Chapter - IV

Women in Meredith's Novels
Chapter IV

Heroines and Other Women Meredith’s Novels

It is almost the unanimous opinion of all the critics and a student of George Meredith that his greatest triumphs in the creation of character is his heroine. They have been ‘Swimming’ now for years in the oceans of analysis and application. His heroines are the most enchanting ladies. They are the masterpieces of English as well as other literature. A rapturous praise of their charms already exits in a great quantity; still one cannot pass by quietly. A reader is definitely mesmerised not only by the splendour of their physical beauty but is amazed to see their wits and highly intellectual qualities. They are capable of facing any problem and can find a solution on their own. They have certain inborn qualities and as they grow up, they flourish into a multifaceted personality. The secret of such wonderful creation lies in Meredith’s manner of presentation. The poet in him sees in them bright images of health of beauty. They are the fruits of right living, lovely and loving symbols of Earth. On the other hand, the critic in him uses them as a kind of test. It is this skill of writer that gives them a very strong position, which is quite different from that they occupy in most fictions existed earlier or even during that period. The earlier novelists were convinced that if their readers saw their heroines clearly and if every detail of the lovely face is described, then the character of the lady could be left misty and vague. But Meredith thought in exactly opposite way. He boldly presented his heroines as definite individualities. He has taken the greatest care to show the springs of their actions in order to examine their motives. At the same time, having described the character, he leaves the lovely face and figure for us to meditate. He gives
them a kind of aura and makes them move in golden mist. They are shown as shining figures in which every man sees his own Helen of Troy. The poet in him very skilfully gives touch of beauty, hinting at this and that and builds up those elaborate portraits so suitable to the situations. Above all his women are bathed in glamour. It this poetic glamour which strengthens the appeal of the character.

An account of the part they play in the comedy has already been given at some length in the previous chapter. It is also discussed that his heroines have a double function. They are created to perform the double role of creation and continuation of the species. Meredith strongly believes in the fact that a woman has the capacity to establish a healthy atmosphere for a happy life when body, mind and soul can have a perfect union. On the other hand his theory of Comic Muse makes it clear that a woman works as an instrument in the hands of the Muse in order to unmask the sentimentalist or egoists and bring them back to the right track so as to create the harmony. In this chapter the standpoint is slightly changed. It is no longer examining his comic view but an effort has been made to study Meredith as a harbinger, a prophet, a strong admirer of women who fought for the betterment of their status in society. He had the capacity to probe into the deep mystery of a woman’s heart.

One has to agree with the fact that Meredith’s heroines are a strange combination of definite individuality with poetic glamour. That’s why they are infinitely superior to those of previous writers. It is the heroines of Shakespeare with whom they have often been compared. They precisely have the same appeal. Cleopatra, Rosalind, Portia,
Imogen and many others are distinct characters whose beauty and wit has made an everlasting impression in the world of literature. They are woven so artistically in the given circumstances that they are considered as realities even today. Shakespeare has the knack of creating the perfect atmosphere surrounding his heroines. Meredith too has remained successful in creating the required atmosphere to the highest extent. As a result of which, his heroines stand as realities before our eyes. The heroines and the events are closely connected and hence they become more delightful, touching and always unexpected. They move around us as individuals. They bathe in bright light and move in music. So he has not only given intellect in the matter but also has given wonderful poetry. Had he been less a poet, less able, in some curious fashion, to suggest sheer lyrical ecstasy in the middle of his analysis of motive and action, his heroines would have been like the factors in an intellectual problem. But the detailed study shows that it is not so. They walk in light, music and loneliness. Each one of them has been portrayed in a particular fashion having a particular motive behind. Before one goes closer to his Diana, we are told, 'how she makes everything in the room dust around a blazing jewel.' Just as we are told that Juliet's beauty 'hangs upon her cheek of night, like a rich jewel in an Ethiopian's ear.'

Apart from being beautiful, intellectual and glamorous, his heroines also possess one more quality, which makes them stand apart. They are truer to the Victorian Age than those of any other known male novelist of the day. They stand as realities. They are so natural that we regard them in different lights according to our affinities with them. They are so many in numbers that one gets amazed. Just as in our daily life one chooses
his friends in accordance with the character and insights, so it is with Meredith's heroines. Far from being the ideal heroines of romance, they are full of faults and failings as well as virtues. As he himself says, "They are women of mixed essences, standing off from the divine to the considerably lower." They are not merely the product of his poetic imagination but the outcome of social inheritance. They are the creatures of Nineteenth Century, living Victorian life through and through. Though they stand in the dim twilight of past generation yet they catch the glow of the slowly approaching dawn.

This makes one acquainted with the writer's insight,

"They feel on their brows as they wait,  
An air of the morning, a breath  
From the springs of the East, from the gate  
Whence freedom issues, and fate;  
Sorrow and triumphs and death".

There are some occasions when these women are unable to face the world boldly because some of them are terribly cramped by the defects of their education. At times they are bound and tied by the convention and custom hence cannot catch with the fast moving world. Yet they are conscious of their natural responsibilities. They never forget the fact that they are destined to make this world more beautiful and nobler. A close study of his heroines makes one feel that his women think our thoughts and feel our needs. Meredith has probed into the depths of their experiences and has successfully grasped all possibilities. They struggle hard with the difficulties of their sex. They cherish life in every fibre.

It is to women that Meredith looks as capable of performing the service of helping to civilise the world. This social philosophy has already been discussed in the second chapter. Being a champion of women he asserts the fact that position of women in a
society is the deciding factor of its civilisation. But one can not ignore the fact that the process of civilising the world takes place through the process of purification. It involves much pain and suffering on the part of a woman. She has to undergo a constant suffering to make the world worth living. A woman has to rebel against the set notions and conventions. This great task has been performed by Meredith's women in all his novels. His Diana, Clara Middleton, Nesta, Rhoda Fleming, Aminta, Renee, Carinthia, Lucy Desborough, Nataly and all the rest of them are seen fighting the battle courageously. Meredith himself writes, "Philosophy is required to make our human nature credible and acceptable....... Your imagination of the feminine image you have set up to bend your civilised knees must temper its fastidiousness....... You must turn on yourself resolutely track and seize that, and scrub and cleanse him, by which process you will arrive at the conception of the right heroic woman for you to worship, and if you proved to be of some spiritual stature, you may reach to an ideal of heroic feminine type for the worship of mankind, an image as yet in poetic outline only, or on upper skies."

Having been inspired by such ideals, Meredith has painted his heroines with different shades. If some of them are weak, submissive and conventional, others are strong and struggling.

Unfortunately, even today women are considered as the prize or toy, whether by men or by Gods. The scientific inventions and technical advancements have not brought in much of a change in scene. It was Meredith, who visualised the seriousness of this problem. And has suggested a solution over it. According to him women can be liberated only and through men. And what she must be liberated from are the roles which
man has imposed upon her. She has been seen as the fatal woman, shrine, slave, servant, victim of vanity, biologically unsound and so forth. She has been the means of exploitation, through the image, which might differ but one fact remains the same that a woman is being exploited. Meredith was one of those pioneers who has felt and judged the ability of women. He believes that it is the women who are superior in energy and sacrifice. Meredith’s knowledge of women, which for several reasons seems even more notable than his knowledge of men. It is true that in his novels a man’s understanding of women appears more remarkable than understanding of men. Meredith appears to have brought in most cases a finer analysis to bear on women than men. One has to accept the fact that women are on the whole more truly under the sway of their impersonal individuality than men. It is not that they are easier to understand- they are harder but that they all cease to be comprehensible at certain clearly seen points. A man always knows that he will cease to understand a woman and when a woman may understand a man to his last turning. Meredith, with a special insight has followed the track of women along the intricate path of their inborn nature. When the ordinary man says, “Here she ceases to be comprehensible.” Meredith says, “Here she becomes truly woman.” He is led forward by an acute and cordial sympathy. It is this that has given him the understanding of the high ideal of womanhood, nobly presented in many portraits. They are studies in the highest sense, full of poetry, fire, imagination and the splendour of physical and mental beauty. They are intensely human and embodiments of the profoundly questioning and progressive spirit of true womanhood. As he himself says in Rhoda Fleming, “There is the democratic virus secret in every woman.”
It is apparent that Meredith's mind could grasp not only the good, which here means the natural but also the bad, which is the untrue or the false. There are some women with whom he does not sympathise at all. Constance Aspers and Lady Wathin in 'Diana of the Crossways' leave him more than cold. In the same way the three Pole girls in 'the Tragic Comedians' and Countess de Saldar in 'Evan Harrington' are apparently false to the fine ideals of womanhood. Keeping such typical ideas of men and women in his mind, Meredith has sketched his portraits in the light of their actual existence. By tracing their mental development one gains the truest sense of his power of reading right the tangled scroll of individuality. By watching them evolve through their instincts and natural resources, the wisdom and reality of his observation is noted. Besides in character drawing, there is an extraordinary sense of atmosphere, spreading a feeling of truth over the picture. His figures are always individual and striking. They are notably true to themselves.

Meredith holds strongly that 'the beginning of the motive life with women must be in the head, equally with men —so in his gallery of women he has given women of various range. He writes, "My people conquer nothing, win none; they are actual yet uncommon. They are directed to set in motion and — poor troops of actors to empty benches! The conscience residing in thoughtfulness that they would appeal to"

It is very difficult to choose out a few heroines from the long list. When we call to mind Rose, Clara, Vittoria, Nataly, Nesta, Aminta, Rhoda, Diana, the little princess Ottilia, and many others, it is a hard task to select a few. The chapter especially deals
with the writer’s manner of presenting variety of heroines so I will be focusing upon a few of them.

A careful study of his novels brings an important fact before. His heroines belong to all sections of society. Though it is sometimes said that his characters are too frequently drawn from the upper ten thousand but he himself has warned us that he appeals to all the classes. They belong to various social strata. We have women like Diana, Clara Middleton, Nesta, Cecilia Halkett, Aminta, Renee, and Nataly who belong to upper class of society. They all are young, beautiful, rebellious and yet practical. On the other hand there is Rhoda and Dahlia Fleming, Mrs. Harrington, Mrs. Sumfit and Mrs. Berry who represent the humble rank. We also have lady Grace, Margret Lovel, Mrs. Mount and above all the delightful Countess de Saldar in Evan Harrington who represents various classes in society. The character of Countess de Saldar is created out of his memories of a vivacious aunt from abroad and it becomes more appealing and effective. While Emma Dunstane and Nataly stand before us as middle aged matrons, matured by the discipline of life. Meredith never seems weary of giving sketches and finished pictures of young married women and girls. They are so natural that they become intimate friends of the readers. There is Emilia also known as Sandra Belloni and Vittoria representing the quintessence of natural woman. It is said, “She is half man ....... she is not what man has made of your sex; and she is brave at heart.” Similarly, Princess Ottilia in ‘Harry Richmond’, is seen moving freely as air, she could perceive her studies and argue and discuss and quote, such unclouded eyes and laugh and play and be her whole living self.’ In the same novel Janet Ilchester appears as Meredith’s ideal
mate, a woman, who while remaining distinctively feminine, can be a companion to a man in all his activities: 'A woman who can be a friend of men is the right sort of woman to make a match with ....... Janet Ilchester is the only girl who doubles the man she marries.' This is how Meredith thought about women, so novel and so bold. It may be added here that Meredith is very successful in portraying the middle aged, aristocratically, eccentric women of the world. Example are Lady Jocelyn in 'Evan Harrington', Lady Gosstro in 'Sandra Belloni', Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson 'The Egoist', Baroness Von Crefeldt of 'The Tragic Comedians' and Lady Charlotte Eglett in 'Lord Ormont and his Aminta' and many more. It is a type for which Meredith has a peculiar affection and into whose mouth he places many of his witty and scintillating remarks upon society. He likes their calm sense of mastery and ease. Their aristocratic independence of judgement and freedom of action and opinion is worth noting.

Such different shade of a woman's character is clearly revealed not only in his novels but also in the poetry. The supreme examples of two absolutely contradictory shades of a woman's personae could be clearly drawn from his representative poems such as 'The Love in Valley' and 'Modern Love'. If the former stands for beauty, love and devotion, the latter is the symbol of unfaithful, tragic partner whose frailty becomes the cause of the lover's doom. This heart breaking experience is so devastating that the lover looses his faith in 'womanhood'. Of course the expression becomes too appealing, as the experience is also a part of Meredith's personal life. His experience of first marriage and the elopement of his wife with her friend leaving the son and the husband was so shattering that Meredith had actually lost his faith in woman. Of course in the later part
of his life this image seems to be wiped out and is replaced by much brighter, kind and loving and loveable. The changed attitude of the writer could very well be seen in the poems written much after the bitter experience. It brought a wide popularity to the author. In ‘Sage Enamoured’, Meredith deals with a situation which is quite contradictory to the situation described in ‘Modern Love’. In this poem he brings to our notice the fact that man is an irrational and irrational must a woman be in turn. The light of reason will never be completely quenched in them, as they are so close to Nature. For Meredith woman are supposed to be perfect, free from the unseemly tug of lower passion. The women portrayed through such poems are quite influencing and effective because the expression has the touch of reality. These women are not merely the products of his poetic imagination but they also are directly related to Meredith’s own life.

It is quite amazing to note that in this whole range of women, one type is missing. Meredith has never portrayed the spinster boldly throughout his novels. A woman who is leading a happy, active life and doing service to race has to be by law either a wife or a mother. A spinster had no space in his world. His heroines are either married or on the verge of marriage. This throws light upon the fact that he believed in married life. It is only through marriage the complete harmony could be achieved in life. This concept has already been discussed in the second chapter. The man, woman and society are the three sides of a triangle. This triangle cannot be complete without marriage. It is the true union of ‘body and soul’. It should not be based on any bargain or transaction. The physical as well as spiritual fulfilment is possible only through marriage. This can be the
reason behind rejecting the delineation of an unmarried woman leading a complete life on this earth.

In order to bring forth such new ideals, Meredith has very effectively given the hypocrisies involved in the customs of marriage during the Victorian Age. He condemned the existing conventions like a true reformer advocated for a better human relationship. His spinsters are of the old fashioned type who lead an idle life and devote themselves to lapdogs. For example, Miss Davidneys described as ‘Sweet old-fashioned grey gentle woman’. Jenny Denham, who seems going to develop into the type referred to, but finally undergo a change and marries Beauchamp. The reason behind refusing to portray a single woman leading a successful life remains unknown, but it could be said that his novels were written a little early in date for them. Thought he had a strong sympathy for the pioneers like Florence Nightingale and others, still his strong belief in ‘true marriage – as the most perfect condition of life for human beings’ might not have allowed him to portray the single woman. In a letter written to Ulrica Duncombe, Meredith writes, ‘An unmarried woman has less than half a life, unless she chooses to embark on a tipsy-boat to the devil her own way.’ As one precious to me flauntingly call it, and with whom? For on that journey the woman must have a male companion; most probably to appear to those who admire, as marvel image under eclipse of an inkblot, let her not ever have the world against her, if she can help it. On the one hand, Nature will not bear an offence. Women are between these contending powers and the worst of it is, that in the critical time of their youth, when they are urged within, to
make the choice. Their ignorance and their tastes generally precipitated them upon the wrong one."  

In the social philosophy of life, Meredith has placed the woman at the centre and marriage has been kept as the right choice. As a reformer he always dreamt of a society having a free choice of education as well as life-partner. Boys as well as girls should be allowed to experience the world as it comes to them they must be exposed to all the realities of life.

It is true that each female character in Meredith's novels has been created with certain motives. Some of them are the outcome of his poetic glamour while others are truly the products of the reformer's zeal. To pick and choose a few among them is but to exalt a personal taste and to provoke quarrels. They all are conceived on different spheres. The heroines of his early novels such as Lucy Desborough in 'The Ordeal of Richard Feverel' and Rose Jocelyne in 'Evan Harrington' are almost the conventional young girls of the fiction. In them the poetic glamour is more evident than definite individuality. They are exquisite girlhood. In the characterisation of these heroines, we find his gift at his highest. His sense of character and the interplay of one or another, the emotions they engender and the romantic beauty they disclose are the qualities which are going to make them memorable in the world of literature. These heroines are true to all life, to human nature and belong to no one period. Here is a description of Richard Feverel's first glimpse of Lucy by the Water's edge.
"When nature had made us ripe for love, it seldom occurs that the fates are behind
hand in furnishing a temple for the flame."

Above green flashing plunges of a weir, and shaken by the thunder below, lilies,
golden and white, were swaying at anchor among the reeds. At Meadows hung from the
banks thick with weed and trailing bramble and there also hung a daughter of Earth. Her
face was shaded by a broad straw hat with a flexible brim that left her lips and chin in the
sun, and, sometimes nodding, sent forth a light of promising eyes. Across her shoulders
and behind, flowed large loose curls, brown in shadow, almost golden where the ray
touched them. She was simply dressed, befitting decency and the season. On a close
inspection you might see that her lips were stained. This blooming young person was
regaling on dewberries. They grew between the bank and the water. Apparently she
found the fruit abundant, for her hand was making pretty progress to her mouth.
Fastidious youth, which revolts at woman plumping her exquisite proportions on bread
and butter and would (we must suppose) joyfully have her scraggy, to have her poetical,
can hardly object to dewberries. Indeed the act of eating them is dainty and induces
musing. The dewberry is a sister to the lotus, and an innocent sister. You eat: mouth,
eye, and hand are occupied, and the undrugged mind free to roam. And so it was with
the damsel who knelt there. The little skylark went up above her, all song, to smooth
southern cloud lying along the blue: from a dewy corps dark over her nodding hat the
blackbird fluted, calling to her with thrice mellow note: the kingfisher flashed emerald
out of green osiers: a bow-winged heron travelled aloft solitude: a boat slipped toward
her, containing a dreamy youth: and still she plucked the fruit, and ate, and muse, as if no
fairy prince were invading her territories, and as if she wished not for one, or knew not her wishes. Surrounded by the green shaven meadows, the pastoral summer buzz, the weir-fall’s thundering white, amid the breath and beauty of wild flowers, she was a bit of lovely human life in a fair setting; a terrible attraction. The magnetic youth leaned round to note his proximity to the weir-piles, and beheld the sweet vision. Stiller and stiller grew nature, as at the meeting of two electric clouds. Her posture was so graceful, that though he was making straight for the weir, he dared not dip a skull. Just then one enticing dewberry caught her eyes. He was floating by unheeded, and saw that her hand stretched low, and could not gather what is sought. A stroke from his right brought him beside her. The damsel glanced up dismayed, and her whole shape trembled over the brink. Richard sprang from his boat into the water. Pressing a hand beneath her foot, which she had thrust against the crumbling wet sides of the bank to save herself, he enabled her to recover her balance, and gain safe earth, whither he followed her.4

The Italian innocence of Sandra Belloni exhibits another incidental virtue and ability of Meredith’s characterisation. Without any feeling of patronage, he can seize on national character and expose it. Sandra is in her essence an Italian. Meredith had been educated for some years at a school abroad and was a European as well as an Englishman. His talent approached genius. His foreigners are among the best in English fiction. His style revivifies his characters, though the circumstances out of which they and their problems grew, and the manner, in which they lived, have perished utterly. In ‘Sandra Belloni’ he has treated the impact of an Italian artiste upon the aspiring members of the family of a city merchant.
Emilia is the girl of Italian living in London. She is blessed with a wonderful and a passionate love for music. Italy and music are the organic passions of her existence. Her character is a fine study of the nature and development of a true artist. It is drawn from life. She is a daughter of an eccentric old musician, an Italian refugee. He is a man of musical genius. He is given in constant difficulties. Emilia is portrayed as a woman of straightforward simplicity, childlike, indifference about the future, except a vague golden dream, is quite charming. She is in the habit of loving openly whatever she likes to say straight out without the slightest disguise whatever she feels and thinks. She is adopted by a pretentious family of the name of Poles, partly from good nature and partly out of vanity. There are the three sisters who at first take up the friendless heroine. They are masterpieces of delicate ironical handling. They are daughters of an uneducated rich merchant. They want to be more refined and more fastidious. Above all they are out to become the leaders of good society. They are as dry as sand. But are kind enough to Emilia. Their brothers are fall in love with her. She is also attracted to him with all heart and in a most embarrassing matter-of-fact fashion. He can be described as a young man without brains and not without heart. He is definitely below her in truthfulness and depth of nature. He is divided between her and the world. The young man allows himself to be entangled in a flirtation with a fine lady, which becomes serious. Like many other men, he tries to go two ways at once, which never answers. Soon she realises that the heart she seeks is not in him. She is strong enough to put him away. From this bitter experience, she is stricken down, but not wholly crushed. She has received a fearful wound, but not a mortal blow. She suffers cruelly, but she survives. The straightforwardness of her nature
could be seen from this incident. When she is singing happily in the woods, the Pole sisters find her and are amazed to hear the melodious voice. They ask her whether the place inspires her to whom she replies that she does not come to woods for inspiration but because the women at the farm where she lives do not let her sing in the house. There is one more occasion in the novel when a great admirer of music thinks of sending her to Italy and asks her how much money she has. She candidly replies that 4£, 19$ in her pocket. When she tells her lover who she is. She appeals at once to a standard, which is unaware: is not the standard of society or of a young cavalry officer and tells him, “My father is one of the most wonderful men in the whole world – he is one of the first violinists at the Italian Opera.

The Poles, her friends fall into trouble. Even her father becomes embarrassed in business and makes away with Mr. Chump's fortune. Emilia out of gratitude for their kindness works on Mr. Pericles. She gives up a proposal of a marriage with the man who deserves to be her husband so there is nothing ideal about her. She walks on the earth with the trade of a mere woman and proposes to go England. Emilia in character is beautiful as well as looks alive. She is genius without culture: goodness without rule, love without worldly restraint. Her passion for music for Italy and for Wilfrid is blended with consummate skill.

Emilia plays a much greater part in the action of the story. She rather stands as a kind of test or standard. She stands as a lovely, free, spontaneous as the natural child of the Earth. Her music is the very voice of the Earth. She stands against the background of
the artificial and sentimental Pole. She is touched with a genius as natives to her as breathing. While in Vittoria she no more remains the same person. In her, Meredith has given a more matured heroine. She becomes the symbolic figure of Italian national genius. In her character the individuality of a woman is overshadowed.

Thus, in this and in other novels, suggestions are made on the most fruitful subjects. The social relations of the sexes are highlighted. His women are of high intelligence and culture, lovingly trained in an atmosphere of generous liberalism. The picture of this clear and ripening intellect framed in so fair a form, suggest the hope that Mr. Meredith is no friend to that hard and fast line, which would deny to woman and woman only.

On the other hand the heroine of the novel ‘Rhoda Fleming’ after whose name the novel has been titled is another powerful woman. She is natural, heroic and stands for earthly womanhood. It is generally said that the novel ‘The Ordeal of Richard Feverel’ deals with educational problems. The father in the novel wants his son to follow the path led by him. It is the history of a father who acts Providence to his son. If it is so ‘Rhoda Fleming’ deals with the problem of heredity and the result of absence of any kind of true training in early days to girls. The heroine, Rhoda, realises the weaknesses in her personality, still stands heroic and acts providence to her sister. The writer has very effectively put before us the problems of young girls. If they are not brought up in a healthy atmosphere they tend to make mistakes. Due to lack of confidence, they make wrong choice. One wrong decision leading to another ultimately ruins their life. It
becomes a disastrous experience. Though Meredith believes that Nature is stronger than 
Nurture, but nurture can also make the difference. The last scene of the novel is highly 
symbolical in nature. It reveals the theme boldly. Dahlia, the sister of the heroine Rhoda, 
is immensely sentimental in nature. In her sickness, she utters her last words to Robert 
spoken calmly, “Help poor girls.” It actually was an earnest request made by Meredith to 
girls both of weak and strong characters. They inherited much evil in their early life. 
The help that is needed for such woman is in education, which is truer to nature, 
knowledge of the world and greater freedom of action. Meredith also emphasised upon 
the fact that a change in moral tone is required. The sins of men and women must be 
treated alike. Such bold and shocking ideas were advocated by Meredith in an age when 
the idea of woman’s emancipation was a mere dream.

The heroine Rhoda Fleming is sketched as ‘the motherless’, dark-eyed lassie. She 
is brought up with her sister Dahlia. Her father, farmer Fleming is a man of stern country 
morality. The evidence of his stern attitude is seen from a very small incident in the 
novel, which occurs in the early part. He punishes his daughter Rhoda by a week’s 
silence because she had dared to draw near to a girl who had returned to the village with a 
stain on her name. His only desire in life is to see his daughters respectably married, 
‘Rather than live her alone.’ This was the usual dream of any father for their daughters 
during those days. Mr. Fleming is even prepared to get her married to the old man, old 
Gammon. He fails to understand the fact that loveless marriage would be reproach. 
Rhoda inherits to the full, her father’s rigid sense of rectitude and the obstinacy, 
regardless of advice and consequences. The father never makes any effort to educate the
girl at all. Dahlia falls at the moment of temptation. She becomes a prey of false promises of a young man who is not worthy of her love. She is seduced by Edward Blancove, the nephew of the squire of Wrexby. She is forced to marry a wretch. On the other hand Rhoda brings disaster and misery on all around by setting her will power run wild. She dominates her judgement. She is portrayed as a woman of beautiful strength. She has a great sense of duty. Her faithful love for her sister remains steadfast in all the circumstances. On the other hand Meredith has portrayed her in such a way that she was regarded as a hard, cruel woman whose will has been cultivated at the expense of feelings. She is she is strong enough not to care for anything except for the power of forcing the wills of all around her. Meredith has rightly remarked, “She dares to take on her conscience to subdue another human creature’s struggling will.” Robert Armstrong, the farmer’s apprentice, is in love with Rhoda and leaves no chance to win her heart. He cannot believe that Rhoda’s strong determination can fail to break down at the last. It seems barely rare to him that Rhoda should act like a fate in the contempt of emotion.

Rhoda has the intense feeling of rebellion against her fate. Of course that has been the painful experience of many women in the last century. There is a powerful scene in the novel, which reveals so many facts to us. In one scene Robert stops Rhoda as she is going to meet Algernon to gain tidings of Dahlia. The rebellion surging in Rhoda’s bosom at the conventional restraints of women is clearly seen here. “Is there no freedom for a woman at all in the world?” She roars furiously when Robert plunges into the world of action to search for Dahlia, Rhoda feels a woman’s great envy of the liberty of a man, who has not, if it pleases him not, to sit and eat grief among familiar images.
The thirst for freedom and pride runs in the blood of Flemings. The strength of purpose in Rhoda’s character is seen through many striking scenes. By her forceful nature, she subdues Robert’s passion. She stands supreme in the strength of her dignity and he is reduced to apologise. Rhoda had never had the freedom to act, to mix with the world, as men have. Still she could defend herself. Hence she is described as, ‘a strong Biblical girl Hebrew hardness of resolution and Hebrew exaltation of soul.’ So in the portrait gallery of Meredith’s heroines, none is found to have such a force for good or evil. Through her character the writer’s zeal of reformation and the liberal attitude towards women is assured. He also seems to be optimistic enough that even a small number of women like Rhoda, are capable of bringing in the desired change in society. If they are brought up in a better or more suitable environment and if they are trained and studied by a more suitable education, they can certainly fight against the present conventions in a society. It was the need of the day.

In another novel, ‘Beauchamp’s Career’ an upward lead is taken by the writer. There are total four women influencing the hero throughout the novel. There is an elderly lady, Rosamund Culling, who is the widow of a British officer and now works as lady housekeeper of Mr. Romfrey’s. She has a strange affection for Nevil, the hero. She treats him as her son and always dreams of his prosperity. She is actually set on Nevil’s worldly success. There are three more girls, young and beautiful. There is Cecilia Halkett, Renee and Jeny Denham, madly in love with Nevil and try hard to influence him in their own ways. Though their ways are different, but the girl is one. They are tied in
the bonds of artificial and conventional society. There is throughout their lives a constraint put on their natural aptitude and their powers. They can never truly be themselves and each one fails in consequence.

Though all these female characters are admirably sketched, there is one character, which actually takes up less space but is yet, more alive, she is Renee. She is a fascinating young girl of sixteen when introduced in the novel. She is a bewitching beauty in Venice. A delicate cup of crystal brimming with the beauty of the place is the way Meredith describes her. She is a French woman sketched so very well that the French themselves must have been pleased to accept. She is a creature of sweet imperviousness and delicate fire. Nevil drinks in his impression through her. She is fresh from her convent school. Her education has been such that obedience to her father's wish is to her a religion. She has strength to control her passion for Nevil. When Nevil urges her to let him speak to her father, she talks to him 'like a woman to plead the cause of her obedience as a girl.' She is essentially sincere. She makes no concealment of her love for Nevil. At the same time she remains loyal to her father's wish too. She submits herself to marry the Marquis and is well prepared to meet her fate bravely. Meredith has very artistically portrayed her sincere nature, which is at war with the terrible ways in which convention binds her and forces her to behave as the father wishes. There is a wonderful occasion sketched in the novel when the lovers are left quite alone. Nevil and she goes off on a madcap sailing expedition at night in order to see Venice at dawn and the unfortunate Marquis is left standing on the bank, she is in a fear of herself. She is conscious of a tumultuous rush of sensation, none of them of a very healthy kind,
coming, as it were, from an unlocked chamber of her bosom, hitherto of unimagined content. Though Renee is educated as well as strong, her upbringing leaves her completely at the mercy of others. She lacks the confidence in herself. She is carried away on the tide of Nevil’s passion. Nevil is prepared to carry Renee back to England as his wife, but Renee is completely torn between her duty to her father and her passionate love for Nevil. In the character of Renee there is a wonderful picture of a woman who is caught between her dreams and realities. Meredith was sensitive enough to feel the turmoil of a woman’s heart. Thought reformer in heart, he never suggested the ways, which would ruin the girl completely. Though he could see the bright rays of freedom hidden in future, but never tried to ignore the twilight of the passing age.

Just like Renee, Cecilia too is extremely young having a wonderful speech-gift. Being an heiress of huge wealth and powerful political background, she is surrounded by luxury. Her father anticipates her every wish and she gives him much confidence in return. She adopts his politics with reflection. She wishes to move through her world calm and unflustered amidst much admiration and flattery. Her attitude to life is that of a ‘beautiful snob having no sense of service.’ She wants her intellect could stand in arms and prevents the susceptibility to complements. She has a vision of a greater independence than she is capable of sustaining. It vexes her that Nevil does not take her seriously. She is seen falling back in her luxurious life, which ultimately proves her prison. She is one of those ‘who take the rank of princesses among women before our world has tried to their claim to it.’ Her calm contempt of conventional life is shattered by the coming of Nevil. She loves him in a calm controlled spirit. As compared to
Renee, Cecilia wished to have a luxurious and safe life. If Renee is a vessel at sea, breasting tempests, Cecilia is a vessel lying safe in harbour, untried." Cecilia never abandons herself to emotions and fascination. She is very jealous of Renee. She dislikes all references to French life. She hates the devotion of Nevil to Dr. Sharpnel, the radical of the day. It makes her too helpless and insignificant. On the other hand Renee urges Nevil to marry Cecilia. She is more vivid and less self-conscious, while Cecilia is very proud and dislikes all show of emotions. She wants to move through life in queenly fashion. That is how the girls of her class were taught to behave right from the childhood. She is ashamed of her bondage to her surrounding, but has not the courage to break away from them. She will not acknowledge even to herself, how she longs to see and advises Nevil. Meredith himself says, "She was one of those artificial creatures called woman who dare not be spontaneous and cannot act independently if they would continue to be admirable in the world's eye, and who for that object must remain fixed on shelves, like other marketable wares avoiding motion to avoid shattering or tarnishing. This is their fate, only in degree less inhuman than of Hellenic and Trojan princesses offered up to the Gods, or pretty slaves to the dealers. Their artificiality is at once their bane and their source of superior pride." Meredith has sketched the character of Cecilia in such a masterly fashion that the working of her mind is clearly seen to us. The conflict in her mind is shown in this way, 'She obeys his wishes but cannot sympathise with his feelings'. She is disappointed, vexed and at times ashamed. She is clearly seen torn between her love for Nevil and her dislikes of his unconventional ways. She feels him to be her superior. She is aware of the fact that it would persist in loving him inspite of everything. She feels herself falling in the strength of character that he possesses but she
cannot shake herself free from the bonds of her upbringing. She fails in courage and in
the passionate will to conquer obstacles. Nevil first hates to seek her for mere money,
though he would not have hesitated if she had shown willingness to use the money for the
cause of England’s reform. Cecilia grows to love Nevil more and more while her father
is less inclined for the match. He sets an elderly gentleman, Seymour Austin, to guard
her when Nevil is about. He is falsely convinced of Nevil’s sins and blames Cecilia. She
is highly stung by jealousy and lacks the courage to love Nevil any more. Finally she
decides to leave for Italy. Nevil reaches to her house with a definite purpose to find the
house empty. Cecilia becomes miserable without Nevil and finally yields to her father’s
wishes and consents to marry the man he advises. At the end she realises that she has all
along been a ‘self-worshipper’ and her lack of courage and jealousy have spoiled her life.
Ultimately she has to accept the bondage.

The third heroine in the novel has been described as ‘a girl having strong head
and will’. She always causes surprise to those who come across her by her remarkable
strong intellectual power and her courage. For a long time Nevil is not attracted to her.
He is astonished to find that she can ‘think because he starts life on the assumption that
women can only feel’. It is the illness of Nevil, which becomes the deciding factor in the
novel. It leads to the discovery that Jeny Denham is the real wife for Nevil. She
unselfishly continues to work for the union of Cecilia and Nevil. She never considers
herself to be worthy of him hence she is free from jealousy. She never hesitates to think
of him as Cecilia’s husband. ‘She actually refuses to accept Nevil’s offer of marriage
until she is assured that Tuckham is going to be Cecilia’s husband. Her calmness makes
those around her think that she does not love Nevil, but in reality, she is devoted to him. The Earl, Nevil’s uncle is delighted by the strength of will and calmness while nursing Nevil. The Earl said, “She was like no person of her age that he remembered to have ever met. She was pliable only to service, not to grief, whilst Cecilia sobbed and sniffed.” According to Nevil she will be the bravest and helpful wife in England. He realises the great value of Jeny’s character. She has a clear head and nobly poise character. She taught the joys of colour and sweet companionship, simple delights, a sister mind, with a loveliness of person and nature unimagined by him. He drank of happiness that neither Renee nor Cecilia had promised. She is expected to lead a courageous and successful life.

Just like these young and beautiful heroines, Rosamund Culling, comparatively an elderly lady is Mr. Romfrey’s lady housekeeper. She too is devoted to her interests in the hero. She had known him since he was a little boy and shown motherly affection to him. She wants him to marry a very beautiful and extremely wealthy girl Cecilia Halkett, daughter of Colonel Halkett. She tries her best to unite them together. When she realises that Nevil is passionately in love with a charming French girl, she starts hating Renee and calls her a schemer. Through her attitude towards Renee Meredith wants to bring to our notice the typical attitude of an English woman towards a foreigner. Of course this also shows Rosamund’s sincerity and loyalty towards Nevil. Her heart is full of motherly feelings for him. She fears that Nevil’s marriage to an unknown French girl may spoil her darling’s career. She distrusts the girl. In the character of Rosamund, Meredith has successfully portrayed a typical English woman who misinterprets Renee’s sprightliness.
A kind of jealousy is seen at the bottom of her attitude towards the young folks. She is rather afraid that if Nevil falls in love with a young girl she may lose him.

When Nevil gets attracted towards Dr. Sharpnel's ward Jeny Denham, Rosamund watches his proceeding with great anxiety. She collects all the information about Jeny. She is pleased to see her winning manners when she meets her. She is convinced that she is the right girl who might capture the vacant heart of a young man sighing for a new mistress after having escaped the bondage of the foreign woman. She is astonished at Jeny's wit and her vivid feminine intuition. Everard Romfrey, Nevil's uncle has a false assumption that Dr. Sharpnel has insulted Rosamund, so he horsewhips the old man very badly. There is a big row over this occasion leading misunderstanding between Nevil and Rosamund. Meredith says to her, 'She escaped from contempt at the cost of her sisterhood'. She tried to fortify her nature against accusation rather than cleanse it for inspection hence can not speak out boldly when confronted by the uncle and nephew. She is forced by Nevil to confess to Mr. Romfrey what her error had been. She can not make up her mind to do so. She is in a position of a shuttlecock between the two men she loves. As soon as she finds an opportunity to please Nevil, she happily accepts the offer and becomes a chaperon to Renee. She influences Nevil in his choice between Renee and country. She shows courage of calling herself the countess in order to save the situation and later on bravely throws up her position in the Earl's household. Thus it is through bitter experiences of life, she becomes more courageous. As a result of which she is proposed by the Earl to be his wife. And the marriage takes place. She is disappointed when she finds that an heir is expected, as she had always hoped to forward Nevil's
interests by her marriage. When Nevil falls ill, she goes to serve him. He is still furious because Rosamund had not made an apology to the old doctor. She finally begs for the old man's pardon and makes the Earl apologise too. By doing so, the nobility of her heart is seen. She is bold enough to confess that she was the cause of contention. So in the character of Rosamund, Meredith has portrayed one of the brave women of the Earth, when thrown on her own resources.

In this way one meets powerful women standing on different planes fighting their own battle with life in this novel. Thought they are seen working on various spheres, the ultimate goal of their lives is the same. They all wish for a better carrier for Nevil, the hero. In this novel Meredith has ventured upon a bold experiment. The study of individual character has been combined with the expression and discussion of modern ideas. Meredith has here given a complex network of social and political problems. The important characters are seen caught and entangled in it. One can feel the intellectual pressure of their time. They are compelled to live and breathe in an atmosphere that is heavily charged with the strong and conflicting currents of modern age. In an article published in Saturday Review, J. C. Carr, the critic remarks "Meredith's outlook is too wide and his understanding of characters too deep to permit him to use men and women as puppets summoned merely to enforce and expound a particular creed, nor is the author in his own behalf disposed to suggest any sure and ready solution of the many problems he loves. What he attempts is merely to bring individual character into sharp and close relation with the dominant influences of a chosen period. He forces the actors of his drama not only to wear the appropriate costume of the time, but to bear its intellectual
burdens and he does not permit them even for a moment to indulge the placid indifference, which in actual life is enjoyed by so vast a proportion of human race.  

In the next novel “One of Our Conquerors” Meredith has presented the conflict between two women, Nataly and Nesta. They represent two generations and hence the struggle becomes more intense. Nesta, the daughter has an independence of character, heartiness of affection and love of right. She is the most attractive girl among Meredith’s heroines. On the other hand, Nataly, the mother is the slave of existing conventions because she is the artificial product. Men do not feel a doubtful position, as women must. They have not the self to endure; the world gives them land to trade, where women are on breaking seas. The character of Nataly is worked out in most delicate fashion. The effect of her position in the eyes of the world on her sensitive nature is compared with the effect of her husband is carefully traced.

Victor Radnor, the husband is a typical of the English man having a tremendous lust for wealth and pleasure. He is a businessman with eager desire for money as a means of enjoyment. In order to fulfil all his dreams in the shortest way, he marries the wealthy but sickly Mrs. Burman. She is a widow and twice his age. The marriage between Victor Radnor and Mrs. Burman, which is a kind of a bargain, results into an utter dissatisfaction and misery. It is based on business and not true love. Victor can not remain loyal to Mrs. Burman. Having once married to this lady, Mrs. Burman, he falls in love with a beautiful girl of a good family Nataly. When Nataly comes on the scene, he gets attracted towards her beauty and wit. They defy all the existing conventions and Nesta is the outcome of
their union. Now and then malicious gossip cause trouble to his life but he lives well with his worldly enterprises and his devoted friends of wit and music and cordial sympathy. Nataly, a woman of strong and winning nature is swept away by Victor's impetus confidence and prosperity. She stifles her anxiety and her longing for seclusion and for rest. Their trial in the sight of nature comes upon them through their only child Nesta. Nesta ranks with Clara Middleton and Lucy Desborough. The father is expecting his first wife's death. He plans and works hard to establish his child socially. He does not condemn his own actions but half conquered by social circumstances on her behalf. The mother too does not condemn herself but is half conquered by the knowledge of Nesta's practical compassion towards a low woman. It is because she inherits from her birth a lawless defiance of social obligations. After having heard her mother's history, she finds no difference between her history and the history of a low woman. Nesta's character has been made courageous, powerful and having great insight by Meredith. It is Nesta the daughter and not Nataly the mother in a different sense one of our conquerors. This young lady is intended to be the incarnation of nobility and charm. Her conquest is that of her own fine spirit over her lower nature of others. It is a conquest between true over the false purity. She is a brave woman who steps out of the ranks to challenge the world. She is definitely not one of the framed and glazed ideals of 'feminine innocence'.

Though her parents' secret is carefully kept from her, she is too much in society. She is intellectual enough to realise the ways of the world. She wins conventionality with triumph. She becomes a friend with a woman of unsatisfactory life and morals.
Unfortunately she falls prey to the false promises of a stupid young aristocrat. She even gets engaged to him. It is quite shocking to see such a direct and clear-sighted girl getting thus entangled herself. Perhaps she wished to please her parents. It could also be the possibility that she succumbed to the world's view of love. Or it may be because of the lack of her education, which ultimately leads to make a wrong choice. The problem of lack of education has been discussed effectively in almost all the novels of Meredith. That shows the writer's sensitivity towards such an important issue like education. Whenever and wherever possible, he has openly discussed this issue through his novels. That is the reason to call him the champion of woman's emancipation. He has not only dreamt of a brighter future for woman but has shown the appropriate way towards it. It is definitely the lack of education, which made Nesta choose the wrong way. But she is intellectual enough to understand her mistake and finally holds herself up successfully. Unlike other heroines of Meredith, she manages to get rid of existing conventions. She works out her own salvation. She is one of the modern young women who has her own ideas about life. She cannot hold herself aloof from stir and stress. She is in the thick of the battle. She does not wish for wealth, conventions and formalism but tries to lift herself to a higher platform. It is this higher platform, where Meredith wished to place women in an age when the concept of equality was quite unknown.

Unlike Nesta, her mother Nataly has partly succumbed in her struggle. In her worship of Victor, she has been, as she herself acknowledges was a slave and not helper. She is a complete devotee. Though she has given him her life, but it has not saved him much. She has the capacity but she allows herself to drift. But fortunately all her finer
qualities find fulfilment in her daughter. Nesta goes straight to the mark, rescues Mrs. Marrett, saves her father from his folly with lady Grace and becomes at last the wife of the man fit for her.

Nothing is more curious in the whole novel than the unpleasant relations between husbands and wives. In no single instance do they live together happily or even tolerably. There are Mrs. Burman and Radnor, Captain Dartrey Finellan and his wife, there is Lady Grace Halcy, whose husband out of the saddle is asleep. There is Captain Marrett and the Lady who goes illegally by his name and Mrs. Blathenoy, who proposes to Dartrey Finellan to elope with her. Thus the writer has very effectively put forward the issue of the marriages, which are based on bargain and not on true love. It is after all the love and the understanding between husband and wife, which brings harmony not between them but in the society.

Carinthia, the heroine of another famous novel ‘Amazing Marriage’ is quite unusual in nature. It is the background and the situation in which she is brought up, makes her stand apart in the series of other women. In order to justify the character of Carinthia one has to consider the situation of the story. She has had a supremely happy childhood. Meredith has taken special efforts to describe her character. A close study of Carinthia makes the fact very much clear that she has led thoroughly out of door life. She is always found among the beauties of nature and finally they had become a part of her. She is in reality ‘a mountain girl’. Her mother was an extremely spirited girl who preferred to run away with a fine old Captain. The boldness of a mother’s character can
be seen through this action. Her brother, John Chillon was sent over to England to be educated but the girl was brought up entirely among the mountains. The conventional discrepancy in the upbringing of the boys and girls can be highly marked out here. Meredith specifically makes it a point to show the difference. She was brought up entirely among the mountains. According to Edmond Crosse, the critic, "In Carinthia, Lady Fleetwood, Mr. Meredith has conceived one of those sturdy Amazonian woman whom he loves to portray - half Roman matron, half Elizabeth Fry - with a glowing heart beneath a broad marmoreal bosom. The development of her instincts, in the slow change of her sentiments towards her capricious and unreasonable husband is worked out with a happy mastery."  

The physical health of Carinthia is magnificent and every practical need of a woman's life has been thought out by her father. She has learned to jump, to dance, to ride, to swim, to shoot and to fence. She can speak French and English very well, though with a German accent. She has been carefully instructed in the duties of motherhood. She looks on marriage as the natural goal of young girl's life.

She is quite unsophisticated and has the habit of judging all men in the light of father and brother. All her affection goes to her brother. She is a warm-hearted creature who always loves and needs to be loved. "I can not live without love," she says as she questions about the uncle with whom she has to live. She is a devoted young sister and takes a special joy in hearing brother's praise of her walking powers. To be praised by her brother was the sweetest thing on the earth to her. She detests dreaming and resists
firmly to Chillon that 'dreams are sometimes useful when we can not get what we want but we should not waste ourselves in dreams'. This is her practical approach towards life. Beauty is not her portion as it is Chillon's though her features are irregular but her expression is quite vivid. She resembles her plain father in her looks, though her hair is a sunny red, just like a mother. Her eyes are brown, her red lips well cup, but the brows are very rugged. Her face speaks of strength rather than tenderness. Her voice is rich and deep. She is wide-hearted, strong in mind and body. She is full of spirit and hopefulness, practical, keen, intelligent, frank and above all unconventional. That is what makes her unusual. This charming mountain girl goes to meet her fate. She is highly touched by a chance remark of her brother. She is distressed at the thought of being a burden to the brother when she learns that little money is left with them. On one occasion her brother had very lightly said, 'marry and be a blessing to your husband'. These words are deeply carved in his young sister's mind. They actually influenced her destiny. She believes that marriage would be an escape from the den of her uncle. Even her father had taught her to look forward to the marriage. Though she despises dreams, but conjures up the thought that one day a noble knight would stoop to a plain damsel like her and release her from being a burden on those she loves. At the same time she fears that as she is unsophisticated, no one would ever consent to marry her. Hence she willingly decides to earn her living by doing some job and not let the idea of marriage enter her mind.

She learns the fact that her brother has fallen in love with a young beautiful girl named Henrietta Fakenham, she becomes very happy. Within a moments span she gives Henrietta to Chillon and reserves for herself a handmaiden's place within the circle of
their happiness. It is through her brother she comes to know that his rival is Lord Fleetwood, a somewhat eccentric young man, who prides himself on the fact that he has never been known to break his word in any case. Carinthia also decides that the brother's difficulty of earning enough to win Henrietta must be overcome. Thus in the character of Carinthia Meredith has depicted a sister's true devotion for her brother.

On meeting Gower Woodseer, Chillon gets many occasions to preach Carinthia. It is through one of such discussions, Chillon gets an opportunity to give his unconventional sister a little brotherly lecture on class distinction. On such occasion she feels very shy when she contrasts herself with the grand ladies of upper class, she has to meet. She finds herself very lower as compared to those ladies. In order to escape such embarrassment, she begs her brother to tell them how she had shared the mountain walks with him, so that they may not think her so ignorant. Meredith has very skilfully depicted the simplicity of her nature. Chillon's words cheer her up. She thinks nothing but of his comfort. It is from Henrietta's letter written to Chillon, she learns that Henrietta's family wishes her to marry Lord Fleetwood. Her love for her brother moves her completely. She gets desperate enough to help her brother out in this problem.

In the meantime Fleetwood has heard from Woodseer of Carinthia and her kindness to him over his sprained ankle. Woodseer discusses her looks to Fleetwood and describes her as 'a beautiful Gorgon'. 'I don't wish to find her, but I want thoroughly to believe in her------.' These are the prophetic words of Fleetwood when he sees Carinthia standing on the trunk of a tree; he is greatly struck by her beauty. He thinks of her as a
militant young princess of Goths and Vandals. Though no speech is exchanged between her and him but Fleetwood starts comparing her with Henrietta. He decides to attend the ball that evening and is shocked to see Carinthia there. Fleetwood is attracted to the splendour of her radiant young happiness. He thinks himself authorised to avenge himself – to avenge men, women, liberty, poverty, innocence and love upon a creature so insensitive. He flirts with her to such an extent that in a fit of joking he asks her to be his wife and Carinthia promptly accepts his offer. She remembers those words of her brother ‘get married and be a blessing to your husband.’ She also knows it very well that if she accepts Lord Fleetwood’s offer, the way will be paved for Henrietta’s marriage with her brother and above all she will no longer be a burden to those whom she loves. With the Earl’s wealth she can certainly help her brother too. Keeping all such pure intentions in mind, she accepts the Lord’s proposal. This action of Carinthia shows her courage and the sense of devotion towards her brother.

However, it was not a pure self-sacrifice to accept the Earl’s offer. As she was brought up in an unconventional ways, her eyes dazzled to see the brilliant society of Fleetwood and his wealth. She is overjoyed to be introduced to the wonderful world, which was like a dream for her. She is surprised with the thought that how can a man like Earl asks so simple a girl like her to marry him. This is something beyond her expectation. Though before the marriage he tries to plainly state the fact that he did not love her or even tried to reveal his manners to her but she simply replies that she is ready for the wedding. He thinks that she is marrying only for his money and position. He imagines her to be foolish and the marriage takes place immediately.
It is after the marriage, Carinthia’s life changes completely. Her character becomes stronger and bolder after every occasion. For her surprise she has only one evening of the young husband’s courtship to build upon any close intimacy. She is prepared to give her whole-hearted affection. She calls him ‘my husband’ out of love. But it annoys him because to him it appears to be but a way of saying ‘my fish’. This shows that Fleetwood does not believe in any kind of commitment or bindings. On the other hand inspite of his humiliating treatment, her warmer behaviour is quite shocking and surprisingly unconventional. He is more shocked to see that she chooses to sit beside him on the coach-box, climbs up and down unaided and never runs a hair throughout the fight. It is this manner of her behaviour that makes her different and unusual than other heroines.

The character of Carinthia undergoes one test after another. The harsh blows of destiny toss her around. Still she trusts him. Probably with her slight knowledge of him she looks upon his eccentricities as part of his English nature. Her love though was sudden but not shallow and was difficult to die. It was the great error on the part of the Earl that his pride did not allow him to reckon on the fact that his wife was a woman with a soul. Her nature was absolutely direct and simple. There was no place for sentimental acting in any of her action. When nature speaks to him and bids him realise that the woman he has wedded could be his strength. He feels pride that he has the precious possession of a young girl’s first ardent love. He regards her better self, which is leading him to believe in Carinthia’s genuine love and noble character, as his wilder self must be
laid. On the other hand Madge is wiser. She at once takes Carinthia straight to her heart and sees the sympathetic large-hearted nature to which Fleetwood is wilfully blind. Even Gower Woodseer gives the countess his help. He is genuine enough to understand Carinthia’s intense sincerity.

In the course of action of the novel, the heroine is seen ripening. She shows patience and waits for Fleetwood to see her. The boldness of her character is clearly witnessed when she finally decides to see Fleetwood personally. Being absolutely loveless, her brother Chillon, Henrietta and others look at the marriage as total failure. But Carinthia does not lose her heart. She has a strong faith on her love. On the occasion of the birth of her baby, she expects him to see her, but he again stifles the voice of nature and conscience and refuses to see her. Carinthia is disappointed once again.

Fleetwood’s conduct was certainly disgusting enough to make any ordinary woman hate him, but Carinthia goes firmly on the course. She thinks right to love him. She is no Griselda to endure her lord’s treatment with patience. The teachings of her father to be true to her husband remains firm in her mind. Inspite of humiliation and unfaithful treatment of her husband, Carinthia does not give up. She remains steadfast like the rocks and mountains.

At last she decides to help the people living in the cottages. The nobility of her heart is also seen by her decision of helping her friend Rebecca, the dying wife of Mr. Owen Wytham. Fleetwood at last decides to see his wife at Welsh Castle but fearing that
the husband may take the baby away, she decides to take up her abode with her friend Mr and Mrs Wytham. During their meeting, at the estate, Carinthia saves the party from the attack of a mad dog by a device her father had taught her. Fleetwood is absolutely melted to see her courage and presence of mind and her keen sense of duty. This young woman is the very sword in the hand of her idea of duty. She is ever prepared to burn the little infant’s wound to save his life. But admiration, reverence, respect, worship would mean being conquered and Fleetwood’s pride does not allow him to do so. This was a very good chance for him to sink to kiss the feet of the woman who had faced death without fear. But his heart is full of self-pride and egoism that it does not allow him to do so.

At last Carinthia goes to Esselmont, but a sudden change has come over the young woman. Her love for her tyrannical husband is being slowly driven out. In his repentance, he begins to try and approach her but with quite firmness she lets him reap. She gives him a chance to wash his sins. There is an interview between the husband and wife, which is quite striking.

Carinthia : ‘I will be true to the marriage tie.’
Fleetwood : ‘To your husband?’
Carinthia : ‘To his name, to his honour.’
Fleetwood : ‘To the vow to live with him?’
Carinthia : ‘My husband broke that for me.’
Fleetwood : ‘If he bids you, begs you to renew it,
God knows what you may save me from.’
Carinthia : ‘Pray to God, Do not bet of me. I have my brother and my little son. No more husband for me! God has given me a friend too, a man of humble heart, my brother’s friend, my dear Rebecca’s husband. Who can take them from me? No one but God. See the splendid sky we have.’

(Page no. 191 ‘Amazing Marriage’

Above quotation from ‘Amazing Marriage’ by Mary Elizabeth Braddon."

---

The quote above is from 'Amazing Marriage' by Mary Elizabeth Braddon. It expresses the complexity of the characters' emotions and the challenges they face in their relationship.
At last the time comes when the Earl awakens to the fact that he has lost his wife. He also comes to know that she is planning to go to Spain with her brother. There is a little change seen in his character. He sees the splendour of the character of a woman injured as she had been, soft to love as he knew her, yet giving her husband no other rival than a beloved brother. No ground of complaint saves her devotion to her brother. He tries his best to see his wife but she refuses completely. He is coward enough to reveal his heart to his wife, who is a woman of strength in the real sense. He thinks that such confessions are due from men only to the priest. Meredith wants to assert that had he humbled himself, Carinthia would have seen her duty towards him and taken her burden as bravely as she had faced other trials of her life. But her stern nature is seen in the last part of the novel. Though now she is in his eyes ‘the jewel of all the earth’ and wants her to be won back the essential nobility welling up within him, he is forced back by his constituent pride. And she too rejects the idea of reunion.

At this juncture, one can feel that Carinthia’s attitude towards her husband is wrong. She could have given him a chance to correct himself for the follies in the past. But she is carried away by her devotion towards her brother. She compares her husband with her brother, drawing a contrast between her heroic brother and a luxurious idle lord scattering blood of bird and stag and despising the soldier’s profession. She idolised her brother and the thought of the difference in the characters had created an unbridgeable gulf between her husband and herself.
As a mother Carinthia was not more drawn to her boy's upbringing. But of course one should not forget that she lived at a period when the extreme importance of early training was not understood. In this way Meredith has analysed a young woman in Carinthia's perplexity in a masterly way. The strong affection of a sister to her elder brother is depicted in a striking manner. It is quite strange to know that the young girl decides to accept Fleetwood's offer of marriage only to prove a careless remark of her brother: 'Marry and be a blessing to your husband'.

Her devotion to her brother grows to such an extent that she says,

- Carinthia : 'My heart is my brother's.'
- Fleetwood : 'All your heart?'
- Carinthia : 'My heart is my brother's, till one of us drops.'
- Fleetwood : 'There is not another on earth beside your brother?'
- Carinthia : 'There is my child.'

This is indeed like a hard-hit for the repenting aristocrat. It is the pure love that brings about this ordeal. It is the woman who lets in the roaring winds and finally casts him out into the night. Thus it is learnt that in her fine and direct stem way she flung him, pitied him and passed on along her path elsewhere. She truly acts on her father's advice, 'No regrets, they unman the heart we want for tomorrow.' After the Spanish expedition, she becomes stronger and more ripened by experiences of life. After her return she might have taken a chance to be united to her husband, but it is learnt that he has taken refuge in a monastery. Instead of leading her own life devoted for son's education, she prefers to marry Owen Wytham. Thus George Meredith has painted a brave, fearless, firm-willed and strong both physically and mentally character in the form of Carinthia Jane.
A woman's nature had never been probed into such details by any other novelist than George Meredith. As said earlier, Meredith had some purpose in delineating a character. It is from the close study of women in each novel, the purpose is revealed to us. The next heroine to be discussed comes from his novel 'Lord Ormont and his Aminta'. The novel also stands as a guide to the teachers as well as women. Our greatest modern humanist has discussed the problem and the need of education in this novel. The novel can also be called as 'A Guide to Teachers' not only because its heroine becomes schoolmistress but also because it contains valuable educational suggestions. Those suggestions are so valuable that they are applicable even today. It also deals with an important issue of preparation of girls for womanhood.

The character of Aminta has been portrayed in great moments. She is mainly seen through the eyes of those that loved her. 'Her look was like the fall of light on the hills from the first of the morning.' 'She was that fire in the night which lights the night and draws the night to look at it.' But there are a few moments when she can be seen directly in a grand way. There is a scene where she lies waiting for lightening, 'her black hair scattered on the pillar like shadow of twigs and sprays on moonlit grass, illuminated intermittently; smiling to him, but her heart out and abroad, wild as any witch's.' She is highly picturesque.

The story begins with a wonderful love passage between the head boy of a private boy's school, Matey Wayburn and the girl, the heroine, Aminta Farrell, a dark young lady, whom he met on his Sunday walks. She is at Miss Vincent's boarding
establishment for young ladies. The corresponding of these two is discovered and stopped. They go out in the world and are separated from each other.

Matey Wayburn, who was a strong leader among the boys, has taught the school to regard Lord Ormont as its chief hero. Lord Ormont was a distinguished cavalry officer, admired as a hero. This noble man had saved the nation from a serious danger. But later on he had a sharp quarrel with authority, the affair having got into the print affected his popularity. Still he was admired by young girls. He was one of those candles at which the feminine moth scorches her wings.

Aminta, in her teens, meets Lord Ormont on board ship and ‘imagines’ herself to be in love with him, who is about sixty at that time. She is pestered by her old aunt, Mrs. Pagnell in this affair. She consents to be married to him at the English Embassy at Madrid. Lord Ormont, though fond of his wife, does not in the least understand the needs of women. Moreover he is rather ashamed of the idea of falling in love with and marrying a young girl. He is also afraid of his sister Lady Charlotte Eglett. She essentially is an aristocrat with a working mind. So out of fear and self-pride, he refuses to acknowledge Aminta as his wife on social grounds. He deliberately keeps her away on tours for several years. After returning back to London, the so-called the best society, led by Lady Charlotte, refuses to receive her. Lord Ormont too wished to punish London for its opposition to him. He does not introduce his young beautiful wife to the society. On the other hand Lady Charlotte tries to prove that Aminta is not legally married.
Matey Wayburn somehow gets posted as the tutor of Lady Charlotte’s grandson. Lady Charlotte being pleased with his job, persuades Lord Ormont to keep him as his secretary. In this way the two early lovers happened to meet again. In the meantime, Matey Wayburn, realising the failures made in education, serves hard to collect sufficient money to start a school in Switzerland.

Lord Ormont makes mistakes after mistakes with his wife. At last, conquering his sister’s objections he decides to prepare a country house in Steignton and give the family jewel to Aminta. But becomes too late. At this moment he receives a letter from Aminta telling him that she has decided to be independent of him henceforth. This decision comes as a harsh blow upon the Lord. He had never expected his wife to become so bold to take such a striking decision.

Upto the very last Matey Wayburn had kept his passion completely under control. He had the ambition of becoming a schoolmaster and wanted to make himself worthy of the profession. He had also used his powers to bring about a better understanding between Lord Ormont and Aminta. As a good friend he had also suggested to Aminta a plan by which she can influence Lady Charlotte. At this moment he learnt that Aminta had decided to leave Lord Ormont altogether. Matey’s love at last found expressions. After having undergone the ordeal of life, both of them realise the fact that they were made for each other. Aminta happily consented to go with Matey to Switzerland and promised him to join her hands in the noble job of starting the school.
It is only after the departure of Aminta that the Lord realises his mistakes. He learns from his loss how much he had loved her. He also realises his wants. Seven years after his bereavement, he happens to visit Switzerland and hears about the success of Matey’s school. He intends to put his nephew’s child in it so he goes to see it and is pleased to find Wayburn there. Finally the gentleman dies leaving the grand child with Matey Wayburn and Aminta to be educated properly.

Thus the novel discloses very important views of the writer regarding the education system. He seriously deals with the errors of school education on the one hand and the serious mistakes made in bringing up the girls. Meredith strongly focuses upon the issue of education of girls. He particularly talks about the co-education in this novel. It is also important to note here that the school Matey Wayburn plans to establish in Switzerland is surrounded by beautiful valleys and meadows so that the student may learn to know and value Nature at its best. One can notice the impact of Nature on Meredith’s mind when he was in school. He had loved the long evening walks even as a child. This fact points out the reformer’s zeal of right kind of education.

When the school is established, Matey and Aminta take the boys for country expedition. When Wayburn first talks to Aminta about his plans to establish a school, he speaks very enthusiastically. ‘It’s not scaling Alps or commanding armies, true.’ ‘It may be better’, said Aminta, and thought as she spoke. No doubt the contrast between her husband and his young friend was growing in her mind. Then she asked: ‘You have ideas about the education of girls?’

‘They cannot be carried out unaided.’
‘Aid will come’. Replied Aminta.

Wayburn’s confidence, high though it was, had not mounted to that pitch. ‘One may find a mate’, he said. ‘The woman to share and practically aid in developing such ideas is not easily found: that he left as implied.’ Aminta was in need of poetry, but the young schoolmaster’s plain well directed prose of the view of a business in life was welcome to her.

Wayburn was strong on the need of co-education. It is the cherished ideals of George Meredith, which reveal through the character of Matey Wayburn. He proposed, “the education and collection of boys and girls in one group, never separated, declaring it only way for them to learn to know and to respect one another. They were to learn together, play together, have matches together, as a scheme for stopping the mischief between them.” While talking about the errors of board school Wayburn tells us that his attachment to Aminta at that early age and the consequent nonsense about girls and women that is introduced in the school is owing to the dull gloomy Sundays the boys are forced to spend and the dreary walks, which merely allowed them to shave their legs along the boys having nothing else to think about or do, the idea of secret relationship develops.

On the other hand to avoid such things and to grow confidence among the students, the teachers must play a better role. They should be no means the masters of their profession only but should try to understand their students. The usher objects to the boy’s worship of Lord Ormont, because the noble man has bad reputation about his relations to women. On this point Matthew truly remarks, “Guardians of boys should
make sure that the boys are on their side before they raise the standard of virtue.” The master would have done better to leave boys to their enthusiasm for the action they could fully understand. They should not attempt to make them premature judges of men.

Thus in the novel Matthew Wayburn is found reflecting in after life on the mistakes of his bringing up. One grave error he finds is the persistent separation of boys and girls in life. Meredith rises above this by saying that Matey not only dares to plan a co-education in school but also decides to get friends of different nations to help him understand different nationalities and religions. In return boys and girls of other nations will help to give the English ideas and love to work.

No doubt at the later stage, Wayburn realise that had he and Aminta grown up like this together, Aminta would never have made a mistake of marrying Lord Ormont and he would never have lost sight of her. He says, “All the devilry between the sexes begins at their separation. They are foreigners when they meet, and their alliances are not always binding. The task is to separate as little as possible.” Matey also suggests that the relations between masters and boys are to be frank and easy. The schoolmaster has to be careful not to smell of his office. He must live with them, join them in their games too. Favouritism is to be put down. No teacher is held worthy of the name who does not like all his pupils.

Meredith has sincerely made an appeal for the freedom of boys and girls. At the same time he sincerely feels that girls should be better prepared for every kind of
emergency. According to him education consists in the organising of resources in the human beings, of powers of conduct, which shall fit him to his social and physical world. An educated person is practical able to extricate himself from circumstances in which he was never placed before.

Unfortunately, Aminta's upbringing had been very different. As it is said education teaches one to think an act but she was not at all taught to think. Aminta had been educated simply to feel, but she takes a brave step and chooses to think and 'a candle is held to her in a windy darkness.' Aminta's natural tendency to pure rectitude comes to her help and in thought she weighed women in the scale with men, put her heart where justice pointed, sending men to kick up aloft. Lady Charlotte's strong sense of justice moved her to join the party of her unfairly handled sisters, a strong party if it were not so cowardly she had to think. Had Aminta been trained to think in early girlhood, with her natural tendency towards justice, she would have been spared seven years of bitter experience. It is her lack of decision power, which ruined her and ultimately led to throw Lord Ormont overboard and joined Wayburn.

No doubt, George Meredith considers that a girl and boy should be brought up together. He further insists upon the fact that it will be healthier for girls to join boys in their sports. In his account of a snowball match described in the novel, he brings to our notice the envious feeling that occurred to the mind of girls. As an eminent psychologist he can feel the heart of those girls who had a leap and fall of the heart in looking on at the play they were not allowed even to desire to share. The thought of the difference
between themselves and the boys must have like the right band. Lady Charlotte who is wiser in theory that in practice, scarcely allows her granddaughter Philippa to speak to Leo’s tutor, Wayburn and so sets thoughts stirring in the child’s mind, which tended to ripen her over rapidly. In this way like a skilled psychologist Meredith has made a wonderful study of a young child’s mind. He firmly believed in the fact that if girls and boys are mingled more in ordinary paths of life, the girls would take the ways of nature more simply. Hardly blushing she would walk on in to the new life besides him and hear him say: “I in my way, you in yours; we are equals, the stronger for being equals.” That is how she can be the braver mate for him. Where girls freer they would not lose a soul to win a title and escape the common place to discover it ghastlier under cloth of gold — a temptation to which many girls of not only the passing generation but of today also yield.

The desire of women for freedom is to be encouraged in every way, because it is at the bottom a desire to serve. And service is the keynote of Meredith’s teaching. In his famous poem ‘The Fair Ladies in Revolt’ Meredith expresses his thoughts this way:

‘Though few, we hold a promise for the race
That was not at our rising, you are free
To win brave mates, you love but marionettes,
He who is for us, for him are we.’

In the long run they will discover what they can and cannot do, but then try all things that at last they may hold fast that, which is good. It is true that Meredith regards marriage and motherhood as the natural goal for girls, but girls are also to be brought up for life. The man or woman who has never known love has escaped the title of fool at the cost of a celestial crown. And that is the reason why there is not one unmarried woman of any worth in any of Meredith’s novel. Even the elderly women are either married or widows.
Boys and girls alike are to go forth into the world forearmed or well equipped with the facts of life. They are to be brought up in such way that nothing in the nature shall be regarded as unclean.

In the portrait gallery of Meredith's women there is one more sparkling star who has the capacity to dazzle one's eyes. She is Diana Antonia Merion who is also known as Tony. She is one of the best of Meredith's heroines. Her delineation marks the writer for one of the breed of Shakespeare or Moliere. Her portrait is a study of character as well as emotions. Though it is a picture of facts, it is touched with generous romance. Like Rosalind, she is a pure woman and has in her enough of her spiritual sire to proclaim her birth right and affirm the illustrious kinship. Meredith has created her in such a way that the presence of her creator is seen around her, as one becomes aware of Shakespeare while studying his Rosalind and Hermione. Just like Rosalind's, Diana's wit, intelligence and expression are touched with a familiar attribute on the occasion when her empire tatters. Her inspiring qualities such as the quickness and brilliance of her blood, her exquisite and abounding spirit, her delicate vigour of temperament, her swiftness of perception, her generous intensity of emotions are worth noting here. In love, in war, in friendship, in ambition and sorrow, in thought and deed and feeling, she is noble to her self. She is admirable when in her delusion. She sketched as a woman and she has a woman's needs. She betrays them so quick yet so chaste and sweet.

In an unsigned review in Pall Mall Gazette XII, published on 28th March 1885, the writer says, "The figure of the heroine is a poetical and sympathetic portrait of one
of the most famous wits and beauties of this country. She can be easily recognisable by everyone who is well acquainted with the political society of 30’s and 40’s. There is a healthy, vigorous realism about Mr. Meredith’s representation of character, which is infinitely refreshing."

The novel is a carefully drawn picture of a true friendship between two women with its delight and difficulties, its trials and triumphs. Meredith has very effectively written about a close intimate friendship which last from the childhood of one woman to the approaching death of the other. Diana, the heroine, is sketched as a witty, sparkling, heart whole, the passionate woman controlled by her innocence and self-respect. Lady Emma Dunstane, who is a somewhat older woman, is wise and loving friend of Diana. Meredith has successfully delineated a beautiful picture of a thoughtful yet thoroughly womanly character. She is earnest, thoughtful and intellectual with motherly warmth and feeling for Diana. She is the wife of Sir Lukin and too delicate to take full share in the bustling life of society. Thomas Redworth is intended to be a typical John Bull, as Diana is a typical Irish woman. He is a man of good sense and smitten by Diana’s charm at first sight. But from an over-prudent anxiety to give his wife the best of worldly position he misses his chance. Diana has to go through a terrible ordeal. She has to defend herself against the husband of her dearest friend. She is highly disturbed when she learns the disloyalty of Emma’s husband and decides never to disclose this fact to her dearest friend. In order to escape the unchivalrous, she rushes into a hasty marriage with Mr. Warwick. She thinks the marriage would mean safety from the dangers of the society. Unfortunately the marriage proves disastrous. Diana, because of her reckless nature and
carelessness about conventions is accused of infidelity. He blames her for having too
great intimacy with Lord Dannisburgh, the old statesman, and gallant lord. He wants to
have a lawsuit against her. In order to save herself from the society she hastily
determines to leave the country. When Emma comes to know about her decision, she
sends John Redworth to persuade her from leaving the country and instead requests her to
seek her old home and property, the house at the Crossways in Kent.

Diana is now plunged into London life. She faces her enemies, lives in the
lodgings with her maid and blossoms forth as an authoress. Then comes the great trial
of her life. At length she becomes victim to the tender passion. She meets the nephew of
Lord Dannisburgh, a rising young statesman, Percy Dacier. He is a handsome and rich,
ambitious man. He has the highest prizes before him and the world of women at his feet.
Yet is entirely carried away by the over-flowing vivacity and grand nature of Diana.
There is a beautiful scene on the mountain pastures near Rovio where Diana and Percy
meet in the early morning. Her influence stimulates, inspires guides him and enables his
aims and quickens his insight. According to him, “She was delightful to hear, delightful
to see; and her friends loved her and had faith in her. So clever a woman might be too
clever for her friends!..."

The circle he moved in hummed of women, promoting novices as well as veterans
to suspect that the multitude of them, and notably the fairest, yet more the cleverest,
concealed the serpent somewhere. She certainly had not directed any of her arts upon
him. Besides he was half engaged. And that was a burning perplexity; not because of
abstract scruples touching the necessity for love in marriage. The young lady, the great heiress though she was, and willing, as she allowed him to assume; graceful too, reputed a beauty; struck him cold. He fancied her transparent, only Arctic. Her transparency displayed to him all the common virtues, and a serene possession of the inestimable and eminent one outweighing all; but charm, wit, ardour, intercommunicative quickness and kindly beauty, airy grace, were qualities that a man, it seemed, had to look for in women spotted by a doubt, of their having the chief and priceless.

However, he was not absolutely plighted. Nor did it matter to him whether this or that woman concealed the tail of the serpent and trail, excepting the singular interest this woman managed to excite, and so deeply as set him wondering how that Resurrection Bell might be affecting her ability to sleep. Was she sleeping? -- great Nature brought him thus to drink of her beauty, under the delusion that the act was a speculation on her character."

For a long time she struggles and resists but overcomes at last. She consents to leave England with her lover and all prepared for departure. Once more she is rescued by Mr. Redworth, who arrives with the news that her friend is serious and may die under a serious operation. Diana goes back, serves her and saves her life. Emma lives and Diana goes back to her London life and to Percy. To her he confides all the secrets and she too counsels him. At last a fatal moment comes when Diana after being trusted the most important state secret, in a crisis goes to an editor's office in the dead of darkness. She reveals the secret to him for money. Percy turns his back upon her forever. And immediately marries a high church pink and white specimen of womanhood, Miss
Constance Asper. Her lover’s cruelty joined to an overwhelming sense of her own guilt nearly crushes the erring but noble spirited woman. She is half-killed with pain and remorse and is nursed back to life by Emma. Mr. Warwick dies at last. Thus Meredith has given a development of a woman from childhood to womanhood. At last there is Diana’s union with her old and faithful but long disregarded lover, John Redworth. It is a kind of reward for her, after having undergone such a tremendous ordeal in life.

Diana is definitely represented throughout as one of the most attractive of young Irish women, a dark beauty. She is described as a girl who has ‘an unshadowed bright face with candid eyes that have the power of looking forth right at men.’ Her dark, large eyes were full on the brows, her nose strict with delicate nostrils that in anger resembled those of a war-horse, her red lips reposeful to shut. She had a broad forehead, the chin of earth sufficient firmness to sustain that noble square, the brows marked by a thick, soft brush to the temples, her thick black hair, and her complexion olive with swarthy, central rose. Her voice had the capacity to thrill the listener. In stature and in step she is a true Diana, with the genius of laughter. 

In spite of her beauty, strength, wit one thing does puzzle any reader that how can a woman as intelligent as Diana reveal such an important state secret to the editor. Of course this action of Diana can be justified this way. She is a bright, dark-eyed, gloriously beautiful, brilliantly clever girl. She is an Irish by birth. She is quickened in every sense of life and makes the surrounding humorous with her laughter and with her delicious chatter. Her wit is of the ‘airy, hawk-prise and pounce down kind’, and they do
not at all appreciate it. Diana thrust for independent and is constantly doing indiscreet things. She discards the conventionalities of her time. She is courageous enough to go for long early morning walks alone because in those days going without a chaperon was like breaking of the laws, especially in case of a girl like Diana. She travels in a third class carriage. This was also a bold action made by Diana because in those early days of railway travelling, it was considered dangerous for women to travel alone. She was free and frank enough to enjoy conversation with statesmen in her husband's absence. This way she does a thousand of indiscreet actions. Her nature is an extremely impetus one. She is described as the 'the reflective daughter of impulse.'

Her marriage with Mr. Warwick is blindly rash, so is her flight from the lawsuit. In London she pursues for fame and independence. She throws parties regardless of declining financial condition of herself. She has an almost overweening development of the instinct of self-assertion and the incident with Sir Lukin, which is quite unforgivable by her and hence she cannot forget it. It gives her an unbounded belief in her power to subdue and triumph over all masculine passion. She imagines that she could tame drunken sailors if she meets them. She says to herself, "My pitfall is to imagine I have powers equal to the first look-out of the eyes of the morning."

Diana's intense vitality prevents her from enduring anything in dignified silence. She must act. She must plunge into every excitement. Her flight from Warwick was urged by a weak despondency and blind desperation. But she is capable of development and the sources of her help are open to her. Her habit of looking within and learning
from experience by which she gathered an increasing knowledge of a human constitution. Even her true friendship with Emma Dunstane brings her lot of strength. The deep steadfast affection and serious temperament makes an ideal friend for the eager hot-headed girl. But unfortunately she has to keep herself away from Emma in consequence of Sir Lukin’s behaviour. Had Emma spent some more time with her she might have definitely helped her to keep passion sober, a trotter in harness. Diana is carried away by her love for Dacier. At the same time she is convinced of her power to control both herself and her lover. When Percy follows her to the little French writing place she completely triumphs. She refuses the use of her Christian name and scathingly remarks that she must revise the next edition of the ‘The Young Minister of States’, and makes an emotional curate of him. Diana proudly concludes that they can safely continued to meet because of her skill and self-possession, which will keep them rational. At last she is carried away by the fear of further legal processes and consents to fly with her lover to France. But unexpectedly she is saved by Redworth and prevented from going away. That’s how equilibrium is regained by her. She takes pleasure in nursing her friend and goes back to her London life stronger than ever in her conviction that Percy would submit to her control. Their meeting at a garden party leads to resume the old friendship. Her financial affairs become hopelessly embraced. On the other hand she feels proud that she can use the majesty of her womanhood and her power to control the young statesmen. He too very confidently confides the state secret to her. Then comes the fatal evening when Percy betrays the state secret to her and in doing so demands a physical reward. She overcomes his passions for a moment but is left sting and degraded. It is a moment of crisis, which has been described very skilfully by Meredith. Diana had always thought
her to be the master of her surrounding but at this moment she is crushed completely humiliated. Her love for him rises and struggles with the vision of the hopeless days without him, because if she is to have any self-respect in future, she must leave him. She must forbid her love for him. All the pride and ambition of her nature comes to the fore. Her soul is the tumultuous battlefield. It is in the midst of such turmoil the ideas occur to her mind. She plans to sell the secret for money. She plans to make a demand of thousands of pounds with the help of which she would re-established her lost position in her society. This plan strikes to her mind as the right source of making profit and she makes the bargain. Thus, with the fear impetuosity, which is always being the flaw of her character and her love of immediate action on an idea makes her rush off to the editor's office and she sells the secret.

The decision taken by Diana can not be completely inconsistent with her nature. The secret has been revealed by her only in a moment of the most intense wrath and revulsion towards Percy. It is the result of the great turmoil of her elemental passion. In her calm moments she is honourable, rational and noble. When Percy comes in as usual and when he arrives, she behaves like one of those 'ignorant innocents' drawn so well by Meredith. In his letter written to Lady Ulrica Duncombe who disliked the character of Diana Meredith wrote that she ought to be able to enter the breast of a passionate woman, a wife widowed, in love, much needing to be on the guard against the man, ready to fly with him, hating to intrigue and while she totters in this juncture, assailed by monitory needs, vain of her touch on political secret, subject is a crisis to a swoon of the wind --
she becomes physically and mentally unaware of the importance of the secret. The
swoon of the mind would suggest the possibility of temporary insanity.

Some of us who believe ourselves to be strong and courageous know what it is to
fail on an important occasion when we seem but half alive to the consequences of our
actions. When we later awake to realise our failure. Such people may perhaps
understand Diana better and the swoon of her mind. No doubt their sympathy will go for
her. The wavering of Diana’s mind, in the crucial hours of life is very effectively
sketched by the author. The working of Diana’s mind and later how she is gradually one
back to life by her faithful friend is sketched very well. The wooing of Thomas
Redworth, who had been constantly standing by Diana and her reluctance, is also
described in a masterly manner. In her love towards Redworth, she wished to look
entirely forward as upon a world washed clear of night, not to be cast back on her
antecedents by practical wooing or words of love: to live spiritually. Her love for him is
a matured love less passionate but deep and abiding, which had learnt from her
experience of life.

As a champion of women Meredith advocated not only for a political or social
equality but a spiritual and intellectual equality. It is simple that man must realise his
idealisation of women is really based upon his own lust. He denies her the right to
emotional and physical fulfilment while reserving it exclusively for himself. But
Meredith’s heroines bold are enough to come out of all the bondage and create their own
place in society.
Chapter IV

1. George Meredith, “Rhoda Fleming”, Chapter XII.


