

## A Reading of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*

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### I) Introduction

*Richard Feverel*, the “History of Father and Son” according to its subtitle, has perplexed readers and critics with its apparently inconsistent plot, which is two-thirds comedy and then suddenly ends with a tragic conclusion. Sir Austin Feverel, the father, brings up his son, Richard, according to his “System” of education. But when his “ordeal is over” (538), the boy’s life is pathetically ruined. John W. Morris, in his article in 1963, “Inherent Principles of Order in *Richard Feverel*”, suggested that the novel follows the form of New Comedy and decided that the book thus fails to realize its artistic potential since it has a tragic ending thrust upon it. Lawrence Poston III, however, defended the novel against such arguments, and maintained it can be read as a tragedy in spite of the obvious element of New Comedy (the novel can be, according to Poston, “analyzed ... as a five-act structure which gives coherence to the novel’s tragic pattern” 749). It is not really to the point, however, to classify *Richard Feverel* as either a failed comedy or a successful tragedy, since Meredith wished to go beyond literary genres and express the reality of life, which he thought “not a Comedy, but something strangely mixed” (*Essay on Comedy* 23) with comedy and tragedy. In one of his poems, “The Two Masks”, which opens with the lines, “Melpomene among her livid peoples, / Ere stroke of lyre, upon Thaleia looks,” Meredith describes the struggle between the Muses of Comedy and Tragedy, and it is such a struggle that structures *Richard Feverel*.

The following essay is an attempt to show how Meredith uses comedy and tragedy in *Richard Feverel*. I first examine Meredith’s denial of comedy through his alter ego in the novel, Adrian Harley. Adrian holds up

the comic principle, which Meredith associates with the intellectual attitude of detaching oneself from an experience and criticizing it. But Meredith is also aware of the danger that the comic attitude can easily turn into a self-protective cynicism. That is why he eventually expels Adrian before concluding the story, though Adrian functions as an indispensable critic of the author’s other alter egos, Sir Austin and Richard. Adrian’s function is to break down the form of comedy, which is the main focus of this section, and reveal the author’s most ardent self-criticism. After discussing comedy, I shall move on to the structure of tragedy in the book, to examine its progress behind the work’s façade of intellectual comedy. I shall suggest that to complete *Richard Feverel* as a tragedy is not the novelist’s aim. I hope to show that in his usage of tragedy, we can rather recognize the author’s serious attempt to interpret his own experience.

### II) Comedy

Meredith undoubtedly seems first to have conceived *Richard Feverel* as a Terentian New Comedy. “New Comedy”, Frye explains, “normally presents an erotic intrigue between a young man and a young woman which is blocked by some kind of opposition, usually paternal” (44). In *Richard Feverel*, Richard marries Lucy without his father’s consent. But their “erotic intrigue” is not resolved by “a twist in the plot” (Frye 44) with a happy ending. Meredith does not “allow the book to realize itself, to achieve its potential form” (Morris 340) as a comedy. For Meredith, what is important in comedy is not its form but its function as “the fountain of sound sense” (*Essay on Comedy* 20). The “comic Spirit”, Meredith sees as having to “extinguish her [Folly] at the outset” through

“thoughtful laughter” (47), is embodied in Adrian Harley in *Richard Feverel*. But we can also recognize as Frank D. Curtin suggests: “the limits he [Meredith] set...to the role of comedy” (272) in Adrian. Meredith allows Adrian as his “spokesman” (Curtin 275) to criticize other characters in the book, and then he turns on Adrian to criticize him. Judith Wilt argues that Meredith criticizes him because “[he] senses in himself the same mental temptations and tendencies that Adrian surrendered to, and badly needs to separate himself from them” (108). I should like to add the suggestion that Meredith denies Adrian’s attitude not only by criticizing him but by assigning this character the function of breaking up the comedy in the plot. Adrian’s function in this way is what allows us to see *Richard Feverel* not as a failed comedy, as a comedy whose shift to tragedy is intentional.

Meredith created Adrian Harley, the “Wise Youth”, as he is called in the novel, first as his spokesman and an upholder of the comic tendency in the story. As Curtin says, Adrian Harley “resembles ... in his wit, his learning, his love of companionship and good living ... the young Meredith himself” (279). It can be said that Adrian is a character composed of only intellectual, cynical elements in his author. Adrian is an “epicurean”, who needs “no intimates except Gibbon and Horace ... to accept humanity as it had been, and was; a supreme ironic procession, with laughter of Gods in the background” (10), and he is privileged to criticize the characters and events in the novel, including Sir Austin and Richard Feverel. His critical insight is even extended into social phenomena or life itself in general, as Curtin and Wilt point out, both citing the passage on class from Adrian’s letter to Lady Blandish (364; Curtin 276; Wilt 104). Claiming that “all wisdom is mournful. ’Tis therefore ... that the wise do love the Comic Muse. Their own high food would kill them” (48), Adrian has “his laugh in his comfortable corner” (10). His laughter can be identified with the “silvery laughter” of the “Comic Spirit” in *An Essay on Comedy*, in which Meredith writes as follows: “... whenever they [men] offend sound reason, fair justice ... the Spirit overhead will look humanely malign. ... followed by volleys of silvery laughter. That is the Comic Spirit” (90). Thus,

we can suggest, Adrian Harley represents the Comic Spirit in *Richard Feverel*.

The form of *Richard Feverel* as a New Comedy, however, is undermined and finally broken down by the function that Adrian Harley fulfils its plot. In the “Bakewell Comedy”, an important episode in Richard’s boyhood precedent to the main plot of his marriage, Adrian functions negatively. In this episode, the young Richard sets fire to Farmer Blaize’s rick in revenge for the horsewhipping he has received from the farmer because he poached on the farmer’s demesne. Adrian is critical of Richard’s deed, but does not do anything in particular to correct his wrong doing, in spite of his position as the private educator chosen by the boy’s father. Adrian’s criticism and cynicism go so far that his intention seems almost malignant, as can be seen in the scene in which Adrian probes Richard to draw a confession. We learn that “under Adrian’s manipulation ... Richard [was fast becoming] a liar” (42). Adrian also suggests buying off the farmer to settle the matter, and in fact, bribes a witness against the boy. J. W. Morris argues that this first episode, concluding with a happy resolution, functions as an analogue to the main action, and that it psychologically determines the reader’s expectations of a happy outcome. But the fact is that Adrian’s “cynical and potentially dangerous tampering” (336–7), in Morris’s phrase, can far more seriously mar the form of comedy than Morris admits.

In the main action, that is, in Richard’s marriage to Lucy Desborough, Adrian’s sinister function is decisive and fatal — and this confirms the reader’s impression that Adrian’s action in the first episode had been premeditated as a strong hint by the author. First, visiting the newlywed couple on the Isle of Wight, Adrian cunningly persuades Lucy into declining to see Sir Austin at Raynham, while Richard is planning to appease his father’s anger by having him see his daughter-in-law. This causes the couple’s long, unreasonable separation up to the end of the story. Second, Adrian detains Richard in London and leaves Bella Mount, a beautiful “fallen woman”, to seduce the young man. Richard is then unfaithful to Lucy. In the latter case, Adrian, acting as an agent of Sir Austin, can be considered to represent paternal opposition, which is

of course an indispensable feature of New Comedy. Similarly, Adrian's deed in the former can be explained as well-grounded in comic terms. He has decided not to make a hasty reconciliation between Sir Austin and the couple, it is stated, because he judges that it is difficult to make the baronet "consent to see her [Lucy]" when he has "not yet consented to see his son" (353). However, Adrian's consistent criticism of Sir Austin's "System", according to which the baronet has ordered Adrian to let his son "see vice in its nakedness" (139), and his selfish epicureanism, which gives him an unpleasant motive in persuading Lucy ("Wise youths", the narrator comments, "who buy their loves, are not unwillingly, when opportunity offers, to try and obtain the commodity for nothing" 362), give profounder significance to the wise youth's role. What regulates Adrian Harley, in a word, is his philosophy that life is a "bad play" (Beer 30). Ironically enough, then, though he may boast of acting on the principle of comedy, it is Adrian who damages directly and indirectly Richard's happiness at the crucial points in the plot and prevents the formation of the novel comic patterns.

When we consider Adrian's function in the early and main episodes as we have seen above, we realise that Meredith has made Adrian's version of the Feverel story through the wise youth's comments and observation into a kind of structural irony — only Adrian is by no means the naive or deluded hero of the kind that writers often employ in such cases. Adrian's verbal ironies are stable ones in general; as Wayne C. Booth suggests, we can reconstruct a real meaning behind Adrian's various words. It may be argued, as Thomas L. Jeffers does, that the narrator sometimes assumes Adrian's voice to undercut the other characters and sometimes, for example, Sir Austin's to undercut Adrian. It is by cancelling his seeming support of his spokesman-commentator, however, with the device of structural irony, that Meredith denies Adrian eventually and far more effectively than, as Wilt and Curtin argue, by attacking him harshly. Adrian Harley exits from the book in the penultimate chapter for good; he is deprived of any chance to comment on the Feverels' final disaster. He is no longer necessary when the comedy shifts to tragedy.

### III) Tragedy

In *Richard Feverel*, Meredith thus deliberately breaks down the comic form and shifts into tragedy. Richard is severely wounded in a duel with Lord Mountfalcon. Lucy dies of brain fever. Events of this kind are not the material of comedy and cannot be recovered in a happy ending. We can analyse *Richard Feverel* according to Frye's formulae of tragedy as we will see, and this shows that Meredith is conscious of the form of tragedy as well as that of comedy. Here again, however, what is crucial to Meredith in tragedy is not just its form. Meredith's idea that comedy intertwines with tragedy can be seen in his description of Don Quixote in *Essay on Comedy*: "The knight's great aims and constant mishaps ... are ... fusing the Tragic sentiment with the Comic narrative" (65). More important, Meredith represents his characters in tragedy as "tragic comedian[s]" whom we "must contemplate, to distinguish where their character strikes the note of discord with life" (*The Tragic Comedians* 210). This means that Meredith tries to interpret what causes "Folly" in tragedy, while he fights it with the "Sword of Common Sense" ("To the Comic Spirit", of the Comic Spirit. I would like to show that Meredith uses the form of tragedy for the purpose of self-understanding in *Richard Feverel*. In this context, we can suggest that the narrator's absence in the last chapter, concluding as it does with the letter from "Lady Blandish to Austin Wentworth", is the inevitable result of Meredith's use of what we now call the "Absurd". Camus writes in *Le mythe de Sisyphe*:

Ce monde en lui-même n'est pas raisonnable, c'est tout ce qu'on en peut dire. Mais ce qui est absurde, c'est la confrontation de cet irrationnel et de ce désir éperdu de clarté dont l'appel résonne au plus profond de l'homme. (37)

It is the attempt to interpret an experience in reasonable terms which reveals fundamental absurdities in the human condition.

Northrop Frye gives two formulae to explain

tragedy:

There are two reductive formulas which have often been used to explain tragedy. ... One of these is the theory that all tragedy exhibits the omnipotence of an external fate. (209)

The other reductive theory of tragedy is that the act which sets the tragic process going must be primarily a violation of *moral* law, whether human or divine; in short, that Aristotle's hamartia or "flaw" must have an essential connection with sin or wrongdoing. (210)

Frye explains about the first formula that the Greek *ananke* or *moira* "appears as external or antithetical necessity only after it has been violated as a condition of life, just as justice is the internal condition of an honest man, but the external antagonist of the criminal" (210). About the second formula, pointing out that "the conception of catharsis, which is central to Aristotle's view of tragedy, is inconsistent with moral reductions of it" (210), he concludes that in tragedies "there is a sense of some far-reaching mystery of which this morally intelligible process is only a part. The hero's act has thrown a switch in a larger machine than his own life, or even his own society" (211). We will see below employing these two formulae, how tragedy holds and heightens the complex effect in *Richard Feverel*.

Meredith seems to consider the "Pride" possessed by his protagonists as corresponding to *hybris* in tragedy. In the Modern Library edition, in particular he mentions "Pride", especially Sir Austin's wounded pride because of his wife's betrayal. Sir Austin is a "stern cold man": "touched in his Pride - nowhere but there" (Modern Library 20). The Ordeal, which is said to be special for the Feverels, seems to be also connected with the pride of the Feverels:

Sir Austin also came to their [those who knew the Feverels] conclusion, that it was in his blood; a superstition he had aforesaid smiled at. He had regarded his father, Sir Caradoc, as scarce better than a madman when he spoke of a special Ordeal

for their race. ... Sir Austin, strong in the peculiar sharpness of the sting darted into him, held that there was an entire distinction in their lot [compared with other men]. ... He indicated that the Fates and Furies were quite as partial as Fortune. Stricken Pride, and a feverish blood, made him seek consolation in this way. (Modern Library 16-17)

Correspondingly, it is Richard's false pride which leads him to his fatal duel with Lord Mountfalcon in spite of Lucy's forgiveness of his infidelity. The conflict in Richard's mind is described with the same image of the dualism of good and evil as appears in Chapter XXXIII, "Nursing the Devil", in which Sir Austin's false pride decides his son's fate for tragedy. Richard is with his newborn son and wife at Raynham after his exile to Germany; but he leaves them:

Two natures warred in his bosom, or it may have been the Magian Conflict still going on. ... Might he not stop with them [Lucy and his child]? ... But pride said it was impossible. ... A mad pleasure in the prospect of wreaking vengeance on the villain who had laid the trap for him, once more blackened his brain. (535)

To understand the relationship between Richard Feverel and Sir Austin as accomplices in their possession of egoistic *hybris*, we must take on board how Richard was created by Meredith as his alter ego. Phyllis Bartlett has shown that the poems assigned to Richard in the novel are actually taken from Meredith's own early work. And Richard is thus another alter ego of the author along with Sir Austin and Adrian Harley. Bartlett suggests that Meredith savagely attacks the chivalric impulse in Richard's life "because he identify[s] it with the impulse which had led to his own marriage" (*A Change of Masks* 20).

Meredith himself had been bereaved of his mother at the age of five and left with his father, Augustus Meredith, as his only child. Their relationship was not a smooth one, because Augustus married his housekeeper, and Meredith never approved of their marriage. He was

sent off to school in Germany at the age of 13, and there was no reconciliation between the father and son until Augustus' death in 1876. All this is of course reflected in the plot of the novel. In his turn, ironically, Meredith was left with an only son, Arthur, after his wife Mary's elopement with Henry Wallis. It is not difficult then to imagine that the complex relationship between father and son in *Richard Feverel* represents in complex reflections and refractions something of what the author himself went through in his real life.

What is more important, however, is that it is not the practical problem of how to be reconciled with Augustus and Arthur, but a more fundamental problem concerning egoism that Meredith seems to try to describe by dealing with the motif of father and son. In *The Egoist* also, for example, he writes:

... the Egoist is the Son of Himself. He is likewise the Father. And the son loves the father, the father the son; they reciprocate affection through the closest of ties; ... they cannot consent to see one another suffer or crave in vain. The two rub together in sympathy besides relationship to an intenser one.

... The Egoist is our fountainhead, primaeval man: the primitive is born again, the elemental reconstituted. ... He is not only his own father, he is ours; and he is also our son. (184-5)

In the most critical sense, Richard Feverel can be said to be Sir Austin's double. Sir Austin's sins in his life, therefore, directly result in Richard's sins in *his* life and must be compensated for. Their common sin is reflected in what they must both lose, as we shall see below.

To consider what is sacrificed for the Feverels' character flaw, it must be registered that the author does not completely deny that Richard Feverel is an embodiment of poetry, though it is true, as Bartlett argues, that Meredith savagely attacks the sentimental feelings and chivalric impulses expressed in his own early poems and in Richard's conduct. On the contrary, Meredith seems to try to preserve the poetry of his protagonists, as well as attacking them. It is when Sir Austin orders Richard to burn his poems in Chapter XII,

for example, that their relationship becomes fatally flawed. Finding out that his son is writing poetry, "his [Sir Austin's] wounded heart had its reasons for being much disturbed" (99), because of his wife's betrayal of him with a poetaster. The baronet invites a London phrenologist and an Oxford Professor of poetry to examine the boy. The latter's diagnosis is not encouraging for Richard, and less so the former's. The phrenologist assures the baronet that his son is "totally deficient in the imitative faculty" (99), examining Richard's skull and, through his diagnosis, crushing his soul. Richard is made to feel an animal, and "his being seemed to draw in its shoots and twigs" (100).

In spite of his denial of his son's poetry, however, Sir Austin himself is poetic in his own way, even if it is in the way of "monomaniacs" with "the peculiar gift" (98) to persuade others. If Sir Austin tries to kill poetry in his son, it means that he also kills poetry in himself.

What is sacrificed and lost by the Feverel hybris is symbolized most in Lucy's death — a death which makes Richard a living corpse. Lucy is the preserver of Richard's poetry. In this regard, she is Clare's double, who is also victimized by Richard's egoistic indifference. Clare has secretly copied Richard's poem in her diary. Richard is not actually killed in his duel with Lord Mountfalcon and survives both his wound and Lucy's death. However, in the final chapter we learn that "Richard will never be what he promised" (542). His *poetry* is thus lost forever with Lucy.

Lucy we may suggest is to some extent a portrait of Mary Ellen, Meredith's estranged wife — though Bella Mount has more often been identified with Mary Ellen because of her dashing beauty and masculine intelligence. It is suggested, however, that Lucy is Bella's double in the crucial passage in which Richard's feelings are described:

A white visage reappeared behind a spring of flame. Her [Bella's] black hair was scattered over her shoulders and fell half across her brows. ... Something in the way her underlids worked seemed to remind him [Richard] of a forgotten picture; but a veil hung on the picture. There could be no analogy, for this was beautiful and devilish,

and that, if he remembered rightly, had the beauty of seraphs. (439)

The femme fatale and Ewig-Weibliche can be two sides of one woman. Mary Ellen, or her fictional version, is in effect lost once by Sir Austin as Lady Feverel at the beginning of the novel, and then for the second time lost by Richard as Lucy. Meredith's personal loss is thus dramatized repetitively in his fictional world. And he provides good reasons for this loss: he shows that the loss is caused by men's own self-betrayal. This coincides with his account of "tragic life" in *Modern Love* :

In tragic life, God wot,  
No villain need be! Passions spin the plot:  
We are betrayed by what is false within. (XLIII)

Lucy's death is partly predetermined by the author himself. Frye's second formula of tragedy, the violation of a human moral law, is thus well followed in *Richard Feverel*.

But as for Frye's first formula that "all tragedy exhibits the omnipotence of an external fate," "Time", which is mentioned by the narrator more than once when he comments on the incidents and characters in the novel, foreshadows the disaster and makes also readers feel that it is caused by some impersonal, arbitrary power apart from human responsibility. In the episode of the rick-burning, Sir Austin's uneasy feeling over his son's escape from his power is described with the image of time's irrevocability: "The boy had embarked, and was on the waters of life in his own vessel. It was as vain to call him back as to attempt to erase what Time has written with the Judgment Blood!" (36). There is also an aphorism on time in the Pilgrim's Scrip: "Could we see Time's full face, we were wise of him" (212). In Chapter XXVIII, describing the bridal eve of Richard and Lucy, the narrator comments as follows:

The System, wedded to Time, slept, and knew not how he had been outraged. ... For Time had heard the hero [Richard] swear to that legalizing

instrument, and had also registered an oath. Ah me! venerable Hebrew Time! he is unforgiving. Half the confusion and fever of the world comes of this vendetta he declares against the hapless innocents who have once done him a wrong. They cannot escape him. They will never outlive it. The father of jokes, he is himself no joke; which it seems the business of men to discover. (275)

Time is thus vengeful and unforgiving, and even Mrs. Berry, who always cares for Lucy's happiness, is not allowed to foresee and prevent misfortune: "... not guessing Time to be the poor child's [Lucy's] enemy, she [Mrs. Berry] endangered her candle by folding Lucy warmly in her arms." The narrator adds as the concluding sentence of this chapter, "Old Time gazes grimly ahead" (275).

Though Richard has his faults as well as Sir Austin, there is something malign and arbitrary finally to cause the disaster which is symbolized by time's unforgivingness and vengefulness. Returning to Raynham, Richard has his final interview with his father on the eve of his duel with Mountfalcon. Sir Austin is ready to be reconciled with his son. The baronet has already welcomed Lucy as his daughter-in-law at Raynham. He says that he thinks Richard to be "very fortunate" in his choice of his wife. Richard's response is as follows:

Fortunate! very fortunate! As he revolved his later history, and remembered how clearly he had seen that his father must love Lucy if he but knew her, and remembered his efforts to persuade her to come with him, a sting of miserable rage blackened his brain. But could he blame that gentle soul? Whom could he blame? Himself? Not utterly. His father? Yes, and no. The blame was here, the blame was there: it was everywhere and nowhere. ... (527)

If Sir Austin had seen Lucy at the very first, if Lucy had been successfully persuaded to see Sir Austin after their marriage, if Richard had not stayed so long in London away from Lucy, if, — but all these 'ifs' are vain. Even

the duel could have been prevented, since Ripton, Adrian and even Mrs. Doria did know about it on the eve. The narrator continues, " ... and the young man cast it on the Fates, and looked angrily at heaven, and grew reckless." Frye's words undoubtedly apply to Richard's case: "The hero's act has thrown a switch in larger machine than his own life, or even his own society."

The problem is, however, that Meredith himself has inserted Chapter XLII, "Nature Speaks", which cannot but confuse his own use of both problems of human responsibility and of inhuman power, as the cause of the tragedy. Exiled in Germany, Richard is for the first time informed by Austin Wentworth that he is the father of a son. The famous storm scene in the German forest, which has echoes of *King Lear*, follows. "And though he [Richard] knew it not," the author writes, "he was striking the key-notes of Nature" (504):

... the lightning seemed as the eye of heaven, and the thunder as the tongue of heaven, ... Alone there — sole human creature among the grandeurs and mysteries of storm — he felt the representative of his kind. ...

He fancied he smelt meadow-sweet. ... He ... stretched out his hand to feel the flower, having, he knew not why, a strong wish to verify its growth there.

Richard's eyes ... were able to discern it for what it was, a tiny leveret. ... He grew aware that the little thing he carried in his breast was licking his hand there. (506-508)

Richard is presented here as a representative of human kind. The flowers of meadow-sweet are the reminder of his pure love for Lucy ("That kiss ... reminded him of his first vision of her on the summer morning in the field of the meadow-sweet" 533). His communion with Nature is perfected by the baby hare. He had come abroad "seeking for that which shall cleanse me [Richard]" (484) and thus he is purified.

If what this chapter contains holds good, why should Richard have to fight a senseless fight with

Mountfalcon because of his false pride? Does Meredith mean to deny his own powerful writing about Richard's purification? Should the "Nature" which purifies Richard be identified with a "Nature" which does not forgive, as the author suggests through his characters on the eve of Richard's duel (Hippias says "Nature never forgives!" on page 520 and then Adrian on 525)? In *Modern Love* also, Meredith writes as follows:

'I play for Seasons; not Eternities!  
Says Nature, laughing on her way. 'So must  
All those whose stake is nothing more than dust!'

.....  
Upon her dying rose,  
She drops a look of fondness, and goes by,  
Scarce any retrospection in her eye;  
For she the laws of growth most deeply knows,  
Whose hands bear, here, a seed-bag — there, an urn.  
Pledged she herself to aught, 'twould mark her end!  
This lesson of our only visible friend,  
Can we not teach our foolish hearts to learn?

(XIII)

"Nature" has "a seed-bag", that is, life, in one hand and "an urn", death, in the other. She does not pledge herself to either because her very mutability is "the laws of growth." In *Richard Feverel*, Richard is intended by the author to learn these "laws of growth" in the German forest. But by committing Richard to the duel, Meredith cancels the significance of Chapter XLII. And Richard's "purification" by Nature makes Meredith's explanation that tragedy is caused by men's self-betrayal doubtful, since we cannot explain what this self-betrayal is, if Richard's self-reflection in "Nature Speaks" are insufficient to cure him of his sin. Meredith's interpretation of external fate beyond human power is also made uncertain and unstable because his view of Nature is evolutionary (as is seen in the stanza of the poem and Chapter XLII), while the phrase "Nature never forgives!" intensifies the feeling that Nature has a more fundamental malign arbitrariness.

Thus, the absence of the narrator in the last chapter

is highly significant, and indicates Meredith's temporary relinquishment of his efforts to interpret. It is suggested that Sir Austin has hardly improved ("... if I could be quite sure that he [Sir Austin] is an altered man even now the blow has struck him," Lady Blandish writes, "but I have doubts" 540 - 541). Richard is left with his son alone as Richard's father was left with him at the beginning of the book. Everything is back where it started. The book concludes with Lady Blandish's words describing Richard: "Have you noticed the expression in the eyes of blind men? That is just how Richard looks, as he lies there silent in his bed — striving to image her on his brain" (542). What has happened is presented as not open to any formulaic interpretation.

#### IV) Conclusion

As we have seen, then *Richard Feverel* can be read finally as neither comedy or tragedy, because Meredith's pursuit of comedy and tragedy is not the pursuit of their forms. Meredith's aim is to exploit their potency as methods of reconstructing versions of the reality of life in fiction. Meredith uses comedy as a method of self-criticism; he uses tragedy as a method of self-understanding. Through other works after *Richard Feverel*, he continued this experimental interpretation and representation of reality in fiction, employing both the methods of comedy and tragedy. *Richard Feverel*, however, is significant as the work where Meredith first established a technique of writing which could be said to combine, or at least to be inspired by the two Muses of Comedy and Tragedy.

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