Chapter - III

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The prevailing social conditions, in which George Meredith started writing, have been explained in the previous chapter. Like his contemporaries, he was not at all satisfied with the existing social set up. As a true physician, he made a detailed study of the present social condition and tried to find out correct diagnosis. He had a prescribed plan for reforming the society from its ills. He had given a more faithful picture of the English man, with his merits and defects. One of the most important tasks Meredith did was to desentimentalise of men and women in his society. By writing his famous ‘Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit’, Meredith brought the position of women into intimate relation with comedy. He clearly suggested that one depended upon other. Unlike his contemporaries, he removed the conventional rose pink that early Victorian writers particularly loved to cloak the womankind in. Peter Westland says, “What Fielding did for men, George Meredith did for women, drawing them frankly and sincerely from the life—and not from the conventions.” In his attempt to draw a solution over the social problems of the day, George Meredith evolved his own theory of ‘Comic Spirit’. Many times this essay is considered as something directly related to literature or literary comedy but the serious reading of the essay brings out its various facets. The essay also contains all the essence of his philosophy towards life. So in this chapter an attempt is made to make the doctrine of Comic Spirit clear. In order to understand the intimate relationship between comedy and woman it becomes necessary to understand Meredith’s concept of the comic spirit, its form and functions. Because the concept of
the comic spirit does not limit itself into his essays but it is clearly spelt and explained in most of his poems as well as novels.

According to Meredith the Earth has given the spirit of comedy to the human being so as to maintain a proper balance between man and earth. It works as our guardian angel. It is situated in such a position as Jupiter or Uranus who would unnecessarily judged out thought and our actions with reference to the world in which we live. On February 1, 1877, Meredith delivered his only public lecture, addressing the London institution for the advancement of literature and the diffusion of useful knowledge on the subject. It was first published in the New Quarterly Magazine, and then in 1887 it came out in the book form. This essay has subsequently been studied in all English countries as a classic contribution to the study of comedy. As a strong believer in comic spirit should do, Meredith enlightened his literary criticism with anecdotes from real life to illustrate his theme. The lecture brought into focus a theory that Meredith had held throughout his writing. The theory is the value of laughter as a form of intellectual clarification and emotional therapy. He conceived it as neither satire nor burlesque, but a dispassionate and clear-sighted perception of folly, sentimentality and conceit. In the course of the lecture he introduced several of his pet doctrines. He declared that pure comedy could flourish only in a society, which permits mental equality between the sexes. His basic assumption was that the comic spirit could promote true human progress by destroying inflated self-importance and providing a sane sense of proportion. It functions only when the senses are under the complete control of the intellectual.
The essay was welcomed by a fully representative chorus of dramatic critics headed by G. B. Shaw in The Saturday Review. He found it an excellent, even superfine essay by perhaps the highest living English authority on this subject.” As indicated in the title the essay is in two parts. The idea of comedy started with an assessment of comedy in England. Meredith finds English literature rich in comic element but poor in number of comedies. In Shakespeare and Cervantes, Meredith found the richer laughter of heart and mind in one; with much of the Aristophanic robustness, something of Moliere’s delicacy. He admitted Congreve’s ‘Way of the World’ with reservation and pointed out Fielding, Goldsmith and Jane Austen steeped in the comic spirit. He explains briefly that although Shakespeare is a wellspring of characters, which are saturated with the comic spirit, he does not fit into the subject of this essay because his characters are enlarged by great poetic imagination and are subject of a special study in the poetically comic.

In the second part of the essay Meredith explained that for a great comic writer to flourish, “A society of cultivated men and women is required, wherein the ideas are current and perceptions quick, that he may be supplied with matter and an audience.” In this sentence the presence of woman is the vital part of his doctrine. Being a strong feminist, Meredith believed that woman is subjection to man made society and he approved of the growing agitation in favour of the political and social freedom. The following passage would throw a clear light upon Meredith’s way of connecting the two ideas i.e. comedy and the position of woman. These two ideas are sharply brought together. He says, “I am not quoting the Arabs to exhort and disturb the somnolent East, rather for cultivated women to recognise the comic spirit is one of their best friends.
They are blind to their interest in swelling the ranks of the sentimentalist. Let them look with their clearest vision abroad and at home. They will see where they have no social freedom, comedy is absent, where they are household drudges, the form of comedy is primitive; where they are tolerably independent but uncultivated, exciting melodrama takes place and a sentimental version of them. Yet the comic will come out, as they would know if they listened to some of the private conversations of men whose minds are undirected by the comic muse, as the sentimental man, to his astonishment, would know like-wise, if he is in similar fashion to an equal footing with men, in attainments and in liberty – in what they have won for themselves and what has been granted to them by a fair civilisation – there and only waiting to be transplanted from life to the stage as the novel, or the poem, pure comedy flourishes, and is, as it would help them to be the sweetest of diversions, the wisest of delightful companions.  

Meredith was inherently bent towards an incisive analysis of social elements and individual discrepancies. His philosophy was based upon his own experiences. Darwin’s theory of evolution had inspired him to visualise an ideal world. In this ideal world, the man was placed on the highest position. At the same time he was well aware of the fact that the path towards the attainment of this ideal situation on the earth was a Herculean task. His strong faith in Nature made him believe that Nature would definitely be successful in her task of creating the ideal world on the earth. In this set plan, Meredith felt that society plays a major role. As an individual is born with some ideals or goals, so does a society. The society also has some ideals to be fulfilled. So ultimately it is through Man, Society and Nature, the real human progress is possible.
On the contrary, there are various dangerous phenomena existing in the nature, which would mar the path towards the progress. Meredith described them as 'the ascetic rocks' and 'sensuous whirlpools'. This concept of asceticism or sensuality usually works as discrepancies and hence is extreme to be avoided. At the same time, it is the egoism, sentimentalism, snobbery, hypocrisy etc., which work as dangers in the progress of men at various levels. As man develops, egoism assumes more and more subtle forms, wears more and more elaborate disguises and finally it becomes very difficult to detect. This, self-absorption, this inability to face entirely out words, that leads men to shrink from an open commerce with facts and finally they take refuge in the dark holes of cynicism, sentimentalism and the rest. It forever destroys the proper balance of Blood, Brain and Spirit. In such circumstances man may forget his goal. He may not be in a position to establish a proper relationship with Earth. By becoming an egoist or sentimentalist he would isolate him from society and would ignore his social responsibilities. In such circumstances the progress of human race is almost impossible. As a result of which the nature would not be in a position to complete her experiment of creating an ideal world on the earth. Keeping all these factors in mind Meredith has put a greater emphasis upon three elements. They are Nature, Man and Woman. Undoubtedly it is the co-ordination and proper working between these three elements, which would help to fulfil the dream of an ideal situation of the earth. Keeping this in mind Meredith puts a greater responsibility upon the shoulder of a woman. Meredith, being a man, very well knew that man is more exposed to his vagaries. Due to these weaknesses man loves to fly on clouds of fancy and does not want to be tied down to any one place or plan. If this
speculative tinge draws man away from the nature's plan, Nature employs woman to bring man back to a disciplined order. Nature has bestowed greater and more valuable responsibilities of corrections and continuation of species upon woman. Nature too wants man as well as woman to contribute in the same. If the man fails in his job, it is the woman who brings him back to his originality. She would help him in fulfilling his obligation to nature as well as society. This is the meeting ground for man and woman. Instead of understanding that and participating in it, man exploits the meeting with woman by trying to make her a slave to slake his passions.

Meredith's women, with their different situations and destinies are alike the sterile products of an artificial civilisation that denies them rightful position. They are mentally and physically strong enough to fight not for their betterment but also for fulfilling the responsibilities bestowed upon them. After all man is connected with society by a silken thread called common sense. But due to his selfishness and egoism the silken thread is split and he becomes a threat to the progress of the society. On such occasion, to re-establish common sense woman acts as powerful means. For Meredith an ideal society consists of healthy and intelligent men and women who are well aware of the social and natural responsibilities. He says, "Man and woman must live in perfect co-ordination to make possible the creation of certain noble races."

If the comic spirit is the presiding deity in the novels of Meredith, a woman plays the role of the protagonist. In almost all of his novels, the story centres round a male character that becomes a butt of ridicule of the comic spirit and the heroine is the means
through which the comic spirit operates. She becomes the test for the hero. Before the actual working of the comic spirit is discussed, here is a detailed discussion on Meredith's idea of comic spirit and his intentions behind using this spirit as a dominating element in his philosophy of life.

Meredith found the English comedy of manners coarse, stereotype and better forgotten. He believed in the fact that French were better at 'Sately Comedy' because they knew men and women more accurately than the English do. It is Moliere who is Meredith's ideal of Comedy. And hence nine years after this essay, Meredith declared, "Moliere is the sole writer of pure comedy, so rare it is."  

A true instinct had urged Meredith to devote himself to comedy. In a letter written to Ulrica Duncombe he writes, "Comedy is the key to the understanding of social life. I tried to make it perceived by the English in the essay I wrote." His concept of life accords in the main with the dictum of Socrates that no one willingly errs. It is the lack of intelligence, which causes more than half the troubles, which afflicts the world. One cannot rage furiously against those who are not wise. One can only smile gently at their failings or even laugh heartily. Meredith has very successfully distilled his philosophy into his brilliant analysis of the comic spirit. To define in clear terms, it is not the farcical, nor the humours, nor the rollicking, things often confused with it. It is based upon the fine perception of the incongruous. Referring to the comic and the part played in the novel of Meredith, J. B. Priestley has observed in 'George Meredith': 'Once Meredith's view on Man and Earth is understood, it is not difficult to grasp the
significance comic spirit which is the main spring of his fiction." Here is Meredith’s own account of the comic spirit as he has given in his famous essay on comedy. He says, “If you believe that our civilisation is founded in common sense you will, when contemplating men, discern a spirit overhead: not more heavenly than the night flash outward from glassy surfaces, luminous and watchful, never shooting beyond them, nor logging in the rear; so closely attached to them that it may be taken for slavish reflex until its features are studied it has the sage’s brows and close lips drawn in an idle wariness of half tension. That slim feasting smile, shaped like the longbow, was once a big round satyr’s laugh, that flung up the brows like a fortress lifted by gunpowder. The laugh will come again but it will be of the order of the smile, finely tempered, showing sunlight of the mind, mental richness than noisy enormity. Its common aspect is one of unsolicitous observation, as if surveying a full field and having leisure to dart on its chosen morsels, without any fluttering eagerness. Men’s future on earth does not attract it. Their honesty in the present does, and whenever they wax out of proportion, overblown, affected, pretentious, bombastical, hypocritical, pedantic, and fantastically delicate; whenever it sees them self-deceived or hoodwinked, given to run riot in idolatries, drifting into vanities, congregating in absurdities, planning short-sightedly, plotting demonedly, whenever they are at variance with their profession and violate the unwritten but perceptible laws winding them in consideration one to another; whenever they offend sound reason, fair justice are false in humanity or mind with conceit, individually or in the bulk – the spirit overhead will look humanely malign and cast an oblique light on them, followed by volleys of silvery laughter. That is the Comic Spirit.”
In his famous poem 'Ode to the Comic Spirit' he strikes the same note in its opening lines:

"Sword of Common Sense:
Our surest gift: the sacred chain
Of man to man; firm earth to trust
In structures vowed to permanence
Thou guardians issue of the harvest brain!"

There is an intimate relation between the Comic Spirit and the Common Sense. Meredith insisted upon Common Sense so it becomes necessary to understand his definition of Common Sense.

Meredith reasserted that the laughter of men and women in a concert is essential to pure comedy. But if a woman is not given a chance to express herself freely in a society, that society can never cultivate. It is completely impossible in such as eastern culture, which though intensely susceptible to laughter, keeps women behind the veil; the comic spirit is one of the best friends of cultivated women. As humanity dominates individual and machines by morality and by laws, so earth imposes upon humanity a guardian, in the form of comic spirit. In effect, this angel is above all a judge. It compares that variable relationship with the constant relationship, which ought to unite the human race to the earth. It compares, calculates, appreciates and evaluates. And in doing this it enunciates measure according to which each individual should conform to his duty towards the human race.

The proper function of the spirit of comedy is not to excite laughter. Having nothing of the bawd in its nature, it is no more jocular than common sense. The spirit makes use of her weapon in order to guard the indefeasible rights of the Earth. So to
study the comic spirit is not just to study the comic spirit but much more. It is a special smile: the smile, fine, subtle, grave, mysterious, which is prolonged in to a thought. He declared that comedy being not confined exclusively to the theatre yields itself with considerable facility to the narrative form. The object of comedy, he claims, is to awaken laughter. It is the laughter of the mind. The comic muse is a corrective and beneficent influence on civilised society. Applied to individual, its services to warn against taking the heart, instead of the brain, for guide. In order to this job perfectly, Meredith has made use of his favourite method i.e. 'Intellectual Comedy'. Whenever the spirit finds her men or women, going out of track, she unmasks them and shows them 'what they truly are by thoughtful laughter.'

The second part of the essay 'The Uses of the Comic Spirit', starts with the argument that the spirit serves three purposes. They are 1) to offset folly, 2) to correct dullness, 3) to throw light on public affairs. Meredith maintains that folly takes many shapes in a society possessed of wealth and leisure. The plain common sense without the comic spirit is too angry, contempt and inhumane and the defensive operation of the heavily-armed man of science and the writer of the leading article or elaborate essay too slow to combat her successfully. Dullness and boredom can only be banished by the comic spirit, which blows away the vapours of unreason and sentimentalism. Most of the English humorists have efficiently made use of humour to create laughter. But Meredith made his reader not only laugh but also think. He used the 'humour of mind', which was very difficult to define. Being a famous master of epigram, he also commanded a most frolicsome fancy. He always had in mind more thoughtful and fruitful method of comedy
whose aim was the correction of folly. The comic spirit hunts the follies of men and women in a society of the intelligent, the cultivated, and the urbane.

High comedy deals with high life. This phrase may be taken literally or in ordinary sense and is equally applicable to Meredith’s dramatic personae. He was not concerned with lower strata of society in which vice and suffering has a debased as to have the divine features of man unrecognisable. Debased humanity has nothing to teach us. Disease and crime are for the doctors while intelligent, clean, respectable men are the subjects of comedy. Among the best lies the hope for mankind. The foibles and cunning vices that are at once most diverting and most instructive.

Meredith drew his memorable romantic characters from the ‘bourgeoisie’ and even from the aristocracy. It is a matter of small importance if his characters have not an intelligence of the first order. But they essentially require a recognised standard of education, society, manners and above all a delicate sensibility. This condition applies not less to the actors than to the spectators because the true understanding of the comic is the privilege of an ‘elite’. His comic figures in particular are prone to flourish titles. Right from the entrance of the Countess de Saldar in ‘Evan Harrington’ to the retirement of the Earl of Fleetwood in ‘The Amazing Marriage’, a reader finds himself in distinguished company. Comedy makes choice of persons wealthy and high in rank because here the comic traits of characters have the freest play. Vanity and egoism has a chance to develop fully in an aristocratic society where intelligent and witty people exist. At the same time it must be kept in mind that true comedy does not consist in the
exploitation of originals. It is the serious characters that are comic. Meredith is not concerned with the saints and sinners but with the natural and unnatural, the honest and dishonest. He is interested in those who knew their own minds and the victims of delusions.

It is not my intention to make any detailed examination of the comedy of George Meredith. But I think the end would be served by mentioning a few comic situations in which his works abound. ‘Evan Harrington’ brims over with comedy of a joyous and fresh description. The various scenes at Beckley, when the Harringtons are in the heart of the hostile camp, are rich in effect. Here is Meredith’s typical social battlefield, where the comic spirit is seen haunted. The triumphs and awful moments of Countess de Saldar are nothing but essays in the emotions of the comic. The situations in the novel are full of hearty and thoughtful laughter. The setting of Harry Richmond is too romantic to be the ideal background of comedy. But it is in ‘Sandra Belloni’ a ripe fruit of comedy of the first stage can be seen. The character of Lady Gosstre is fine. The garden party at the Besworth, where the three Miss Poles are so conscious of what must be done and so anxiously watchful of the great lady’s every gesture is unalloyed and delicious comedy. In fact the setting of the book is an example of what is real food for the comic spirit. The idea of the ladies Pole, with their fine shades of understanding, scheming night and day for the smiles of the country, is that of a brilliant imagination for the comic. The social atmosphere of this novel involves a true understanding of what are the essentials of comedy. It is a book that shows Meredith’s fine and judicious handling of comedy.
With ‘The Egoist’, Meredith’s comedy becomes more mental and less obvious. The spirit of comedy is seen more deeply laid in the basis of character instead of being to some degree the result of whims. Sir Willoughby Patterne is the prey of the Comic Muse and not merely its servant. The plot of ‘The Egoist’ is concerned to very high degree. The spirit throws light upon all the figures and searches out every weak spot and inherent blemish. The comic spirit in this novel simply plays a role of an instrument of truth at all cost. As a result of which little apt is to be hoodwinked by the sentimentalism or egoism. Following ‘The Egoist’, there is ‘The Tragic Comedians’ where the comic comprehension becomes significant and arresting. ‘Diana of the Crossways’ too has scenes of glittering comedy. Much the same may be said about the last three novels ‘One of Our Conquerors’, ‘Lord Ormont and His Aminta’ and ‘The Amazing Marriage’.

From Meredith’s essay on Comedy, one more aspect becomes noticeable that there is an intimate relation between comic spirit and common sense. Common Sense obviously means something more than normal understanding. The fundamental normality, itself implying the balance, is still there. It may be taken to mean the product of that sweet reasonableness. It is the result of the certain detachment being only possible when the world is not seen only in the flickering illumination of one’s own desires and aspirations but is observed clearly in steady light. Our society is rooted in this common sense, without which it would not be possible. But it is only common at certain levels. Once a person moves forward into greater sensitiveness, into innumerable labyrinths of sensation and emotion, he is apt to let go this silken thread that links a man to the world. The more weight one has to bear, the harder it is to keep a balance. The more
complicated life appears, the more difficult it is to preserve a sufficient sense of proportion. When comes across a supremacy sensitive persons, who are compelled to have a very lively interest in their own egos, imaginative persons, the common sense becomes the last and greatest gift of the God.

Humour is simply the combined product of steady unwavering common sense and unusual powers of imagination and feeling. The first pounces on the incongruity, the second plays round it and aims back associating themselves with the object first assailed. Thus concluding with an outburst of sympathetic laughter, Meredith remarks, 'If you laugh all round him, tremble him, roll him about, deal him a smack, and drop a tear on him, own his likeness to you and your neighbour, spare him as little as you shun, pity him as much as you expose. It is a spirit of humour that moves you. This is not comic which gives us thoughtful laughter and is the perceptive, the governing spirit.'

Irony is treated as one of the instruments of the comic spirit. Unlike humour it preserves its detachment, content to throw a beam of clear light on some incongruity. Its appeal is from common sense to common sense, from normality to normality, and it simply calls the attention to what folly is serving up for it. It always looks on and can never associate itself with its object, except for the purpose of irony. Common Sense, of whatever level may be, is clearly social sense and its sword, the comic spirit, is drawn against whatever is anti-social.
This theory of comedy as a social weapon is Meredith's great contribution to philosophical criticism. It has undeniable value. As the greater part of his essay deals with comedy proper, which has always been able to ridicule passing follies and thus has helped to exterminate them. Meredith's claims are sufficiently just. He throws too much emphasis upon its purely corrective tendencies more especially its power of purging fools of their folly. Great comedy has only flourished at a few favoured moments. When a small exclusive society, held together by a common sense of value that has extended upward even to the utterest trifles of the conduct and appearance, has given the comic writer and audience.

Meredith comes still closer to the heart of his subject when he remarks: "You may estimate your capacity for comic perception by being able to detect the ridicule of them you love without loving them less and more by being able to see yourself somewhat ridiculous in dear eyes, and accepting the correction of their image of you propose."

Meredith further says, "The spirit enables one at certain moment to observe oneself, outside the golden haze of one's wishes and desires and aspirations, as a naked figure robes its robes and moons and music so that the stern grappling with oneself, orders at any time, but most orders, if not impossible, in a world, where nothing but self-deception flourish is made somewhat easier. The sword of common sense is placed in one's hand. This sword is a sword of wondrous properties lengthened or shortened at wills, making transparent whatever empty things it is flashed upon. It is capable of separating the thoughts in one's head." This sword of common sense was celebrated in his famous poem 'The Ode to the Comic Spirit' in this way-
"A lightening over the half illumed,  
Who to base brute – dominion cleave."

The main business of the sword is the same:

"Thou dar'st probe  
Old Institutions and Establishments,  
Once fortresses against the flood of sin,  
For what their worth."

After reading the novel 'The Egoist' one joins the gleeful pursuit of Sir Willoughby, one hears the sickening patter of a haunted creature somewhere at the back of one's mind and realises that there is a tiny Sir Willoughby perishing there. Unless one is associated with the hunters and the hunted, the comic spirit has failed disastrously of its object, which to purge and not to plume its audience with a sense of their superiority.

With Meredith, the comedy began at his heart. He himself was the principal object of his own comic perception. He had himself nobly entertained the comic spirit. It is for this reason that his finest comedy i.e. 'The Egoist' cut to deep and make it almost impossible for us to describe ourselves from its victims. In his comedy there was something more than a close and clear observation. There was something more than a comic idea subtly transformed into flesh and blood. There is a genuine self-revolution of a very curious kind. One part of the self, as it were showing up another, autobiography sketched against an ironic background. The intellect of George Meredith may be observed presenting like a mocking showman, the temperament of himself.

In the previous chapter, it is seen that Meredith in his teaching of Earth declared a war against various discrepancies such as egoism, sentimentalism, snobbery, hypocrisy
etc, which is present at all the levels of society. Egoism is the archenemy of the spirit. It is multiform. It is the marrow of the primitive brute. It has no particular shape but represents a principle both general and organic. Meredith says, "We pretend to strip our old enemy, but in reality we dress him up in the prevailing fashion. Under his new disguise he is represented as the product of a complex civilisation. And we treat a tendency, inborn and deeply rooted as a senile conformity."

Thus, 'The Egoist' is the extreme expression of his recurrent drama of the defeat of egoism by the power of comedy. In the Mid-Nineteenth century, when Meredith began to write egoism was much in air. Meredith consistently identified egoism as the great enemy of truth and progress and is associated with artificiality. In the Prelude of 'The Egoist' Meredith writes, "Comedy is a game played to throw reflection upon social life and it deals with human nature in the drawing room of civilised men and women, where we have no dust of struggling outer world, no mire, no violent crashes to make the correctness of representation convincing."6

In another novel 'Sandra Belloni' Meredith has beautifully blended romance, comedy and tragedy. Here, the heroine, Emilia herself is the romantic touchstone by which the comic actions of others are tested. The writer has tried to strip bear the false refinement of civilisation, principally in the lives of Wilfred Pole and his three sisters. Wilfred is victim of his civilisation as well as a contributor to its defects. As a gentleman he has become a soldier and fought in India. When unoccupied in England, he eventually decides to join Austrians against Italy, not from principle but mainly for Lady Charlotte's
approbation. His sisters have at first exploited the glamour of his being wounded and almost getting a medal in India, but they are distressed because he has no intellectual accomplishments. He is a sentimentalist and he can never get rid of his self-conscious apprehensions. Having ably defended Emilia during a rustic fistfight, he is embarrassed by the damage to his face. When Emilia tells of her childhood poverty and of her living mainly on potatoes, Wilfred’s delicacy is affronted, he has already reasoned that he must not fall in love with a ‘a little unformed girl’. He loves Emilia but his passion has been dissipated by him to reassure himself that she is ladylike in her refinement. He reveals in the picture of her a successful singer in love with him, but when she tells him that she would like to do something to please herself, he is confused. Though Lady Charlotte does not meet his fastidious requirements in persons or manner, he has accepted his father’s money in order to marry her and he is consequently tied to her wishes. When Emilia rejects his double-dealing plot to keep their love secret, Wilfred puts on her the masculine task of undeceiving Pole. In the earlier part of the novel the writer reminds us of his hero’s essential weakness: ‘Wilfred was young and under the dominion of his senses, which can be, if the sentimentalists will believe him as tyrannous and misleading when super-refined when ultra bestial. He misses true heroism.’

He is not a sensualist in the obvious manner. He is comic precisely because the mastery of his sensuous over his mental nature is disguised even from Wilfred himself. Like his sister, he is one of the finer beings who labour under these excessive sensual subtleties. ‘I perceive their uses and they are right good comedy . . . . Man is the
laughing animal. So let us be cordially thankful to those who furnish matter for sound embracing laughter”, says the writer.

In his castigation of sentimentality, Meredith suggests that sentimentalism is the Nineteenth Century substitute for monasticism, a point which was explored by Meredith in his novel ‘The Amazing Marriage’ where the sentimentalist Lord Fleetwood enters a monastery. It is Wilfred’s attempt at the denial of the animal in him that makes for incongruity. He would have a mistress of affection without stooping to uncouthness or physical seduction. He is afraid of Emilia because she is talented singer and he can only play the second fiddle. Once he mistakenly thinks that he can forgive her. He is happy because then he is the magnanimous hero. In his subsequent enthusiasm Wilfred writes her a love note, but even in the red heat of passion his born diplomacy withheld his own signature. Of the many ludicrous incidents, one of the most incidents pointed clearly typifies the sentimentalist. Once in chasing Emilia’s carriage, Wilfred unfortunately runs into a pot boy, most certainly the agent of Karoz if not the genie himself, and he is doused with beer. To counteract the odour he sprinkles himself liberally with Alderman’s Bouquet perfume. Instead of accepting the truth and finding in it laughter or romance, Wilfred and the other little people shrink into a sentimental world of make-belief. According to Meredith they are not great lost souls of Limbo, but rather the sterile half-spirits of a negative civilisation. They can never master the event.

On the other hand, in the last three major novels, Lord Ormont, Lord Fleetwood and Victor Radnor, the three heroes make an impressive quarter of self-deceivers. They
are all deluded as to their own natures and are depicted in contrast to their romantic, clear-eyed, opposites – Aminta, Carinthia and Victor’s daughter Nesta respectively. Lord Ormont, whom Wayburn’s schoolgirl beloved marries, is Wayburn’s idol. He is assumed to be possessed of all the lad’s own chivalry towards girls. Actually, he is one who in relations with women has enjoyed possessions without responsibility. Though married, he expresses his scorn of society by refusing to take Aminta into it or install her in his ancestral home. He is portrayed as the self-styled master of women, but later becomes their comic victim.

He thinks he is no match for women. His Amazonian sister opposes to recognition of Aminta. She declares the marriage to be illegal one. While Aminta’s aunt determines to win her position back and creates circumstances for Ormont, which is a constant embarrassment. In the true sense Ormont is drawn as a comic giant, who has thrown his career among men and because he is really ignorant of women finds himself helpless among them. It is his refusal to recognise himself as a common man. His massive selfishness and icy inaccessibility to emotion as a husband prevents him finding romance in life. He is still foolishly defensive when he determines to force Aminta into society. Only when this act of supreme egoism makes her leave him and then he discovers what a jewel he has cast away. Despite his selfishness, Aminta comes to respect him as a true nobleman. At the end of the novel one finds change in the attitude of Ormont. The catharsis of his cynical egoism is however asserted than proved. It is the wiser and gentler Ormont who finally sends his grand nephew to Aminta and Wayburn’s school. At the end one can conclude that Ormont is not a philosophical person but an
egoist who has been stripped of self-respect and left to writhe in despair. It is the Comic Muse who is seen chasing the person throughout the novel and finally exposing his follies. The demasking of the sentimentalist is being done by the heroine Aminta.

Truth or life as it is, is the great the desire of the comic spirit and to whip men back to that she does carry her lash of laughter. Her great gift is an eye for proportion to sin, against which, in one way or another, all comic attitudes may be treated. Nevertheless the comic spirit does not allow itself to be duped. It spares the egoist, the frank egoist who is a variable dragon, a monster, fantastic, unparalleled, prodigious. But it cannot pardon the sentimentalism or hypocritically virtuous form of egoism and all the more pernicious in that it is called deliberate. Meredith believed that egoism formally corrupts the mind, the sentimentalism of today poisons the concerns. Sentimentalists vainly pretended to blink as do short sighted people. They see very clearly into their own natures.

In our progress from brutal to spiritual beings, the push forward, the lift upward, is given us by our ideals. We are guided not wholly by animal instinct, but by certain general conception beauty, fitness, and social expediency. Then came law, morality, principles of beauty, dignity of character. We pride ourselves on our emancipation from material fact. Meredith is the last person to disparage the civilising process. He takes it for granted, as the one thing worthwhile, the meaning and the purpose of life. The sentimentalist, in Meredith's usage is one whose ideal is his undoing. He puts on the wings of an Icarus leaves the solid earth only to be dropped again wingless into the abyss.
True feelings is the most precious thing in life but a false sentiment, put on for ornament is perilous and an object of laughter. Sentimentality is a finer form of snobbery. Snobs suppose themselves to be of greater social importance than they are. The sentimentalist is a spiritual snob. Mere selfishness may be carried to brutality, without passing through a comic phase. If a sentimentalist is a product of advance civilisation, so also is the egoist. The primitive egoist was presumably a frank and downright brute. But the civilisation brought with it a new society, men grew considerate, even altruistic, self was restrained or subdued. The golden rules were practised. Egoism was on the wane. So it appeared on the surface. Such was our ideal; this is how we wanted to represent ourselves. Still egoism flourished. Self-seeking remained the motive power by which the healthy organism supported itself. Unfortunately our social system actually cultivated egoism.

As compared to the past, people are definitely civilised today. They are aware of their social conventions. They are proud of their own refinement and conscious to see models of altruism. This is being consciously observed by the comic muse. She is always diverted by clever pretence. She loves a mask and also loves to tear it off, exposing the shamed face behind. She is tickled to see the striking discrepancy between the real and the false faces. According to the comic muse the modern gentleman is a good actor and has been trained to this job. But the comic spirit likes to see him stammering and blushing with embarrassment. She rather loves to betray the modern gentleman into an exhibition of the primitive egoist. 'The Egoist' is the extreme expression of his recurrent drama of the defeat of egoism by the power of comedy. In the
Mid Nineteenth Century when Meredith began to write egoism was much in air. Meredith consistently identified the egoism as a great enemy of truth, feeling and progress and is associated with artificiality and sentiments. In the prelude of the book ‘The Egoist’ Meredith writes, “Comedy is a game played to throw reflections upon social life and it deals with human nature in the drawing room of civilised men and women, where we have no dust of the struggling outer world, no mire, no violent clashes to make the correctness of the representation convincing.”

Meredith further stresses this point. He says if an egoist is a lover, he is equally anxious to idealise his lady. He does not want a real woman but a puppet of his fancy, a fit companion for his own sentimentalised character. To her he uses a language carefully chosen to suit her state of innocence and his own ideal of their relations. Love, he likes to receive but not to give. He does not want to surrender himself. That would be a loss of his ego. This civilised egoist is thus appeared, as a typical representative of the man society knows, comprehending the whole range of pretence and self-deception. Meredith always attempted to create such characters that are caught by the comic spirit. It is seen that his concern for class has genuine and passionate as was seen with many writers of his age. He abandoned compromise with the taste of his time. He wrote in the most dazzling intellectual way the idea on egoism, on sentimentality and on the function of comedy. This has been used as his equipment almost from the beginning of his literary career. In ‘The Egoist’, the heroine Clara is engaged to a wealthy and egoistic man who is the victim of his own overweening pretensions. The father seeks to force the heroine to keep her troth to a man she has grown to despise. In each case the egoist is exposed so that his
neighbours and friends see him at last for the empty being he is. By this exposure and by her recognition of the freedom conferred by a comic view of her situation, the girl is liberated. Finally there is a modest aspirant to the heroine's hand. He waits until the comedy of egoism is played out and his worthiness can triumph.

On the other hand Sir Willoughby Pattern is an emotional vampire. He seeks to establish and sustains his pretensions by playing on the emotions of others, which all he has to offer the mechanical responses of the circle, but the prime victim is a woman. This pattern of victimisation of woman appears in most of Meredith's novels. It was contemplated by a genuine concern for the liberation of woman from the social and legal discrimination, which they suffered in the Victorian era.

Sir Willoughby Pattern, the egoist, is the incarnation of the spirit of ordered things and the representative of the modern conservativism of the country magnet. He is a baronet, who whilst still a child, has become an heir of a title, a great fortune and a position of power in his country. He is surrounded by object flattery. He grows to consider himself a king. It is obvious that there was a vein of excessive egoism born in him. The unfolding of Willoughby's character is skilfully shown in his relations to women. He becomes engaged to a famous beauty, who, on the eve of marriage elopes with a cavalry officer. Sir Willoughby retires into expressionless depth of wounded self-love. He is clever enough not to make any outward sign of the blow. But immediately and openly pays great attention to Miss Dale. Her father has a house on Sir Willoughby's estate. He attempts to guard himself from the scandal of the country, by proving that he
himself was too thankful for the step. Sir Willoughby now decides to go on tour round the world leaving Miss Dale in the fluting spirit of indecisiveness. He remains absent for several years. When he returns he renews warmly his acquaintance with her. But of course he takes care of not proposing her. In the character of Sir Willoughby Meredith has drawn double egoism. It is the refined completeness of egoism, which tries not only to rule outwardly but also to satisfy the sentimental desire for an inward comfort. This may be the secret of his renewed warmth to Miss Dale.

The country is next thrilled by the announcement of Sir Willoughby's engagement to Miss Clara Middleton. She is a daughter of a rich and worldly doctor. The girl comes with her father to stay with Sir Willoughby. It gradually opens her eyes to his character and her desperate attempts to break off the engagement start. It is this incident around which the whole story and analysis of motive hangs.

Sir Willoughby is a man of the most acute sensibility. It is his aim to be the perfect great man of the country. The thought of any man laughing at him or even discussing about him is agony for him. He is in the constant state of testing the sureness of his position and of gratifying the deep-rooted vanity of the egoist. Here, for instance in a conversation with Miss Dale is a telling illustration of this- 'And you are well?' The anxious question permitted him to read deeply in her eyes. He found the man he sought there, squeezed him passionately and let her go—
But his egoism is carried to a depth of fatuity that becomes blind through the very desire to assure himself of the actuality of the esteem he is held in. Perhaps it is of so gross a kind that in real moments of a crisis it shows itself as totally swallowing all sense of decency. Here is a scene between Sir Willoughby and Clara Middleton, which unclothes everything.

"An oath?" she said and moved her lips to recall what she might have said and forgotten.

"To what? What oath?"

"That you will be true to me dead as well as living? Whisper it."

"Willoughby, I shall be true to my vows at the altar."

"To me! me!"

"It will be to you."

"To my soul. No heaven can be for me— I see none only torture, unless I have your word, Clara. I trust it, I will trust it implicitly. My confidence in you is absolute."

"Then you need not be troubled."

"It is for you, my love; that you may be armed and strong when I am not by to protect you."

"Our views of the world are opposed, Willoughby."

"Consent, gratify me; swear it. Say 'Beyond Death' whisper it. I ask for nothing more. Women, think the husband's grave breaks the bond, cuts the tie, sets them loose. They wed the flesh— pah! What I call on you for is nobility, the transcendent nobility of faithfulness beyond death. "His widow!" let them say; a saint in widowhood."

(Chapter VI, The Egoist)

There is a long struggle between Sir Willoughby and Clara Middleton. He is determined to avoid the scandal and talk of the country. This conflict is developed through many chapters with subtlety of psychological details the whole unlovely mind of Sir Willoughby is dissected and he is left as the shivering landmark of a perpetual example. As Meredith's principle is revealed in his letters.

It was Clara Middleton who had the first opportunity to recognise Sir Willoughby. Latitia Dale had known him from the first, but had not observed him to such a close range. From her cottage on the borders of his realm, she could only see this prince of the county. Though Latitia does not appreciate Sir Willoughby's real character. It shows
itself towards in his attitude towards her. Willoughby's fondness for her was but a fondness for himself. He loved her for the reflection of his own splendour. He wished to keep Latitia as a sweet feeder to his personal egoism. But she was too humble a person to be chosen for a bride. His social egoism required the selection of someone with qualities to dazzle the world of males. Clara Middleton had money and health and beauty. Sir Willoughby, like a good hunter found her perfect for the courtship.

She was intellectual enough to understand the real Willoughby. She began very early to feel in his courtship something peculiar. He wanted to be sure not only of her heart, but of her soul as well. He wanted her to reduce herself to ashes, or incense, in honour of him. His imagination had long range. He attributed his desire to his sentiment. She felt to be the unnatural craving of his ego to be assured by absolute possession. A woman like Clara Middleton, having especially independent spirit, soon realises that her union with Sir Willoughby involved 'the surrender of independence'. She felt the baser elements in his over-ardent love. And everywhere, in every relation she began to observe the signs of egoism, of selfishness, tyranny and conceit. Thus, in this novel the comic spirit successfully works upon Sir Willoughby, the egoist. She uses Clara Middleton as her instrument to expose his vagaries and by the end of the novel brings him back to the way towards the nature.

In this way Meredith has very skilfully tried to draw our attention towards the fact that by becoming an egoist or sentimentalist people try to disunite unscrupulously that what earth had united. He tried to scoff at that which our flesh, our intelligence, our soul
form into a triple and inviolate whole. Though these follies are but sports for the modern men, but by these methods they run into two contrary heresies, asceticism and sensualism.

The comic spirit protests that man is neither an angel nor beast. Neither the soul nor the body can incur contempt. Since they both are directly sprung from the mother earth, the comic spirit extol temperance as the via media between two excessive equally absurd.

So above all the Comic Spirit strives to discipline the sexes. She works as a searchlight. She very carefully catches hold of the person who tries to avoid or neglect his natural or social responsibility. Since a woman is more practical, wiser and closer to nature, she has been used as a medium by the Comic Spirit. Woman is the ally to the comic spirit, because she has a large fund of that sweet common sense which nourishes and sustains comedy. She is closer to nature not in the sense of being less civilised but in the sense of having a closer grasp of abiding natural principles of this life. She is nearer to earth and her task as to see that man is rooted there and not left to his own fancies. She is mentally and physically capable of holding a man in the mid-air of his dreams. Nature pricks her away from egoism. And the most important thing that will almost invariably set her right is 'Love'. It causes her common sense to shine more brightly. It is her love that tempts men to folly and obscures such common sense as they have in Meredith's comedy; love is fool's opportunity, to show himself in his true glaring colours. It works as the egoist trap. Meredith himself has stated about love in 'Diana of the Crossways'.
'She gave him comprehension of the meaning of life, a word in many mouths, not often explained, with her, wound in her idea of her, he perceived it to signify a new start in our existence, a finer shoot of the tree strongly planted in good earth; the senses running their live sap, and the whole nature conjunction. In soothe, a happy prospect for the sons and daughters of the earth, divinely indicating more than happiness, the speeding of us, compact of what we are, between the ascetic rocks and the sensual whirlpools.' And for this channel between the ascetic rocks and sensual whirlpool, women have commonly the keener eye and steadier hand on the tiller. But for this voyage and its happy companionship, woman needs freedom to express her and to disengage herself from the sentimental image of her set up by egoistic males. He realise that the fact that if love is necessarily founded on equal rights and the companionship of minds, then many long cherished ideas must be flung aside. Society must protect itself but the blow must fall equally upon the sexes: Nature tells men and women to share the guilt in common. To put it shortly, if woman is to be regarded as a real person, with present and the future, she must if necessary be allowed to have had a past. Meredith looked at a woman as an individual, the mate of man. Once she is no longer regarded as a possession, the values about her are apt to change.

Most of Meredith's women work as central figures or heroines in his novels. They have been created to serve many purposes. The poet, the romancer, the creator in Meredith lavishes all his art upon them and takes a special delight in them. At the same time they are treated as critics. Meredith makes use of them as a kind of test. They are so close to nature that at times they actually take the place of Earth. Almost all his comic
victims are men whose egoism has led them away from nature into the same alley of pride and foolishness. Their attitude towards woman, who is the envoy of nature, is deeply significant. It is when the woman appears on the scene, setting the fantastic machinery in motion that the comic spirit takes out its tablets. She becomes the touchstone. This can be well illustrated by a passage from another famous novel 'The Amazing Marriage' in which Gower Woodseer had been explaining to Fleetwood that Lady Fleetwood, having suffered a sort of kidnapping when she was bearing her child, has now a distrust of her Lord and master, an inevitable state of mind, Gower tells his companion, explained in a book by Edinburg doctor, then follows... "Such animal these women are! Good Lord!" Fleetwood ejaculated, "I marry one and I am to take to reading medical books!"

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

And a later echo of Gower's voice which is unmistakably the voice of Meredith himself, states the matter even more directly, "And Mr. Philosopher argues that the abusing of woman proves the hating of Nature; name it 'the commonest insanity and the
deadliest’ and men are planted in the bog of their unclean animal condition until they do proper homage to the animal Nature. It makes the woman be... Men hating nature insane. Women and Nature are close. It is rather general to hate Nature and maltreat woman, we begin to see why the world is a mad world...’ In this novel, Fleetwood in his pride and folly deserts and ignores Carinthia and is infuriated because her pursuit makes him look ridiculous. But he aims that pursuing her far more frantically himself, trampling down his fear of ridicule, making himself a spectacle. This is the pattern of Meredith’s comedy, repeated with endless minor variations. It can be said as ‘Nature's revenge through the hand of a woman’. He is too tender with himself and fearing a blow to his self-esteem, as certain men will not come to terms with the facts of his life. And shrinking from the first cutting blast of reality outside, he remains cosily in the warm chamber of delusion and unreason. But before he has done with, he has been sent out naked into the hail and east-wind. He would not face a little hurt, the first shivering contact with reality, so now he must submit to a great one and be blown about and frozen.

It is love that brings about this ordeal. It is women who lets the roaring wind and finally casts him out into the night. The light of comic spirit is usually focused upon one man, who is the figure of comedy. This light is directed there by the hand of a woman. That is the general plan of Meredith’s comedy. Sometimes a woman is used as a ray of illumination upon a whole group of figures.

As it can be seen in his novel ‘Sandra Balloni’, the heroine Emilia brings out in various ways all the people with whom she comes into contact. She lights up for us about the Pole family and their circle. She is something more than Emilia, the beautiful young
Italian singer, she is a standard, a criterion, a value, beauty and goodness, Nature, Earth an idealised norm. Yet, she remains in the action as Emilia, an individual, and one out of a number of characters in a narrative. She has double value function. Apart from being an individual she is also a kind of value being at one and the same time a figure in the foreground and an illumination in the background. It is the successful working of this double function that gives Meredith's comedy and its best, its unique combination of intellectual subtlety and dramatic power. In this novel, most light is the thrown upon one man, Emilia's lover, Wilfred Pole, whose sentimentalism has marked him down as the prey of the comic spirit. It is his relation to Emilia that throws into bold relief his native weakness.

Thus in most of the other novels the comedy moves narrowly round one male figure, but even in them, woman is used as a more or less general test. Throughout she is the unconscious ambassador of Nature. This is her place in comedy. At the same time Meredith remained successful in sketching her as an individual too. His women escape their bondage and, unmasking and thrusting aside their egoist and sentimentalist only to become the wives of strenuous philosophers. However great their courage and their wit. It is never suggested that they are self-sufficient or even partially self-sufficient. Their search is simply an old search for the right man. Clara Middleton and Aminta has wit enough to discover the difference between nosegays and fetters and have courage enough to escape into the wide world. But they always have Whitfords and Weyburns at their sides. This throws light upon Meredith's view on marriage. Marriage is considered as
true end of life. It is through a true union of body and mind the noble purpose of life could be served.

Though it is true that a woman becomes test for the hero in Meredith’s novels but sometimes she herself becomes the target of the spirit’s play. Meredith does not ignore the possibility that a woman become victim of the egoistic and sentimental pressures. In such a circumstance, the pressure is inverted and this results in a complication. As it is found in his famous novel ‘Diana of the Crossways’ in which the heroine Diana falls in the trap built by her. Meredith undoubtedly wrote his comedy with the intention to create a very brilliant, beautiful and unusual woman as the central figures. The woman in Diana of the Crossways takes the centre of the stage, acting independently in the full light of the comic. Her weakness is a mingling of vanity, self-centredness and infirmity of will. Her misfortunes are as much the neutral results of her frailties. Her ridiculous marriage with Warwick, her ill considered friendship with Lord Dannisburg, her reckless extravagance and its strain of depths, her betrayal of Dacier’s secret, all these have their roots in her vanity and instability. The misfortunes they bring are of her seeking. The only hope for her is to ally her with a stout sensible man. She finds him in Redworth. At last she is left at peace, loving the man who has helped her to return to mental harmony with the laws of life. Her love for him is a more mature love less passionate but deep and abiding. The speciality of this heroine is that she is made by her creator as the corrector as well as the corrected. Diana plays an interesting as well as complicated role in a double capacity entrusted to the single woman.
In this novel there is a divorce suit, and elopement projected. There is a strong temptation of a married woman and grave suspense and the fortunes of the heroine is followed out sympathetically from her first appearance in society to her ultimate sensible marriage. Diana is a woman of large energies, of generous and aspiring soul. She aims throughout her career to secure the freest play for her faculties. She always means the best. But she is also the subject of human weakness. On her character, Meredith has one of the most beautiful aphorisms: "The light of every soul burns upward. Of course, most of them are candles in the wind. Let us allow for atmospheric disturbance." Mr. Travelyn has pointed out that the central theme of Meredith's novel is 'the growth of undesirable young, through suffering through spiritual manhood, the suffering by which youth wins wisdom and strength, if the victim is not broken to pieces in the process of ordeal." [8]

('The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith', G. M. Travelyn Page no. 119)

Diana was not one whose purity was carved in marbles for the assurance to an Englishman that his possession of the changeless thing defies time and his fellows; is the pillar of his home.

Meredith feels pity that with so much intelligence, none of them have consistency of achievement. That's why Diana Warwick and Clotilda Von Rudiger had to face the disaster. Both of them like Vittoria are carried by their feelings far beyond the limits of their will. With others such as Rhoda Fleming, the will even encroaches upon the intelligence and becomes tyrannical. The character of this remarkable woman abounds in
inconsistencies. They are in bewildering conditions between their plans and their actions. They deliberately forge claims for themselves as soon as they are given liberty. Tender hearted and loving, ready to make the noble sacrifice. They unaccountably give way to vain and foolish ideas. Then, when they have forgotten all wearies and disappointed, incapable of combating their egoism. They allow themselves to be entangled in a maze of conventions.

The comic spirit smiles too furtively for women to perceive. Instead of invoking it they descend to the use of vague sentimental phraseology. They also confound ignorance with innocence. Too much liberty overpowers them. They detest naked truth. It will be no exaggeration to say that women too are the slaves of their egoism. In fact according to Meredith the comic spirit is a ‘League for the protection of women on account of their Beauty’ it would serve the fair sex much better than the righteous demonstrations of suffragettes. Yet far from refusing them civic rights of magistracy, Meredith applauds their success. Further he goes as to state that a man who resembles a woman without becoming effeminate is the ornament of sex. Meredith highly esteemed woman’s qualities. He found them beautiful, intelligent and having a marvellous strength of purpose. As to his famous aphorism which is often quoted but badly interpreted – ‘I expect that woman will be the last thing to be civilised by man’¹ But the fact is that man lacks the qualities with which he could civilise women. Intellectually, she is equally superior to him by reason of her divination, her intuition and her extraordinary inspiration.
As life usually consists of a mixture of tragedy, romance and comedy, Meredith would test his artistic skill by encompassing all three in the same canvas. He has used it very skilfully. There are number of women characters in his novels with their sinister destinies. They are the sterile products of a civilisation that denies woman a deserving place. They live an ornamental existence unable to find adventure in work and tempted to use their beauty and brains in an egoistic contest. Meredith found them fascinating to contemplate. He did not contaminate his portraits by sentimentalising them. A character such as Margret Lovell in 'Rhoda Fleming' has a husband fight and be killed because of the power of her beauty over men. After describing her blond loveliness Meredith adds, "There is a fate attached to some women . . . . that blood is to be shed for them." In her frustrated desire for action Mrs. Lovell has gambled away most of her property. She would even welcome a chance to gamble even men’s lives and she would be astonished to victimise them to demur. In a world where she feels that only men can act with forthright power she resorts to depend on her beauty and wiles. She refuses to marry the one man who has loved her enough to rebuke her folly and instead accepts the hand of a banker of wealth and approaching senility. To unsophisticated Fleming girls she is a strange, beautiful lady from a picture book; to others she can seem cold and pitiless. But before the second marriage she gives her lover the handkerchief stained in her dead husband’s blood. She reveals that the self-subjugation, which she will try to make of her new union, will be a penance for her guilt. It will be a protection against her nature. To her first husband, she was a beautiful serene to fight for; to her second she is a lovely ornament. Except for Waring’s friendship her life will continue to be one of loneliness.
In 'One of Our Conquerors' there is another minor character Judith Marsett, yet not twenty-three years of age, has already gone through the earlier stages. She has formed a mingled bitterness against men and desire for atonement. From obscure hints it is gathered that she had been an adventurous and she still liked 'love, blood and adventure.' Smartly dressed and usually well poised, she can lapse into the 'James-water English of commerce and drainage'. Her past and her unmarried possession exposes her to rudeness till she would be glad to murder. But there is penitence mixed with her desire to evade the past and to gain respectability as a captain's wife. She blames the corrupt teachings of a bard who is obviously Byron. She speaks with hatred of men; she is now desperately in love with Ned. Ned is sobered into a sense of integrity and marries her. Like other women in the novel, she joins collective woman in speaking of 'bad women' and in hoping to shield any daughter of her own from the knowledge of their ways.

In 'Lord Ormont and his Aminta' it is Amy May whose life dangerously approaches that of the early Mrs. Lovell. Her husband has several times defended her honour. He finally kills a man and flees the country. She has known of his previous duels in advance, but the last occurs without her knowledge. Meredith draws upon his store of metaphors to describe Amy's beauty:

"Her hair was radiant in a shady street; her eyelids tenderly toned around the almond enclosure of blue pebbles, bright as if shining from the sea-wash." Of a fatal destiny Meredith writes, "In the days when dwelling flourished on the land, frail women could be powerful." Mrs. May does not comment on her fate; instead she pretends as
calm assurance about her husband, whom she likes but does not love and assumes her unbrave role at a dinner party. But since ever Ormont is said to phrase yet not respects her and gradually her life becomes more desolate. Finally she has been in lonely possession of love, revenge and power. According to Meredith nature justifies such persons and they are made to suffer.

Livia Fleetwood in 'The Amazing Marriage' is also a winning beautiful temptress. The unsophisticated Woodseer thinks of her as a most heavenly lady, composed of day and night in her colouring, but more of night, where the western edge has become a pale steel blade. She is wedded at young age to a man with a son of her own age. She is a foot-loose, board and indeed a corrupt widow, who gambles from ennui and finds amazement in watching the passions of the gamblers around her.

Thus the spirit of comedy that hovers there over almost every scene is not only a muse inspiring the artist but the minister of reason, of the common sense to untold generations schooled by the Mother Earth, correcting and guiding humanity.
References Chapter III

1. ‘History of English Literature’, The Victorian Age, 1830-1880, Page-162.


3. Ibid


5. ‘J. B. Priestly’, George Meredith.


7. G. M. Travelyn ‘The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith’, Page 119,