrate his influence as part of a process of continuum.

As noted in the Introduction, the influence of his experimental fiction has been identified by scholars making links to literary modernism. Stone concludes that the 'suspicion of literary kinship between Meredith and Joyce has been confirmed by Stanislaus Joyce and Richard Ellmann', and asserts that if 'Meredith affected Joyce in matters of style and technique, he anticipated D H Lawrence in terms of subject matter' (1972, p.336). Lawrence's portrayal of women is investigated by Carol Dix in her 1980 book *D H Lawrence and Women*, as a response to Kate Millett's negative view in *Sexual Politics*, published in 1970. Dix considers that Lawrence treats women with respect 'hardly ever accorded to them by male writers', stating that in his novels it is 'women who explore, progress, advance, think and feel. Real heroes of all of his novels are the women' (1980, p.12). The reading by Dix suggests that the character of Constance in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is not submissive, but finds pleasure and fulfilment in expressing her sexuality. Dix considers Lawrence's understanding of the conflicts faced by women, and his depiction of fluid gender roles which challenge social stereotypes, which have been identified in this thesis in Meredith's work. Intense emotions are conveyed with subtlety by both writers in the expression of characters' eyes. Comparison between Lawrence's depiction of female sexuality, and the expression of young women's sensuality by Meredith fifty years earlier, would be an interesting subject for further research. Referring to Meredith's 'interrogation of gender issues', Harris states in 2019 that 'there has little work explicitly on sexuality, which remains an aspect of Meredith's work bound to reward extended consideration' (*Yearbook of English Studies*, 2019, p.188).

Meredith's contribution in moving toward a new form of the novel is evident in his influence on the next generation of writers. Stone concludes that 'he did successfully provide aid for other novelists, both in his failures and in his continuing willingness to experiment' (1972, p.335). Showing determination and optimism by incorporating philosophy and poetic techniques in fiction, despite critical reviews, Meredith demonstrates his belief in the

potential for forward movement through uncertainty, and in experimentation as part of a process of development. He identifies the challenges as women and men strive to achieve fulfilment in personal and public spheres, and in his exploration of alternative relationships and flexible gender, he anticipates conflicts which are debated in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The discovery and discussion of Meredith's work has been ongoing in the years since his death, as Woolf predicted. Appreciation of his writing and analysis of his achievement by readers and scholars, although few in number, indicates immortality as Meredith perceived it, in his work and in the minds of others.

'His words wing on - as live words will' (Thomas Hardy, 'George Meredith 1828-1909')

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