



# The Poetry Of George Meredith: "A witty woman is a treasure; a witty beauty is a power."

*George Meredith*

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George Meredith was born on February 12th, 1808 in Portsmouth, England. At age five his mother died and by fourteen he was sent to school in Neuwied, Germany for two years. He read law and was articled as a solicitor, but abandoned that career path for journalism and poetry. He published for private circulation a literary magazine called 'The monthly Observer'. His co-founder was Edward Peacock, the son of poet Thomas Love Peacock, and after a volatile relationship he married Edward's widowed sister, Mary Ellen Nicolls, in 1849. He was twenty-one and she twenty-eight. He published his first collection of poems in 1851 though most had been previously published in periodicals. In 1856 he posed as the model for The Death of Chatterton, a popular painting by the Pre-Raphaelite painter Henry Wallis. However Mary ran off with Wallis two years later leaving him to raise their five year old son. This shattering event was recalled in the collection of "sonnets" Modern Love in 1862. He married Marie Vulliamy in 1864 and settled in Surrey. He continued writing novels and poetry, often inspired by nature. His writing was characterised by a fascination with imagery and indirect references. It was not until 1885 that any of his novels achieved real success. This was 'Diana of the Crossways' and was the fifteenth of the nineteen that he wrote. His income was thus uncertain and variable and so he worked also as a publisher's reader. However his poems and novels are much admired. Indeed Oscar Wilde said of Meredith "Ah, Meredith! Who can define him? His style is chaos illumined by flashes of lightning". George Meredith is now seen as a substantial novelist and poet of the Victorian era though he preferred 'action of the mind' ie dialogue to advance his work rather than other literary devices and therefore his work can seem overly dense and allusive. In 1909, he died at his home in Box Hill, Surrey and is buried in the cemetery at Dorking, Surrey.

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