

Notes

¹ "The Death of Masterman: A Repressed Episode in H. G. Wells's *Kipps*," *PMLA*, 86 (1971), 63–69.

² For a fuller discussion of this pattern in *Kipps*, see my *Structure in Four Novels by H. G. Wells* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1968), pp. 42, 54–56, 62, and 68–70.

³ *Structure*, pp. 42–50 and 61–66.

⁴ Preface to Vol. VII (1925) of *The Works of H. G. Wells*, Atlantic Ed. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1924–27), p. ix.

⁵ See especially II:ix:2 and the final section of the novel. *Structure*, pp. 62–64 and 70–71.

⁶ "A General Introduction to the Atlantic Edition," in *Works*, I (1924), xvii.

E. M. Forster and George Meredith

In her very useful study of the manuscripts of *A Passage to India* (*PMLA*, 85, 1970, 284–94) June Perry Levine quotes the following passage from MS. B describing Fielding's reaction to a Marabar Cave:

"Have you anything to say?" [he asks the cave] "Boum." "Of man's first disobedience and the sin / Of that forbidden tree . . ." he remarked. Then he recited, in a different tone of voice, the beginning of a poem that he had once admired even more than *Paradise Lost* because it was adventurous and sane, and sang of the triumphs as well as the fall of man

Enter these enchanted woods

You who dare

A shout, a whistle, a whisper, all were "Boum," loud or soft but without distinction in quality.¹

(The passage goes on to describe how the same result occurs when Fielding recites the Persian quatrain that Aziz in the final version of the novel intends to have on his tomb.) Professor Levine suggests that Fielding is futilely quoting Milton and Dante in the cave. But the poem that Fielding once admired more than *Paradise Lost* because it sang of man's triumph as well as his fall is not *The Divine Comedy* but George Meredith's once well-known "The Woods of Westermain." The lines quoted by Fielding open the poem and make up the refrain at the end of each stanza. To mistake Meredith for Dante even in the manuscripts of *A Passage of India* is to miss a dimension of irony in the portrait of Fielding that remains in the final version of the novel.

Forster quoted from Meredith's poetry at least once before in his fiction without identifying it. While discussing how Leonard Bast avoided "the anodyne of muddledom" in *Howards End* (1910) Forster quoted from *Modern Love*,

And if I drink oblivion of a day,
So shorten I the stature of my soul.²

Forster went on to comment, "It is a hard saying, and a hard man wrote it, but it lies at the foot of all character."³ When Forster came to write *A Passage to*

India, however, Meredith appears to have gone soft for him. Forster's changed opinion can be seen three years after the publication of *A Passage to India* in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927):

Meredith is not the great name he was twenty or thirty years ago, when much of the universe and all of Cambridge trembled. . . . Though fashion will turn and raise him a bit, he will never be the spiritual power he was about the year 1900. His philosophy has not worn well.⁴

Forster's fellow Apostle, G. M. Trevelyan, has probably summarized best Cambridge's trembling admiration of Meredith in his 1906 study, *The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith*. In "The Woods of Westermain," according to Trevelyan, Meredith

chooses a forest to stand allegorically for human life,—a haunted forest, beautiful and homely to those who have no fear, but madly terrible to those who "quaver at a dread of dark." As the piece goes on, it becomes a book of ethical proverbs, a poetical *Pilgrim's Script*, a shower of characteristic percepts loosely held together by continual reference to the allegory of the woods, wherein lurks the enchantment for the lover of poetry.⁵

Trevelyan's opinion of the poem is not unlike Fielding's or even Forster's up to *Howards End*. "You must love the light so well," says Meredith in the poem, "That no darkness will seem fell,"⁶ and this, says Trevelyan, anticipating Forster's phrase in *Howards End*, "is a hard saying."⁷

Trevelyan does not cite the lines of "The Woods of Westermain" in which Meredith explains the necessary unity that allows one to dare the enchanted woods of life:

Each of each in sequent birth,
Blood and brain and spirit, three
(Say the deepest gnomes of Earth),
Join for true felicity.
Are they parted, then expect
Some one sailing will be wrecked.
Separate hunting are they sped,
Scan the morsel coveted.
Earth that Triad is: she hides
Joy from him who that divides;
Showers it when the three are one
Glassing her in union.⁸

These lines read ironically in the light of Fielding's experience in the Marabar Caves. There are no gnomes in that deep earth. The union of blood, brain, and spirit can produce no triadic joy in them. There is only the horrifying monistic vision: "Pathos, piety, courage—they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value."⁹

Meredith as well as Milton presumably had to be dropped when this vision becomes Mrs. Moore's rather than Fielding's.¹⁰ They are replaced, as Pro-

fessor Levine shows, by quotations from the King James Bible. In its use of Meredith, however, MS. B reveals a distance between Fielding and Forster and tells us something about the significance of Meredith in Forster's development.

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Notes

¹ "An Analysis of the Manuscripts of *A Passage to India*," p. 286.

² "Modern Love," *The Poetic Works of George Meredith*, ed. G. M. Trevelyan (London: Constable, 1912), p. 138.

³ *Howards End* (London: Edward Arnold, Pocket Ed., 1947), p. 336. Forster also alludes explicitly to Meredith through Cecil Vyse in that most Meredithian of his novels, *A Room with a View*; Cecil claims Meredith is right, the cause of comedy and of truth are the same, though he does not yet realize just how funny the truth is going to be. See *A Room with a View* (London: Edward Arnold, Pocket Ed., 1947), p. 142.

⁴ *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Edward Arnold, Pocket Ed., 1949), p. 85. Forster's attitude does not seem to have changed later; in 1949 he found "Lucifer in Starlight" inadequate: "The heavens and the earth have become terribly alike since Einstein. No longer can we find a reassuring contrast to chaos in the night sky and look up with George Meredith to the stars, the army of unalterable law, or listen for the music of the spheres." "Art for Art's Sake," *Two Cheers for Democracy* (London: Edward Arnold, 1951), p. 100.

⁵ *The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith* (London: Constable, 1906), p. 143.

⁶ "The Woods of Westermain," *Poetical Works*, p. 197. The poem originally appeared as the first work in Meredith's *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of the Earth* (1883).

⁷ *The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith*, p. 163.

⁸ *Poetical Works*, pp. 201–02.

⁹ *A Passage to India* (London: Edward Arnold, Pocket Ed., 1947), p. 156.

¹⁰ Something of Fielding's experience in the cave remains with him in the finished novel. A view of the caves from a distance acutely depresses him and he wonders "whether he was really and truly successful as a human being"; he feels somewhat insanely that "we exist not in ourselves, but in terms of each other's minds, . . ." *A Passage to India*, pp. 199 and 259.

Metacommentary

To the Editor:

Mr. Jameson's, and Susan Sontag's, argument ["Metacommentary," *PMLA*, Jan. 1971] can be summed up as follows: since life—and its portrayal in great art—is whole and attempts to seize it are partial, don't interpret: be. This is like the perfectionistic despair of a Mallarmé. But whereas he went on despite the desperate odds to make marvelous art anyway, they abandon what could be a comparably noble effort in criticism. Even humble interpretation at least represents a naïve fidelity to its better half, art, a sort of juggling before Notre Dame. But this disdainful turning away leads to what: to cold abstractions, a far worse calamity of life than even the humble interpreter's.

Thus a Robbe-Grillet's perfectionism (*le degré zéro*) leads him to abandon the imperfect but richly human or personal (i.e., rooted in the sacred, however remotely) schemata of symbolism in favor of a quasi-scientific "impersonality"—which is really another set of all-too-human schemata, alien to art—and eventually the movies. Susan Sontag too passed over to the structuralists and then the movies and social commentary. So it is not surprising that Mr. Jameson ends his piece with a "metacommentary" on science-fiction movies plus an invocation of Marcuse. Some of us prefer to just keep juggling and adoring—like Mallarmé, who told the tinkering René Ghil: "On ne peut pas se passer d'Eden"—while the faithless go about "trashing" the past.

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On the Naming of Huckleberry Finn

To the Editor:

James Colwell in his "On the Naming of Huckleberry Finn" [*PMLA*, Jan. 1971] overlooks an obvious origin for Huck's name. The boy was a "hick" who loved to have "fun," or a "fun hick." The transposition of letters would not be that difficult, especially for a writer like Twain, who loved playing with names.

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