Victorian Literature and Culture (2011), **39**, 525–543.
© Cambridge University Press 2011. 1060-1503/11 $15.00
doi:10.1017/S106015031100012X

"STAMPED ON HOT WAX": GEORGE MEREDITH'S NARRATIVES OF INHERITANCE

By Melissa Shields Jenkins

In "The Decay of Lying" (1889), Oscar Wilde's speaker calls Victorian novelist George Meredith "a child of realism who is not on speaking terms with his father" (Wilde 976). The comment underscores the idealism running through Meredith's strange and understudied novels. Wilde's speaker announces that Meredith "has made himself a romanticist" (976), a self-conscious reactionary against Victorian High Realism who is nonetheless situated deeply within it. Meredith's uneasy relationship with his own time has likely affected recent critical assessments of his work. Though his canonical status surpassed George Eliot's in the 1940s, and although there was a mini-explosion of Meredith scholarship in the 1970s,[1] more recent work has focused on his sonnet sequence, *Modern Love*, and his psychological novel, *The Egoist.* However, with the rise of interest in the history of the book, gender and sexuality studies, and Victorian publishing, Meredith's novels are becoming the subject of renewed attention.

As is implied by Wilde's statement, Meredith's careful self-positioning within literary history is matched by his fascination with literal fathers and children. Many of Meredith's novels center on texts-within-texts, often works written or consulted by father figures attempting to raise sons and daughters. These include the "Book of Egoism" that guides Sir Willoughby Patterne in *The Egoist*, and "The Speaker," the elocution manual consulted by the patriarch in *Harry Richmond.* Gillian Beer's list of "tutelary books" includes Diaper Sandoe's volume of verses in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, and two works – "The Rajah of London" and Colney Durance's serial "The Rival Tongues" – within *One of Our Conquerors.* These imagined texts, she argues, serve to "intensif[y] the cerebral effect of his novels; his people live not only in a world of ideas but of books and writing" (Beer 81). Other critics have touched upon the importance of Meredith's literary self-consciousness. Analyses of the relationship between Meredith and his readers rightly illuminate how lapses in communication between characters reflect Meredith's own authorial uncertainties.[2] I want to explore how Meredith's interest in writers and readers is matched by his interest in the relationships between writers of one generation and writers of the next; I will examine how changes in the production and distribution of texts help to transform this second relationship. My goal is to show how these books can, in themselves, become Meredith's primary preoccupation. Meredith's

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

novels begin inside the pages of imagined books to ask pointed questions about the reception and recycling of patriarchal texts. This article begins with the "Pilgrim's Scrip," penned by Richard Feverel's father in Meredith's first full-length novel, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel: A History of a Father and Son* (1859). It ends with the book "Maxims for Men," penned by Carinthia's father in Meredith's final novel, *The Amazing Marriage* (1895). Despite the many structural similarities between Meredith's first and final projects, I have not encountered a work of criticism that directly compares the two novels. The questions raised by this pairing may help us to rethink other celebrated works by Meredith, including *Harry Richmond* (1871), *The Egoist* (1879), and *Diana of the Crossways* (1885).

Meredith's readers cannot help but comment on his obscure and (arguably) inconsistent style. Ioan Williams saw Meredith's artistic purpose as two-fold, as the "representation of processes of growth and development in individuals, and incorporation of an overall criticism of life as a whole" (Williams 190–91). Meredith adds another layer of complication, however, by inconsistently peppering his works with elements of autobiography, and "confusingly distribut[ing] various of the elements at work in life in general among characters in the action" (192). In *The Experimental Impulse in George Meredith's Fiction*, Richard Stevenson also connects Meredith's metacommentary with his "stylistic incongruities" (Stevenson 41) and occasional "stylistic disaster[s]" (50), writing that readerly confusion comes from "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" (41). In this comment, Richard Stevenson echoes what Virginia Woolf wrote of *Feverel* – "He has been, it is plain, at great pains to destroy the conventional form of the novel" (Woolf 228) – but adds the idea that Meredith is creating formal problems that he then cannot – or will not – solve. Meredith strains the Bakhtinian flexibility of the novel to a degree that tests connections between several modes at once – the bildungsroman, the autobiography, the social problem novel, the romance, and the satire.[3] Thus, it is important to think about the tensions between characters as related not only to individual psyches, and the imaginings of individual readers, but also to the abstract processes underlying reading, *and* the practical processes fueling the production and distribution of the material book. The relationship between people and texts in Meredith's novels represents the undercutting of "conventional romantic patterns" (Stevenson *Experimental* 45), but also responses to specific approaches to reading and writing.

Meredith's First Literary Ordeal

RICHARD FEVEREL'S TITULAR ordeal begins, as does Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767), with a book written by a father to monitor and control his son's development. If all goes well for Sir Austin, the book will become a new "Tristapaedia," guiding future British sons. The son, however, would rather order his life by consulting works of the imagination. He woos a buxom country girl in a chapter entitled "Ferdinand and Miranda," becomes an amateur poet, puts his marriage to "Miranda" in jeopardy through his attraction to "Bella," fights a duel for his wife's honor, and becomes a broken man after his wife dies of (you guessed it) brain fever. In this mish-mash of clichéd conventions from romance, melodrama, and sensation fiction, Richard situates himself in a decidedly different section of the bookstall than that occupied by his father. Here we begin to see the tensions Meredith establishes between the novel of personal development on the one hand, and on the other impersonal works

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

containing generally applicable advice – texts meant to guide, rather than describe, conduct. The patriarch of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* wants his son to be a Rational Being, whereas the son would rather be a Romantic poet or even a hero from a Chivalric Romance. The plot casts doubt on the ability of texts from one era (conduct books, Richardsonian moral tomes) to sufficiently curb yearnings for textual (and, as I've argued elsewhere, sexual[4]) innovation in the next generation. Meredith capitalizes on what John Maynard has called the tendency of the bildungsroman to "process and colonize other genres, repeating in a kind of multiplying *mise en abîme* the original processing of genre by the aggrandizing novel form itself" (Maynard 280). Since the novel of development, in theory, seeks to bridge the past and future rather than to mechanically repeat the past (286), one would expect that *Feverel* would inherently strain against the system. As Maynard notes, citing *Feverel* as an example, "Novelists fear systems will stamp or cut out, often cut down humans; it [the bildungsroman] prefers what it images as natural growth" (289).

Sir Austin's child-rearing manual and his son literally develop together, but not without difficulty, especially when the question of "reproduction" comes to the fore. The System "hung loosely on his limbs at first," and Richard wore its edicts "unconscious of the tight jacket he was gathering flesh to feel" (Meredith, *Feverel* 35; Vol. 1, ch.4). In his early adolescence, Richard feels "insulted" (38; Vol. 1, ch. 4) when he is ordered to strip naked and display his developing sexual organs to his father. Sir Austin's book seeks to reassure a related form of reproductive health – the assurance that his copy can produce more copies, that the "Scrip" can be marketed to other young men. The rest of the novel tracks the battle between Sir Austin's clear, printed aphorisms and the half-illegible scrawl of his son's cursive writing. The son, of course, decides to become a poet, that most disordered and inward-turning of literary endeavors. This battle of the books tests the relationship between emotional and sexual excesses. In her essay "A Shock to the System," Emily Allen rightly labels Richard's frantic poetry-writing as analogous to masturbatory urges (Allen 89–90). However, the scene is also about forms of publication, with the father's easily reproducible, excerptable, and transportable printed text competing with the aura surrounding the son's first blushes of original expression. Yet, Meredith responds with ambiguity about these dueling texts, as if he prefers investigating the relationship between the bildungsroman and conduct books instead of rendering the two incompatible. As Gillian Beer has noted, some of Sir Austin's aphorisms are on loan from Meredith's personal notebooks.[5]

Richard's education begins, appropriately, with the protagonist's introduction to the first letter of the alphabet and its literary significance.[6] The first allusions to Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* come after Richard and his friend Ripton have just set fire to Farmer Blaize's rick. Adrian, Richard's uncle, scares the boys by saying that "ARSON" will be "branded on your backs" (67; Vol. 1, ch. 8). Later, to tease Ripton, who has been sending frantic epistles to his co-conspirator, his family speculates that the fear-inducing "Captain of the Alphabet" (99; Vol. 1, ch. 14) signifies Amor, Angel, or America; the possibility of deportation implied by the third word "threw Ripton straight back in his chair" (99; Vol. 1, ch. 14). Much later in the novel, the fiery scarlet A, originally a symbol of boyish misbehavior, reappears as Hawthorne intended. When Mrs. Berry, Richard's former nurse, sees him strolling in the park with a lady not his wife, she says, "I know his back," recognizing it "as if she had branded a mark on it in infancy" (387; Vol. 3, ch.6). In this novel about adultery and abandonment, the multiple allusions to A's scrawled on pages, or marks burned onto backs, underscore the violence inherent in inscription.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Sir Austin says of his son, the "systematized youth" (137; Vol. 1, ch. 14), that a father should know the inner workings of his child so well that "all its movements – even the eccentric ones – are anticipated by you, and provided for" (139; Vol. 1, ch. 19). His quest to mechanize his son is so pronounced that another character says of Richard, "He isn't a boy, or a man, but an Engine" (284; Vol. 2, ch. 14). In Meredith's usage, the word "Engine" means both a machine and a tool or agent of an idea, as when, in 1897's "On the Idea of Comedy and of the Uses of the Comic Spirit" he describes the "engine of Irony" (Meredith, *Comedy* 41). How does one apply literal *or* linguistic brakes to a runaway Engine – to a boy's raging hormones or to an out of control idea? In the first, unexpurgated version of his novel,[7] Meredith provides a detail, edited out of later versions, that explicitly links Sir Austin's efforts with those of eighteenth-century "fathers of realism."[8] In the 1859 version of the novel, Sir Austin tries to pair Richard with a descendent of Sir Charles Grandison, and thus to forge a literal relationship with Richardson's paradigmatic fictive model gentleman. In the process, he links Richard to a time in literary history when, according to Clifford Siskin, the novel and the system were complimentary genres.[9] The reference to *Sir Charles Grandison* is more than a reconsideration of a young man's journey from innocence to experience. Richardson's protagonist stood as a model of noble chastity (as contrasted with a promiscuous hero such as Tom Jones) and his novel *Grandison* stood as a model of the moral, instructive text.[10] However, Richard is drawn to the youngest Grandison daughter, a tomboy who asks Richard to call her Carl. She is clearly not interested in reproduction.

These initial steps don't lead to Richard's successful literary rebellion from his aphorism-writing father, nor does said rebellion take Richard squarely outside of the literary canon or even improve upon his father's conduct book. Instead, Richard only replaces the eighteenth-century "System" with clichés from other eras and modes. Richard's narrative becomes surprisingly conventional, full of allusions to tales of chivalry and Shakespearean romances. In the "Ferdinand and Miranda" chapter, for example, the narrator is at a loss, unsure how to take a transcript of events between these two lovers. When "Miranda" speaks, the narrator can only note, "She used quite simple words, and used them, no doubt, to express a common simple meaning" (130; Vol. 1, ch. 18). However, to Richard "she was uttering magic, casting spells," and thus his replies were "too foolish to be chronicled" (130; Vol. 1, ch. 18). The narrator, who seems at times to side with Sir Austin,[11] cannot record both Lucy's quotidian speech and Richard's romantic misreading. The two modes of discourse cannot occupy the same space. As with Richard's reading, so with his writing. His poems, bad imitations of Petrarchan love poetry, don't get any closer than his father's "Pilgrim's Scrip" to uncovering the secrets of reproduction. Adrian criticizes Richard's work by saying, "I'm aware that you've had your lessons in Anatomy, but nothing will persuade you that an anatomical figure means flesh and blood" (235; Vol. 2, ch. 10).

Meredith inserts Clare Doria Forey into the narrative to underscore the damaging relationship between Richard's pen and a woman's body. Beyond her status as a woman pining away with secret love for her cousin Richard, her presence in the novel is inconsequential. Her interior life is invisible within the novel until her diary is read post-mortem. Once her dead body becomes interchangeable with the diary's pages, her significance becomes clear. A passage in which Richard gazes at the young woman's corpse gives way to a description of a book that absorbs its author: "The book was slender, yet her nineteen years of existence left half the number of pages white" (445; Vol. 3, ch. 9). The words in her diary return Richard's

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

thoughts, in a circle, "irresistibly to gaze" (445; Vol. 3, ch. 9) on Clare's body. Clare's final written request is for those responsible for her body after death to bury her "with [her] right hand untouched" (442; Vol. 3, ch. 9), to preserve the rings she placed there to symbolize her love for Richard. The paper on which she writes the request absorbs the state of her dying body. The "tracing of the words showed the bodily torment she was suffering, as she wrote them on a scrap of paper found beside her pillow" (442; Vol. 3, ch. 9). In reading her diary, with its title written "in the round hand" of her childhood, "step by step [Richard] saw her growing mind in his history." The words literally pain him. The remembrances were "bearing upon him" (443; Vol. 3, ch. 9) and "the delicate female handwriting like a black thread drew on his soul to one terrible conclusion" (444; Vol. 3, ch. 9). Clare finally gains some power over Richard when her "hand" is left untouched; ironically, this power requires her transition from subject to object, from author to text.[12]

The direct association between Clare's written thoughts and her white lifeless body leads Meredith's readers to reconsider the many ways, both in his novels and in more general clichés of speech, that individual bodies are compared with texts. In Meredith's novel the phrase "white as a sheet" (208; Vol. 2, ch. 8) takes on an additional, literary, meaning, because the Thompson girls, who tend to base thoughts of love on what they read, are called the "daughters of parchment" (99, Vol. 1, ch. 14).[13] In *Diana of the Crossways*, Lady Dunstane thinks about her distant relation, Mrs. Cramborne Wathin, in similarly literary terms: "She was a lady of incisive features bound in stale parchment. Complexion she had none, but she had spotlessness of skin, and sons and daughters just resembling her, like cheaper editions of a precious quarto of a perished type. You discerned the imitation of the type, you acknowledged the inferior compositor" (Meredith, *Diana* 151; Vol. 1, ch. 14). The Darwinian pun ("type") again links sexual reproduction to writing, and biological inheritance to literary production. The inferior parent becomes the inferior printer, who, in setting the type poorly, guarantees a flawed product. It seems that Meredith *expects* the copy to be inferior to the original.

In this, Meredith adds an ironic spin to conventional gestures within autobiography: thinking of generations in terms of editions, and comparing the labor of living a life to the labor of recording a life. For example, Thomas Carlyle, an author who Meredith greatly admired (Harsh 437), promises to look on the houses his father built "with a certain proud interest," for they became "little texts to me, of the Gospel of man's Free-will" (Carlyle 3). He writes that his father's "Deeds and Sayings" will not "be found unworthy, not false and barren, but genuine and fit" (3) because his memorable maxims come from "the teaching of nature alone" (7). The clarity and brevity of his humble speech becomes another sign of his father's worth. Carlyle writes admiringly about how his father "in few sentences . . . would sketch you off an entire Biography, an entire Object or Transaction: keen, clear, rugged, genuine, completely rounded in!" (9). In the eulogistic rhetoric of his autobiography, the father, though illiterate, teaches his son how to write. Carlyle prays that his own written words are as "rounded in" as his father's spoken works, actions, and buildings ("let me write my Books as he built his Houses" [11]). He describes the resurrection of his father's memory in relation to the turning of pages: "With him a whole three-score-and-ten-years of the Past has doubly died for me; it is as if a new leaf in the great Book of Time were turned over" (Carlyle 51). Finally, he describes himself as part of a glorious literary series, saying, "I might almost say his spirit seems to have entered into me (so clearly do I discern and love him); I seem to myself only the continuation, and *second volume* of my Father" (52). Carlyle

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

insists upon phrasing this father-son connection in literary terms, despite the fact that the son is the author of texts and the father is the author of acts.

The *Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, though, is the story of two authors, rather than of a working man and the literary son who tells his story. It is, seemingly in consequence, not a celebration of the son as a second edition, but rather a struggle in which the son refuses to relegate his work to this secondary status. Sir Austin's major linguistic tool of control, the aphorism, ultimately fails to contain the boy-engine. Sir Austin concludes, ironically in proverb form, that "a proverb is the half-way house to an idea . . . and the majority rest there content" (476; Vol 3, ch. 13). The statement recalls a similar claim voiced by the aptly-named Sir Willoughby Patterne in *The Egoist*: "There are people who do *not* know themselves, and as they are the majority they manufacture the axioms" (Meredith, *Egoist* 245; ch. 29). The word "manufacture," rather than write, says volumes about the market status of such easily reproducible and extractable phrases and forms.[14]

As with the Benjaminian twists and turns in twentieth- and twenty-first century novelistic theory, Victorian critics had differing opinions about "the application of machinery to the printer's art" (Knight 2: 367). On the one hand, according to a mid-century assessment of English technologies and innovations, the advent of printing meant that authors no longer had to find "encouragement from the ranks of the upper-classes, who alone were regarded as the intelligent and educated orders" (2: 367). Instead, the "judges and patrons of literature" become "not the few but the many" (2: 367). This has its risks and its benefits. No longer can an author see himself as "tolerably successful" if he sells five hundred copies (2: 367). Yet, the chronicler of *Old England* announces that "We purchase for pence more and better literature than our grandfathers bought for shillings – better in point of authorship, of morality, of practical sense and educational value" (Knight 2: 367). However, the sheer glut of articles condemning the immorality of "popular" fiction, especially assessments of mid-century sensation fiction, are evidence of the chorus of voices who saw things very differently. Another downside to printing, one that affects authors, was strongly on Meredith's mind – the loss of control over the reading public that may consume his books, and the resulting pressure to avoid offending the general and/or "gentle" reader. At times, no need annoyed Meredith more. He wrote to Augustus Jessopp on 20 September 1864, "A man who hopes to be popular, must think from the mass, and as the heart of the mass. If he follows out vagaries of his own brain, he cannot hope for general esteem; and he does smaller work" (Meredith, *Letters* 1.156).

Just as Richard cannot escape systematic thinking entirely (he rejects his father's conduct book but still imitates other inherited literary forms), Sir Austin's system imposes itself on its author. We are told of Sir Austin, "he had written a book; he had made himself an object" (Meredith, *Feverel* 12; Vol. 1, ch. 1). Most simply, this means that he has become a target for critics, but the phrase also becomes literalized. Sir Austin is often called "the Aphorist" and in one case, "The Pilgrim," as if he has become a walking version of his book. Similarly, in *Harry Richmond* (1871), the father who hopes to formulate his life as a "grand plot" ends, as with Dickens's patriarch in *Little Dorrit* (1855–57), as an unstable man who is unable to say anything original. The sign of madness is the fall into repetition, as the father becomes a faded copy of his son. When Harry discovers his father making an incoherent speech in City Hall, he recognizes his father's words as "a reproduction of many of my phrases employed in our arguments on this very subject." The fallen father was "letting his florid fancy loose on these eminent persons, they were at one moment silver lamps, at another poising hawks,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

and again sprawling pumpkins; anything except useful citizens" (Meredith, *Richmond* 2.327; ch. 55). In hoisting recycled phrases before a new audience, the father's metaphors are "let loose," but lose their meaning.

Harry Richmond is, on the one hand, Meredith's most conventional work – he called this bildungsroman a "spanking bid for popularity on the part of its author" (Meredith, *Letters* 1.143; Roberts 89). But, on the other, it displays painful self-consciousness about the quest for novelty in the face of convention. Its position as the first of two direct responses to *Richard Feverel* appears in the subtitle of *Harry Richmond's* second edition, "A History of Father and Son" (Buckley 66). In the scenes leading up to this tragic denouement, all of the images of printing, stamping, and circulation reappear yet again. Patriarch Roy and son Harry compete to assess different kinds of narratives (conduct literature, poetry, romance, drama), especially as they pertain to organic versus "wooden" characterization.[15] In an almost ludicrously literal scene, Roy Richmond finds himself playing the role of a statue during a German national celebration. After the experience, Roy promises his mortified son that "human, somewhere, I do believe myself to be" and declares, "Have patience: I shall presently stand unshelled. I have much to relate; you likewise have your narrative in store" (Meredith, *Richmond* 202; Vol. 1, ch. 17). Ironically, the same father who wants to control *story*, the complete sequence of events, and to restore the human connection between father and son, turns to carefully-constructed *plot*, events arranged to create a specific effect, to elevate himself to mythical status and threaten his relationship with his son.[16] Roy Richmond tells his son that "the entire course of his life was a grand plot, resembling an unfinished piece of architecture, which might, at a future day, prove the wonder of the world" (Meredith, *Richmond* 215; Vol. 1, ch. 19). In watching his father's performance, Harry thinks otherwise:

> I became a perfectly mechanical creature: incapable of observing, just capable of taking an impression here and there; and in such cases the impressions that come are stamped on hot wax; they keep the scene fresh; they partly pervert it as well. Temple's version is, I am sure, the truer historical picture. He, however, could never repeat it twice exactly alike, whereas I failed not to render image for image in clear succession as they had struck me at the time. (Meredith, *Richmond* 198; Vol. 1, ch. 17)

Arguably, as with Harry, so with every "impressionable," invested observer. Harry's friend Temple stands in for the critical observer, the one who is not pressured to respond bodily to the forms presented by the father figure. Temple, therefore, provides the "truer historical picture" – indeterminate, changing, and open to creative reinterpretation. The biological son, however, becomes, yet again, the impression in wax whose purpose is to copy the original. And with each reprinting imperfections of another kind creep in.

Augustus Roy Richmond's theatricality is perfectly suited for young audiences, and for the most "romantic" readers. Says Harry, whose father sends him letters by bird (Meredith, *Richmond* 30; Vol. 1, ch 3.) and tells fantastic bedtime stories, "There never was so fascinating a father as mine for a boy under eight or ten years old" (18; Vol. 1, ch. 2). While Meredith's first father-author, Sir Austin, writes a book-length script for Richard Feverel to follow, Harry's father drills him in speeches for the entertainment of live audiences (20; Vol. 1, ch. 2). After one performance, guests call Harry a "comical character" (24; Vol. 1, ch. 2) and a "romantic child" (25; Vol. 1, ch. 2). Yet, as Harry ages, he resists these assigned genres (romance and comedy) and begins to list the limitations of his father as if they were a litany of outdated literary styles. Harry's grandfather says to his theatrical son-in-law, "Please don't

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

talk like a mountebank . . . we're not writing a Bible essay" (264; Vol. 2, ch. 51), and later declares, "Are you going to be a damned low vulgar comedian and tale of a trumpet up to the end, you Richmond? . . . Keep your menagerie performances for your pantomime audiences" (279–80; Vol. 2, ch. 52). Harry is surprised to find that "instead of a comic, [he] found [his father] a tragic spectacle" (199; Vol. 2, ch. 47). An opposition appears here between the active critical reading that takes Harry away from his father's influence, and the passive spectating that draws him in. From an early age, he sees reading as both related to his father's charms and as a means of replacing them. He writes, "Out of his circle of attraction books were my resource" (258; Vol. 1, ch.22). After his father publishes a premature and fanciful announcement about his son's engagement to a German princess, Harry must look to other modes of written communication. To "cut the case at the fountain head," he must "prepare . . . for the interview" with his father "by looking at the newspapers first" (149; Vol. 2, ch. 42).

Harry, the narrator of his own story, confesses that "one who takes the trouble to sit and write his history for as large a world as he can obtain, and shape his style to harmonize with every development of his nature, can no longer have much of the hard grain of pride in him" (Meredith, *Richmond* 4; Vol. 2, ch. 33). Harry's restrained self-plotting comes as a direct reaction against his father, who "uncontrollably poured out the history of [Harry's] heroism, a hundred words for one" (14; Vol. 2, ch. 33). This paternal "scripting" leads the narrator into a wincing stream of apologies. Near the end of the novel, the only one of Meredith's novels written in the first person, the narrator says of his own positioning within the text, "The pleasant narrator in the first person is the happy bubbling fool, not the philosopher who has come to know himself as his relations toward the universe. . . . As you see me on the page now, I stand somewhere between the two" (332; Vol. 2, ch. 56). Richard Stevenson, thinking of Allon White's *The Uses of Obscurity*, writes of this passage, "Harry's self-mocking valedictory nicely illuminates several aspects of Meredith's modernist impulse. This autobiographer undermines both the formal constraints of traditional closure and the confines of any definitive identity for himself as he acknowledges his indeterminate position" (85). The novel blatantly exposes its own controlling mechanism, but also clings in form to the "blankly eloquent" (Meredith, *Feverel* 124; Vol. 1, ch. 14) scribbles of an undeveloped voice. This narrator would prefer to share the details of his story without forcing them into a definite shape, but distances himself as well from the "happy bubbling fool" who has no rational mind motivating his writings – who composes mechanically and fancifully, rather than critically and imaginatively.

The Amazing *Return to System*

IN MEREDITH'S FIRST VERSION of this repeated story, within his first novel, the titular Ordeal is defined as "Love of any human Object" (Meredith, *Feverel* 193; Vol. 2, ch. 6). "Human Object" is a key phrase that recurs in relation to those who revere, or revile, Sir Austin's text. The objections of the women who read the elder Feverel's "Pilgrim's Scrip" match Adrian's objections to young Feverel's poetry: "you make dolls of us! Puppets! Are we not something – something more?" (13; Vol. 1, ch. 1). This question, which adds the issue of gender to discussions of literary inheritance, becomes Meredith's main preoccupation by the turn of the century. His final novel, *The Amazing Marriage*, recycles the premise of his first, but with the genders reversed and the father's text accidentally, rather than purposefully, falling into the hands of his child.[17] Sir Austin Feverel's goal in controlling and predicting his son's

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

actions through his mechanized, easily reproducible text, is the intent suggested by multiple writers of conduct books. William Cobbett's work *Advice to Young Men and (Incidentally) to Young Women in the Middle & Higher Ranks of Life* (1829) announces "It is yourself that you see in your children; their bosoms are the safe repository of even the whispers of your mind" (215).[18] It is in Cobbett's parenthetical afterthought that we find George Meredith's object in his final novel. It does not seem that Cobbett expected young women to pick up his volume: "Children naturally want to be like their parents, and to do what they do: the boys following their father, and the girls their mother; and as I was always writing or reading, mine naturally desired to do something in the same way" (281). But he would agree with Sir Austin that Richardson is a better literary model than Fielding: "I deprecate romances of every description . . . every girl, addicted to them, sighs to be a Sophia Western, and every boy, a Tom Jones. What girl is not in love with the wild youth, and what boy does not find a justification in his wildness?" (294).

To understand what is at stake for the daughter as well as the son in Meredith's modern battle of the books, one must go to the latter half of his career, where his attention shifted from the hero to the heroine. In his poem "Marian" – probably inspired by his first wife, who had "the full freedom of her father's library" (Stone 11) – the speaker characterizes his heroine as fascinatingly transgressive because she "can talk the talk of men" ("Marian" line 7). The poem connects this masculine speech with the ability to wield unusual power as a writer: "She can flourish staff or pen, / And deal a wound that lingers" ("Marian" lines 5–6). The pen's phallic power, when wielded by a woman, imparts a strange, potentially dangerous redefinition of masculinity. These hints culminate in Meredith's novel *Diana of the Crossways*, in which the protagonist, a woman writer, competes against the reputation of her father, Dan Merion, the "legendary improvising songster . . . the convivial essayist, the humorous Dean, the travelled cynic" (Meredith, *Diana* 191; Vol. 2, ch. 2). In every encounter with Diana, the public wants to know, "Is genius hereditary?" (192; Vol. 2, ch. 2). No wonder that she eventually declares the "misfortune of her not having been born a man" (186; Vol. 2, ch. 1). Even more pointedly, Diana writes, "We women are the verbs passive of the alliance. . . . We are to run on lines, like the steam-trains, or we come to no station, dash to fragments. I have the misfortune to know I was born an active" (75–76; Vol. 1, ch. 6). The comparison recalls Richard as boy-engine in *Feverel*, but also underscores the additional influence of gender on Diana's situation. Her misfortune of being an "active verb" trapped in a passive construction – in other words, her status within a written text – parallels her laments about her status as her father's daughter.[19]

An 1865 poem by Meredith, "Martin's Puzzle," is another meditation on how "daughters" react differently to texts than sons. Its narrator looks sadly upon a crippled peasant girl who walks "up the street with a book in her hand" ("Martin's Puzzle" I.1). In the fourth stanza he exclaims,

> But to see the poor darling go limping for miles
> To read books to sick people! – and just of an age
> When girls learn the meaning of ribands and smiles!
> Makes me feel like a squirrel that turns in a cage.
> The more I push thinking the more I revolve:
> I never get farther: – and as to her face,
> It starts up when near on my puzzle I solve,
> And says, 'This crush'd body seems such a sad case.' (IV.1–8)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Why does the narrator of this poem, in "pushing thinking," revolve in stanza after stanza on two details about the girl – her various missing and detached limbs, and the book in her hand? What is the relation between the book, meant for "sick people," and her crushed body? The poem fails to reach a decisive conclusion. The questions inspired by this Wordsworthian "solitary reader" go beyond why bad things happen to good people ("Do bullets in battle the wicked select" [Meredith, "Martin's Puzzle" VI.6]). The poem also asks, what's the good of damaged goods – the good of a girl who reads a hymn with three fingers or prays with only one leg? The speaker fails in deciphering her mystery, but in trying, reads her like the other object in the poem, the book in her hand: "Here's a creature made carefully – carefully made! / Put together with craft, and then stamped on, and why?" (IX.5–6). After reading these lines, one may ask, what would be the difference if the girl's hand were "left untouched" – if she could have written herself, rather than being "stamped on" by another?

Meredith began his career with a novel about a spectacularly flawed heterosexual union, poorly plotted by a father's conduct book and the conventions of multiple outdated literary genres. In his last work, *The Amazing Marriage*, the union is similarly ill-fated, but it is the heroine, rather than the hero, who must respond to the father's conduct book. Carinthia, deemed another one of Meredith's "triumphant androgynes, a wonderful girl with a man's heart" by a contemporary reviewer ("Method" 842), tests the relation between reading and gender when she consults her dead father's "Maxims for Men." Meredith's narration attempts the same feat, as the text alternates between the voices of a restrained male narrator, the Philosopher, and a chatty woman named "Dame Gossip." Dame Gossip indulges in the narrative impulses towards action, whereas the Philosopher prefers analysis (and judgment) of character (Wilt 45; White 97). In this divide, the two narrators approach what one would expect from a bildungsroman on the one hand, and a conduct book on the other; what one would expect from plot versus story, as defined by Forster; from sensation fiction as opposed to psychological realism; and, possibly, using the language of Meredith's letter, the divide between the writer "who hopes to be popular," and the writer who "follows out vagaries of his own brain" (Meredith, *Letters* 1.156).[20] The battling male and female narrators have different opinions about the novel's text-within-a-text, the "Maxims for Men," penned by the heroine's deceased father. Dame Gossip is clear that these maxims were "not addressed to her sex," remarking, "I shudder at them as if they were muzzles of firearms pointed at me" (Meredith, *Amazing* 6; ch. 1). To some extent Dame Gossip is absolving herself of blame for being unable to understand the father's book. Even Meredith's chapter headings introduce the possibility that daughters and sons absorb the same stimuli differently. See, for example, the title of chapter eight: "Of the encounter of two strange young men and their consorting, in which the male reader is requested to bear in mind what wild creature he was in his youth, while the female should marvel credulously." Donald Swanson's study of the dueling narrators in *The Amazing Marriage* highlights Meredith's use of strongly interventionist narrators as another way to expose the mechanisms that drive his novels. He argues that "Meredith's use of narrators sometimes helps to obscure the line between metaphor and event" (Swanson 36), recalling one of the earliest assessments of Meredith as a "realist who uses metaphor" (Le Galienne 11). In other words, his novels vacillate between the impulse to tell a story and the impulse to discuss storytelling – and between the impulse to tell a particular story, or, per Sir Austin, a universalized one.

One puzzling difference between the "Maxims for Men" and the "Pilgrim's Scrip" is that the "Maxims" are guaranteed to have a small audience. Dame Gossip relates that this limited

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

edition text "fetches a rare price now wherever a copy is put up for auction" (Meredith, *Amazing* 6; ch. 1). The "Maxims for Men" also operate more like the conduct books of the previous century, in that the book should replace the *absent* father. Paternal authors in the conduct book tradition often underscore the book's role as a compensation for the mortality of fathers themselves.[21] In *The Amazing Marriage*, the maxims eerily recall the dead father to his children; his ideas become so quotable and transportable that the children ventriloquize his teachings. Carinthia and Chillon cannot talk without chance words recalling their father to them. When Chillon begins a quotation Carinthia can finish it, and vice versa. The daughter and son are made almost interchangeable in these scenes. Importantly, though, despite the fact that some maxims are "as sharply bracing for women as for men" (Meredith, *Amazing* 310; ch. 30), this easy transportability requires some selective editing. When Carinthia quotes, "Father says, *The Habit of the Defensive Paralyzes Will,*" Chillon must reply, "*Womanizes*, he says, Carin. You quote him falsely, to shield the sex" (379; ch. 36).

Despite its superiority to the "Scrip" in its rarity and in the children's voluntary adoption of the book's teachings, the damning flaw in the Old Buccaneer's text is the same as in Sir Austin Feverel's composition. In Chapter 32 of *The Amazing Marriage*, "In Which we See Carinthia put into Practice one of her father's lessons," she manages to save a child from a wild dog.[22] She explains to her suitor, Fleetwood, who is watching helplessly, "Father told me women have a better chance than men with a biting dog. He put me before him and drilled me. He thought of everything" (337; ch. 32). Yet, the father forgot about the "biting dog" qualities of human males. Chillon's new wife says of Carinthia, shortly before her not-so-amazing marriage to Fleetwood, "Oh! She is wild! She knows absolutely nothing of the world. . . . Men would like her" (115; ch. 11). Eventually, Fleetwood displays the flaws in Carinthia's education; the constant comparisons between Fleetwood and dogs underscore the insufficiency of this particular lesson. The eventual critique of the father's work again takes us back to eighteenth-century models. One can recall how Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) condemns conduct books such as Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1761) or Fordyce's *Sermons for Young Women* (1766). Wollstonecraft bemoans texts that create women who know the art of pleasing men, but who lack the training to do much else.

The Amazing Marriage is ultimately conservative about the relationship between the father's text and the daughter's education, despite Meredith's growing reputation as one of the first truly "feminist" male authors. As Constance Harsh puts it in one of the few recent analyses of the novel, "Meredith's narrative strategies and deployment of sexual stereotypes undermine his own progressive impulses" (Harsh 438). Meredith seems to channel Eliza Lynn Linton's description of the censorious English reading public, but with any possible irony or sarcasm removed. In the 1890 essay "Candour in English Fiction," published in the *New Review* alongside essays by Walter Besant and Thomas Hardy, she talks about past times in which "the locked bookcase made all safe" (Linton 13). Linton lists as "masculine literature" an English father's "translations of certain classical authors; his ethnological and some scientific books; his popular surgical, medical, and anatomical works; perhaps some speculating philosophies of an upsetting tendency" (Linton 13). In contrast, women are welcome to read "Jane Austen and Sir Walter Scott, Miss Mitford and Mrs. Edgeworth" (Linton 13). The divide between male and female here – the son's library and the daughter's – relates to knowledge of the body, but also to the line between practical non-fiction and escapist fiction.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Thus, the ending to *The Amazing Marriage*, Meredith's final statement in prose on this subject, counters critiques of censorship by Hardy and others, as well as the more progressive stances in Meredith's early works. Meredith was, to some extent, registering a concern that was beginning to diminish, perhaps partly due to his example. In his competing version of "Candour in English Fiction," Walter Besant writes disparagingly of attempts to write for "Average Opinion" calling them a ploy to increase the circulation of one's works. Speaking as one of these average readers, he writes, "If men and women are free to rove, there can be no family: if there is no fidelity in marriage, the family drops to pieces. Therefore, we will have none of your literature of free and adulterous love" (Besant 8). Meredith counters "Average Opinion" himself in poetic form, beginning Sonnet 25 of *Modern Love*, "You like not that French novel?" and ending with "Unnatural? My dear, these things are life: / And life, some think, is worthy of the muse" ("Modern Love" XXV. lines 1, 13–14).

Carinthia, whom Gower Woodseer calls a "perpetual student," begins to imitate Woodseer's father in the absence of her own: "She made use of some of his father's words, and had assimilated them mentally besides appropriating them" (Meredith, *Amazing* 257; ch. 25). She weans her infant son on schedule, despite the threat that Fleetwood will take him away, "because her father had said: Not a quarter of a month more than nine for the milk of the mother" (300; ch. 29). Carinthia needs this man's book to perform woman's work because her mother's conduct book is even more difficult to procure than her father's. (Dame Gossip speaks of a "little volume of 'Meditations in Prospect for Approaching Motherhood'" [29; ch. 3] written by Carinthia's mother, but tells us that it is out of print.) By the end of *The Amazing Marriage*, Carinthia consults patriarchal texts only when she needs to aid other men.[23] She works as a substitute reader for her busy brother, absorbing Spanish texts to "correct [Chillon] on points of Spanish history relating to fortresses, especially the Basque" (498; ch. 47). She reads "Travels in Catalonia" only to give it to Chillon with "paragraphs marked, pages dog-eared, for reference" (498–99; ch. 47). At the end of the novel, the English contingent leaving for Spain is described as "sample print of a book's first page, blank sheets for the rest of the volume" (502; ch. 47). We thus know immediately that Carinthia will become the caretaker of her brother and his wife – essentially a faded copy of the women Chillon and her father married. Carinthia is a thing already printed, full of multiple sources, "dog-eared for reference" – none as lasting as her father's words. Fleetwood was right, then, in gazing on Carinthia after their wedding, to compare her to "warm wax to take impressions" and "hard stone to retain them" (389; ch. 37). But how does a reader feel when, in the end, Meredith's final heroine amounts to little more than her brother's most important reference work?

So, what has changed from the first novel to the last, and why does Meredith revisit this scenario so often? What becomes of conduct books recovered, or stripped, from the father's library? Perhaps we can get assistance from a final "tutelary book," the "Book of Egoism" jokingly referenced in Meredith's famous 1879 novel *The Egoist*. One passage, from the chapter "In the Heart of the Egoist," argues that the solipsistic soul of the Egoist is best understood via a parasitic father/son relationship: "The two rub together in sympathy . . . the younger has offered a dainty morsel to the elder, or the elder to the younger. Absorbed in their great example of devotion, they do not think of you. They are beautiful" (324; ch. 39). On the most basic level, the passage refers to Willoughby Patterne's courtship of the *father* to win the daughter, but also reflects the novel's vision of the relationship between self and society. Meredith writes, "The Egoist is our fountain-head, primeval man: the primitive is

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

born again, the elemental reconstituted. . . . He is not only his own father, he is ours, and he is also our son. We have produced him, he us (324; ch. 39). Meredith was writing *The Egoist* while revising *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* for the 1870s edition (Beer 29); thus, that first father/son pairing was fresh in his mind as he wrote those lines. The sentiment behind the passage, related to the inescapable, oppressive power of "Patterne," reminds us why Richard Feverel's rebellion from text through text fails. Richard thinks he is writing his way out of a system, but is instead merely writing his way into a *different* system.

Maybe the father's library is inescapable after all. Maybe, in the end, the father and son bear down on us in every utterance of the "I." In an April 1906 letter, Meredith tried to purge his inner Little Richard, expressing regret for some past specimens of "didactive verse" (Meredith, *Selected* 187). More and more often as he aged, he tried to purge his inner Sir Austin, too, marking letters to young authors as "Private" so that they wouldn't appear in print as universally applicable advice (Meredith, *Selected* 189). Perhaps his frustrations with his literary forefathers prevented him from striding confidently into that symbolic role.

The Amazing Marriage ends with the Philosopher thinking skeptically about his role in guiding his readers:

> So much I can say: the facts related, with some regretted omissions, by which my story has so skeleton a look, are those that led to this lamentable conclusion . . . Character must ever be a mystery, only to be explained in some degree by conduct; and that is very dependent upon accident: and unless we have a perpetual whipping of the tender part of the reader's mind, interest in invisible persons must needs flag. For it is an infant we address, and the story-teller who excited an infant to serious attention succeeds best. (510–11; ch. 47)

In classifying the average reader as an "infant" (presumably with a limited attention span and limited ability to absorb challenging or unpleasant information), Meredith's narrator casts himself as a father, his book as a text of education, and his reader as a malleable child. He wonders if fictional characters act with enough consistency to allow for an extractable moral. He even wonders if he can keep the reader engaged long enough to try the experiment. Yet, one gets the sense from Meredith's words that there is much more at stake for the Philosopher-narrator than shaking a flashy rattle. Writing to G. P. Baker, Meredith explains, "When . . . you say that a certain change in public taste, should it come about, will be to some extent due to me, you hand me the flowering wreath I covet. For I think that all right use of life, and the one secret of life, is to pave ways for the firmer footing of those who succeed us; as to my works, I know them faulty, [and] think them of worth only when they point and aid to that end" (Meredith, *Letters* 2: 398).

The first edition of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* was banned by Mudie's circulating library for its "generic unorthodoxy" (Roberts 8), and the *Saturday Review* declared, "It is quite right that there should be men's novels, if only it is to be understood at the outset that they are only meant for men. . . . *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* is entirely a man's book" (49; qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 74–75). I argue that Meredith spent the rest of his career trying to deconstruct the term "a man's book." Meredith, a reluctant single father at home, was reluctant to be a father figure to his contemporaries or to the next generation.[24] However, he was excited when he saw new projects that mirrored his old preoccupations. Looking back to *Feverel* in a letter to Edmund Gosse, about a year and a half after reading a manuscript of Gosse's *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments* (Meredith, *Letters* 111n2), Meredith

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

wrote, "My first novel dealt with your question. It was, I heard, denounced over the country by clergymen, at book-club, and it fell dead. They have since had their drenching of the abominable – as all do, who stand against the plea for the painting of what is natural to us. It may be shown recurring through literary history" (*Letters* 110). Gosse's 1907 autobiography "studied" the differences between Victorian and Edwardian ways of seeing, calling itself "a record of a struggle between two temperaments, two consciences and almost two epochs" (Gosse 35). Gosse would later assess Meredith as part of the old guard, an "oddity," a man "with brilliant gifts, but no cultural discipline" (Charteris 502). The assessment does not erase what Meredith himself noticed while reading Gosse – that we see his idea "recurring," even reverberating, across early twentieth-century assessments of Victorian texts and mores.

It may be no surprise, based on the above analysis, that some of Meredith's most ardent fans were writers trying to forge a new path in the modernist tradition.[25] In 1911's *The New Machiavelli*, H. G. Wells called *One of Our Conquerors* "one of the books that have made me," given that it was "the first detached and adverse criticism of the Englishman [he] had ever encountered" (Wells 7; Williams 185). Richard Stevenson argues for echoes of Meredith within the works of D. H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf, echoes that exist irrespective of whether these authors expressed admiration for Meredith's style (Stevenson, *Experimental* 194–202). Most famously, Sir Austin's words appear as a timely telegram in James Joyce's *Ulysses*; the characters turn to Meredith as they convene in the National Library to talk about sex, Shakespeare, and Hamlet's fathering of himself (Joyce 199; ch. 9). Stephen Daedalus seems to have internalized Sir Austin and Richard, Clare and Adrian when he says in this chapter, "Fatherhood, in the sense of conscious begetting, is unknown to man. It is a mystical estate, an apostolic succession, from only begetter to only begotten. . . . *Amor matris*, subjective and objective genitive, may be the only true thing in life. Paternity may be a legal fiction. Who is the father of any son that any son should love him or he any son?" (Joyce 207; ch. 9).

One possibility for the reversal of the "fiction" of paternity described in so many of Meredith's works appears in a subplot of *The Amazing Marriage*, wherein Woodseer, a young man, collects aphorisms *for* his father, rather than the other way around. Fleetwood, in perusing Woodseer's notebooks, sees the phrase "*A Text for Dada*" (78; ch. 8) scrawled beside one of the sayings. Woodseer says the following about his relationship with his father (a former shoe mender turned Dissenting Preacher): "When I strike a truism, I've a habit of scoring it to give him a peg or tuning fork for one of his discourses. . . . He and I are hunters of Wisdom on different tracks; and he, as he says, 'waits for me'" (78; ch. 8). One gets the sense that the best audience for Carinthia's "Maxims for Men" would have been Fleetwood, a symbolic son and *un*conscious begetter. When he finally tries to win Carinthia back, he does so by calling for a copy of her father's book. He is finally touched by the book by proxy, as Carinthia becomes a walking representative of it for him: "he mourned her day and night, knowing her spotless, however wild a follower of her father's MAXIMS FOR MEN. He believed – some have said his belief was not in error – that the woman to aid and make him man and be the star of human form to him, was miraculously revealed on the day of his walk through the foreign pine forest" (Meredith, *Amazing* 508; ch. 47). In this final work, though Carinthia is in everything her father's daughter, Meredith hints that some of the century's youngest children may find ways to be authors of themselves. Looking into the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

eyes of their son, Fleetwood sees "a thing made already, and active on his own account" (386; ch. 37).

Wake Forest University

NOTES

1. Prominent works, many of which I will discuss in this essay, include the 1971 collection *Meredith Now*, edited by Fletcher, and book-length studies by Wilt (1975), Beer (1970), and Buckley (1974).
2. In a study of Meredith's punctuation, Henry argues that Meredith "employs the metaphor of text in order to examine what it means to know oneself or others" (Henry 329). Wilt's book, *The Readable People of George Meredith*, studies the relationship between Meredith's narrators and the imagined readers of the novels; she sees the book-within-a-book device as a way to reflect this relationship outside of the text (Wilt 70, 77). In discussing Sir Austin Feverel's "Pilgrim's Scrip," Wilt and Mitchell think about the disinterested readers of the father's text, Lady Blandish and Adrian Harley (Wilt 101–08), and about Sir Austin as a stand-in for George Meredith (Mitchell 75), but not about the son's literary response to the father's work – the son as competing "author." Wilt's work is one of the few that discusses Meredith's final novel, *The Amazing Marriage*, despite its strong thematic links to *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, *Modern Love*, *The Egoist*, and *Diana of the Crossways*. In her chapter Wilt focuses on Dame Gossip's response to the father's conduct book, rather than the daughter's response, writing, "the truly amazing marriage in this novel is not Carinthia and Fleetwood's but that of Dame Gossip and the Modern Novelist" (233).
3. Williams calls both the formal and thematic disorder of this novel an "abandonment of orthodox moral and aesthetic characterization and the development of the subject according to its own inner logic" (191).
4. "'Was Ever Hero in the Fashion Won?': Alternative Sexualities in the Novels of George Meredith." (2006).
5. Buckley sees Meredith as fond of these aphorisms rather than hostile to them, at least formally: "the epigrams ascribed to Sir Austin give abstraction and generalization, of which Meredith was overfond, a plausible place in the framework of the novel" (Buckley 69). Buckley also seeks to lay out similarities between Meredith's strategies as a single parent and the strategies employed by his fictional patriarch.
6. For more about the relation between the alphabet book and lessons in morality, with *The Scarlet Letter* as the centerpiece of the American story, see Crain's *The Story of A: The Alphabetization of America from The New England Primer to The Scarlet Letter*.
7. Meredith revised his novel twice, in 1875 and 1896, partly in response to protests that prevented its distribution by Mudie's circulating library.
8. To see the variations between the different editions of *Feverel*, consult George Meredith, *Bibliography and Various Readings*, Volume 27 of the Memorial edition of Meredith's *Works*.
9. Quoting Anna Barbauld's 1810 statement "Let me make the novels of a country, and let who will make the systems," Siskin begins an article that argues, "system, like the novel, is a genre and not just an idea" and "a form of writing that was crucially important to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (Siskin 202). Johnson's *Dictionary* defines "system" as a genre distinct from the essay. Unlike the more rambling and confessional essay form, system for Johnson becomes, writes Siskin, the "reduct[ion] of 'many things' into a 'regular' and 'uni[ted]' 'combination' and 'order'" (Siskin 204). Richardson's rival, Fielding, proclaims in *Tom Jones*, "I am not writing a system, but a history" (568; qtd in Siskin 203).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

10. Critics have a tendency to look to eighteenth-century models in order to explain Sir Austin's approach to text. Lionel Stevenson writes, "To find Meredith's antecedents one has to go back to previous generations: Sterne in the eighteenth century and Peacock as a belated child of the Enlightenment" ("Meredith" 179). Mitchell reminds us that Meredith's tendency to "discus[s] the form of his novel while in the process of writing it" puts him in the company of Sterne on one side, and Joyce on the other (73). If Meredith's content satirizes Richardson, his style leans towards Sterne's. Indeed, an 1864 review of *Feverel* in the *Westminster Review* called the novel "somewhat in the style of Sterne" ("Novels with a Purpose" 30; qtd in Henry 316). Wilt sees Meredith as a new Fielding (Wilt 24–29), which would again set his work against the Richardsonian model of novels meant to provide moral instruction for impressionable readers.
11. Buckley writes, "Egoism, in the Meredithian sense, is almost by definition a comic theme; and at no point in the novel are we asked to regard Sir Austin the egoist as a tragic figure" (81). I argue that we are at least to regard Sir Austin's ultimate project as a failure, but also to see Richard's alternative models as equally flawed.
12. Thinking in particular of Emilia, Clara, and Diana, White sees in Meredith's heroines "an interior narrative that can never be told, an area of undisclosed privacy that must not be violated" (91).
13. See also the colonial narrative *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, in which the heroine becomes a "priceless manuscript cast to the flames," or, as Carens puts it, "a text worthy of editorial development" (817).
14. Suspicion of mechanism in Meredith's works can be applied to other forms of mass production and consumption. For example, early critics of *The Egoist*, led by Robert B. Mayo, quickly noted the similarity between Sir Willoughby's name and the popular "Willow Pattern" of china en vogue at the time of composition.
15. For a discussion of *Harry Richmond's* hybrid status as "autobiography, Bildungsroman, and historical novel," see Tarratt 165–87. Richard Stevenson also notes that *Harry Richmond* is "a mixture of genres," this time "picaresque romance," Bildungsroman, and satire (*Experimental* 63). He talks about how the candid first-person narration is the most experimental aspect of this novel. But again, adding thoughts about Roy Richmond as a manipulator of texts as well as "a braggart confidence man and thief masquerading in the guise of a 'good gentleman'" (Stevenson *Experimental* 69) provides additional insights into Meredith's aims. He thinks about what Romance does to characters, but also tests how individuals craft competing documents.
16. See Forster's distinction between plot and story in *Aspects of the Novel*: "We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. . . . The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it" (86).
17. In its attendance to the psychological torture of an unwanted relationship, the novel is also a reversal of *The Egoist*. In *The Egoist*, the Meredith novel that is most often read today, a young woman must decide whether or not to marry, with her choice either securing or disrupting "the survival of the Patternes" (Swanson 57). In *The Amazing Marriage*, a man must decide whether or not to stay married. The original title of the novel was *The Amazing Lover* (*Contributions* 7). Perhaps Meredith changed the title to emphasize that in *The Amazing Marriage* he is more interested in analyzing thought processes of regret after consummation, rather than uncertainty before it.
18. Where Sir Austin Feverel failed is in not heeding another snippet of Cobbett's advice: "I must here insist, and endeavour to impress my opinion upon the mind of every father, that his children's happiness ought to be his first object; that book-learning, if it tend to militate against this, ought to be disregarded" (270). He adds of his own children's education, "I effected everything without scolding, and even without command. My children are a family of scholars, each sex its appropriate species of learning; and, I could safely take my oath, that I never ordered a child of mine, son or daughter, to look into a book, in my life" (Cobbett 273).
19. Diana's language is comparable to that of Butler in *Gender Trouble*, who states that woman represents absence in any "phallogocentric language," but when one moves beyond these categories gender is no

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

longer "a static cultural marker, but "an incessant and repeated action of some sort," an active verb (Butler 143; qtd in Jenkins 131).

20. In a fourth possibility for understanding the relation between "Gossip" and "Philosophy," Richard Stevenson argues that the doubled narration underlines "the tensions inevitably created between traditional and 'modern' modes of reading the world" (Stevenson, *Experimental* 172).
21. Penn's *Fruits of a Father's Love* (1727) is typical in beginning, "My dear children, Not knowing how long it may please God to continue me amongst you, I am willing to embrace this opportunity of leaving you my advice and counsel" (3). Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son* (1776) underscore his absence on every page; in one notable letter, Chesterfield expresses surprise at how much his son has grown, a fact discovered when he peruses an artist's recent painting.
22. An optimistic reading of the scene would characterize the episode as "a paradigm of Carinthia's development, adaptation, and maintenance of integrity" as she "translate[s] her alpine training to meet the demands of her new situation rather than in any way being overwhelmed" (Stevenson, *Experimental* 182). Yet, this idealism may require overlooking the difference between self-determination and system. Is Carinthia acting organically or mechanically?
23. See Harsh 453. Harsh mentions Carinthia as a disappointment, but focuses on the conservative view of men in this seemingly radical text, writing, "if Meredith has in a sense repudiated the conventional wisdom of conservative critics, defining his own view of gender politics, he has once again put a hedge around his modernity by embracing a caricature of masculinity in his admired military figures" (447). She attributes only some of this conservatism to the 1830s setting (Harsh 450).
24. Wilt sees this reluctance in Meredith's writing style, when she argues that he "wrote like an orphan . . . out of relationships one step removed from the guilt and knot of parent-child bonds" (90).
25. Lionel Stevenson sees the popularity of Meredith's writings from 1880–1910 as part of his status as "a forerunner of the twentieth-century novel" ("Meredith" 200).

WORKS CITED

Beer, Gillian. *Meredith: A Change of Masks*. London: Athlone, 1970. Print.

Besant, Walter. "Candour in English Fiction." *New Republic* 2.8 (1890): 6–9. Print.

Bradburn, Elizabeth. "The Metaphorical Space of Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways*." *SEL* 43.4 (2003): 877–95. Print.

Buckley, Jerome. *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman From Dickens to Golding*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1974. Print.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999. Print.

Calder, Jenni. "The Insurrection of Women." From *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction*. New York: Oxford UP, 1976. 181–88. Reprinted in Meredith, George. *The Egoist.* Ed. Robert M. Adams. New York: Norton, 1979. 472–80. Print.

Carens, Timothy L. "Colonial Male Authority in George *Meredith's Lord Ormont and His Aminta. SEL* 41.4 (Autumn 2001): 805–26. Print.

Carlyle, Thomas. *Reminiscences*. Ed. Charles Eliot Norton. London: Macmillan, 1887. Print.

Charteris, Evan. *The Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931. Print.

Cobbett, William. *Advice to Young Men and (Incidentally) to Young Women in the Middle & Higher Ranks of Life in a Series of Letters Addressed to A Youth, A Bachelor, a Lover, a Husband, a Father, a Citizen, or a Subject*. 1829. London: Peter Davies, 1926. Print.

Crain, Patricia. *The Story of A: The Alphabetization of America from The New England Primer to The Scarlet Letter*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000. Print.

Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the Novel*. New York: Harcourt, 1927. Print.

Gosse, Edmund. *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments*. Ed. Peter Abbs. New York: Penguin, 1983. Print.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Harsh, Constance. "The Ambivalently Modern Master: Hedges Against the Modern in Meredith's *The Amazing Marriage*." *English Literature In Transition* 48.4 (2005): 436–58. Print.

Henry, Anne C. "'Explorations in Dot-and-Dashland': George Meredith's Aphasia." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 61.3 (2006): 311–42. Print.

Jenkins, Melissa. "'Was ever hero in this fashion won?': Alternative Sexualities in the Novels of George Meredith." *Straight Writ Queer: Non-Normative Expressions of Heterosexuality in Literature*. Ed. Richard Fantina. Jefferson: McFarland, 2006. 124–33. Print.

Jones, Mervyn. *The Amazing Victorian: A Life of George Meredith*. London: Constable, 1999. Print.

Knight, Charles, ed. *Old England: A Pictorial Museum of Regal, Ecclesiastical, Municipal, and Popular Antiquities*. 2 Vols. London: James Sangster, [1850s]. Print.

Le Gallienne, Richard. *George Meredith: Some Characteristics*. London: Elkin Matthews, 1890. Print.

Linton, E. Lynn. "Candour in English Fiction." *New Review* 2.8 (1890): 10–14. Print.

Maynard, John. "The Bildungsroman." *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*. Ed. Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing. Malden: Blackwell, 2002. 279–301. Print.

Mayo, Robert D. "*The Egoist* and the Willow Pattern." *English Literary History* 9 (1942): 71–78. Reprinted in Meredith, George. *The Egoist.* Ed. Robert M. Adams. New York: Norton, 1979. 453–59. Print.

Meredith, George. *The Amazing Marriage*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1968. Print.

———. *Bibliography and Various Readings*. Vol. 27 of *The Works of George Meredith*. Memorial Ed. London: Constable, 1911. Print.

———. *The Contributions of George Meredith to the Monthly Observer January–July 1849*. Ed. Maurice Buxton Forman. Edinburgh: Printed for Private Circulation, 1928. Print.

———. *Diana of the Crossways*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1968. Print.

———. *The Egoist*, ed. Robert M. Adams. New York: Norton, 1979. Print.

———. *Harry Richmond*. 2 vols. New York: Russell & Russell, 1968. Print.

———. "Martin's Puzzle," "Marian," and "Modern Love." *The Poetical Works of George Meredith*. London: Constable, 1912. Print.

———. *Letters of George Meredith, Collected and Edited by his Son*. 2 vols. London: Constable, 1912. Print.

———. "On the Idea of Comedy and of the Uses of the Comic Spirit." *Miscellaneous Prose. The Works of George Meredith Memorial Edition*. Vol. 23. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910. 3–58. Print.

———. *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. Ed. Edward Mendelson. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print.

———. *Selected Letters of George Meredith*. Ed. Mohammad Shaheen. New York: St. Martin's, 1997. Print.

"The Method of George Meredith." *Saturday Review* 80 (Dec 21, 1895): 842–43. Print.

Mitchell, Judith. "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel: A Sentimental Education." *Meredith Now: Some Critical Essays.* Ed. Ian Fletcher. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971. 69–74. Print.

Review of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel. Saturday Review* 8 (9 July 1859): 48–49. In *George Meredith: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Ioan Williams. London: Routledge, 1995. Print.

Penn, William. *Fruits of a Father's Love: Being the Advice of William Penn to his Children, Relating to their Civil and Religious Conduct*. 6th edition. Philadephia: Printed and Sold by Joseph Crukshank, in Market Street between Second and Third-Streets, 1776. Print.

Roberts, Neil. *Meredith and the Novel*. New York: St. Martin's, 1997. Print.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain*. New York: Oxford UP, 1985. Print.

Siskin, Clifford. "Novels and Systems." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 34.2 (Spring 2001): 202–14. Print.

Stevenson, Lionel. "Meredith and the Art of Implication." *The Victorian Experience: The Novelists*. Ed. Richard A. Levine. Athens: Ohio UP, 1976. 177–202. Print.

Stevenson, Richard C. *The Experimental Impulse in George Meredith's Fiction*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2004. Print.

Stone, J. S. *George Meredith's Politics*. Ontario: P. D. Meany, 1986. Print.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Swanson, Donald R. *Three Conquerors: Character and Method in the Mature Works of George Meredith*. The Hague: Mouton, 1969. Print.

Tarratt, Margaret. "The Adventures of Harry Richmond – Bildungsroman and Historical Novel." *Meredith Now: Some Critical Essays*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971. 165–87. Print.

Wells, H. G. *The New Machiavelli*. Whitefish: Kessinger, 2004. Print.

White, Allon. *The Uses of Obscurity: The Fiction of Early Modernism.* London: Routledge, 1981. Print.

Wilde, Oscar. "The Decay of Lying." *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1989. 970–92. Print.

Williams, Ioan. *The Realist Novel in England: A Study in Development*. London: Macmillan, 1974. Print.

Wilt, Judith. *The Readable People of George Meredith*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1975. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *The Common Reader, Second Series*. 1932. London: Hogarth, 1986. Print.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015031100012X Published online by Cambridge University Press