George Meredith's *Beauchamp's Career*: Politics, Romance and Realism

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It is philosophical–political, with no powerful stream of adventure: an attempt to show the forces round a young man of the present day, in England, who would move them, and finds them unutterably solid, though it is seen in the end that he does not altogether fail, has not lived in vain. Of course this is done in the concrete. A certain drama of self-conquest is gone through, for the hero is not perfect. He is born of the upper class, and is scarcely believed in by any class, except when he vexes his own, and it is then to be hated. At the same time the mild spirit of a prosperous middle class, that is not extremely alarmed, is shown to be above persecuting; so that the unfortunate young man is in danger of being thought dull save by those who can enter his idea of the advancement of Humanity and his passion for it. In this he is a type. And I think his History a picture of the time—taking its mental action, and material ease and indifference, to be a necessary element of the picture.

(George Meredith on *Beauchamp's Career*, June 1874 in *Letters* (1912), i. 242–3.)

In 1868 George Meredith's friend Commander Frederick Maxse stood as a Radical candidate at the Southampton election, and was defeated. G. M. Young wrote in his introduction to the World's Classics edition of *Beauchamp's Career* that "Meredith did not learn his politics from Maxse, but the experiences they shared in the Southampton canvass gave him an insight into the nature of the political animal, whether candidate or elector, which would make *Beauchamp's Career*, even if it were nothing else, a document—and a most far-sighted document—for the political history of its time."[1] Meredith had gone to Southampton to help Maxse in his campaign, and the grounding in this experience is obvious in the novel, not only in the physical description of the town of Bevisham and its environs, the harbour (Southampton water), the island (Isle of Wight) and the yachting, but also in the central figure of Beauchamp. We need not agree with Siegfried Sassoon that "Beauchamp is Maxse",[2] but the similarities are

1 George Meredith, *Beauchamp's Career*, World's Classics edition, Oxford University Press, London 1950, p. xiii. All quotations are from this edition. References indicate first the chapter (for those using other editions) followed by page reference. *Beauchamp's Career* had been serialized in the *Fortnightly Review*, August 1874 to December 1875, and appeared in book form in late 1875 (postdated 1876).

clear enough—both Maxse and Beauchamp moving from military careers (and retaining their military titles) into radical politics. The documentary accuracy of the party-political analysis Meredith gave was remarked upon by contemporary reviewers. H. D. Traill in the *Nineteenth Century* (October 1875) pointed to the completeness

> with which the author has succeeded in individualising a series of characters belonging generically to the same type in respect of social position and politics . . . The feudal Toryism of Everard Romfrey, the martinet unidea-ed Toryism of Col. Halkett . . . the hard-headed Philistine Toryism of Blackburn Tuckham, and the sceptical eclectic conservatism of Seymour Austin and Stukely Culbrett belonging to four separate and clearly marked types.
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> Nor is there less felicity of discrimination displayed in the Radicalism of Nevil, of Dr Shrapnel and of Lydiard. Mr Grancy Lespel represents thoroughly well the "landed variety" of the old Whig . . .[3]

The documentary basis for the political portraits in the novel is firmly grounded, then, and attested by contemporaries. Similarly the political issues—the Game laws, the press servilely dependent on its advertisers, the Navy estimates—are very specific issues; their specificity even becomes comic with part of Nevil's platform being his campaign for opening museums on Sundays. Though museum opening was taken seriously by radicals—it is not merely a comic dig at Nevil; it is the sort of thing the radicals must have found themselves caught up in; it was still an issue for William Morris in 1877.[4]

Such documentary specificity is also basic to the political accuracy of the novel. Although larger issues—ideas rather than particular reforms—are discussed in the novel—capitalism, the existence of a leisure class, the role of the clergy as establishment lackeys—many of the conversations are firmly based on specific contemporary issues. So we encounter the future of Gibraltar, the war against the Chinese, the Manchester free-traders. Both components are necessarily there—the general issues and the specific details. One of the concerns of *Beauchamp's Career* is the problem of translating political enthusiasm, abstract political convic-

2 *Meredith*, Constable, London 1948; Arrow paperback, London 1959, p. 157.

3 Cited in Jack Lindsay, *George Meredith: His Life and Work*, Bodley Head, London 1956, p. 214.

4 See *Political Writings of William Morris*, ed. A. L. Morton, Lawrence & Wishart, London; International Publishers, New York; Seven Seas Books, Berlin 1973, p. 45. Morris's comments are in his lecture "The Decorative Arts" given in 1877.

tion, into specific political action. The specific documentary detail is hence necessary to show the political objectives of that historical time; and then we can see how far away those specific objectives are from political ideals and abstractions and enthusiasms. Nevil's initial theoretical political enthusiasm has to be tested by its ability to survive the mundane and trivial documentary detail —and to realize that not all that detail is unimportant.

Morris E. Speare remarked that "*Beauchamp's Career* is rather a satire upon English political Conservatism than it is an encomium upon the political thought of Bright and Cobden."[5] Taking care not to accept any implicit slight of the novel's radicalism here, it is worth taking Speare's other point. The novel is set almost entirely amongst the families of the aristocracy and upper middle class—frequently the military families. It is in this essentially an anatomy of the establishment. The majority of the scenes take place in country houses serviced by armies of servants, with an occasional diversion on horseback or on a yacht. Meredith is not concerned to present a picture of English society in its entirety, he is not concerned with a social cross-section here; the working-class, for instance, hardly figures. Had Meredith purported to be writing a social novel of politics and class in England, his omission would have been absurd. But he does not attempt even the incomplete spread of George Eliot in *Felix Holt* or *Middlemarch*. Rather, he is primarily concerned with an anatomy of establishment conservatism, and with attitude change in a given environment. He is not presenting the conflicting demands of different social classes: rather he is demonstrating the establishment solidarity.

But the demonstration comes from a radical perspective. By the consciousness of the radical protagonist—and more especially by the more coherently and radically radical figure Dr Shrapnel —we are given a context in which to view the establishment conservatism. The class solidarity of the establishment is attested importantly. Nevil Beauchamp is standing as second liberal candidate to Mr Cougham the senior candidate; but "Cougham had passed through his Radical phase, as one does on the road to wisdom . . . though they were yoked they stood at the opposite ends of the process of evolution" (19:159). Cougham, though standing as a liberal, was "chrysalis Tory" (19:160). Opposition

5 Morris Edmund Speare, *The Political Novel; Its Development in England And In America*, Oxford University Press, New York 1924, p. 241.

candidates were, are, so often of the same social class and political views as the establishment sitting candidates: Cougham standing as a liberal is a Tory standing in opposition to another Tory.

But the irony does not rest only on Mr Cougham the liberal being in fact a Tory. Nevil Beauchamp himself is central to this irony. The tight-knit structure of the English establishment has often enough been indicated. Dissent comes from the same family as conservatism—just a different wing of the family making sure the family stays in control of the conservative establishment and the radical anti-establishment. Nevil with his firmly establishment background, environment, and friends stands as a radical liberal, as a people's champion. To the sceptical eye, he could be just as conservative as his family, engaged in a bit of generational struggle no doubt, so calling himself radical.

This is the situation Meredith explores. Is Nevil just another establishment ploy—an establishment move to control and contain radicalism so it does not get out of the hands of the "natural leaders"? Or is Nevil in fact a genuine radical, rebelling against the values of his class, genuinely committed to massive social change? Not only is Meredith's analysis concentrated on one class, this class focus is narrowed down further to a concentration on to the family. The familial unit is stressed in the novel when Nevil's cousin Baskelett is nominated to stand as second Tory candidate for Bevisham, against Nevil. The fact of their cousinship is exploited to discredit Nevil's radicalism in the eyes of the radical voters. Whatever political position you vote for, the same establishment, the same family even, will be there.

Nor is the "radical" Nevil's platform so challenging:

> The address, moreover, was ultra-Radical: museums to be opened on Sundays; ominous references to the Land question, &c.; no smooth passing mention of Reform, such as the Liberal, become stately, adopts in speaking of that property of his, but swinging blows on the heads of many a denounced iniquity. (11:90)

Meredith keeps the address deliberately vague; the only specific point—that museums should open on Sundays—is so trivial amidst the splendid abstractions, that the effect is comic; at the same time its specificness points up the vagueness of the rest of the speech. And as for the threats on property, Nevil is thoroughly dependent on his own unearned income, on his allowance from his uncle. His schemes and tastes are thoroughly aristocratic; for his later scheme, to run a radical newspaper, he would need a fortune. He is a radical who believes in an aristocracy:

> One may venerate old families when they show the blood of the founder, and are not dead wood. I do. And I believe the blood of the founder, though the man may have been a savage and a robber, had in his day finer elements in it than were common. But let me say at a meeting that I respect true aristocracy, I hear a growl and a hiss beginning: why? Don't judge them hastily: because the people have seen the aristocracy opposed to the cause that was weak, and only submitting to it when it commanded them to resist at their peril; clinging to traditions, and not anywhere standing for humanity: much more a herd than the people themselves. Ah! well, we won't talk of it now. I say that is no aristocracy, if it does not head the people in virtue—military, political, national: I mean the qualities required by the times for leadership. (28:269)

He is annoyed at his uncle's marrying Rosamund Culling:

> He had no wish to meet his uncle, whose behaviour in contracting a misalliance and casting a shadow on the family, in a manner so perfectly objectless and senseless, appeared to him to call for the reverse of compliments. (44:434)

He inveighs against the "flood of luxury" of the aristocracy, while the poor go hungry, and after inveighing

> He called for claret and water, sighing as he munched bread in vast portions, evidently conceiving that to eat unbuttered bread was to abstain from luxury. He praised passingly the quality of the bread. It came from Steynham, and so did the milk and cream, the butter, chicken and eggs. He was good enough not to object to the expenditure upon the transmission of the accustomed dainties. (42:411)

Such, then, is the radical Nevil Beauchamp. Rosamund remarks on his similarity to his uncle, Everard Romfrey (35:342; 53:517). Everard's reply is "Two ends of a stick are pretty much alike: they're all that length apart." Their similarities are stressed when each ends up offering the other an ultimatum for an apology. The central episode of the novel is Everard Romfrey's thrashing Dr Shrapnel. In Everard's scheme it is a moral and chivalrous act: he is defying those members of society who give Rosamund Culling a bad name for living with him unmarried. The chapter in which Everard sets out is entitled "Showing a Chivalrous Gentleman set in Motion" (31:302). But it is a barbarous act—and the barbarity is sanctioned by the establishment. There is never any suggestion that there should be a court case or that Dr Shrapnel should be recompensed. Nevil helps nurse him back to health, certainly. But Nevil's main objection to the whipping is not the suffering of Dr Shrapnel, but the fact that such an act reflects on the family honour. The "honour" of the family is still a basic priority for this radical—and it is to redeem the family's name that Nevil demands an apology from Everard. It was to avenge

Rosamund's name and honour that Everard performed the whipping in the first place. And after all, it was for a similar defence of Rosamund's good name that Nevil as a child had thrashed Cecil Baskelett. Uncle and nephew are very similar.

The episode is paradigmatic of Everard's and Nevil's attitudes. Everard never has any doubt that this is the way to act—he naturally takes the law into his own hands in this pre-social, aristocratic warrior individualist way. This is Nevil's typical manner, too.

Everard Romfrey, as Meredith describes him, "was in person a noticeable gentleman, in mind a medieval baron, in politics a crotchety unintelligible Whig . . . At one time he was a hot Parliamentarian, calling himself a Whig, called by the Whigs a Radical, called by the Radicals a Tory, and very happy in fighting them all round" (2:14–15). "A medieval gentleman with the docile notions of the twelfth century, complacently driving them to grass and wattling them in the nineteenth . . ." (3:27). The hot-headedness, the impetuosity, the anarchic individualistic aspect of Nevil's radicalism, demonstrates the similarity of the uncle to Nevil.

If Nevil is like his uncle, and his uncle is a member of the establishment—even if a crotchety member—what are the values of that establishment class that might come into conflict with Nevil's radicalism—or that might throw light on the extent of that radicalism? The property bonds within the establishment are demonstrated fully by Meredith—bonds that keep the establishment close knit. In so far as there is any "plot"—and how far there is, will be discussed later—it revolves round the possible marriage between Nevil and Cecilia Halkett—a marriage both Colonel Halkett and Everard Romfrey are at first concerned to settle, for the cementing of class and property bonds. It is not a romance extraneous to the political theme as, say, that between Felix and Esther in *Felix Holt*. Meredith has tied it into his social analysis. In the end Cecilia marries Blackburn Tuckham, the Tory candidate. Politics-property-marriage are all necessarily involved here. The loyalties members of the class show to each other, and the ideas they are in agreement over, are demonstrated in Colonel Halkett's defence of Romfrey's whipping of Dr Shrapnel even though he has no knowledge of what it was in response to, let alone whether it was a justified response (which even in Romfrey's barbarous system it turns out not to be).

> Though he could not guess the reason for Mr Romfrey's visit to Bevisham, he was, he said, quite prepared to maintain that Mr Rom-

> frey had a perfect justification for his conduct.
>
> Cecilia hinted at barbarism. The colonel hinted at high police duties that gentlemen were sometimes called on to perform for the protection of society. . . . Evidently he had resolved to back Mr Romfrey blindly. That epistle of Dr Shrapnel's merited condign punishment and had met with it, he seemed to rejoice in saying: and this was his abstract of the same: "An old charlatan who tells his dupe to pray every night of his life for the beheading of kings and princes, and scattering of the clergy, and disbanding the army, that he and his rabble may fall upon the wealthy, and show us numbers win; and he'll undertake to make them moral:" (32:317)

Because of his political views, the establishment class believe that Shrapnel deserved to be whipped anyway, whatever else he might have done. Romfrey was only doing his social duty in acting for all of them, expressing their wish.

> "And he deserved it!" the colonel pursued, on emerging from the cabin at Lord Lockrace's heels. "I've no doubt he richly deserved it. The writer of that letter we heard Captain Baskelett read the other day deserves the very worst he gets."
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> "Baskelett bored the Club the other night with a letter of a Radical fellow," said Lord Lockrace. "Men who write that stuff should be strung up and whipped by the common hangman."
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> . . . . .
>
> Colonel Halkett protested that he never could quite make out what Radicals were driving at.
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> "The rents," Lord Lockrace observed in the conclusive tone of brevity. (32:315)

Lord Lockrace is, of course, quite right. For Lockrace and the rest of Meredith's characters here the rents are their God-given due. It is by their land, their property, their unearned income that this conservative class can live the way it does—can live at all. And Meredith absorbs into this attack on landowners and capital, Arnold's attack on the barbarism of the aristocracy and philistinism of the middle classes—an attack on the English establishment mindlessness, its contempt for the arts. The two qualities are not necessarily associated—and Meredith does not assert that they are; indeed, he shows in the French count, Renée's father, an equally inequitable political and social system supporting a man of taste; the count looks at the art treasures of Venice on his feudal, unearned wealth; while Romfrey would not go to visit Nevil in Venice—it would mean "breaking loose from shooting engagements at a minute's notice, to rush off to a fetid foreign city notorious for mud and mosquitoes" (5:42).

A love for art does not justify or even soften the count's feudalism. However, a specific contempt for art is usually a sign with

Meredith of something wrong with a character.

> Captain Baskelett respected the poetic art for its magical power over woman's virtue, but he disliked hearing verses . . . He abused his friend roundly, telling him it was contemptible to be quoting verses. (30:301)

The Tory Blackburn Tuckham remarks "We've got ten thousand too many fellows writing already . . . it's all unproductive—dead weight on the country, these fellows with their writings!" (28:266). Indeed, that is true; if the country is to be the sort of country the Tuckhams and Baskeletts want, writing is a dead weight on the country. It is Tuckham who gives the most coherent defence of capitalism and property:

> "Property is ballast as well as treasure. I call property funded good sense. I would give it every privilege. If we are to speak of patriotism, I say the possession of property guarantees it. I maintain that the lead of men or property is in most cases sure to be the safe one . . ."
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> Mr Tuckham grew fervent in his allusions to our wealth and our commerce. Having won the race and gained the prize, shall we let it slip out of our grasp? Upon this topic his voice descended to tones of priestlike awe; for are we not the envy of the world? Our wealth is countless, fabulous. It may well inspire veneration. And we have won it with our hands, thanks (he implied it so) to our religion . . . We perish as a Great Power if we cease to look sharp ahead, hold firm together, and make the utmost of what we possess. The word for the performance of those duties is Toryism: a word with an older flavour than Conservatism, and Mr Tuckham preferred it. By all means let working men be free: but a man must earn his freedom daily, or he will become a slave in some form or other: and the way to earn it is by work and obedience to right direction. In a country like ours, open on all sides to the competition of intelligence and strength, with a Press that is the voice of all parties and of every interest; in a country offering to your investments three and a half and more per cent., secure as the firmament!—
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> He perceived an amazed expression on Miss Halkett's countenance; and "Ay," said he, "that means the certainty of food to millions of mouths, and comforts, if not luxuries, to half the population. A safe percentage on savings is the basis of civilization." (26:247–8)

And he goes on to drink his claret—luxuries are allowed for him —and "commended the fishing here, the shooting there"—he is exempt from the necessities of daily work and earning his freedom anew each day. Beauchamp elsewhere deals with the question of the press, which Meredith shows us quite clearly did not give voice to all parties and to every interest.

Tuckham's conservatism is one that believes in the necessity of capitalist industry. Romfrey, however, is opposed to that; he

hates the free traders of Manchester as "negrophiles and sweaters of Christians" (3:31). The collocation is interesting—and worthy of *Huckleberry Finn* for its encapsulation of an ideology. Romfrey's dislike of the "sweaters of Christians" is not the result of any belief in the equality of man, the brotherhood of humanity: he condemns Manchester as negrophile—and he has no sympathy with Nevil's serving in the navy to catch slave-traders. Romfrey's objection is that industry is some ignoble, noisy and vulgar, un-English; that Romfrey and his like are more and more dependent for their leisured existence on the profits of industry, he does not recognize. Romfrey's ethos is brilliantly caught by Meredith in a passage shortly after the horsewhipping of Shrapnel:

> Moreover, the month of September was drawing nigh; he had plenty to think of. The entire land (signifying all but all of those who occupy the situation of thinkers in it) may be said to have been exhaling the same thought in connexion with September. Our England holds possession of a considerable portion of the globe, and it keeps the world in awe to see her bestowing so considerable a portion of her intelligence upon her recreations. To prosecute them with her whole heart is an ingenious exhibition of her power. Mr Romfrey was of those who said to his countrymen, 'Go yachting; go cricketing; go boat-racing; go shooting; go horse-racing, nine months of the year, while the other Europeans go marching and drilling.' Those occupations he considered good for us; and our much talking, writing, and thinking about them characteristic, and therefore good. And he was not one of those who do penance for that sweating indolence in the fits of desperate panic. Beauchamp's argument that the rich idler begets the idling vagabond, the rich wagerer the brutal swindler, the general thirst for a mad round of recreation a generally-increasing disposition to avoid serious work, and the unbraced moral tone of the country an indifference to national responsibility (an argument doubtless extracted from Shrapnel, talk tall as the very demagogue when he stood upright), Mr Romfrey laughed at scornfully, affirming that our manufactures could take care of themselves. As for invasion, we are circled by the sea. Providence has done that for us, and may be relied upon to do more in an emergency. —The children of wealth and the children of the sun alike believe that Providence is for them, and it would seem that the former can do without it less than the latter, though the former are less inclined to give it personification. (33:320–1)

There is no need to demonstrate further Meredith's analysis of the beliefs and attitudes of the upper and upper-middle class establishment; his exposure of philistine conservatism, of feudal barbarity informs the whole novel, and once noticed (and so many critics have not remarked on it) its central importance is obvious. And the radical protagonist Nevil Beauchamp belongs to this establishment world being analysed. His attachment to it and his

sharing unconsciously much of its ideology, is basic to his character and to Meredith's theme. But Meredith's theme is also one of political change, political conversion. The radicalism that is part of the novel is a dynamic radicalism—it is not safely contained like Felix Holt's radicalism, but it works evaluatively within the novel. The more radical Nevil becomes, the more radical the book becomes, the more all of it can be re-read from this critical radical position. And Meredith involves this with a theme of conversion—the form of the novel enacting the conversion of its protagonist. So we see Nevil belonging firmly to the conservative establishment that is analysed, and then we see his attempts to break away from it, his attempts to preach radicalism in it, and his gradual understanding of what radicalism in fact is—the continuing radicalization of Nevil that has not ended when he dies; his death is an arbitrary point cutting across the constantly evolving dialectic of his understanding. (In this sense the death is tragic; it was not a convenient death, arriving when he has no more to say.)

The enthusiasm that drives Nevil into political action is initially a romantic, chivalric enthusiasm — something associable with the feudal, with his uncle. He fights for Rosamund's good name as a child; he performs valiantly in the Crimean war; his valour is of the single-handed individual hero variety. Romfrey wrote to him:

> They tell me that while you were facing the enemy, temporarily attaching yourself to one of the regiments—I forget which, though I have heard it named—you sprang out under fire on an eagle clawing a hare. I like that. (4:36–7)

and again "I have a letter from your captain, informing me that I am unlikely to see you home unless you learn to hold yourself in" (4:37). Individual valour and a sentimental sympathy for the victim inspiring these single-handed acts of rash courage—saving a hare in the middle of a battle! And a certain lack of conventional proportion. This sympathy for the underdog was of course there before Nevil left for the war, when he stopped the keepers chasing a poacher and went in chase himself. "I caught him myself, but recognized him as one of a family I take an interest in, and let him run before they came up" (3:29). It is an incident that causes one of Nevil's early clashes with Romfrey—and shares, of course, all Romfrey's arbitrary impetuosity.

Nevil at the beginning of the novel promises to be a hero of a romantic episode with Renée, only daughter of the Comte de

Croisnel. Nevil has saved the life of her brother Roland—so "he who had saved her brother must be nearly brother himself, yet was not quite, yet must be loved, yet not approached" (5:43). But the Renée episode is an important development and qualification of story-book romance. The total romantic situation—beautiful woman, man who has saved her brother's life—does not issue in romance. Nevil's very romantic chivalrous illusions complicate the simplicity of the plot line, and leave us unclear what his motives might be. In his chivalric and sentimental way he believes he is doing a good thing in saving Renée from what as an Englishman he abhors—an arranged marriage to a man old enough to be her father. But how far that is a rationalization for simple sexual desire, is never clear. Meredith brilliantly presents it as ambiguous.

Renée's appeal to Nevil is twofold: she is as a woman a second-class citizen, a victim of feudal attitudes to marriage, another underdog, and so she needs—he has no doubt—his support and sympathy; but secondly, she is also an aristocrat, with all the appeal of a mysterious and aristocratic culture. Lord Palmet, the connoisseur of womanhood who is mapping the places for pretty women in England ("some parts of Norfolk, and a spot or two in Cumberland and Wales, and the island over there, I know thoroughly. Those Jutes have turned out some splendid fair women. Devonshire's worth a tour"—19:161) remarks later in the novel

> "Odd it is, Beauchamp, to see a lady's maid now and then catch the style of my lady. No, by Jove: I've known one or two—you couldn't tell the difference! Not till you were intimate." (19:176)

But it is inconceivable that Nevil would fall in love with a lady's maid or fail to tell the difference, at the beginning of his career. Renée's aristocratic birth is essential. This is the sort of person Nevil is, Meredith is stressing, so that the extent of his radicalization can be realized—that is the battle radicalism has in England. Class is more important to Nevil than just sex—whereas for Lord Palmet, sexual adventures are the reason for existence, all done in an amiable, friendly way. Sex is not that important to Nevil; he is just as likely to be diverted by sentimental do-gooding. But class, "good family", is important to this "radical". And he *seems* as though he should be the ideal, stereotypical "romantic" lover—dumb, ex-military chap. He certainly chooses to hang round the people who would expect him to be like that—that is the social milieu he remains in. Nevil's continued devotion both to Renée and to upper-middle class Cecilia, attachments persist-

ing long into his developing radicalism, indicates the extent of his class attitudes; in personal terms he is attached to these aristocratic and upper-middle class ladies even when politically he is in opposition to the values of their class. This has of course become such an accepted fact of social democratic leftist parties in the years since Meredith wrote that we probably do not realize that Meredith is being *ironic* about the idea, he thinks it is grotesque, and has built the grotesqueries into the centre of his conception of the novel. Meredith no doubt observed from 1870s realities; he could hardly have imagined that only a hundred years later, his satirical observation would have achieved the status of a truism. It is only right at the end of his career that Nevil breaks away from both Renée and Cecilia and marries Jenny Denham, niece of Dr Shrapnel; but even she is no daughter of the people. Nonetheless, her background and attitudes are vastly different from Renée's and Cecilia's.

We have then initially a dashing Romantic hero—brilliant reputation from the Crimean war, distinguished family, and, to make him sympathetic, he has a generous kind spirit for the underdog. And the structure of the novel promises to be romantic, centres on such romantic aspects of a young man's career; following, that is, the one hero in a romantic way, not proposing to offer a picture of a cross-section of society with balanced interest spread through three or four main characters in the dull, bourgeois realist way of George Eliot. And we have the romantic settings—Venice, the wooing by Nevil of Renée, the plan to elope by sea.

But *Beauchamp's Career* develops very differently. The hero's expectations and the novel's structural promise are foiled jointly. For it is a novel about politics, modern politics, radicalism. And Meredith goes on to demonstrate that the romantic individualistic commitment of Nevil's is not appropriate for political action: the novel is concerned to deal with the gulf between on the one hand enthusiasm, commitment, ideas, and on the other hand the political practicalities. Individualistic romantic enthusiasm needs to be channelled into socialized practicality. The romantic is frustrated and ends continually in the bathetic. Nevil does not elope with Renée; nothing splendid happens. The incident parallels that episode of his single-handed youthful challenge to the French guard in defence of England's honour—when nothing happened. Nevil's feudal chivalry (inherited from his uncle's medieval baronial attitudes) is inappropriate for the nineteenth century.

Every time Nevil succumbs to these emotions, disaster results.

In the middle of his electoral campaign, he receives the summons from Renée—and romantically dashes over in response to her cryptic note. But she is not waiting to be rescued from dire distress; she simply had a wager with an effete French aristocrat, that Nevil would respond to her summons. It is unlikely that Nevil would have won the election anyway—but his absurd departure, and the consequent scandal from which his opponents make political capital, demonstrate the gulf between his romantic enthusiasms, and the realities of parliamentary, political action.

His commitment to radical politics—developing on from his vaguer humanitarian single-handed hero exploits, and his serving on an anti-slave trade frigate—occurred within two hours of landing in England. His impetuosity is emphasized. But his impetuosity is not to be ridiculed; it is the force of his commitment that drives him into politics—unlike, say, the fence-sitting aphoristic, epigrammatic, negative wit and wisdom of Stukely Culbrett. But it is an impetuosity and energy that must be channelled if it can be of any use, and not lost in the indulgent and counter-effective.

The inappropriateness of Nevil's romanticism, and the frustration of his romantic hopes, goes along with a similar frustration of romantic episodes in the novel. The elopement with Renée at Venice comes to nothing, the summons from Renée during the election is all for nothing; and when later she comes to England, instead of their love at last being dramatically and romantically and passionately fulfilled, in some beautiful yet absurd operatic way, Nevil calls for Rosamund to stay in the house to stop any breath of scandal and rejects Renée. It is not even a grandiose heart-rending romantic rejection—but a prosaic, practical one. And of course it is not even *practical*, it fails in its object anyway, scandal is not prevented—and how could summoning Rosamund, for so long a figure of scandal living in sin (Nevil has fought for her "name", Everard has horsewhipped Shrapnel over it), ever be imagined to produce the desired effect? There is an element of self-destructiveness, of blind compulsive accident-proneness in Nevil. As if psychically he summons the very thing he feared—and maybe wanted all along; maybe he does essentially want to get rid of Renée to free himself for his radical commitments. And does not his radicalism stand for a total objection to the life style and values of the establishment, does it not stand for a world in which he could have an affair with Renée if he wanted, and he could choose not to have one and not compromise her if he wanted; and in that sort of ideal society

there would not be any "compromising"?

All these possibilities are raised by the deliberate frustration of plot suspense—the continual explosion of or bathetic curtailment of some potentially romantic cliché activity. Meredith, early on in the novel, remarks on what he is doing, just to let us know that it is intentional, that it is not ineptitude in handling romance, but a deliberate frustration of romance:

> I am reminded by Mr Romfrey's profound disappointment in the youth, that it will be repeatedly shared by many others: and I am bound to forewarn readers of this history that there is no plot in it. The hero is chargeable with the official disqualification of constantly-offending prejudices, never seeking to please; and all the while it is upon him the narrative hangs. (4:33)

And Meredith goes on to tell how Nevil "with every inducement to offer himself for a romantic figure . . . despises the pomades and curling-irons of modern romance" (4:34). Brought up, as we have seen, in an environment conducive to his becoming a romantic hero, and conducting his early career with an appropriate romantic individualist impetuosity, he destroys the romantic image continually—by allying himself with radicalism especially; and he goes on, after his romantic commitment to radicalism, to shun that romanticism that is politically unhelpful. He renounces Renée most unromantically: because she will not live in England, and he must remain there for his political aims. And because Dr Shrapnel is always advising him to avoid sexual scandal.

The problem, then, of the effective conversion of romantic enthusiasm into political action, becomes the problem of making an effective political novel: the novel begins as a romance, but the romantic is frustrated. And Meredith allies the problems of his hero in the fictional world with Meredith's own problems in presenting politics in a novelistic framework. Meredith returns to the problem towards the end of the novel—in a passage that looks forward to D. H. Lawrence's similar comments about the problems of writing a political novel in *Kangaroo*. Both of them point out they are dealing with the adventures of the mind, the impact of political belief on commitment, on thought. For neither Meredith or Lawrence is politics *action*; yet both of them are fascinated by action—if only politics *were* action, if only we did not have to see it with such a sardonic vision. Both novels seem to be setting off into romantic action at various stages—but in both novels the external, physical action is bathetic. What is significant, what we are directed to, what is built up for us by those bathetic comparisons, is the drama of the consciousness.

> Chapter follows chapter, and nothing doing. But man is a thought-adventurer, and his falls into the Charybdis of ointment, and his shipwrecks on the rock of ages, and his kisses across chasms, and his silhouette on a minaret: surely these are as thrilling as most things.

So Lawrence opens chapter 15 of *Kangaroo*.[6] Meredith's comment is similar—Lawrence's Scylla and Charybdis image is implicitly there in Meredith's way between two streams of the real and unreal, and his "thought-adventurer" is there in "the conscience residing in thoughtfulness":

> Those happy tales of mystery are as much my envy as the popular narratives of the deeds of bread and cheese people, for they both create a tide-way in the attentive mind; the mysterious pricking our credulous flesh to creep, the familiar urging of our obese imagination to constitutional exercise. And oh, the refreshment that there is in dealing with characters either contemptibly beneath us or supernaturally above! My way is like a Rhone island in the summer drought, stony, unattractive, and difficult between the two forceful streams of the unreal and the over-real, which delight mankind—honour to the conjurors! My people conquer nothing, win none; they are actual, yet uncommon. It is the clockwork of the brain that they are directed to set in motion, and—poor troop of actors to vacant benches!—the conscience residing in thoughtfulness which they would appeal to; and if you are there impervious to them, we are lost . . . (47:479–80)

"Politics in a work of literature is like a pistol-shot in the middle of a concert, something loud and vulgar, and yet a thing to which it is not possible to refuse one's attention," Stendhal wrote—and Irving Howe opened his *Politics and the Novel* with the comment.[7] Certainly both Meredith and Lawrence found their political material disruptive of the comfortable aesthetic of the novel as novel-reading concert-goers, or concert-going novel-readers, liked it. Both were concerned to modify the consciousness, to alter the form of the novel—so that it could represent the experience of politics without distortion of the experience. If it was going to be a pistol-shot then it was going to be a pistol-shot—not a cap gun, or a pistol in a soundproof chamber. In dealing with the political material, they made certain innovations in the current conventions of the novel, they opened up the form. Their

6 D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo*, 1923: Penguin edition, Harmondsworth 1963, p. 312. I have discussed this aspect of Lawrence's novel in "Between Scylla and Charybdis: *Kangaroo* and the form of the Political Novel", *Australian Literary Studies* IV, 4 (October 1970), 334–48.

7 Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel*, 1957; Stevens & Sons, London 1961, p. 15.

innovations were the opposite of the Joycean mode: they did not attempt that arty avant-gardeism. Rather, the changes they made were in the proportional allocation of space and energy to "story", "plot", "romance" and to the drama of the thought-process, the clockwork of the brain. For both of them the emphasis had to be placed not on the reader's expected "plot", but on the inner drama, on the modification of the consciousness. Translating political enthusiasm into action requires not the military, single-handed derring-do, the old knightly bravery, that Nevil has in common with his uncle Everard, but the constant, continual platforming, speech-making, canvassing, being pelted with fruit. The romantic settings of Venice are replaced by English provincial church halls. It is all ignominious, vulgar and slow after Nevil's military fame. But he accepts it readily. Nevil's initial programme—museums open on Sundays and vague words—has little practical about it, and anyway it is disrupted by the romantic flight to Renée. There is initially a tragic, and absurd, gulf between political conviction, enthusiasm and idealism—and political action. But it is a gulf that has to be bridged. Significantly, Meredith moves from disrupted romantic action to the canvassing episode. It is one of the significant exceptions to the overall upper-crusty settings of the novel in yachts, drawing-rooms, chateaux. The scenes in the yachts, drawing-rooms and chateaux have demonstrated all too clearly the barbarian political prejudice, the hostility to ideas, the blind reactionary nature of the 1870s English — and European — establishment. To translate political enthusiasm into political action in a parliamentary way, this blind prejudice has to be converted; because this blindly prejudiced establishment controls the political machine—the suffrage, the parties. The political problem is seen by Meredith as a problem of changing human attitudes, as a battle of minds, as a drama of consciousness: Hence the battlefield is the drawing-room — and more publicly, "democratically", the canvassing episode.

The dreary routine, the personal humiliations, the endless arguments of canvassing are the bridge for converting Nevil's enthusiasm into action; this is the way to get votes, and if he can get votes he can get elected, and if he can get elected . . . It is all very remote after hare-saving in mid-battle. The canvassing episode is the new battlefield for the election campaign; Nevil of course loses the fight.

Besides his lecture tours with Dr Shrapnel, the drawing-rooms of his family and class are the wider, more enduring battlefield for

Nevil. And it is a valid area of activity. For until the individual is converted, there can be no political change. Political change here is seen as the sum of individual changes. If he cannot succeed in the public meeting, perhaps Nevil can succeed in private conversation. And to change one consciousness in the establishment . . .

With this in mind we can see the significance of Romfrey's remark towards the end of the novel. Rosamund says

> "What I feel is that he—our Nevil!—has accomplished hardly anything, if anything!"
>
> "He hasn't marched on London with a couple of hundred thousand men: no, he hasn't done that," the earl said, glancing back in his mind through Beauchamp's career. "And he escapes what Stukely calls his nation's scourge, in the shape of a statue turned out by an English chisel. No: we haven't had much public excitement out of him. But one thing he did do: *he got me down on my knees*!"
>
> Lord Romfrey pronounced these words with a sober emphasis that struck the humour of it sharply into Rosamund's heart, through some contrast it presented between Nevil's aim at the world and hit of a man: the immense deal thought of it by the earl, and the very little that Nevil would think of it—the great domestic achievement to be boasted of by an enthusiastic devotee of politics! (55:534)

For the political Romantic, which Nevil never wholly ceases to be, as Rosamund realizes in recognizing how he would not attach Lord Romfrey's significance to this event, getting Romfrey on his knees to apologize to the outsider radical Shrapnel, is merely bathetic as the high point of a career that aimed at political significance. The comedy is there. But Romfrey's emphasis is from another perspective the correct one. The great domestic achievement, Rosamund called it. But it is just because it is a domestic achievement that it is politically significant. We saw earlier the familial inter-relationships of the conservative establishment. To begin to achieve political change, the conservative establishment must be made, taught, wooed, converted, to think differently; and this means the conversion must occur largely within the family and by the family. Dr Shrapnel would never be admitted into the house to begin propagandizing directly to any of these establishment conservatives. By getting Romfrey to apologize to Dr Shrapnel, Nevil has achieved a major change of consciousness in his uncle: it was an activity unthinkable at the novel's opening: and at the novel's end, we see Dr Shrapnel and Lord Romfrey side by side, united in their grief at Nevil's death, but also united in a developing understanding. To find them together, to find their concerns and fates touching, is a mark of the change Nevil

has achieved. To have them standing here together, on this same spot, is a fine visual image of the achieved relationship between the two men: I do not say unity, because it clearly is not that. But at the beginning of the novel they could never have been seen in the same frame as this dual image. Contrast it, for instance, with that often cited ending of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), where Aziz and Fielding are separated by their horses swerving apart at the novel's end. Or the epigraph to *Howards End* (1910), "only connect." Meredith has achieved, equally visually, the reverse of Forster's political image, and expressed the fulfilment of that epigram. Nevil, after all, has achieved something. He has made a connection. He has led no revolution, he has not even got into the corruptly elected parliament when the novel ends. But he has achieved individual successes: small, unromantic, bathetic, mundane successes — but the necessary basis for social change. Romfrey is one; in more practical, political terms, there is the success in getting Carpendike to vote for him. Walter F. Wright has commented on how "the converting of one man by argument and character was in the direction of progress for Meredith."[8] But perhaps his most significant, and the most realized in fictional terms, example of change is that of Cecilia. Nevil's own conversion to radicalism, and his conversion to subduing his personality to the rigours of disciplined campaigning, we do not see. The first meeting with Dr Shrapnel, and the campaigning tours, occur off-stage. Meredith is uninterested in these—he senses that for him at any rate they would be dull, tedious, even distasteful perhaps. Meredith has a theme he finds more interesting, more complex and subtle and offering of manoeuvre for sardonic ironies as well as a mark of the battles radicalism will have to encounter. So he focuses on Nevil's arguments with Cecilia, his attempts to convert her, bully her, woo her politically; and then he goes on to show Cecilia using Nevil's arguments in resisting the barbarism and political benightedness of her family. It is in Cecilia that we see the fullest drama of the consciousness, in her we see the process of resistance, considering, wavering, conversion and change. With Everard Romfrey the change is a personal one; but it is a necessary beginning; without such personal conversion there is unlikely to be a political change of heart. With Cecilia we see the further change of her political opinions, the modification of her ideology. With Renée, the love

8 Walter F. Wright, *Art and Substance in George Meredith,* University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Nebraska 1953, p. 125.

of his aristocratic, pre-radical days, Nevil does not really argue: on the ship off Venice, he bullies her into a submission to him, but mainly assumes responsibility for her thoughts, answering for her. When Nevil refuses to return to Venice, and Renée's brother tells him, "You heard her wish to return to Venice, I say," Nevil replies simply, "She has no wish that is not mine" (10:76), justifying this arrogance on his usual liberal sentimental grounds—that her brother always speaks for her so she never expresses her true feelings: "she can neither speak nor think for herself: you lead her blindfolded." If she is not allowed to express her thoughts, Nevil will express them for her and coincidentally they are exactly the thoughts he would have expressed himself anyway. With Meredith, man's relationship and attitude towards woman is a pretty clear index of his further politico-social attitudes. He had identified the concept male chauvinism some ninety years before the concept or phrase became widely current, and he had related it to other forms of political and social oppressions. Sir Willoughby Patterne in *The Egoist* (1879) is the supreme aristo-macho reactionary.

But Nevil develops. When Nevil rushes off to Tourdestelle at Renée's summons in the middle of his election campaign, Meredith remarks, "He thought little of politics in relation to Renée" (23:209). But politics are present in Nevil's first meeting with Cecilia on his return to England. Delighted to see him, she is somewhat shattered when it turns out he has called in order to get her father to vote for him, and not only is his being merely political in his visit shattering, the fact that he has chosen radicalism is some sort of lunatic betrayal. "Have you gone over to the enemy, Nevil–" she asks, and elaborates.

> "We are Tories, you know, Nevil. Papa is a thorough Tory. He cannot vote for you. Indeed I have heard him say he is anxious to defeat the plots of an old Republican in Bevisham—some doctor there; and I believe he went to London to look out for a second Tory candidate to oppose to the Liberals. Our present Member is quite safe, of course. Nevil, this makes me unhappy. Do you not feel that it is playing traitor to one's class to join those men?" (15:131)

Her attitudes are totally those of her class, and direct paraphrases of her father's views (male domination of woman identified with this reactionary politics that are imposed on the women — the political nature of male chauvinism emerges again and again).

> "Yet the wealthier we are the more an army is wanted, both to defend our wealth and to preserve order. I fancy he half inclines to compulsory enlistment. Do speak to him on that subject . . ."

> He (Nevil) nodded and spoke coolly. "An army *to preserve order?* So, then, an army to threaten civil war!"
> "To crush revolutionists."
> "Agitators, you mean. . . ." (16:144)

The grotesquerie is not caricature, as Meredith knew. Troops had been used to put down radicals before, at Peterloo, and were to be used again. On Bloody Sunday, 13 November 1887, a radical demonstration in Trafalgar Square was broken up by police and troops; three demonstrators were killed, two hundred received hospital treatment. Another radical was killed a week later, run down in the street by the forces of law and order. Troops were used to break the general strike in 1929. Compulsory enlistment carried on from World War II through the Cold War until the end of the 1950s in Britain. Colonel Halkett expresses with no mystification the basis of the establishment's power: military force. As Nevil remarks, drawing on discussions with Dr Shrapnel, "as the middle-class are the party in power, they would not, if they knew the use of arms, move an inch farther in Reform, for they would no longer be in fear of the class below them" (17:114). The "if" is somewhat gracious—or a mark of Meredith's own mystification—the desperate refusal to recognize that the middle-class indeed did know the use of arms.

Cecilia expresses her class views in conversation, in argument with Nevil. There is a dialectic, there is change. She is surprised afterwards to find herself taking on certain of Nevil's emotional attitudes and positions. Angered at the ballad about Nevil and the French Marquees, she expresses her disgust at politics involving such "disgraceful squibs". Her father replies

> "There's pitch and tar in politics as well as on shipboard."
> "I do not see that there should be," said Cecilia resolutely.
> "We can't hope to have what should be."
> "Why not? I would have it: I would do my utmost to have it," she flamed out. (16:149–50)

She looks forward to Ursula in *The Rainbow* in her impassioned refusal to accept things as they are, just because they are as they are. Her father notices the Beauchamp-like emphases in her flaming out:

> "Your *utmost*?" Her father was glancing at her foregone mimicry of Beauchamp's occasional strokes of emphasis. "Do your utmost to have your bonnet on in time for us to walk to church. I can't bear driving there."
> Cecilia went to her room with the curious reflection, awakened by what her father had chanced to suggest to her mind, that she likewise could be fervid, positive, uncompromising—who knows?

> Radicalish, perhaps, when she looked eye to eye on an evil. For a moment or so she espied within herself a gulf of possibilities, wherein black nightbirds, known as queries, roused by shot of light, do flap their wings.—Her utmost to have be what should be! And why not? (16:150)

It is a slow, a gradual change. But it is Cecilia's conversion from mindless Toryism, into thinking about politics. She asks Austin to "Recommend me some hard books to study through the Winter" (28:263), and her father is appalled to find she has been reading "three privately-printed full reports of Commander Beauchamp's speeches" (28:271). When Dr Shrapnel is horsewhipped by Romfrey, she is horrified at the self-satisfied Tory-authoritarian-barbarism of the action. Late in the novel Rosamund tells Nevil that

> Colonel Halkett and Cecilia called on us at Steynham. She was looking beautiful; a trifle melancholy. The talk was of your—that—I do not like it, but you hold those opinions—the Republicanism. She had read your published letters. She spoke to me of your sincerity. Colonel Halkett of course was vexed. It is the same with all your friends. She, however, by her tone, led me to think that she sees you as you are, more than in what you do. (44:433)

This attestation of Cecilia's belief in Nevil's sincerity (whereas her father and his set think Nevil a criminal lunatic), is given especial force by its context of Rosamund's nervousness and abhorrence of even mentioning the word "Republicanism". To have persuaded Cecilia of his sincerity and integrity when there was every pressure to make her hold the beliefs of her father and Rosamund, is one of Nevil's political achievements.

Though she lapses back. Converting the establishment to radicalism is a slow, maybe even a hopeless task; maybe Nevil is misguided and only mass revolution will change things. Maybe it is not worth trying to convert the establishment. Maybe they can never be permanently, sincerely, genuinely changed. Horrified that Nevil is possibly still in love with Renée, and wanting to marry Cecilia merely for her fortune which he will need in order to finance his radical newspaper, Cecilia withdraws from him, and finally marries the Tory Tuckham. All we have is the hope that she will not simply relapse into mindless Toryism; maybe—surely—Nevil's example, arguments, persuasion will have made some small enduring impression. But we are left with the question, a possibility—not any certainty.

Such small personal—and insecure, shaky—conversions are Nevil's achievement. But slight and temporary as they may be, he has at least done *something*. When he is lying sick at Dr

Shrapnel's, weak but recovered, Jenny Denham tells her uncle not to bring home deputations of working men to see Nevil. And Nevil at first agrees. Shrapnel explodes:

> "Wrong!" the doctor cried! "wrong! wrong! Six men won't hurt you more than one. And why check them when their feelings are up? They burn to be speaking some words to you. Trust me, Beauchamp, if we shun to encounter the good warm soul of numbers, our hearts are narrowed to them. The business of our modern world is to open heart and stretch out arms to numbers. In numbers we have our sinews; they are our iron and gold. Scatter them not; teach them the secret of cohesion. Practically, since they gave you not their entire confidence once, you should not rebuff them to suspicions of you as aristocrat, when they rise on the effort to believe a man of, as 'tis called, birth their undivided friend. Meet them!"
>
> "Send them," said Beauchamp. (54:524)

He has, then, inspired some people, co-operated in the development of a movement, won some people's confidence. And now he must move from the easy one-to-one confrontation, and face a mass organization; leave the drawing-rooms of the establishment altogether, and get out into wider organizing activity. It is all so different from his earlier romantic notions; but he has been changing throughout. His initial evasiveness about the game-laws —sharing something of his uncle's land-owning, hunting, shooting and fishing attitudes—has changed and we find him, when Shrapnel is ill, conducting Shrapnel's correspondence on behalf of poachers. And it is the unglamorous handling of correspondence we see him involved in—contrasting with his earlier impetuous derring-do-catching, and releasing of his own accord, that single poacher.

This developing co-operative, disciplined activity is disrupted by Nevil's final gesture, a resurgence of the old, single-handed romanticism as he drowns while attempting to save two small boys. Romfrey and Shrapnel watch the attempts to find his body in the novel's last scene. Romfrey approaches Shrapnel:

> He put his arm within the arm of the heavily-breathing man whom he had once flung to the ground, to support him.
>
> "My lord! My lord!" sobbed the woman, and dropped on her knees.
>
> "What's this?" the earl said, drawing his hand away from the woman's clutch at it.

And it's the boy Nevil saved, lost his life for.

> Dr Shrapnel's eyes and Lord Romfrey's fell on the abashed little creature. The boy struck out both arms to get his fists against his eyelids.

> This is what we have in exchange for Beauchamp!
> It was not uttered, but it was visible in the blank stare at one another of the two men who loved Beauchamp, after they had examined the insignificant bit of mudbank life remaining in the world in place of him. (61:547)

It is a deeply disturbing ending, and one that has aroused extraordinary critical hostility. Sassoon, for instance, remarks "it makes one feel as if Meredith had lost patience with the tale and thrown it aside with a savage gesture" (p. 157). The comment is absurd, but it indicates the savage gesture of rejection of the ending many readers feel compelled to make, especially those who retain attachment to the earlier romantic individualist hero image of Nevil. And the rejection is enacted in Romfrey's rejection of the working-class woman and the saved "insignificant bit of mudbank life." All the class tensions of the novel, all the uneasy, unresolved conflicts of élitism and co-operation implicit in Nevil's radicalism, are resurrected at this moment of the death of the hero. Romfrey's "What's this?" rather than "Who's this?" nicely catches the way his class sees the working class as not people but impersonal things. Nevil had certainly moved beyond that point; and Nevil's attempt at saving the two working-class children is psychologically true of his unsubdued, romantic chivalrous impetus, and also of his developing sense of solidarity with the working class. But it is an attempt that shows the limits of such individual attempts; for the cause of radicalism is certainly not advanced by his death. And yet what would have been the worth of Nevil's ideals had he not attempted to save the children, had he rowed past saying, my political career is more important, my political success will save the mass, so this drowning pair must be abandoned? Jack Lindsay remarks correctly that Beauchamp "cannot advance to mass struggle. He dies in an individual act of heroism, which expresses his anguished desire for union with the common people but which also kills him, returning him to romantic loss" (p. 220). And Lindsay's complaint that Beauchampism "still can conceive only of individual action, individual heroism and self sacrifice," and fails to grasp "the secret of cohesion" is true; but in this concrete instance, Beauchamp has no alternative; this was a case where individual heroism was the only choice.

We are forced back to reappraise our concealed assumptions, our suppressed élitism: was this "insignificant bit of mudbank life" worth Nevil's life? Romfrey withdraws his hand from the woman's grasp spontaneously, instinctively, expressing an unam-

biguous rejection of the worth of the sacrifice. Lindsay writes, "There can be no irony in the end of such a man; the saved child is the future for which he has striven; the child is the working-class with whom the next word lies" (p. 220). The novel considers both these conclusions, ends with nagging questions rather than certainties. We have seen Nevil progressively dropping his aristocratic characteristics, slowly becoming involved in the radical struggle, subduing his impetuous individuality, eroding the certainties of his uncle and of Cecilia. His final act is the result of a consistent direction, a synthesis of his new radicalism and the best of the old noble qualities of his knight in shining armour style behaviour. But is Nevil's programme impossible? Is the only hope for the radicalization of the establishment its own extinction, its self-sacrifice, its voluntary self-destruction? Will the change come after all not from the Nevils but from the anonymous mudbank life that has not been examined? Has the whole novel been focused on the wrong representative consciousness? Has it been the study of a class on the verge of extinction, rather than that of an emergent new radical impulse? Or is Nevil the deviant of that class doomed to extinction? Maybe the establishment will hold on to power and the radicals will be the sacrificial victims of that power's perpetuation. Meredith doesn't have the future perspective of a William Morris or a Jack London to be able to say, yes, repression will continue to dominate for years to come but in the end radicalism will triumph, bits of mudbank life will no longer be insignificant. His ending is deeply problematic, generating a series of questions, not any proclaimed hope or convinced faith.