The Adventures of Harry Richmond as a *Bildungsroman*

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(I)
Introduction

Man and his meeting with the world which leads to his self-discovery has always been good fiction material. Goethe was not the first to discover it, but because of its passionate interest in individual human experience *Wilhelm Meister* is regarded as the archetype of the *Bildungsroman*. Critics have been struck by the awkwardness of the German term as applied to English literature, and several possible synonyms they have thought of are the novel of youth, the novel of education, of apprenticeship, of initiation, or even the life-novel. The genre was known to English readers early in the 19th century, especially after Carlyle's translation of *Wilhelm Meister* (1824). It gave such a fresh impetus that contemporary writers tried to adapt it for their own purposes, and there have been countless followers with endless variations. The basic idea of the apprentice novel is that "living is an art which may be learned and that the young person passes through the stages of an apprenticeship in learning it until at last he becomes a 'Master'" (Howe 4). Thus the adolescent hero sets out on his way through the world, meets with setbacks usually owing to his own temperament, falls in with various guides and counselors, makes many

poor choices in choosing his friends, his wife and his life work, and finally adjusts himself in some way to the demands of his time and environment. "Their life, says Goethe,... is a success not through final static achievement, but in the measure in which they fulfill or sacrifice themselves according to the exigency of each moral occasion, and in the degree in which they make this process the growth of their personalities." (Harrold 45). Meredith seems to have been attracted to this apprenticeship theme, as he produced *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, Evan Harrington, The Adventures of Harry Richmond* and *Beauchamp's Career,* all of whose protagonists win wisdom and strength through the process of trial and error.

As a boy, Meredith studied for a couple of years at the Moravian School at Neuwied in Germany, about 10 years after Goethe died. This schooling especially prepared him for one of the important influences upon him, that of German literature, resulting in his continued interest in Goethe. The German writer from the beginning was one of his heroes and therefore it is not surprising to find some possible traces of *Wilhelm Meister* in his works---Richard's delighted discovery (like Wilhelm Meister's) that he is a father in *Richard Feverel,* Kiomi, the child of nature in *Harry Richmond,* (somewhat like the less robust Mignon), and Harry's sense of misdirection (like Wilhelm Meister's). However, the demonstrable influence of Goethe may be less important than the fact that Meredith was aware of early examples of the *Bildungsroman* and the use of the genre. Since "the *Bildungsroman* is characterized by its autobiographical elements" (Kawamoto 12), in *Harry Richmond,* symbolically a first-person story, Meredith writes of his emotions. "It is, I have learnt, out of the conflict of sensations such as I underwent that a young man's brain and morality, supposing him not to lean overmuch to sickly sentiment, becomes gradually enriched

and strengthened, and himself shaped for capable manhood" (*Harry Richmond* 457). For Meredith, "the fiction which is the summary of actual Life, the within and without of us," is to have a practical aim: it is to be an instrument of the effort to raise our humanity. It is quite natural that he should turn to the *Bildungsroman* as a means to depict a youth's development through self-understanding. Since "our world is all but a sensational world at present, in maternal travail of a soberer, a braver, a brighter-eyed..., the fiction, prose or verse..., should minister to growth" (*Diana of the Crossways* 12-17).

(II)
Growth through Father-and-Son Relations

In 1859, a year after his first wife ran off with the painter Henry Wallis and left their five-year-old son Arthur in his care, Meredith published *Richard Feverel,* in which Sir Austin Feverel, whose wife also deserts him, is described as a father who works out an elaborate system of education to make his son a perfect man. The process in which Richard tries to free himself from the grips of the System enables him to learn about himself and the world. However, the pressures of the System have been too strong to resist and as a result Richard's development is arrested in the midst of his ordeal rather than completed. Almost a decade later Meredith published *Harry Richmond,* another study of the relations between father and son with the essential difference that the father fails to destroy his son's happiness in spite of his repeated errors. Meredith told Augustus Jessop about the design of *Harry Richmond:*

> Consider first my scheme as a workman. It is to show you the

> action of minds as well as of fortunes of here and there men and women vitally animated by their brains at different periods of their lives---and of men and women with something of a look-out upon the world and its destinies:--the mortal ones (Meredith, *Letters* I 451).

The letter evidently shows that Meredith intended the adventures of the book (acts of fortune) to serve as incidents of intrinsic interest. The hero's analysis of the nature and significance of the acts of fortune is what results in his understanding of himself, out of which the acts of mind are shaped. Harry's growth through the two kinds of acts is enacted by two stages: the early stage where the mind of the boy is receptive and enchanted by the wonders of the external world, and the later stage where the mind of the adult faces a difficult moral choice which involves self-realization as well as self-justification.

Throughout the story but especially in the first stage, Meredith emphasizes a father-and-son relationship by describing how badly or well the father Richmond Roy influences the son Harry Richmond. The father, unlike Sir Austin, does not seem to have any educational policy for Harry, who lost his mother as a child. As Jerome H.Buckley suggests, almost all *Bildungsroman* heroes, such as Wilhelm Meister and Pip, are "semi-orphans" (Buckley's word), or orphans. In this respect Kawamoto Shizuko makes the point that "there are three kinds of ordeals the *Bildungsroman* heroes go through; Ordeal of Father, Ordeal of Women, and Ordeal of Money" (Kawamoto 20). Their motherless circumstances make them susceptible to their father's influence, which they inevitably resist.

Roy, who insists that he is the true heir to the British throne, conceives it his duty to train Harry as though he were a prince of royal

blood. And Harry is fascinated, influenced, and overshadowed by his flamboyant effrontery, and dragged helplessly in its wake. Roy, who exercises the amazing resources of his imagination to entertain Harry, is seen through the admiring eyes of his son as his hero in the beginning but later with embarrassment. Meredith presents Harry's progress in counterpoint against the career of the father, at first his life and blood, then double, and ultimately his opposite. The two characters move together in a striking account of father shaping son and son growing away from father.

Roy proceeds to inculcate his own false values. He gives the child a misleading "taste of grandeur" and fills him with extravagant dreams of unearned wealth and station. In the description of Harry's early education, the reader finds Roy succeeding in convincing the boarding school master that Harry is a young prince. When Harry entertains his friends there at his own expense, he toys with the idea that he can be a nobleman even if he cannot be a prince. His encounter with gypsies leads him to daydream of becoming their king if he masters their language. Inflated by his father's fantasy, Harry is playing a prince.

Meredith shows Roy as an unforgettable figure in the statue scene in which Roy stands as a bronze statue, gilded from head to foot, to amuse a German margrave. "[T]he statue was superb---horse and rider in new bronze polished by sunlight. 'It is life-like! it is a true Prince!' and no Prince Eugene---nay, nor Malborough, had such a martial figure, such an animated high old warrior's visage" (*Harry Richmond* 153-54). After a few years of searching for his father, Harry ends up arriving at the margrave's estate at the moment when Roy poses. Harry calls for him: "Father! here's Harry Richmond come to see you. Where are you?" Roy cannot resist his paternal impulse and responds to him. Roy

topples because he sees his son, for his heart is not brazen. Meredith skillfully pursues Harry's unusual, shocked state of mind, a kind of suspension of ordered thought and feeling: The "powers of my heart and will were frozen; I thought and felt at random," registering "trifling phenomena of sensations," some apparently irrational, instead of full picture. "I thought to myself: This is my father and I am not overjoyed or grateful. In the same way I felt the daylight was bronze, and I did not wonder at it" (157). Meredith uses this episode as a turning point in Harry's judgment of his father, as his letter to William Hardman shows : "(after the scene of the Statue....) Note as you read, the gradual changes of the growing Harry, in his manner of regarding his father and the world. " (Letters I , 453-54). What Meredith indicates here is that Harry, as the narrator, begins to play two different roles, accounting incidents and analyzing situations. As he tries to view his life more closely, the range of acts of fortune is narrowed down, while that of the acts of mind expands.

Though the whole scene is a moving one, it has an underlying irony, for the enacting of the romantically heroic image of the father leads not to joy but to disillusion and sense of loss. Harry's fears and conflicting feelings are conveyed at the end of this episode in one of the memorable dreams that Meredith can make so vivid and meaningful:

> My dreams led me wandering in a light of pearls and exploded old wrecks. I was assuring the glassy man that it was almost as clear beneath the waves as above, when I awoke to see my father standing over me in the daylight; and in an ecstasy I burst into sobs (170).

The statue scene exposes the delicate poise which Roy maintains

almost until the end, the poise between dignity and grotesque inflation. Barbara Hardy interprets the scene as "the literal enactment of so much in Richmond Roy: mountebank, romantic, noble in appearance, unrealistic and false in aspiration. The statue becomes a symbol of the man" (Hardy 99). In a series of nonsensical incidents Roy is responsible for, this most absurd one reveals his weakness and his touch of nobility. The golden age when the father entertains the son and the son idealizes the father is over.

While Roy is in debtors' prison, Harry, who lives with his mother's father, Squire Beltham, has grown mature enough to say to himself, "[t]he world, and the mind and passions of the world, grew visible to me" (205). Now he realizes that the gay companion of his childhood is an impostor and possibly mad. However, in spite of that awareness he is soon won over by the affability and charm of his plausible parent, who is absorbed in the present, and to whom the future is a carnival of rosy illusions. Already he is scheming to marry his son to a German princess, Ottilia, and to find him a seat in Parliament. A few years later, when they meet her by chance---Harry being now of age---the plan begins to materialize. Roy rents a yacht so that Harry will enjoy cruising with Ottilia in an elegant atmosphere, which he hopes will make the youngsters closer. Meredith provides the ecstatic sea-scene where Ottilia sails in Harry's yacht--an amorous correlative very like the swimming scene in *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* and another yacht scene in *Beauchamp's Career*. The sea as amorous image recurs through Meredith's work.

Standing by Roy's side on deck, Harry is suddenly ashamed of his "recent critical probings of his character" and seized with old sentiment: "My boy's love for him returned in full force." Not long after, however, at the time of Roy's efforts to impress the German prince,

Ottilia's father, he has no such sympathy: "At no other period of our lives were we so disunited. I felt in myself the reverse of everything I perceived in him." Harry has begun to suspect that the father's attempt to marry him to a German princess may be motivated by selfishness. "I am an English commoner, the son of a man of doubtful birth, and I claim the hand of the princess?"(255) Again and again he deplores his father's double-dealing and despises his sententious volubility, but he is nonetheless unable to escape the magician's spell, which is what L.T.Hergenhan calls "the near-circular nature of Harry's growth" (Introduction to *Harry Richmond* 25).

> My glorious future, he said, was to carry a princess to England and sit among the highest there, the husband of a lady peerless in beauty and birth.... I had the option being the father of English nobles or of German princes; so forth. I did not like the strain; yet I clung to him....(267) In spite of myself, I caught the contagion of his exuberant happiness and faith in his genius.... It struck me he had really found his vocation, and would turn the sneer on those who had called him volatile and reckless....(268) He shook me by both hands. I was touched with pity, and at the same time in doubts whether it was an actor that swayed me; For I was discontented, and could not speak in my discontent; I was overborne, overflowed (356).

Harry's liberation coincides with Roy's decline; his stepping beyond the bounds of his charm. The father is more and more excitable, increasingly dependent on stimulants, less able to distinguish fact from fantasy. The following episode is an example to serve as an illustration. Baroness Turckems catches Harry and Ottilia meeting in the library

secretly and rings the bell, so Roy sets the curtains on fire to explain why the bell rang and to excuse those present there to leave quickly. Seeing the curtains extinguished, Ottilia withdraws. When Roy gives the household a fabricated story about the fire, Harry feels humiliated on Ottilia's behalf and enraged on his own. He has a touch of fear of a man who could unhesitatingly go to extremes by summoning fire to the rescue.

Before the squire unmasks him Roy has begun to deteriorate. As he rushes off to London to be poetically "in the thick of the fray," Harry comments, "it was not a moment for me to catechize him, though I could see that he was utterly deluded"(404). To the rest of the world he is still a comic figure; to Harry he now acts out a tragedy. "I chafed at his unteachable spirit, surely one of the most tragical things in life; and the proof of my love for him was that I thought it so, though I should have been kinder had he amused me, as in the old days"(429). Roy is no longer amusing; he has grown dangerous. When he tries to blackmail the prince by announcing Ottilia's engagement to Harry, he is viciously intent upon having his will at any cost: "Never," writes Harry in frightened retrospect, "did power of earth or of hell seem darker to me than he at that moment, when solemnly declaiming that he was prepared to forfeit my respect and love, die sooner than 'yield his prince'"(466). After Squire Beltham's cruel, though strictly honest diatribe, Roy, stripped of his illusions, collapses both mentally and physically. Stupefied, he repeats, "I am broken." We last see him taken in Harry's embarrassed charge from a banquet at the city hall, where he has delivered a sad, insane speech on the iniquity of princes. Harry is almost destroyed by his father and with him, but he never wholly repudiates him; standing by his side in defeat, he tries hard to remember the royal impostor at his kingly best and in the end he is

saved by his love, or at least by letting himself be reconciled "to the idea of that strange father of mine." Harry grows in self-awareness until by the end he can describe his own egoism and so vanquish it: "In reality the busy little creature within me, whom we call self, was digging pits for comfort to flow in, of any kind, in any form..."(534). Meredith presents the contrast where the son develops and the father does not.

(III)
Growth through Interaction of Mind

The adventures of the latter part of the book center mainly around Harry's involvement with the Princess Ottilia and Janet Ilchester, and it is through his developing relationship with these two that he acquires the self-understanding. Harry's guide to his moral maturity is neither Roy's wild imagination nor the squire's belligerent practicality; it is a subtle refinement and fusion of both, the example--reflecting Meredith's respect for the female intelligence--of Ottilia and Janet. As he is torn between father and grandfather, so Harry wavers between the two young women, the one gently idealistic and his father's choice, the other tenderly commonsensical and his grandfather's choice. Until almost the end of the story, Harry feels he is "divided by an electric shot into two halves, with such an equal force" is he drawn this way and that, pointing nowhere.

The princess teaches Harry, who has been egregiously self-indulgent, his first lesson in renunciation; she chills his self-love by placing her duty to her family and her people above her personal desire, and only with difficulty does he convince himself that her quiet integrity is not to be coerced or compromised. Ottilia says that she regrets that she

"was blind" when she thought it would be possible to marry Harry. Her duty is to show her father that she does not forget she is a princess. The library scene quoted in (II) exposes the weakness and illusions in the lovers, through which Harry comes increasingly to recognize that Ottilia is too rational and self-reliant to conform to his romantic fantasies, and he is able in the end to accept her inevitable loss without the bitterness and wounded pride that have in the past placed him in the hands of his father. Indeed after the scene it gradually emerges that Harry maintains only a token lover's allegiance; one of the interesting phases of his development is his regretting his loss, but at the same time unconsciously accepting it in advance, and even assisting it by refraining from the obvious positive steps until it is too late. As usual Harry is slow in making his growing attitudes conscious.

Harry's attraction to Ottilia leads him to explore the power of reason. Ottilia and his mentor, Dr.Julius von Karsteg, teach him to argue. The most significant result of Harry's involvement with Ottilia may lie in his learning about his limitations. He is incapable of marrying Ottilia. Her rank and state, and Harry's oscillation are assumed to be the reasons for it. Dr.Julius has him realize what he is struggling with and he comes to accept what Dr.Julius tells him and finds his true element. Harry first boasts about the superiority of British people: "we are the hardest workers in the world," "we have our aristocracy," and "we are the only people on earth who have shown mankind a representation of freedom." Dr.Julius rebuts Harry's naivete: "you work hard for money," "you remain in a past age, and are proud of it," and "your nobles are nothing but rich men inflated with empty traditions of insufferable, because unwarrantable, pride..."(247-48). Dr.Julius reasons:

> You English,... who won't believe in the existence of aims that don't drop on the ground before your eyes, and squat and stare at you, you assert that man's labour is completed when the poor are kept from crying out.... [Y]ou shall have help in a settled course. Certain professors, friends of mine, at your University, will see through it. Aim your head at a star--your head!--and even if you miss it you don't fall. It's that light dancer, that gambler, the heart in you, my good young man, which aims itself at inaccessible heights, and has the fall--somewhat icy to reflect on! Give that organ full play and you may make sure a harmful of dust.... It's a mind that wins a mind. That is why I warn you of being most unfortunate if you are a sensational whipster.(249-53)

The talks with the professor who reminds the readers of the radical Dr. Shrapnel in *Beauchamp's Career,* influence Harry to think that he "would endeavour to equalize ranks at home, encourage the growth of ideas." He now knows that he is struggling to get a seat in Parliament only to lift him near to Ottilia.

"Ottilia seems to Harry to be of the air as intensely as Janet seems of earth"(Wright 96). It is just as the imaginative Roy is contrasted with the matter-of-fact squire. Harry thinks Janet commonplace: she talks "of love in a ludicrous second-hand way." Janet's straightforward character is reflected in her spontaneous expression of her feelings. On Harry's birthday her greeting is: "A thousand happy years to you, and me to see them, if you don' t mind. I'm first to wish it, I' m certain!"(209) In contrast, Ottilia is subtle. She "tends to like short expressions,"(Shaheen 128) which are provocative and exciting to Harry. He struggles to grasp the meaning, for example, of her "violets are over," with its innumerable meanings. As Ottilia's lover, Harry

cannot be free from asking the question, "What is rank?" Harry knows that he has been deceiving everybody, "as a man must do when in chase of a woman above him in rank."

Janet, on the other hand, provides society where Harry is sure to be himself since she sees him of his "natural height." Janet endears herself to Harry by acts of compassion as once in his absence she finds Roy in a violent insanity and nurses him through weeks of delirium. Nonetheless, out of deference to the squire who, in a great disappointment about Harry, has chosen her as the heir of Riversley, she has denied Roy access to the estate. Later, the news of Janet's engagement torments Harry. "At the moment when she enslaved me with gratitude and admiration she was lost to me"(521). Harry's eventual unity with Janet, after her fiance's death, is given some implication of true moral choice by his rejection of almost all that his father stands for.

Unlike most *Bildungsroman* heroes, Harry seems to be exempted from the ordeal of money as heir apparent to Riversley. However, he does have the problem with money complicated by the ambitions of Roy, the squire, and his own. Harry has tried to let his father's prodigal way of living last as long as he has a penny to support him. Then it turns out that Roy has embezzled Harry's money, which the squire demands Roy return by the due date. Harry meditates on his possible choice:

> Supposing the squire disinherited me, could I stand? An extraordinary appetite for wealth, a novel appreciation of it.... pricked me with an intensity of hope and dread concerning my dependence on my grandfather. I lay sleepless all night, tossing from Riversley to Sarkeld, condemned, it seemed, to marry Janet

> and gain riches and power by renouncing my hope of the princess and the glory belonging to her, unless I should within a few hours obtain a show of figures at my bankers(410).

Harry wonders if this means good-bye to ambition. "It was open to me to marry Janet. But this means the loosening of myself with my own hand for ever from her who was my mentor and my glory, to gain whom I was in the very tideway"(410). The problem is eventually solved by the secret payment by Dorothy, the squire's other daughter, who loves Roy secretly. Ignoring Harry's inquiry about the payer, Roy cites numerous instances in his life of special action of Providence in his favor. When Harry rejects the Providence of his father's faith--- "I am watched over," "power placed in my hands by Providence," "I was under heaven's special protection," and so on---it is to see the part played in his Providence by human hands. Ottilia has been Harry's Providence, Dorothy, fatally, is his father's, and he comes to admit that if Providence may be thanked, it is not proudly as Roy does, but humbly. Harry in fact interprets many events as the guiding of his special Providence, and it is not until the end of the novel that his view of Providence, an echo of his father's, is put in its place. "[W]hen by and by I learnt how entirely inactive special Providence had been in my affairs, I had to collect myself before I could muster the conception of gratitude toward the noble woman who clothed me in the illusion"(534). This may explain why Barbara Hardy considers *Harry Richmond* to be "an anti-Providence novel."

The long novel "with one hundred and sixty-nine characters in it " if Jack Lindsay's count is correct, ends where it begins, at Riversley and at night, and this time the squire's dream of fire has been lit by Richmond Roy's carelessness. Harry and Janet have just come back to

England from their honeymoon, only to see "the dark sky ominously reddened over Riversley" and have "the funeral flames of the old Grange dashed" in their faces. Roy himself presumably --though his body is never found--burnt to death in his own fire, looking for Dorothy, who he should have known was not there.

(IV)
Conclusion

Not much can be learned at home, so the *Bildungsroman* heroes with a very few exceptions like Emma, travel as Wilhelm Meister travels with a touring company. While traveling, they encounter various kinds of people and events, through which they deepen their understanding of themselves and the world. Harry's journey is characterized by the changes in his views of Roy. Harry, who compares his father to Ulysses, and himself to Telemachus in the story, first does nothing but search for his father, who represents the world to him, and then he begins to have critical eyes toward his father, particularly when Roy is scheming to help Harry marry Ottilia. To overcome the barrier of rank Harry has to do what he does not believe in, partly because Roy puts him in the situation he cannot escape from and partly because he has not acquired good judgment. Although Harry has doubts about the integrity of his father, toward the end Harry thanks Roy for his devotion to him. "I wound up by thanking my father for his devotion to me: I deemed it,..., excessive and mistaken in the recent instance, but it was for me"(499). Harry at the same time appreciates the virtues of Janet, freeing himself from the spell of Ottilia as his journey ends.

Meredith wants his readers to see how Harry grows through mistakes, because that is the way the novel can contribute to raising the

level of humanity. Probably the interest in how young men grow will never cease in literature as Virginia Wolf, James Joyce and other modern writers pick up the theme with a wider variation. Their heroes tend to experience a feeling of frustration, for "the writers know the ideal unity of truth, good and beauty that Goethe optimistically pursued is now impossible"(Koike 6). It is safely said that the *Bildungsroman* is an appropriate form for the purpose of depicting the youth's real self, and in that genre did Meredith find a theme to suit him and a method he could use.

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