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"REBEL DISCORDS": GEORGE MEREDITH'S METRICAL ART
DISSERTATION

A dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy
in the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

by

JASON W. JOHNSON

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ABSTRACT

George Meredith is perhaps best known for his innovative contributions to the Victorian novel. Unfortunately, his formal experiments in poetry have gone unnoticed. This dissertation seeks to rectify this problem by examining Meredith's metrical art and the ways in which he departs from the metrical tradition. The first chapter of the study evaluates his early poetry, most of which is derivative and metrically conventional. Despite. Only two poems are considered prosodically innovative, "The Death of Winter" and "South-west Wind in the Woodlands." The second chapter discusses Meredith's experiments with the sonnet tradition, particularly as they relate to his most famous sequence, *Modern Love*. While most critics have referred to this poem as a sonnet sequence, a formal analysis reveals that the poem's formal provenance is indeterminate. The reason given for such indeterminacy is that the speaker of the piece is also responsible for composing the sequence. The poem's formal peculiarities serve as indicators of the speaker's damaged psyche. The third chapter outlines Meredith's use of meter to connect poems which have been seen as unrelated. Two sequences are discussed. The first sequence contains "The Woods of Westermain" and "The Day of the Daughter of Hades" and the second is comprised of "Phoebus and Admetus," "Melampus," and "Love in the Valley." It is argued that Meredith uses similar formal strategies to connect the poems in each sequence in order to reveal the ways in which these poems inform each other thematically. After both sequences are considered separately, they are read together in order to illustrate how they are related to one another. The dissertation concludes by suggesting potential courses of research still untouched by Meredith scholars.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents and to my wife and son.
Without their patience and support, I would not have completed the doctorate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my dissertation advisor, Dr. Benjamin F. Fisher and my committee members, Drs. Colby Kullman, T.J. Ray, and Charles Gates. Without their devotion, patience, compassion and wisdom, I would not have completed the dissertation. I am thankful to the faculty and staff in the Department of English for whom I have the utmost respect.

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INTRODUCTION

George Meredith had certain obvious concerns about meter, as the few sources in which he discusses the subject show. The most fully realized comments on prosody are in a letter to John Morley dated January 27, 1870:

I see the *Quarterly* deals rather firmly with the 'Holy Grail'—something in these days. It is hard on the 'Lucretius'—compares the flow of the English line with the Latin hexameters of the poet. No one but Milton has the roll of the English line. The French Alexandrine, which I have been studying of late, is (though far off) nearer to ancient poetical music than anything we have out of Milton. When I have leisure I hope to write some papers on poetry and versification. (*L* i.415)

We learn that Meredith had been studying the French alexandrine (a twelve-syllable line also called hexameter). Apparently, he was thinking comparatively, discussing Latin, French, and English versifications. In this letter at least, Meredith believes that English meter does not fare well when compared to the alexandrine, which "is (though far off) nearer to ancient poetical music than anything we have out of Milton." The "papers on poetry and versification" Meredith wished to write during moments of "leisure" never did come to fruition, or if they did, they have subsequently been lost.

Aside from the letter to Morley, Meredith's constant concern with prosody appears in only one source, the memoirs of Francis Cowley Burnand, who, in the company of Maurice Fitzgerald, visited Meredith briefly in 1859. As Lionel Stevenson explains the circumstances:

[Burnand] was also replete with songs from the London music halls, especially a catchy new tune from one of H.J. Byron's burlesques. During our country walks, and in the quiet evenings," he reports, "Meredith would 'call' for this song...What used to delight George was the 'swing and go' of it, and the catch of the rhythm...The lilt of this to some old American jingle called, '*Shid-a-ma-lik*' used to take Meredith's fancy." This fascination with a syncopated popular tune is consistent with the flair for strongly accented meters in many of Meredith's poems at the time, and with his habit of improvising

rollicking nonsense rhymes about his friends. (70, ellipses and italics in original)

If Burnand discussed all things metrical with Meredith, he does not report it here. Rather, all we learn is that Meredith was carried away by the "catch of the rhythm." Stevenson quite correctly asserts that Meredith's love of music hall tunes is not coincidental, but "consistent with the flair for strongly accented meters" in his poems written around 1859, when Burnand visited Meredith. This particular excerpt only establishes Meredith's love for meter, nothing more.

There is mention of prosody in his fiction and poetry, but they are only oblique references. Usually, a word associated with prosody is mentioned but not expounded upon or clearly defined. Consider the first poem *Modern Love*; the speaker uses a word which has a loose affiliation with prosody: "and so beat / Sleep's heavy *measure*" (10-11, emphasis added). Of course, "measure" is a cliché used in reference to music. Meredith does not expound here on versification, but leaves the word unfinalized and indeterminate. Perhaps the most explicit reference to meter in the fiction is in *The Egoist*, a novel that often deals with poetry: "Men who have yielded [the initiative] are like cavalry put on the defensive; a very small force with an *ictus* will scatter them" (emphasis added). With respect to prosody, "ictus" refers to the metrical beat, not the syllable that occurs on the metrical beat. In this instance, it simply means a strike or blow. In a novel in which we find much about poetry, however, Meredith undoubtedly used the word in hopes that the reader would catch the word's dual meaning.

Most other references to meter in Meredith's canon relate poetic form to music, a time-honored analogy. Such brief mentions are of no help for the metrist interested in Meredith's ideas about meter. Because Meredith left no commentary on the subject, the reader must turn to the poems in order to locate the poet's views on versification. I will set out in the following

pages to explore the ways in which Meredith used the elements of versification—meter, rhyme, strophic and stanzaic construction. Of particular interest in this study are Meredith's metrical experiments and how they challenge the tradition as well as how they affect content.

In chapter one, I will consider the beginning of Meredith's career, starting with this first collection of poems. As will become clear through the metrical analysis of these early poems, Meredith had not yet broken with convention in any significant way. Only a few poems stand out as experimental pieces: most important and daring are "The Death of Winter" and "South-west Wind in the Woodlands." While these poems do not prove to be the foundation or beginning of Meredith's complicated and often convoluted philosophy, they are the augur of what is to come as concerns his use of poetic form.

In chapter two, I will focus on *Modern Love*, which is not only one of Meredith's best experimental pieces, but one of the most experimental poems in nineteenth century British poetry; and it is surely one of the most formally challenging sonnet sequences in English before the twentieth century. I will begin by investigating the problem of the narrator. Who is speaking in the poem, and is there more than one narrator? Such questions are difficult to answer because both third- and first-person are used in the text. Despite the two perspectives, I will argue that there is only one speaker: the use of first- and third-person illustrates his mental state. The meter of the piece also points to an anxiety surpassing any cure. I will suggest that the speaker is a poet himself and that the entire sequence is a product of his own poetic imagination. If this is the case, then the form of the piece would directly reflect the speaker's mind. I will discuss the sequence in terms of the sonnet tradition, attempting to locate it within a lineage of the sonnet in some way. Ultimately, though, the form—at least the

strophic form—is elusive and unfinalizable; that is, there is no way to pin down any of the sonnets as either a sonnet or any other form.

In chapter three, I will argue that in his later years Meredith wrote two major metrical/formal sequences: the “Westermain” series and the “Love in the Valley” series. The poems in each sequence are linked by formal similarities or, in the case of the “Love in the Valley” sequence, explicit formal concerns. The metrical features of each sequence not only serve to set that sequence apart, to indicate that the poems in that series are of a piece, but also to ensure that the reader will read each poem with the other poem or poems in the series in mind. As the poems are linked formally, I will argue that there must be other non-prosodic connections as well, namely, in terms of theme and content. I will then read the two series as two parts of a larger series in order to examine the ways in which they interact with and comment on one another.

In the last analysis, this study is an appreciation and an appraisal, a way of bringing into the light one of the most significant, though thus far unacknowledged, formal innovators of the nineteenth century poetry in English.

A Note on Method

A word should be said about the metrical theory upon which all of the following scansion is built. The most accessible and most reliable metrical approach to date is the four-level stress model. Four-level stress theory begins in much the same way as traditional theory begins: that is, the metrist still uses symbols to denote stressed (“/”) and unstressed (“x”) syllables. The traditional prosodist and the four-level stresser disagree, however, on the existence of the spondee and the pyrrhic foot. Traditionalists scan feet containing two heavily stressed syllables as a spondee (//) and feet with two unstressed syllables as pyrrhics (xx). A

four-level stresser would argue that spondees and pyrrhics do not exist, that in every foot one syllable will receive at least a bit more stress than the others in the foot. Thus, there are no spondees and pyrrhics in English poetry; rather, the four-level stress theorist proposes that the following are the only possible feet in English: the iamb (x/), the trochee (/x), the anapest (xx/), the dactyl (/xx).

This first component is called meter, which is not to be confused with rhythm. Susanne Woods explains the difference this way:

Meter, I claim, is derived from pairs (occasionally triads) of syllables, and depends on one syllable being relatively more stressed than the other (or others)...Rhythm, on the other hand, is the movement of a whole line of actual language which embodies the abstract scheme we call meter. ("Real Meter" 287)

Meter, then, is the abstraction, the pattern established over time and used by poets, a kind of scaffold on which syllables and lines are constructed. Rhythm, however, is the physical realization of the abstraction. While only one syllable in a foot can receive primary stress, it need not be a heavily stressed syllable in speech; it must only carry more stress than the other syllable(s) in the foot. Conversely, both syllables can carry a great deal of stress in speech, but one of them will carry more stress than the other.

So the traditional symbols ("x" and "/") are used to register the "binary abstraction of meter" (Woods, "Real English" 287). The realization of the abstraction is registered by numerical values ranging from 1 to 4, 1 representing least stress and 4 representing greatest stress.¹ Consider the scansion and numerical values of the following line:

¹ In her seminal study, *Natural Emphasis*, Susanne reverses the numbers, making 1=greatest stress and 4=least stress. I have followed Timothy Steele's order in this study, which he advocated in *All the Fun's in How You Say a Thing: An Explanation of Meter and Versification*. He gives an abbreviated version of four-level stress theory in "Staunch Meter, Great Song" in *Meter in English: A Critical Engagement*.

1 2 3 4 1 4 1 4 1 4
 x / x / x / x / x /
 But, in | long jour|neys, cloth,| and lea|ther use.

(John Donne, "Elegie II, The Anagram" 34)

While the line is written in iambic pentameter, two feet in the first line deviate from the standard iamb (with a 1-4 rhythm), but the deviation is not a substitution. That is, the iamb is not replaced by a trochee or a triple foot. Rather, the speech stresses in the first two iambs do not match the stress values in the last three feet, which are perfect iambs. A traditional prosodist would call the first foot a pyrrhic foot and the second a spondee. But as one syllable in the foot must take on more stress than the other, the only proper scansion is an iamb. The numerical values represent the relative heaviness or lightness of a foot. The first foot is composed of two lightly stressed syllables, the second of which receives slightly more stress than the other; and the second foot is composed of two heavily stressed syllables, the second of which receives more stress than the first. This 1-2-3-4 progression is common in English poetry. The light foot-heavy foot combination can also appear as a 2-1-3-4 progression as in the following example from D.G. Rossetti's *The House of Life*:

2 1 3 4 2 4 2 1 3 4
 / x x / x / / x x /
 Of the | deep stair | thou tread'st | to the | dim shoal

(Sonnet III, 11)

The second and fourth feet would best be described as light or weak trochees (a 2-1 progression).

I have given only the briefest outline of the four-level stress approach. Throughout the next three chapters, I explain the theory more fully, as well as introducing triple rhythms and their numerical progression.

CHAPTER 1
"AMBITIOUS METRES, SOUND AND SWEET"
MEREDITH'S EARLY POEMS

I.

Most reviewers of Meredith's first collection *Poems* (1851)—what he would later refer to as his "boy's book"—were concerned with the young poet's use of poetic form (*L*, i.110). And while meter does not often enter the discussion (In some cases, the critic only allows for a few sentences on Meredith's meters.), what is said on the subject is invaluable for understanding what Meredith's contemporaries must have thought about the volume's versification. Usually, what the critics had to say about the meter was not positive. An anonymous reviewer for the *Leader* finds a handful of the poems "musical with emotion"; though "[T]he versification of these poems is frequently careless and unmusical to a degree that nothing can excuse" (27). Presumably, he is referring to the collection as a whole, as he does not specify which poems fail on a formal level. J. A. Heraud, a critic for the *Athenaeum*, points out Meredith's "want of mastery," which is undoubtedly a reference to style. He also complains that "we meet at times with stanzas that are quite prosaic in feeling and diction" (31). "Prosaic" is a problematic word in this context because of the ambiguity it creates. Is Heraud complaining that the verse is mundane, or does he use "prosaic" here to mean prose-like, that is unmetrical? The latter seems more likely, because Heraud does not refer to "poems," but rather "stanzas." Also, he uses the word "diction," definitions of which include 1. syntax 2. word choice 3. and versification. Given the context of the word, "diction" must in part at least refer to versification. Unfortunately, Heraud does not give a specific

example of Meredith's prosaic meter; thus, we cannot get a clear sense of how the volume fails in Heraud's estimate.

Of all the critics who reviewed the collection, only Charles Kingsley and William Michael Rossetti discuss in any detail Meredith's metrical art. Writing for *Fraser's Magazine*, Kingsley thought the poems were "all genuine, all melodiously conceived, if not always melodiously executed" and that "...now and then form, as well as matter, is nearly perfect" (36). For a first volume such observations are high praise, but Kingsley also had concerns about Meredith's metric. He refers to the meter of one section of "Pastorals" as "[c]areless as hexameter, but honest landscape-painting" (36). Kingsley's most critical remarks on Meredith's meters are significant for at least one reason: not only does the following passage reveal Kingsley's own ideas on meter, but it may also represent a more popular view of the uses of poetic form.

concerning certain ambitious metres, sound and sweet, but not thoroughly worked out, as they should have been. Mr. Meredith must always keep in mind that the species of poetry which he has chosen is one which admits of nothing less than perfection. We may excuse the roughness of Mrs. Browning's utterance, for the sake of the grandeur and earnestness of her purpose; she may be reasonably supposed to have been more engrossed with the matter than with the manner. But it is not so with the idyllist and lyrist. He is not driven to speak by a prophetic impulse; he sings of pure will, and therefore he must sing perfectly, and take a hint from that microcosm, the hunting-field; wherein if the hounds are running hard, it is no shame to any man to smash a gate instead of clearing it, and jump into a brook instead of over it. Forward he must get, by fair means if possible, if not, by foul. But if, like the idyllist, any gentleman "larks" his horse over supererogatory leaps at the coverside, he is not allowed to knock all four hoofs against the top bar; but public opinion (who, donkey as she is, is a very shrewd old donkey, nevertheless, and clearly understands the difference between thistles and barley) requires him to 'come up in good form, measure his distance exactly, take off neatly, clear it cleverly, and *come well into the next field*'.... And even so should idyllists with their metres. (38)

Here, Kingsley separates poets into two camps, the prophets and the lyricists (what he calls "idyllists" and "lyrists"). Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whom Kingsley offers as an example of the first type, "may be

reasonably supposed to have been more engrossed with the matter than with the manner." In other words, a poet concerned with serious matters must focus more on the content than the form, as the composition of the message is more important than the medium. In a prophetic or vatic poem, it is the moral or spiritual content, not the meter, which counts. As a result, such poets can be forgiven for their formal incongruities. A lyricist, on the other hand, is not granted such leeway. He "is not driven to speak by a prophetic impulse"; that is, his work is not inspired, but intentionally crafted. His poems are the product of "pure will," meaning that "he must sing perfectly." Unlike the prophetic poet who is swept up in a kind of divine vision, the lyricist chooses to write, decides what the subject and theme of the poems will be. He controls the content of the piece, which lacks the "grandeur and earnestness" of vatic poetry. As his poems deal with more trivial material, his meter must be "nothing less than perfection." Kingsley develops here a simple theory: prophetic poems are not to be judged by their flaws in versification. Conversely, non-vatic poems must achieve metrical perfection or they are marred significantly.

To clarify his position on the lyricist's handling of meter, Kingsley offers an analogy, "that microcosm, the hunting-field." The first class of poet he compares to the rider whose "hounds are running hard." In such a case, "it is no shame to any man to smash a gate instead of clearing it, and jump into a brook instead of over it," because "[f]orward he must get, by fair means if possible, if not, by foul." The first scenario is analogous to the lack of control a vatic poet has over her/his own work. If the meter is "foul," she/he is not to blame, carried along by the vision, not by the will. The rider who "'larks' his horse over supererogatory leaps at the coverside" represents the second class of poet, the lyricist/idyllist. Unlike the first rider, "he is not allowed to knock all four hoofs against the top bar,"

because he is not controlled by the hounds but rather sets his own pace and, therefore, can be expected to clear obstacles with precision. By using the word "lark," Kingsley suggests the lyricist is prone to laziness or sloppiness. "Allowed" is also important, particularly as it relates to Kingsley's comments about the common readership. Although he does not always trust "public opinion," which he refers to as a "donkey," he does praise it for "require[ing] [the lyricist] to 'come up in good form, measure his distance exactly, take off neatly, clear it cleverly, and *come well into the next field*'" (Kingsley's emphasis). Such a poet must meet the demands of the public, not a higher purpose/power. Judging by Kingsley's comments, Meredith did not live up to the standards of popular taste.

William Michael Rossetti, like Kingsley, had mixed feelings about Meredith's book. In praise of the volume, Rossetti wrote, "[i]n his best moments [Meredith] seems to sing, because it comes naturally to him" (33). Most of Rossetti's concerns with the collection are related to Meredith's versification:

He has a good ear for melody, and a considerable command of rhythm; but he seems sometimes to hanker unduly after novelty of metre, attaining it, if there be no other means to his hand, by some change in length or interruption of rhyme which has a dragging and inconsequent effect.
(34)

Rossetti does not think that Meredith is an incompetent versifier. On the contrary, the young poet has "a good ear for melody, and a considerable command of rhythm." If Meredith is skilled in metrical composition, then what complaint can Rossetti have about his poems? Rossetti contends that Meredith's formal "ambition" (Kingsley's word) and his "hanker[ing] unduly after novelty of metre" that are the major flaws of *Poems*. Meredith will achieve such "novelty" at any cost, even by means as drastic as "some change in length or interruption of rhyme which has a dragging and inconsequent effect." Rossetti demands a metrical consistency that these poems do not

offer; instead of preserving the integrity of the stanza, he will upset the reader's expectations by not placing a rhyme where it should be. He claims that such experiments in Meredith's hands have "a dragging and inconsequent effect." What Rossetti means by "dragging" is hard to say; perhaps he means simply that the poem slows down or decelerates as a result of the change, that the voice falters in the reading of such an imbalance. "Inconsequent effect" is clear enough, however; the formal alterations in the poems do not have any effect on their meaning. Certainly, the Victorians (like most readers today who are sensitive to the workings of sound) thought meter and rhyme should be used to affect the content, be it by mimicking the action described in the lines or by emphasizing particular words (often the function of rhyme) and their relation to the theme of the poem. According to Rossetti form in Meredith's poems has no relation whatsoever to content, either mimetically or thematically. Thus these prosodic experiments are an end unto themselves, a bit too *l'art pour l'art* for British tastes. Like Heraud, Rossetti gives no examples of Meredith's metrical failures, or what we might call his prosodic experiments.

Both Rossetti and Kingsley are concerned with the failures brought about by Meredith's "novelty of metre," an experimental desire that tends to produce roughshod poems, not vatic tours-de-force. In this chapter, I will consider Meredith's "ambitious metres" in a few of the more experimental pieces in *Poems*, in order to trace his successes and failures. While I will discuss several poems here, the most extensive treatment will be reserved for only a few poems, "South-West Wind in the Woodlands" chief among them.

II.

To read Kingsley's and Rossetti's reviews of *Poems* without having read the volume gives the impression that the book is all experimentation, novelty, and ambition. Nothing could be further from the truth. The opening

poem, "The Olive Branch," is conventional in its meter and stanzaic structure:

```

    x /   x /       x /   x /
The ve|ssel took | the lau|ghing tides;
           1 2
x /   x / x /   x /
It was | a joy|ous re|velry
           1 2
    x /   x /   x /   x /
To see | her dash|ing from | her sides
           3 4 1 2
    x /   x /   x /   x /
The rough, | salt kiss|es of | the sea. (9-12)

```

The stanza is not doggedly regular; in order to avoid monotony, Meredith uses three light iambs ("velry," "ing from," and "es of") and one heavy iamb ("salt kiss). Such modulations slow down and speed up the lines by turns, an effect that does not allow for an isochronous reading. But such substitutions are nothing new; only the final foot of line 10 ("velry") causes any real discomfort, in that the reader must place a small degree of stress on a syllable that would carry no speech stress. We might expect to find the other modulations in poetry not only from the Victorian period but from any era whose poets rely on both syllables and stresses. The second and third feet of line 12, for example, are a common combination in English accentual-syllabic verse; traditional metrists would argue that these two feet are a spondee (//) followed by a pyrrhic foot (xx). The reverse of this light-heavy foot combination is also popular, what traditional metrists would refer to as a double iamb (a pyrrhic foot followed by a spondee). Though the meter here is not monotonous, it is not innovative either.

The rhyme in these lines is highly regular, a standard *abab* rhyme scheme, which follows the long measure stanza so common in hymns; "tides" and "sides," like the other rhymes, are perfect rhymes. In fact, the only interesting moment in these lines with regard to rhyme is the combination "revelry"-"sea." The difference in degree of stress in the last syllable of

line 10 ("ry") and the final syllable of line 12 ("sea") produces a formal imbalance. But as with the meter, such a strategy is not unusual in traditional poetry. This stanza is the most formally interesting of any quatrain in the poem. Most of the poem stays close to perfect rhyme and most of the meter is unmodulated or modulated within standard parameters. Words like "revelry" are not common in the poem, so such instances of interesting metrical expression are at a minimum. In other words, the reader knows what to expect after reading the first few quatrains of the poem. There are other such examples of standard verse practice in the volume. "The Sleeping City," "Daphne," and "London by Lamplight" follow closely the conventions of traditional verse. Doubtless, Kingsley and Rossetti did not have these poems in mind when they criticized Meredith's metrical practice, as such poems are not deviations from the formal tradition.

Poems as regular as "The Olive Branch" make up only a small portion of the volume. Meredith appears to have preferred more innovative and unusual forms to those praised by his reviewers. Many of the poems are composed of stanzas of Meredith's own making. Consider the brief two-stanza "Violets":

Violets, shy violets!
How many hearts with you compare!
Who hide themselves in thickest green,
And thence unseen
Ravish the enraptured air
With sweetness, dewy fresh and rare!

Violets, shy violets!
Human hearts to me shall be
Viewless violets in the grass,
And as I pass,
Odours and sweet imagery
Will wait on mine and gladden me!

Traditionally, poets indent lines of verse for two reasons. First, they are drawing attention to lines that rhyme with one another. Tennyson's *In Memoriam* stanza is such a case:

Our little systems have their day;
They have their day and cease to be:

They are but broken lights of thee,
And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

(Prologue, 17-20)

Line 17 rhymes with line 20 and line 18 with line 19. In order to make the scheme immediately obvious, Tennyson indents the bracketed rhymes, not the bracketing rhymes. Second, the poet may indent the line in order to draw attention to its meter and to indicate what other lines are composed in the same meter. Caroline Norton in *Voice from the Factories* uses the Spenserian stanza, in which she sets off the final line in order to indicate the difference in meter from the rest of the poem:

When fallen man from Paradise was driven
Forth to a world of labour, death, and care,
Still, of his native Eden, bounteous Heaven
Resolved one brief memorial to spare,
And gave his offspring an imperfect share
Of that lost happiness, amid decay;
Making their first *approach* to life seem fair,
And giving, for the Eden past away,
CHILDHOOD, the weary life's long happy holiday.

(I.1-9, Norton's emphasis)

Lines 1-8 are written in iambic pentameter, none of which is indented. Line 9 is, however, iambic hexameter, and therefore it is set closer to the left margin than the other eight lines. Norton, like Edmund Spenser, is not concerned with indicating the rhyme scheme; otherwise, the beginning of the final two lines of the stanza would be set flush with one another, as they form a rhyming couplet. Likewise, the even numbered lines would be indented to reveal the *ababbcbc* scheme of the first eight lines.

Meredith's stanza does not so easily fit into either of these categories. If we read the indentations as metrical cues, then we are likely to find that lines 2, 5, and 6 in the first stanza and lines 8, 11, and 12 in the second are written in the same meter because they are indented the same number of spaces from the left-hand margin. Of course, these lines do share a common meter, iambic tetrameter. If we are to read the indentations as an

indicator of rhyme, we would expect to find that these same lines rhyme with one another, which they do ("compare," "air," and "rare" in the first stanza and "be," "imagery," and "me" in the second). So it is possible that the indentations in these lines are designed to point to both rhyme and meter, though there is no way to be certain. In another, simpler poem, we might look to the remaining lines to see what patterns emerge, patterns that may aid in solving the problem posed by the prosodically indeterminate lines. "Violets" offers us no such key to unraveling the mystery of the spacing. In fact, the first, third, and fourth lines of each stanza only serve to further muddle any consistent reading of the piece. Line 3 of the first stanza, like lines 2, 5, and 6, is tetrameter, but it is not indented the same number of spaces as the other tetrameter lines. This format would suggest that the indentations are used to indicate rhyme scheme. But if such were the case, then the following line would be flush with line 3 as I have written below:

Who hide themselves in thickest green,
And thence unseen

Instead, line 4 is indented further to the right than the previous line, which suggests that meter is the driving force behind the spacing. If so, then why is the first line of each stanza flush with the left margin, when it scans perfectly as headless iambic tetrameter?

4 1 2 3 4 1 2
v / x / x / x /
Vi|olets,| shy vi|olets!

The final word of the first line ("violets") has no rhyme, which may be why it is the only line flush with the margin, except for line 7, which is line 1 repeated as a refrain, unusual in its placement at the beginning of each stanza (Usually refrains round out stanzas and give a sense of closure to a unit of thought). No absolute answer suggests itself in this piece as to which procedure Meredith is using, either indentation as index of rhyme or

meter. Such indeterminacy becomes a kind of formal theme not simply in *Poems* but in the rest of Meredith's poetic canon as well.

But does the form of "Violets" have any expressive or mimetic dimension, or does it have only an "inconsequent effect"? George T. Wright, in his essay, "Donne's Sculpted Stanzas," has dealt with John Donne's use of stanzaic forms similar to Meredith's. Donne's sculpted stanzas "interweave pentameter lines with iambic lines of other lengths to form stanzas of complex design" (123). According to Wright,

Donne used the stanzas of mixed line-lengths to combine feelings of very different sorts into poems of remarkably complex, often mercurial, tone. These different feelings proceed from the lines' different structures and the different relations between phrase and line that those structures entail. (124)

Unlike Donne, Meredith does not appear to use his sculpted stanzas to "combine feelings of very different sorts," at least not in "Violets." Certainly, his use of indentations is "mercurial" enough, but he does not tie them to the content of the poem in any meaningful way. The most that can be said for the versification is that it illustrates Meredith's ear for meter. Unfortunately, he also proves that in this poem his ear is too regular. There are only a few modulations and no metrical substitutions (Trochees are conspicuously absent in the poem.). One of the modulations we have scanned already, the first line of the poem. The stress value progression 4-1-2-3-4-1-2 is not monotonous, to be sure, but it has little effect on how we experience the content of the line. On the contrary, the third foot ("shy vi") does not correspond to the shyness of the violets, as the foot is a heavy one, what traditional metrists would call a spondee. Both syllables are pronounced slowly and with emphasis, possibly by increasing the volume of the voice. Shyness would best be represented by a light foot, or a pyrrhic foot, which is read quickly and with little stress, therefore giving the impression of shyness and of silence.

There are moments at which regular stresses are absent, moments in which we would expect them. Two examples illustrate this point well:

4 1 2 1 4 1 4
 √ / x / x / x /
 Ra|vish the | enrap|tured air (5)

4 1 2 3 4 1 2
 √ / x / x / x /
 O|dours and | sweet i|magery (11)

In the first instance, the second syllable of the second foot takes more stress than the first syllable. This is unusual because articles, definite and indefinite, almost never take any stress, not even relative stress. The tendency is to shift the stress to the other syllable in the foot to avoid a stilted performance. Even prepositions and conjunctions, which also take very little speech stress receive more metrical stress than articles:

2 1 3 4 1 4 3 4
 / x x / x- / x /
To the | Carthu|sians' world-|famed home²

(Arnold, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse," 30)

2 1 3 4 4 2 1 4
 / x x / / x x /
And the | moth-hour |went from | the fields

(Yeats, "The Ballad of Father Gilligan," 15)

In the first foot of each line is a trochaic inversion brought about by a definite article in the second syllable. In any other foot, the conjunction (in this case, "and) and the preposition ("to) would be metrically unstressed. Consider the fourth line of the Yeats poem, for example. "From" is relatively weaker than "went," hence the trochaic substitution. If we were to read these lines with the stress on the article, meter would fail due

² The symbol x- represents two compressed syllables, that is two syllables that are meant to read as one syllable. In this case, "Carthusians" is compressed to three syllables. Though there are several specific terms to describe different types of elision (syncope, synaeresis, and synaphoela), I will use the term "elision" and will recognize two types of elision, internal elision (elision that occurs within a word) and external elision (elision that occurs between words). "Carthusians" is an example of internal elision.

to a break in the speech rhythm. Such a reading would do violence to the line and the poem. Usually poets are careful enough about word order that we are not put into the awkward position of performing a forced scansion. Unfortunately, Meredith does not exercise the same consideration; instead, the reader must place unwanted stress on the article, marring the line and the poem. The only excuse for causing such violence is the poet's desire to affect how we experience a certain phrase, perhaps to influence how we read the content, or to echo or mimic some action in the text. There does not appear to be that kind of intricate design at work in Meredith's line. About the only way to salvage the foot is to interpret the "the" as a performance of ravishment, but in the context of the line, the metrical violation outstrips the innocence of the "many hearts" that "Ravish the enraptured air." The metrically stressed article exaggerates an innocuous event, transforming it into sexual aggression or rape.

Line 11 of "Violets" also reveals Meredith's injudicious use of metrical variation. The last two syllables of the line ("magery") constitute a light foot, which is a perfectly fine modulation.³ Such a substitution of a light foot for a standard iambic foot is not uncommon, especially at the end of a line.⁴ In such cases, the weak foot is frequently a part of a polysyllabic word that spans over more than one foot, as we see in this line as well as in line 10 of "The Olive Branch" discussed earlier ("re|velry"). Meredith has not flubbed the meter here; in fact, he shows how subtle his

³ In this study, "modulation" and "variation" are used interchangeably to avoid terminological monotony. Substitution is not used synonymously with these terms, as it refers to substituting one foot for another, a trochee for an iamb, for example. Variation/modulation refers to the performance of the meter, to the degree of stress of each syllable. The numbers above the scansion marks represent the modulation of the syllables.

⁴ Also used interchangeably are "weak foot" and "light foot" as well as "strong foot" and "heavy foot." Though it would be more convenient to simply label these pyrrhic feet and spondees, it would be inadequate, as the four-level stress system flatly denies the possibility of spondees or pyrrhics.

meters can be. But the weak foot in question is a problem when we consider its context; it does not appear to support the sense of the line, but metrical feet need not always perform a semantic function. Because of the variation, the line attains an interesting balance.

4 1 2 3 4 1 2
 v / x / x / x /
 O|dours and | sweet i|magery

The line, because of its stress value progression, pivots on the middle syllable, "sweet." (Normally, traditional metrical lines do not have a middle syllable, but line 11 is headless.) On either side of "sweet" is a 4-1-2 progression. Such sonic balance is a sign of Meredith's early metrical virtuosity.

The problem with this foot, then, is not an aesthetic one. The foot fails because it undercuts meaning and undermines the sense of the line. Meredith goes on to use the same technique in much of his mature verse, but in those cases the sabotage of content is a necessary component of the poem. "Violets" is, however, a straightforward poem. Therefore, the metrical variation and substitution should perform only two functions: to support meaning or to break the monotony of the line. The last foot of line 11 undermines the sense by weakening the concept of "imagery" and the speaker's relationship to the landscape. The light foot suggests the impotence of the sensual aspect of the poem, a reading the content does not support. The foot undermines the relationship between the scene and the speaker as well. The last syllable of line 11 is far weaker than "me" in line 12. That these words rhyme suggests that the speaker is connected to the landscape, but the difference in stress values serves to mar the relationship. The last syllable of "imagery" would receive no speech stress in everyday conversation. "Me," on the other hand, can be either stressed or unstressed in everyday speech. In a metrically stressed position, "me" becomes a fairly

strong syllable, particularly if the preceding syllable is weak, as is the case with the syllable before "me" ("en"). The final syllable of "imagery" only receives stress because of the meter. The speaker, while important, should not be the center of the poem; rather, the content of the poem suggests a reciprocal relationship between the violets, which are a metaphor for the human heart, and the speaker. The meter undermines this moment of mutual and equal affection by elevating the speaker above all other human hearts, which is representative of the human species.

John Donne, who must have influenced Meredith's early formal choices, uses a weak foot at the end of a line in a way that supports the sense of the piece.

```

3 2
2 1
/ x
2 3
1 2      3 4      2 4
x /      x /      x /
I am | two fooles, | I know,
1 4 1 2      1 4 1 4
x / x /      x / x /
For lo|ving, and | for say|ing so
1 4 1 4 1 2
x / x / x /
In whi|ning Po|etry;

```

("The Triple Foole," 1-3)

There are a few points of interest here. The indeterminate first foot of line 1 may be read as either a trochee or an iamb and each scansion may be given different speech values. The substitution/non-substitution and the modulation depend on how we interpret the speaker's words. If the foot is an iamb, it seems reasonable to read it as a 1-2 modulation (a weak foot) as it is followed by a strong foot (3-4); this progressive modulation 1-2-3-4 is common in poetry. Deemphasizing "I" and "am" gives the words "two fooles" more prominence than they would have if we were to read the foot as a 2-3 modulation. Likewise, the trochee would draw some attention away from the

first foot by interrupting the expectation of an iambic rhythm. Even though this is the first line of the poem, a reader would expect the poem to be written in an iambic meter, as most metrical poems are built on an iambic base.

A consideration of the last foot in line 3 may clarify the first foot of the poem. The last foot of line 3 is, like Meredith's "i|magery," a light foot. Unlike Meredith, however, Donne's use of the foot is appropriate to the meaning. The foot is the last two syllables of "Poetry," a word that is significant enough to be the only capitalized content word in the passage. The last two syllables of the word do not receive speech stress; without the metrical stress on the final syllable, the word and the line would fall off completely. The weak ending is appropriate to the sense because Donne is not denigrating poetry in general, but "whining Poetry." So the weak iamb mimics the whining of the poetry and of the poet as well. "Violets" becomes a poem about a self-absorbed speaker, even though the content gives us no reason to think of him as egocentric. The chasm between the meter and the meaning weakens the poem, revealing the inexperience of a young poet. Donne, on the other hand, develops a poem whose meter dramatizes the failure of "whining Poetry." The final foot of line 3 aids us in understanding the first foot of the poem. The speaker is concerned with his own foolishness, which suggests that "I" should receive the metrical stress. That the foot is indeterminate until we reach the end of line 3 may be read as proof of the poet-speaker's foolishness and his metrical incompetence. The speaker poet should not, however, be confused with Donne the flesh-and-blood poet. While the "I am" points to the speaker's own faults as versifier, it evidences the real poet's "remarkably complex" metrical style (Wright, "Donne's" 124).

III.

To read "Violets" as somehow typical of *Poems* is only accurate to a point. Most of the poems in the volume do not connect sound and sense in any significant way; in that regard, "Violets" is a fair representation of the book. On the other hand, there are a handful of poems that are not only highly experimental, but whose sound is inextricably linked to the sense. These few poems show interesting use of stanzaic/strophic organization, rhyme, and meter.⁵ Among the more experimental poems, we will examine here, "The Death of Winter."

"The Death of Winter" is one in a long line of poems celebrating the end of winter and the coming of spring. The first strophe of the poem describes the coming of spring and the villagers' festivities; the second describes the winter's demise; and the third is the poet's address to the dying season. Like Donne's sculptured poems, each strophe in "The Death of Winter" is built differently than the others. The first strophe begins with a traditional ballad stanza:

				2	4		3	4
x	/	x	/	x	/	x	/	
When A pril with	her	wild	blue eye					
3	4	1	1	4				
x	/	x	/	x	/	x	/	
<u>Comes dan cing o ver the grass,</u>								
x	/	x	/	x	/	x	/	
And all	the crim	son birds	so shy					
x	/	x	/	x	/			
Peep out	to see	her pass;						

(1-4)

The *abab* rhyme scheme is not unusual for literary and even some popular ballads, though most popular ballads employ an *abcb* scheme. The rhymes are unremarkable, much like those of a popular ballad. The meter, while not

⁵ For the purposes of this study, "stanza" and "strophe" are not interchangeable, as they so often are in prosodic studies, textbooks, and anthologies. I will follow William Harmon and C. Hugh Holman's distinction between the two terms: "stanza is limited to units that are regular, rhymed, and recurrent; other subdivisions are called STROPHES" (494, emphasis in original).

innovative, is expressive of the content. The meter in line 2 mimics April's dance through the bucolic landscape. The heavy first foot ("Comes danc") aurally depicts April's deliberate movement through the countryside, while the anapest ("ver the grass) at the end of the line—the first anapest in the poem—imitates her light step as well as the tripping rhythm of the dance. The repetition of the "s" sound in "Comes," "dancing," and "grass" connects the personification of spring as well as her kinetic and circadian rhythms with the landscape (Nature). The "r" sounds in "grass" and "overr" in line 2 and "crimson" and "birds" echo the "r" in "April," another way of illustrating the landscape's dependence on spring for its rejuvenation; April is the first instance of the "r" in the stanza and the poem, as spring is the source of rebirth.

The three consecutive heavily stressed syllables at the end of line 3 ("wild blue eye") may not have the same mimetic function as these metrical and sonic peculiarities, but they do perform a purpose: rather than referring to the scene, the heavy syllables reenact popular balladry's move toward the accentual and away from the accentual-syllabic. Most street ballads in Victorian London, for example, did not rely wholly on strict iambic tetrameter and trimeter, but would use one of two strategies. First, the balladeer would place so many unstressed syllables between stressed syllables that any standard scansion would be impossible. Sometimes four or more consecutive unstressed syllables separate two stresses. The ear can recognize no more than three syllables as a foot, which is why all the legitimate feet in English meter are three or fewer syllables. Therefore, when more than three unstressed syllables intervene between two stressed syllables, the listener will hear purely accentual verse, which is not concerned with unstressed syllables. Second, popular ballad poets would sometimes eliminate unstressed syllables and place two stressed syllables

next to each other. Two of the four syllables of a tetrameter line may be adjacent to one another; in such a case, these combinations would not count as spondees but as independent monosyllabic feet. This particular strategy was not as common as the use of extra unstressed syllables, but it was used from time to time in popular balladry during Meredith's time and before. Hopkins would later borrow both of these methods from popular balladry and nursery rhymes, calling the meter sprung rhythm. Of course, Meredith's stanza is, like most other literary balladry, written in accentual-syllabic meter, but the heavy stresses as well as the anapest in line 2 are a tip of the hat to a tradition that Meredith the young poet and Meredith the seasoned poet both embraced and challenged. Meredith often refers to the metrical tradition in his later poetry in the form of puns, a point to which we will return later.

While they serve as an example of Meredith's developing metric, these opening lines are hardly original in form, but are an homage to the ballad tradition. After this quatrain, however, the poem departs from the repertoire of accepted stanzaic forms in favor of new forms which Meredith created specifically for "The Death of Winter." Before the shift from the ballad stanza to the more innovative material, two lines of ballad meter (tetrameter and trimeter) intervene:

x / x x / x x / x x /
 As light|ly she loo|sens her sho|wery locks
 x / x x / x /
 And flut|ters her rai|ny wings;

(5-6)

All but three feet are anapestic; in fact there are more anapests in line 6 than in the first four lines of the poem (only one occurrence of the anapest in the first four lines). Because there are more anapests than iambs, it would be difficult to make a claim for the iambic nature of these lines. Are they, then, to be read as anapestic, or do we perceive the meter as accentual

with several intervening unstressed syllables? A reader may be inclined to hear the lines as accentual, because the meter is so loose compared to the strict iambic meter of lines 1-4. The iambic nature of the lines is difficult to establish, as no two consecutive iambs—that is, the iambs are separated by anapests. If only two iambs were adjacent to one another, an auditor would likely hear the lines as iambic, so strong is the expectation of iambic meter as the base meter in English poetry.

Such a metrical shift from iambic to anapestic/accentual meter may be said to have at least three functions, none of which is mutually exclusive from the others. First, the anapestic/accentual meter may be a continuation of the backward glance at and a show of respect for the ballad tradition begun in lines 1-4. These lines are not only a continuation of formal reflection, but are an intensification, an erasure of the iambic foot in popular balladry. Second, the meter is mimetic in that the loosening of the meter is a reference to April, who “loosens her showery locks.” The anapest in line 6 also is a representation of her fluttering wings; the unstressed syllables in the anapest are read quickly and, therefore, produce the effect of quickly moving wings. Third, the drastic metrical shift may be a means of transition from a standard meter and a standard stanzaic form to a more experimental and original strophic form. The shift to the innovative work is marked by an indented stanza. Because it is difficult to see the effect of the indentation without a frame of reference, I will quote again lines 5-6 as well as several lines following.

As lightly she loosens her showery locks
And flutters her rainy wings;
Laughingly stoops
To the glass of the stream,
And loosens and loops
Her hair by the gleam,
While all the young villagers blithe as the flocks
Go frolicking round in rings;—
Then Winter, he who tamed the fly,
Turns on his back and prepares to die,

For he cannot live longer under the sky. (5-15)

The shift from the ballad form to the rest of the strophe is startling but not entirely unexpected. Lines 7-10 are startling because they are indented farther to the right than any other lines in the text. A cursory glance at the poem, without any attention to the words at all, reveals a strange text-scape, which results in large part from the extreme indentation of these lines. Yet somehow these lines are expected and not in the least bizarre because they look like a ballad stanza, at least at a glance. Except for the shortness of the lines and the indentation, lines 7-10 look much like lines 1-6 and allow for the comfort that tradition brings. So the reader is both bewildered and disarmed by the stanza. Reading the lines, however, we soon realize that metrically they share little in common with the previous lines, except for perhaps the rhyme scheme (*abab*):

```

    /  x    x  /
    Laughing|ly stoops
      x  x  /    x    x    /
      To the glass | of the stream,

x    /  x  x  /
And loo|sens and loops
      x  /    x  x  /
      Her hair | by the gleam,
```

Traditionally, the stanza compartmentalizes sense; while it relies on a context for complete comprehension, one can still read the stanza and locate a complete thought, a complete syntactic unit. This quatrain cannot be read in isolation at all because the syntax is incoherent and incomplete on its own. Who "laughingly stoops"? We have no way of knowing what the subject of the stanza is because the subject is absent. By making the stanza incomprehensible without its semantic and metrical content, Meredith challenges the traditional stanzaic structure and function. Here, the stanza is dependent upon what precedes it to the point that nothing can be gleaned from it without looking back to the first line of the poem. Such dependence

is a reminder that this stanza is significant because it is transitional. One would be hard pressed to prove that the stanza serves the function of introducing a new subject. It does pave the way for a description of winter's passing, but it offers no new material. Rather, it is a reiteration of April's movements. In fact, Meredith describes the act of April letting down her hair in lines 9-10 only a few lines after he described the loosening of her hair the first time in lines 5-6. Usually, the introduction of new stanzaic or strophic forms indicates a change in topic or a shift in thought.

The word "transition" may not be accurate enough in describing the dimeter quatrain's role in the larger strophe. "Interrupter" is a more accurate name for this stanza, as it breaks up a ballad stanza, lines 5-6 and 11-12. We are not likely to see the stanza because the dimeter quatrain conceals it. The rhyme scheme and the meter of these separated lines, as well as the formal precedent set by the first four lines of the poem, indicate that that the dimeter lines interrupt the quatrain that brackets it. The first four lines of the poem are a ballad stanza, as we established earlier. Lines 5-6 begin by partially repeating the same pattern of tetrameter-trimeter alternating lines and rhyme alternating *abab*, but the dimeters give the appearance that the ballad stanza will remain incomplete. The ballad stanza resumes, however, after the dimeter lines conclude, resolving the metrical conflict with the meter and rhyme scheme in lines 5-6. Earlier, I suggested that the stanza does not have any mimetic characteristics, repeating information mentioned only a few lines before in a shorter meter. But is the sense of the ballad stanza affected by removing the indented lines? Below are lines 5-6 and 11-12 without the four dimeter lines:

x / x x / x x / x x /
 As light|ly she loos|ens her show|ery locks
 x / x x / x /
 And flut|ters her rain|y wings;

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc}
 & & & & 2 & & \\
 & & & & 1 & 3 & 4 \\
 x & / & & x & x & / & x & x & / & & x & x & / \\
 \text{While all} & | & \text{the young vill} & | & \text{agers blithe} & | & \text{as the flocks} \\
 x & / & x & x & / & & x & / \\
 \text{Go fro} & | & \text{licking round} & | & \text{in rings;} & -
 \end{array}$$

The sense of the lines is not damaged or obscured. As the dimeters repeat the material in lines 5-6, verbatim in one case, they prove unnecessary to communicate content. Even the syntax is unaffected by the omission of the indented lines; of course, the fit is not exact, but a reader familiar with Meredith's poetry would not be surprised to find lines whose grammar loosely approximates spoken English.

The identical formal strategies used in lines 5-6 and 11-12 make the omission of the dimeters not only permissible but also preferable. The perfect rhymes of "locks" and "flocks" and "wings" and "rings" are obvious indicators that these four lines are of a piece. But there are other metrical nuances that can only be heard when the lines are read consecutively without the interrupting dimeter quatrains. We have discussed Meredith's use of anapests in these lines and their mimetic and metrical functions. The anapests in these sets of lines are even more significant when we consider how many anapests are used and where they are placed in the line. Each set of lines has four anapests. Lines 5 and 11 (or the first and third lines of the reconstructed stanza) consist of three anapests, and lines 6 and 12 consist of one. Perhaps even more important is the identical placement of the anapests in these lines. In lines 5 and 11 (the tetrameter lines), the second, third, and fourth feet are iambs. In lines 6 and 12 (the trimeter lines), the second foot is anapestic. Because they are exact, the rhymes of lines 5-11 and 6-12 are obvious in spite of the dimeters. The anapestic parallelism of the lines is only audible, however, if we read them without the interruption of lines 7-10, which technique suggests that Meredith expects, even hopes, that his reader will omit the dimeters in a second or

third reading. In fact, it is possible that Meredith wrote lines 7-10 after completing the ballad stanza which brackets them.

I have said that these lines are extraneous to the content, that they contribute nothing to the sense of the piece. They do not, after all, carry the same mimetic freight as lines 5-6, for example; that is, line 5 uses meter to draw attention to a moment discussed in the line (the loosening of April's hair). The dimeter stanza does not produce localized sonic effects in that way. But the stanza does affect the poem significantly in other ways, even if it does not aurally portray or echo particular moments in the text. First, it establishes a relationship between human beings and the seasons. Lines 11-12 are unique to the poem in that they are the only lines that make any reference to humans in the poem. Interesting about this brief mention is that it is cast in the same meter as the first six lines of the poem, the ballad stanza, yet it is separated from them. The metrical interruption demonstrates human beings' reliance on Spring and their relative insignificance when compared to cosmic and planetary activities. The "young villagers" are described as "blithe as the flocks"; like sheep, they follow Spring the shepherd figure and are subordinate to the season. The ballad stanza links April and the villagers, but by allotting only two lines to the human species, Meredith points to our insignificance in the face of ever-changing Nature. While the villagers are separated from the common measure description of Spring, no such stanzaic barrier exists between the villagers and Winter, which may be a reminder of the inevitability of death, even for the young men and women dancing with spring on the heath. The punctuation at the end of line 12, a semicolon followed by an em-dash, portrays the connection between the villagers/humans and Winter/death.

Meredith could have avoided straining the limits of punctuation by ending line 12 with a period. The lines following line 12 work well as a complete sentence:

Then Winter, he who tamed the fly,
Turns on his back and prepares to die,
For he cannot live longer under the sky. (13-15)

Or Meredith could have divided the lines with only a semicolon in order to indicate a compound sentence. Apparently Meredith wanted the first strophe to be one sentence; a semicolon, then, is a reasonable choice for preserving the syntactic unity of the strophe. But the semicolon-dash combination is conspicuous because it is rare in any text before, during or after the nineteenth century. As to their function, these two marks are at odds with one another. In standard usage, the semicolon is employed to join two complete sentences. The dash, on the other hand, is used to signal a strong appositive; it is often used in poetry to represent a pause in speech, a pause that would be shorter than a period but longer than a comma or semicolon. In such a case, the dash is a metrical marker to aid the reader in heeding the poet's instructions on how to perform the lines. Clearly, the semicolon is used here to connect two complete sentences, and the dash probably represents a pause in speech. Without the semicolon the dash would produce a pause shorter than that of a period-endstopped line; but, as it stands, the combination of semicolon and dash suggests a substantial pause, one equal in length to the pause that follows a period.

What, then, does this bizarre combination have to do with the young villagers and winter? The semicolon may illustrate the close ties between humans and death, the obvious connection the young men and women have with winter. While death is inevitable, even for the young, it is not necessarily in the near or immediate future. The dash, whose pause represents time, is a kind of reprieve from the villagers' eventual fate. That the dash follows

closely on the heels of the semicolon, however, is a reminder that no reprieve from death is permanent.

But this unusual double punctuation need not serve only one purpose. It also reveals a connection between the seasons: winter is the season of death and hibernation, spring the season of rejuvenation and reanimation. These contradictory traits connect the two seasons, a cycle of which both are a part. Like winter, spring will give way to summer, which will give way to autumn, which in turn will yield to winter, and the cycle continues. Yet despite this sense of continuity between and interconnectedness of the seasons, spring and winter are separated by the attributes described above. One is not likely, in a healthy climate, to mistake one for the other. Of course, there is a sense of transition, but Meredith does not register gradual climate change; instead, he presents the triumphant return of spring and the sudden death of winter. So the semicolon connects the two, while the dash defines the boundary between them.

Meredith does not rely wholly on such particular devices to relay the differences between these two personifications or characters. Meter, rhyme, and strophic divisions are also used to establish these differences. The most obvious device employed toward this end is blank space. All but a few lines of the first strophe of "The Death of Winter" are about the coming of spring, while the second strophe is devoted entirely to winter. The spatial break further demonstrates the sharp demarcation between winter and spring. We are likely to read each strophe as a unit of thought, just as we would a read a paragraph. The white space between the first and second strophes does serve the purpose of separating thoughts and indicating a change in aspect, but the white space between strophes 1 and 2 does not only signify a shift in thought; it is also the first formal sign that the speaker—and Meredith for

that matter—views these two characters as having their own individual personalities.

While spatial separation is the most obvious of the formal devices in the poem, rhyme and meter play a more important role and prove to be more complex and sophisticated ways of distinguishing between winter and spring. The rhyme used in most of the first strophe (the first twelve lines) is an alternating scheme (*abab*). The second strophe departs from this initial rhyme scheme using instead an *abacdecfffc* rhyme scheme. Metrically, the second strophe consists of tetrameter and trimeter lines, though they are not as regular as the common meters of the first strophe. Each of these devices (rhyme and meter) is important in its own right, but in order to have a greater sense of how they affect the poem and what roles they play, we must examine each with the other in mind. While it will be necessary from time to time to discuss one or the other individually, a responsible reading will treat meter and rhyme as one unit, meant to be considered as a piece. Rather than representing the rhyme scheme separately from the meter as I have done above, it would be best to represent both rhyme and meter in the following scheme: $aba_4c_3de_4c_3fff_4c_3$.⁶ Though such a representation is useful, it is a shorthand description and, therefore, it does not capture the nuances of the strophe. Because of the inadequacy of the rhyme/metrical scheme above, I will quote the second strophe in full:

/ x / x / x x /
Down the | valleys |glitter|ing green,
 Down from | the *hills* | in sno|wy *rills*,
 He melts | *between* | the bor|der *sheen*
 x / x / x x / (x)
 And leaps | the flo|wery ver|ges!

⁶ The subscript represents the number of feet in the line. For example, $a_4b_3a_4b_3$ is a common measure line composed of alternating rhymes (*abab*) and alternating tetrameter and trimeter (the *a*-rhymes are tetrameter and the *b*-rhymes are trimeter. When there are two or more consecutive lines written in the same meter, the subscript is given only at the last of the consecutive lines. For example, $ababbcbc_5c_6$, or Spenserian stanza, is written in iambic pentameter except for the last line, which is written in iambic hexameter.

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} & & & & 1 & 2 & 4 \\ x & / & x & / & x & / & x & x & / \\ \text{He can|not choose,| but brigh|ten their hues,} \\ x & / & x & x & / & x & / & x & / \\ \text{And tho'| he would creep,| he fain | must leap} \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} & & 2 & 1 & 4 & & 3 & 4 \\ & & x & x & / & & x & / & x & / & (x) \\ \text{For the quick | Spring spi|rit ur|ges.} \\ \vee & / & x & / & x & / & x & / \\ \text{Down | the vale | and down | the dale,} \\ & & & & & & 1 & 2 & 4 \\ x & / & x & / & x & x & / & x & / \\ \text{He leaps | and lights,| till his mo|ments fail,} \\ / & x & x & / & x & / & x & / \\ \text{Buried | in blos|soms, red | and pale,} \\ & & 2 & 1 & 4 & & 3 & 4 \\ & & x & x & / & & x & / & x & / & (x) \\ \text{While the sweet | birds sing | his dir|ges! (16-26)} \end{array}$$

The strophe is unsettled from the outset. The first line (l. 16) is difficult to pin down. How are we to perform the line? The scansion offered here reads the line as three consecutive trochees followed by an iamb. The opening of the next line appears to confirm this scansion; not only does it begin with a trochee, but the foot's first syllable is "Down," the same word that begins line 16. Unlike line 16, though, line 17 is iambic, with the exception of the trochee at the beginning of the line, a substitution common in the first foot of iambic lines since before Wyatt. Line 16 is different, however: its three consecutive trochees disrupt the iambic base of the first strophe as well as our expectations of the meter in the lines that follow. Can one refer to line 16 as iambic when only one of the four feet is iambic? Normally, the base meter dominates the line, not the substitutions. The reading resulting from this scansion is uncomfortable, because of the trochaic nature of the line, despite our sense that the line should be iambic, a sense reinforced by the closing iamb. Nonetheless, the accuracy of the scansion is not in doubt—until we read line 23. Like lines 16 and 17, line 23 begins with "Down," but there is a crucial difference: a count of the

syllables reveals that the line is missing a syllable. That there are only seven syllables in an iambic tetrameter line allows for only one feasible scansion: the line is headless (i.e., the first unstressed syllable is absent). Of course, the line *could* be read as trochaic tetrameter catalectic (the last unstressed syllable of the line is absent),

/ x / x / x / v⁷
Down the | vale and | down the | dale

but there is no good reason to assume the line is anything other than iambic, as the base meter for the rest of the poem is iambic. Given the very different meters of lines 17 and 23, the first line of the second strophe is indeterminate. If Meredith had used "Down" in only one of these lines, that word would serve as a clue in scanning line 16. Instead, we are left with two possible readings, each feasible but neither entirely adequate. This double bind is expressive of winter's precarious position in the newly verdant world. That he is stranded between life and death, between a frozen and a reanimated landscape, presents itself in the first line of the second strophe.

The strophe's many anapests perform an expressive function, representing spring's victory over winter, of life over death. We first encounter anapests in strophe 1, which mimic April's tripping dance and loosely flowing hair. Because these anapests connote spring, all other anapests are echoes of her coming. If we are mindful of these echoes, then we will hear the anapests in strophe 2 as performatives of the coming of spring at winter's expense. Consider, for example, the anapests in lines 21 and 22. The words in the first anapest ("he would creep") deal with winter's desire to leave the scene slowly, but the meter does something quite different. Traditionally, spondees or strong iambs are read more slowly than

⁷ This symbol (v) is used to indicate initial or terminal truncation (headless and catalectic).

other feet; the use of a spondee in line 21 would be appropriate, then, as it aurally represents winter's lethargic movement. Instead Meredith uses an anapest, which must be read quickly. The two unstressed syllables carry little to no weight, drawing attention to the stressed syllable. An anapest is inappropriate here if Meredith wants to convey winter's normal movements. That the speed of the anapests runs counter to the content emphasizes winter's thwarted desire to depart at his own pace. Spring prohibits his wishes and hurries winter on to his demise. The anapest-heavy iamb combination of line 22 ("For the quick Spring spi-") characterizes spring's complex nature. Unlike the triple rhythm in line 21, the anapest in line 22 ("For the quick") is appropriate to April's sudden entrance and frenetic movement. The anapest is also appropriate to the happiness attendant on spring, a point Paul Fussell makes when he states that "triple rhythms...seem inevitably to have something vaguely joyous, comical, light, or superficial about them" (13). The iamb following the anapest is problematic, however, as it expresses a slowness associated not with spring, but with winter. The presence of the anapest, and its performance of spring's sudden conquest, disallows a reading of "Spring spi-" as suggestive of lethargy. Strong feet require more time to read than other feet, and the duration of a strong foot seems to lengthen when preceded by a rushed foot (an anapest, a dactyl, and a weak iamb). Emphasized by the speed of the anapest, then, the drag of "Spring spi-" is a metrical performance of spring's longevity. Also, April reappropriates a foot we would normally associate with winter's creeping quality, suggestive of winter's defeat at the hands of spring. April forces winter to adopt the frenzy of rejuvenation (the anapest in line 21) and claims a foot expressive of winter's slow movements for its own (the heavy foot in line 22). The combination of these prosodic peculiarities points to winter's weakness compared to the relentless encroachment of spring.

Like the anapest, rhyme plays an expressive role in the second strophe; in fact, rhyme's function in strophe 2 is more important than in the first strophe. As most of the sonic effects in strophe 1 are produced within the lines themselves—alliteration, assonance, and consonance—rhyme has no real mimetic quality. The rhymes in the second strophe, on the other hand, are thematically and mimetically charged; that is, they affect how one interprets the poem as well as how one experiences the action of the text. Notice the rhymes in lines 19, 22, and 26 ("verges," "urges," and "dirges"). "Verges" in line 19 is significant because it is a feminine rhyme. The extra syllable is separated from the stressed syllable of the rhyme. As a result, we hear the rhyme as a kind of border crossing, a word that cannot be contained by the trimeter line. As it is the first of the three rhymes, our reading of the other two rhymes is affected by this border crossing, this encroachment. Like "verges," "urges" in line 22 cannot be contained by the six-syllable line; in this case, though, the feminine ending alters the traditional sense of the word to something more aggressive. With the first rhyme in mind ("verges"), the idea of boundary breaking requires that one think of "urges" as an understatement, that spring does not use language to expel winter from the garden, but uses physical force, crossing into winter's domain in the process. Finally, the last rhyme of the three ("dirges") is the result of spring's violent invasion of winter's landscape, a trespass that leads to the latter's death. Though all three rhymes are connected by sound and meaning, the connection between the last two rhymes ("urges" and "dirges") is strengthened by the meters of the lines of which they are a part. Lines 22 and 26 share not only the same meter (trimeter) but the same substitutions and modulations as well:

2	1	4		3	4				
x	x	/		x	/	x	/	(x)	
<u>For the quick</u> <u>Spring spi rit</u> ur ges.									

2 1 4 3 4
 x x / x / x / (x)
While the sweet | birds sing | his dir|ges!

Each line begins with a fast-paced anapest followed by a heavy iamb ending with a standard iamb and a hypermetrical syllable. The reason for this double connection (i.e., meter and rhyme) is to link spring's violent urges and the merciless death of winter. The resonance of these two prosodic forces registers a causality of aggression and submission, of violence and acquiescence.

Of course, the sonic power of the strophe is not confined to end-rhyme and meter. Internal rhyme performs an important thematic and mimetic function. Unlike most cases of internal rhyme, the rhymes in strophe 2 are far from subtle, because they are coupled with rhymes at line's end. There are five such instances of internal-end-rhyme coupling in the strophe: line 17 ("hills" and "rills"), line 18 ("between" and "sheen"), line 20 ("choose" and "hues"), line 21 ("creep" and "leap"), and line 23 ("vale" and "dale"). As to the mimetic effects of the rhymes, there are only a few points of interest. "Creep" and "leap," for example, suggest the slow movement of winter giving way to the accelerated movements of spring. The pairing of the two words is not only an aural realization of opposing forces, but the impossibility of one force ("creep") because of the persistence of the other ("leap").

The other rhymes appear to have no mimetic function. In fact, they are not as well-wrought as the trimeter rhymes. But the rhymes do serve a larger purpose: each internal rhyme falls at the end of the second foot of the line. If a listener were to hear the lines without the benefit of seeing the text, he would probably hear not tetrameters, but dimeters:

/ x x /
 Down from | the *hills*

x / x /
in sno|wy rills, (17)

x / x /
He melts | between

x / x /
the bor|der sheen (18)

x / x /
He can|not choose
x / x x /
but brigh|ten their hues, (20)

x / x x /
And tho'| he would creep,
x / x /
he fain | must leap (21)

v / x /
Down | the vale
x / x /
and down | the dale (23)

The visual unity of the lines is undermined by our aural experience of the text, a reading strengthened by the absence of enjambment between the second and third foot of each line. The pause produced by an internal rhyme may not lead to the stichic disintegration in these lines. It is the combination of internal rhymes and strong caesuras (often without punctuation) that sets sight and sound at odds. The divergence of the two senses is a somatic enactment of winter's disintegration and sudden death (the aural experience of the line) as well as its once dominant position (the visual experience of the line). The choice of rhymes does not matter as much as the strategic placement of those rhymes in the middle and at the end of the line.

If strophes 1 and 2 show something of the character of spring and winter, it is then reasonable to assume that the final strophe reveals the speaker's character and concerns. Their first two strophes are marked by their metrical complexity and their unusual rhymes. In light of such complexity, the final strophe is relatively tame by comparison.

O Winter! I'd live that life of *thine*,
With a frosty brow and an icicle tongue,

And never a song my whole life long,—
Were such delicious burial *mine*!
To die and be buried, and so remain
A wondering brook in April's train,
Fixing my dying eyes for aye
On the dawning brows of maiden *May*.

(27-34, emphasis added)

The speaker takes no risks in his address to Winter or in his final encomium for Spring. The rhyme scheme and meter are straightforward, running abbacdd₄. The strophe employs iambic tetrameter, the dominant meter of the poem, but it does not incorporate the trimeter line found in the previous strophes. Likewise, the rhyme is not at all innovative, for Meredith does little more than combine two traditional rhyme schemes: the brace rhyme or *In Memoriam* stanza (abba) and the rhyming couplet (cc and dd). As to their expressive effects, the rhyme words have limited mimetic and thematic power. The rhyming pairs are not unexpected or surprising, and they do not carry with them the possibility of revelation or epiphany for either the speaker or the auditor. "Aye" and "May" in lines 33 and 34, for example, have no impact on the verse, nor do they echo any internal elements in their respective lines. Though one could argue the anachronistic "aye" pairing with "May" alludes to much medieval love poetry, such an assertion does not redeem the rhyme's lack of expressiveness or originality. Similarly, "thine" and "mine" in lines 27 and 30 are predictable, but, unlike the previous pair, they have some expressive effect, linking as they do the speaker and winter. Unfortunately, the "thine-mine" rhyming pair has been used so often in English poetry, that even the most expressive use of the pair is still likely to seem hackneyed to an experienced reader.

Despite the expressive deficiencies of the rhyme, there are moments in the strophe when meter touches meaning. The anapests used so effectively in the first two sections of "The Death of Winter" recur here in the speaker's apostrophe:

1 2 4
x x /
O Win|ter! I'd live | that life | of thine,
2 1 4 2 1 4
x x / x x /
With a fros|ty brow | and an i|cicle tongue,
1 2 4 3 4
x x / x /
And ne|ver a song | my whole | life long,-
21 4
xx /
Were such | deli|cious bu|rial mine!
1 2 4 1 2 4
x x / x x /
To die | and be bu|ried, and so | remain
2 1 4
x x /
A won|dering brook | in A|pril's train,
4 1
/ x
Fixing | my dy|ing eyes | for aye
2 1 4
x x /
On the daw|ning brows | of mai|den May. (27-34)

Each anapest refers in some way to winter or spring, life or death, with the exception of the first anapest ("ter! I'd live"), which refers to life and death simultaneously. The narrator wants to "live that life of [winter]; the problem with this particular desire is that to live a life of winter is not to live at all, but to embrace stillness and silence and death, a condition the speaker is willing to undergo. Animation vs. stillness is elaborated in line 28, a line that is almost all anapests (there is only one iamb in the line). The motif of stillness is elaborated by the inclusion of frost and ice, the mention of which is isolated entirely to the triple rhythms. The anapest in line 29 is not only a cessation of movement but of song, which is probably a reference not only to music but to poetry as well. The speed of the anapest suggests the sound of a fast-paced, celebratory song which abruptly comes to an end by the strong fourth foot. The anapests in lines 30 ("rial mine") and 31 ("and be buried and so") are linked by their content, the burial of winter in foliage and flowers and the desire of the speaker to be so interred. Not until the last three lines of the strophe does the

speaker discuss movement and animation at any length. The second foot in line 32 ("dering brook") and the first foot in line 34 ("on the daw-") express the constant movement of spring and thus constitute a celebration of life, which ends appropriately enough with an aubade, a subgenre of poetry in praise of sunrise and new beginnings. More interesting than the movement represented in the anapests is the trochee that they frame in line 33 ("fixing"). Meredith's use of this particular word allows a certain ambiguity of meaning; considering the context, "fixing" means to concentrate or to be still in an act of concentration. But on its own, it can also refer to reparation. Of course, both meanings are feasible given the action of the poem. Spring does "fix" or repair the damage winter has done to the landscape, going about the business of thawing and reanimating. The act of reparation also implies movement, which works well with the anapests before and after the trochee. Both deal explicitly with movement, but concentration is significant too. Rather than signifying spring's activities, the trochee's subject is the speaker. "Fixing" in this case implies stillness, not the movement that reparation requires. The speaker, then, is awed by nature, incapable of movement, yet surrounded by motion, which is sonically portrayed by the framing of the trochee by two triple feet.

By using the anapests in a stanza whose rhymes do not properly express the speaker's ecstatic apostrophe, Meredith illustrates the speaker's inherent weakness and insignificance when compared to the natural world and the seasonal cycles, both of which will outlive him. The rhymes are his creation, not spring's, which may explain his inability to animate language in the way spring animates flora and fauna. After all, the anapests appear long before the speaker's address and represent that season and its conquest over death; thus, the only truly expressive metrical work is not the speaker's, but spring's.

"The Death of Winter" is not the only sculpted poem in the collection. "Angelic Love" and "Twilight Music" also rely on varying line lengths as well as a number of metrical nuances for mimetic, thematic, and expressive purposes. "The Death of Winter" is, however, Meredith's most complex exploration of the possibilities of developing and distinguishing personality and character through strophic and metrical innovation. There is at least one poem of note in *Poems* that does not rely on strophic innovation at all but turns expressiveness over to meter entirely.

IV.

In a poetic career that spanned almost sixty years, Meredith defended his use of a particular meter only once. In a letter to Edmund Ollier, who expressed some reservations about Meredith's formal choices in "The South-West Wind in the Woodland," the young poet concedes the poem's weaknesses but explains the necessity of the meter:

What you say about my blank octo-syllabic meter may be true, and is quite just; but the 'S.W. Wind in the Woodlands"—in which I used it—is a subject which, in my opinion, would have been marred by rhyme—Nor could I find any other (better) mode of giving my impression of the reckless rushing rapidity, and sweeping sound of the great wind among the foliage which I felt impelled to do in such manner that the ear should only be conscious of swiftness, and no sweetness; and that there should be no direct pause throughout. This (in my mind) the hurrying measure of the four feet gives. (*L* i.16)

Meredith uses unrhymed tetrameters so that "the ear should only be conscious of swiftness, and no sweetness." Without rhyme, there is one less ordering device, a device often used for the purpose of compartmentalizing and asserting control over sense, a way to smooth out rough-hewn syntax. In the case of "The South-West Wind in the Woodlands," Meredith does not want the reader to experience the beauty or stabilizing force of rhyme, but an aural depiction of the "swiftness" of the violent wind. He also wishes to avoid "direct pause"; while we cannot be sure what he means by "direct" here, it seems reasonable to assume that he is referring to limiting the number of

end-stopped lines in the poem. One method for decreasing the chance of a pause is to avoid rhyme as it gives the reader the impression that the line is self-contained; that Shakespeare and Milton use enjambment more in their blank verse than in their sonnets is no coincidence. Presumably, Meredith wanted to eliminate the pause to further imitate the relentless force of the wind.

In order to assure Ollier that his metrical intentions are not predicated on frivolity and shallow aestheticism, Meredith explains:

Believe me, I venerate English poetry too much to wish to make any innovation on the old majestic metre [either iambic pentameter or hexameter] of Epic, Pastoral, and Drama; I used it for a purpose; for such a purpose I would use it again, but only for such a purpose and under such a plea— (16)

I take his consolation to mean that Meredith cannot condone, in good conscience, innovation for its own sake. A poet should not strive after novelty, but instead use experimental measures only when they are necessary to reinforce the sense. The innovativeness of the piece is evidenced by the oddity of blank verse composed in a meter usually accompanied by rhyme.

Wright puts it this way:

Four-foot iambic lines..., though they constitute a significant resource for poets writing in English, lack the amplitude of the five-foot line and seem as a rule unable to survive the absence of rhyme, a defect which partly limits their power to seem convincingly speechlike. (*Shakespeare's* 5)

Despite the usefulness of the young Meredith's insights into his metrical intentions, he does not supply a more detailed discussion of the poem, leaving only brief observations and justifications of his methods. A more detailed reading of the poem reveals that "The South-West Wind in the Woodland" is the exception to the "rule" Wright correctly establishes; Meredith proves that the rhymeless tetrameter can have the "amplitude" of traditional pentameter blank verse. Of course, the tetrameter alone is not enough to "represent the swift energy of a day brought alive by the southwest

wind" (Kelvin 145). In order to transform the meter usually associated with balladry, hymnody, and light verse, the poet must rely on other devices to strengthen the four-beat line as well as to compensate for the lack of rhyme.

Aside from the absence of rhyme, one of the most conspicuous prosodic features is the sound patterning within and across lines, a tapestry of repeated and interwoven consonants and vowels that not only rivals the sonic features of "The Death of Winter" but surpasses them. The opening of the poem prepares readers not only for the content to come but also the "reckless rushing rapidity" of sound that persists throughout the text:

The silence of preluded song—
Æolian silence charms the woods;
Each tree a harp, whose foliaged strings
Are waiting for the master's touch
To sweep them into storms of joy,
Stands mute and whispers not; (1-6)

The central and most assertive figure is the wind, which Meredith calls the "master." The wind animates the forest, which waits in silence and stillness for his sudden arrival. Appropriately, most of the sounds repeated in this passage are found in "master's"; the "m," "s," "t," and "r" sounds occur several times in the excerpt, but they are found in the same word only twice: in "master's" and "storms." The connection between these two words is a causal one: The storm is the wind's creation. The recurring sounds in the words also suggest that while the storm and the master are not one and the same, the former is an extension of the latter, which is why it contains the same consonants. The storm is not a copy of the wind, illustrated by the change in the sound patterning ("storms" orders the consonants in a "s-t-r-m-s" pattern while "master's" uses a "m-s-t-r-s" pattern), but the two do share a striking family resemblance, a point Meredith cannot make without the recurrent sound patterning found in both words. Of course, there are sound patterns that do not find their origin in "master's"; despite their apparent freedom, however, even these sounds are bound to the wind. Consider, for

example, the words that open with the "w" sound ("waiting" and "whispers"). Both words are linked to the trees in that they describe their motionlessness and silence. While the trees are granted the privilege of being given their own consonantal descriptors, those descriptors remind us that the trees are dependent on the wind for both sound and movement.

Sound patterning becomes more frenetic after the wind has moved into the forest:

And bend their stems, and bow their heads,
And gring, and groan, and lion-like
Roar to the echo-peopled hills
And ravenous wilds, and crake-like cry
With harsh delight and cave-like call
With hollow mouth, and harp-like thrill
With mighty melodies sublime
From clumps of columned pines that wave
A lofty anthem to the sky,
Fit music for a prophet's soul- (79-88)

The first two lines observe a hemistichic balance in terms of sound patterning. Line 79 opens with the movement of the foliage and the bending of the stems. The "b" in "bend" is repeated in the second half of the line in "bow." What is interesting about this particular combination is how "bend" affects the meaning of "bow"; given the context of the line, the trees and stems are bowing as in prayer, performing a submissive posture. But "bend" also introduces a very different possibility—that the "bow" also refers to the stringed weapon. The "b" alliteration connects the two words, and in so doing it, changes or complicates their meaning. Instead of the univocal, one-dimensional meaning of worship and submission, Meredith aurally portrays the bending of a bow and the drawing of the string, capturing a sense of tension before the arrow is loosed. Now "bow" is performing contradictory functions, signifying violence and pacifism/prayer; without the alliteration, the reader understands the line as simply a reference to prayer and reverence. Instead, the dual reading reinforces the suddenness and speed of the wind as well as its pride of place in the natural world. Likewise,

"grind" and "groan" and "lion-like" in line 80 effect a hemistichic balance by placing an alliterative pair ("g") in the first half of the line and another pair ("l") in the other. The pairs are suggestive of a progress from weakness to strength. "Grind" and "groan" do not carry with them positive connotations; by using these words, the speaker is saying that the trees are resistant to change, that the force that propels them is unwelcome. But soon enough, their reservations are transformed into a "lion-like / Roar." According to this reading, the wind is a motivator, inspiring all that he touches, a sort of muse of movement.

In these cases, the sound patterning is intralinear (within the line), but there are a number of interlinear (across lines) patterns as well. Note the "c" alliteration in lines 82-83 ("crake-like cry" and "cave-like call"). "Cave-like call" can be read as an amplification of "crake-like cry": First, Meredith presents a cry similar to that of a small bird, which then grows to a call as vast as a cave. Such growth is not gradual, but rather sudden, a still small voice converted to a cavernous call. Intermingled with and connected to the "c" alliteration is a constellation of consonants beginning with the recurrence of the "h" sound in lines 83-84 ("harsh," "hollow," and "harp-like").

By itself, "harsh" is only a modifier for the "delight" of the "crake-like cry," but in light of its similarities with "harp" it becomes far more complex. It is still a modifier for sound but its field of description has expanded to include simple bird cries, which are used in communication, and music, which goes well beyond communication toward a celebration of the artistry of organized sound in the form of pitches and rhythms, a definition similar to that of prosody. That these words share more than one sound in common is surely significant; in fact, the only sound "harsh" and "harp" do not have in common is the final consonant/phoneme. The phonetic parallelism

points to the possibility that the two words are to be viewed as synonyms for one another; this view that "harsh" and "harp" are equivalent to one another is not only borne out in the sonic patterning of the pair, but in the poem as a whole. One would be hard pressed to say that the sonic and metrical effects of "The South-West Wind" are beautiful in any traditional sense, for the lines are often abrupt and the sound patterning intrusive to a continuous or smooth reading.

The only other "h" sound that occurs between "harsh" and "harp" is "hollow" in line 84, which may be read in different ways. First, it may be a bridge between "harsh" and "harp," a kind of meeting place for the two concepts, which merge in the hollow of the mouth to produce linguistic rhythm—that is, the poem. Second, it may serve as a bridge between the "h" and the "m" clusters. Because "hollow" modifies "mouth," it is by extension connected to those words including the "m" sound. Third, it connects not only itself to the "m" cluster ("mighty" and "melody"), but the words with which it alliterates ("harsh" and "harp"). The effect produced is one of swelling sound; we begin with an instrument (the harp) and end with something much larger, a "mighty music" that fills the woods. Also, the "h" adjective ("harsh") becomes a more positive force in the "m" adjective ("mighty"). The swelling tone of the harp is now strengthened by the realization of the transformation of the music from something out of tune to a chorus of majestic movement.

The words at line's end also perform an important role, even if there is no real rhyme. I say no real rhyme because in these lines there is one rhyming pair which terminate their respective lines—"cry" in line 82 and "sky" in line 87. As is the case with so many of the sound effects discussed to this point, this rhyming pair performs the small-to-large motif so important to the subject of the poem, the swelling of the wind in the trees.

$$\begin{array}{cccc} & & & 1 & 4 \\ x & / & x & / & x & / & x & / \\ \text{Or when} & | & \text{the ou} & | & \text{zel sends} & | & \text{a swift} \\ 3 & & 4 & & & & & \\ x & / & x & / & x & / & x & / \\ \text{Half war} & | & \text{ble, shrin} & | & \text{king back} & | & \text{again} \\ x & / & x & / & x & / & x & / \\ \text{His gol} & | & \text{den bill,} & | & \text{or when} & | & \text{aloud} \\ 1 & & 4 & & 3 & & 4 & \\ x & / & x & / & x & / & x & / \\ \text{The storm-} & | & \text{cock warns} & | & \text{the dus} & | & \text{king hills} \\ 1 & & 4 & & 1 & & 2 & \\ x & / & x & / & x & / & x & / \\ \text{And vil} & | & \text{lages} & | & \text{and val} & | & \text{leys round} & (6-14) \end{array}$$

The first consideration relating to these lines is the seeming inappropriateness of the heavy foot ("Brood dumb") in line 7; if the line suggests an address to silence, then why would Meredith use a foot that places stress on those syllables that introduce the concept of silence in the first place? Do not strong feet tend to produce considerably more volume than weak feet? If the sound of the syllables is meant to represent silence, then there would be no question of the poet's failure to choose the right metrical modulation; but if Meredith wants us to focus on the silent interval between the stressed syllables rather than the heavily stressed syllables themselves, then the foot is appropriate to the content of the line. Thus the interval represents the birds' self-imposed silence while the consecutive stresses are expressive of contemplation, a sonic rendering of the slow, deliberate broodings before the coming of the wind. When we read with the last syllable of the previous line ("birds") in mind, we are given a double silence, the brief interval between "birds" and "brood" and the slightly longer pause between "Brood" and "dumb." The heavy foot as expressive of silence is not isolated to this instance. The first foot in line 6 also refers to silence in both its content and metrical modulation:

$$\begin{array}{cccc} 3 & & 4 & & & & & \\ x & / & x & / & x & / & x & / \\ \text{Stands mute} & | & \text{and whis} & | & \text{pers not;} & | & \text{the birds} \end{array}$$

The next heavy foot (“-cock warns”)—also preceded by a stressed syllable—does not appear to be interval-focused, but concerned with the heavy stresses instead. Because “storm-cock” is a compound word that straddles the foot boundary, we are less likely to allow a silent interval to intervene between the word’s two components. As a result, we focus on the loudness and slowness required to perform the foot correctly. A consideration of the stressed syllables sponsors an interpretation in which the heavy foot mimics the emphatic warning of the storm-cock as well as his loud, almost desperate cry.

As important as the strong feet are in producing expressive effects in the poem, weak or light feet play just as significant a role. Consider the light foot (“lages”) in line 14. The speed produced by the 1-2 progression is only important when read in the context of the three heavily stressed syllables in the previous line (“storm-cock warns”). The warning is issued before the coming of the south-west wind, expressed by the deliberate and measured call of the cock. The stresses in this line also represent the scene before the sudden wind. The light foot is, however, a kind of metrical foreshadowing. That the word “village” straddles a foot boundary also suggests an imbalance. The first syllable of “village” is situated in a standard 1-4 iamb; at this point, the village is unaffected, in a sort of stasis. The second syllable is located in the light foot, which imitates the wind’s powerful effect on the village. Without the 1-4-1-2 progression, we would not have a physical experience of the wind sweeping through the inhabited landscape; these formal effects are the only devices that keep the poem from becoming little more than an intellectual exercise.

Weak feet are used to express rapidity at several other points:

2 4 1 2 1 4 1 4
x / x / x / x /
Till sud|denly | with migh|ty arms (24)

2 1 4

x / x / x / x x /

Like one | that leaps | a fi|ery steed

4 3 4 2 1 4

x / x / x / x x /

Whose keen | black haun|ches qui|vering shine

1 2 1 2

x / x / x / x /

With ea|gerness | and haste, | that needs

1 4 3 4

x / x / x / x /

No spur | to make | the dark | leagues fly! (28-31)

Frequently, light feet are followed by heavy feet; this combination occurs so often in English poetry that metrists often think of the 1-2-3-4 or 2-1-3-4 pair as one foot, what they call a double-iamb or ionic minor.⁸ But in these lines the light feet are followed by standard iambs with a 1-2 progression. In the light-heavy pairing, the speed with which we read the light foot is evened out by the relative slowness with which we read the heavy foot. Put another way, the time required to read these two feet is roughly equal to the time one would need to read two standard iambs in succession. But in these cases, the line's rhythm is not smoothed out; some of the time we would normally use to read the line has been lost for the lack of a heavy stressed syllable. What such technique implies is that not only does the light foot represent speed, but the line does as well because it is read more quickly than it would be if there were five heavily stressed syllables (3's or 4's or combinations of both as in the 3-4 heavy foot). The speed of the light foot in the second excerpt is emphasized by the presence of two anapests at the end of lines 28 and 29 ("ery steed" and "-vering shine" respectively) and serve as evidence of Meredith's desire to imitate the speed he writes about in the letter to Ollier.

⁸ Unfortunately, such names are misleading, because they suggest that two syllables can be equally unstressed or equally stressed. Of course, many prosodists readily admit that no two syllables are equal, but continue to use scansion marks that do not square with their concession.

Though it is true that both feet suggest speed, the foot in line 30 ("gerness") picks up extra polysemic freight the other foot lacks. That the last two syllables of "suddenly" are placed in a light foot is expressive of the wind's sudden arrival, but the foot's expressive power ends there. "-Gerness," on the other hand, relates at least three meanings simultaneously. First, it mimics the "eagerness" and the desire to leap into action at a moment's notice; thus the foot performs the conceit of the steed admirably. Second, the 1-2 foot expresses the speed of the wind; like the first reading of "-gerness," the foot echoes the rider/steed conceit, but is an echo with a difference. Instead of capturing the desire of horse and rider to leap into action, the foot, in combination with the heavily stressed "haste," expresses the sudden transition from stillness to a sprint. Without the three lightly stressed syllables preceding "haste," the reader would not experience the burst of air necessary to produce the "h." The voiceless consonants, which are staccatoed, would still mimic the surprising start from the gate, but they become more impressive when preceded by the consecutive lightly stressed syllables. Third, the three unstressed syllables draw attention to the three heavily stressed syllables in line 31 ("dark leagues fly!"). The three consecutive stresses make up for what the unstressed syllables lack. All the anticipation and anxiety present in the unstressed syllables are released and fulfilled in the stressed syllables. Also, in light of the weak foot-standard iamb pairing, the stresses in the standard iamb-heavy iamb become more emphatic, a sonic contrast that establishes the somber, reverent mood that continues through the rest of the poem.

Heavy and light modulations in "South-West Wind" take on semantic value because the same motifs and subjects frame and are framed by each of the modulations. So when we hear a heavy foot, we expect reverence, deliberateness, and gravity (at least when we listen for the silent

intervals). The light feet tend toward eagerness, suddenness, and imbalance. There is only one motif that both heavy and light feet share: speed. That they share only one motif in common is evidence of the pride of place given to quickness and speed. Put another way, the consistent association of speed with both heavy and light feet aids us in recognizing the motif's centrality in the text.

While sound patterning is central to "South-West Wind," it cannot save the poem from monotony. In order to intensify the effects of slant-rhyme and sound patterning, Meredith fosters complications in the meter, a meter which dies on the vine without some sort of authorial interference. The complications come in the form of enjambment, a device common enough in iambic pentameter, particularly in blank verse. Enjambment is out of place in four-beat lines; because of its conspicuous presence, we are perhaps more conscious than we are of the device when used in its traditional pentameter setting. By enjambling lines, Meredith manipulates and challenges the integrity of the line. Such stichic transgressions not only affect how we hear the meter, but the kind of meter we hear; that is, Meredith's virtuosity creates doubt in the listener as to the exact nature of the line boundaries. The following lines are representative of this particular strategy, not to mention some of the most metrically expressive lines in the poem:

x /
the birds →⁹

3 4
x / x / x / x /
Brood dumb | in their | forebo|ding nests (6-7)
x / x / x / x /
Or when | the ou|zel sends | a swift →
3 4
x / x / x / x /
Half war|ble, shrin|king back | again →

x / x /
His gol|den bill (10-12)

⁹ The arrow (→) indicates the presence of enjambment.

$\begin{array}{cccc} & & 1 & 2 \\ x & / & x & / \\ \text{Till sud|denly} & | & \text{with migh|ty arms} & \rightarrow \\ 3 & & 4 & \\ 2 & & 4 & \\ x & / & & x & / & & x & / & x & x & / \\ \text{Outspread,} & | & \text{that reach} & | & \text{the ho|rizon} & \text{round,} \\ & & 3 & & 4 & & 2 & & 3 & & \\ x & / & & x & / & & x & / & & x & / \\ \text{The great} & | & \text{South-West} & | & \text{drive o'er} & | & \text{the earth,} \\ x & / & x & / & x & / & x & / \\ \text{And loo|sens all} & | & \text{his roa|ring robes} & \rightarrow \\ x & / & x & / & x & / & x & / \\ \text{Behind} & | & \text{him, o|ver heath} & | & \text{and moor.} & & (22-26) \end{array}$

All of the lines above are iambic tetrameter, which is confirmed by the lineation of the printed text. Despite this knowledge the auditor is likely to hear in such lines not tetrameter but pentameter. Enjambment tends to diminish or eliminate altogether the pause or breath between the end of one line and the beginning of the next. As one might expect, the pause between two enjambed lines exists on a spectrum from brief pause to no pause at all. Lines 6-7 move toward the brief pause side of the spectrum, exerting as they do a slight break in speech between "birds" and "Brood," whose expressive function we discussed earlier in terms of the performance of silence. Even with the pause, however, we are still aware of the enjambment, even if its realization is experienced more in the mind than in the ear. In other words the reader, after having performed hundreds or thousands of enjambed lines, expects one line to run seamlessly into the other when the last word of the first line is a noun (specifically a subject) and the first word of the second line is a verb (particularly when its agent is the previous noun). But the reader hears a pause, which runs counter to her mental understanding of the lines, which demands she read them without a break. As to why we naturally pause in such moments in spite of our expectations, there is at least one plausible reason in lines 6-7 as well in the second passage (10-12): "birds" in line 6 and "Swift" in line 10 are followed by heavy feet at

Eliminating the pause between lines entirely gives us the sense that the poem is composed in more than one meter. In fact, three meters present themselves in the poem: tetrameter or the base meter; pentameter, which is the product of enjambment; and trimeter or the feet remaining after one foot of the line has been absorbed by the previous line as in line 26 ("over heath and moor"). Other meters emerge from Meredith's use of enjambment, but these three are the most common.

Aside from breaking up the monotony usually found in poems written entirely in four-beat lines (an accomplishment unto itself), enjambment also produces expressive effects. The first realigned excerpt refers to the timid movements and cries of an ouzel, and it appears that the line is not designed for expressive purposes but employed here merely to satisfy the need for metrical variety. The last two lines' capability to break the monotony is trumped by their expressive power. Both lines refer to growth and loosening. The first interstichic pentameter mimics the personification of the wind stretching his arms wide, as the meter is opened up and stretched beyond the limits of the line. The second pentameter, which refers to the loosening of the South-West wind's "roaring robes," is the product of such a loosening. Pentameter in this poem, at least for a time, is used in much the same way as strophic organization is used in "The Death of Winter": a means of indicating a change in character as well as separating one entity or personification from another. Unlike "The Death of Winter," "South-West Wind in the Woodlands" is not so cut and dry. In the former poem, each strophe concentrates on a particular character—spring in the first, winter in the second, and the speaker in the third. As mentioned earlier, a profitable way to think of these strophes is as visual and aural calling cards, a maneuver which cordons off one being from another. "South-West Wind," on the other hand, is more complicated. The interstichic or interlinear meters are not

concentrated or localized to particular areas in the text; rather they appear sporadically throughout the poem and come as a surprise to a reader trained in the metrical tradition. In this way, the reader's surprise at tetrameter enjambment mirrors the surprise of the village as well as some, but not all, of the flora and fauna in the woods. Along with creating and registering surprise in the reader, the interspersed interlinear pentameters seem to imply that the wind is omnipresent, surrounding and moving through all things—a pantheism Coleridgean in nature.

I use the words "seem to imply" for a reason. For if we only read, or had Meredith only composed, the first two verse paragraphs, we could easily accept this interpretation of the South-Wester as ubiquitous. Alas, such is not the case; the ultimate complication that makes the wind's dominance over all the earth untenable is introduced in the last verse paragraph, which I will quote extensively:

$x / \quad x / \quad x / \quad x /$
The voice | of na|ture is | abroad →
 $x /$
This night;| she fills the air with balm;
 $\quad \quad 1 \quad 2$
 $x / \quad x / \quad x / \quad x /$
 Her mys|tery | is o'er | the land;
 And who that hears her now and yields
 $\quad \quad 1 \quad 2$
 $x / \quad x / \quad x / \quad x /$
 His be|ing to | her year|ning tones,
 $\quad \quad \quad \quad 1 \quad 2$
 $x / \quad x / \quad x / \quad x /$
 And seats | his soul | upon | her wings,
 $\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad 4 \quad 3 \quad 4$
 $x / \quad x / \quad x / \quad x /$
And broa|dens o'er | the wind-|swept world →
 $\quad \quad \quad \quad 1 \quad 2$
 $x / \quad x / \quad x / \quad x /$
With her,| will ga|ther in | the flight

 $3 \quad 4 \quad 1 \quad 2 \quad \quad \quad 1 \quad 4$
 $x / \quad x / \quad x / \quad x /$
More know|ledge of | her se|cret, more →
 $\quad \quad \quad \quad 1 \quad 2$
 $x / \quad x / \quad x / \quad x /$
Delight | in her | bene|ficence

$x / \quad x / \quad x / \quad x /$
 Than hours | of mu|sing, or | the lore
 That lives with men could ever give!
 ...
 For every elemental power
 $x / \quad x / \quad x / \quad x /$
 Is kin|dred to | our hearts, | and once →
 $x / \quad x / \quad x / \quad x /$
Acknow|ledge, wed|ded, once | embraced,
 $x / \quad x / \quad x x / \quad x /$
 Once ta|ken to | the unfet|tered sense,
 $x / \quad x / \quad x / \quad x /$
 Once claspt | into | the na|ked life,
 $x / \quad x / \quad x / \quad (x /)$
The u|nion is | eter|nal. (98-109; 114-119)

Of the three verse paragraphs, the third is the only one to start with an enjambed line, a distinction worth some consideration.

As with "The Death of Winter," "South-West Wind in the Woodlands" uses a tripartite structure: the first verse paragraph is a description of the woods just before the coming of the wind; the second is devoted to the arrival of the wind and its effect on the landscape; and the third verse paragraph—much like the third and final strophe of "The Death of Winter"—is a quasi-philosophical, moralistic, instructional commentary on our place in the natural world and the ways in which Nature can benefit us if only we allow her (Meredith's gender designation). That the enjambed line which inaugurates the third section of the poem contains the first real mention of Nature as a concept (with a capital "N," not to be mistaken for nature with a lower-cased "n," which represents the more tangible ecosystems) is significant for several reasons.

First, the interstichic pentameter of lines 98-99 does not force a slight pause between the last syllable of the first line and the first syllable of the second line; responsible for the uninterrupted flow from one line to the other is the lack of a heavy foot at the beginning of line 98.

1 4 1 4 1 4 1 4 1 4
 x / x / x / x / x /
 and once /| acknow|ledge, wed|ded, once | embraced,

(116-117)

In each interstichic line, Nature is viewed as a balm or salve for the human species' ills. The first interstichic line uses uninterrupted pentameter to imitate the spreading of Nature's wings. The metrical modulations reproduce the largeness of the world with the ponderous standard foot-heavy foot pairing ("the wind-swept world"). To remind us of man's weakness (Meredith's gender designation) compared to that of the cosmos, the poet places the weak syllable of "broadens" in an offbeat position in a weak foot with "o'er" falling on the beat. The second pentameter modulates the meter in the form of a weakened final foot ("ficence"). The weak line ending counterpoints the use of "more" twice in line 106 ("More knowledge of her secret, more"), both of which are heavily stressed, one at the beginning of the line in an offbeat position and the other at the end of the line in a beat position. The difference in modulation (growing from a 3 to a 4) performs sonically the growing surplus of man's delight for which Nature is responsible. The double use of "more" suggests her magnanimity (in both senses of the word, generosity and size). The weak foot presents Nature not only as the booming voice of the wind and the larger functions of the ecosystem, but also as the still small voice and the crane's cry. The last pentameter is interesting because of its regularity; when man opens himself to Nature and allows himself to live with her, a harmony is struck and the abstract (Nature) and the concrete (man) are "wedded" just as the speech rhythm (man) and the metrical abstraction (Nature) have collapsed the difference and aural space between them to form a sonic realization of a union rare in poetry, particularly when we consider the modulation of each foot is a 1-4 progression. Normally, there is an iamb or two which are regular, but with a

2-4 progression; Meredith polarizes each foot, however, producing the abstract principles of meter in real speech. The metrical frame, then, is Nature and man, speech. If we view meter as a means of controlling language in order to raise it above mere communication, then we would be right to draw such a conclusion about the poet's view of Nature and man: Nature has the potential to control and discipline man if he is willing to submit to her better judgment. Man's submission to Nature's design will raise him above mere existence to a healthier, more spiritual life. The "union" of man and Nature is "eternal," which Meredith not only explains but points out with the poem's final three-beat foot. Though we only read and pronounce three feet, there is a fourth which remains silent, the way the fourth foot of the alternating trimeters in a ballad stanza remains silent. The silence is one brought on by peace, by an understanding between man and Nature, an understanding and a silence that transcends the wind which is only a manifestation of Nature, not Nature proper.

As inventive as "The South-West Wind in the Woodlands" and "The Death of Winter" are, they still show signs of a young poet's unhoneed ambition, an observation with which William Michael Rossetti and Charles Kingsley would agree. Meredith's contemporaries would have to wait another eleven years for one of his most experimental texts, one that would challenge the metrical tradition in general and one of the centuries-old staples of English poetry—the sonnet.

CHAPTER 2
MODERN LOVE AND THE SONNET TRADITION

I.

Before Robert Buchanan's "Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D.G. Rossetti" (1871) and Dante Rossetti's "Stealthy School of Criticism" (1871) were R.H. Hutton's review of *Modern Love* (1862) and A.C. Swinburne's epistolary response (1862). Hutton and Swinburne prepare the ground for and are echoed by Buchanan and Rossetti. For one thing, Hutton accuses Meredith of "[having] a sense of what is graphic, but he never makes an excursion beyond that into what he intends for poetry without falling into some trick of false ornamentation" (93). Buchanan takes up this same thread of surfaces for their own sake when he offers what is now one of the most famous definitions of Pre-Raphaelitism:

[T]he fleshly gentlemen have bound themselves by solemn league and covenant to extol fleshliness as the distinct and supreme end of poetic and pictorial art; to aver that poetic expression is greater than poetic thought, and by inference that the body is greater than the soul, and sound superior to sense... (646)

Buchanan says little about meter here, but the suggestion is clear: that the Pre-Raphaelites are aesthetes, a term applied by Buchanan with derision. Hutton also discusses meter but goes further than Buchanan in his indictment of the poet's second collection: "when [Meredith] is *smart*, as he is habitually, the form of versification makes the smartness look still more vulgar, and the jocularitv jar far more than it would in prose" (92). Unlike Buchanan, who simply states that "the Mutual Admiration School" believes that "sound [is] superior to sense," Hutton argues that the meter magnifies the vulgarity of the poems, particularly in the book's title poem ("Fleshly School" (646).

While not quite so much like its predecessor, Rossetti's response does show a certain resemblance. For example, Swinburne and Rossetti argue that the respective reviewers are unreasonable in their assertions and that no audience would fail to see the merits of the work the critics have overlooked or, worse, found wanting—in short, that the critics are not representative of the reading public:

I ask you to admit this protest simply out of justice to the book in hand, believing as I do that it expresses the deliberate unbiassed [sic] opinion of a sufficient number of readers to warrant the insertion of it... (Swinburne 98)

Any reader may bring any artistic charge he pleases against the above sonnet [*The House of Life*, sonnet XXI, "Love-Sweetness"]; but one charge it would be impossible to maintain against the writer of the series in which it occurs, and that is, the wish on his part to assert that the body is greater than the soul. (Rossetti 658)

Despite the similarities between reviews and their responses, Hutton and Swinburne differ markedly from their successors in their formal classification of *Modern Love*:

The chief composition in the book, absurdly called 'Modern Love', is a series of sonnets intended to versify the leading conception of Goethe's 'elective affinities'. (Hutton 92)

As to execution, take almost any sonnet at random out of the series, and let any man qualified to judge for himself of metre, choice of expression, and splendid language, decide on its claims. And, after all, the test will be unfair, except as regards metrical or pictorial merit; every section of this great progressive poem being connected with the other by links of the finest and most studied workmanship. (Swinburne 98-99)

Hutton complains about the title and argues that Meredith takes his cue from Goethe, a poet Meredith had been reading well before he published his first collection.¹¹ Swinburne, presumably in response to the reviewer's critique of Meredith's "vulgar" meters, praises the poet's "workmanship."

¹¹ Meredith was aware of the German romantic poets as early as 1849 as is evidenced in a letter to R.H. Horne, for whom he acquired a copy of Goethe's poems. As to Meredith's devotion to Goethe, Lionel Stevenson points to the time Meredith spent with Thomas Carlyle in 1860 (one year before Meredith began writing *Modern Love*): "Carlyle talked lengthily about deep philosophical matters, being gratified to discover the devotion to Goethe

But perhaps more interesting than the praise or blame heaped on the poems is the designation both men attach to the title poem, referring to *Modern Love* as a sonnet "series" (a word Swinburne and Hutton both use). The curiosity here is less about the designation and more about their defense of their choice of terms. No explanation would be necessary if the "sonnets" were "legitimate" (i.e., Italian) or English sonnets. Why do Hutton and Swinburne take the sequence's provenance for granted? Would their readership make the same leap? J.W. Marston, writing for the *Atheneum*, makes the same claim and, like Hutton and Swinburne, does not explain his reasons for framing the series in such terms (100).

Even Meredith thought of the poems as sonnets; in a letter to his closest friend Frederick A. Maxse, Meredith writes, "I send you a portion of proofs of 'The Tragedy of Modern Love' There are wanting to complete it, 13 more sonnets" (I, 128).¹² Unfortunately, Meredith does not defend his reasons for calling the poems sonnets. The question now is: How do these three critics (Hutton, Swinburne, and Marston), each of whom holds opinions of the poem quite different from the others, come to call the texts sonnets? Swinburne's choice of prosodic taxonomy is the easiest to explain away; because he had known Meredith quite well for some time, it is reasonable to assume that the author of *Modern Love* in conversation with Swinburne called the poems sonnets. Exactly how Hutton and Marston decided on the terminology—independently of one another, presumably—is not clear. That Swinburne had any communication with Hutton or Marston is unlikely. Certainly, Meredith never spoke to either of them; in fact, Hutton is brought up only once in Meredith's correspondence; in a letter to Swinburne, as it so

that had been increasing in Meredith ever since his schooldays in Germany" (74).

¹² The period missing before "There are wanting" is missing in Cline's edition of the poems. Whether or not it is an editorial oversight or a true representation of the letter in Meredith's hand, I cannot say with any certainty.

happens, he writes in a mix of exasperation and humor, "—I see the illustrious Hutton of the *Spectator* laughs insanely at my futile effort to produce an impression on his public" (I, 354). The letter, composed 2 March 1867, is not a reference to Hutton's review of *Modern Love* but to the two reviews of *Vittoria* written while Hutton was editor for the *Spectator* (L, I, 354n.). Unlike Hutton, J.W. Marston does not even warrant a mention in the correspondence.

Many twentieth- and twenty-first century literary critics have called the sections of *Modern Love* sonnets, but their designation owes much to their knowledge of Meredith's own classification of the text. Literary critics in Meredith's time could not have known of Meredith's own view on the sequence unless he expressed this view publicly, which he did not. Why do these critics take for granted that *Modern Love* is a sonnet sequence, particularly when one considers how markedly the individual sections depart from any traditional conception of the sonnet? What about Meredith's first long poem suggests a tie close enough with the sonnet tradition for critics to include it in that tradition? Were the critics' understanding of *Modern Love* as sonnet sequence informed by the content of the piece or by its stanzaic/metrical characteristics? In this chapter, I will attempt to answer these questions by performing a detailed reading of the text and its prosodic peculiarities. In order to get a sense of Meredith's experiments with the sonnet, it would be useful to consider how he handles the sonnet in its most conventional/traditional framework.

II.

Meredith wrote most of his sonnets long after the release of *Modern Love*. "Lucifer in Starlight," by far his most famous single sonnet, was published at the head of a group of twenty-five sonnets entitled, unimaginatively enough, "Sonnets" in *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth*

(1882), some twenty years after *Modern Love*. A thorough-going examination of these sonnets, particularly a reading that frames them as a sequence and not a haphazard miscellany of sonnets, would be a valuable contribution to Meredith scholarship. But as these poems were written well after Meredith had composed his tragic series, they are not useful in determining how the young poet experimented with the fourteen-line form we would recognize as a sonnet. His first extant sonnet, "Hateful are those false themes of speculation" (also called "Sonnet") is Meredith's opening volley in experimental prosody, if, in fact, this is his first sonnet:

Hateful are those false themes of speculation
Goadling the wise and harassing the weak—
This world of ours—so lovely and unique
Why is it subject to such sad vexation?—
'Tis all for want of proper occupation
"PHILOSOPHERS" become SO VOID and VAIN;
With birth, life, death, mind, matter, bone and brain
Can there be any doubt of our CREATION?—
And of our Spirits early information—
Intelligence and Action?—chief whereby
Thro' rapid glances of the inner eye
The Soul is sentient of its own salvation
And in the Faith that such a knowledge brings
Feels the great glory of its Future wings.

(original emphasis)

In many ways, the poem is forgettable and by and large simply bad. Its form is, however, deserving of some consideration. Perhaps the first comment to make about the sonnet is that it is a *mélange* of two sonnet types: the Italian and the English. The Italian sonnet written in iambic pentameter (in English, at least) uses an *abbaabbacdcddc* rhyme scheme. The octave must adhere to the *abbaabba* rhyme scheme, but the sestet is under no such strictures. The only forbidden scheme is one in which two lines rhyme consecutively—that is, a couplet. So any number of sestet schemes are available such as *cdecde*, *cdcdcd*. The only other restriction concerns the number of rhymes one can use in the sestet; no more than three rhymes are permissible. The volta, or turn in thought, traditionally begins in line 9,

the first line of the sestet. The English sonnet, on the other hand, uses an *ababcdcdefefgg₅* rhyme scheme. Unlike the Italian sonnet, the English sonnet does not allow for any wiggle room at any point in the poem. The turn in thought or resolution does not begin until line 13 or at the opening of the rhyming couplet.

Meredith has combined the two types by incorporating characteristics of both in his sonnet. Most notable is the rhyme, which follows an *abbaaccaaddaee₅* scheme. Much like the Italian sonnet, "Sonnet" uses brace or bracket rhyme and limits the number of rhymes to five, the maximum number allowed in a legitimate or Italian sonnet.¹³ Like the English sonnet, the rhymes appear to divide the poem into three quatrains and a rhyming couplet. These similarities notwithstanding, Meredith departs drastically from both types. Had he adhered to the bracket rhyme of the Italian tradition, Meredith would not only have continued to use the a-rhyme—which he does—but he would also continue the b-rhymes for the remainder of the brace rhymes. Instead, he abandons the b-rhymes after lines 2-3, moving to c- and d-rhymes in the last two bracketed rhymes.

At issue, too, is the nature of the volta. Line 13, because it is the beginning of the rhyming couplet, is a reasonable location for a turning point. But the poem's punctuation provides another feasible location for the volta. A number of dashes, question marks, and a combination of the two appear in the poem (lines 2, 4, 8, and 9); because of their frequency, the punctuation marks lose their force. The uncommon marks in the poem are the semicolon and the period. Usually, colons and semicolons are a regular occurrence in poetry; the only punctuation mark more frequent than these marks is the comma. But in "Sonnet" the period and the semicolon appear only

¹³ In the nineteenth century, "Legitimate" was used interchangeably with "Italian." The implication, of course, is that the English sonnet is illegitimate or somehow inferior to its Italian predecessor.

once: the former closes the poem and the latter falls at the end of line 6. As with the dash and the question mark, the semicolon does important work, but its role differs dramatically. Meredith uses dashes in order to create a pause or perhaps to place rhetorical emphasis on a particular line. When following a question mark, the dash may indicate that the question mark is not the end of the sentence. Both uses of this combination occur at the end of a line (lines 4 and 8); had Meredith simply ended the line with a question mark, we would assume that the sentence terminated with the line break, especially when we consider that the capitalization of the initial letter of the line was a convention in English until quite recently. The dashes direct us to read these question marks not as sentence-ending punctuation, but rather as a question embedded in a larger sentence. The semicolon is used to join two related sentences, eliminating the need for a conjunction. To separate the sentences with a period would suggest that their semantic relationship was a loose constellation of ideas; the semicolon indicates that one sentence is a natural extension of the other, not a repetition of the content of the first, a confederation of ideas. A sonnet's turning point does much the same thing: it separates ideas. The volta is connective tissue that holds related entities together but indicates that the second is not a repetition but an extension and a complication of the first. Voltas are usually set off by a conjunction ("but," "yet") or an interjection ("Oh!"). In the absence of a conjunction, then, we would expect a semicolon to perform the same function.

That the semicolon in Meredith's poem performs this role is apparent, as there is a shift in thought between lines 6 and 7:

'Tis all for want of proper occupation
"PHILOSOPHERS" become SO VOID and VAIN;
With birth, life, death, mind, matter, bone and brain
Can there be any doubt of our CREATION?—

The first six lines of the sonnet deal with the "false themes of speculation" philosophers often perpetuate, marring "This world of ours—so lovely and unique." After the semicolon, Meredith begins to undermine the "vexations" brought on by such thinkers by pointing to the complex and elegant anatomy of the human body as proofs that we do, in fact, exist, that we are not figments of another's imagination. This turn in thought serves as a textbook example of a volta. While the shift in thought may be the quintessential volta, its formal placement is far from ideal. If we take line 7 to be the volta of "Sonnet," then the sonnet divides into 6+9 structure. The problem with this organization is that it is a reversal of the Italian sonnet's floor-plan or 9+6 pattern. Rather than placing the turning point in line 9, Meredith moves it to line 7. In this case, he does not doggedly follow the form, fitting his thought to the conventional 9+6 division; instead, he allows his thought to dictate the terms of the engagement. This sort of "meter-making argument" becomes a staple in Meredith's canon.

Meredith worked with the sonnet form only one other time before the composition of *Modern Love*. One of the last poems in *Poems*, "Pictures of the Rhine" has received no critical attention, unless one expands that term's definition to include "honorable mention." The only critical commentary on the sequence is Phyllis B. Bartlett's note:

I refer to the *Pictures* as "sonnets" because they reflect [Meredith's] early experimentation with varying the two conventional sonnet patterns [the Italian and the English sonnets]. Later he experimented more boldly in the 16-line sonnets of *Modern Love*. (97)

Bartlett realized early on, I think, that this sequence is a movement toward and an anticipation of *Modern Love*, and she is certainly one of the few scholars to mention Meredith's experimental hybridization of the Italian and the English sonnets. Unfortunately, as her observations are confined to a note, she could not provide a detailed analysis of the text.

Of course, Bartlett's contention that the poems here are sonnets is not a difficult leap, considering that each stanza or section is fourteen lines long. If the only requirement for sonnetness is line number, then these poems would easily qualify. Most purists would demand more than one prerequisite, such as a rhyme scheme associated with the sonnet (be it Italian, English, or Spenserian), the meter associated with the form (always iambic pentameter in English), and a volta or turn in those lines designated for such a purpose (line 9 in the Italian tradition and line 13 in the English and Spenserian traditions).

If to make a sonnet all of these elements must coincide, then "Pictures" hardly qualifies as a sonnet, only as a collection of echoes of the tradition. Either way, a reading of the sequence with the sonnet tradition in mind is doubtless the most productive means of approaching the poem. While all the sonnets deviate in some significant way and are, therefore, deserving of treatment, we will examine only one here, for it will offer a sense of just how much the sequence deviates from the accepted model.

Hark! How the bitter winter breezes blow
Round the sharp rocks and o'er the half-lifted wave,
While all the rocky woodland branches rave
Shrill with the piercing cold, and every cave,
Along the icy water-margin low,
Rings bubbling with the whirling overflow;
And sharp the echoes answer distant cries
Of dawning daylight and the dim sunrise,
And the gloom-coloured clouds that stain the skies
With pictures of a warmth, and frozen glow
Spread over endless fields of sheeted snow;
And white untrodden mountains shining cold,
And muffled footpaths winding thro' the wold,
O'er which those wintry gusts cease not to howl and blow.

(sonnet V)

The most obvious deviation from the sonnet tradition—one so visually striking that the reader notices it before beginning the poem—is the offset hypermetrical line that closes the sonnet. Few sonnets in English employ hexameter at any point in the poem, but if they do appear, the alexandrine is

almost always the last line of the text. It goes without saying that Meredith did not invent the closing hexameter. Other poets, whom Meredith had no way of knowing, used the form before him. William Gilmore Simms, an American contemporary of Meredith's, wrote a sonnet entitled "To My Friend" (1829, 1845, 1853) that uses the hexameter line:¹⁴

And, when thou show'st its purity, attest
 Mine eye was ever on the sun, and bent,
 x / x / x x / x /
 Where clouds | and difficult rocks | made steep |
 x / x /
 the great | ascent (12-14)

Meredith did not know Simms or his work, so he could not have borrowed the six-beat line from the Southern poet. Most likely, Simms and Meredith found this form in another poet, one who may or may not have invented the form. (There is no way to trace with any certainty the poet who first used the sonnet-ending hexameter in English.) Meredith, like Simms, uses the line to great effect, but in a far more creative manner. Simms's line is a way of illustrating the tenacity of the speaker to overcome "difficult" obstacles, an "ascent" the speaker's friend has witnessed. Meredith does not use the line for mimetic purposes but to highlight the fourteenth line of the first sonnet, which is iambic pentameter, a line which is unusual because it is the only sonnet-ending pentameter:

And this dear land as true a symbol shows,
 While o'er it like a mellow sunset strays
 The legendary splendour of old days,
 1 4 1 2 1 4 1 2 1 4
 x / x / x / x / x /
 Invi|sible, | invi|olate | repose. (sonnet I, 11-14)

Sonnet I is distinct from the rest of the sequence by its virgin status; there is no mention of humans or the signs of their conquest, i.e., culture. Line 14 of sonnet I, then, does not square with the hexameters present in

¹⁴ James Everett Kibler, the editor of the *Selected Poems of William Gilmore Simms*, often lists more than one date for a particular poem. Because Simms was an obsessive reviser, Kibler dates the different incarnations of the same poem. "To My Friend" was begun in 1829 and revised significantly twice.

sonnets II-VI, a sonic realization of the landscape's untainted nature. As if to bolster this reading, Meredith develops a line that uses two light feet, representing nature's "inviolable repose"; the softness of feet 2 and 4 reproduces the silence that can only exist in the absence of human activity. In the hexameters, light feet are not quite so prevalent, a stark counterpoint to the humanless landscape in sonnet I.

The other landscapes employ hexameters because they share one significant feature: each makes some mention of man and the byproducts of his existence in nature. In Sonnet II Meredith, in his usual strong imagery describes

The distant village-roofs of blue and white
With intersections of quaint-fashioned beams
All slanting crosswise, and the feudal gleams
Of ruined turrets... (sonnet II, 9-12)

Not only have human beings encroached upon the natural world, they have felled trees and cut stones to erect their residences and fortifications. Of course, nature overruns the ramparts, but the damage has been done, despite the landscape's eventual victory. Sonnet III makes two references to human beings and the man-made:

Fresh blows the early breeze, our sail is full;
A merry morning and a mighty tide.
Cheerily O! and past St. Goar we glide,
Half hide [*sic*] in misty dawn and mountain cool.
The river is our own! (1-5)

As in sonnet II, Meredith reminds us that the speaker is not standing outside and above the landscape and is certainly not an omniscient disembodied voice—a voice we find in his later poetry such as "The Woods of Westermain." Rather, the speaker observes the scene from within the Rhineland of the poem. On a cruise down the Rhine, the speaker is another human force that affects the natural world. While on the riverboat (a symbol of human culture as well as the human desire to harness the natural world for human purposes), the speaker sees St. Goar, a town on the banks of the Rhine. As with the

"distant village-roofs" of sonnet II, the town breaks up the landscape's "inviolable repose." Humanity is present in sonnet IV, but not in quite the same way. Unlike the previous sonnets, in which man is mentioned in material terms (villages, towns, and sailboats), Meredith's references in this sonnet are more abstract, more ethereal:

To dream of fairy foot and sudden flower;
Or haply with a twilight on the brow,
To muse upon the legendary hour,
And Roland's lonely love and Hildegard's sad vow. (11-14)

"Fairy foot" as well as the legend of Roland and Hildegard are not tangible like the turrets and towns that line the river, but they are nonetheless products of culture. No longer is nature to be understood on its own terms; now, it is a means of geographical contextualization, as a means of verifying the location of a particular event—Roland's self-imposed exile, for example. Of the five sonnets to discuss man and his effects on the environment, sonnet V offers the briefest mention: "And white untrodden mountains shining cold, / And muffled footpaths winding thro' the wold" (12-13). Following hard on a description of the "untrodden mountains," the speaker points to the "muffled footpaths." The grammatical parallel of these two utterances (modifier+substantive) emphasizes the contrast between the unviolated, virgin soil and the artificial edifices which dot the riverbank and mar the ecosystem. That man's footprints are "muffled" may point to his general ineffectiveness and imperfection compared to the nature of sonnet I. His footpaths have impacted nature, however minimal that impact might be. The last sonnet is a reiteration of the ruins and "the loveliness of slow decay" as well as nature's reclamation of those ruins. The fortifications will never be salvaged and "Memory now / Is the sole life among the ruins gray" (sonnet VI, 1, 5-6). Memory, the final human component introduced in the sequence, is the last link between the speaker and those who once enjoyed the opulent life of nobility and privilege. In this regard, nature does ransack

the ramparts. This final human element, Memory, is weaker than the relentless eroding force of the natural world because it is unstable and altered over time: "Herself almost as tottering as they [the caves and turrets]" (10).

Meredith uses the six-beat line to great effect, but others have also used the hypermetrical line at the end of the sonnet (Simms, for example). Meredith does offer his own experimental contribution in the shape of rhyme; the scheme he employs, *abbbaaccaadd₅a₆*, shares certain characteristics in common with the Italian sonnet. Much like the Italian sonnet, Meredith's scheme uses brace rhyme; the innovation is not the use of bracket rhyme, but the number of lines contained within the brackets. Rather than placing two rhyming lines between two other rhyming lines, Meredith places three rhyming lines between the bracketing lines. Because of the extra braced lines, the poem is no longer built on the traditional octave-sestet format but now follows a 10+4 structure. The formal division between lines 10 and 11 is not as clear as that of an Italian sonnet, whose rhyme cordons off the first eight lines from the following six. The absence of such a clean break or an obvious bipartite structure exists for a couple of reasons. First, the last four lines of the poem are not built like a sonnet ending; one would expect a rhyming couplet or a sestet without consecutive rhymes to end a sonnet. Both schemes signal that we have reached the final leg of the poem. But in sonnet V, the poet uses yet another brace rhyme (*adda*), a scheme that suggests, semantically speaking, an additional complication. The reader is likely not to achieve the closure offered by the traditional sonnet. The only element that suggests an ending is the hexameter. Second, much like "Sonnet," sonnet V uses the a-rhyme throughout the poem, while changing the braced rhymes from bracket to bracket. There is a significant difference between in the compartmentalization of the a-rhymes. In "Sonnet," the a-rhymes are

dispensed with by the final couplet; that is, as with the Shakespearean and the Italian forms, non-recurring rhymes are used in the final section of the poem. Compartmentalization is not preserved in sonnet V, for the a-rhymes do not end with the tenth line but continue into the second section of the sonnet. Such sonic continuity makes it difficult to offer any serious claim for a clean break between one section and another. Quite the contrary: that the poem ends with the same rhyme with which it begins unifies the poem, giving it the appearance of one unbroken unit. The content and the development of the argument support this notion that the poem is of a piece, not a bipartite sonnet.

If there is a volta in the poem, we would expect to find it in line 11, given the 10+4 structure suggested by the shift in schemes, but the punctuation does not satisfy our expectation:

With pictures of a warmth, and frozen glow
Spread over endless fields of sheeted snow;
And white untrodden mountains shining cold,
And muffled footpaths winding thro' the wold,
O'er which those wintry gusts cease not to howl and blow.

The semicolon points to the turning point beginning in line 12, but it proves to be just as misleading as the scheme division. If we confine our analysis of volta to content alone, we realize that there is no turning point; the poem reads in many ways like a list of descriptions, one piled on another piled on another. The last three lines, then, are not a turn in thought but a continuation of what precedes them.

"Sonnet" and "Pictures of the Rhine," then, are Meredith's earliest and most ambitious experiments with the sonnet tradition. Each exhibits a decisive move away from rigid or fixed forms toward more loose, more individualized pieces with prosodic features that can now be arranged to fit the content and purpose of the poem, rather than fitting the content and purpose of the poem to the strictures of convention. As interesting as these

sonnets are, they are still relatively immature compared to Meredith's later work. In fact, without their formal peculiarities, these poems would not merit discussion, except perhaps to understand the maturation of the young poet's ideas and systems of thought. Meredith's experiments with the sonnet are little more than metrical curiosities until he composed what Jennifer Ann Wagner calls an "anti-Petrarchan sequence" and what Norman Friedman refers to as "[a] 'sonnet'-sequence with a difference" (141; 12).

III.

In many ways, recent Meredith scholarship is repeating what Meredith's own reviewers said about his work. This repetition is particularly evident when we consider how often scholars have called the sections of *Modern Love* sonnets. In an article outlining how the sequence is about the ways in which we deal with and conceptualize the other, Henry Kozicki simply calls the individual units in Meredith's long poem "sonnets" (145). Kozicki and critics like him are not to be faulted for taking the poem's sonnetness as a given; after all, as we discussed earlier, it was Meredith who referred to the sections as sonnets. As a result, much of the poem's commentary simply takes *Modern Love's* formal lineage for granted. There are a few scholars, however, who have qualified their claim on the long poem's form. When describing the poem's formal aspects, John Lucas reminds us parenthetically that the designation of "sonnet" was "Meredith's own term" (67). Adela Pinch wisely tempers her categorization of the sequence by calling the sections "sonnet-like poems" (385). In much the same way, Karen Alkalay-Gut is willing to label the poems "sonnets," but not without qualifying their sonnetness as regards their formal idiosyncrasies, particularly in the ways they depart from the tradition:

The poetic means to analyze this "marriage-tomb" is an expanded sixteen-line sonnet: the additional two lines in themselves indicate that the conventional sonnet form has proved insufficient to represent "modern love." (235-235)

Despite a thoughtful explanation of the series' deviations from the Italian sonnet, she still accepts the sequence as being comprised of sonnets without giving much reason for why we should think of the poems in terms of the sonnet tradition. Norman Friedman, whose work I have quoted earlier, likewise thinks of the poems as sonnets "with a difference," though he does not actually explain the designation.

How have Meredith scholars, otherwise careful in their assessments of the poetry, come to think of the sequence as being comprised of sonnets with little to no equivocation or skepticism? Undoubtedly, Meredith's letter to Maxse, in which he refers to the poems as sonnets, is to blame. We tend to trust poets too quickly when they discuss their own work, or at least we have here. Of course, there is no reason that Meredith would lie to his closest friend about something like the generic category of *Modern Love*. Poets often think of their own work in a way that none of their readers would, because they (the poets) have a special relationship with the poem that no one other than they can have. By making certain connections in the poem, leaps in logic they believe to be patently obvious, they often incorrectly assume that their audience will reach the same conclusion. Meredith does not explain his reasons for thinking of the series as a sonnet sequence; nor do we have any record of Maxse requesting an explanation for the poet's designation. (Maxse probably trusted Meredith's assessments of his own work as literary critics have.) Had Meredith written a sonnet and referred to it as an epic, neither critics of his time nor ours would take such a statement at face value; rather, they would go about the business of asking why he would refer to a short poem as an epic and how such a signifier would affect the analysis of the text and how the poem's meaning is altered by an otherwise ridiculous claim.

On the other hand, there are scholars who either do not trust or do not find useful Meredith's term for the poems—each a manifestation of the intentional fallacy and the New Criticism in its desire to focus exclusively on the text. These critics tend to avoid the term "sonnet" when discussing *Modern Love*. Kerry McSweeney, in *Supreme Attachments: Studies in Victorian Love Poetry*, does not use the term at all but opts instead for a safer term, referring to the numbered units collectively as "the 50 sections of *Modern Love*" (97). While McSweeney's implicit skepticism is commendable, particularly when we consider how easy it is to take Meredith's statement at face value, his use of the term "section" to the exclusion of "sonnet" moves toward the opposite extreme.

A view that navigates the middle road between these assessments is not only the most responsible approach but the most realistic one as well. The middle road in this case demands an analysis that neither assumes the poems are sonnets nor simply disqualifies them as such. Rather, a developed interpretation will adopt a healthy skepticism about the sections while framing the sequence in terms of the sonnet tradition. Put another way, even if the poems are not sonnets in any definitive manner, observing how they break from the tradition will foster a more fruitful reading of *Modern Love* than an analysis that takes for granted the status of the poems as either sonnets or sections.

There is another issue that will affect our understanding of the uses to which Meredith puts form, and that is the presence of first and third person narration, what Adela Pinch calls "the logic of the pronoun" (388). The question of who narrates and the number of narrators will affect significantly the role of meter, a point we will settle shortly. First, however, the problem of narrative voice must be dealt with. With respect to the critical understanding of narrative bifurcation in the piece, there are

two camps. John Lucas and Carol Bernstein, the two critics who have offered the most cogent discussions of the issue, are representative of these two camps, whose work I will quote extensively:

[T]he first five and last two [sections] are spoken by a narrator, and the remainder by the husband with the narrator's occasional interpolations. The husband's sonnets are not all spoken in the first person; on one or two occasions he becomes a narrator himself, seeing himself from the outside, and the tactic, which is not overworked, allows for some brilliantly exploited ironies. (Lucas 67)

The relation between first and third person narrators in "Modern Love" is extremely problematic. It seems as if an authorial third person narrative frames the husband's first person narrative, but if we read the sonnets this way, we find the narrator intruding at odd and somewhat random moments. Since the narrator is never more omniscient than the husband could be, it is just as plausible to see the husband himself speaking now in the third person, now in the first. (Bernstein 12)

Lucas's argument about the two narrators is reasonable to a point. The pronoun differences suggest that there are two narrators: one who lives in the story-world of the text itself (the first person/husband) and one who lives outside the story-world and, therefore, simply reports the events (the third person narrator). Lucas's argument is less successful when he points out the moments when the husband "becomes a narrator himself, seeing himself from the outside." How can we tell when the third person is the husband and when he is the outside narrator? These two third person voices do not differ in any significant way. Despite the clarity of Lucas's argument, Bernstein offers a more plausible and consistent solution to the pronominal problem. Rather than arguing, as Lucas does, that there are two narrators, and that the husband occasionally adopts the third person perspective, Bernstein streamlines the analysis by stating that "it is just as plausible to see the husband himself speaking now in the third person, now in the first." Lucas's reading would be more convincing if the outside narrator and the husband differed significantly in diction, but their word choice as well as their views on the wife are similar enough to consider

Having worked out the problem of narration, we are one step closer to understanding how Meredith's formal innovations are related to the husband as narrator. That the husband is the narrator throughout the poem is significant from the perspective of theme and content, but its impact on the way we look at the prosody is minimal. Whether or not there is one narrator or two may not necessarily enhance or detract from the metrical expressiveness of the lines. Meredith's deviations from the sonnet tradition will be of primary importance even if we do not place any focus on the speaker(s). But without the careful consideration of one line in sonnet XXX, we cannot understand the form's connection with the narrator:

What are we first? First, animals; and next
Intelligences at a leap; on whom
Pale lies the distant shadow of the tomb,
And all that draweth on the tomb for text.
Into which state comes Love, the crowning sun:
Beneath whose light the shadow loses form.
We are the lords of life, and life is warm.
Intelligence and instinct now are one.
But Nature says: 'My children most they seem
When they least know me: therefore I decree
That they shall suffer.' Swift doth young Love flee,
And we stand wakened, shivering from our dream.
Then if we study Nature we are wise.
Thus do the few who live but with the day:
The scientific animals are they.-
Lady, this is my sonnet to your eyes. (1-16)

Most of the sonnet is like much of the speaker's discourses on nature, love, and humanity's relation to both. The poem opens by examining man's animal and intellectual nature as well as his transience in the world. The speaker then discusses love and its curative powers, yoking "intelligence and instinct." But Nature, realizing that man does not live in communion with her, makes him suffer. After having summed up our plight, the speaker delivers the moral: we are wise to study Nature and to follow those few who realize the impermanence of their lives. The speaker refers to those few as "scientific animals," presumably meaning that they have married instinct and

intelligence.¹⁵ Not only is the poem's drift of thought representative of the husband's views that work themselves out repeatedly in the sequence, but it becomes, in one version or another, the central theme for much of Meredith's poetry, particularly in poems like "The Woods of Westermain" (1883) and "Earth and Man" (1883).

There is one line, however, which does not contribute to the husband's philosophical observations, at least not directly. Line 16 does not seem to fit the rest of the poem, as it in many ways reads like a non sequitur. There are only two ways to interpret the line in order to see it as connected to the rest of sonnet XXX. The first possibility is that the husband, after lecturing to his mistress (whom he calls "Lady"), gives her a poem he has written to her eyes. This particular reading is feasible, but there are certain problems which accompany it. Why is the line necessary? How does the gift of the sonnet relate to the husband's lecture? What philosophical import does the sonnet have for sonnet XXX? An attempt to answer these questions via close reading will lead to little more than unfounded speculation.

The second possibility is that the sonnet to which the husband refers is sonnet XXX. In such a case, sonnet XXX becomes the "sonnet to your eyes." There are good reasons to adopt this view. Unlike the previous reading—that the "sonnet" is one the husband gives his mistress after he wraps up his lecture/sonnet XXX—this possibility does not require any critical gymnastics to explain the line's purpose. Also, Meredith offers a significant clue that this line is meant to refer to sonnet XXX: the demonstrative pronoun "this" performs the deictic function of pointing to lines 1-15 as "my sonnet to your eyes." A paraphrase of the line might read, "What I have just uttered is my

¹⁵ The word "scientific" is probably used here in its original form to mean knowledge, not the meaning that was gaining currency in Meredith's time and superseding the old term "natural philosophy."

sonnet to your eyes." To read the line this way also saves the reader from explaining its presence in relation to lines 1-15, if we take "to your eyes" not to mean that the poem is about her eyes but rather dedicated to them. Clearly, the subject matter of sonnet XXX has no direct relation to his mistress's eyes, so it seems reasonable to think of the line as an indication that he did not write the poem *about* her, but *for* her.

But what is the value of line 16? Is its only function to indicate that the speaker/husband is addressing his mistress or is something else at work here? That the husband chooses his "Lady" to be his auditor is important, to be sure. I contend, however, that the line indicates not only who the recipient of the lecture is, but also points to the individual responsible for the composition of the 50-sonnet sequence *Modern Love*. Because the husband offers his lady a sonnet, we learn that the speaker is in fact a poet. Because the husband's irregular sonnet (sonnet XXX) uses the same meter, rhyme scheme, and number of lines as the other forty-nine sections of *Modern Love*, it is reasonable to assume that the speaker is also the poet of the entire sequence. I am not referring here to Meredith by using the word "poet"; of course, Meredith is the flesh-and-blood writer of the sequence. Instead, I am suggesting that Meredith presents the fictional speaker, however implicitly, as the writer of *Modern Love*. If the husband wrote the sequence, then by extension he is responsible for the poem's peculiar prosodic characteristics. If the speaker is also the poet, then the meter's purpose is significantly complicated. No longer can we view the meter as a medium through which a disembodied speaker filters his content. Under normal circumstances, the meter and rhyme of a piece are not designed by the speaker in the text. Rather, the reader is always aware that the flesh-and-blood poet uses the meter to bring certain moments into the light, and that those characters who inhabit the fictional world do not actually

speak in meter, only that their speeches are brought into line with the prevailing meter in order to preserve the poem's formal unity as well as to emphasize key moments in those speeches.

In *Modern Love*, poetic form is not the product of a disembodied voice or a speaker who lives outside the story-world nor is it simply a medium for the flesh-and-blood writer designed to comment on a character's words or actions. The speaker/husband/poet is the versifier, not an outside, ethereal speaker. And while Meredith is obviously the one generating the metrical and stanzaic configurations, the reader is meant to view the fictional speaker as the poet/metrist. As a result, then, the formal characteristics of the poem are subjective, revealing the speaker's views on himself as well as on subjects such as nature, time, and love. The speaker also has implicit concerns about poetic form, as is evidenced by the peculiar "sonnet" form he creates for the tragic poem. The poem is as much about the form as it is about the disintegration of a marriage. As Philip Davis points out, "the form [of *Modern Love*] becomes the subject matter, the subject matter becomes the form" (500). The two—content and form—are inseparable precisely because the husband is also the poet/versifier. In the remainder of the chapter, I will examine the ways in which the husband uses prosody and the purposes for such use.

Before I begin the analysis of the husband's versification, I must establish *Modern Love's* relation to the sonnet tradition. Where exactly does the *Modern Love* sonnet intersect with and diverge from the conventional models?

To begin with the divergences: the most obvious departure is the number of lines in the *Modern Love* sonnet. Rather than using fourteen lines as the Italian and English sonnets do, Meredith (or the husband) uses sixteen lines. This particular departure means little unless it is paired with the poem's

other significant difference, namely, the rhyme scheme. As I have discussed earlier, the rhyme schemes of the Italian and English sonnets suggest at least two distinct parts. In the case of the English form, the rhyme scheme follows an alternating rhyme scheme abab cdcd efef; these three quatrains are used to develop a question or explore an idea. The rhyming couplet gg opens the turn in thought, where the poet offers a sense of resolution to the poem. The Italian sonnet uses brace rhyme in lines 1-8 (*abbaabba*); in these first eight lines the problem is developed and explored. The turn in thought and the resolution of the problem begin at line 9, where the rhyme scheme changes (*cdcdcd* or some other variation). In both sonnets, a change in rhyme indicates the beginning of the volta or turn in thought. The *Modern Love* poet does not include a change in scheme, but builds his sonnets entirely out of four brace rhymed quatrains (*abbacddceffeghhg*). As there is no change in scheme, the reader is given no cue as to the location of the volta; this technique, of course, suggests that the turn in thought can move to any position in the poem, though the rhyme scheme would seem to demand that the turn begins at the beginning of one of the quatrains. As we will soon see, however, the husband often does not place the volta at the opening of a quatrain.

As to the similarities or intersections: the *Modern Love* sonnet is written in iambic pentameter like the Italian and English models. Of course, such a similarity is negligible, considering the number of verse types that use the five-beat line. More significant is the similarity in rhyme scheme: the *Modern Love* sonnet invokes or echoes the brace rhymes of the octave of the Italian sonnet (*abbaabba*). Even with such an important overlap, the husband's sonnet does not align itself with the limit of two rhymes to the octave, moving instead toward a quatrain-isolated scheme, that is, by its lack of recurring rhymes across quatrains (the resulting pattern is

abbacddceffeghhg). As a consequence of its compartmentalization of quatrains by non-repeating rhymes, Meredith's sixteen-line sonnet harkens back to the English sonnet, whose quatrains are similarly isolated by their non-overlapping rhymes. Like both sonnet forms, too, the *Modern Love* sonnet often uses punctuation to further separate each stanza, though this time syntactically. As interesting as these prosodic observations are to the metrical theorist, it is the ways in which the husband exploits those departures and intersections in his sonnets that is of primary interest to the critic.

IV.

The best place to begin is with the husband and his uses of poetic form to communicate his own weaknesses and trauma. Consider sonnet II, which is supposed to profile his wife, but becomes instead a self-portrait:

It ended, and the morrow brought the task.
 Her eyes were guilty gates, that let him in
 By shutting all too zealous for their sin:
 Each sucked a secret, and each wore a mask.
 But, oh, the bitter taste her beauty had!
 He sickened as at breath of poison-flowers:
 A languid humour stole among the hours,

3 4

x / x / x / x / x /

And if | their smiles | encoun|tered, he | went mad

4 3 4 2 1 4

x / x / x x / x / x /

And raged | deep in|ward, until | the light | was brown

1 2

x / x / x ||/ x / x /

Before | his vi|sion, and | the world | forgot,

3 4 1 2 3 4 3 4

x / x / x / x / x /

Looked wicked as | some old | dull murder-spot.

A star with lurid beams, she seemed to crown

1 2

x / x / x / x / x /

The pit | of in|famy:| and then | again

1 2 1 2

x / x / x / x / x /

He fain|ted on | his venge|fulness,| and strove

1 2 1 2

x / x / x / x /

To ape | the mag|nani|mity | of love,

2 1 4

x / x / x / x x / x /

And smote | himself, | a shud|dering heap | of pain.

While the sonnet is about the wife, she is discussed only in terms of her effects on the speaker. Not until line 6, when the speaker invokes the pronoun "he," does the poem turn almost entirely on the husband's circumstances. In the final foot of line 6, in which the speaker refers to his madness, the meter takes on an expressive effect absent in the poem's previous lines. There are expressive moments before line 6, but they are few and not generated by meter. "Guilty gates" in line 2 and "sucked a secret" in line 4 reveal through alliteration their shared but somehow individual suffering. The speaker links himself and his wife by creating an alliterative parallel between the "g-g" and "s-s" sound patterns. That the sonic pairings—a sort of union or marriage of sound—are separated by line 3 suggests growing distance between husband and wife, even though their suffering is virtually the same in intensity.

These two sound patterns notwithstanding, the real metrical work of the sonnet begins at the end of line 6. Here the husband's anger is represented by a heavy foot ("went mad"). Normally, "went" would receive less speech stress than it has here; in fact in any other context it would render the foot a standard iamb. Because of rhetorical emphasis, "went" receives so much stress, stress that expresses the increasing volume of his voice, or the gathering momentum or swelling of his anger. The next line, with its mix of standard, heavy, and light feet, represents an anger unchecked and uncontrolled. If the husband were describing his anger kept in check by discipline and logic, this line would not support that reading; instead the husband offers the reader a sense of his anger, beginning "deep inward" as a seething anger thus far unrealized by word or action. The heavy iamb-anapest combination ("deep inward, until") points to the husband's near breaking

point, that moment in which he is on the verge of showing his anger. The light third foot in line 8, interrupted as it is by a caesura, indicates how close the husband is to unleashing his hostility on his wife. This light foot is the only barrier that separates inward and outward, the mind and the world. If the speaker loses his temper, he forgets his place and the social norms the world demands. The placement of the caesura between two lightly stressed syllables suggests that the barrier between inner and outer, the human psyche and the world, has been worn thin by years of frustration and anguish. Line 11, in its consecutive speech stresses ("some old dull murder-spot"), expresses that moment of greatest intensity, the peak of the husband's anger. Meter in this line is a sort of narrative climax, one which the speaker anticipates with the heavy feet found in previous lines. If the reader takes the analogy of meter-as-narrative to its logical conclusion, then she/he must consider the light iambs in lines 13-15 as falling action. At the moment he decides to "ape the magnanimity of love," the speaker introduces several unstressed syllables which point not only to restraint but to resignation as well; that is, not only has the husband's pique subsided, indicated by the light foot in "vengefulness," it has been replaced by a despair which makes it difficult to imitate or "ape" the "magnanimity of love." Of particular importance here are the two consecutive light feet which make up "magnanimity." Though it can refer to "dignity" and "nobility," the Latin root of "magnanimity" means "large" or "great"; these last literal meanings of greatness of stature or size are undermined by the lack of heavy speech stress in the word. What this absence of speech stress suggests is the husband's almost literal shrinking away from nobility and dignity of love.

The metrical interpretations of sonnet II offered thus far are easily made without the knowledge of the husband's role as versifier. The meter is

quite expressive as it stands, but the interpretation is deepened significantly when we take into account the husband's hand in the poem's metrical idiosyncrasies. The meter, then, refers not only to the emotions of the past, to the anger the husband felt during a particular moment. Rather, the meter also represents the husband's feelings as he pens the sequence. In this case, his anger grows as he remembers those times when his wife drove him to an anger that he could barely control. The falling metrical action in the sonnet's final lines does represent his past resignation through imitation, but it represents as well an ongoing surrender and despair often preceded by rage, as it is in sonnet II.

There are, of course, several moments when we learn about the narrator/husband, but few are quite so prosodically charged as those in sonnet IV:

All other joys of life he strove to warm,
 1 2 1 2
 x / x / x / x / x /
 And mag|nify,| and catch | them to | his lip:
 1 2
 x / x / x / x / x /
 But they | had suf|ered ship|wreck with | the ship,
 And gazed upon him sallow from the storm.
 Or if Delusion came, 'twas but to show
 The coming minute mock the one that went.
 4 1 1 2 4 3 4
 / x x / x / x / x /
 Cold as | a moun|tain in | its star-|pitched tent,
 3 4 1 2 3 4
 x / x / x / x / x /
 Stood high | Philo|sophy,| less friend | than foe:
 4 3 4 1 2 2 1 4
 x / x / x / x / x x /
 Is al|ways watch|ing with | a won|dering hate.
 4 2 1 2
 / x x / x / x / x /
 Not till | the fire | is dy|ing in | the grate,
 3 4 1 2
 x / x / x / x /
 Look we | for a|ny kin|ship with | the stars.

grandeur and sublime otherworldliness of the celestial bodies are replaced with a sense of confinement and hopelessness. It is through such a poetics of "self-caged Passion" (a phrase whose truth becomes more devastating by the use of three heavily stressed syllables), a state of being locked within the cell of one's own mind, that we begin to see just how egocentric the husband really is, a point which is clarified in the meter of lines 11 and 12. The most prominent features in line 11 are the trochee in the first foot ("Not till") and the light fourth foot ("ing in"). The trochee suggests a sudden turn of events, that the grate went cold quickly; the placement of the beat on "Not" works to negate any warmth that the hearth ever provided. The light fourth foot is a metrical dramatization of the fire dying, as it is a falling off of rhythmical intensity. Sound patterning also plays a significant role in the line, particularly in the presence of the "i" sound in "fire" and "dying." The recurrence of the vowel links the two words; but more than that it is the husband's way of saying that the fire contained the element of its own destruction, that its own eventual death is a major part of its composition. The husband's egoism and self-loathing—each a synonym for the other in *Modern Love*—are more clearly developed in the first foot of line 12 ("Look we") than at any other time in the sonnet. What makes this foot off-putting is its syntactic reversal, which has the effect of elevating the personal pronoun to a heavy stress in a beat position. It is not only the reversal that significantly increases "we"'s stress level. "Look," itself a heavily stressed word, pushes up against and forces the stress promotion of the pronoun. The only way to alleviate the extra stress would be to read the foot as a trochee, but such a reading mars the line. If "we" is placed on the beat and is preceded by a heavily stressed syllable, then one has no choice but to elevate the pronoun's stress level.

of") makes the dance of the young men and women appear small. The heavy-light foot comparison is used to illustrate the insignificance of the speaker's presence at such celebrations in his youth. The second foot in line 8 ("known rus") represents the "revels" the speaker attended in his youth while "vels in" suggests that he did not matter when compared to the plurality of people who comprise the celebration. The heavy-light pairing in the next line ("May-fly pleasures of") performs much the same function, but now with the emphasis of an extra heavily stressed syllable before the heavy foot ("May"). The last two metrical touches play opposing roles. The first instance, the heavy final iamb in line 13 ("seem near"), suggests the young people are close to nature, as the heavy iamb has from early in the poem been associated with nature. That the celebrants have been cast in terms of the grandeur of nature indicates that the speaker accepts their communion with nature as authentic. But in line 15, we see a sudden, almost inexplicable reversal of belief; "cret of," the third foot with its light speech stresses, undermines the closeness the speaker claims the youth share with the natural world by associating them with a light iamb that, from the beginning of the poem, has come to symbolize our powerlessness and insignificance when compared with nature as well as the chasm that exists between man and nature.

The poet marshals all of the sonnet's formal components to undermine the closeness of the young people and nature, a closeness he believes to be real in line 13. Consider the bracing rhymes of lines 13 and 16. "Near" refers to the communion of the people on the green with nature, while "beer" is his explanation for the appearance of closeness. In other words, the "revels" are not the result of closeness but drunkenness, a view that is metrically foreshadowed by two consecutive heavy iambs preceded by a heavily stressed beat in line 6 ("flows one nut-brown stream"). This combination of

relentless stressed syllables is difficult to read at a speed that approximates a series of standard iambs; the slow, ungainly, and unnatural enunciation of these syllables produces in the reader the verbal effects of drunkenness. Similarly, the turn in thought suggests both a proximity to and a distance from nature. That is, if we locate the volta at the end of line 14:

They have the secret of the bull and lamb.
'Tis true that when we trace its source, 'tis beer.

Formally, the distich recalls the English sonnet, in that the turning point performs its service in two lines. As in the English sonnet, lines 15-16 are appropriately separated from lines 1-14 by a fairly strong punctuation mark, a semicolon, which creates a significant enough pause to tell the reader that there is presumably a change in content in the following lines. The rhyme scheme does not, however, follow the scheme set out in the English sonnet; taken on their own, without any reference to the previous lines, the distich does not rhyme. Taken in the context of the previous two lines (13-14), the distich is the second half of the final quatrain of the poem. Syntactically, the lines do not meet the requirements of the English sonnet's rhyming couplet. Unlike the rhyming couplet, which preserves the grammatical unity of the lines, the husband separates the two lines into two sentences. By ending each line with a period, the poet creates uncertainty about the nature of the turn in thought, in particular where it is actually located. Are we to read line 15 as a part of the turn or the last line before the turn? Certainly the latter possibility makes good sense; after all, it is in line 16 that the poet undermines the proximity of the young men and women to nature by claiming that the closeness they feel is little more than an illusion brought on by intoxication. All the line needs to fulfill the traditional turn in thought is a subordinating conjunction before "'Tis":
"They have the secret of the bull and lamb. / But 'tis true that when we

trace its source, 'tis beer." The meter is not as regular, to be sure, but a correct scansion would read the first three syllables ("But 'tis true") as an anapest, a substitution that appears not infrequently in *Modern Love*.

Despite the feasibility of the last line as turn, there is another equally feasible possibility: perhaps there are two turning points. The first volta occurs after line 14 and the second after line 15. After the first turn, the speaker explains why the youths on the green are wiser than he is, that "They have the secret of the bull and lamb." The bull and lamb are representations of nature in its extremes. But these creatures probably do not represent opposites (though the potential for such a reading is there), but instead are meant to represent all of nature, much like the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil does not refer to good and evil but rather to a knowledge of everything. The second turn reverses this view by suggesting that the source of the secret is only intoxication, not a closeness with the natural world. This second volta is a proposal that contradicts the explanation made by the first. Both formal possibilities—the double volta or the single volta on the last line of the sonnet—reveal a confused mind and a tortured psyche, and may even portray a man incapable of settling on one view. The ambivalence produced by the turn(s) expresses the husband's ambivalence, which manifests itself on several occasions. If we accept the double volta reading, it would appear that the speaker would very much like to see some beauty in an otherwise bleak world, but his idealism is trumped by pessimism and self-loathing.

Not surprisingly, he reacts to love in much the same way. Considering the subject matter of the sequence, the speaker discusses love often, but usually in brief passages here and there, rarely devoting most or all of a sonnet to the subject. While a reading of each brief passage on love would be a boon for Meredith scholarship, the prosodist interested in understanding

XVIII, the light and heavy iambs often take on thematic value. In sonnet XVIII heavy iambs are used in reference to the grandeur and largeness of nature ("Fair space") and the light feet in reference to humans' relative insignificance in comparison ("shak|ings of"). Though both sonnets use modulated feet to handle particular themes, it is more difficult to identify a particular modulation (heavy or light) with one theme or motif throughout. Unlike sonnet XVIII, whose light and heavy feet divide along fairly neat thematic lines, the modulations of sonnet XXVI, while they do at points take on distinctive thematic values, often blur into one another. This blurring is particularly evident when the two modulations are presented in combination, which occurs in the poem four times in four lines of text. The poet uses it for purposes of emphasis and imitation as he does in sonnet XVIII; consider the combination in line 1 ("gle in high skies"). The ascending 1-2-3-4 modulation mimics Love the eagle as he takes flight. But the motif of ascendancy associated alters significantly by line 6, where the next heavy-light combination is located ("of his spent pain"). This combination also follows a 1-2-3-4 progression, but this time with a different effect; instead of representing the majesty of Love and its ascendance, these feet are now associated with "spent pain." We can read these four syllables mimetically as expressive of agony or even as a kind of descent. After being struck by the arrow, Love the eagle can no longer stay aloft. The 1-2 foot, then, suggests weightlessness while the jarring 3-4 syllables are a kind of puncture wound and a clumsy, frenzied flapping of wings before the fall. "Of a harsh chain" in line 7 moves from the eagle's fall to a sort of imprisonment. And while it is a light-heavy combination, it is a light-heavy combination with a distinct difference: rather than following the 1-2-3-4 modulation of those in lines 1 and 6, these four

anapests and dactyls. "Love in the Valley," which uses a mix of triple rhythms and accentual meters, is the metrical outlier of the early work.

syllables are a 2-1-3-4 progression. Mimetically speaking, this particular stress pattern is quite powerful. Because the sonic pattern is a rhythmic trough—beginning on a 2, descending to a 1, rising to a 3, and ending on a 4—the sonic image of manacles which snare the bird is expressed through the bracing (in both senses of the word) rhythmic modulation. Put another way, as the more heavily stressed syllables (“of” and “chain”) bracket the relatively lighter ones (“a” and “harsh”), so the chains of blood surround and anchor the eagle to the earth. As the chains are a reference to blood loss, we may also read the light syllables as the sudden gush of blood and the heavy syllables as the heart laboring to beat in spite of the wound.

To this point I have discussed these three foot pairings in terms of their mimetic effects. Their thematic power, that which unifies them, is, however, what makes them a valuable component to the poem. Each pairing is a stage in Love’s progress: the first pairing describes and mimics Love’s eagle-like ascent; the second pairing details the eagle’s pain and its descent; and the third pairing describes the eagle’s earthbound state. Read in quick succession, these foot pairings represent the fall of Love and its subsequent serpentine metamorphosis.

The final pairing of light and heavy iambs in line 15 breaks with the established pattern by reversing the progression, placing the heavy foot (“no cow”) before the light foot (“ard:—you”). It is no more unusual to find a reversed modulation like this one (3-4-1-2) in Anglophone poetry than the light-heavy progression (1-2-3-4 or 2-1-3-4). What, then, is the reason for such a reversal? By relying on light and heavy feet, the poet links the addressee—most likely the wife—with the wounded eagle. But the reversal suggests the connection is not a positive one; the husband is not praising “Madam” for her affiliation with love. Rather, he claims that she has wounded the grand bird, therefore accusing her of Love’s earthbound condition

as well as its unfortunate transformation. The use of the word "coward" in this pairing also supports such a reading, adding another possibility: the reversal and the use of "coward" are a not so subtle way on the speaker's part of claiming that his wife and the eagle are diametrically opposed. While the eagle's natural habitat is the "high skies," his spouse occupies the very depths. Finally, the combination performs a mimetic role, for a decrease in volume that results from a steady decrease in stress is expressive of a cowering figure. The wife here may be shrinking under her husband's ire. In passages like this one, through metrical modulation, the poet is capable of reporting his wife's responses to his monologues without the use of explicit description. A more detailed discussion would undoubtedly reveal other such moments in which the poet uses meter to implicitly narrate others' reactions to his diatribes and his actions.

These light-heavy/heavy-light pairings perform most of the heavy lifting in the sonnet, but they are not the only semantically charged components in the poem. As in the other forty-nine sonnets, light and heavy iambs individually play a significant role in affecting the meaning of the poem as well as the husband's meaning. Consider sonnet XXVI's heavily stressed opening syllables ("Love ere"), which perform at least two functions. First, the heavy iamb may express Love's grandeur, as the reader must linger over the words, which if read too quickly will ruin the line. Second, the foot suggests two disparate interpretations, each of which is to be read with the other in mind. The first interpretation relies on meter and modulation to emphasize word play in the second syllable. "Ere," when read as a heavy speech stress, is homophonous with "air," a pun that foreshadows Love's flight in the last two feet of line 1. In fact, because the foot must be performed as a 3-4 progression, the volume increases and the inflection rises as the eagle rises. Third, the heavy speech stresses emphasize Love's

eventual fall; in this reading, "ere" simply means "before." An analysis sensitive to these two readings simultaneously reveals not only the poem's complexity, but the husband's mental state. He is incapable of meaning what he says, or worse, he cannot settle down on one particular idea. Thus he develops two competing definitions that serve to obscure his motives. Despite his attempts to keep us at arm's length, or, rather, in spite of them, the husband inadvertently reveals one of his most debilitating flaws: an ambivalence and indecisiveness that rivals that of Hamlet.

Light iambs also play a significant role in the sonnet. To emphasize their value, the poet uses only three light feet, which equal the number of heavy feet. Of course, there are more than three light and three heavy feet, but only three of each do not occur in a heavy-light combination. The first light foot in line 8 ("him to") allows for two possible scansion. The first scansion, a trochee, would place more stress on "him" than "to." That the foot is preceded by an initial trochee ("Binding") certainly makes the trochaic scansion an attractive option. If we read the foot as a trochee with the metrical beat on "him," then the personal pronoun takes precedence over the preposition. How does this inversion affect the meaning of the poem? Perhaps the two consecutive trochees are a means of representing the eagle's struggle to overcome gravity. An interpretation that goes beyond the mimetic would involve viewing the second trochee as a means of equating Love with his snares. That is, the second inverted foot, by virtue of being a trochee, is naturally paired with or bound to the first. To support this particular reading, we need only look at the rest of the line and the rest of the sonnet: the rest of line 8 is written in standard 1-4 iambs; nowhere else in the sonnet do two trochees occur consecutively. Both of these factors combine to emphasize just how unusual consecutive trochees sound and just how

rare they are in Anglophone poetry, unless, of course, the poem is composed in a trochaic meter.

The second scansion places the metrical beat on "to," also an acceptable reading. In this case, the eagle does not create his own bondage; instead, the preposition places emphasis on Love's location: "Binding him to the ground." Such emphasis is a reminder that the eagle can no longer fly: the key feature that makes him distinct from species that live on the land or in the sea has been taken from him. Now he must live on the ground where he is vulnerable to those species over which he once held dominion. Also, by moving the stress away from "him," the poet illustrates Love's weakness. Personal pronouns are a means of establishing identity; when we wish to refer to someone without using his name, then we use the personal pronoun "him." By placing the beat on "to," the poet subordinates "him" to an already weak syllable.¹⁷ The weakening of "him"'s stress is a weakening of Love's identity, a weakening that is a direct result of the eagle's loss of flight.

"Gle in," the light iamb in line 10, is interesting in that it also appears in line 1. In its first incarnation, the foot refers to the eagle's flight before it is wounded. In the second, the foot still refers to the eagle (actually, a part of the word "eagle" as in the first instance), but this time with a significant difference. In line 1, the light foot carries with it a positive connotation of freedom. In line 10, however, the husband uses the same foot to argue that the eagle was once in his "bosom," but now it is the serpent that inhabits his heart. As the metamorphosis takes place in the poet's heart, so does the wound that grounds the eagle. The impotence and pain the eagle endures, the poet also endures. While no personal pronoun is used here, identity is dealt with nonetheless. By repeating the same syllables twice without alteration ("gle in"), the poet implicitly states

¹⁷ Usually, prepositions receive little to no speech stress unless stress is necessary for rhetorical effect.

that he is the eagle, that the eagle is the husband. By extension, then, the husband claims to be love, a pronouncement consistent with his egoism and self-loathing.

The final light foot ("-lie of"), while expressive, is not as polysemous as the others; it does warrant at least some consideration, however. A word like "lie" would normally occupy a metrical beat and carry significant speech stress. But because it is a compound word, however, in which the first half ("side") falls on a beat position in a neighboring foot, "lie" cannot sit well in either a beat position or speech stress. If one were to try to read the foot as a trochee, the entire line would collapse:

/ x x / x / / x x /
 Speak, and | I see | the side|-lie of | a truth.

The ear cannot sustain such a reading without losing the meter. Thus "lie" must be in an offbeat position and receive less stress than the preposition "of." A foot whose heaviest speech stress falls on a preposition will naturally be read with less volume than a heavier foot. Reducing the volume is a metrical realization of line 12: "I can interpret where the mouth is dumb." The silence the speaker interprets is expressed in the light "lie of." It also suggests the timidity of the addressee, whom the husband asks to "Speak," a word delivered forcefully as is evidenced by the 4-1 trochee ("Speak, and"). It is as if the wife is afraid to speak, waiting as she does for her husband's anger.

There are many more formal peculiarities in *Modern Love* than we have considered here. Every sonnet contains metrical anomalies, to be sure; but such a treatment is best left to an annotated edition of the sequence, not to a brief study of Meredith's metrical art. What each sonnet reveals, though, is quite similar to what the few sonnets examined here have revealed: that the husband is the poet and that any real understanding of the series' formal characteristics must begin with this fact. Any attempt to analyze the poem's

form without keeping in mind that the husband is the creator of the meters will lead to an incomplete and possibly inaccurate interpretation. Had Meredith not supplied the clue in sonnet XXX ("Lady, this is my sonnet to your eyes."), we would trace the source of the meter back to a disembodied speaker. In such a case, the meter functions as authorial commentary, a means on the part of the flesh-and-blood poet to make clear his views on this or that character and this or that theme. As far as *Modern Love* is concerned, such is not the case. Because it is a part of the husband's voice, prosody tells us something of his trauma, of his egoism, and his self-hatred. Even when he discusses themes like nature and love, he is informing his reader less about the subject at hand and more about himself, the real subject of the sequence. In this light, the lack of resolution in the sonnet is symptomatic of a mind under stress. Had the husband composed the sequence under different circumstances, he would have undoubtedly turned to the Italian or English sonnet tradition. He writes instead in a form that does not allow any real closure, whose four brace-rhymed quatrains is without any formally set or indicated volta. The sixteen line form reveals a speaker incapable of wrapping things up, who sees no real end in sight.

CHAPTER 3
MEREDITH'S SEQUENTIAL PROSODY
A READING OF POEMS AND LYRICS OF THE JOY OF EARTH

I.

Meredith left no real record of his own views of *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth* (1883). He does refer to the volume in his correspondence, but offers little in the way of commentary. The following letter to Frederick McMillan is a representative sample of his mention of the book:

From what I hear there is something of a demand for my volumes *The Joy of Earth* and *Tragic Life*. I think it would be as well to reprint 250 of each. I propose to reprint a Selection of my poems in the Spring. (SL 137)

Any mention of the poems is either in passing or in connection to a business transaction, namely concerning the publication of individual poems in a newspaper or, as in the letter to McMillan, the printing of more copies to meet demand. Such an absence in reflection on his volume is not unusual for Meredith, for he rarely elaborated in his correspondence on any of his volumes of poetry. The Meredithian, then, must satisfy himself on scraps and brief comments in order to construct something like the poet's thoughts on his work. Occasionally, however, the scrap proves to be almost as illuminating as an extended discussion. Of all the mundane letters that make brief reference to *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth*, only one short passage in a letter to Norman MacColl provides anything approaching explanation and commentary:

Enclosed are two sonnets, to be printed in company, if they are suitable to your columns. They come out of a body of sonnets, forming a portion of a volume I have in hand, called *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth*: but whether these two, as they stand by themselves, carry sufficient animation of the anti-Pessimism of the bulk, to have meaning enough for your readers, I cannot judge—therefore excuse [sic] you for a negative decision. (L I, 685)

Meredith wrote a number of letters like this one, that is, letters to magazine, newspaper, and journal editors requesting that they publish his poetry or short fiction. This letter deviates, however, from what amounts to a form letter. Usually Meredith states his business and ends the letter. In the letter to MacColl, however, he explains that the sonnets were originally printed in his 1883 volume. This information is relevant, according to Meredith, because the poems may not stand on their own merit without the context of "the bulk." Meredith "cannot judge" whether or not this is the case, so he allows MacColl to make a decision with all the facts before him.

What is significant here is not Meredith's full disclosure as to the poems' publication history, but what he reveals about his views of the book. He is careful to state that the sonnets "come out of a body of sonnets," which in turn "[form] a portion of a volume I have in hand." In this description, Meredith implies that the poems are of a piece, a part of a whole. This indirect statement is clarified when he points out that he cannot be sure "whether these two [sonnets], as they stand by themselves, carry sufficient animation of the anti-Pessimism of the bulk." The concern is that taken on their own, these two sonnets may not "have meaning enough for your readers." Clearly, Meredith views the poems as part of a larger entity, a volume not of individual unconnected poems but of a tightly woven tapestry of verse, each poem commenting on and complicating the rest of the book. The theme which these two sonnets aid in developing is "anti-Pessimism." His concern is whether the sonnets in question successfully communicate the theme without the aid of the rest of the "body of sonnets" in the volume. His discussion of the two poems' place in the group of sonnets suggests that not only are they an integral part of the volume as a whole, but a part of the collection as well. The word "body" gives the impression that the group of sonnets is in fact a sequence, not simply a miscellany of poems written in

the same fourteen line format. Assisting in the establishment of this view is the umbrella title "Sonnets" that precedes the series.

But even had Meredith not named the section "Sonnets," the reader would still be likely to view the poems as a collection because of their shared formal lineage, i.e., their sonnetness. If the form cues the reader to think of the sonnets as a sequence, then a title is unnecessary. In fact, there are sequences in *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth* that are not labeled as such. The only factor that unites these otherwise separate poems is their formal similarities. If we use form as our means of locating sequences, then there are at least three series. The first series is a pair of poems: "The Woods of Westermain" and "The Day of the Daughter of Hades. The second series is comprised of three poems: "Phoebus and Admetus," "Melampus," and "Love in the Valley." Finally, the third series is the sonnet sequence referred to earlier. While there are doubtless more poems closely related enough to be called sequences, these three units are the only poems linked by a common metrical/formal thread. The question then becomes: why are they linked? Do they share other affinities beside their obvious prosodic similarities? How is our reading of these individual poems changed when we examine them as a sequence? Last, why has Meredith scholarship not addressed the possibility of sequences in *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth*?

This last question is the easiest to answer. Meredith scholars have not been concerned with the poet's formal experiments, preferring to focus on other issues, usually his philosophy as it is expressed in the poetry in this volume. To say that Meredith critics have not had anything to say about Meredith's meter is true, but they have not ignored his technique. Carol Bernstein, for example, devotes chapter five of her seminal study of Meredith's verse to the poet's style, addressing questions of word choice, Meredith's compound words, metaphor, and many other stylistic issues. George

Macaulay Trevelyan also discusses Meredith style, focusing on metaphor and compression (9-15). Neither study pays much attention to the metrical dimension. As a result of omitting such an important element, critics are not likely to see the link between certain poems, particularly if that link is established by poetic form.

The other questions above are more complex and will require a more detailed treatment. The rest of this chapter will attempt to answer these questions by examining the "Westermain" and the "Love in the Valley" sequences. By paying close attention to each poem's formal dimension as well as the ways in which form interacts with the content, we will consider how each poem, given its formal peculiarities, fits into its respective sequence. Whether or not these two sequences are isolated from or interact with one another will also be briefly examined at the end of the chapter.

First, a word should be said on why I have excluded the sonnet sequence from the poems to be discussed. Unlike Meredith's first forays into the sonnet tradition, the sonnets in *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth* are not patently experimental, but follow quite closely the conventions set down over the past several centuries. This is not to say that the sonnets are undeserving of further discussion. Quite the contrary: the sonnets to this point have been treated individually, "Lucifer in Starlight" receiving the most attention. Nonetheless, they do not deviate from the sonnet tradition enough to be called innovative or experimental. The "Westermain" sequence and the "Valley" sequence are discussed precisely because of their transgressive metrical strategies. They are of Meredith's own invention, with the exception of "Love in the Valley," which Phyllis Bartlett claims is written in a meter Meredith first encountered in "Serenade of a Loyal Martyr" by George Darley (P 62n.).

II.

The first sequence in *Poems in Lyrics of the Joy of Earth* includes "The Woods of Westermain" and "The Day of the Daughter of Hades," poems which are connected by a similar formal infrastructure. Both rely on an extraordinarily tight meter resistant to triple rhythms or excessive substitutions. Their other prosodic characteristics run counter to the strictures of the meter, deviating from what the reader thinks in the beginning to be regular rhyme schemes. Because it is the first poem in the sequence and sets the tone for the sequence as well as the volume, I will turn now to "The Woods of Westermain."

Before detailing the expressive effects of form in "The Woods of Westermain," I will outline those formal elements that make up the poem. One of the most interesting and certainly most striking features of the poem is its meter. The dominant meter is tetrameter, which is interrupted from time to time by a trimeter or dimeter refrain. I have only explained half of the meter here by stating that the poem is written in tetrameter and trimeter. Standard metrical analysis demands that the metrist not only explain how many feet are in the line, but that he must also relate the kind of foot on which the poem is based. We have met the former requirement, but not the latter, because the type of foot used is indeterminate. Consider the first few lines of section I:

```

/ x / x / x /
Enter these enchanted woods,
    / x /
    You who dare.
/ x / x / x /
Nothing harms beneath the trees
/ x / x / x /
More than waves a swimmer cleaves.
/ x / x / x /
Toss your heart up with the lark,
/ x / x / x /
Foot at peace with mouse and worm,
    / x /
    Fare you fair. (1-7)
```

The reader will notice that the vertical lines used to separate feet used in this study thus far are absent. The reason I have not yet included them is to point out the problematic nature of foot designation in this poem. Because there are no even-syllable lines, we cannot possibly categorize the meter with a particular foot. Meredith has written the entire poem in seven-syllable lines. Usually, a poet will use an odd-syllable line occasionally in order to break the monotony of the base meter or for some expressive or mimetic effect. The reader is then not confused as to the nature of the foot categorization because it is established early on and departed from only sporadically. "The Woods of Westermain" uses the odd-syllable line exclusively; that is, the seven-syllable line is the dominant line with five-syllable lines intervening from time to time. Had Meredith included only a few even-syllable lines, we could feel more comfortable settling on a foot. If, for example, there were a few iambic tetrameter lines here and there, we would call the dominant meter headless iambic pentameter. If, on the other hand, a few trochaic tetrameter lines cropped up in the text, we would call the line catalectic trochaic tetrameter. But we do not have the luxury of such metrical cues.

We must, then, have the choice of two meters, which are represented below:

Headless trochaic tetrameter and trimeter and dimeter:

```

/ x      / x      / x      /      v
Enter | these en|chanted | woods,
      / x      /      v
      You who | dare.

```

Iambic tetrameter and trimeter and dimeter catalectic:

```

v / x      /      x      / x      /
En|ter these | enchan|ted woods,
  v /      x      /
  You | who dare.

```

The ear is likely to perceive the meter as trochaic, for the first syllable we hear in every line is stressed. This sensory perception is doubtless why Renate Muendel calls the meter trochaic tetrameter, what he rightly refers to as an "unusual meter in English" (24). Muendel is not to be faulted for this idea; most readers with a proficient ear would make the same assessment. But there is reason to be cautious in making a choice so quickly based on a first sensory impression. While the reader may rush to judgment in classifying the poem, he should notice that the line ends with a stressed syllable, not an unstressed syllable as a trochaic line should. Upon reflection, he should notice a conspicuous feature—i.e., the missing syllable. Even if auditors persist in their trochaic scansion, they must acknowledge that the meter is unsettling. Despite the risks inherent in choosing a foot designation for such an unusual meter, we must nonetheless categorize the meter for convenience alone. Thus we will scan the lines as trochaic tetrameter and trimeter catalectic, keeping in mind that the choice is arbitrary.

The second peculiar feature of the poem is its use of rhyme. Unlike fixed forms that use a particular rhyme scheme stanza after stanza, "The Woods of Westermain" does not observe a regular rhyme scheme. This is not to say that certain rhyme types do not continue to emerge in the poem. Consider the rhymes in the following passage:

Open hither, open hence,
Scarce a bramble weaves a fence,
Where the strawberry runs red,
With white star-flower overhead;
Cumbered by dry twig and cone,
Shredding husks of seedlings flown,
Mine of mole and spotted flint:
Of dire wizardry no hint,
Save mayhap the print that shows
Hasty outward-tripping toes,
Heels to terror, on the mould.
These, the woods of Westermain,
Are as others to behold,
Rich of wreathing sun and rain;
Foliage lustreful around
Shadowed leagues of slumbering sound. (III, 8-16)

At the outset, the rhyme scheme seems regular enough, following a couplet pattern: *aabbccdde*. Lines 1-10 establish the couplet scheme, but the scheme is broken in line 11 with "Westermain," which does not complete the rhyming pair beginning with "mould." Of course, "mould" is not an orphan word; its rhyming partner follows "Westermain" ("behold"). At this point a new scheme is established beginning with line 11: *fgfg* ("mould," "Westermain," "behold," and "rain"). But no sooner is the alternating scheme established than it shifts to a new pattern, a return to the couplet scheme: *hh* ("around" and "sound"). These two patterns repeat throughout the poem, but not with any set pattern or structure. So despite their recurrence, these schemes are not predictable.

There are other important prosodic features in "The Woods of Westermain," but these two elements—the indeterminate meter and the irregular yet regular rhyme schemes—set the poem apart from the formal tradition. The other prosodic features in the poem—end-stopped v. enjambed lines, alliteration, and modulations in speech stress—are frequently used in traditional Anglophone poetry. Put another way, they are not distinguishing features of Meredith's poem. I do not wish to suggest that these elements are not important; rather, they are a large part of the poem's expressiveness, a fact which will be verified by the following discussion of form's relation to meaning in "The Woods of Westermain."

Although we have settled on the metrical designation of trochaic tetrameter with occasional trimeter and dimeter refrains, the uncertainty of the meter is still worth considering, particularly as it relates to the poem's message. Meredith's metrical choice ultimately is directly linked to the poem's addressee, the second-person pronoun introduced in the second line of the text: "Enter these enchanted woods, / You who dare" (I, 1-2, emphasis added). The "you" is never clearly defined; we learn nothing about the

individual being addressed—his/her sex, profession, class. The pronominal ambiguity is important for it opens the field of potential addressees. Perhaps the reason Meredith does not fill in these gaps—his/her sex, profession, class, etc.—is that because he does not have a particular person in mind, or he does not wish to specify the addressee’s identity. By avoiding specificity, he implies that the addressee is Everyman or Everywoman. But the most attractive possibility is the addressee is Meredith’s reader. After all, when an individual hears the pronoun “you,” she/he usually assumes that she/he is the person being addressed.

The reader/addressee’s first experience of the poem begins with a challenge or a “dare.” “You who dare” works as an accusation of cowardice, but also as a warning. It is as if the speaker is saying, “Even the brave should take care if they decide to enter here.” Moreover, the speaker suggests in this warning/challenge that the reader should be apprehensive or even frightened. After this point, the addressee will be on his guard, or at least that is the poet’s intention. The meter only serves to add to this apprehension. At the same time as the speaker is throwing the reader off balance, the meter causes the reader to pause, to proceed with uncertainty as to how to think about the form. The meter, then, is a challenge as well, a means of telling the reader that only the brave should continue through the poem. Such metrically induced discomfort is heightened by the modulation of stress in the opening lines:

Enter these enchanted woods,
 1
 4 3 4
 / x / v
 You who | dare.
 Nothing harms beneath the leaves
 More than waves a swimmer cleaves.
 4 2 4 1 2 1
 / x / x / x / v
Toss your | heart up | with the | lark,
 Foot at peace with mouth and worm,

woods; "you" is weaker than the creatures in the woods, who "Have you by the hair." The "h" sound in "hair" traps the reader in the woods under the watchful eyes of those species who inhabit the landscape.

On a number of occasions, Meredith uses heavy and light feet to vary what is otherwise a monotonous meter. Consider, for example, the following passages, which use heavy and light feet to great expressive effect:

$$\begin{array}{cccccccc} & & 4 & 3 & & 4 & & \\ / & & x & / & x & / & x & / & \vee \\ \text{Or, when | } & \underline{\text{old-eyed}} & | & \underline{\text{oxen}} & | & \text{chew} & & & \\ & 2 & 1 & & 2 & 1 & & & \\ / & x & / & x & & / & x & / & \vee \\ \text{Speculation | } & \underline{\text{with the}} & | & \text{cud,} & & & & & \\ \text{Read their pool of vision through,} & & & & & & & & \\ \text{Back to hours when mind was mud;} & & & & & & & & \\ \dots & & & & & & & & \\ \text{Farther, deeper, may you read,} & & & & & & & & \\ \text{Have you sight for things afield,} & & & & & & & & \\ \text{Where peeps she, the Nurse of seed,} & & & & & & & & \\ & & 2 & 1 & & & & & \\ / & & x & / & x & / & x & / & \vee \\ \text{Cloaked, but | } & \underline{\text{in the}} & | & \text{peep re|vealed;} & & & & & \\ & 4 & 3 & & & & & & \\ & 2 & 1 & & & & & & \\ / & x & / & x & & / & x & / & \vee \\ \text{Showing | } & \underline{\text{a kind}} & | & \text{face and | } & \text{sweet:} & & & & \\ \text{Look you with the soul you see't.} & & & & & & & & \end{array}$$

By using three consecutive heavy speech stresses in line 45 ("old-eyed oxen"), Meredith depicts metrically the oxen's slow, deliberate chewing movements, a kinetic image that aids in animating the wilderness. The two consecutive light feet ("lation with the") in the next line are the counterparts of the heavy speech stresses in line 45. Speculation is of course intangible, almost ethereal, particularly when we compare it to the heavy stress of "cud" at the end of the line. Line 46, then, is polarized: at one end the ethereal, the insubstantial, the intellectual, the ideal; at the other the physical, the tangible, the real.

The last two metrical variations in the passage, while they have a mimetic function, return us to the reader in the woods, the "you" of the poem. The sentence begins "Farther, deeper, may you read / Have you sight

for things afield"; "may" here indicates that Meredith is offering the reader his blessing, imparting to him powers that will give him the insight (and sight) to really see the forest and, by extension, nature. The modulations that follow are the potential results of the blessing, what the reader will achieve if he only accepts the benediction. The first light foot ("in the") in line 56 is the first potential result of the reader's newly-given sight. Despite the fact that the "Nurse of seed" is "Cloaked," the reader can still see her. In much the same way, a reader attuned to poetic form will still hear the metrical beat, even though it is cloaked in a lightly stressed syllable ("in").

The final variation ("a kind"), the most problematic foot in the passage and possibly the poem, gives a sense of just how sharp the reader's vision could be. Typically, articles, indefinite and definite, do not occur on metrical beats; to place even a little stress on an article in order to bring out the metrical beat produces an awkward reading. Very rarely is a reader obliged to put the article on a metrical beat, because the neighboring syllable in the foot will almost always carry more speech stress. On occasion, however, the poet pries the article into a beat position, which inevitably produces an awkward and stilted reading. "A kind" is one of those rare occasions when the article must fall on the beat. An attempt to shift the beat to "kind" violates the meter even more. The meter simply will not allow for a metrical inversion in the second foot, or any foot in the line, for that matter. The uncomfortable scansion is made more so by the second syllable, "kind," which must always produce heavy speech stress. But if we read the foot as a trochee, then we must demote "kind" so that its speech stress is weaker than "a," resulting in a 2-1 progression. This scansion's expressive effect would echo the cloaked, almost invisible Nurse, whom the reader can now see. There is another, perhaps more feasible scansion: rather

than significantly lessening the speech stress on "kind," we can raise the speech stress of "a," resulting in a 4-3 progression. The expressive effect borne out of this reading suggests that the reader, because of his new vision, now sees things more clearly. Even the smallest objects are now magnified, just as the article is now amplified by the metrical beat. Other metrical variations appear in the text, but most of them are purely mimetic or serve only to break the monotony of the four beat line. These moments of metrical intensity charged with flashes of intellect are rare.

Not so rare are those moments when rhyme significantly impacts the poem's meaning. Because Meredith did not use a fixed or predetermined form for the poem's composition (a sonnet, for example), the placement of rhyme is not dictated by tradition, but instead is more deliberate. Thus when he places rhyming words in a particular configuration, he is not simply fulfilling a prescribed rhyme scheme. The rhymes, then, are ordered in a certain way to achieve a particular thematic or expressive effect. Consider the deployment of rhyme in the opening lines of the section II:

Here the snake across your path
Stretches in his golden bath:
Mossy-footed squirrels leap
Soft as winnowing plumes of Sleep:
Yaffles on a chuckle skim
Low to laugh from branches dim:
Up the pine, where sits the star,
Rattles deep the moth-winged jar.
Each has business of his own;
But should you distrust a tone,
Then beware. (II, 1-11)

Thus far, the rhyme scheme is predictable enough (*aabbccdde*), and by and large the rhyme pairs appear innocuous enough. Upon deeper inspection, though some of the pairs do not seem entirely logical. "Leap" and "Sleep," for example, are concepts not at all connected; one suggests silence and rest, while the other connotes a din of frenetic movement. "Star" and "jar" do not appear to be diametrically opposed, particularly when we consider that

the nightjar is a nocturnal bird. Clearly, the scene is set at night, so this rhyming pair makes sense. If we take "jar" out of context for a moment, then we must account for other possible definitions of the word, one of which would be to shake or shock or jostle. If we look at the line from which "jar" comes, we will see at the beginning the word "Rattle," not such a far cry from the definitions listed above. Now the link between the two rhymes is not so mundane. Of course, both words are still associated with the night, but they are no longer so limited. Given the expanded possibilities, it seems the rhyme here is used to suggest an image of a star shaking or rattling. The two rhyming pairs ("leap"/"Sleep" and "star"/"jar"), like the odd-syllable meter destabilize the reader, heightening his anxiety precisely at that moment when he should be at ease. As Meredith describes it here, the scene is calm and quite peaceful until line 11. The rhyme tells us something quite different; the unstable and unbalanced pairs are the poet's way of saying, "Under this calm surface, the unknown is afoot. So beware." The reader attentive to the rhymes' revelatory function will not be surprised by this instability, but the reader Meredith envisions does not expect the complications that arise from the wilderness.

Related to his sophisticated rhyming strategies is the tapestry of sounds that makes up so much of the poem:

These, the woods of Westermain,
Are as others to behold,
Rich of wreathing sun and rain;
Foliage lustreful around
Shadowed leagues of slumbering sound.
Wavy tree-tops, yellow whins,
Shelter eager manikins
Myriads free to peck and pipe:
Would you better? Would you worse?
You with them may gather ripe
Pleasures flowing not from purse. (III, 12-22)

Unlike the four-beat meter, which does not often allow for enjambment (though there are points when it is used to great effect), recurrent sounds are

rarely if ever intrastichic (isolated within the line). On the contrary, a sound will show up again and again line after line as many of the consonant sounds do here. Consider the "w" sound, which Meredith employs for the first time in the title ("Woods" and "Westermain"). Because these two words are the phonetic origin of this recurrent sound, any time the auditor hears the "w," his mind will be drawn back to those source words, no matter how far from the source words the recurrent sound may be. Such phonetic echoing, by drawing the reader back to the sound's source, frames all words with that sound in terms of the source word. In the case of the "w," all "w" words are affected semantically by "woods" and "Westermain." And conversely, the meaning of the source words is complicated and expanded by the meanings and connotations of every "w" word in the text. In the passage above, those words in which the "w" appears do not always complicate the meaning of the source words. Instead, most of them serve to remind us that the woods surround us, that we are no longer at a safe distance from the wilderness, but are now circumscribed by it. Meredith goes so far in line 20 to remind us of our location in the woods, that he uses the near-homophone "would"; of course, it is only an auxiliary verb, but nonetheless it emphasizes even more than the "w" sound alone that we are encircled by the wilderness.

A number of other sound patterns emerge, though their use is more local. That is to say, we are not likely to remember the first time the "s" is used, whereas the "w" is central to the text. Thus other such sounds work well over five or ten lines, say, but afterward the reader may have trouble remembering the source word. This is not to say, however, that these sounds are insignificant, only that their use is less universal. "R" sounds, for example, play a significant role in the poem, but they seem to be more heavily concentrated here than at any other point in "The Woods of Westermain." Only in four words does "r" receive pride of place as the first

sound: "Rich" in line 14; "wreathing" in line 14; "rain" in line 14; and "ripe" in line 21. "Rich" is a modifier for "wreathing," a way of offering the word and its concept depth; "Wreathing" refers to the manner in which the sun and rain permeate the forest. "Rain" is obviously one component necessary for forest life, for both flora and fauna. "Ripe" is that moment at which the flora are at their peak. Because they open with the "r" sound, these four words would be considered the source words for this passage. As a result, the other "r" sounds within words that are in close proximity with "wreathing," "rain," and "ripe" have the potential to echo those words. Sometimes, an "r" word will do little more than act as a synonym for a source, as in the case of "around" (in line 15), which suggests, however loosely, the shape of a wreath. But more often than not, the relationship between "r" words and source word is more sophisticated. "Slumbering" in line 16 defines and elaborates the peace that the rain brings, while "lustreful" draws attention to the beauty not only of the rain but to the vegetation now ripe because of the showers. Of course, there are "r" words which do not support or are not synonymous with the source words. "Purse" (line 22) is phonetically connected with "Rich," but it does not share a positive association with the source word, a word which is so often linked with wealth. In this case, however, "Rich" represents the forest while "purse" is a symbol of the marketplace. Far more complicated in its function, "Pleasure" in line 22 is affiliated with "Rich" and "purse." The poet explains that there are pleasures to be found in nature that cannot be found in the marketplace. So "pleasure" refers simultaneously to the pleasure of the woods and to the pleasures of money. Because it follows "ripe" (the last word in line 21), it is also affiliated with that word. Many more sound patterns exist in the passage, as the emphases illustrate, each offering its own network of meaning, but we need not tease out all of

them to show that sound patterning plays a central role in developing the poem's themes.

Thus far, meter and rhyme have been discussed separately, but no reader experiences them separately, at least if he/she is reading the poem. Only afterward, during the critical process, does he/she divide up the elements. Parsing out the pieces is necessary to simplify the analysis, but eventually we must return each component in order to see the big picture again, to understand how each affects and interacts with the other. The interaction between rhyme and meter in "The Woods of Westermain" is complicated. The relentless, indeterminate meter, often aided by modulation, not only produces but also represents the reader's anxiety upon entering the forest. Rhyme, in association with sound patterning, serves to foreshadow instability in the woods and the addressee and to give a sense of the reader's circumscription by the woods. In concert, meter, modulation, rhyme, and sound patterning portray the reader alone in the woods. Not only does the poem develop a sense of place, but it develops our own existence in that place. Comparing the poem to the woods Muendel writes, "The poem alternates between promise and warning, but underneath this seemingly firm structure the linguistic ground, like the geographic one, is constantly shifting, throwing the reader off balance" (24). Doubtless, Muendel is correct, but I would take his assessment of poem and its relation to the woods a step farther. Not only does the text represent place but in a very real sense, it becomes place. This notion of poem as place—not to be confused with poem *and* place—is best articulated by Cleanth Brooks in his discussion of John Donne's "The Canonization":

The poet has actually before our eyes built within the song the "pretty room" with which he says the lovers can be content. The poem itself is the well-wrought urn which can hold the lovers' ashes and which will not suffer in comparison with the prince's "half-acre tomb." (17)

In much the same way, Meredith has turned the poem into the woods of Westermain through a dizzying array of prosodic devices. Supporting this concept of poem as place are the several occasions in the text when the poet uses "read" to mean "see" or "understand." "Read their pool of vision through" and "Farther, deeper, may you read" are representative of the way in which Meredith uses the word (III, 47, 55). That he uses this word, with its association with textual experience, instead of "pay attention to" or "look at" suggests that Meredith wishes his reader would think of the poem as the woods and the woods as the poem. Thus upon entering the poem, the reader enters and is surrounded by the woods, which are the formal peculiarities of the text, elements which intensify the reader's anxiety at being in this place/poem.

"The Day of the Daughter of Hades," the second poem in the "Westermain" sequence, shares certain formal characteristics with "The Woods of Westermain," but it is by no means a prosodic copy of that poem. Visually, the poem looks quite similar to "The Woods of Westermain," because, like "The Woods of Westermain," it uses blocks of text of varying length, which from time to time are interrupted by indented lines, usually near the end of a strophe or section. Here, however, the similarities end.

Rather than using an odd-syllable tetrameter line that only rarely uses triple rhythms, "The Day of the Daughter of Hades" is composed of three-beat lines with occasional dimeter refrains, and uses triple rhythms so frequently that one would not be at fault for categorizing the poem's dominant foot as trisyllabic. The triple feet Meredith uses are unusual, however, in English poetry:

2	1	4	2	1	4	21	4
x	x	/	x	x	/	xx	/
And the team of the cha riot swart							
3	1	4	2	1	4	1	4
x	x	/	x	x	/	x	/
<u>Reared in mar ble, the six, dismayed,</u>							

2 4 1 2 4 3 1 4
 x / x x / x x /
 Like hoofs | that by night | plashing sea
 3 1 4 2 1 4 3 4
 x x / x x / x /
Curve and ramp | from the vast | swan-wave (III, 15-18)

2 1 4 1 4 1 4
 x x / x / x /
 At a snap | of twig | or bark
 2 1 4 2 1 4 2 3 4
 x x / x x / x x /
 In the track | of the for|eign foot-fall,
 2 4 2 1 4 2 1 4
 x / x x / x x /
 She climbed | to the pine|forest dark (VII, 14-16)

Most traditional prosodists would call the majority of the triple feet in these passages anapests, an assessment with which I have no problem. But three feet in the first excerpt and one in the second would probably not register as anapests in traditional foot prosody. A traditionalist is likely to classify the underlined feet in the first excerpt as cretic feet (/x/) and the underlined foot in the second excerpt as a bacchic foot (x//). Four-level stress prosody suggests otherwise: because a foot cannot have two or more equally stressed syllables, then a trisyllabic foot must have one syllable which is more heavily stressed than the other two. As a result, cretic and bacchic feet do not exist in poetry in English. The only two trisyllabic feet available to the poet, then, are the anapest and the dactyl. Thus the trisyllabic feet in the passages above are anapestic in nature. But we cannot pass over the unusual anapests without considering how they are modulated. A standard anapest's modulation is 2-1-4 or 1-2-4, for no two adjacent syllables in a foot can carry equal stress, not even relatively weak speech stresses. The modulation for the unusual anapests—what I will call heavy anapests—is either 3-1-4 (e.g., "Curve and ramp") or 1-3-4 (e.g., "eign foot-fall"). This consistent use of heavy anapests is the defining characteristic of Meredith's poem.

One other feature distinguishing "The Day of the Daughter of Hades" from "The Woods of Westermain" is its much simpler rhyme scheme of alternating rhymes (*abab*):

Now the youth footed swift to the dawn.
 'Twas the season when wintertide,
 In the higher rock-hollows updrawn,
 Leaves meadows to buds, and he spied (II, 1-4)

Rarely does Meredith allow for anything approaching near- or eye-rhyme, preferring the rigidity of perfect rhyme. As a consequence of its dogged adherence to scheme and its lack of expressive effect, rhyme will be passed over here. The discussion that follows of form's expressive function in "The Day of the Daughter of Hades" will concentrate on the role of meter in deepening the text, as it is the meter, not the rhyme, responsible for the text's prosodic pyrotechnics.

More often than not, meter performs a mimetic role, as one might expect, particularly with respect to the heavy anapests, as is evidenced in the following lines:

3 1 4 1 2 3 3 4
 x x / x x / x /
O and naked of her, | all dust,

 1 2 4 1 2 4
 x x / x / x x /
 The majes|tic Mo|ther and Nurse,
 3 1 4 2 1 4
 x x / x x / x /
Ringing cries | to the God, | the Just,
 3 1 4 2 1 4 2 1 4
 x x / x x / x x /
Curled the land | with the blight | of her curse

(II, 13-16)

By modulating the first syllable of line 13 to a 3 ("O"), Meredith brings it as close as he possibly can to the syllable in the beat position ("na") without shifting the metrical beat. That "O" approaches "na" in volume suggests the power of Demeter's cry and the effect it will have on the land. "Ringin'g cries" in line 15 imitates the ringing of Demeter's cries by

interrupting these two heavily stressed syllables with a lightly stressed "ing," an aural image of the mother gasping at the loss of her daughter. The final heavy foot ("Curled the land") portrays the effects of her cries and curses; as the land curls, the modulation produces a curl in volume, beginning with a level 3 stress, then sinking to a 1, and finally curling up to a 4. The curling to which Meredith refers is probably that of the foliage, whose leaves are now shriveled and wrinkled with "blight." If such is the case, then the 3-1-4 progression mimics the death of the valley's vegetation.

There are a number of passages similar to this one, in which meter is quite stunning, but more often than not the it is only a mimetic device. The most sophisticated metrical strategies are saved for those passages in which Callistes and Skiageneia sing/recite their own songs/poems:

It befell

2 1 4 2 1 4 1 4
x x / x x / x /
That he call | up the war|ior host
2 1 4 3 1 4 1 2
x x / x x / x /
Of the Song | pouring hydromel
 1 2 4 3 4
x / x x / x /
In thun|der, the wide|-winged Song.
And he named with his boyish pride
The heroes, the noble throng
3 4 1 2 4 3 4
x / x x / x /
Past Ach|eron now, | foul tide!
1 2 4 2 1 4 3 4
x x / x x / x /
With his joy | of the god|like band
And the verse divine, he named
 3 1 4 2 1 4
x / x x / x x /
The chiefs | pressing hot | on the strand,
3 1 4 1 3 4 1 2 4
x x / x x / x x /
Seen of Gods, | and Gods aid|ed, and maimed.
 4 3 1 4 1 2 3
x / x x / x x /
The fleet|-foot and ire|ful; the King;

2 1 4 1 2 4 1 2
 x x / x x / x /
 Him, the prom|pter in strat|agem,
 3 4 1 2 4 1 2 4
 x / x x / x x /
Many-shif|ted and mas|terful: Sing,
 O Muse! But she cried: Not of them! (VII, 86-100)

Despite the obvious seriousness of the poem, what follows is almost comic. Tongue in cheek, Meredith reminds the reader that Callistes is little more than a teenage boy and a novice poet. In order to illustrate the boy's youth and poetic inexperience, Meredith begins the passage with grand, archaic, biblical language ("It befell"), which is quickly undermined by the metrical variations that follow. "Pouring hy," for example dips in the middle of the foot as if to suggest the act of pouring liquid, but its two heavily stressed syllables also perform another role, that of substantially weakening the next foot. Meredith compares the boy's verse to "hydromel / in thunder." Hydromel, a honey drink that if fermented will become mead, represents the boy's immaturity and lack of poetic ability, a weakness and lack of potency borne out by the relatively weak final foot ("dromel"). "Wide-winged Song," taken out of context, seems to express the power of the poet's song; but to read these heavily stressed words with the hydromel in mind, it becomes clear that Meredith uses metrical irony. While the meter may suggest strength, the context tells us otherwise. Thus the heavy syllables are used to convey Callistes' poetic incompetence, not his bardic talents. Once Callistes begins to sing of great men, meter becomes an instrument Meredith uses to register disapproval of the boy's hackneyed lines. After line 90, the outside speaker (Meredith) ceases narrating and becomes little more than a scribe, writing down and reciting the young poet's song, which explains why the quality of writing diminishes so quickly. To say that the speaker is only reporting what he hears is not entirely accurate. First, he interrupts the poem occasionally to comment on the piece or to summarize parts of the

text so the reader does not have to endure what is admittedly a bad poem. Second, he recasts Callistes' words into the dominant meter of "The Day of the Daughter of Hades" by fitting the youth's lines to the dominant meter. He has the opportunity to comment on the poem's content without using asides or annotations or parenthetical criticisms. In quoting the opening of Callistes' poem, Meredith uses variation to draw attention to the poem's clichéd and overly dramatic opening lines: "the noble throng / Past Acheron now, foul tide!" The heavy foot in the beginning points to the boy's desire to impress Skiageneia by being indirect. Rather than saying that he will sing of the heroes long dead he refers to their passage over the river Acheron and their entrance into the underworld. Such indirection is not necessarily inappropriate, particularly when one remembers that Meredith himself is often indirect, sometimes to the point of obscurity. The last foot in the line, also a heavy foot, ruins the line, however, and is, quite simply, bad writing. Not only does "tide" refer to the sea rather than the river, the self-righteous phrase reads is an affectation. That is, while his poem does not have to sound like ordinary language, it should not sound too precious or artificial either. Meredith draws attention to the highly stylized, almost Augustan syntax, particularly in line 94: instead of describing the boy's poetry as "divine verse," the speaker inverts the word order to read "verse divine," which is a subtle way of saying that the boy's poetry is derivative as well as outdated.

In reconstructing and recasting Callistes' lines, the speaker will often intentionally make a line difficult to read by requiring the reader to somehow force a series of words into a meter not designed for them. Line 97, for example, is likely never to be satisfactorily read aloud. "Ireful," which Callistes presumably wants us to hear as two syllables, is difficult to compress largely because of the "r," a consonant that is never successfully

resolved into one syllable. If a two-syllable word were substituted for "ireful," particularly one that does not contain an "r," the faulty line would fit nicely into the meter:

1 4 3 1 4 1 2 4
 x / x x / x x /
 The fleet|-foot and an|gry; the King

What is most ingenious in these lines is Meredith's ability to intentionally write so poorly and to stretch meter to the point of breaking. True, he often contorts syntax and stretches meter close to the breaking point, but only rarely is it a sign of bad writing. Instead Meredith will use such moments to draw our attention to an idea central to the text, one we might not have otherwise noticed without the formal cues.

Skiageneia's song, on the other hand, does not suffer from affectation or faulty meters, a sign that the speaker believes that her verse is mature and truly divine:

1 2 4 1 2 4 2 4
 x x / x x / x /
 Then with won|derful voice | that rang
 2 4 2 1 4 3 4
 x / x x / x /
 Through air | as the swan's | nigh death,
 2 1 4 1 2 4 2 4
 x x / x x / x /
 Of the glo|ry of Light | she sang,
 2 4 2 1 4 1 2 4
 x / x x / x x /
 She sang | of the rap|ture of Breath.
 ...
 2 4 1 4 1 2 4
 x / x / x x /
 She sang | of fur|row and seed,
 1 4 12 4 2 1 4
 x / xx / x x /
 The bu|rial, birth | of the grain,
 1 4 2 1 4 1 2 4
 x / x x / x x /
 The growth, | and the show|ers that feed,
 2 1 4 3 4 1 2 4
 x x / x / x x /
 And the green | blades wax|ing mature
 2 1 4 1 2 4
 x x / x x / x /
 For the hus|bandman's arm|ful brown. (VIII, 37-40, 46-50)

The reader may be wondering why I have scanned and given the numerical values for every foot in the passage, particularly considering that most of the feet are standard anapests and iambs. The procedure followed in this study is to give numerical values only for heavy or light feet. I have abandoned established procedure here to prove a point: that compared to Callistes' song, and much of "The Day of Daughter of Hades" for that matter, Skiageneia's song is rather simple with respect to meter. Exactly what Skiageneia's song must have been is not certain because the speaker records fewer lines than he does of Callistes' poem. Despite the lack of direct quotation, we still learn the speaker's impression of her recitation. If Meredith imitates her style, then he illustrates through his imitation Skiageneia's lack of ostentation and flash, faults that appear time and again in Callistes' poem. Because she does not load her lines with heavy and light anapests and iambs, her verse seems more authentic, leaving an impression that her song and its stripped down meters are outgrowths of a genuine interaction with the natural world. Callistes' frequent use of heavy and light feet reveals a detachment from the subject, an outgrowth of his ignorance of the subject before his eyes, i.e., the valley. Besides giving the song the appearance of authenticity, Skiageneia's infrequent use of non-standard feet places special emphasis on those passages where such feet are used. In the excerpts quoted above, there are only two irregular feet, both heavy iambs, each strengthened by a heavily stressed syllable in the previous foot. The first variation is composed of the phrase "swan's nigh death" and the second, "green blades wax" (38, 49). The first modulation is a reference to death, while the second refers to life. To read each of these combinations with the other in mind produces a theme that Meredith develops in "A Ballad of Past Meridian," a poem he placed between "The Woods of Westermain" and "The Day of the Daughter of Hades." In "A Ballad of Past

Meridian" the speaker narrates the events that took place on a twilight walk. On his return home he meets Death and Life, and he realizes by the end of the poem that Death and Life are "inwound notes," that they are not forces wholly separated but are intimately related to one another (III, 5). Where there is one, the other is as well. Skiageneia's heavy iambs support this theme of the concurrent, "inwound" processes of life and death.

These two very different songs reveal the poet's own ideas of the function of poetry. Callistes' poem is an encomium celebrating the triumphs of great men during the military campaign at Troy. The language is predicated on flash and glam, a way for the young poet to prove to his audience that he has an attentive ear. Despite of his efforts, or perhaps because of them, he composes a poem whose meter and syntax distract the reader from the message; his metrical pyrotechnics are employed for their own sake, not for a higher purpose. Skiageneia's song celebraes not heroes but Nature and the "husbandman" who has learned to live in harmony with it. Not surprisingly, he meters are much subtler and more supple because they serve a higher purpose. Variations are used only when they aid in developing the theme of the text. Clearly Meredith favors the goddess's nature poetry, which is predictable for the reader who has read the bulk of his poetry.

The formal features of "The Day of the Daughter of Hades" work to assist in the distinction between good poetry and bad, a theme which makes sense, given the poem's other major theme as explained by Muendel: "'The Day of the Daughter of Hades' dramatizes the rise of poetry through a unified vision of life and death and employs narrative to frame and to mimic the theme's progress" (28). Perhaps a more accurate statement than "the rise of poetry" would be "the rise of a poet": Callistes begins as a novice but comes to realize that the true subject of poetry is not wars and rumors of wars, but the soothing balm of nature.

Thus far, we have discussed the formal similarities between "The Woods of Westermain" and "The Day of the Daughter of Hades" and the ways in which poetic form informs meaning. If these two poems are a diptych or series, however, then one might expect them to have more in common than their formal characteristics alone. How, then, are "The Woods of Westermain" and "The Day of the Daughter of Hades" related to one another? That is, what, beyond their formal similarities, about these poems indicates that they are best read as a sequence?

First, each deals with one significant aspect of nature. "The Woods of Westermain," as the title suggests, takes place in the wilderness, while the setting of "The Day of the Daughter of Hades" is a pastoral scene. Wilderness typically refers to the natural world untouched by human beings, and pastoral refers to nature which has been altered by humans for agrarian purposes. The anxiety we feel upon entering "The Woods of Westermain" is that of the unknown; the woods do not bear the signs of culture, but serve as a reminder that our power is limited in the wilderness. Pastoral in "The Day of the Daughter of Hades," made manifest in the form of a valley, offers a sense of peace, at least for a time, to Callistes and Skiageneia.

Second, "The Woods of Westermain" is not simply a poem about a place but becomes the woods themselves, as indicated in the first lines of the text: "Enter these enchanted woods, / You who dare" (I, 1-2). The inconsistent rhymes as well as the elaborate, unpredictable sound patterning is another sonic portrayal of the untamed wilderness. "The Day of the Daughter of Hades," on the other hand, never allows the reader to forget that the poem is a text. Like the opening of "The Woods of Westermain," the prologue explains:

He who has looked upon Earth
Deeper than flower and fruit,
Losing some hue of his mirth,
As the tree striking rock at the root,

Unto him shall the marvelous tale
Of Callistes more humanly come
With the touch on his breast than a hail
From the markets that hum. (I, 1-8)

"Tale" informs us that what follows is a narrative, while the opening strophe in "The Woods of Westermain" uses the words "these enchanted woods," the demonstrative pronoun suggesting that the poem itself is the forest. The reason we are reminded that "The Day of the Daughter of Hades" is to be read as a poem rather than experienced as a real place is that the poem itself is concerned with poetry. Aside from the use of the word "tale," Meredith emphasizes the text's artificiality by maintaining the rigid *abab* rhyme scheme, which is expressive of poetry's status as an artifact created and sustained by humans.

Finally, the introductory lines of "The Day of the Daughter of Hades" suggest the necessity of reading the two poems as a series. According to the prologue, "He who has looked upon Earth / Deeper than flower and fruit" is ready to receive the "marvelous tale." I take "He who has looked upon Earth" to mean that he who has passed safely through "The Woods of Westermain" is now ready to hear this narrative. "The Woods of Westermain" gives the reader the vision necessary to see "Deeper than flower and fruit," and reveals to us the dialectic all humans need to live in communion with nature—"Blood and brain and spirit" (IV, 170). Without such an understanding of nature and the realization of our place in it, the message of "The Day of the Daughter of Hades" will fall on deaf ears. "The Woods of Westermain," then, is an examination which the reader must pass before he can receive the tale of Callistes and Skiageneia. In "The Day of the Daughter of Hades," the speaker assumes that readers do not need to be educated in the ways of nature, as they have already survived the harrowing wood.

III.

While they are not as challenging as the "Westermain" series with regard to content, the poems in the "Love in the Valley" series do offer metrical conundrums equivalent to those of the volume's first series. Unlike "The Woods of Westermain" and "The Day of the Daughter of Hades," "Phoebus with Admetus," "Melampus," and "Love in the Valley" are not linked by similar formal features. Rather, Meredith provides for each poem metrical instructions for the reader not sensitive to more exotic meters. The poems are also presented consecutively in the volume, no other poems between them, providing a sense of unity. Because these poems are not as rich and prosodically dense as those in the "Westermain" series, our discussion of each poem will be more brief. As with the analysis of the "Westermain" series, the poems will be discussed in the order of their appearance in *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth*.

In a note to "Phoebus with Admetus" Phyllis B. Bartlett explains:

At the end of *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth* (1883) there is the following note: "PHOEBUS WITH ADMETUS. The measure runs:

— u — u — — u — u — u —
— u — u — — u / / / " (242)

If Meredith's aim here is clarify his metrical intentions, then he succeeds only in part. Obviously the macrons (the horizontal scansion marks used by Greek and Latin prosodists) represent stressed or long syllables and the breve (the "u" also used in classical metrics) marks unstressed or short syllables.¹⁸ Meredith does not turn to more obscure metrical symbols, relying instead on those which have served classical metrists for centuries. The trouble with these two symbols is that their meaning changes depending on the language to which they are applied. Within the context of Latin and Greek,

¹⁸ While the "u" approaches the symbol Bartlett uses in her quotation of Meredith's note (who presumably used the same symbol), it is not entirely accurate. I have not been able to reproduce the breve symbol, but the only real difference is that the breve Meredith and Bartlett use lacks the stem found on the "u."

they refer to quantitative value, as those two languages use quantitative prosody. Rather than recognizing syllabic stress as the heart of the foot, Greek and Roman poets thought in terms of duration; thus the duration of a long syllable would be longer than the duration of a short syllable. The Greeks and Romans would not have been familiar with what we think of today as stress in poetry. English poets and prosodists use these symbols to refer to metrical stress, which is determined by pitch, inflection, and volume. Quantitative meter does not work well in English, because English is a stress-driven language. Despite its inadequacy in English, quantitative meter has been employed on occasion, most often in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many Victorian poets turned to quantitative meters again, Robert Bridges being the most notable example. Even Meredith dabbled in quantitative measures, as in "Phaethon: Attempted in the Galliambic Measure," but like other poets who "attempted" quantitative meters, he fails to capture the essence of classical prosody. This is not to say that the poem is not at points quite beautiful, only that it fails as a metrical specimen.

Because Meredith did attempt classical meters, it is difficult to know if the marks in the note to "Phoebus with "Admetus" designate quantitative or accentual-syllabic meter. Further complicating the scheme are the last three symbols on the second line (/ / /). Now Meredith presents what appear to be two opposing symbols. While many prosodists of Meredith's time did use the horizontal macron when referring to English metrics, many others were turning to the stress symbol that most prosodists of English use today, the accent mark or "/" mark.

What, then, does Meredith wish to convey with these marks? Is he indicating that the poem is written in quantitative meters with three long monosyllabic feet at the end of the second line? Or is he directing his

reader to scan the lines as accentual-syllabic meter with three heavily stressed monosyllabic feet? Or, and perhaps even more confusing, is he asking us to read the lines quantitatively with the exception of the last three syllables, which are to be scanned as three heavily stressed metrical beats? Despite the difficulties in discovering Meredith's intentions here, at least one component of the meter is easily settled: the last three syllables of the second line:

Scarce the stony lizard sucked hollows in his flanks:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} & & & & 4 & & 4 & & 4 \\ & & & & / & & / & & / \\ \text{Thick on spots of umbrage our} & | & \text{drowsed} & | & \text{flocks} & | & \text{lay.} & & \end{array}$$
 (II, 3-4)

Of the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth lines of each stanza, only two lines do not end in three syllables which could be read as three consecutive heavy syllables (each of which we will discuss shortly). Given that so many of the three-syllable endings are composed of three heavy syllables, or syllables that can easily be read as heavy, it seems reasonable to assume that Meredith intended that his reader scan each of these syllables as a monosyllabic foot, a scansion I have represented above. By instructing his reader to hear each of these syllables as a monosyllabic foot, Meredith implies that the final three syllables are written in accentual, not accentual-syllabic or quantitative, meter.

The remainder of his scansion is not so easily deciphered. An examination of the first two lines of the poem does not necessarily offer much assistance. Consider the following examples:

$$\begin{array}{cccccccccccc} _ & u & _ & u & _ & _ & u & _ & u & _ & u & _ \\ \text{When by Zeus relenting the mandate was revoked,} \\ _ & u & _ & u & _ & _ & u & / & / & / \\ \text{Sentencing to exile the bright Sun-God} \end{array}$$

(I, 1-2)

This particular scansion has certain obvious problems; but what I have provided is no scansion at all. The scheme outlined in Meredith's note has

been placed above the lines without any concern for their accuracy. If the macrons and breves represent accentual-syllabic meter, then clearly there are a few feet that do not match the scheme. "Lenting" in line 1, according to Meredith's note, should be heavily stressed on both syllables, but only "ent" receives strong speech stress. Likewise, "ing" and "exile" in line 2 do not follow the template, as "ing" receives little stress, and the second syllable in "exile" receives no speech stress. A more accurate reading would be:

4	1	4	1	4	1	1	4	2	3	1	4
/	x	/	x	/	x	x	/	x	/	x	/
When by Zeus relenting the mandate was revoked,											
4	1	2	1	4	2	1	4	4	4	4	4
/	x	/	x	/	x	x	/	/	/	/	/
Sentencing to exile the bright Sun-God											

I have avoided foot divisions not because Meredith omits them, but because any placement would be inadequate and too easily contested. Instead of worrying over foot placement, I will consider a few of the lines in which the syllables deviate from the scheme and discern what effect such a deviation might have on the meaning, beginning with the instances in the lines scanned above. One reason for their departure from Meredith's note may be to avoid monotony. But one would expect that to avoid monotony, the poet would not depart from the meter in the first lines of the poem. It is more likely that the meter is performing an expressive function. What expressive power do "enting" and "exile" have? The first deviation from "relenting" may be a metrical imitation of the word itself; by removing stress and allowing the word to fall off, Meredith allows the speech rhythm to give in to the metrical rhythm, to relent. The second deviation, "exile," may likewise have an expressive effect. In his description of Phoebus' exile being lifted, the poet expresses or imitates relief by substituting a weak syllable for the heavy syllable prescribed by the note. Doubtless, most such variations in the poem perform a similar expressive role.

never overtly stated in the poem. In such moments, the form alone generates the theme.

The metrical provenance of "Melampus" is not difficult to establish compared with that of "Phoebus with Admetus." As in the note to the latter, Meredith uses the macron (_) and breve (u) to indicate the metrical scheme:

u _ u _ uu _ u _ uu _
 u _ u _ uu _ uu _ u _ (P 245n.)

The note appended to "Phoebus with Admetus" brings up more questions than answers. In particular, the reader cannot know with any certainty whether the poem is written in quantitative, accentual, or accentual-syllabic meter. Out of convenience, the analysis offered above treated the poem as a specimen of accentual meter. The note to "Melampus" does not, however, confuse the reader. On the contrary, it establishes beyond a doubt the poem's meter. The odd-numbered lines are written in pentameter, the first, second, and fourth feet of which are iambic while the third and fifth feet are anapestic. Likewise, the even-numbered lines are written in pentameter, but this time, the first, second, and fifth feet are iambic, and the third and fourth feet are anapestic.

Though the meter in "Melampus" is relatively simple in comparison with than in "Phoebus with Admetus," it is no less affective in its expressive effects for its simplicity. Several times Meredith uses substitution and modulation to imitate actions in the poem or to draw attention to the poem's larger concerns. Consider the modulations Meredith uses in a description of animal life in the forest:

Of earth and sun they are wise, they nourish their broods,
 3 4 3 4 1 2 4 1 3 4 1 4
 x / x / x x / x x / x /
 Weave, build, | hide, bur|row and bat|tle, take joy | and pain
 3 4 1 4 21 4 1 4 1 2 4
 x / x / xx / x / x x /
 Like swim|mers var|ying bil|lows: ne|ver in woods (IV, 1-3)

Because spondees have not been used in this study, the scansion above may appear in line with Meredith's instructions. Meredith and his contemporaries did not yet have the four-level stress theory, however, so they had to rely on traditional terminology and scansion. Thus Meredith would no doubt label the heavy feet in lines 2-3 ("Weave, build," "hide, bur," and "Like swim") spondees. These heavy feet, then, represent a departure from the standard iamb set down in the note.

As to the expressive component, the consecutive heavy iambs in line 2 places emphasis on the prowess of the creatures that inhabit the woods, particularly their skill as builders. On their own, these feet provide aural imagery, giving the reader a sense of the landscape, but they perform another function as well, one which is not brought to fruition until line 3. The opening foot of the line is comprised of two heavily stressed syllables. Mimetically speaking, it suggests the slicing motion of swimmer through waves as well as the force of the waves themselves. Perhaps more important than its mimetic quality is the foot's connection to the heavy feet in line 2. Finding these feet so close to one another, the reader is not likely to forget the consecutive heavy feet in the second line, if for no other reason than such combinations are unusual. Because "Like swim" echoes "Wave, build, hide, bur," Meredith removes the gap between fauna of the woods and human beings, suggesting that the latter is no better than the former. These three heavy feet remind readers of their own egoism and self-importance; in such a case, prosody is a subtle warning to those who view themselves as superior to nature.

Meter in this instance and in several other places in the poem reveals the complexities of nature and the interconnectedness of it with human beings. By exploiting meter's mimetic and expressive potential, Meredith makes these connections without explicating stating them. Had Meredith

confined poetic form peculiar power of association to the subject of nature, "Melampus" would still be a powerful poem. As is so often the case, however, he retools meter and its attendant devices to flesh out another subject for which it is particularly suited: music. Frequently Meredith uses substitutions and modulations in "Melampus" to represent nature, but when music is addressed, the meter and speech rhythm sync up with only a few significant modulations. Consider the stanza in which the poet introduces Phoebus, who is at the heart of the first poem in the "Valley" series:

Him Phoebus, lending to darkness colour and form
 Of light's excess, many lessons and counsels gave;
 3 4
 x / x / x x / x / x x /
Showed Wis|dom lord | of the hu|man in|tricate swarm,
 And whence prophetic it looks on the hives that raye,
 And how acquired, of the zeal of love to acquire,
 And where it stands, in the centre of life a sphere;
 And Measure, mood of the lyre, the rapturous lyre,
 He said was Wisdom, and struck him the notes to hear.

(XII)

Of the forty feet in the stanza, only one is non-standard, namely, the heavy foot at the beginning of line 3. As it is the only heavy foot in the stanza, "Showe Wis" is a metrical performance of wisdom's place as "lord of the intricate human swarm." The rest of the stanza is composed in standard feet, possibly to represent the calm Phoebus brings. The unmodulated meter may, however, have another purpose: by excluding heavy and light feet from the stanza (except for "Showed Wis"), Meredith creates a steady pace, a metronome of sorts that a musician might use to establish the rhythm of a piece of music. Of course, Meredith does eventually use variation, but that appears less often after the subject of music enters the poem. The most significant variation concerning music is:

3 4
 x / x / x x / x / x x /
Sweet, sweet:| 'twas glor|y of vi|sion, ho|ney, the breeze
 In heat, the run of the river on root and stone (VIII, 1)

"Sweet, sweet" mimics the motion of the hand strumming the lyre, only one letter off as it is from "Sweep, sweep," or to sweep one's hand over the strings. Complicating this particular reading and going well beyond simple mimesis is the colon which follows the heavy foot. The strong punctuation mark indicates definition, from general to specific, that what follows is a detailed explanation of what comes before the colon. In this case, the colon falls after the strumming of the instrument, suggesting that the remainder of the stanza, and perhaps the rest of the poem, is the music produced by the harp.

Since modulation is rare in these stanzas, compared to its central role prior to stanza VII, Meredith must rely on another device to create expressive effect. In stanza VII and following, sound patterning is that device. Though several sound patterns are underlined, I will focus here on the "l," "m," and "r" sounds, as they are associated with music more than any other sounds in the stanza. Of course, one could correctly object to thinking of these three sounds in terms of music, as their source words are anything but musical: "l"'s first appearance is in "lending" in line 1; "m" appears for the first time in "form" in line 1; and "r" appears for the first time in "darkness" in line 1. So it seems reasonable to make an argument for these three words—"lending," "form," and "darkness"—as the source words for "l," "m," and "r." These sounds occur inconspicuously within words for most of the stanza. Not until line 7 do all three sounds take pride of place at the beginning of a word ("lyre," "Measure," "moody," and "rapturous"). Because they open these words rather than simply being placed within a word as they are in line 1, "l," "m," and "r" are associated not with the words in which they make their debut in the stanza, but in those words where they are most noticeable. Put another way, while they do occur in other places in the

stanza first, these sounds are best remembered as integral parts of the content words of line 7.

That the source words occur near the end of the stanza, not the beginning, means that the "l," "m," and "r" sounds' role changes significantly, especially after one reads line 7. Before the discovery of the *real* source words, the sound patterning is likely to seem like window dressing, only a way to avoid monotony. Once these three sounds appear in words like "Measure," "lyre," and "rapturous," however, they become a way to understand the rest of the stanza, a way of framing all those words that contain at least one of these sounds. Without such an elaborate sound patterning, music would not seem to be central in the stanza; after all, music is not mentioned in the stanza until line 7. Now any word that incorporates one of these three sounds will be redefined to include the meaning of the source words.

Perhaps more than any other line in the stanza, the first is affected the most. As Phoebus is the subject of the line, the musical frame provided by the sound patterning is appropriate. "Lending" alliterates with "lyre" in line 7, suggesting that Phoebus offers Melampus not only wisdom but music as well, a way to overcome the darkness which has hemmed in the physician. Since only one of the three sounds is included in "darkness" ("r") but two appear in "colour" ("l" and "r"), Meredith provides an aural image of darkness disappearing before the light. Phoebus arrives in the darkness, represented by the "r" and quickly generates light and "colour," which is represented by "l" and "r," demonstrating his skill at wordplay and metrical punning. Simultaneously, Meredith connects Phoebus not simply to music, but to meter as well. In academic parlance, "form" is often used to refer to matters stylistic and technical. Meredith does not, however, make the word's meanings do all of the work. The final two letters of "form" also happen to

be source sounds—"r" and "m." Thus "form" refers to "Measure," a synonym for meter; the "r" echoes "rapturous," suggesting the diviner aspect of music and meter. "Form" is linked also with Phoebus, for they share the same opening consonant sound, the "f" sound. By linking "Phoebus" and "form," Meredith implies that at the heart of Phoebus' art—the poet's art—is poetic form, the most musical component of poetry. Linking "Phoebus" and "form" also has another expressive effect: the "r" and "m" sounds in "form" remind us of Phoebus' two interwoven natures—of his divinity ("rapturous") and his musical ability ("Measure").

The complex sound patterns beginning in stanza XII suggest a shift in aspect, much like a shift in rhyme scheme indicates a volta in an Italian sonnet. Stanzas I through XI rely on variation to represent the natural world while stanza XII stabilizes the meter and incorporates sound patterning to represent music/poetry in relation to the patron (Phoebus) of those sister arts. Nature and music are not separate entities, but two sides of the same coin as Melampus learns from Phoebus: "the man descried / The growths of earth, his adored, like day out of night, / Ascend in song, seeing nature and song allied" (XIII, 6-8).

Its instructions more enigmatic than either "Phoebus with Admetus" and "Melampus," "Love in the Valley," Meredith explains, is to be read as "Trochaic, variable in short syllables according to stress of the accent" (*P* 250n.). What exactly do these instructions mean? If it is to be read as trochaic, which suggests two-syllable feet, how then can the poem be "variable in short syllables according to stress of the accent"? How does Meredith define stress and accent? What is the difference between these two terms, according to Meredith? In an attempt to clarify Meredith's instructions, John von B. Rodenbeck, still the only critic to discuss Meredith's metrical art at length, has suggested that "[t]he basic units of

the meter are four trochaic dipodies, with a caesura regularly following the second dipody and a catalexis replacing the final (unstressed) syllable of the fourth" (29). The trouble with Rodenbeck's scansion is that it assumes that "Love in the Valley" is built on a particular meter, in this case, dipodic trochaic with catalexis on the even-numbered lines. The desire to fit the poem to one meter makes sense, particularly when we consider the regularity of the rhyme scheme. Normally the presence of a consistent, predictable rhyme scheme suggests that a predictable repeatable meter is present as well. Instead of standardizing the lines, forcing them to fit within the strictures of a particular meter, I will focus on the metrical inconsistencies and what they might say about the meaning of the text or what mimetic or expressive function these peculiarities may have. Sometimes I will use virgules (vertical lines used to indicate foot divisions), depending on whether or not a line reads as an accentual-syllabic meter or an accentual meter.

The first half-stanza appears predictable enough, at least in large part:

2	1		4	3		2	1	4	3		
/	x	/	x	/	x	/	x	/	x		
Under		yonder		<u>beech-tree</u>		single		<u>on the</u>		<u>green sward,</u>	
		/	x	x	/	x	/	x	/	x	
		Couched with her			arms behind her		golden		head,		
		/	x	/	x	/	x	/	x		
Knees	and		tresses		folded		<u>to slip and</u>		ripple		idly,
		/	x	/	x	/	x	/	x		
		/	x	/	x	/	x	/	x		
		Lies my		<u>young love</u>		sleeping		<u>in the</u>		shade.	

(1-4)

Balanced on either side of the caesura of line 1 are three trochees, one of which is light, one standard, and one heavy. In the first half-line, "under" is the light foot (2-1), "yonder" is the standard trochee (4-1), and "beech-tree" is the heavy foot (4-3); in the second half-line, "single" is a standard

trochee (4-1), "on the" is the light trochee (2-1), and "green sward" the heavy foot (4-3). Reflected in the metrical balance is the balance or harmony on the sward. In this instance, the variations do not serve a mimetic purpose, but are used instead to link images in the line (a beech-tree and the green sward) so that neither image is subordinate to the other. While it does not receive the same equilibrium as the pairings in line 1, "Young love" in line 4 does receive emphasis. By using a heavy trochee when mentioning his lover, the poet compares her to the tree and the sward, which are themselves presented in heavy feet. The convention of comparing one's love to nature is an old one, but using metrical variation, Meredith has made such a comparison unconventionally.

Of the substitutions in the half-stanza, only one is rare in English: the fourth foot of line 3 ("to slip and"), which in traditional prosody is called an amphibrach. The tendency of most metrists would probably be to find a way to scan the poem that would eliminate this particular foot designation. It would be quite easy simply to rescan the line in order to rid the poem of the offending foot:

/ x / x / x x / x / x / x
 Knees and | tresses | folded to | slip and | ripple | idly,

Certainly this scansion simplifies matters by redrawing the foot boundaries to create a dactyl and a trochee, both common feet in English poetry. But such a scansion is not sensitive to the silence demanded after "folded." Of course, caesuras have been used before to divide feet. Usually, those feet are only two syllables, and for one or another reason, iambs and trochees can survive such pauses. Triple rhythms, particularly when they straddle a caesura dividing a hexameter in half, do not, however, fare nearly as well. To read these syllables as a dactyl would require the reader to observe the pause too quickly or not to observe it at all. In truth, not even reducing the time spent in silence between syllables would be enough to hold the

dactyl together. A reading that avoids a caesura after "folded" will do violence to the line, so much so, in fact, that the meter is likely to unravel entirely. Despite its undesirability, then, the amphibrach (x/x) is the only foot that allows for the caesura and thus preserves the solidarity of the line. As to its mimetic and expressive effects, "to slip and" suggests the young woman's "tresses folded" and their eventual loosening. Surprisingly, the amphibrach, its expressive potential unlimited as a result of its rarity, is relatively univocal when compared to Meredith's masterful manipulation of more common modulations and pairings.

The opening lines of "Love in the Valley" scan with little difficulty, with the exception of one amphibrach. But there are a number of lines where the meter is almost indeterminate.

/ x / x / √ || / x / x / x
 Stepping | down the | hill with her | fair com| panions,
 / x / √ || / x / x / x / √
 Arm in | arm, | all a|gainst the | raying | West,
 / x x / || / x / x / x / x
 Boldly | she sings, | to the | merry | tune she | marches,
 / x x / || x / x / x /
 Brave is | her shape, | and swee|ter un|possessed.

(41-44)

As in the opening lines, the meter here is either hexameter (lines 41-43) or pentameter (line 44). Complications emerge, though they appear most obviously with caesura placement and the feet which are organized around the caesura. Traditionally, the caesura falls between the third and fourth foot in six-beat lines, which naturally divide at the halfway point. Pauses in lines 42-44 do not bisect the line, but instead move closer to the beginning of the line. In each case, the caesura divides the second and third foot. At least with regard to the hexameter, the caesura causes the reader to return to the beginning of the line in order to re-establish the meter, reciting the line again in order to observe the caesura in its current position as well as correctly performing the meter. Only in line 44 does the

caesura occur in its traditional position after the second foot, for the line is only five beats long.¹⁹

To be sure, the reader who listens attentively for the pauses will have little problem picking up the meter; the early caesuras are not a difficult obstacle to clear. Not so easily overcome are the syllables that precede the caesuras in lines 41 and 42. In the stanza's first line, there appears to be a syllable missing after "hill" and before the caesura. Such an omission can produce disastrous effects, such as giving the auditor the impression that the line is somehow unmetrical. The only way to salvage the line is by reading "hills" as a monosyllabic foot with a pause to compensate for the missing unstressed syllable, a pause that is compounded by the caesura. Such a hesitation suggests the speaker's inability to express the awe he feels while looking at his love. Only one more monosyllabic foot appears ("arm"), having much the same effect as "hill."

There is one final peculiarity in these lines: the iambic substitution in an otherwise trochaic setting (line 43). Typically, iambs do not fit well in dominantly trochaic meters. For whatever reason, trochaic meters are less forgiving of metrical inversions than pentameter, which will admit almost any substitution at almost any point in the line. Presumably this inversion does not offend the ear because whole pentameter lines have been scattered throughout the poem, an example of which is line 44. This particular substitution is perfectly placed, drawing attention to his lover's singing. That singing does not appear to follow the traditional tripping tune, much

¹⁹ Breaking a pentameter line with a caesura after the fourth syllable was not often practiced rigidly by Meredith or his contemporaries. In fact, the pentameter line, as the Victorians knew, does not require a pause at any point in the line. The Tudor poets, however, thought of the pentameter line as two unequal halves, which were stitched together by a caesura following the fourth syllable. The most useful and clearheaded discussion of this practice remains George T. Wright's "Wyatt's Decasyllabic Line."

like the iamb does not fit the trochaic undercurrent. Instead, she sings "Boldly," marching to her own rhythm.

As a series, these three poems are connected by a concern for the natural world. The series begins in a pastoral scene ("Phoebus with Admetus"), moves into the wilderness ("Melampus"), and finally returns to the pastoral world ("Love in the Valley"). Two of the poems, "Phoebus and Admetus" and "Melampus," are further connected by association with Phoebus Apollo, who is exiled in the former and willingly enters the woods in the latter. In the first poem he is the quintessential shepherd (a profession so central to pastoral poetry that the subgenre itself is named after it). While he is not the central figure in "Melampus," Phoebus' role as teacher is an integral part of Melampus' growth. The latter's understanding of the woods and of music and of their symbiotic relationship with one another are impossible without the wisdom of the former.

Though obviously a part of the "Valley" series, "Love in the Valley" performs its function in the sequence at a distance. For example, Phoebus does not cross over from Melampus' woods to the valley of lovers. And while there are a few minor connections between "Love in the Valley" and the first two poems in the sequence, it is music that unifies the three poems. Music is invoked in "Phoebus with Admetus" in the refrain—itsself a standard component in songs—when the speaker sings/states:

God of whom music
And song and blood are pure,
The day is never darkened
That had thee here obscure. (I, 9-12)

Music becomes the central focus in "Melampus" in stanza XII, which we have already discussed at length. Finally, while music does play a role in "Love in the Valley," it is never the center of the poem. Instead, it is mentioned on a number of occasions—line 43, for example, which received attention earlier. Phoebus, then, is not the unifying subject in the sequence, music

is. In fact, Phoebus is to some extent a reference to music. If it is music around which the three points revolve, then the center of the sequence must be "Melampus," as it is in this poem that music is linked to two larger concepts, nature and wisdom. In "Love in the Valley" and "Phoebus with Admetus" music is not explicitly connected to other concepts. A rereading of the poems would naturally carry this definition of music across poem boundaries in order to see how Meredith further complicates the relations between these poems.

IV.

Each series can easily be read and interpreted on its own as we have done thus far. But the only way to understand each series's larger purpose is to read it in the context of the other sequence. By reading these poems as a larger series composed of two individual series, we begin to comprehend the scope of Meredith's project. The following remarks will not be a catalogue of all the ways in which the two series are connected. Instead, the two series's more salient features will be briefly discussed.

On the formal/metrical level, the poems move from unfixed to fixed forms. While they share a particular order (regularity of meter in the first and regularity of rhyme in the second), "The Woods of Westermain" and "The Day of the Daughter of Hades" cannot be easily broken into set stanzas. The formal composition of the poems is best described as organic because the content, not an arbitrary pattern determined beforehand, dictates the strophic length. "Phoebus with Admetus," "Melampus," and "Love in the Valley" adhere to a fixed prosodic scheme. Each is written in stanzas, a predetermined, recurrent metrical pattern and rhyme scheme. To use fixed forms as Meredith has here means that the poet must write the content to the form. Unlike the "Westermain" series whose content dictates form, content in the "Valley" series is at the service of form.

As to subject matter, the "Westermain" and the "Valley" series use pastoral and wilderness scenes as staging grounds for larger ideas. The "Westermain" series opens at the entrance to an enchanted forest in "The Woods of Westermain," moving next to a pastoral scene in the form of a valley in "The Day of the Daughter of Hades." Reversing the order of appearance, the "Love" sequence begins with a pastoral scene in "Phoebus with Admetus," then turning to the wilderness in "Melampus," and finally returning to the pastoral scene in "Love in the Valley." If not for the final poem of the "Valley" series, the second series would be a mirror image of the first, which would mean that the reader would begin her journey in the woods only to end there. "Love in the Valley" guarantees, however, that she will not end the journey where she started. Rather, the wilderness-to-pastoral transition deals with the larger themes of transcendence and evolution, which are possible only if the pilgrim accepts Meredith's dialectic of "Blood and brain and spirit."

Although the similarities to this point are general and do not treat of the content of individual poems, there are several points at which individual poems intersect or parallel one another in specific ways. Consider, for example, the connection Meredith establishes between "The Day of the Daughter of Hades" (in the "Westermain" series) and "Phoebus with Admetus" (in the "Love in the Valley" series). In the first poem, Skiageneia, the daughter of Pluto, escapes from the underworld and enters the solace of the valley. In the second poem, Phoebus, a deity like Skiageneia, is exiled from Mount Olympus for a time and forced to live as a shepherd under the authority of Admetus. Like Skiageneia, the sun god returns willingly to Olympus after the sentence is lifted. Meredith places the final destinations of these poems at polar opposites, moving from the heights in one poem (Mount Olympus) to the very depths (Hades or the underworld).

Many more moments such as this one reveal the interconnectedness of these two series. After discovering these connections, the reader can no longer read any one poem in isolation. In fact, he cannot read one series without the other because the poems are so closely linked. Without their formal similarities and differences, Meredith could have linked the poems, to be sure. The relationships he points to with prosodic innovation would, however, have to be established with heavy-handed, didactic content/subject matter.

CONCLUSION

George Meredith's metrical art is by no means limited to the poems discussed in this study. Many poems worth consideration have been omitted in order to keep this dissertation to a reasonable length. The ballads, for example, are some of the most innovative in the nineteenth century, as Meredith often eschews formal ballad conventions. Likewise, the odes and their place in the ode tradition is a subject which has remained untouched, particularly with regard to the poems' metrical features. While the sonnet tradition is addressed in the second chapter, most of Meredith sonnets go untreated. As of yet, no study of the sonnets as a sequence exists.

Despite these glaring omissions, I hope that this study has presented enough examples of Meredith's prosodic experiments to prove that a reading of his canon without some consideration of his use of formal elements will produce an incomplete reading at best. Perhaps future Meredith criticism will be more attentive to the poet's metrical dimension. Such an attentiveness to his form and more detailed discussion of how poetic form relates to content and meaning will undoubtedly expand Meredith's reputation beyond that of novelist to Victorian poet and formal innovator. Such study will reveal many of Meredith's experiments to be forerunners of Modernism, where breaks with convention is marked first and foremost by its break with the strictures of accepted metrical norms. Whatever else a form-driven examination of his poetry may reveal, it will at the very least place Meredith near the top of the list of nineteenth-century formal innovators.

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