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GEORGE MEREDITH'S MODERN MYTH OF LOVE

An Essay

Presented to the Graduate Faculty

Department of English

University of the Pacific

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The Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Arts

by

Mark David Rosenthal

May 1978

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While George Meredith's sixteen-line sonnet sequence Modern Love fits neatly into his philosophical, triadic system of Blood, Brain, and Spirit,¹ the neatness of this correspondence should not cause us to ignore other complementary systems that inform and expand the poem. A careful reading of Modern Love will expose a consistent allusion to the biblical myth of Adam and Eve, an allusion which adds a grand, universalized dimension to the poem's focused drama. Meredith has re-interpreted the myth to fit his own evaluation of love; moreover, the imagery of Modern Love, as it transforms the original myth, allows us to ascertain through those salient differences the sentiments behind Meredith's rewriting of the myth and to appreciate more fully Meredith's acute, almost brutal, reappraisal of the essential relationship between men and women.

Meredith referred to Modern Love as "a dissection of the sentimental passion of these days, which can only be apprehended by the few who would read it many times. I have not looked for it to succeed."² It is important, then, to follow his suggestion and read beyond the more obvious associations with the explicit and specific ideological system that is present in the sonnets. For Modern Love does indeed, as Meredith said, dissect love. It offers an evaluation: it tries to establish, recognize, and

ultimately accept what Meredith believes to be the new condition of love. Meredith follows that artistic imperative which causes writers to re-evaluate constantly the validity of popular notions of the human experience and which inevitably effects a larger consideration of values, an ontological reappraisal. In describing the social function of mythology, Mircea Eliade has suggested that "myth is always related to a creation."³ Meredith's evaluation is much like a myth. It is demonstrably not merely the story of two lovers, but rather an analysis of the genesis of love in the modern world.

Every society needs to know the "story" of its circumstance, the etiology of its values; and myths offer such stories. They are familiar patterns that signal an attempt to reach great truths through the tribulations of characters. We can gain an appreciation of the great craftsmanship of Modern Love if we recognize how Meredith has embedded mythic images in his drama--images which transform the husband/narrator's reminiscence into a ritual, a means for him to relive powerful past events and experience ceremonially the trauma of his life, thereby "knowing the origin of things."⁴

We might say that Modern Love acts like a displaced myth. Through this poem Meredith offers his redefinition, his personal reiteration of the primal myth of man and woman--the fall from grace and the expulsion from paradise.⁵ As such, Modern Love is an euhemerized account, a story

which to one of Meredith's contemporaries treats "one of our own modern problems like some ancient tragedy."⁶ Because of the scientific milieu of the period and Meredith's own absolute insistence on realism, the mythic aspects of the story are internalized, revealed as psychological dispositions. This technique allows the poem's mythic dimensions to be in absolute agreement with Meredith's perception of existence--firmly rooted in earth. He was adamant about the validity of that perception: "For my part, I love and cling to earth, as one piece of God's handiwork that we possess. I admit that we can re-fashion; but of earth must be the material."⁷

To "re-fashion" the myth, Meredith has allowed the battle between Satan and Jehovah to be manifested as personality dilemmas. In fact, the main aspects of the biblical myth--Adam, Eve, the serpent and the god, the garden and the acceptance of the forbidden fruit, the expulsion and its consequences--are all accounted for within the poem's patterns of imagery. More importantly, the mythic substructure of the imagery coheres in the central sequence of the work and forms, in a sense, a mythic matrix which can act like a code to the poem. After examining the imagistic basis of this matrix, we will consider how Meredith utilized the various elements of the biblical myth, and, especially, how two of those elements--the garden from which man was forced to flee and man's loss of immortality as punishment for his transgression--allowed Meredith

to describe his lovers' tragedy with a vividness that resonates beyond the particular confines of this poetic drama. But before we proceed to such an examination, it is important to substantiate the validity of this exegesis.

There is good reason for the reader to be especially sensitive to the mythic allusions in Modern Love, for such a reading is primarily supported by a suggestion provided by Meredith himself, a suggestion which so far has been overlooked by critics. In the 1892 edition of the poem, the first new edition since its original publication in 1862 as Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside, Meredith selected one of his newly composed sonnets to stand as a preface to the sequence.⁸ This poem, "The Promise in Disturbance," is in a sense Meredith's only substantive comment on Modern Love. It is a key to the patterns of imagery in the poem. Like a cartographer's legend, it instructs us how to "read" the story.

The sonnet "The Promise in Disturbance" makes explicit use of the Old Testament myth of Lucifer. Now because of the meticulous verisimilitude of the sonnet sequence itself, we should ask why Meredith created a frontispiece so constructed by references to the myth of the angels' fall.

Actually, the second line of "The Promise in Disturbance" immediately establishes Meredith's motives. In order to define our contemporary condition we must listen carefully to our own "primal thunder," the continued, consistent echoes of that first "black descent." Our world

is in its essence the imperfect world of experience. The original fall from innocence had as one of its consequences the metamorphosis of Eden, that place of pure love, into a "mire." Here Meredith uses a mythic allusion to attack naive romanticism or sentimentalism. Eden is an impossible paradise: as a symbolic concept of pure and easy love, it is dangerous. It deludes lovers into believing that there can be an untainted love, free of the day-to-day lapses of existence, a love which believes in--as he says in Sonnet 10 of the sequence--fairy princes and dreams, when in reality love is "a thing of moods."

Yet this very recognition of our fallen condition is reason for hope. The alternative, the misguided notion that there is a possibility to return to that lost paradise of innocent love, serenaded by "the golden harp" of holy, sweet celestial music, is a presumption "Too like revolt." This false yearning for the golden age is the mark of immaturity in love, and that image of the golden harp and its music now lost is juxtaposed with a "newly-added chord" that will play a more somber song of love without illusions. We might thereby salvage from the world another peace, sober and mature; we might discover "an intelligible Lord," stripped of sentimentalism. This is the promise offered to us even from such "rebel discords up the sacred mount." The fall to experience was a serendipity, a felix culpa. It brought the knowledge that there must be discord, that the "golden harp" is a dangerous instrument playing a Siren's

song. "The Promise in Disturbance" is a poem fascinating in its subtle use of mythology. It manages to incorporate mythic references into an allegorical system which is gently assertive and which, giving hints instead of commands, is an open-ended allegory of love that can only be fully understood by reading the sequence that succeeds it.

Modern Love will continue the same allusions, but this time they will be submerged under that "midnight ocean" (50) of human will and emotion.

We might now understand why Modern Love seems to begin in medias res: it is after the fall; innocence departs before the modern tale begins. The story recapitulates the narrator's arduous psychic odyssey from the despair of post-lapsarian marriage to the faint hope of dawn across that last terrifying night. "The Promise in Disturbance" offers us a mythic allegory which introduces the general circumstances of the lovers we are about to meet. They live in a world that is inherently imperfect. Their failure to understand this imperfection will lead to anger, despair, and death. The story we will see unfolding before us resonates beyond its two characters. It breathes; it whispers a larger truth--"But listen in the thought"⁹--that speaks of love's limitations. By recognizing the way the imagery has been used to suggest deeper meanings, we will best appreciate Meredith's achievement in creating characters who can act out the forces that inform human love in the modern world.

The opening sonnets of the work set the scene for a modern rendition of that primal story of lovers, Adam and Eve. They also supply the attentive reader with a grand overview of the subsequent narration, pointing to Meredith's final evocation of the lovers' garden and love's death. We begin at the silent moment after the fall, the lovers in bed, captured in their despair like Milton's Satan in a lake of fire. To "drink the pale drug of silence" (1) in this marriage bed, a supposedly holy place, is the husband's metaphor for the death of their love, an ironic reversal of the mythic drink of love in the Tristan legend. This image of consumption is the modern analogue to Adam and Eve's acceptance of the forbidden fruit. It is the end moment of their "dead black years," the culmination of a hollow existence. In the stillness that marks their recognition of the death of their marriage we can intuit that the narrative will lead inexorably to the perfect stillness of a more tragic death. The banishment from Eden led to death as well; man lost his immortality when he lost the garden. Thus Meredith has foreshadowed the end moments of the poem when the lovers will return to their "garden" and accept their mortality. The acceptance of love and sexuality precludes deathlessness. The poem is like an eternally ringing echo of the divine command to leave paradise, a reminder that the punishment is with us still.

The fifty sonnets are narrated by the husband, our witness, who frequently changes from first to third person

reference in order to move in and out of the vignettes, those dramatic scenes of disintegration. These scenes themselves can be grouped into larger patterns based on the repetition and elaboration of images. As we follow the husband's story, the images evoked seem to gather speed, to achieve a certain density, until we reach a mythic core of the work in Sonnets 23-30, a matrix in which the various mythic allusions of the poem cohere. In this matrix the husband undertakes a bitter self-investigation that produces sonnets of striking imagery. An understanding of the mythic understructure of these images makes them more accessible.

Sonnet 23 is perhaps the most salient and difficult sonnet before the final verses of the sequence. It acts like a praeternatural introduction to the mythic matrix of the poem. It is deep winter and we are at the frozen core of their marriage inferno. It is a country house, ironically at Christmas time, a season supposedly of joy at the birth of the saviour. The lovers, like a mock holy family, also have difficulty in finding lodging, but in their case it is because they are outcasts, marked by their terrible love. Though the scene seems similar to a picture of the nativity-- "Out in the freezing darkness the lambs bleat"--Meredith actually uses an inversion of the Christmas story to make the central image of the sonnet more understandable; the couple has been given a room in the attic of the house and that night, so the husband relates, "I dreamed a banished angel to me crept:/ My feet were nourished on her breasts

all night" (23). His dream presents him with a strange succubus, a fallen spirit, who is a type of those heavenly outcasts that fled their celestial home for residence on earth. The husband is a kindred spirit. We note that the angel "creeps" to him: when the serpent tempted Eve, so the biblical myth tells us, God took from him his feet so he would forever be attached to the ground. The earth became his punishment. But as Meredith suggested in "The Promise in Disturbance," there can be solace in our fallen home. This "banished" angel offers consolation to a fellow exile from Eden. She nourishes him through her breasts; he imbibes through his feet, the earth's limbs, the terrestrial point of contact, transformed into organs of nourishment in an occult act of communion. This complex image is presented as an eidetic dream image so that the realism of the poem can be maintained, but within the dream the image offers us an interesting metamorphosis from the demonic to the maternal: the earth will succor the fallen. The earth, symbolic of experience, will teach its children to understand their flaws. This reassurance, meager as it may be, is the only salvation offered at Christmas time, the wisdom gained despite the expulsion from paradise.

Sonnet 24 juxtaposes the particular and domestic situation of the husband with the previous mythic allusion as a demonstration of how that parable manifests itself in reality. The husband admits to his pride. He cannot forgive. In the myth, hubris was the cause of the great

fall which led to Adam's temptation. Pride and egoism continue to manifest themselves in man. The husband, admittedly prideful, is willing to forgo the love that once fed him: "Pluck out the eyes of pride! thy mouth to mine! Never! though I die thirsting. Go thy ways!" (24). He is willing to reject the flesh of his former love in favor of his newly-won earthly sustenance. Sonnets 23 and 24 indicate the husband's allegiance to his new circumstance. He is adapting to the fall. We now move to a sonnet that universalizes this situation.

Sonnet 25 relates another modern interpretation of the fall in the domestic intrigues of a French novel. The lover's story is not isolated. There are always other incarnations. The characters in the novel are the same archetypes, "the usual three: Husband, wife, and lover" (25). Like the woman in the French novel, like Eve, his wife must "choose between them," the serpent (the Lover in his role as tempter) or the law (Husband): "these things are life." "Unnatural?" the husband questions--impossible, for the natural harmony of man and woman has long since dissolved.

This sonnet is followed immediately by an effusive allegory-in-miniature that reaffirms and recapitulates the mythic allusion. In Sonnet 26, Love, in the form of an eagle, flies through the heavens, immune from earthly vanities, until his heart is pierced by an arrow. This image, a correlative for the acceptance of the forbidden

fruit, is a more brutal sexual metaphor: both suggest the loss of purity. Like Crashaw's Theresa, the vision is more than a passionate image--it is a divine raptus. Immediately after their act of disobedience, so the myth tells us, Adam and Eve became aware of their sexuality, aware and ashamed. Their own bodies became their tempters. Here the mythic parallel reinforces and augments the significance of Blood in Meredith's philosophical system--the Blood that urges man to obey his brute passions. The soaring eagle falls to the earth blinded by his own blood and that blood becomes his chain. Blood is the alchemical agent which transubstantiates the angel into demon: "A subtle serpent then has Love become" (26). Meredith has used mythic condensation in this sonnet to make his point, for the husband now assumes the role of Adam turned Lucifer. Ironically, as the husband realizes, the man betrayed becomes a satanic member of the cycle. This fused duality, divine and demonic, is the real condition of man, a painful truth that is asserted with courage: "I had the eagle in my bosom erst:/ Henceforward with the serpent I am cursed" (26). The husband admits that it is human to be selfish, uncaring, vengeful, and even self-destructive. The supernatural elements of the biblical myth are translated into psychological phenomena, but the sexual roles do not therefore disappear; they are merely reassigned. Infidelity and disobedience changed the eagle to a serpent, the godhead to the demonic.

This epicene quality--the violated eagle merged with

the violating serpent--is even analogous to the ironic condition of the wife's lover. Though he is the husband's foe, he is also a shadow figure for the husband. Indeed, when he is introduced in Sonnet 3 we are told, "But he is nothing:--nothing," and in Sonnet 6 he is called "Love's Ghost." The adultery is only a symptom of a more basic, a darker problem: human nature, the "original sin" that infects love. The husband need not look to such "ghosts" to find the agent of his woe; his nemesis is within.

In Sonnets 27 and 28 the husband accepts the demonic aspect of his nature, or at least he will admit to it. He warns his mistress, "Lady, I must be flattered. Shouldst then wake/ The passion of a demon, be not afraid" (27). Lovers shall henceforth possess no pure and gentle motives. Duplicity is the nature of love. The husband admits, "I feel the promptings of Satanic power" (28). But though Meredith reveals the husband's struggle to live with the impaired fundamentality of love, we are not told that the husband is completely confident in that struggle. He longs for paradise, for the days of love's naiveté. Sonnet 29 continues this motif, first established in "The Promise in Disturbance," the futile longing for the "golden harp," the age d'or, lost paradise, an image viable on many levels; "Something more than earth/ I cry for still; I cannot be at peace/ In having Love upon mortal lease" (29). The soft haze of paradise, Eden and eros, is not quickly forgotten or renounced.

This motif can be traced throughout the poem. In Sonnet 3 the husband tells us that the woman he claims, the woman he really wants, is a "Phantom-woman in the Past." In Sonnet 12 he states that although he does not mind the future he has lost, he is tortured by the fact that his wife's infidelity has robbed him of his past. The need for the security of a genuine past also retards his ability to maintain new affairs; "The dread that my old love may be alive/ Has seized my nursling new love by the throat" (40). Sonnet 11 presents a bucolic scene, "yellow meadows" that seem to be unchanged, golden, "Now, as then, the grace/ Of heaven seems holding the earth in its embrace" (11). But the husband comes to see that it is a mirage, a false picture and a wishful distortion. In the sunset appears "An amber cradle near the sun's decline;/ Within it, featured even in death divine,/ Is lying a dead infant slain by thee" (11). That child, a symbol of purity and fertility, of innocence, is unable to survive in the world of experience. A realistic view of nature encompasses the realization that it is man's pride, his egoism that infects his love. The cradle in the sunset is nature's decree; "Nature says; 'My children most they seem/ When they least know me; therefore I decree/ That they shall suffer'" (30). There is no holy liaison between nature and man. They are forever separate. The biblical myth carefully indicates that Adam was privy to the secrets of nature. He knew the names of all of nature's creatures and thus had dominion

over them. After the fall, such intimacies between man and nature were ruptured, and, for Meredith, man must now actively seek a meaningful reintegration with nature.

These sonnets collectively form a pattern which encourages the reader to incorporate the poem's imagery into a mythic allegory that echoes the actual events of the story. It then becomes easier to read a sonnet, such as 33, for it continues an idea already explained: it is in the nature of all beings to possess both divine and demonic elements. Here the husband feels compelled to ridicule Raphael's pictorial rendering of the primordial battle with Satan. The "St. Michael" in the Louvre is "too serene!" The husband remarks,

Oh Raphael! when men the Fiend do fight,
They conquer not upon such easy terms,
Half serpent in the struggle grow these worms,
And does he grow half human, all is right, (33)

Two masks are needed to play the role of lover in the modern world--half serpent, half human. The play itself transforms the players. Angel and devil left Eden together.

In this new explanation of the meaning of the fall from grace, Meredith replaces original sin with a very Victorian sense of human responsibility. Sonnet 43 tells us that we are betrayed by what is false within, and in Sonnet 20 the husband asseverates, "I take the hap of all my deeds" (20). But human responsibility cannot explain everything away. Meredith surrounds the story with a sense of inevitability which suggest that some human drives are

not to be denied. Human will cannot control the demonic aspects of the mind. Sonnet 43 says that "passions spin the plot," as if part of the human disposition will always remain attached by a blood red cord to uncontrollable exigencies. The battle between tempter and tempted, man and serpent, or Blood and Brain is eternal. It is the confrontation of the irresistible and the immovable, "the great waves of Destiny/ Convulsed at a checked impulse of the heart" (5). In such a battle there are two possibilities only, death or the lifelong struggle to overcome egoism. It is in the husband's character to live. He has been afforded the insight to begin to try to improve his condition. The wife is less fortunate. Like Eve, she has been made to assume the full fury of the punishment.

The myth also tells us that the sin in the garden effected an ontological evolution in Adam and Eve. The essence of their humanity was changed. We have seen how sexuality, the dark force of the Blood, was acknowledged by Meredith as an alchemical agent to transform divine love to demonic lust, the eagle to serpent. Sexuality resulted from the fall, but mortality was another consequence, perhaps a more seductive addition to human nature. For often, as a result of human weariness with the struggle of evolution, the ordeal of living and loving, a human fascination with the easy escape of death is manifested, a will to relinquish life. It is a sign of weakness, and Meredith prepares us throughout the poem for the wife's

greatest demonstration of her despair, her rejection of life.

In Modern Love there is a marked movement towards death. If marriage is supposed to be a protecting shelter, the self-dismissal of the lovers from their shelter withdraws that protection. Beginning with Sonnet 1 as we have seen, the husband gives us copious hints of the eventual death of his wife, hints that also suggest his own helplessness in protecting his wife from the destructive tendencies of love in their fallen state. In Sonnet 15 the husband describes his wife's pure sleep in an image suggestive of her eventual suicide, "when low/ Hangs that abandoned arm toward the floor" (15). Sonnet 17 refers to "Love's corpse-light"; in Sonnet 21 the wife faints and the husband retains this impression: "Her lost moist hand clings mortally to mine" (21). Sonnet 29, more satiric in tone, assails the couple's affected insouciance with this macabre image: "we sit contentedly/ And eat our pot of honey on the grave" (29). In Sonnet 42 the husband describes his wife as a woman bent on martyrdom. These are all signposts on the path to destruction.

There were three consequences to the expulsion from the garden--carnal knowledge, death, and original sin--and Meredith has incorporated them all, in various ways, into the mythic substructure of the poem. As the husband's revocation of the tragedy of his marriage comes to a climax in the final sequence of the poem, we become especially aware of how the garden itself has been integrated into the

poem's imagery. A type of "garden" plays an important role in the couple's life, only we see in it an inversion, a reversal of values that tells us that it is Eden after the fall. In the biblical myth, the garden was the locus amoenus, the beautiful place, a paradise. The spaces that the lovers inhabit in the poem are demonic correlatives of that paradise. They contain the "breath of poison-flowers" (6). The memory of their sin--"original" in that it is defined as the inherent flaw in human relationships--makes the world itself a cruel mockery of Eden, as "wicked as some old dull murder spot" (2). But more specifically, the lovers have a special relationship to a woods, perhaps the place of their initial encounter, but a place which has become, like Eden, a representation of what once was but is no more. "Love's deep woods" have become "Love's jealous woods" (10). Ironically, the "crime" that the husband confesses to having committed in those woods--"I plotted to be worthy of the world" (10)--suggests that he was punished for his willingness to confront and accept the baser aspects of love.

We can perhaps best understand the singular importance of the woods to Meredith's mythology if we remember how he used woods to symbolize the world of Nature, the heart of mother Earth, in his poem "The Woods of Westermain." To appreciate, adjust ourselves to, and constructively utilize the human powers we are endowed with on earth is no easy matter. For man to enter the "enchanted Woods," as Meredith

explains in "The Woods of Westermain," he must beware "the snake across [his] path." The woods are no longer the careless, bucolic domain that the Romantics once celebrated. To Meredith, they represent the locus of a Darwinian struggle: the world is not for the shallow or the selfish. Meredith uses "The Woods of Westermain" as a catalogue of caveats. He warns the lover who would enter the woods:

But bring you a note
Wrangling, howsoe'er remote,
Discords out of discord spin
Round and round derisive din:
Sudden will a pallor pant
Chill at screeches miscreant.¹⁰

It is only fitting, then, that the husband and wife in Modern Love, almost instinctively, return to the woods, and that their return is the act which catalyzes the suicide of the poem's climax. They have not heeded the warning, "In yourself may lurk the trap."¹¹

Sonnet 46 is the scene of the couple's confrontation in the woods. Their false Eden has been darkened by "a disturbing shadow" of corrupt love. Yet, the husband felt compelled to see the woods again. Meredith sets the scene for this momentous return in Sonnet 45. It is the season of the "sweet wild rose," summer days, when passion is high. The husband awakes on one such day (Sonnet 46) to the "sounding of the Matin-bell." His wife is gone, and though he is confused, disoriented, something urges him to visit the woods. There is an irresistible call. Like an animal smelling impending death, the husband once again moves to

that special place, the hallowed-now-cursed ground "where first our love-salute/ Was interchanged" (46).

Again in the woods, he is affected once more by the stigma of his punishment. He is unable to communicate with his wife. He can only offer his arm. The gesture is all. This tortured rendezvous in Eden is appropriately the introduction to the final sequence of the poem. The deepness of those woods, the locus of the lovers' erstwhile wholeness, will eventually be transformed to the closing image of the deep sea. So the poem's resolution, Sonnets 48-50, is in a sense a coda. Once the lovers have returned to Eden, the cycle is complete. We have a symbolic completion of the husband's psychodrama. His ritual can go no further. The end of the tale will tie up loose ends. Indeed, there is a certain ethereal, wistful tone to the narrator's description of his wife's suicide at the end, the sentiments of a man who is learning, perhaps too quickly, to heed his own advice, a man weighted by his wisdom.

This poetic closure, though demonic in tone, ultimately offers an affirmation beyond the troubled relationship of its hero and heroine. It offers the possibility of an epiphany, obscured, brought on the wings of a banished angel, but there nonetheless, discernible to those who would think to look for it: "More brain, O Lord, more brain! or we shall mar/ Utterly this fair garden we might win" (48). But it is such a quiet epiphany, so subtle, minute as the tide's "thin line" (50) that we might fail to recognize the husband's

acknowledgment of the existence of hope, the quality that separates this retelling of the myth from adject despair. Though "Dusty answers" are all we can ever receive for our "Deep questioning," we should expect no more. Since the responsibility is now our own and since we cannot look for divine solutions, our only recourse is to the world and to other men; that essential force, like the dark ocean, is only palpable now and then, as fleeting as the tide lines on the shore.

In Modern Love, Meredith has identified eternal forms of behavior and charted them in "the mythical patterns of experience, the attempts to give form to the shifting ambiguities and complexities of unidealized existence."¹² The function of the myth is to instruct, to help understand. This is always the goal of myth-makers. Underneath the psychological verisimilitude of the poem is a language that resonates as mythic discourse, language that expresses recurring themes, deep, commonly felt emotions. As Eliade says,

It seems unlikely that any society could completely dispense with myths, for, of what is essential in mythical behavior-- the exemplary pattern, the repetition, the break with profane duration and integration into primordial time-- the first two at least are consubstantial with every human condition.¹³

Modern Love, then, is a love song, not only to a tragically disintegrated marriage, but to the human condition, to our "living passion" (41) which, as Meredith wrote in "The

Promise in Disturbance," fuels "The rebel discord up the
sacred mount."

FOOTNOTES

¹Norman Friedman, "The Jangled Harp: Symbolic Structure in Modern Love," Modern Language Quarterly, 18 (1957), 9-21.

²C.L. Clive (ed.), The Letters of George Meredith (Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1970), Volume I, p. 160.

³Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 18-19.

⁴Ibid., p. 19.

⁵Eric Smith, Some Versions of the Fall (London: Croom Helm, 1973): "There is a tendency to personalize biblical myth, to see in it a recurrent situation as it affects the artist or man as seen by the artist" (p. 161).

⁶G.M. Trevelyan, The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith (New York: Scribner's, 1912), pp. 19-21.

⁷Letters, I, p. 161.

⁸G.M. Trevelyan (ed.), The Poetical Works of George Meredith (New York: Scribner's, 1912), p. 581. For convenience, the sonnet is reprinted below:

THE PROMISE IN DISTURBANCE

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

(N.B.: When deemed necessary, quotations from Modern Love will be followed by references in parentheses to the number of the sonnet; all other quotations are footnoted.)

⁹"The Promise in Disturbance," 9.

¹⁰"The Woods of Westermain," III, 172-177.

¹¹"The Woods of Westermain," IV, 442.

¹²Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 223.

¹³Mircea Eliade, Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries (New York: Harper & Bros., 1960), p. 31.

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