Meredith, like George Eliot, believed in the social destiny of the individual. He also accepted the idea that the laws of nature should be made use of in the service of humanity. Like George Eliot, he too was concerned with man's life on this planet. But the former's emphasis on the individual's moral relation to the society derived from her recognition of the non-moral order of nature. But Meredith, on the contrary, believed in a moral and spiritual order implicit in nature. He was no doubt aware of a tragic situation in human life. But it was to him the result of disparity between nature and society. He believed in the fulfilment of the purpose of human life through conformity to nature. He pleaded that the individual's relation to society should be based not on the conventional, religious morality but on the spiritual order of nature. To George Eliot the individual may discover a purpose in nature by discovering the significance of moral values deriving from his relation to society. But in Meredith's view the individual finds a purpose in society by realising the value of the spiritual order in nature. This may explain the difference in their attitudes towards the natural impulses — George Eliot condemned them as immoral and Meredith saw them as the means of moral and spiritual
growth. Like Swinburne, he warmly espoused evolutionism. But, whereas Swinburne's enthusiasm for nature and naturalism was mainly governed by his Shelleyian passion for emancipating man from religious and political tyranny, Meredith forged a principle of harmony between man's spirit and his social goal from the idea of evolutionism. He made it the basis of his 'naturalistic ethics' and adapted the concept of biological evolution to the idea of intellectual evolution. In his view the evolution of a primitive means of preservation to complex and highly adaptable structural modifications can be seen as the basis for the evolution of reason from the senses as the normal process, and this process can be taken as the norm for man's ethical conduct.

Meredith had a life-long interest in nature. His deep-rooted love of nature found expression in his literary work, in his social ideas, in his dealings with men and in his philosophy of life. He believed that no spiritual system could be evolved in dissociation from nature. To him nature was the solid rock on which social and spiritual systems


2cf., "To literature as a career Meredith turned naturally, seeing in it the means for the expression of his love of nature, his philosophy of life, and perhaps - though his weighed least with him - a source of livelihood." W.N. Meredith (ed.), Letters of George Meredith (London, 1912), 1,4.
should be based for realising the higher goal of human life. In spite of changes in his approach to nature at different stages of his career, his faith in the spiritual evolution of man and society from and through nature remained unshaken. His aim, in his work, "to strike the poetic spark out of absolute human clay" was in consonance with his belief that "in you and in me there may be lofty virgin points, pure from what we call fleshliness."

Meredith's faith in humanity originated from his faith in the spiritual order of nature. Although, as a realist, he was not blind to the presence of evil in nature, he brought a Browning-like philosophy of 'imperfection' to bear upon the contemporary concept of the evolutionary process as a guide to the development of the individual and the society. But Browning took the earthly life of man as a preparatory ground for his higher destiny outside the frame of nature. Meredith was concerned with the spiritual destiny of man in

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3 cf., "Our great error has been (the error of all religion, I fancy) to raise a spiritual system in antagonism to nature." ibid., p.33.
4 ibid., p.45. 5 ibid., p.33. 6 ibid., p.388.
7 cf., "Nature, it is true, seldom finishes and rounds off what she gives us. We must - more or less; and because men require it." C.L. Cline (ed.), Letters of George Meredith (Oxford, 1970), I, 41.
8 Jeach, op.cit., p.435.
his life on earth. He accepted the scientific view of nature by recognising the importance of the real, but he did not find it incompatible with the ideal. The ideal in his view is the development of man's character from the lower to the higher nature, and this ideal can be based only on the real. The causes of evil are no doubt present in life but the "spiritual God is always accessible to the soul desiring Him." 9

Meredith's faith in the spiritual and moral order of nature is also reflected in his criticism of the social views which were merely customary and sentimental and ignored the spiritual value of man's natural life. 10 The achievement of a state of civilisation in which the claims of both society and nature (which is another word for the feelings and desires of the individual) could be fulfilled was Meredith's vision of the state of happiness. He adapted the idea of evolution of nature to that of the evolution of civilisation.

Darwin had shown the role of the preservative instinct in the evolution of the species. 11 Egoism in man is a primitive characteristic of the preservative instinct in the struggle for existence. But after a certain level of civilisation has been achieved, man develops better means of

9 W.H. Meredith, op.cit., II, 581. 10 ibid., p. 607.
preservation in co-operation with nature. The growth of civilisation is, in Meredith's view, in conformity with the laws of nature, for it offers man firmer means of preservation both in the struggle for survival as well as the achievement of happiness. The idea of survival is also adapted to the idea of human happiness. Civilisation is Meredith's equivalent of the structural modification of the organism as a means of preservation in a complex social situation. Egoism, in human terms, also means the individual's concern with his own happiness. In civilisation human society develops a higher form of egoism as the means of preservation as well as happiness. Meredith adapted the idea of evolution to the growth of reason as a means of the achievement of human happiness as well as the progress of the individual and the society. As reason is a growth from the evolutionary process and civilisation is the product of the collective mind of the social body, rationality is part of the growth of the individual and the society.

Once society comes into existence, the role of primitive egoism as a means of preservation is minimised. Society evolves a higher form of egoism, i.e., transforms it into civilisation. The higher the growth of civilisation the greater is the power of the existence of society. It is therefore to be recognised that egoism is inimical to the growth of civilisation, for it is a retrogressive step from
a higher means of preservation to a lower one. In this sense Meredith sees egoism as unnatural and irrational because it is anti-evolutionary.

Meredith's faith in the mind of society as a collective intelligence is in keeping with the nineteenth-century faith in science and reason. His concept of the Comic Spirit is incidentally very relevant here. It is first of all similar to Rousseau's idea of the general will. The Comic Spirit, Meredith writes, is "born out of our united social intelligence." He often uses Earth, right reason, and Comic Spirit and nature to mean the same thing, i.e., reason. All these terms are used as opposites of egoism.

The Comic Spirit is a natural and rational means, attained through the evolutionary process for the development of civilisation and consequently of human happiness:

She it is who proposes the correcting of pretentiousness, of inflation, of dulness, and of the vestiges of rawness and grossness to be found among us. She is the ultimate civiliser.

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15 The Egoist, p. 5.
It is an instrument of the mind, and mind in the modern world is nature's chief means for furthering evolution. Comedy is thus nature's instrument for the growth of civilisation. It liberates "powers through which man can escape the crushing weight of ego." It is an invigorating energy of mind, which keeps it healthy and growing. By bringing out the contradictions of existence it makes their overcoming possible.

Meredith's vision of civilisation incorporates the idea of liberated woman and the abolition of male egoism. In his view slavery and repression of women are signs of male egoism. His idea of a healthy and civilised society is that of one in which women are given a proper and respectful place. His ethical views relating to the place of man and woman in society are a corollary to this presumption.

The recognition of the moral role of woman is an extension of Meredith's 'rational naturalism'. Disrespect to women and their neglect by the society is a handicap in the achievement of the ideal, i.e., civilisation. In this

16 Karl, op.cit., p.129.
18 An Essay on Comedy, p.60.
19 cf., "Now virtue is possible to men...under the spell of love." Cline, op.cit., II, 799.
connection it may be remembered that Meredith's ideal of spirituality is very much like the positivist position that man is capable of achieving a humane ideal. Since women form a large part of humanity, it is irrational to hope that without the development of women the 'spiritual' goal of social happiness can be achieved. The place of women in society and their role in contributing to the social happiness must be recognised. Meredith felt that without the development of women neither the progress of civilisation nor social happiness is possible. An important aspect of his humanistic ideal is that women must fight for their rightful and natural place in society. Intelligent, i.e., enfranchised and rational, women are a necessary condition for the growth of social mind.

Egoism is an obstruction in the development of civilisation because it is self-gratifying. Both at the individual as well as the social level one must realise that his happiness lies in the happiness of the society. The individual's desire of happiness can be identified with the happiness of the society and egoism can thus be used in the service of the society with the help of reason. Meredith thus discovered in the transformation of egoism into the larger self associated with the society an acceptable answer

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20 Beach, op.cit., p.430.
to man's relation to society and nature.

Meredith's attitude to work is a reflection of his rational naturalism. Like his idea of reason, his concept of work derived from the evolutionary assumptions. He adapted the Darwinian notion of evolution to that of the progress of civilisation; and work, like reason, is an instrument in the furtherance of the evolutionary goal of nature, i.e., civilisation.

In Darwin's theory 'Natural Selection' (adaptation of the organ to function and of the organism to other organisms and the environment) is the result of the struggle for existence. He wrote:

Man by selection can certainly produce great results, and can adapt organic beings to his own uses through the accumulation of slight but useful variation given him by the hand of Nature.21

This idea of 'human selection' was favourable to Meredith's optimistic philosophy. Work and service are in his view equivalent to the struggle in the world of nature. On the level of the practical conduct he envisaged the individual's

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21 Origin of Species, p.53; cf.,

...we marry
A gentler scion, to the wildest stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race. This is an Art
Which does mend Nature: change it rather, but
The Art itself, is Nature.
The winter's Tale, IV,iv.
active relation to nature through work. Like reason as the natural activity of the mind, work is a natural activity of the body. Through work man is related to society, and the progress of humanity is related to man's study of the laws of nature; and work is one of these laws. In the sense that Meredith related work to the evolutionary process and to society, he has been appropriately called a social Darwinist.

Meredith's view of nature, in the early phase of his literary career, is rather Wordsworthian. For instance, in Ude to the South Westwind nature is presented as a power with spiritual and regenerative force. Like Wordsworth, Meredith's observation of nature "ranges from sheer sensuous delight in Nature's beauty to that profound mysticism which sees all earth and heaven in a single flower." He shared the Wordsworthian belief in the purposiveness of creation and the spiritual order of nature. But in the later writings of Meredith the Wordsworthian image of nature is modified into an idea which is nearer the contemporary naturalistic and humanistic attitudes towards nature. Although Meredith

22 Beach, op. cit., p. 499.  
23 Kelvin, op. cit., p. 125.  
still referred to the spiritual order of nature, it became essentially synonymous with the civilised order in society.

In Meredith's early fiction nature is presented as a spiritual and benevolent order. In this regard Farina (1857) anticipates an important theme of his subsequent works. Kelvin's observation that The Shaving of Shagpat (1855) and Farina "do not anticipate the themes and forms that were to occupy Meredith throughout his subsequent career" is applicable only to the former. But in the case of Farina it applies only to the form but not to the theme. In Farina, as later in The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, Meredith upholds the value of nature as represented by love against the conventional values of society. In his view love is directly associated with nature and earth. His idea of love is that of a relationship between man and woman in which the natural desires are sublimated into a spiritual experience. Man represents a higher stage in the evolution of nature and this spiritual experience distinguishes the fulfilment of the natural life of man from that of other animals. Meredith saw the growth of the spirit from the

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26 Kelvin, op.cit., p.5.

senses as the evolution of nature in man. Love as a form of the spiritual experience is associated with earth and nature, and love and women are seen as nature's representatives on earth. That is to say, in man's relation to woman the natural process of evolution of the spirit from the senses finds fulfilment. The natural imagery in which Margarita's beauty is couched identifies her with nature, which suggests the purity of the senses and their spiritual significance in man's life:

She was bright as the sunset gardens of the Golden Apples. The braids of her golden hair were bound in wreaths, and on one side of her head a saffron crocus was stuck with the bell downward. Sweetness, song, and wit hung like dews of Morning on her grape-stained lips.23

Margarita's spinster aunt, Lisbeth, represents the 'Dragon' social views in antagonism to Margarita's romantic, healthful views of life. The satirical tone of the following sentence points out Meredith's disapproval of the repression of the senses in the name of false virtues:

"Margarita's robustness was beginning to alarm and shock Aunt Lisbeth's sealed stock of virtue."29 Margarita has been wearing a cameo on her breast. In the eyes of her aunt it is a means through which Satan works his temptation.

In Lisbeth's view attraction to the objects of the senses is an evil. But Margarita does not see any evil in her romantic ways and believes that where there is no harm there is God.

Werner and his men represent the evil in the lower nature as manifested in the animal and licentious desires of man. When Margarita is taken away by Werner to his castle and Goshawk and Farina go to her rescue, the duel that follows between Goshawk and Werner is symbolical of the conflict between good and evil. The licentious desire of Werner is pitted against the chivalrous courage of Goshawk. The Lady of the Water is symbolical of the spirit of nature, who has come to rescue her child, Margarita. The prophetic voice of the Lady freezes the baron, and his men become petrified. Margarita is rescued and Werner is killed. The virtuous spirit of nature and love conquer the devil of licentiousness and animality. Aunt Lisbeth comes to see the virtue of love and ceases to object to Margarita's cameo. When Farina and Margarita are married, Lisbeth prepares the bridal bed:

She smoothed the White Rose [Margarita] in her bed, tucked her up, and kissed her, leaving her as a bud that waits for sunshine. 30

The suggestion of growth and fulfilment here points out the

30 ibid., p.129.
healthy fruition of life in nature. It also suggests nature's fertility and health-giving power as against the barrenness of asceticism.

The romantic aspect of Meredith's love of nature finds fuller expression in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859). The theme of the goodness and purity of nature as exhibited in the love of man and woman, allegorically treated in *Farina*, is placed in a social context in this novel. In it Meredith shows that any system of education, which does not take human nature into account, is bound to fail. The development of human character in Meredith's view is not possible through the repression of nature.\(^1\) Since the goal of education is the development of human character, it is necessary that the educational system be based on nature.

The love of Richard and Lucy is presented as the vindication of nature against the soul-crippling conventions of society. Nature, as represented in the love of Richard and Lucy, is not all matter "but a living portion of the spheres."\(^2\) It is an expression of the divinity, and the human soul can reach towards its ideal development only

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\(^1\) cf., Meredith's criticism of asceticism in the Essenean parentage of Christianity (W.M. Meredith, op.cit., I,67; Cline, op.cit., I,140).

\(^2\) Richard Feverel (Westminster,1896), Vol.I, Ch.XXII, p.211.
through it, because it is erroneous to aspire for the ideal to the neglect of nature. Love is a necessary condition for the fuller development of man. Senses are the repository of nature and play a definite role in the development of this goal through love.

In Richard Feverel it is shown that nature has provided man with the means of spiritual growth. Richard and Lucy are the children of nature and their love is presented as the spiritual fruition of the senses. Their meeting in the lyrical surroundings of nature and the perfect harmony of their passion with the surrounding world illustrate the view that "when nature turns and produces contrasts of colour on a fair face, where is the Sage, or what the Oracle, shall match the depth of its lightest look."

The marriage of Richard and Lucy is a vindication of the system of education based on nature. If Sir Austin had been rational enough, he would have seen the success of his system. The marriage is a vindication of the system of education based on nature.

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33 ibid., cf., "Between realism and idealism there is no real conflict... Does not all science tell us that when we forsake earth we reach up to a frosty inimical Inane." Cline, op.cit., I, 160-1.

34 cf., Meredith's exaltation of the senses (W.M. Meredith, op.cit., ii, 409).


36 ibid., Ch.XV, p.130.
of his system in Richard's choice of Lucy. It is Sir Austin's pride that makes him object to the marriage. In his pride he fails to see the value of nature in his system of education. In bringing about the separation of Richard and Lucy he has been blind to a law of nature. And Richard too, in respecting his father's wish, goes against nature. His abstinence from Lucy is a 'sin' against nature whose laws are above all other laws. As Mrs. Merry advises Richard, "a father's will...that is a son's law; but he mustn't go against the laws of his nature to do it." During his separation from Lucy, Richard enters into a licentious life, which shows that the violation of nature is a hindrance in the development of human character. It is through the voice of nature that he is weaned from the evils of sensuality. Nature here means Richard's natural sentiments, i.e., his love for his wife and child (which also happens to be his duty towards them). When he is told by his uncle about the birth of his child, he becomes aware of a "singular harmony that burst over his whole being."

37 Cline, op.cit., I,39. 38 Kelvin, op.cit., p.8.
40 cf., "...The way to the spiritual life lies in the complete unfolding of the creature, not in the nipping of his passions." W.M. Meredith, op.cit., I,409.
Impelled by the voice of nature, he sets about making his own amends to Lucy by hurrying to England. After spending a few hours with Lucy, he again leaves to meet Lord Mountfalcon in a duel and is wounded. Lucy is unable to bear the shock and dies. "Richard, successfully passing his own physical crisis, awakens to a world that will henceforth be barren and meaningless for him." 42

It is clear that the tragedy and so much of suffering could have been avoided if Sir Austin had not stood in the way of the natural fruition of the marriage of Lucy and Richard. Lucy would have been saved from the unnecessary hardships and Richard from the temptations of licentiousness and from moral degradation. Sir Austin's admission that "instinct had so far beaten science" 43 is too late to mend matters. His unnatural application of the 'system' in disregard to the claims of nature leads to the tragedy. He becomes ridiculous because his application of the scientific system is a violation of science itself inasmuch as it ignores nature. The tragedy thus results from the fact that "all that was done in the name of science was done in violation of Nature." 44

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42 Kelvin, op.cit., p.7.
43 Richard Feverel, Vol.II, Ch.XLIII, p.265.
In *Richard Feveral Meredith* upheld the law of nature against all other laws. But in the face of the scientific and the rationalist ideas of the period he felt the need to re-examine the romantic view of the goodness and purity of nature. His association with the *Fortnightly Review* brought him into contact with the positivists who made an earnest attempt to construct a philosophy of nature and who were devoted to the cause of humanity. They were working out a philosophy of nature which could reflect their concern with social happiness. They laid emphasis on the utilisation of the scientific knowledge of nature in the cause of humanity. The knowledge of nature was to be used for the good of the society by mending those courses of nature which were evil and harmful and by making use of the tendencies which were found beneficent. That nature is both evil and good and that the duty of the citizen is to learn the use of "those sources of happiness which nature supplies" were important aspects of this 'utilitarian' view of knowledge.

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45 Many of Meredith's novels appeared serially in *Fortnightly Review*.

46 Beach, *The Comic Spirit in George Meredith*, p.204.

47 cf., "...The impression that some of the feelings are wholly bad...is not true of any one of them; and that others are good...is also not true of any one of them." Herbert Spencer, *Education* (London,1949), p.33.

48 ibid., p.9.
positivist approach to nature and society made the former subservient to the latter.

In this intellectual atmosphere and in the face of the unhappy experiences of his own marriage, Meredith could not hold on to his romantic faith and he found it also difficult to abandon his long-held ideas of nature. It led him to an assessment of the relative values of nature and society and the individual's relation to them. In the novels written during 1861 and 1876 he tried to weigh the social and natural values against one another.

In *Evan Harrington* (1861) Meredith has exposed the falsehood of the idea that the nobility of character is dependent on social position and circumstances of birth. Through the character of Evan it is shown that the virtues of honesty and sincerity are the gifts of nature and valuable in society. Rose Jocelyn's constancy to Evan, even after she comes to know of his low birth, demonstrates her respect for the nobility of nature. His union with Rose in Goren's shop symbolises the value of work both for the development of the human character and the progress of the society and also for the achievement of happiness in life. Evan realises his 'true self' in Goren's shop which

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49 *Evan Harrington* (Westminster, 1895), Vol.II, Ch.XLIII, p.275; Ch.XLVII, p.316.
is the symbol of work. In Meredith's view human life in society is related to nature through work. Goren is a lover of nature, for he recognises the value of work. In the character of Louisa the author criticises the false notion of social nobility and also romantic adventurism. Her false claim of aristocratic descent is satirised to show the hollowness of her notion of nobility deriving from social position. It also makes her romantic adventurism, which is cut off from the natural ground of work, appear ridiculous.

In the novels that followed Evan Harrington Meredith continued to be occupied with the theme of the conflict between nature and society. Earlier in Modern Love (1862) he had presented nature as a destructive force. But in the novels that followed it we do not find this unresolved destructive picture of nature. Meredith rather probes into the causes of the conflict between nature and society and traces it to the divergent claims of the personal and the social lives of the individual.

In Rhoda Fleming (1865) this conflict is traced to the element of 'irrationality' of the individual. In Meredith's view any kind of escapism is unnatural and hence irrational, for work is a law of nature. In this

novel Algernon is ridiculed for his escapism and presented as one of "great Nature's fools" who are simply the 'engines' of their appetite. In refusing to grow out of his primitive nature and in not recognizing his duties to the society he violates the evolutionary law of nature. Blind slavery to social laws is another form of escapism. The indiscriminate adherence to duty makes Rhoda and her father insensible to human feelings in their relation to Dahlia. Rhoda's devotion to duty is dogmatic, unnatural and irrational and therefore a treachery to her own nature. The conflicting claims of nature and society in Algernon and Rhoda are thus traced to the irrational adherence to the lower nature by the former and to society by the latter. Here Meredith has merely shown the awareness of the problem and stated it without offering a solution.

In The Adventures of Harry Richmond (1871) the theme of irrationality of the individual is further explored. The irrationality of the other characters is highlighted in contrast to the character of Princess Ottilia who is presented as the standard of rationality. Her intelligence and the laws of society are in perfect harmony:

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51 Rhoda Fleming (Westminster, 1897), Vol.I, Ch.XII, p.119.
52 ibid., Vol.II, Ch.XXV, p.40; Ch.XLIV, p.238.
She obeyed [the laws] as a subject, not slavishly; she claimed the right to exercise her trained reason. She is neither a slave nor an escapist. In contrast to her, Roy Richmond is an adventurist and an escapist. He believes in pleasure and has no faith in work, which he calls "the order of our great mother Nature." His conception of nature is irrational because it makes him disregard his responsibility to the society. Similarly, Janet's blind following of duty is irrational because it makes her insensitive to the feelings of others.

In this novel Meredith has also shown the value of rationality in the individual's relation to nature and society. When Janet recognises the mistake in her slavery to duty, she is also able to see life in a more natural light. Harry too is gradually disillusioned about his father and recognises the significance of business in life. In the development of Janet and Harry it is shown that the individual can reconcile the conflicting claims of duty and feeling, of society and nature by using his reason. He can see the unreality of escapist and discover meaning in work,

53 Harry Richmond (Westminster, 1897), Vol.II, Ch.XXXIII, p.9.

54 Ibid., Vol.I, Ch.XXIV, p.300.

55 Ibid., Vol.II, Ch.XLII, p.165; Ch.LIV, p.347.
which is the symbol of the fulfilment of nature's claim to face the facts of life. It also symbolises the fulfilment of society's claim that everyone should perform his social responsibility.

The respective claims of society and nature are related to Meredith's concept of civilisation in Beauchamp's Career (1876). Here he expresses his faith in the development of women as a necessary condition for the growth of civilisation. Women's submission to the unnatural laws of society and society's tyrannical demands for this submission are marks of irrationality in a half-civilised society. In this novel Meredith has traced the conflict between nature and society to the half-civilised state of the society (which is in fact Meredith's equivalent of social irrationality).

This irrationality in Beauchamp's Career is presented in the working of the institution of marriage. Renée is made to submit to her father's wish and marry the old Marquis. As she has no love for him, her marriage is a form of slavery and a part of "the system cursed by nature." Her cowardly disregard of the claims of her heart in her submission to duty is a sin against nature. It reflects

57 ibid., p.71;Ch.IX, pp.89,93; Ch.XI,p.105.
the undeveloped character of woman in society. The half-
civilised state of society is further presented in Celia’s
fatalism, which is a result of her lack of courage and will
to face the conventional prejudices. 58

In the earlier novels before The Egoist (1877) Meredith
had exposed the dangers of irrationality but he had not
worked out a satisfactory answer to the individual’s relation
to nature and society. The ideas of right reason, civilisa-
tion, and liberated woman, briefly suggested in the earlier
novels, are more fully explored in the later works as
Meredith’s answer to this question.

In The Egoist egoism is presented as anti-intellectual
and anti-social. An egoist is blind to the higher needs
(happiness) of the society and hence he is an ‘animal’.
He has not learnt to control his primitive instinct and to
use it for the advancement of the society. Sir Willoughby
is such an egoist. As Hudson has observed, “The egoism of
Sir Willoughby Patterne is a reversal of the evolutionary
process, a bar to progress.” 59 He recognises the relation-
ship of man and woman at the most primitive level. His
desire for Clara Middleton is of an animal nature. He

58 ibid., Vol.II, Ch.XXXIX, p.138.

59 R.B. Hudson, “The Meaning of Egoism in George Meredith’s
The Egoist,” Nineteenth-Century Fiction, III (December, 1948),
164.
does not see that a woman has a mind as well as a spirit with a natural love of liberty. Meredith has underscored the fact that Willoughby's love of Clara does not recognise the equality of the sexes. His egoism is a variation of sensuality devoid of all intellectual and civilised quality. It is also seen in his idea of society. He looks at the society as his enemy and has not learnt the basic command of nature for the advancement of civilisation - 'Accept and Serve'. His treatment of Laetitia Dale shows another aspect of his egoism - covetousness and possession without obligation.

Infatuation is a form of egoism because it makes one lose the sense of reality, which cuts him off from the earth - 'Mother Nature'. For instance, in *The Case of General Ople and Lady Camper* General Ople becomes ridiculous when he is blinded by his infatuation for the elderly Lady Camper. He forgets his duty to his daughter, Elizabeth, and becomes insincere and pretentious. Again, an egoist may show his primitivism in exploiting the weaknesses of others. Tinman in *The House on the Beach* becomes a mere animal pouncing on the weaker when he tries to exploit the secret of his friend and practically forces his engagement on the friend's...

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daughter, Annette Smith.

In *The Tragic Comedians* (1880) the egoist is presented as an abstract optimist. "In such a man there is a widening gap between ideal and actuality." Alvan is such an idealist-optimist who, in his blindness to the realities of society and convention, thinks that his beloved Clotilde's parents will give her up to him in recognition of his 'natural' claim. He himself does not see that it is unnatural for him to leave her in the hands of her parents.

In *Diana of the Crossways* (1885) the idea of individual egoism is extended to that of social egoism. False, unnatural social convention is presented as a variation of male egoism. Diana is driven to marry Warwick to avoid the advances of men like Sir Lukin. Her marriage without love is an imprisonment. She has to fight her battle of freedom against the society in which the 'pristine male's' ascendancy is marked by his brutish passion. In this unhealthy state of things the husband becomes unnatural to her and she must struggle for freedom against the animal and cruel law of marriage.

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62 Lindsay, op.cit., p.283.

63 *The Tragic Comedians* (Westminster, 1898), Ch.VIII, pp.106-7.

64 *Diana of the Crossways* (Westminster, 1897), Vol. I, Ch.XIV, pp.176-8.
Besides tracing the conflict between nature and society to egoism, the role of reason in the development of the individual, whereby the two conflicting claims of passion and intellect, nature and society are reconciled, is also presented in *The Egoist* and *Diana of the Crossways*. Clara Middleton, in *The Egoist*, gets her release from Sir Willoughby and her own egoism by using her brain. She learns the lesson of the use of intellect from Whitford Vernon in whom the lower and the higher natures are in harmony, for he uses the lower nature for the fulfilment of the higher. The spiritual development of Clara and Laetitia is achieved by their knowledge of their own lower nature. Reason teaches them the use of self-control by which they are civilised. Similarly, Diana’s spiritual evolution stems from her ability to act rationally. After going through the fire of experiences in life, she is born “a girl again with a woman’s broader vision and receptiveness of soul, with knowledge of evil... she was compassionate, large of heart toward all beneath her.” She learns the use of control of the impulse for the happiness in personal as well as social life. Redworth is her rescuer both literally and symbolically. He saves her from the actual dangers of impulsive acts and also from lower nature. He is the symbol of reason and is always able

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65 *ibid.*, Ch.XV,p.197.
to use "the war between subordinate self and sovereign principle" for the development of the higher self.

Thus Meredith has treated reason as the instrument for the development of the individual. The animal nature in man is a reality, and the knowledge of this reality can be used in the growth of the higher nature from the lower. In fact, reason is presented as the instrument of self-control through which the individual can escape the dangers of animality and also sublimate the animal power into the spiritual. In this way Meredith has developed the concept of civilised individual in whom romance and reason, paganism and asceticism meet without division.

It has been seen that Meredith traced the conflict between nature and society to irrationality and evolved the concept of reason from the study of this conflict. In The Egoist and Diana of the Crossways he mainly showed the use of reason for the freedom and development of the individual. In the novels of the eighties the chief concern was with the upholding of reason as a growth of nature against egoism. By and large, Meredith's attitude to nature was guided by the idea of the individual's freedom. For instance, Clara Middleton's struggle for freedom was mainly against Sir Willoughby and not against

\[\text{ibid., Ch.V, p.7d.}\]
any institution or society. Diana, although she branded her marriage as unnatural, did not attempt any freedom outside wedlock. Neither Clara nor Diana was a social rebel. They did not violate any established social convention. The freedom desired and achieved by them was against individuals presented as lower nature.

In the novels of the nineties Meredith tested the concept of enfranchised and civilised individual in the context of social living. Now the question of society and nature is taken up on a larger scale than in the earlier novels. Meredith had earlier treated the theme of tragic marriage situation in Richard Feveral and Diana of the Crossways (and also in Modern Love). But in these works the situation is individual and not social, for none of these presents a violation of social law.

In One of Our Conquerors (1891) Meredith has taken up, for the first time, the theme of freedom as a defiance of the social law and presented a tragic marriage situation in the social context. Here it may be noted that the 1890's were marked by a revulsion from puritanism and by a new popular enlightenment. The best minds of the period were seriously occupied with an idea of freedom which was being

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defined as social and cultural experience.

The tragic situation of One of Our Conquerors is the product of the laws of society and nature at variance with each other. Victor Radnor, a vigorous, young man, marries the aged Mrs. Burman because she is a rich lady. He realises that this loveless marriage cannot bring happiness to him and seeks release from the bond of marriage. He is in love with Nataly; but they cannot be united in marriage because Mrs. Burman refuses to legally release Victor. Consequently, he is forced to seek the fulfilment of his love in an unmarried union with Nataly. Although this union is a violation of a law of society, it is presented as natural because it is based on love. And Victor's marriage with Mrs. Burman is unnatural because it is loveless. Thus the antagonism between Victor's and Nataly's love and the law of marriage is presented as a conflict between nature and society. In the eyes of the society the union of Nataly and Victor is a state of sin because the society fails to perceive the morality in their adherence to nature's law, i.e., love.

The moral question of the conflict is referred to the Powers by which Meredith means a moral order more rational than the social conventions. The love of Nataly and Victor belongs to this moral order because it is in keeping with the laws of nature. The rebellion of Victor

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58 One of Our Conquerors (Westminster, 1897), Vol. I, Ch. II, p. 15.
and Nataly is not lawlessness: "We may be rebels against our times and its laws; if we are really for nature, we are not lawless." On the contrary, convention in its contempt and violation of nature is presented as the sinner. It drives Victor and Nataly to defy its laws. The gulf between society and nature is created by the irrational basis of convention. This irrationality is represented by Mrs. Burm's refusal to release Victor. If she had used her reason, she would have seen that her loveless marriage could not bring any real happiness. This rational approach would have enabled her to release Victor, and, as a consequence, Victor and Nataly would not have been compelled to violate the law of marriage. Thus the so-called state of sin might have been averted, and the reconciliation of nature and society, love and marriage achieved.

The perception of the union of Victor and Nataly as sinful reflects the artificial state of society in which women are slaves of convention and the value of freedom and reason is not recognised:

The unreasoning Collective Woman... is the enemy of Nature...she is the slave of the existing conventions. - And from what cause? She is the artificial production of a state that exalts her so long as she sacrifices daily and hourly to the artificial.

69 ibid., Ch.XI, p.137. 70 ibid., Ch.VII, p.73. 71 ibid., Ch.XIII, p.156.
Here it may appear that the author is pleading for the rehabilitation of egoism against the collective mind of the society. But he is in fact extending his denunciation of egoism in the individual to the egoism in society.\(^{72}\)

It is not egoism but individualism that is upheld in this novel. Egoism is still presented as a lower preservative instinct and enemy of civilisation in the form of the 'collective woman' who "sides with Mrs. Burman - the foe of Nature; who with her arts and gold lures, has now possession of the law (the brass idol worshipped by the Collective) to drive Nature into desolation."\(^{73}\) In her 'unreason' and slavery to convention the collective woman is the enemy of freedom and nature.

Besides the conflict between social egoism and nature, the conflict between individual egoism and nature is also presented in this novel. The following observation by Kelvin on Meredith's novels of the '90's needs modification:

...In the novels [of the '90's] he no longer condemns egoism. He transmutes it into an authentic individualism, for his instinct told him that it was on this latter concept, not on the view of mankind as an undifferentiated mass, that his final endeavour to harmonise nature and

\(^{72}\)In *Diana of the Crossways* also Meredith had denounced social egoism as irrational and unnatural (vide above p.232).

society would have to rely.  

It is true that Meredith transforms egoism into individualism in the novels of the '90's. But Kelvin seems to have overlooked the point that Meredith's instinct also told him that the 'individualised' individual was also in danger of retreating into the egoistic individual. This danger is represented through the character of Victor in One of Our Conquerors. The union of Victor and Nataly is held as moral against the laws of society so long as their faith in nature, i.e., the purity of their love, remains strong. But in his attempt to force the social recognition of their union and to keep the real nature of his union with Nataly a secret from his daughter, Nesta, and Dudley Sowerby, Victor exposes the weakness of his faith in nature. Behind the desire for social recognition is his own impulse for being recognised as a reformer and leader of the society. Like Alvan in The Tragic Comedians, he is an abstract-optimist. And "the Abstract Optimist, in Meredith's terminology, is the man who sees himself bustling on to a worthy social goal - while in fact the goal is only the heightening of his own egoism."  

Victor's retreat into egoism leads him on a path against

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74 Kelvin, op. cit., p.166.  
75 Lindsay, op. cit., p.283.
nature, which brings about a division between himself and his beloved, and finally leads to the tragic death of "ataly. He attempts to propitiate the society by marrying his daughter to Dudley Sowerby and thus fails to see the contradiction in the position he aims at. Dudley cannot love Nesta, for he is a product of the social convention and is educated to see any violation of social law as evil and immoral. He does not have a civilised man's respect for woman nor does he have any concern with the idea of emancipated woman. Victor ignores the fact that the marriage of Nesta and Dudley will be as much a violation of nature as his own marriage to Mrs. Burman was.

In the union of Nesta and Dartrey, Meredith has presented a situation in which nature and social laws are in agreement. Their adherence to nature and society is rational and discriminatory. They love each other as well as show respect to the laws of society through their union in marriage.

In One of Our Conquerors nature is upheld against society. But Meredith was also aware of the dangers to which we can be exposed by following 'unbridled Nature'. The spirit of the age of science and empiricism was strong enough in him to make him see the evil and harmful aspects of nature. Realist as he was, he was conscious of the destructive and

\[76\text{One of Our Conquerors, Vol.II, Ch.XXVI, p.93.}\]
irrational elements in nature. In the early novels egoism was presented as a form of this lower nature. And when nature was upheld against society it was in the sense of the higher nature as rational and civilised principle.

In Lord Ormont and His Aminta (1894) Meredith returns to the theme of passion as lower nature and also shows how passion and reason are reconciled. A distinction is made between passion as an animal element in man and love as the spiritual aspect of man. In love passion and reason are reconciled and work in perfect harmony because through self-control passion is sublimated into a form of spiritual experience. In this novel a conflict between the two forms of nature, the lower and the higher, is highlighted and the two natures are also placed in relation to the social question of marriage.

Early in the novel Meredith refers to passion as "horrid old Nature" that drives women to frenzy. Here again we are presented with a marriage situation that proves to be disastrous. The marriage of Victor and Mrs. Burman was condemned as a violation of nature because it was not based on love. The marriage of Lord Ormont and Aminta represents the other extreme and becomes disastrous because it is based

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**77** Lord Ormont and His Aminta (Westminster, 1897), Vol. I, Ch. II, p. 34.
on passion. Aminta marries Ormont because she lacks self-control and her "enchantment of the hero gives way to her natural desire for the handsome man." 78

This, however, does not mean that passion is completely rejected. On the contrary, it is held that the repression of nature may lead to unhealthy results. Meredith is actually for striking a balance between reason and passion. Lady Charlotte's advice to Weyburn, which he implicitly accepts, is for a rational approach to the sex:

It's only a large and a close and a pretty long study of them [women] that can teach you anything; and you must get rid of the poetry about them; and be sure you haven't lost it altogether. That's what's called the golden mean. 79

In Weyburn reason and passion are in perfect harmony, and his union with Aminta is justified as the assertion of the higher nature over the lower. It may appear that the treatment of the marriage of Aminta and Ormont as the condemnation of nature and the presentation of the union of Aminta and Weyburn as the vindication of nature are contradictory. But there is in fact no real contradiction. What is condemned in Aminta's and Ormont's marriage is the "human nature not so far removed from the dog." 80

78 ibid., Ch.III, p.57. 79 ibid., p.53.
80 ibid., Ch.XII, p.172.
Urmon t, Aminta has succumbed to passion. Lady Charlotte's opposition to the marriage is in the name of nature and justice; she condemns it as an act of madness and folly. As Aminta herself realises later, reason was hoodwinked by the senses: "The sphere of beauty was a glass lamp-globe for a delirious moth." She had failed to control her feelings which 'corrupt the blood'. Through Weyburn she realises that her marriage is loveless and she gets release from it by exercising her natural courage and by acting rationally.

In the union of Aminta and Weyburn passion and love, the higher and the lower natures are reconciled. Weyburn is conscious of the destructive power of passion. His gospel of work is an antidote to illusion and irrationality. Work is to him "man's moral aid to temptation". In his view human nature can be trained to grow upward, and work for him is a means of controlling nature as well as keeping in touch with it.

Aminta takes Weyburn and his ideas as an antidote to irrationality and passion. In becoming conscious of the illusion in her marriage with Ormont she recognises the role of self-control for happiness and fulfilment of life. As acknowledged by Ormont later, passion and reason are now

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81ibid., Ch.XIV, p.199. 82ibid., Ch.V, pp.84-5.
reconciled in her. Her love for Weyburn incorporates both passion and reason: "Her faith in Weyburn's guidance was equal to her dependence. Nature and love are busy in conjunction." 83

Meredith's reference to the union of Aminta and Weyburn as being in conformity with the Divine Law, and the invocation of the Gods 84 for the justification of this union is quite relevant in the context of Meredith's concern with spirituality and its value in terms of civilisation. As already noticed, Meredith was concerned with the spiritual growth of the individual as a necessary condition for the achievement of civilisation. This spiritual growth, in his fiction, is always the evolution of the civilised individual. The Divine Law of Lord Ormont is the law of evolution from the animal to the human, from the uncivilised to the civilised state. This law should not be confused with divine law of religious systems. Meredith's divine law is the law of evolution of an ideal civilisation. It is in keeping with the spirit of the age when the concept of civilisation was being linked with the concept of freedom not only from the false conventions of the society but also from the

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83 Ibid., Vol.II, Ch.XXIV, pp.113-4.
84 Ibid., Ch.XXVIII, p.170; Ch.XXIV, p.118.
unnatural religious ideas. 85 Meredith's own ideal civilisation is at the same time a fulfilment of the evolutionary process and also an achievement of freedom from the false notions of morality. In this sense Kelvin's dismissal of the invocation of 'Divine Law' as 'out of place' loses sight of the evolutionary perspective in which Meredith has placed his ideas of morality: "The invoking of 'Divine Law', in a story that has been blandly secular in its intentions and references all along, is sanctimonious and is unworthy of the better things in the novel." 86 Here Kelvin obviously looks at the divine law as opposed to the secular. He forgets that Meredith's vision of the ideal religion was one of the evolution of a system in which the spiritual order should be founded on nature, what he referred to as the midway of Christianity and paganism. 87 Religion in Meredith's terminology is another name for civilisation. 88


86 Kelvin, op.cit., p.186.

87 W.J. Meredith, op.cit., I,33; Cline, op.cit., I,140.

88 Meredith had suggested in Earth and Man that "out of Earth come God and Man. That is, our religious impulses... are an outgrowth of our natural instincts" (Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry, p.476). His "inherent system is utilitarian, and of a type of utilitarianism characteristic of a period of evolutionary assumptions" (ibid.,p.490).
In his last novel, *The Amazing Marriage* (1895), Meredith gave a final touch to his philosophy of nature. The nature theme in this novel is presented through the character and life of Gower Woodseer, although the main story is concerned with the 'amazing marriage' of Lord Fleetwood and Carinthia and with the theme of nature largely treated in the earlier novels. Through the life of Gower it is shown that the ideal balance between realism and idealism, passion and reason can be struck in and through nature without violating the laws of either society or nature. His name has a symbolic significance. He is "the passionate lover of Nature" as suggested by 'woods', and the rational aspect of his character is suggested by 'seer'.

Gower has all the qualities of the nature-lovers of the earlier novels without any of their defects. He combines in his character the youthful love of nature of Crossjay in *The Egoist* and of Rhodes in *Diana of the Crossways*, Vernon's sense of realism and Weyburn's love of work, and also Dartrey's respect for woman. In short, he has both 'blood and brain'. Meredith's own appraisal of Gower's character is quite appropriate: "...quenchless youth Gower Woodseer, perpetual bathing in morning, who begins life with an old head, but with springing blood, and falls from many a fiery chariot, to feel at home and put his fragments together..."

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when he touches earth." When he touches earth.

In Gower, Meredith has found an ideal solution to his questions regarding nature and society, passion and intellect. Gower is free from the drawbacks of Meredith's earlier heroes. In him circumstance and nature coalesce, and his nature-love does not call for a violation of the laws of society.

The typical marriage situation of the earlier novels, in which nature and society are at odds, is repeated in the marriage of Carinthia and Fleetwood. But The Amazing Marriage is different from the other novels, for in the story of Gower we are presented with a marriage situation in which nature and society are in perfect harmony. In One of Our Conquerors we have no doubt a marriage situation in the union of Nesta and Dartrey, in which nature and society are reconciled. But it should be remembered that their marriage is not absolutely free from irritants. It is on the question of Nesta's marriage that her parents disagreed and drifted away from each other. And in Lord Ormont, although the love of Weyburn and Aminta represents a harmony of passion and intellect, we do not have a perfect harmony of nature and society in their union. In this novel a married

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90 Clihe, op.cit., II, 749.
woman has to run away from her husband with her lover, which is obviously a violation of the law of society. The device of the accidental presence of Urmont at the school, where Aminta and Wayburn are working, to offer an opportunity to Urmont to show his magnanimity by not taking action against them is too extraneous. In *The Amazing Marriage* also we have a similar weakness when Fleetwood has to die so that Carinthia may marry Owain Wythan without violating the laws of society. But this marriage is not a solution to the problem of nature-society conflict because it is done to fulfil the dying wish of a friend.

But, as already stated, Meredith has finally created a situation in the story of Gower in which nature and society are harmonised. Gower's nature love does not force him to rebel against society. Unlike Fleetwood, whose love of nature is very superficial, Gower's love of nature is genuine and sincere. Fleetwood's "raving about Nature" is only a pastime of a man of enormous wealth, who does not know what to do with himself. His fascination for Carinthia is a moment of idiotic weakness in him. In spite of his pledge to marry her and keep his word, he has not learnt the primary lesson of a true nature-lover that women

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91 Kelvin, op. cit., p. 184.
are the daughters of nature and it is only through them that man can have a true relation with Earth. Man's relation to woman is the real test of his relation to nature, for it is in man's love of woman that it can be seen whether he is able to keep the natural passion alive without being a sensualist. The wide chink in Fleetwood's love of nature is seen in his lack of respect for woman. The following conversation with Gower illustrates the superficiality of Fleetwood's love of nature:

'Such animals these women are! Good Lord!' Fleetwood ejaculated. 'I marry one, and I'm to take to reading medical books.' He yawned.

'You speak that of women and pretend to love Nature,' said Gower. 'You hate Nature unless you have it served on a dish by your own cook. That's the way to the madhouse or to the monastery. There we expiate the sin of sins. A man finds the woman of all women fitted to stick him in the soil, and trim him and point him to grow, and she is an animal for her pains! The secret of your malady is, you've not yet, though you're on a healthy leap for the practices of Nature, hopped to the primary conception of what Nature means. Women are in and of Nature.'

Unlike Fleetwood, Gower keeps his head and heart together in his love of woman. It is mainly responsible for his not being involved in any situation that would have called upon him to violate nature or society. He has inherited his father's love of mountains along with

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ibid., Vol.II, Ch.XXXI, pp.84-5.
his love of labour. His father, himself a child of the mountains, derives ample pleasure from labour, and his down-to-earth approach makes him see that there are good hearts behind what appears to be evil and harmful.

Gower is the true son of this old son of the earth. When he is offered an easy home by his father, he rejects it because "good work of the head wants an easy conscience." This recognition of the moral value of work reflects Gower's true love of nature. Similarly, his consciousness of Carinthia's beauty is an hommage to Mother Nature, and his sympathy for her is an expression of it. In his attempts to help her in her troubles, Gower realises that without his father's money, a result of productive labour, "he would have been useless in this case of need." Thus his love of Carinthia and the recognition of the moral value of work become one. This realisation is a result of the co-ordination of work as sanctioned by society and respect for woman as sanctioned by nature.

Gower is always cured of illusions by keeping in touch with reality. Reflecting on his short-lived weakness for Livia, he recognises that he has been blind to nature and hence to truth. He is very soon able to get over

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94 ibid., Vol.I, Ch.XVIII, p.212. 95 ibid., Ch.VIII, p.90.
96 ibid., Ch.XX, p.226. 97 ibid., Ch.XXI, p.238.
the weakness by remembering his duty to Carinthia and to society. As Carinthia symbolises nature for Gower, his duties to nature and society become one.

Gower's balanced and harmonious attitude to woman's beauty is in contrast to the extremity in Fleetwood's attitude. Fleetwood's attitude varies from wild and romantic love to about-turn hatred of woman. But Gower can admire Carinthia's beauty without being an impulsive half-brute. The affinity between Carinthia and Gower is symbolically suggested by the fact that Gower is first introduced to us in the mountains and Carinthia is a daughter of the mountains. In his attitude to her beauty, the real and the ideal are harmonised. His love of nature and respect for Carinthia bring him the feeling of happiness. And her beauty also keeps the vision of the ideal alive. As he tells Madge Flinch, Carinthia's beauty is an expression of the beauty of living nature whose "harmony of flash" is superior to an artist's concept of beauty in repose. He is conscious that Carinthia's beauty is something to be admired and not to be possessed, which shows that he does not lose the touch with reality. This sense of ideality in a woman's beauty makes Gower respect Carinthia and keep the spiritual growing in him.

98 ibid., Vol. II, Ch. XXX, p. 71.
This harmony of the real and the ideal, of passion and self-control in Gower's response to Carinthia is dramatised in his union with Madge Flinch. The love of Gower and Madge grows out of their common appreciation of Carinthia's beauty. Thus through the love of nature a situation is created where Madge and Gower enter into a union that is sanctioned by nature and society. Their marriage exemplifies the harmonious working of the laws of nature and society, of romance and reality. They love each other as well as respect the law of society in their marriage. While presenting Madge as his wife to his father, Gower is himself conscious that he has been faithful to the demands of nature and society. Meredith's own comment on Gower's marriage emphasises this point:

"Enough for proud philosophy [Gower's philosophy of nature, and of course Meredith's too] to have done the thing demonstrably right."

Thus it is seen that Meredith's attitude to nature as well as its treatment in his fiction is influenced by his concept of civilised individual in whom passion and reason are balanced. The civilised individual is a growth from nature and this balance is the characteristic of such growth. Similarly, on the social level, the reconciliation

99 Ibid., Ch.XL, p.181. 100 Ibid., Ch.XLVI, p.269.
of the laws of nature and society is the characteristic of
civilisation. The growth of the individual, in Meredith's
view, is necessary to the growth of civilisation. He made
use of the idea of Comic Spirit relating civilisation to
nature and to the evolutionary process. He derived the
idea of reason from the evolutionary assumptions of the
period, and the idea of the use of reason in the progress
of civilisation relates reason and civilisation to the
evolutionary process.

Meredith's attitude to work and its treatment in his
fiction is part of his rational naturalism. The impact of
his idea of work is quite pronounced in his fiction. It
influenced his characterisation as well as the story. For
instance, it is in keeping with his attitude to work that
the union of Evan and Rose in Evan Harrington is brought
about in a tailor's shop. The nobility and the tailor
(workman) are placed on the natural pedestal of equality.
Robert in Rhode Fleming learns from his father that the
clue to a healthy, sober and happy life is through work. 101
It is through the perception of the contrast between his
own life of escapade and his friend Temple's life, which
is based on the solid rock of work and reality, that Harry
realises as to how illusory his own pursuits have been.

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101 Rhode Fleming, Vol.I, Ch.XVII.
It makes him see that escape from work is unnatural and the life of escapism is doomed to failure. Everard Romfrey in *Beauchamp's Career* does not degenerate into an evil character because of his active interest in life and nature. To him "nature is the breeding of animals, the facts of the fields, a countryman's stoical submission to natural law." In *The Egoist* Crossjay represents man's active relation to nature. He is, in a sense, a contrast to Sir Willoughby - his selfless service to Clara is contrasted with Willoughby's egoism. It is in keeping with Crossjay's active life that Clara finds in him a relief from the repulsive presence of Willoughby. In *Diana of the Crossways* Redworth plays a decisive role in Diana's destiny. His attitude to work moulds his own character and also affects the value judgement of Diana. He is the voice of reality and her moral guide.

He also represents Meredith's idea of the moral value of work. He knows the value of money as a rough test of virtue, for it is the product of fruitful human labour and it is money earned by work that gives power to enjoy and spread enjoyment. Diana, in spite of her confused thoughts about

102 *Harry Richmond*, Vol.II, Ch.XLII; Ch.XLV.
104 *Diana of the Crossways*, Vol.II, Ch.XXXVII, p.70.
money, comes to recognise the virtue of Redworth's 'materialism': "...The Hedworths of the world were right: the fruitful labours were with the mattock and hoe or the mind directing them." 105

Meredith's faith in the moral value of work can be seen in his denunciation of idleness. To him the purposiveness of nature is evident in the process of evolution extending to the growth of human civilisation, and anything which hinders this process is opposed to nature's goal and hence unethical. He sees idleness as unethical because it is inimical to the progress of civilisation. For instance, Jonathan Eccles in *Rhoda Fleming* has a gloomy vision of civilisation in his son's lack of interest in work: "No more green pastures in Great Britain; no pretty clean-footed animals; no yellow harvests..." 106 In *The Tragic Comedians* the polished barbarism of the aristocratic society is condemned because it is the result of idle hours. 107

Meredith's doctrine of work as man's active relation to nature and as an instrument of evolution enabled him to

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105 ibid., p.72. Work in *Lord Ormont and in The Amazing Marriage* is discussed earlier (vide pp.243,250).


107 *The Tragic Comedians*, Ch.I, p.3.
see work as an antidote to egoism. Like reason, work is the enemy of egoism. It is the weapon to fight the war for the progress of civilisation and human race. For instance, in *Lord Ormont* it is shown that it is Aminta's egoism that makes her marry Ormont for which she has to suffer. Through Weyburn she realises the importance of work, which liberates her from egoism and also from Ormont. By "entertaining the wish to work" she discovers a purpose in her life.

The scientific-rationalistic temperament of the period, which characterised Meredith's attitude to work and reason, is reflected in his attitude towards evil in nature. In his view evil in the sense of harmful circumstances and egoistic impulses is a reality and there is no point in closing one's eyes to this reality. Although he shared the Wordsworthian enthusiasm for nature, unlike Wordsworth, he faced the reality of evil in nature and attempted a 'manly' solution to it. The acceptance of evil and of the fact that the progress of human race and civilisation must be in accordance with the laws of nature made Meredith evolve what may be called a philosophy of compromise. It was again in the notion of evolution that he discovered

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the basis for his idea of compromise. Darwin had shown that an organic being evolves variations in its organic structure from its relation to the useful as well as harmful circumstances in the world surrounding it. The accumulation of these variations and their preservation give the organism a greater adaptability to the complex conditions of life. This idea of adaptability and the emphasis of Mill and Spencer on the use of the knowledge of nature's laws for human happiness and progress naturally appealed to Meredith. He was an optimist and the implications of these ideas to an optimist are clear. He accepts the reality of evil and learns the lesson from the complexity of nature that the greater adaptability arising from the complex conditions of life ensures more success in the achievement of the goal of human happiness. Hidden behind Meredith's idea of comedy is the recognition of this complexity in nature. He adapted the evolution of structural variations to the idea of the growth of reason from the senses. His belief that the evil both inside and outside man can be transformed and used for the spiritual growth of the individual and for the progress of civilisation was behind his insistence that the answer to evil was not to be found by avoiding it but by tackling it.\textsuperscript{110} Reason

\textsuperscript{110}Lindsay, op.cit., p.257.
and work are Meredith's guide in tackling evil in nature.

Meredith's denunciation of licentiousness, primitivism, escapism and romantic sentimentalism is an expression of his rational naturalism. For example, Roy Richmond in *Harry Richmond* is a comic figure because he is an escapist and adventurist. Algernon in *Rhoda Fleming* "is an elegant young gentleman outwardly...still run wild in woods, as did the primitive nobleman that made the noise in the earlier world." Nevil Beauchamp's lack of control of his passion for Renée makes him act in contradiction to his professed ideal when he leaves in the middle of his election campaign and goes to her just to find that he was summoned with no specific purpose. Clara and Laetitia in *The Egoist* are blinded by their primitive nature in their attraction for the physical beauty of Willoughby, and their suffering is a result of their having submitted to the primitive impulse.

This is not to suggest that Meredith desired the suppression of nature. He was well aware of the Darwinian notion that the struggle between organisms does not come to an end with the defeat of one or the other, and that the fight to come back continues. Meredith's attitude to

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the elemental forces in man was governed by the recognition of this scientific fact about nature. He held the view that no enduring purpose could be served by suppressing nature. He no doubt condemned the primitive instincts in their animal form but had no quarrel with them when they were controlled and geared to the advancement of the society.\footnote{Hudson, op.cit., p.173.}

In the harsh conditions of life he saw a means of the sublimation of man's faculties towards this end. Unlike Tennyson, who wanted the beast in man to be destroyed, Meredith pleaded for the use of the animal nature of man for humane ends.\footnote{Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry, p.495.}

The idea of the intellectual evolution became the basis of Meredith's optimistic vision of life.

Meredith's rational naturalism is not to be confused with a too rigid naturalism. His reason is not simply synonymous with scientific rationality in terms of antecedence and sequence, because in that case there would be no question of nature's aim and purpose, and Meredith did believe in the purposiveness of nature. The application of the antecedence-sequence rationality to Meredith's view of nature would lead to a position of scientific determinism. Meredith no doubt accepted the idea of determinism, but he
brought in the idea of reason to show, like the positivists, that the uses of the laws of nature were not determined but flexible. His concept of rationality in nature means that the laws of nature and their workings are intelligible to the human mind. The human mind is free to use nature for the purposes of human happiness. As nature and its laws are intelligible to man, the sequences can be altered and made to contribute to the human happiness by altering and regulating the antecedents. Thus Meredith brought the concept of the evolutionary human mind to give a sense of perfectibility and dynamism to life.

Meredith's rational naturalism is a synthesis of the two major tendencies in the late Victorian attitude to nature — the humanistic and the naturalistic. The romantic desire for the emancipation of man's spirit and nature from the religious and social dogmas is reconciled with the humanistic ideal of the social goal of the individual in the idea of civilisation as a growth of nature, for it provides for the development of the individual as well as the society. In this way Meredith was able to retain his romantic love of nature along with the contemporary scientific and humanistic ideas.

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115 vide above pp. 44-5.