Chapter IV

COMIC SPIRIT IN ACTION

Though Meredith has evolved a theory of comedy, as he was a prolific writer of fiction and poetry, it becomes impending to observe whether he practised his own principles in his novels and poetry or not. In this context the opinion expressed by Lionel Stevenson must be quoted: "Though the Essay received little attention at the time, it gradually gained recognition as one of the pre-eminent critical essays of the Victorian age, and a notable example of a creative writer's analysis of his genre. The lecture brought into focus a theory that he held throughout his writing—the value of laughter as a form of intellectual clarification and emotional therapy". Meredith's important novels like Richard Feverel, The Egoist, and Diana of the Crossways, are a close practice of his own principles of a comedy. Some of the passages in the novel, especially in The Egoist, are a practical demonstration of Meredith's theory of comedy. Even in his poetry there is a long poem, titled 'An Ode to Comic Spirit'. It is a sincere poetic exposition of the nature of the Comic Spirit. Here Meredith personifies the spirit of comedy and brings out its attributes, both as a guardian angel hovering over individual's life and also as an effective literary form. After studying his novels and his poetry, one can conclude that Meredith not
only evolved, comedy as a spirit, but he also practised all those ideas while writing his fiction and poetry.

It is quite noticeable that with the advent of The Egoist, the bounds of comedy become more defined. Meredith’s earlier comedies are mere rollicking. Much of ‘Evan Harrington’ for instance is almost farcical comedy; ‘Harry Richmond’ is a romantic comedy, and so on. But with ‘The Egoist’, the type of true mental comedy becomes paramount. The elimination of unnecessary detail is logically insisted on. Meredith says –

“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 crashes, to make the correctness of the representation convincing. Credulity is not wooed through the impressionable senses; nor have we recourse to the small circular glow of the watchmaker’s eye to raise in bright relief minutest grains of evidence for the routing of incredulity. The Comic Spirit conceives a definite situation for a number of characters, and rejects all accessories in the exclusive pursuit of them and their speech.”
In the previous chapters a thorough analysis about the nature and scope of the Comic Spirit is presented and the detailed review of ‘The Essay on Comedy’ is also submitted. It is an inevitable necessity to read the nature of Comic Spirit and the Comedy must be studied together. ‘The Essay on Comedy’ is not only a general account of the literary form, but it also is Meredith’s manifesto relating to the substance and technique of his novels. However, it may be noted that there are two opinions about the scrupulous practice of Meredithian fictional technique vis-à-vis the prescribed norms in the Essay on Comedy. Critics like Gallienne, Crees, stress that Meredith’s novels are written in strict adherence to principles laid down in the ‘Essay on Comedy’. But other critics like J. W. Beech, think that the theory is set for an ideal comedy and only Meredith’s ‘The Egoist’ can satisfy the prescribed criteria in the “Essay”. But the truth probably lies somewhere between these two extreme opinions. In this chapter Meredith’s novels shall be studied individually to find out the play of the Comic Spirit and also the norms prescribed for an ideal comedy.

1. The Shaving of Shagpat (1855)

Meredith’s first novel, Shaving of Shagpat was published in 1855. It is a story of fantasy based on the Arabian Nights. Its structure
is that of Neo-Classical Mock Epic. It was ordained that Shibli Bagarag must shave Shagpat. This shall be done with the heroic sword of Akis, of course, the sword represents luminous common sense so that it can shrink to a pocket raiser or expand to a cosmic ray. Common sense and earthy imagination may forge the self and even literature. But the sword of common sense may not have more than a marginal effect on the actual and existing things. In this novel the axis of concern shifts from sanity to a sense of the sacredness of the self, through which one records the world. A self which must be profaned before it could be accommodated. Shibli’s vanity may constantly drip him up but without that vanity he will be incapable of the ordeal that precede wielding this world.

The novel deals with Noorna who was found in a desert by the side of her dead mother. She was rescued by Goorelka. However, Revolake tells Noorna that he is not her real father and he also asks Noorna to be cautious of Goorelka. One day she discovers the magical powers of a coin with her. With this magic she freezes the black slave Kadrab from his hump and plaster. The princess Goorelka comes to know of Noorna’s magical powers. The princess and Noorna become partners in their ambitious adventures. Noorna gets information from Kadrab that her true father Feshnavat is one of Goorelka’s birds
imprisoned in her aviary. Noorna also is informed that her father Feshnavat can be freed by using his own formula, ‘by the Identical – a powerful hair in the Genie’s head. Noorna swears to give herself to the possessor of the Identical. A battle ensues between the princess and Noorna, in which Noorna succeeds in getting the Identical. To save the Identical Noorna drops it in the head of a layman Shagpat the clothier. As soon as the Identical is planted in hair, Shagpat becomes a hero and an object of adoration in his own city. Since then Shagpat leaves his job of a barber. By this the prophecy made in the magical text, “A barber alone shall be the shearer of the Identical”, comes true.

By now Noorna loses her beauty and becomes a hag. She encounters different people and provokes them to get the Identical. She also promises to marry them when she becomes beautiful again. So Shibli accepts the condition and goes with her to the Vizier’s palace. The Vizier tells Shibli that Shagpat is his enemy and he wants him shaved. Then Shibli and Noorna are betrothed. Noorna discloses that Shagpat wants to marry her, but she refuses the same on the advise of her father Vizier. She also is eager to snatch the Identical from Shibli. She adds, “The only weapon with power to shear the Identical is the sword of Aklis”. Shibli starts on his ordeals to obtain the sword of Aklis. He is assisted in his adventures by Karaz and Noorna. During
their adventure Shibli succeeds in obtaining the phial full of truth waters and three hairs from the great horse. At this stage Noorna manages to take the three hairs and ties them round the wrist of Shibli. Now Shibli is out of power and glory and is left alone. Shibli and Noorna join again to obtain the Lily. Then they reached the land of Aklis. Ultimately, Shibli returns to the world. He imprudently used the Sword to penetrate the secrets of the veiled figure Rubesqurate, and in this act he loses his identity. Signs and wonders accompany the movement of the Sword across the earth. At this time Shibli plans a mock attack on Shagpat but it is foiled by Karaz. In the ensuing battle Shibli is almost defeated though he possesses the Sword. Ultimately Shibli severs the Identical from the true Shagpat. After the victory Fesnnavat is released and Shibli is crowned the King of the city. But he must wait for Noorna for the marriage. This is the simple outline of the novel filled with innumerable twist and uncountable characters.

*The Shaving of Shagpat* is considered by many as a literary satire, a symbolic story and even an allegory. Noorna is the hero of this novel. She attempts to project a model of her world, in which she fails. Her world represents the imagination trying to replace Nature. Shibli also has the same project. But the Sword of Aklis can be wielded only when it is possessed through self-knowledge. It is through this comic sense of
limitation that unites action and intelligence in the novel. One possible meaning of the Identical in the novel is the identity of subject – object knowing itself. But Shibli as a possessor of the Identical offers in Aklis – the deeper self. Similarly, Karaz is represented as an end in itself. For example, the Identical passes from his head to that of his opposite Shagpat. The inhabitants of Shagpat’s city misunderstand the Identical and at the same time worship themselves in the Identical. Shibli’s progress seems to be the dialectical development of reason in history with attendant self-consciousness so that true unity is achieved. It is finally interpreted that romantic imagination fails to restore the first unity, though it finds its ironic solution in the Comic Spirit. It also can be read as a serious parody to try to redeem the social world through the insight that works no less than poet can create his private world through symbol making faculty. However, he may be deceived by symbolic functions.

Ultimately, as McKehnie says, “Interpret as free as you choose, any established evil, any painful superstition, any tyranny lies in Shagpat. Every age breeds its own Shagpat and needs Shiraz Garag. When Luther accomplished his reformation, he shaved the Shagpat of his day and that was a mighty shave.” When Shibli was planted with the Identical, the Kings of the world arrive to do homage to Shagpat. To
punish wicked barber, Baba Mustafa is asked to shave Shagpat. Three times Mustafa approaches him and all the three times Mustafa was shunted violently away to a great distance.

"And now a great cry goes from the people, as it were a song of triumph, for the Identical stood up wrathfully from the head of Shagpat burning in brilliance blinding to look on, he sitting inanimate beneath it. --- so the Identical burned in the head of Shagpat, as in wrath, three nights and three days."

It is the climax of ridicule, reminding us Dryden's *MacFlecknoe* the glorious victory of Shagpat was short lived, like the French monarchy before the revolution. Shagpat was never seen so magnificent. This is definitely a grotesque fantasy with burlesque suggestion, to show the seeming glorification of moribund institutions just before the destruction.

The theme of the novel is more or less to explode the illusions which is the function of the Comic Spirit. Similarly this is the job of Shibli Bagarag, in his own whimsical ways. This theme is dressed in the fanciful and fantastic ironical tale, Meredith's seriousness of purpose is doubtless. "His incidents were, indeed, little more than nineteenth century folk-ways dressed in the trappings of Arabian-Night romance
and transferred from the drawing rooms of England to the magic carpets of Baghdad’. It powerfully presents ‘egoism and illusion or, more precisely, the illusion with which we clothe our egos against reality is the antagonist and unifying theme is its mastery’.

Here is a fantastic description of the shaving of the Identical:

“By this time every soul in the City of Shagpat, kings and people, all save Abarak and Noorna bin Noorka, were overcome and prostrate with their faces to the ground; but Noorna watched the conflict eagerly, and saw the head of Shagpat sprouting incessant fresh crops of hair, despite the pertinacious shearing of her betrothed. Then she smote her hands, and cried, ‘Yea! Though I lose my beauty and the love of my betrothed, I must join in this, or he’ll be lost.’ So, saying to Abarak, ‘Watch over me,’ she went into the air, and, as she passed Rabesqurat, was multiplied into twenty damsels of loveliness. Then Abarak beheld a scorpion following the twenty in mid-air, and darting stings among them. Noorna tossed a ring, and it fell in a circle of flame round the scorpion. So, while the scorpion was shooting in squares to escape from the circle, the fire-beaked vulture flew to it, and fluttered a dense rain which swallowed the flame, and the scorpion and vulture assailed Noorna, that was changed to a golden hawk in the midst of nineteen
other golden hawks. Now, as Rabesqurat came scudding by, and saw the encounter, she made the twenty hawks a hundred. The Genie Karaz howled at her, and pinioned her to a pillar below in the Desert, with Shagpat in her arms. But, as he soared aloft to renew the fight with Noorna, Shibli Bagarag loosed to her aid the Slaves of the Sword, and Abarak marked him slope to a distant corner of earth, and re-ascend in a cloud, when drew swiftly over the land toward the Great Hall. Lo, Shibli Bagarag stepped from it through a casement of the Hall, and with him Shagpat, a slack weight, mazed out of all power of motion. Koorookh swooped low, on his back Baba Mustapha, and Shibli Bagarag flung Abarak beside him on the bird. Then Koorookh whirred off with them; and while the heavens raged, Shibli Bagarag prepared a rapid lather, and dashed it over Shagpat, and commenced shearing him with lightning sweeps of the blade. 'Twas as a racing wheel of fire to see him! Suddenly he desisted, and wiped the sweat from his face. Then calling on the name of Allah, he gave a last keen cunning sweep with the blade, and following that, the earth awfully quaked and groaned, as if speaking in the abysmal tongue the Mastery of the Event to all men. Aklis was revealed in burning beams as of a sun, and the trouble of the air ceased, various slowly curling to the four quarters. Shibli Bagarag had smitten clean through the Identical! Terribly had
Noorna and those that aided her been oppressed by the multitude of their enemies; but, in a moment these melted away, and Karaz, together with the scorpion that was Goorelka, vanished. Day was on the baldness of Shagpat.3 (All the quotations from Meredith's novels are from the Editions published by Archibald Constable & Co. Ltd. 1902)

The Identical—the hair that symbolises illusion—is in the possession of the genie Karaz, who is not evil himself but void of spiritual good. Karaz symbolises active power, as active as human mind and he cannot be destroyed. Noorna is Duty, supremely beautiful and deeply human but changed in to a hag. She realizes that the Identical in the possession of Karaz is not good and she removes the skill of Karaz's evil cunning. Noorna cannot kill illusion by herself, she plants it in the head of Shagpat. Shibli has heard if the Identical, and he agrees to go on adventure. Shibli loves adventures. His nature is to love the good and the beautiful and scorns the evil and the ugly. He is willing to accept the ugly Noorna, because she offers help. The humour in the novel is the liberating power. For example, the aviary of the enchantress Goorelka, contain birds, four real men bewitched and denied the faculty and privilege of laughter. Whereas the rival enchantress Noorna makes them laugh and keeps them laughing whenever till at last they are delivered. Lastly, the sword of Aklis used by Shibli Bagarak is full of wondrous
properties. It is the same sword of Common Sense. Beach asserts that Shibli Bagarag, "The concordist conquering illusion to the sword of common sense". Shibli has not eliminated the illusions and enchantments but learnt to live with them. The cutting of the Identical is his personal triumph. But its social benefit is that 'the master of an Event lasteth among men the space of one cycle of years, and after that a fresh illusion springeth to befool mankind'. The last words of the novel signify that "there is matter therein for the amusement of generations".

The story of Shibli is mainly a revolt against truth. Till the end he could not discard all the illusions which were the hurdles for the play of intellect. When he sways the sword with great enthusiasm, his intellect is liberated and the illusions fall apart. 'It is the intellectual excitement that liberated him from his egoistic bewitchment and lets him take all man's spiritual heritage as his own'.

2. Farina (1857)

Meredith's second novel Farina was published in 1857. The novel is set in medieval Germany. It is Farina of Cologne, a brave lad, but not like others boys with their barbarous ways. Farina wins the love of Margarita, the daughter of the richest burgess. Baron Berner tries to carry away Margarita and Farina and his friend prevent the Baron,
however, the Baron succeeds in separating the lovers by putting Farina in jail and in bringing Margarita into his own control. A Monk Gregory helps Farina’s release from the jail. There is a crisis between the Monk Gregory and Satan. The monk wins this case against the devil before the court with Farina as a witness.

The defeated Satan comes to Cologne on his way back to Hell. The city of Cologne is tempested by the internal stink. Farina with his knowledge and expertise in Chemistry, purifies Cologne by inventing ‘Eau de Cologne’. Then Farina marries Margarita. ‘Farina’ is completely a different novel from the Shaving of Shagpat. Actually, in this novel Meredith was attempting a difficult type of art, the grotesque or the comic-gruesome. It contains the mediaeval background. The story was a conventional specimen of the sentimental historical romance. It has a beautiful heroine, valiant lover, hearty father, savaged villain and other minor characters to provide comic relief. Meredith portrayed the star personages with stresses of caricature suggesting burlesque. The novelist also inserted supernatural events like the conflict of St. Gregory with Satan, and the intervention of Lorelei to save the heroine. It is humorous to include the invention of Eau de Cologne to purify the city. In the end the story turns out to be an anticlimax, and a piece of intentional pathos.
The main theme is the overthrow of the idealist division of body and soul in medieval terms. The novel attacks the thesis of the organic society of Feudalism and also the Victorian ethical creed of spirituality opposed to bodily function. The Monk's contest with Satan is the root a sham fight. By the ascetic defeat of the Devil the intensified vices and vile aspects of life are brought about. In fact the Monk and the Devil accomplices in the perpetuation of a vile system of division which black guards Nature. Whatever the Monk may think he is doing, his creed works out as an alliance with Satan, the great master of the lie and illusion. Meredith avails to present the medieval history and the remnants of feudalism. He mainly attacks the creed of anti-nature as he attacks his own society with its illusions bred from fear and illusion.

Farina is not only a caustic attack on romantic illusions but also a scientific remedy for a better alternative. The hero indulges in a series of self-defeating thrills, and at last turns to the scientific exploration of the facts. He compounds a new chemical drug to antidote the impure infernal stink. The rational achievement is viewed with securing of a happiness of love and scholarship. Farina is one step ahead in Meredith's progressive thought regarding the Comic Spirit. It continues the author's apathy for social illusions and his incessant attempts to puncture them with help from Nature and Woman.
3. *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859)

For a student of literature ‘The Ordeal of Richard Feverel’ presents many difficulties, especially when it is studied in relation to the Comic Spirit. Because it combines different threads of Meredith’s technical experiments — his philosophical exposition and his autobiographical undertones. Where to start is a problem. ‘The Ordeal of Richard Feverel’ was published in 1859. Lionel Stevenson describes the year 1859 as an ‘annus mirabilis’ of English literature, as “It marked a critical turning point”, by setting a new ball rolling in literary subjects and style.

The novel presents Sir Austin Feverel who is the author of the *Pilgrim’s Script*, a book of aphorisms. He also has a System for educating boys for unsullied manhood. Sir Austin is convinced that a woman is a great corrupting influence for the growing youth. He declares that the rotten state of society with women in it, can be purified by a scientific system of education. Such an education can produce an ideal man and consequently an ideal society. Sir Austin has not only evolved his system of education but he actually brought up his son Richard in it.
Sir Richard's Utopian society is based on his misanthropic premise and his misogamy. Sir Austin has brought out his theory due to his own past experiences. His wife ran away with his best friend and dependent, the poet Diaphor Sando, leaving him nothing but the baby Richard. Sir Austin is the master of Raynham Abbey in the Thames Valley with innumerable family dependents. The Feverel family is supposed to be under the curse of a maligned fate (Mrs. Malediction) the enduring of which constitutes its ordeal. Sir Austin believes in this superstition because his wife dissented him and he suffered an ordeal. His son Richard on his seventh birthday sees a lady at his bedside, who is none else than his mother Mrs. Malediction. This appearance of Mrs. Malediction is seen as a bad omen. Sir Austin has changed his lifestyle after his wife's desertion.

Richard who was brought up under the chains of his father's system starts revolting against it. On his fourteenth birthday, Richard along with his friend Ripton Thomson goes to pheasant shooting. When Richard was poaching he was caught and whipped by Farmer Blaize. Richard takes revenge on the Farmer by setting fire to his ricks. After all these aberrations of the System, Richard is reconciled to his father, who is happy and is also confident that his System works.
Richard follows the rules of the System in love and romance. But when he sees his father Sir Austin kissing Lady Blandish's hand he is disturbed and the deep springs of love and sex are stirred in his heart. Richard's cousin Clara is deeply in love with him, but Richard falls in love with Lucy Desbourough, the orphan niece of the Farmer Blaize. Their love is spied on by Benson and he reports this matter to Sir Austin. The father summons Richard to London, and Lucy is sent back to convent. Returning to Raynham, Richard finds Lucy gone and he pursues her but suddenly Richard falls desperately ill. The long absence of Lucy and the illness of Richard put a temporary end to their love. But Richard discovers Lucy in London and his love is revived. Richard marries Lucy and they leave for honeymoon. Sir Austin is shocked and he questions the efficiency of his System. However, for this tragedy of Richard, Sir Austin blames the defects of humanity rather than his system. The father is angry and refuses to see Richard.

In London Richard involves himself in social work, and during this period, he is seduced by Mrs. Mount Stuart. Richard feels ashamed and does not go to Lucy. Inversely, Lucy is seduced by Lord Mount Stuart the husband of Mrs. Mount Stuart. After the suicide of Clare, Richard comes to know of her love to him. He considers himself a virtual murderer, and goes abroad to clean himself. After a series of
dramatic incidents the novel ends with the death of Richard and Lucy. The story starts in gladness and ends in sadness, from gay childhood in disillusioned maturity.

The Ordeal of Richard Feverel is definitely a great novel in narration and in technique. At this juncture it is not the purpose of this thesis to discuss in detail Meredith's fictional technique. But the technique in this novel, The Ordeal of Richard Feverel is the form of the Comic Spirit itself. So it is necessary to consider it. Sir Austin's work Pilgrim's Script provides a vital commentary on his notions and principles of the System. The aphorisms of the Pilgrim's Script are the ironic findings garbed in beautiful language. Sir Austin has composed these principles in his distilled wisdom from his own experiences.

The Pilgrim's Script itself is the butt of ridicule for the Comic Spirit because Sir Austin's solid wisdom proves to be false and shallow. The Jilted Sentimentalist in Sir Austin composed these aphorisms. The training given to Richard as the best education for a boy to reach an ideal manhood, turns out to be defective and even tragic. It also contains some of the best aphorisms in English language. It declares, "I expect that woman will be the last thing civilised by man". It considers
women “as domesticated wild cats”. It is the irony that Sir Austin, with all his wisdom, falls for Lady Blandish.

The Feverels are under the curse of Mrs. Malediction. They are subjected to an ordeal and trial. But the Ordeal they undergo while facing this divine trial, the Feverels are considered by the world as eccentric or mad. What exactly that curse is and who is that spirit which is called Mrs. Malediction may not be a difficult questions. Because Sir Austin is convinced that he was a victim of his deserted wife. So Sir Austin knows thoroughly the part played by woman in the fall of man. The involvement in sex, he calls as the ‘Apple disease’ which reminds us of the primal story of Adam and Eve in garden of Eden. When Richard is seen with Clara, Mrs. Berry told Sir Austin, that now young man has got the taste for apples, he would bite at them. Sir Austin was scared of this ‘apple disease’ in relation to Richard and determined, “not an hour must be lost in betrothing Richard and holding him bound to achieve.” The whole narration about Sir Austin’s endeavour to select an ideal wife for Richard is presented in a very humorous fashion.

“It appeared that he (Sir Austin) had seen numerous young ladies. He had politely asked them to sit down and take off their shoes; but such monstrous feet they had mostly that he declined to attempt to try on the
Glass Slipper and politely departed are tried it on with a resigned sad look declared that it would not fit."

Meredith wants to highlight the dichotomy between the reality and the false idealism of Sir Austin’s principles. All things related to the system and Sir Austin’s philosophy are exposed in their burlesque dignity. In an incident where Mrs. Grandison was showing her girls Gymnasium Sir Austin does not see the reality. He does not pay any attention to the girls there. Meredith comments, "The Baronet too much rapped up in the enlightenment of her principles to notice the despondency of their (girls) countenances." It clearly indicates that Sir Austin is always blind to the actual presence of a particular boy or a girl. J. W. Beech comments "Such incapacity is common enough, and not in itself comic'. It is the complacent and undeveloped assessment of wisdom that makes so ridiculous the want of it".  

The function of the Comic Spirit is to bring out the difference between the real foolishness and the pretended wisdom. Actually, Sir Austin does not know science and his system is in no way scientific. In the dignified pretence of possession of knowledge, he becomes an ignorant fool. It is stated that Plato defined ridiculous as ‘rooted in self ignorance’. If common men commit mistakes there is nothing shocking
in it. But one who claims to be a scientist is not allowed to commit errors. It is here that the exhibition of ridiculous and ludicrous is at its climax. It is pointed out that Sir Austin was a practical scientist dealing in human nature; and the one thing that he left out of account was human nature. Actually, The Ordeal of Richard Feverel may be considered as Meredith’s first significant and remarkable novel. Even if Meredith was trying to strike new technique he did not have a strong conviction or a firm grip, either on the method of the Comic Spirit or the methods of new technique. That is why in spite of its brilliance ‘The Ordeal of Richard Feverel’ reveals some discrepancies. Though the novel is intended to be a comedy by Sir Austin and his system, it ends as a tragedy of Richard and Lucy. Secondly, the concept of the Comic Spirit and its function is not dealt with in a concentrated effort. The whole novel is steeped in bright light of the Comic Spirit. On every page the ludicrous arising out of the reality and pretension is laid base, but the bright light of the Comic Spirit fails. When the reading of the novel is over, what remains, is the tragedy of Richard rather than the comic exposure of Sir Austin and his system. But in his coming novels Meredith avoids this uncertainty to make the function of Comic Spirit more profound and more perfect.
A father who is deserted by his wife and who sets out to rear his son according to a set ‘Scientific System’ unconsciously found on his distrust of women and his own wounded pride should be an ideal subject for comedy. The system, running, as it must, counter to common sense and human nature is bound to fail. And its collapse, with the consequent exposure of the father’s false pride and reassertion of the collective wisdom of the society would provide the comic deflation and denouement. The laughter provoked by the discomfort of the father, underscored by the reaffirmation of the adequacy of the common sense, would produce an appropriate comic catharsis. The same situation has its serious possibilities. The father may ruin his son’s life. But not in comedy. Comedy says that the possibilities are that the son, common sense, and nature will overcome the false system of the father. And the comic artist, knowing well that the whole truth will spoil his comedy is careful not to tell the whole truth only the comic side of it. The dark spirit of tragedy hovers outside the circle of the comedy but does not cross the line.

4. **Evan Harrington (1860)**

Meredith’s novel ‘Evan Harrington’ was serialised in ‘Once a Week’ in 1860. ‘Evan Harrington’ is more autobiographical than ‘The
Ordeal of Richard Feverel’. The novel was born out of Meredith’s psychological conditions in 1860, shuttling into the past and the future simultaneously. The heroine of the novel Rose is carved out of Janet Duff Garden, and her father and mother also appear as Sir Francis and Lady Jocelyn. “The Duff Gardens were fully aware”, writes Lionel Stevenson, “that they were being used as models; and since the depiction was favourable they were not displeased.”

However, ‘Evan Harrington’ stands in all most all aspects as a great contrast with the preceding novel ‘The Ordeal of Richard Feverel’. Evan Harrington is hilarious and humorous and the tragic element is completely eliminated. It is pervaded by humour of every sort, that Meredith is on the point of breaking through the bounds of fiction, to absorb the elements of comedy. Even though the novel revels in hilarious farce Meredith does not ignore to impart his message through the Comic Spirit. His serious lesson to the society is that the hollow foolishness attempts to appear what it is not. The novel also is described as the externalisation of Meredith’s own secrets and wishes. Here Meredith has returned to normal narrative method. The theme of ‘Evan Harrington’ is in short Meredith’s and his father’s careers. He explores his life at Portsmouth profusely. ‘Evan Harrington’ is a son of the Great Mel, goes to see his sister the Countess De Saldar in Portugal, where
Evan meets the family of Jocelyns. Evan’s handsome figure and stately appearance make Jocelyns to consider him as a Gentleman, and they invite him to their house. After returning to England Evan learns of his father’s death at Lymport. He proudly takes the responsibility for family debts and he also agrees to pursue the family profession of a tailor. Actually, Evan was under his mother’s insistence that he should become a tailor.

With regard to Evan, the Countess had far outstripped her sisters in her views. A gentleman she had discovered must have one of two things – a title or money. He might have all the breeding in the world; he might be as good as an angel; but without a title or money he was under eclipse almost total. On a gentleman he sun must shine. Now, Evan had no title, no money. The clouds were thick above the youth. To gain a title he would have to scale aged mountains. There was one break in his firmament through which the radiant luminary might be assisted to cast its beams on him still young. That divine portal was matrimony. If he could but make a rich marriage he would blaze transfigured; all would be well! And why should not Evan marry an heiress, as well as another? This was the problem before the Countess Saldar and she had an immediate plan to solve this question:
"I know a young creature who would exactly suit him," said the Countess. She is related to the embassy, and is in Lisbon now. A charming child — just sixteen! Dios! How the men rave about her! and she isn't a beauty, — there's the wonder; and she is a little too gauche — too English in her habits and ways of thinking; like to be admired, of course, but doesn't know yet how to set about getting it. She rather scandalized our ladies, but when you know her! She will have, they say, a hundred thousand pounds in her own right! Rose Jocelyn, the daughter of Sir Franks, and that eccentric Lady Jocelyn. She is with her uncle, Melville, the celebrated diplomat — though, to tell you the truth, we turn him round our fingers, and spin him as the boys used to do the cockchafers. I cannot forget our old Fallowfield school-life, you see, my dears. Well, Rose Jocelyn would just suit Evan. She is just of an age to receive an impression. And I would take care she did. Instance me a case where I have failed?"

"Or there is the Portuguese widow, the Rostral. She's thirty, certainly; but she possesses millions! Estates all over the kingdom, and the sweetest creature. But, no. Evan would be out of the way there, certainly. But — our women are very nice: they have the dearest, sweetest ways: but I would rather Evan did not marry one of them. And then there's the religion!"
This was a sore of the Countess's own, and she dropped a tear in coming across it.

"No, my dears, it shall be Rose Jocelyn!" she concluded: "I will take Evan over with me, and see that he has opportunities. It shall be Rose, and then I can call her mine; for in verity I love the child."

"It is not my part to dispute the Countess's love for Miss Jocelyn; and I have only to add that Evan, unaware of the soft training he was to undergo, and the brilliant chance in store for him, offered no impediment to the proposition that he should journey to Portugal with his sister (whose subtlest flattery was to tell him that she should not be ashamed to own him there); and ultimately, furnished with cash for the trip by the remonstrating brewer, went.

"So these Parcae, daughters of the shears, arranged and settled the young man's fate. His task was to learn the management of his mouth, how to dress his shoulders properly, and to direct his eyes - rare qualities in man or woman, I assure you; the management of the mouth being especially admirable, and correspondingly difficult. These achieved, he was to place his battery in position, and win the heart and hand of an heiress." In this passage, the sketch of the Countess is marvellous presented by the author. But the actual bathos comes in the
ending of the novel when she leaves for Rome to renounce from her activities. Her last letter is a kind of epilogue for her career.

"Let the post-mark be my reply to your letter received through the Consulate, and most courteously delivered with the Consul's compliments. We shall yet have an ambassador at Rome-mark your Louisa's words. Yes, dearest! I am here, body and spirit! I have at last found a haven, a refuge, and let those who condemn me compaer the peace of their spirits with mine. You think that you have quite conquered the dreadfulness of our origin. My love, I smile at you! I know it to be impossible for the Protestant heresy to offer a shade of consolation. Earthly-born, it rather encourages earthly distinctions. It is the sweet sovereign Pontiff alone who gathers all in his arms, not excepting tailors. Here, if they could know it, is their blessed comfort!

"Thank Harriet for her message. She need say nothing By refusing me her hospitality, when she must have known that the house was as free of creditors as any foreigner under the rank of Count is of soap, she drove me to Mr. Duffian. Oh! how I rejoice at her exceeding unkindness! How warmly I forgive her the unsisterly -- to say the least -- vindictiveness of her unaccountable conduct! He sufferings will one day be terrible. Good little Andrew supplies her place to me. Why do
you refuse his easily afforded bounty? No one need know of it. I tell you candidly, I take double, and the small good punch of a body is only too delighted. But then, I can be discreet.

"Oh! the gentlemanliness of these infinitely maligned Jesuits! They remind me immensely of Sir Charles Grandison, and those frontispiece pictures to the novels we read when girls - I mean in manners and the ideas they impose - not in dress or length of leg, of course. The same winning softness; the same irresistible ascendancy over the female mind! They require virtue for two, I assure you, and so I told Silva, who laughed.

"But the charms of confession, my dear! I will talk of Evan first. I have totally forgiven him. Attaché to the Naples embassy, sounds toll-lol. In such a position I can rejoice to see him, for it permits me to acknowledge him. I am not sure that, spiritually, Rose will be his most fitting helpmate. However, it is done, and I did it, and there is no more to be said. The behaviour of Lord Laxley in refusing to surrender a young lady who declared that her heart was with another, exceeds all I could have supposed. One of the noble peers among his ancestors must have been a pig! Oh! the Roman nobility! Grace, refinement, intrigue, perfect comprehension of your ideas, wishes - the meanest trifles! Here
you have every worldly charm, and all crowned by Religion! This is my true delight. I feel at last that whatsoever I do, I cannot go far wrong while I am within hail of my gentle priest. I never could feel so before.

"The idea of Mr. Parsley proposing for the beautiful widow Strike! It was indecent to do so so soon -- widowed under such circumstances! But I dare say he was as disinterested as a Protestant curate ever can be. Beauty is a good dowry to bring a poor, lean, worldly curate of your Church, and he knows that. Your bishops and arches are quite susceptible to beautiful petitioners, and we know here how your livings and benefices are dispensed. What do you intend to do? Come to me; come to the bosom of the old and the only true Church, and I engage to marry you to a Roman prince the very next morning or two. That is, if you have no ideas about prosecuting a certain enterprise which I should not abandon. In that case, stay. As Duchess of B, Mr. Duffian says you would be cordially welcome to his Holiness, who may see women. That absurd report is all nonsense. We do not kiss his toe, certainly, but we have privileges equally enviable. Herbert is all charm. I confess he is a little wearisome with his old ruins, and his Dante, the poet. He is quite of my opinion, that Evan will never wash out the trade stain on him until he comes over to the Church of Rome. I adjure you, Caroline, to lay this clearly before our dear
brother. In fact, while he continues a Protestant, to me he is a tailor. But here Rose is the impediment. I know her to be just one of those little dogged minds that are incapable of receiving new impressions. Was it not evident in the way she stuck to Evan after I had once brought them together? I am not at all astonished that Mr. Raikes should have married her maid. It is a case of natural selection. But it is amusing to think of him carrying on the old business in 193, and with credit! I suppose his parents are to be pitied; but what better is the creature fit for? Mama displeases me in consenting to act as housekeeper to old Grumpus. I do not object to the fact, for it is prospective; but she should have insisted on another place of resort than Fallowfield. I do not agree with you in thinking her right in refusing a second marriage. Her age does not shelter her from scandal in your Protestant communities.

"I am every day expecting Harry Jocelyn to turn up. He was rightly sent away, for to think of the folly Evan put into his empty head! No; he shall have another wife, and Protestantism shall be his forsaken mistress!

"See how your Louy has given up the world and its vanities! You expected me to creep up to you contrite and whimpering? On the contrary, I never felt prouder. And I am not going to live a lazy life, I
can assure you. The Church hath need of me! If only for the peace it hath given me on one point, I am eternally bound to serve it.

"Postscript: I am persuaded of this; that it is utterly impossible for a man to be a true gentleman who is not of the true Church. What it is I cannot say; but it is as a convert that I appreciate my husband. Love is made to me, dear, for Catholics are human. The other day it was a question whether a lady or a gentleman should be compromised. It required the grossest fib. The gentleman did not hesitate. And why? His priest was handy. Fancy Lord Laxley in such a case. I shudder. This shows that your religion precludes any possibility of the being the real gentleman, and whatever Evan may think of himself, or Rose think of him, I know the thing."

His sister the Countess wants Evan to marry into a rich family of social status. He cannot evade the pressure from his sister and so visits the Jocelyns. The Countess De Salda also involves her two sisters and prepares plans and complicated intrigues to advance the family fortunes. But all her attempts meet with continual threats of exposure. But the Countess does not accept defeat. She fights against all her force and is determined to put her family on a great pedestal. Evan feels guilty and is ashamed of his sisters' manipulations. So one day Evan decides to
tell Rose the truth about him and his family. In the meantime the Countess is exposed for her treacherous acts. Evan is ready to take the responsibility of those treacherous acts on himself. In the end Evan and Rose are united.

This tentative outline of the story cannot be a substitute for the novel. Because the novel is a magnificently sustained comedy of the Countess' intrigues and struggles. The Countess De Saldar is, in the words of Lindsay Jack, "absolutely unscrupulous and abysmal liar ready to use her physical charms for social ends and almost admirable in her buoyant determination. She embodies supremely the masculine snobbery of the Victorian bourgeois and subordination of all human realities to class-aims. She it is who stands out throughout the book, over-life size, a rich comic type." This marvellous lady of pretension and ambition, the Countess is caught in the act of seducing her brother-in-law. She cannot bare the humiliation, and she retires to Rome and Catholicism. In this novel almost all characters are true to life. Rose Jocelyn who is after Janet is presented through the colourful dreams of Meredith.

The Countess Saldar is a thorough snob. For her it is impossible for a tailor to become a gentleman. According to her there is clear
demarcating line between a profession and gentility. She just cannot imagine native gentility and nobleness apart from the social tile of a gentleman. It is the essence of snobbishness to regard the rank instead of the man. In such cases the Comic Spirit no doubt works invisibly. The invisible spirits are trained to discover malignly the ridiculousness in such figures.

The aim is to concentrate on those figures surrounded by the Comic Spirit the full light of publicity, and really follow out the result of actions. Nothing is to distract the attention, nothing hinder the judgement. The Comic Spirit is pitiless where it finds its prey. It discards all trappings that might lead us from the heart of its victim, and seeks simply to unmask the soul, and bring about the fulfilment of its sentences. The differences between the comedy of the earlier period and of the later might be well represented by two quotations. Here is a sentence from Evan Harrington –

'‘Thinking he was apprehended, Mr Goren said: 'I'm going down tonight to take care of the shop. He's to be buried in his old uniform. You had better come with me by the night-coach, if you would see the last of him, young man.'
Breaking an odd pause that had fallen, the Countess cried aloud, uniform!

Mr Goren felt his arm seized and his legs hurrying him some paces into isolation. ‘Thanks! thanks! Was murmured in his ear. ‘Not a word more. Evan cannot bear it. Oh! You are good to have come, and we are grateful. My father! My father!’

She had to tighten her hand and wrist against her bosom to keep herself up. She had to reckon in a glance how much Rose had heard, or divined. She had to mark whether the Count had understood a syllable. She had to whisper to Evan to hasten away with the horrible man. She had to enliven his stunned senses, and calm her own.’

It is just a little too boisterous to have pleased the Meredith of a later age. The real comedy lies in the remark, ‘In his uniform!’ and the flood of colour it throws over the mind of the Countess.

It is almost clear that Meredith was deeply in love with Janet during that time. She provided Meredith the necessary respite, from the traumatic experience, related to Mrs. Meredith. However, when Janet was engaged to be married, Meredith silently accepted the changed position. But he blamed the moribund class distinctions for the shattering of his dreams. Meredith puts his own feelings into the novel.
A study of the novels starting from “Evan Harrington” up to “Harry Richmond”, reveals that they have some similarity of theme and style. Here in this group of novels there is no phantasgomaria of the *Shaving of the Shagpat* nor experimental adventurism of “The Ordeal of Richard Feverel”. In these two early novels, Meredith had a clear conception of the Comic Spirit, but its execution is not perfectly considered nor concentrated. But in the group of novels mentioned above, Meredith seems to have adopted a different attitude.

One of the reasons for this is his personal and domestic difficulties, from which Meredith was slowly emerging out. Secondly, the financial needs dictate the author to compose reader friendly novels. Thirdly, Meredith was under the influence of different novelists, both old and contemporary. Fourthly, his job as a publisher’s reader had many adverse effects on his creativity. Whatever the reasons may be, these novels, Evan Harrington, Sandra Belloni, Rhoda Fleming, Harry Richmond, and the short stories, are definitely in Meredithian in a limited sense. No doubt they contain the basic ingredients of Meredith’s novel – imagination, poetic style, rich metaphor and nature description. They also have a more or less a similar theme. This is not to deny the individualistic nature of them. This is why critics like Bailey and Beach categorise this group of novels in a different way. It is stated that these
novels were written by the 'journeyman'. Bailey elaborates that, "Meredith has discovered the best of his genius and is consciously possessed of power and skill." He also states that 'journeyman' is different from the 'apprentice'. Meredith has definitely gained self confidence but this self-confidence is diluted for the reasons mentioned above. He also describes this stage of Meredith as one of the assimilation because as stated above Meredith was under various influences. But Bailey states, "Indeed whatever charges the most hostile critics have brought against him, none have taken it upon themselves to accuse him very loudly of plagiarism, but have rather gone to the opposite extreme, insisting that in his self-sufficiency he refused to learn from those who could have taught him much". Whatever the explanation might be this group of novels is definitely different.

Meredith fills these novels with his characteristic atmosphere. And the theme is the attempt for social ascendancy. The important characters in this novel display their desire to acquire the status of higher social hierarchy. There are two types of characters, one already in possession of the social status, and the second one, craving to mount the status levels. Behind all those attempts of the characters, Meredith's morbid reaction against the stigma of social inferiority is clearly visible.
5. **Sandra Belloni (Emilia in England) (1864)**

'Sandra Belloni had its original title 'Emilia in England'. In this novel, Meredith presents the development of a character on a higher level of truth and humanity through social struggle. The author also attempts to break down romantic concepts, by means of a clear depiction of characters and a detailed description of the people with the revolutionary spirit of their society. Meredith started with the romantic conception of fictional technique as in his earlier novels. But he realised that the romantic element either should curb or absorb into the struggle for the social change.

The novel *Sandra Belloni* starts with the 'Pole’s Prelude' introducing Arabella, Cornelia and Adela Pole. These ladies of Group Field, are the daughters of a flourishing city merchant. At present these ladies are scaling society with the help of the arts. As the novel opens these sisters are going to attend a singing program of some unknown nightingale. These ladies are designated as Pole, Pollard and North Pole, the three shades of distance which they could convey in a bow. They are ambitious and aspiring, mounting the spirit or the driving force of their lives. They went on perpetually mounting, to be brief, "They are very ambitious damsels aiming at, they knew not exactly what, and
that it was something vide that it had not a name, so high in the air that no one could see it.”

Meredith adds, “that these three ladies are sentimentalist, as they supposed that they enjoyed exclusive possession of the Nice Feelings and exclusively comprehended the Fine shades.”

The novel ‘Sandra Belloin’ is the story of an Italian expatriate in England in search of a new happy life. It works out a subtly suggested contrast between the laboured futility of three fair sentimentalists in chief and the coxcombr of Wilfred mounted on the hippocriff. It also depicts the despair of Purcell Barrett the dreary organist who cannot face the world with courage, and Emilia unformed and immature, but sincere to her inmost soul and nobly unconventional. Emilia is a romantic touchstone by which the comic actions of the other characters are tested. Here the false refinement of civilization is stripped bare. The lives of Adela, Arabella and Cornelia Pole include pathos, but never tragedy, for no matter how frustrated their hopes may be, even if a lover commits suicide, they will not face the disaster frankly and with passion, but will take refuge as always in the ‘Fine Shades’ and ‘Nice Feelings’. “Civilized little people are moved to fulfil their destinies and to write their histories as much by taste as by appetite”. Here is Sandra narrating her childhood experiences of poverty and her exploitation by so many people including that old Jew:
"I could not help running up to the gentleman to beg for his pardon. He told me not to cry, and put some potatoes he had been picking up all into my hand. They were muddy, but he wiped them first; and he said it was not the first time he had stood fire, and then said good-bye; and I slipped the potatoes into my pocket immediately, thankful that they were not wasted. My father pulled me away roughly from the laughing and staring people on the bridge. But I knew the potatoes were only bruised. Even three potatoes will prevent you from starving. They were very fine ones, for I always took care to buy them good. When I reached home——"

Wilfred had risen and was yawning with a desperate grimace. He bade her continue, and pitched back heavily into his seat."

"One night he brought home a Jew gentleman, beautifully dressed, with diamonds all over him. He sparkled like the Christmas cakes in pastry cooks' windows. I sang to him, and he made quite a noise about me. But the man made me so uncomfortable, touching my shoulders, and I could not bear his hands, even when he was praising me. I sang to him till the landlady made me leave off, because of the other lodgers who wanted to sleep. He came every evening, and then said I should sing at a concert. It turned out to be a public house, and
my father would not let me go; but I was sorry; for in public the man could not touch me as he did. It damped the voice!

"I should like to know where that fellow lives," cried the corset.

"I don't know, I'm sure," she said. "He lens money. Do you want any? I heard your sisters say something, one day. You can always have all that I have, you know."

A quick spirit of pity and honest kindness went through Wilfred's veins and threatened to play the woman with his eyes, for a moment. He took her hand and pressed it. She put her lips to his fingers.

"Once," she continued, "when the Jew gentleman had left, I spoke to my father of his way with me, and then my father took me on his knee, and the things he told me of what that man felt for me made my mother come and tear me away to bed. I was obliged to submit to the Jew gentleman patting and touching me always. He used to crush my dreams afterwards! I know my voice was going. My father was so eager for me to please him, I did my best; but I felt dull, and used to sit and shake my head at my harp, crying; or else I felt like an angry animal, and could have torn the strings."
Emilia falls in love with Wilfred with all her sincerity and innocence, but Wilfred plays with in his game of social ascendancy. He courts Lady Charlotte for money and social status, while he wants to retain Emilia for reputation. Cornelia, the third sister wants to question Wilfred whether Lady Charlotte would not be a mercenary in marrying him, but withholds herself from this. But she puts in a language of 'Fine Shades' whether Lady Charlotte is 'much older' to him. Similarly the three sisters play a double game in their concern to marry against paternal wishes and yet not wound their father for their concern for 'Nice Feelings'. They do not greatly love their father and they are also disturbed with his parental 'grammar', but they must conform to an idealized pattern of filial devotion. At one time Cornelia would actually welcome her father's financial ruin that she might marry her impoverished lover Barrett. Afraid to come face to face with difficulties, the sisters at first believe that only indirect allusions and a studied manner can get them social success and good marriages which they need for self-respect. Later on, when they did not get success they still play determinedly the same game to avoid what they would consider disgrace. The novel presents many such incidents to expose their pathetic predicament. The causes for this are their bankrupt father and the artificial civilization.
Their brother Wilfred is also a victim of this artificial civilization as well as his personal defects. He fought in India as a soldier and now in Austrian service to fight against Italy. His sisters magnified his wounds and tried to obtain a medal for him but for the fact that his intellectual attributes are few. He is a sentimentalist and he can never for long rid himself of self-conscious apprehensions. Wilfred fights a rural duel to defend Emilia. When he comes to know of Emilia’s antecedents of poverty, he concludes that she ‘a little unformed girl’ cannot be worthy of him. He loves Emilia, but his passion for her is lessened for she is not ‘lady-like in refinement’. In the end he loses both Lady Charlotte and Emilia. Meredith’s comment is: “Wilfred was young, and under the dominion of his senses, which can be, if the sentimentals will believe me, as tyrannous and misleading when super-refined as when ultra-bestial”.

Emilia is a magnetic and splendid figure in the novel. She spent her early life in a squalor, and runs away when she comes to know that she is to marry a Jewish money-lender. There she meets the Poles. Emilia’s character is filled with extraordinary naïveté and frankness. But during the progress of the novel she gradually rises from the misty memories of her youth into a knowledge of living the reality of life. After her love for Wilfred she ceases to be a child and no longer a
merely irresponsible follower of her whims. Her nature is mixed with fire and steel which is reflected in her love and hatred of Wilfred. ‘She loves with the passionate intensity of delicious strangeness which cannot imagine anything but the same mind in the loved one’. Due to her promise to Pericles, Emilia is obliged to go to Italy and she asks Wilfred to marry her so they may not part from each other. She serves Mr. Pole in his dying days. From his disjointed speech made in coma, Emilia knows the truth. Her fears are substantiated when Wilfred says that he never loved her. Her friend Merthyr Powys rescues her from this catastrophe and ‘her passion for Wilfred is behind her; it has gone and left a calm that is more impassable than hatred’. Wilfred meets her and entreats her to stay, and Emilia becomes ready to stay on one condition. But she realizes the unhappiness and uselessness of her present existence. She also sees the essential futility and boldly breaks the worthless cords. Emilia leaves for Italy with her sense of freedom, patriotism and her melodious voice.

Emilia possesses one attractive quality and that is her practical attitude toward life. She can survive on eating potatoes and yet serve her impoverished family. She takes of the old, dying Mr. Pole in the midst of falseness and suspicion. Living in Italy and loving and yearning for freedom of Italy may seem to be contradictory. Her melodious voice and
passionate songs are high-lighted to prove that song is the direct means for spiritual freedom, first of all from the Poles in England and then for Italy from the Austrians. Peculiarly enough, the incidents and situation presented in the novel are about the other characters; in the sense that they were initiated, conducted and dominated by others. Emilia is placed at the receiver's end. In the welter of circumstance she plays only the role which in actual society she might be expected to have as one of many persons, each living intensely, even desperately and at times in mental isolation.

The Pole sisters and Wilfred are involved in the game of social ascendency. In their foolish notions of artificiality, the innocent Emilia becomes a victim. Meredith's sentimentalists are laid to thorny paths. They learn the lesson as Wilfred has learnt, 'he who will not when he may, may not when he will'.

In this novel the Comic Spirit exposes their sense of superiority to mankind. 'Persons that nourish nice feelings and are intimate with the fine shades carry their own tastes of intrinsic value. It is not easy for a normal artist to sketch the characters of such ladies. Nothing but comedy bordering on burlesque could issue from the contrast, the exact depiction of their character. So the novel is a clinical dissection of the
‘mounting’, the Nice Feelings and the Fine shades of the Pole sisters and their brother Wilfred. He is no doubt different from his sisters. But at the same time he imbibed the general outline of their social philosophy. After coming to know the childhood poverty and the struggle for survival on the part of Emilia, instead of loving her sincerely and heartily Wilfred wants to possess her for melodious voice and singing reputation. Wilfred is exposed for his false notions about social ascendency. Though the Pole sisters are the worst victims of the Comic Spirit, they remain in the reader’s memory forever. Disappointed with Wilfred, Emilia returns to Italy on the advice of Merthyr Bowys. She also regains her self-confidence and patriotic fervour. The central idea of the novel is the contrast between the passion and honesty of Emilia and the sentimentalism and dishonest pretension of the Poles. Emilia is one of the most radiant heroines created by Meredith. She is one step superior to others because of her melodious voice and dedication to music.

From this novel onwards Meredith experiments with heroines of revolutionary type. These heroines by their sense of liberty, struggle against social shams, gain sympathy of the readers. Simultaneously they also pass through sufferings and tragic conditions due to their personal follies.
6. Rhoda Fleming (1865)

Rhoda Fleming is a novel based on Meredith's study of Samuel Richardson. This novel reveals different elements of Richardson, Dickens and even George Eliot. While considering this group of novels to which 'Rhoda Fleming' belongs, in relation to the Comic Spirit, one finds some difficulty. The protagonists of these novels are not easily divided into the sentimentalists or egoists. That is why they are grouped under a separate category of snobs. J. W. Beach attributes this title of 'Snobs' to the characters of these novels. "A snob", states Beech, "is one who has for wealth and social distinction a regard out of proportions to their real value...... The word describes one who pretends to a social distinction nor rightly his ... Snobbery is most striking in the comfortable middle classes. The peasant is beneath hope and pretence. The noble can afford to be magnanimous. But the well-to-do citizen, with every want supplied some what springs from vanity has for his chief business in life the cultivation of society".16

Snobbery is divided into two types - high snobbery and low snobbery practised by Thackarey and Dickens respectively. But the credit goes to Meredith only to conceive and execute comic plots on this theme of snobbery. Besides, Meredith is more happily equipped with
clear insight, thoughtfulness of treatment and imagination. Beech also elaborates that the snob is not so complex character like sentimentalist or an egoist. Hence snobbery may not require subtle analysis or even emotional involvement.

‘Rhoda Fleming’ is a tragic story. It is especially a bitter one as it deals with a betrayed woman. Dahlia Fleming is far more a martyr than a sinning woman. She is the victim and even a scapegoat, and such is a common story in our society. The tragic intensity is described in these words: “Once more the inexplicable frozen look struck over opened eyes, as one of the minutes of Time had yawned to show him its deep, mute, tragic abyss, and was extinguished.” More tragic are her last words. “Almost her last words to him, calmly, but with the quaver of breath resembling sobs were: ‘Help poor girls’.”

The history of Rhoda and Dahlia unfolds the condition of girls from poor family, under the trammels of heredity, without the necessary training and education. The strict and orthodox attitude of the father, not to allow the necessary freedom to the girls, in the fear of social ostracism, seems the main cause for the tragedy. It is interesting to note that the same background and the same mental set-up bring different consequences in two girls. The aspect of heredity for Rhoda, who
inherited her father's qualities, brings her haughty nature and irrational decisions. Rhoda, 'the motherless, dark-eyed lassie' is brought up with her sister Dahlia. Her father Farmer Fleming is a man of stern country morality, keeps his daughters under strict discipline, in the fear of family scandal. His desire is to marry both the daughters respectably. If it comes to marrying them to useless fellow, he does not hesitate, to save the family reputation from the stigma of immoral daughters. Rhoda inherits to the full her father's rigid sense of rectitude, and the obstinacy which makes him keep to his purpose, regardless of advice and consequences.

Dahlia goes to visit his uncle Anthony, who is a porter in the bank of Sir William Bancove. Edward, in collusion with Algernon, seduces Dahlia and casts her off as he fears her as a hurdle to his social ambition. Robert Armstrong is in love with Rhoda, and to make his marriage with Rhoda sure, he makes a plot in connivance with Edward's nephew Algernon. It is for the marriage between Dahlia and Sedgett. By now Edward is repentant and comes to marry Dahlia. But Rhoda prevents a meeting between Edward and Dahlia. She sends Dahlia to church. Roberts recognizes the possible husband of Dahlia as a wretch and one of his old friends. Sedgett, when discovered tries to run away leaving his bride. But Rhoda promises him money on a condition that he
should never come to Dahlia. But she fails to get money from his uncle and in that attempt invited the criminal charge of theft.

After some time Sedgett comes to claim his wife, and the farmer Fleming declares that Dahlia must go with his husband. In the mean time it is discovered that Sedgett is already married. So the situation is saved. But Algernon proposes to marry Rhoda on the promise that Anthony shall be freed from the charge of theft. But with the help of Major Waring, Rhoda is saved from this, and ultimately she becomes Robert’s wife. Edward’s repentance comes too late because Dahlia is not ready to compromise with him. In the end Dahlia dies in the farmhouse of Rhoda and Robert. The deserting scene between Dahlia and Edward is sensitively painted by Meredith in the passage:

"Dahlia, the perplexity to her sister’s heart, lay stretched at full length upon the sofa of a pleasantly furnished London drawing-room, sobbing to herself, with her handkerchief across her eyes. She had cried passion out, and sobbed now for comfort.

"She lay in her rich silken dress like the wreck of a joyful creature, while the large red winter sun rounded to evening, and threw deep-coloured beams against the wall above her head. They touched the nut-brown hair to vivid threads of fire; but she lay faceless. Utter
languor and the dread of looking at her eyelids in the glass kept her prostrate.

"So the darkness closed her about; the sickly gas-lamps of the street showing her as a shrouded body.

"A girl came in to spread the cloth for dinner, and went through her duties with the stolidity of the London lodging house maidservant, poking a clogged fire to perdition, and repressing a songful spirit.

"Dahlia knew well what was being done; she would have given much to have saved her nostrils from the smell of dinner; it was a great immediate evil to her sickened senses; but she had no energy to call out, nor will of any kind. The odours floated to her, and passively she combated them.

At first she was nearly vanquished; the meat smelt so acrid, the potatoes so sour, each afflicting vegetable asserted itself peculiarly; and the bread, the salt even, on the wings of her morbid fancy, came steaming about her, subtle, penetrating, thick, and hateful, like the pressure of a cloud out of which disease is shot.

Such it seemed to her, till she could have shrieked; but only a few fresh tears started down her cheeks, and she lay enduring it.
Dead silence and stillness hung over the dinner service, when the outer door below was opened, and a light foot sprang up the stairs. 19

The description is continued with poignancy and suffering of Dahlia and the haste with which Edward wants to run away from her:

“Well?” he said, finding these indications of exemplary self-command unheeded. His voice was equally powerless to provoke a sign of animation. He now displaced his hat, and said, “Dahlia!”

She did not move.

“I am here to very little purpose, then,” he remarked.

A fluttering fall of her bosom was perceptible.

“For heaven’s sake, take away that handkerchief, my good child! Why have you let your dinner get cold? Here,” he lifted a cover, “here’s roast-beef. You like it — why don’t you eat it? That’s only a small piece of the general inconsistency, I know. And why haven’t they put champagne on the table for you? You lose your spirits without it. If you took it when these moody fits came on — but there’s no advising a woman to do anything for her own good. Dahlia, will you do me the favour to speak two or three words with me before I go? I would have dined here, but I have a man to meet me at the Club. Of what mortal
service is it shamming the insensible? You've produced the required effect, I am as uncomfortable as I need be. Absolutely!

"Well," seeing that words were of no avail, he summed up expostulation and reproach in this sigh of resigned philosophy, "I am going. Let me see— I have my Temple keys?—yes! I am afraid that even when you are inclined to be gracious and look at me, I shall not be visible to you for some days. I start for Lord Elling's to-morrow morning at five. I meet my father there by appointment. I'm afraid we shall have to stay over Christmas. Good-bye." He paused. "Good-bye, my dear."

Two or three steps nearer the door, he said, "By the way, do you want anything? Money?—do you happen to want any money? I will send a blank cheque tomorrow. I have sufficient for both of us. I shall tell the landlady to order your Christmas dinner. How about wine? There is champagne, I know, and bottled ale. Sherry? I'll drop a letter to my wine-merchant; I think the sherry's running dry."

Her sense of hearing was now afflicted in as gross a manner as had been her sense of smell. She could not have spoken, though her vitality had pressed for speech. It would have astonished him to hear that his solicitude concerning provender for her during his absence was
not esteemed a kindness; for surely it is a kindly thing to think of it; and for whom but for one for whom he cared would he be counting the bottles to be left at her disposal, insomuch that the paucity of the bottles of sherry in the establishment distressed his mental faculties?

"Well, good-bye," he said, finally. The door closed.

Had Dahlia's misery been in any degree simulated, her eyes now, as well as her ears, would have taken positive assurance of his departure. But with the removal of her handkerchief, the loathsome sight of the dinner-table would have saluted her, and it had already caused her suffering enough. She chose to remain as she was, saying to herself, "I am dead;" and softly revelling in that corpse-like sentiment. She scarcely knew that the door had opened again.

"Dahlia!"

She heard her name pronounced, and more entreatingly, and closer to her.

"Dahlia, my poor girl!" Her hand was pressed. It gave her no shudders.

"I am dead," she mentally repeated, for the touch did not run up to her heart and stir it.
“Dahlia, do be reasonable! I can’t leave you like this. We shall be separated for some time. And what a miserable fire you’ve got here! You have agreed with me that we are acting for the best. It’s very hard on me! I try what I can to make you comf-happy; and really, to see you leaving your dinner to get cold! Your hands are like ice. The meat won’t be eatable. You know I’m not my own master. Come, Dahly, my darling!?”

He gently put his hand to her chin, and then drew away the handkerchief.

Dahlia moaned at the exposure of her tear-stained face; she turned it languidly to the wall.

“Are you ill, my dear?” he asked.

Men are so considerately practical! He begged urgently to be allowed to send for a doctor.

But women, when they choose to be unhappy, will not accept of practical consolations! She moaned a refusal to see the doctor.

Then what can I do for her? he naturally thought, and he naturally uttered it.
“Say good-bye to me” he whispered. “And my pretty one will write to me. I shall reply so punctually! I don’t like to leave her at Christmas; and she will give me a line of Italian, and a little French—mind her accents, though!—and she needn’t attempt any of the nasty German—kshrra-kouzzra-kratz!—which her pretty lips can’t do, and won’t do; but only French and Italian. Why, she learnt to speak Italian! ‘La dolcezza ancor dentro me suona.’ Don’t you remember, and made such fun of it at first? ‘Amo zoò,’ ‘no amo me?’ my sweet!”

This was a specimen of the baby-lover talk which is charming in its season, and may be pleasantly cajoling to a loving woman at all times, save when she is in Dahlia’s condition. It will serve even then, or she will pass it forgivingly, as not the food she for a moment requires; but it must be purely simple in its utterance, otherwise she detects the poor chicanery, and resents the meanness of it. She resents it with unutterable sickness of soul, for it is the language of what were to her the holiest hours of her existence, which is thus hypocritically used to blind and rock her in a cradle of deception. If corrupt, she may be brought to answer to it all the same, and she will do her part of the play, and babble words, and fret and pout deliciously; and the old days will seem to be revived, when both know they are dead; and she will thereby gain any advantage she is seeking.
But Dahlia's sorrow was deep: her heart was sound. She did not even perceive the opportunity offered to her for a wily performance. She felt the hollowness of his speech, and no more; and she said, "Goodbye, Edward."²⁰

The repentant Edward comes to reconcile with Dahlia but Rhoda does not allow him to meet Dahlia. He knows the time of the proposed marriage of Dahlia with Sedgett, and he wants to stop it by any means. The tense situation is presented in the following passage:

"The sweat was on Edward's forehead. "In a few minutes it will be half-past-half-past eleven! I expect a friend; that makes me impatient. Mr. Eccles" - Edward showed his singular, smallish, hard-cut and flashing features, clear as if he had blown off a mist -- "you are too much of a man to bear malice. Where is Dahlia? Tell me at once. Some one seems to be cruelly driving her. Has she lost her senses? She has: - or else she is coerced in an inexplicable and shameful manner."

"Mr. Blancove," said Robert, "I bear you not a bit of malice -- couldn't if I would. I'm not sure I could have said guilty to the same sort of things, in order to tell an enemy of mine I was sorry for what I had done, and I respect you for your courage. Dahlia was taken from here by me."
Edward nodded, as if briefly assenting, while his features sharpened.

"Why?" he asked.

"It was her sister's wish."

"Has she no will of her own?"

"Very little, I'm afraid, just now, sir."

"A remarkable sister! Are they of Puritan origin?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"And this father?"

"Mr. Blancove, he is one of those sort – he can't lift up to his head if he so much as suspects a reproach to his children."

Edward brooded. "I desire – as I told you, as I told her sister, as I told my father last night – I desire to make her my wife. What can I do more? Are they mad with some absurd country pride? Half-past eleven! – it will be murder if they force her to it! Where is she? To such a man as that! Poor soul! I can hardly bear it, for I can't imagine it. Here- the time is going. You know the man yourself."

"I know the man?" said Robert. "I've never set eyes on him – I've never set eye on him, and never liked to ask much about him. I had
a sort of feeling. Her sister says he is a good, and kind, honourable young fellow, and he must be."

"Before it’s too late," Edward muttered hurriedly – "you know him – his name is Sedgett."

Robert hung swaying over him with a big voiceless breast.

"That Sedgett?" he breathed huskily, and his look was hard to meet.

Edward frowned, unable to raise his head.

"Lord in heaven! some one has something to answer for!" cried Robert. "Come on; come to the church. That foul dog? – Or you, stay where you are. I'll go. He to be Dahlia’s husband! They've seen him, and can’t see what he is! - cunning with women as that? How did they meet? Do you know? – can’t you guess?"

He flung a lightning at Edward and ran off. Bursting into the aisle, he saw the minister closing the Book at the altar, and three persons moving toward the vestry, of whom the last, and the one he discerned, was Rhoda."
The tragedy of Dahlia is caustic comment on the society and its unjust and partial system. Actually the society must condemn the man and woman equally in such conditions. The novel reveals the failure of girls when brought to face to face with the complexities and difficulties of life, in encountering them with courage and discretion. May it be due to their lack of correct training and the necessary education. Dahlia falls the moment temptation is presented to her, and Rhoda brings disaster on all round her by letting her will-power run wild and dominates her judgement. Rhoda is described as ‘a strange Biblical girl with Hebrew hardness of resolution and Hebrew exaltation of soul’. “Indeed, if it were not for this exaltation of soul which makes her trample all emotion under foot that she may carry out her distorted view of duty, and also for the faithful love for her sister, which no circumstance can change, we should be forced to regard Rhoda as a hard, cruel woman whose will has been so cultivated at the expense of feeling that she cares for nothing except for the power of forcing the wills of all around her, ‘who dares’ as Meredith puts it, ‘to take it on her conscience to subdue another human creature’s struggling will’. Even Robert is shocked at this nature of Rhoda who acts like fate in contempt of emotion.

The nature and character of Rhoda is a type of majority of women especially the middle classes, where women are tremendous
pressure from the social and family pressures. It is possible that these women develop righteous indignation, and at the first opportunity, they act in full throbbing to satisfy their suppressed sense of freedom. This thirst of freedom, the pride of the Fleming's and the strength of purpose in Rhoda furnish us with many striking scenes. Rhoda can defend herself. By her forceful nature she subdues Robert's passion; she stands supreme in the strength of her dignity, and he is reduced to apologise. When Edward comes to meet Dahlia, Rhoda sternly prevents it. She argues that Robert's judgement is wrong. She knows that Sedgnett is a worthless man, and yet sees in him proof of worthiness.

The novel 'Rhoda Fleming' is severely criticised for its bad plot, improper placement of incidents and situations and carelessness. The only relieving feature is that the story is that of a seduced and deserted woman and her misery. 'One could simply assume that this is a poor novel', says David Howard, 'that Meredith is a poor novelist; that he always came reluctantly to fiction, that he could not sustain or control fundamentals of plot, character, theme and tone'. It is also suggested that Meredith wrote it hastily and the prime motive of writing it was quick money. Adding to this, Meredith calls it a 'plain story'. Sassoon hinted that the novel might have been written in collaboration with Thomas Hardy. I see these details as the grievous chronicle of a fine
tale bedevilled by the writer’s ability to stick to his conception of ‘A Plain Story’, and enfeebled by the artistic error of plot elaboration’.\(^{23}\) But the reason for the unconvincing contrivance is found in Meredith’s attempt to achieve two different things simultaneously. “The pace and proliferation of Meredith’s plotting produces a kind of exhilaration (indeed all of Meredith’s novels feel better as they lengthen) which can be related to his theory of comedy in which plot exists to defeat ego.” (David Howard, P. 137)

For Meredith ‘ordeal’ is the correlative of frustration and the pressure of non-revelation, which he already exploited in the early novels. In ‘Rhoda Fleming’ this ordeal is extended beyond the encircled baronial estates. This new type and method of extended field for the play of Comic Spirit has started with ‘Sandra Belloni’, the theme of which is the ordeal of an artistic sensibility in the middle-class England, and the ordeal of the birth of a nation in ‘Vittoria’. In ‘Rhoda Fleming’ the placement of egoism and salvation through suffering is the ordeal. The confusion in the various aspects of the novel is the result of egoism, not to see others point of view and not to listen to others advice. The conflict makes every one in the novel not to see the other view. The moral lesson is confused with the ego of each person because the ‘exploited’ is as egoistic as the ‘exploiter’. For example Rhoda and her father force the
detestable marriage on Dahlia which is a worse crime than the original seduction. Even in case of Edward the egoism of submission replaces the egoism of arrogance. So the novel is a complicated study of egoism, where many things got mixed up, as a result Meredith succeeds in imparting the message but in a clumsy manner.

To Meredith sentimentalism is a form of mock sentiment, developed largely to excuse a view of life, which we know to be morally untenable. He says, "All these false sensations, peculiar to men, concerning the soiled purity of woman, the lost innocence, the brand of shame on her, which are commonly the foul sentimentalism of such as can be too eager in the chase of corruption when occasion suits, and are another side of prurience, not absolutely foreign to the best of us in youth..." 24

7. **Vittoria (1867)**

The novel ‘Vittoria’ is a continued narration of Emilia’s life in Italy. It was published in 1867. During her stay in England Emilia had undergone various experiences and gained maturity. But this expectation of a matured Emilia, does not reflect in *Vittoria* at least in the earlier chapters. Sandra is now called by the Italian patriots as
Vittoria Campa. These patriots hold a great hope in Emilia and they are confident that they would assure a victory in their fight.

Here also Meredith has introduced innumerable complications and also characters. The novel attempts, very ambitiously to give a panoramic sketch of Italy in its struggle. The incidents cover heroism, friendship, double-dealing, devotion to country and sabotage of the revolutionary cause and routine daily living and melodramatic experiences. Vittoria meets Wilfred here also. But she snubs him. She falls in love with Carlo a handsome Austrian officer like many other Italian girls do. The last chapters of the novel contain brilliant manipulation of action and character. The final end is cleverly managed. In the last chapter the death of Carlo is reported to Vittoria. Vittoria is left a widow. In spite of the drawbacks and the deficiencies in the construction of this novel, Meredith definitely achieves two goals — one to write historical novel on the basis of the collected material from reality, and secondly, to expose the disparity between what is and what ought to be in the characters with the help of Comic Spirit.

The comparison of Ammiani’s present sentiments to those of the elders of the conspiracy, when his mouth was open in their midst, was
severe and masterful, for the young man arose instantly without a thought in his head.

He marked: "I will tell them that the Signorina does not give the signal."

"Tell them that the name she has chosen shall be Vittoria still; but say, that she feels a shadow of suspicion to be an injunction upon her at such a crisis, and she will serve silently and humbly until she is rightly known, and her time comes. She is willing to appear before them, and submit to interrogation. She knows her innocence, and knowing that they work for the good of the country, she, if it is their will, is content to be blotted out of all participation:-all! She abjures all for the common welfare. Say that. And say, to-morrow night the rising must be. Oh! tomorrow night! It is my husband to me."

Laura Piaveni crossed her arms upon her bosom.

Ammiani was moving from them with a downward face, when a bell-note of Vittoria's voice arrested him.

"Stay, signor Carlo; I shall sing tomorrow night."

The widow heard her through that thick emotion which had just closed her speech with its symbolical sensuous rapture. Divining
opposition fiercely, like a creature thwarted when athirst for the wells, she gave her a terrible look, and then said cajolingly, as far as absence of sweetness could make the tones pleasant, "Yes, you will sing, but you will not sing that song."

"It is that song which I intend to sing, signora."
"When it is interdicted?"
"There is only one whose interdict I can acknowledge."
"You will dare to sing in defiance of me?"
"I dare nothing when I simply do my duty." 25

"She talks like the edge of a sword," cried Laura, desperately, and dropped into a chair. "Take her home, and convince her, if you can, on the way, Carlo. I go to the Duchess of Graäthi tonight. She has a reception. Take this girl home. She says she will sing; she obyes the Chief, and none but the Chief. We will not suppose that it is her desire to shine. She is suspected; she is accused; she is branded; there is no general faith in her; yet she will hold the torch tomorrow night: - and what ensues? Some will move, some turn back, some run headlong over to treachery, some hang irresolute: all are for the shambles! The blood is on her head."

"I will excuse myself to you another time," said Vittoria. "I love you, signora Laura."
"You do, you do, or you would not think of excusing yourself to me," said Laura. "But now, go. You have cut me in two. Carlow Ammiani may succeed where I have failed, and I have used every weapon; enough to make a mean creature hate me for life and kiss me with transports. Do you best, Carlo, and let it be your utmost."[26]

"You will give me five minutes?" Vittoria whispered to her husband, and he nodded.

"Merthyr," she said, passing him, "can I have your word that you will not go from me?"

Merthyr gave her his word after he had looked on her face.

"Send to me every two hours, that I may know you are near," she added; "do not fear waking me. Or, no, dear friend; why should I have any concealment from you? Be not a moment absent, if you would not have me fall to the ground a second time: follow me."

Even as he hesitated, for he had urgent stuff to communicate to Carlo, he could see a dreadful whiteness rising on her face, darkening the circles of her eyes.

"It's life or death, my dearest, and I am bound to live," she said. Her voice sprang up from tears.
Merthyr turned and tried in vain to get a hearing among the excited, voluble men. They shook his hand, patted his shoulder, and counselled him to leave them. He obtained Carlo's promise that he would not quit the house without granting him an interview; after which he passed out to Vittoria, where Countess Ammiani and Laura sat weeping by the door.

When they were alone Merthyr said: "I cannot give many minutes, not much time. I have to speak to your husband."

She answered: "Give me many minutes – much time. All other speaking in vain here."

"It concerns his safety."

"It will not save him."

"But I have evidence that he is betrayed. His plans are known; a trap is set for him. If he moves, he walks into a pit."

"You would talk reason, Merthyr." Vittoria sighed. "Talk it to me. I can listen; I thirst for it. I beat at the bars of a cage all day. When I saw you this afternoon, I looked on another life. It was too sudden, and I swooned. That was my only show of weakness. Since then you
are the only strength I feel."^{27} The lines sound prophetic of Vittoria, future.

Here in Italy Emilia is placed in new surroundings, maintaining her beauty, simplicity character and melodious voice. She was fired by patriotism and heroism, takes part in singing the songs to precipitate the uprising against Austrian operation. However, her attempts are mistimed and they unleash a reign of terror resulting in bloodshed, Emilia is also perished in that havoc. The novel was the result of Meredith's visit to Italy during the Austro-Italian war.

The novel 'Vittoria' opens just before the Italian rebellion of 1848. Italy is full of rumours and the uneasy lull that comes before an outbreak. There is a meeting of the revolutionaries on the summit of Monte Mottorone. Sandra Belloni, now known as Signorina Vittoria is with them. She is to make her debut at Milan, where she shall lit the flame of the rebellion by singing a revolutionary hymn of patriotism. Mean while Vittoria is spied up on by one Barto Rizzo, and he suspects her for his letters written to England, asking the Pole family not to be present in Milan on the night of 15th. There are some attempts to stop her from singing but she does not believe in their authority and resolves to go head. On the fixed night, there was a lot of confusion and in the
darkness she is taken away by his friends, to save her from a sure imprisonment. At this juncture Vittoria and Carlo Ammiani express their mutual love. The rebellion breaks out and many hundreds are dead or wounded. Under such conditions the lovers are married. Shockingly Carlo is killed by the Austrians in a desperate mountain engagement of a lost cause. Vittoria receives the news with a calm as one who has passed through the ordeal in the expectation of it. She lives for her child and she finally marries her child-hood friend Merthyr Powys.

Vittoria Campa, the heroine is pictured as a completely matured woman with the experience and vision of life. She faces the life’s ordeals and acid tests with a stoic courage and conviction. She is an exalted feminine embodiment of the spirit of freedom. She is absolutely confident to save the Italians on the Austrian side. Her calm and unshaken courage is reflected in the last scene.

"Merthyr delivered the burden of death. Her soul had crossed the darkness of the river of death in that quiet agony preceding the revelation of her Maker's will and she drew her dead husband to her bosom, and kissed him on the eyes and forehead, not as one who had quiet gone away from her but as one who lay up on another shore whither she would come. The manful friend, ever by her side, saved her
by his absolute trust in her fortitude to bear the burden of the great
sorrow undeceived, and to walk with it to its last resting place on earth
unobstructed. Clear knowledge of her, the issue of reverent love,
enabled him to read her unequalled strength of nature, and to rely on her
fidelity to her highest moral duty in a conflict with extreme despair.”

The beautiful, innocent and melodious singer Emilia is dragged
by Fate through the thorns of life. Habituated to the sorrows and
miseries of life, Emilia becomes Vittoria Campa, not to have any respite
but to taste the last sorrow of life. The character of Vittoria is a grand
lyric of courage, patience and fortitude.

In 1877 Meredith wrote some stories ‘The Case of General Ople’,
‘The House on the Beach’ and ‘The Tale of Chole’. Though they are
short in length, they reflect the same Meredithian attitude to locate ego
and false shams and how the Comic Spirit tries to dispel the same. In
this category General Ople and Mark Tinman figure dominantly.

General Ople desires to marry his daughter to the nephew of
Lady Camper. But the lady demands a huge dowry which the General
cannot afford. But he pretends to be rich and agrees to pay the dowry.
He is not bold enough to tell the truth. Ultimately, in his utter
helplessness, Ople confesses the truth. The case of Mark Tinman is
different. Tinman is a retired businessman. He becomes a squire and dreams of a marriage to bring him wealth and status. He wants one day to be present at the Royal Court, to read an address to His majesty. His preparations and rehearsals in this direction are ludicrous. He comes to know that an old friend of his returned from Australia with great wealth. He plans to marry his daughter, only for the wealth. Tinman knows some dark secret of his friend. He threatens him with the exposure of this secret, if his friend does not give his daughter in marriage. The friend firmly rejects Tinman’s offer. There is a big storm in which his house is flooded and Tinman waits for serene. Ultimately he falls into the stormy sea.

8. The Adventures of Harry Richmond (1871)

Meredith’s novel Harry Richmond was published in 1871. In this novel the story and character of Evan Harrington is reversely presented. If the Countess Saldar, in 'Evan Harrington', comes from Portugal, Richmond Roy goes to Germany. The father's only desire is to marry his son Harry in a noble house. This impostor and Charlton gets secret instalments of money. He is ignorant of his illegitimate birth. He boasts that his actress mother has a royal connection. To establish his royal birth and royal lineage of his son, Richmond Roy is ready to droop to
any levels. The son Harry reaches Germany in search of his father, where the father works as a court jester.

Just as the Countess Saldař tells lies and arranges a meeting between Evan and Rose, Richmond Roy also brings his son Harry and Ottília together. But comic justice is doled out to him. Suddenly, the mysterious source of his income is discovered. In the same vein the source of his presumptions of his royal birth is also discovered. In the midst of this crisis Harry wants to discourage his father from his foolish and comic schemes. In a very interesting scene Harry wants his father about the growing debts, and he also wants to face the reality. The father takes it very casually and recommends wine to his son. The Comic Spirit hovering above exposes the shallowness and false pretension of Richmond Roy. Actually, the father and the son are already rich and enjoy even some social status. So they are not seeking entrance into good society. What they carve for is a dignity without meaning and unwholesome vanity. In a way Richmond Roy is a pure incarnation of distilled snobbery.

If a man wants to ascend the social hierarchy, there is nothing wrong, and the Comic Spirit has no role to play. But if one starts working on false estimate and pretensions about social values is what is
hateful. Just as the Pole sisters do not know what they actually want, Richmond Roy too has no definite and concrete objective. All of them are incapable of true natural breeding when they saw it. They do not accept that natural simplicity and ability can acquire status. What Meredith teaches to the readers and what he himself must learn is that a man must work with his own abilities and only result and success assigns a man his real social status. The belief that the class or the inherited position and title alone can give social status is a sham, a kind of snobbery which is condemned by the author and corrected by Comic Spirit.

The novel ‘The Adventures of Harry Richmond’ is a mixture of too many strands. It is an ‘autobiographical tale’ a history, a romance and a picaresque narration. In the life of a man, a stage comes when he wants to have adventures. But after experience, he realizes that duty and responsibility are more essential than futile romantic adventures. The novel combines these two chronological experiences of the author for a simultaneous presentation. Meredith deplored the Victorian Puritanism which was opposed to the free pleasure of life. Meredith desires that this forced social restrictions must be set aside and a youth must enjoy fully and completely. Yet Meredith knows that this is not easy. The story of ‘Harry Richmond’ may be taken only as a man’s revolt against the
trammels that would keep him earth bound. If the hero is only a
brainless romantic adventurist then the solution is very easy. But the
novelist wants to present the tragic consequences of such an abstract and
unpractical romantic adventurism. This trend of tragic under current
makes the novel a real Meredith’s characteristic dilemma. As per the
Comic Spirit, when the hero transcends the mortal limitation, he loses
moral touch with humanity, and becomes a victim of tragic muse.

Harry Richmond lives with his grandfather the Squire Beltham.
While Beltham typifies the qualities like duty, responsibility, security
and also abhors romance. But his son Richmond Roy is exactly
opposite, with his artificial magnificence and romantic heroism. Harry is
closely associated with his aunt and his cousin Janet. Harry also has and
enjoys the company of the gypsies, who represent the neutral land
between the father and the grandfather. Kiomi is the central figure in this
neutral land. As the time passes the conflict between the father and the
grandfather becomes bitter, and at a juncture Harry pays off his father’s
debts. When his father appears grand and majestic in his career, Harry is
convinced that this life is more preferable. On the insistence of his father
Harry courts Ottilia the German Princess, because Roy always desires
that his son must be married in a royal house. After meeting Ottilia,
Harry is tempted to have the glamorous life of royalty. In the company
of Heriot, and in the continental tours with his father, in his visit to the German palace, Harry experiences a divine intoxication of spirit. In spite of all these thrilling and exhilarating experiences, his inherent ethical and disciplined nature makes him unhappy. Gradually the reality of Heriot and his father’s career is revealed to Harry. He also reflects his own conduct and his extravagancy and concludes that it is only a contradiction of his own dream.

The climax of this contradiction comes bare when Harry meets Ottilia and Janet together. He cannot decide as whom he should marry. Slowly all the pretensions, on domestic, social, romantic and financial fronts, are removed. Harry resolves to follow the path of his grandfather rather than that of his father. The novel has a tentative open-ended conclusion. The Princess Ottilia is a Platonic type of spiritual beauty. In the end she attempts to bring Harry and Janet together and sends a gift of a couplet:

"Who shuns true friend flies fortune in the concrete:  
Would he see what he aims at? Let him ask his heels."28

Harry Richmond, from his childhood, is torn between two opposing values of life—values which the child sees initially as bourgeois conventionality versus the life of imagination. In the beginning of the novel he is used by the two groups representing the two
different values. Harry has his affection for the Squire Beltham his aunt and Janet. He has grown in the care and influence of these family people. Suddenly he meets his father and is drifted away by his charisma in to the lands and dreams of imagination. Even after this realisation, Harry is not completely free from Roy’s grip. He tried to unite his father and the grandfather on terms of friendship. Harry recognises the importance of work and money, because he finds that his father’s failures are seen largely owing to a constitutional inability to handle money. As a child Harry had thought of the Gods as statues. Roy’s descent as a statue from his pedestal was the first crack of disillusionment in Harry’s god-like image of his father in him. In his behaviour with Ottilia, Harry demonstrates the destructive quality of self-disgust which may issue from an over-wearisome attempt to live up to exalted expectations. His separation from Ottilia sends the whole structure of his idea of his superior nature crumbling in to fragments. He learns the lesson that ‘Leanings’ should be as important as ‘strivings’, and freedom has meaning only in a given context. That is why Janet, according to Ottilia, is the practicable and ideal wife for Harry.
9. **Beauchamp’s Career (1875)**

Meredith’s novel *Beauchamp’s Career* was published 1876, its subject is Radicalism. Meredith wrote about this novel, “And I think this history a picture of the time – taking its mental action and material is an indifference, to be a necessary element in the picture”.

England in 1870’s is seen as a part of Europe and that too an eccentric part. As usual Meredith is severely critical of English and Englishmen for their mental action and physical lethargy. This novel has a background to two historical events – by election at Southampton, in which his friend Maxse was defeated; the second is the Paris Commune, where delegates gathered to express sympathy and support to the communists. Nevil Beauchamp is a personification of English Radicalism as understood by Meredith.

The speciality of this novel is its complicated plot with too many issues. Though Meredith attempts to present, the historical picture of England. The emphasis is on the character of Beauchamp who is no one else than his friend Maxse. On the one hand Nevil is a part and participate of incidents like the French. Rare whipped up by Palmerston in 1858, the Crimean war and the extension of the Franchise in Britain. But simultaneously Nevil is also presented in his personal and public
relations. In this category Nevil’s romantic adventures will at least three women (Rene, Jenny Benhans and Cecilia Halkett) is presented. His relations with the women comprising of so many incidents, is the dominant theme in the novel. Parallel to this, his poetical involvement and participation is also juxtaposed. How Meredith combines the personal and poetical currents of Beauchamp can be illustrated from the following passage.

“He was dropped by the Esponza’s boat, Otley Fierry to walk along the beach to Baby Sham and he kept eye on the elegant vessel as she glided swan-like to her moorings off into Laurel’s Park through dusky merchant craft, colliers, and trawlers, loosely shaking her towering snow-white sails, unchallenged in her scornful supremacy an image of a refinement of beauty and of beautiful servicelessness.

As the yatch so the mistress, things of wealth owning their graces to wealth devoting them to wealth – splendid achievements of art both! And dedicated to the gratification of the superior senses.

Say that they were precious example of an accomplished civilisation; and perhaps they did offer a visible ideal of grace for the rough world to aim at. They might in the abstract address a bit of monition to the uncultivated and encourage the soul to strive towards
perfection in beauty. And there is no contesting the value of beauty when the soul is taken into account. But were they not in too great a profession in proportion to their utility? That was the question for Nevil Beauchamp. The democratic spirit inhabiting him temporarily or permanently asked whether they were not increasing to numbers which were oppressive? And further, whether it was good for the country, the race, the species, that they should be so distinctively removed from the thousands who fought the grand and the grissy and old battle with nature for bread of life. Those grimy cells of Colliers and fishing smacks set them in a great-sea would have beauty for eyes and soul beyond that of elegance and repriment. And do and look on them thoughtfully, the poor and everlastingly unrelievedly in the abysses of the great sea."

She sat still, placid outwardly, in fear of herself, so strange she found it to be borne out to sea by her sailor lover under the eyes of her betrothed. She was conscious of a tumultuous rush of sensations, none of them of a very healthy kind, coming as it were from an unlocked chamber of her bosom, hitherto of unimagined contents; and the Marquis being now on the spot to defend his own, she no longer blamed Nevil: it was otherwise utterly. All the sweeter side of pity was for him. He was at first amazed by the sudden exquisite transition. Tenderness breathed from her, in voice, in look, in touch; for she accepted his help
that he might lead her to the stern of the vessel, to gaze well on setting Venice, and sent lightenings up his veins; she leaned beside him over the vessel's rails, not separated from him by the breadth of a fluttering riband. Like him, she scarcely heard her brother when for an instant he intervened, and with Nevil she said adieu to Venice, where the faint red Doge's palace was like the fading of another sunset north-westward of the glory along the hills. Venice dropped lower and lower, breasting the waters, until it was a thin line in air. The line was broken and ran in dots, with here and there a pillar standing on opal sky. At last the topmost campanile sank.

Renée looked up at the sails, and back for the submerged city.

"It is gone!" she said, as though a marvel had been worked; and swiftly: "we have one night!"

She breathed it half like a question, like a petition catching her breath. The adieu to Venice was her assurance of liberty, but Venice hidden rolled on her the sense of the return and plucked shrewdly at her tether of bondage.

They set their eyes toward the dark gulf ahead. The night was growing starry. The softly ruffled Adriatic tossed no foam.
'One night?' said Nevil; 'one? Why only one?'
Renée shuddered. 'Oh! do not speak.'
'Then, give me your hand.'
'There, my friend.'

He pressed a hand that was like a quivering chord. She gave it as though it had been his own to claim. But that it meant no more than a hand he knew by the very frankness of her compliance, in the manner natural to her; and this was the charm, it filled him with her peculiar image and spirit, and while he held it he was subdued.

Lying on the deck at midnight, wrapt in his cloak and a coil of rope for a pillow, considerably apart from jesting Roland, the recollection of that little sanguine spot of time when Renée life-blood ran with his, began to heave under him like a swelling sea. For Nevil the starred black night was Renée. Half his heart was in it: but the combative division flew to the morning and the deadly iniquity of the marriage, from which he resolved to save her; in pure devotedness, he believed. And so he closed his eyes. She, a girl, with a heart fluttering open and fearing, felt only that she had lost herself somewhere, and she had neither sleep nor symbols, nothing but a sense of infinite strangeness, as though she were borne superhumanly through space.
There is the example where the disappointed but decided, Renee writing to Lady Romfrey regarding her last thoughts.

"The letter was handed to Lady Romfrey. She read through it thoughtfully till she came to the name of Nevil, when she frowned. On the morrow she pronounced it a disingenuous letter. Renée had sent her these lines:-

'I should come to you if my time were not restricted; my brother's leave of absence is short. I have done here what lay in my power, to show you I have learnt something in the school of self-immolation. I have seen Mlle Halkett. She is a beautiful young woman, deficient only in words, doubtless. My labour, except that it may satisfy you, was the vainest of tasks. She marries a ruddy monsieur of a name that I forget, and of the bearing of a member of the gardes du corps, without the stature. Enfin, madame, I have done my duty, and do not regret it, since I may hope that it will win for me some approbation and a portion of the esteem of a lady to whom I am indebted for that which is now the best of life to me: and I do not undervalue it in saying I would gladly have it stamped on brass and deposited beside my father's. I have my faith. I would it were Nevil's too - and yours, should you be in need of it."
‘He will marry Mdlle Denham. If I may foretell events, she will
steady him. She is a young person who will not feel astray in society of
his rank; she possesses the natural grace we do not expect to see out of
our country – from sheer ignorance of what is beyond it. For the
moment she affects to consider herself unworthy; and it is excusable that
she should be slightly alarmed at her prospect. But Nevil must have a
wife. I presume to think that he could not have chosen better. Above
all, make him leave England for the winter. Adieu, dear countess. Nevil
promises me a visit after his marriage, I shall not set foot on England
again: but you, should you ever come to our land of France, will find my
heart open to you at the gates of undying grateful recollection. I am not
skilled in writing. You have looked into me once; look now; I am the
same. Only I have succeeded in bringing myself to a greater likeness to
the dead, as it becomes a creature to be who is cupled with one of their
body. Meanwhile I shall have news of you. I trust that soon I maybe
warranted in forwarding congratulations to Lord Romfrey.’

Rosamund handed the letters to her husband. Not only did she
think Miss Denham disingenuous, she saw that the girl was not in love
with Beauchamp: and the idea of a loveless marriage for him threw the
mournfullest of Hecate’s beams along the course of a career that the
passionate love of a bride, though she were not well-born and not wealthy, would have rosily coloured.

‘Without love!’ she exclaimed to herself. She asked the earl’s opinion of the startling intelligence, and of the character of that Miss Denham, who could pen such a letter, after engaging to give her hand to Nevil.

Lord Romfrey laughed in his dumb way. ‘If Nevil must have a wife — and the marquise tells you so, and she ought to know—he may as well marry a girl who won’t go all the way down hill with him at his pace. He’ll be cogged.’

‘You do not object to such an alliance?’

‘I’m past objection. There’s no law against a man’s marrying his nurse.’

‘But she is not even in love with him!’

‘I dare say not. He wants a wife; she accepts a husband. The two women who were in love with him he wouldn’t have.’

Lady Romfrey sighed deeply. ‘He has lost Cecilia! She might still have been his; but he has taken to that girl. And Madame de
Rouallout praises the girl because—oh! I see it—she has less to be jealous of in Miss Denham: of whose birth and blood we know nothing. Let that pass. If only she loved him! I cannot endure the thought of his marrying a girl who is not in love with him."

'Just as you like, my dea.'
'I used to suspect Mr. Lydiard.'
'Perhaps he's the man.'
'Oh, what an end of so brilliant a beginning!'

'It strikes me, my dear,' said the earl, 'it's the proper common sense beginning that may have a fairish end.'

'No, but what I feel is that he—our Nevil!—has accomplished hardly anything, if anything!'

'He hasn't marched on London with a couple of hundred thousand men: no, he hasn't done that,' the earl said, glancing back in his mind through Beauchamp's career. 'And he escapes what Stukey calls his nation's scourge, in the shape of a statue turned out by an English chisel. No: we haven't had much public excitement out of him. But one thing he did do: he got me down on my knees!'

Lord Romfrey pronounced these words with a sober emphasis that struck the humour of it sharply into Rosamund's heart, through
some contrast it presented between Nevil’s aim at the world and hit of a man: the immense deal thought of it by the earl, and the very little that Nevil would think of it – the great domestic achievement to be boasted of by an enthusiastic devotee of politics!  

The beauty and splendour of Cecilia, viewed emotionally by a lover is immediately associated with the bourgeois attributes scrutinised by a Proletariat. Even if it is a superior artistic method in fiction, in life it seems not probable. The conclusion can be that thenephew’s love is not genuine and sincere, or his motive in Cecilia is only to entrap an aristocrat and convert her into a Radical.

However, it cannot be concluded that this is the reason for his break-up with Cecilia. Because this may be compared with Beauchamp’s’ rushing to Paris to save Rene and that too in the midst of his election campaigning. The call of Rene turns out to be a kind of test. Though her false call was made lightly, her flight to England shows her sincere love for him. But then Beauchamp backs out.

Actually, it is very difficult to follow all the threads of the plot, and to put them down here. Even in his death, he is involved in his characteristic impulsive and heroic behaviour. He jumps into the Solent to save a boy from drowning and doing so drowning himself.
In a way Beauchamp is a bundle of contradiction. This is glaringly reflected in Beauchamp’s attitude towards woman. He puts no woman on the heights, transforms none into a star to guide his wandering bark, is not a votive pilgrim at love’s shrine. Instead he argues for a woman’s support of his ideas as if he were canvassing for a vote at the polls and he even takes love for granted. Virtue in distress finds in him a determined champion. But instead of breaking the door to rescue the imprisoned damsel he may distrust her passionately to be sure on to fly the bars of her window and let herself down outside. (Walter Wright). It is also observed that the novel suffers from a peculiar symptom – the disparity between ideas and their actual practice. Primarily, it poses a puzzle, whether the novel imparts deeper knowledge of social England and its political problems, or a profound understanding of psychology of the radical hero. “Beauchamp would improve the conditions of the lower classes. He sails on antislavery mission he would liberate women from trammels of sentimental unconventionality, and he would enfranchise them, at least socially. He attacks the oppressive weight of England of a landed gentry and aristocracy and the sloth of the clergy, which is comfortably secure under the status quo. He would free all men from needless restrictions, such as Sunday Ordinances – which curtail normal human pleasure and
development. He would make politics a frank contest of issues in which reason could examine facts and dispassionately chose the best. However, the contrast between the present and performance is amazing.

"But in testing these beliefs, Meredith had stressed the great difference between simple acceptance of them and the putting them to work. If his hero flounders in confusion and inconsistency he does so because he is no hypocrite. By temperament and rearing he enjoys luxury almost as much as did Harry Richmond. A yatch he considers a virtual necessity for the convalescence of Dr. Shrapnel and his schemes, including the dream of founding a newspaper require lavish expenditure. Yet he would like to be ascetically devoted to his cause, and in the midst of eating food specially brought from the country he may suddenly become ashamed of his extravagance. He has no positive plan for raising the standard of living of the poor, and also he assumes naively that every poor man is exempt from animal indolence and is politically advance thinker. Yet he is completely democratic in spirit and is depressed because he cannot destroy what he knows is unwholesome oppression. Until date he is unable to perceive the excellence of individual women's mind, yet he finds in them his noblest inspiration. In deploring the narrowness of the clergy he has a stereotyped picture of indolent smugness which may be unjust to the clergy, but instead of cynically
rejecting their ideas because he rejects the man, he tries to put their preaching into practice". With all these things the novel is highly comic with its haziness and ambiguity.

10. The Egoist (1879)

The lecture on "The Idea of Comedy and the uses of the Comic Spirit" was delivered at the London Institute by Meredith in 1877 and in Oct 1880, the Egoist was published (Beech). Meredith's lecture appeared in print as an Essay on Comedy. "In his famous essay Meredith was so much reviving the practice of the comic art as attempting to shadow forth the method on which he was at work himself". This statement of J. W. Beech strikes at the root of whole problem. By that time Meredith had consolidated his views and ideas on comedy and Comic Spirit. He was to launch on a new venture of fiction and technique. In his lecture Meredith was trying to explain and also illustrate a meaning of comedy and Comic Spirit. But his attempt to illustrate his meaning where somewhat pitiful. Meredith tried to provide a few instances in English literature who would fulfil his conception of an ideal comedy, according to his norms and his prescriptions. It is appropriately state that J. W. Beech, "He (Meredith) would have been more intelligible had he drowned his illustrations from
his own novels... one might suppose that *The Egoist* which appeared two years after the lecture was delivered, was offered to show what he had in mind.”

The novel *The Egoist* may be described as Meredith’s ‘magnum opus’. Here Meredith’s clear and supplemental thought is perfectly blended with his radiant style and brilliant technique. The story centres round Sir Willoughby Pattern who is engaged to a lovely girl, Lætitia Dale. But this innocent girl is frightened by the cold and cruel spirit of Sir Willoughby, and runs away. Sir Willoughby is then engaged to Clara Middleton who also finds him very stiff, very cold, and also very cruel. Clara also tries to escape from him. But Sir Willoughby traps her in his snare. Because he is afraid that he would become a laughing stock in society. He faces Clara’s rejection and turns to Lætitia whose adoration he has explored for years. But Lætitia, learns many lessons from Clara and she also become firm and strong to refuse him. In the end Clara releases himself from Willoughby and married Vernon Whitford. In the end Sir Willoughby is completely shattered and he is forced to marry Lætitia on her own terms. This summary in no way provides the real beauty and thrill of the narration of the novel.
Sir Willoughby was exposed, in his secret meeting with Lætitia and Clara takes advantage of this chance. He comes to know that Clara has come to know the truth and he reflects on this: "But already he had begun to regard the deed as his executioner. He dreaded meeting Clara. The folly of having retained her stood before him. How now to look on her and keep a sane resolution unwavering? She tempted to the insane. Had she been away, he could have walked through the performance composed by the sense of doing a duty to himself: perhaps faintly hating the poor wretch he made happy at last, kind to her in a manner, polite. Clara’s presence in the house previous to the deed, and oh, heaven! after it, threatened his wits Pride? He had none; he cast it down for her to trample it; he caught it back ere it was trodden on. Yes; he had pride: he had it as a dagger in his breast: his pride was his misery. But he was too proud to submit to misery. ‘What I do is right.’ He said the words, and rectitude smoothed his path, till the question clamoured for answer: Would the world countenance and endorse his pride in Lætitia? At one time, yes. And now? Clara’s beauty ascended, laid a beam on him.

We are on board the labouring vessel of humanity in a storm, when cries and counter cries ring out, disorderliness mixes the crew, and the fury of self-preservation divides: this one is for the ship, that one for his life. Clara was the former to him, Lætitia the latter. But
what if there might not be greater safety in holding tenaciously to Clara than in casting her off for Laetitia? No, she had done things to set his pride throbbing in the quick. She had gone bleeding about first to one, then to another; she had betrayed him to Vernon, and to Mrs. Mountstuart; a look in the eyes of Horace de Craye said, to him as well: to whom not? He might hold to her for vengeance; but that appetite was short-lived in him if it ministered nothing to his purposes.

'I discard all idea of vengeance,' he said, and thrilled burningly to a smart in his admiration of the man who could be so magnanimous under mortal injury: for the more admirable he, the more pitiable. He drank a drop or two of self-pity like a poison, repelling the assaults of public pity. Clara must be given up. It must be seen by the world that, as he felt, the thinking he did was right. Laocoon of his own serpents, he struggled to a certain magnificence of attitude in the muscular net of constrictions he flung around himself. Clara must be given up. O bright Abominable! She must be given up: but not to one whose touch of her would be darts in the blood of the yielder, snakes in his bed: she must be given up to an extinguisher; to be the second wife of an old-fashioned semi-recluse, disgraced in his first. And were it publicly known that she had been cast off, and had fallen on old Vernon for a refuge, and part in spite, part in shame, part in desperation, part in a fit of good sense under
the circumstances, espoused him, her beauty would not influence the world in its judgement. The world would know what to think. As the instinct of self-preservation whispered to Willoughby, the world, were it requisite, might be taught to think what it assuredly would not think if she should be seen tripping to the altar with Horace De Craye. Self-preservation, not vengeance, breathed that whisper. He glanced at her iniquity for a justification of it, without any desire to do her a permanent hurt: he was highly civilized: but with a strong intention to give her all the benefit of the scandal, supposing a scandal, or ordinary tattle. 'And so he handed her to his cousin and secretary, Vernon Whitford, who opened his mouth and shut his eyes.'

You hear the world? How are we to stop it from chattering? Enough that he had no desire to harm her. Some gentle anticipations of her being tarnished were imperative; they came spontaneously to him; otherwise the radiance of that bright Abominable in loss would have been insufferable; he could not have borne it; he could never have surrendered her.

Moreover, a happy present effect was the result. He conjured up the anticipated chatter and shrug of the world so vividly that her beauty grew hectic with the stain, bereft of its formidable magnetism. He could
meet her calmly; he had steeled himself. Purity in women was his principal stipulation, and a woman puffed at, was not the person to cause him tremours.\textsuperscript{36}

Sir Willoughby Pattern is the best ideal of an Egoist. Actually, a sentimentalist is also an egoist, because he is strongly tinged with ego. The sentimentalist is so much concerned with his own feeling that he cannot consider the advantage of others. When an Egoist is also sentimentalist, he becomes a more attractive but of ridicule for the Comic Spirit. Sir Willoughby is a strong individual, he knows what he wants and attempts to grab it by hook or crook. He has a personality, and also human quality. He enjoys the respect and reputation in his country. But the defect with him is that he obeys his own laws made by himself at the cost of others feeling and happiness. For all purposes he pretends to be a modern gentleman but in reality is a primitive egoist. He likes not only success but the reputation for success. If he is a lover he is equally anxious to idealise his lady. He does not want a real woman but a puppet of his fiancé. Nothing pleases him better than a woman devoted to himself, without his being unduly affected by her love. He likes to receive but not to give. He does not wish to surrender in love because he would not risk of the loss of the ego. These are some of the outlines of \textit{The Egoist}. If anybody asks Meredith to present
an ideal egoist, he presents Sir Willoughby Pattern, because he fulfils all the conditions. He presents himself as a paragon of all desired attributes. But it is in his relation to women that Sir Willoughby betrays the egoist. Sir Willoughby betrays the egoist. Sir Willoughby is unfortunate because he was read and studied in succession by two intelligent women. Lætitia Dale knew Sir Willoughby from the beginning but she had no chance to observe him from close quarters. She could only see this Premise of the country from her cottage. Sir Willoughby love for Lætitia is actually a love for himself. He loved her for the reflection of his own splendour. Though he pretended passionate love to Lætitia he knew that she was too humble to be his bride. The second one is Clara Middleton. Sir Willoughby decides to acquire her for her money and beauty. The acquisition thought Sir Willoughby makes all men jealous of him. Sir Willoughby wants to exhibit his victories over women and they were Constantia Durham Clara Middleton and Lætitia Dale. But Clara was not so slavish to become an exhibit of Sir Willoughby. Clara had her own doubts about Sir Willoughby’s love right from the beginning. She realises that he is as stiff as the personal pronoun ‘I’. Clara asks for release but Sir Willoughby is not ready to forego his ‘kill’. The whole scene is changed with the arrival of a new heroic figure Horace. Sir Willoughby
can not withstand a rival and he would not surrender her to Horace. To save the situation, Sir Willoughby gives Clara away to Vernon Whitford generously. Actually, it is only a face saving device to avoid his own humiliation. The egoist’s nemesis is complete when he grants every demand of Lætitia for the marriage.

*The Egoist* also presents a Prelude to the novel, consisting of an elaborate explanation about the method of the Comic Spirit. It also contains innumerable aphorisms, in the voice of the Comic Muse. The central character Sir Willoughby Pattern is an individual and also a type of the eighteenth century English Aristocracy and the manorial barons. He is rich, handsome, athletic and aristocratic, his conversation is informative and intelligent. He also fulfilled the duties of his position conscientiously. In his outward treatment of women he displays the accepted mode of the hero of romance. But his intrinsic defect and also the reason for his failure with women in the novel is the possessive and aggressive trait called egoism. True to his type and status Sir Willoughby loves not women but loves himself in women. He sees Lætitia Dale and “his sprang to the ground and seized her hand. “Lætitia Dale!” he said. He painted: “Your name is sweet English music. You are well?” The anxious question permitted him to read deeply in her eyes. He found the man, he sought there, and he squeezed him
passionately and let her go”. His love expects that the object must be what he wants it to be. Later on he tells Lætitia, “But try to enter into my mind; think with me; feel with me.”

Clara hates him for his cruel possessiveness and his continuous search in the object of his love. She understands that marriage for Willoughby is the subjugation of a woman, by changing her into a servile property. Clara has this knowledge sheer by her instinct by Lætitia obtains this knowledge late thorough Clara’s help and the changed circumstances.

Clara Middleton is not only beautiful but also intelligent. She believes in freedom, even before and after marriage. Though she becomes a captive physically. She wants to liberate herself from the clutches of the Egoist by using all methods. Clara is a motherless child, grows under the care of her father Dr. Middleton. Her father was a liberal type of scholar rather than responsible father. He was interested in teaching her Greek than leading her towards emotional maturity. Meredith exposes the typical nature of Dr. Middleton and also the cunningness of Sir Willoughby in the following situation:

“Sir Willoughby “raised a key to the level of Dr. Middleton’s breast, remarking: ‘I am going down to my inner cellar.’
‘An inner cellar!’ exclaimed the doctor.

‘Sacred from the butler. It is interdicted to Stoneman. Shall I offer myself as guide to you? My cellars are worth a visit.’

‘Cellars are not catacombs. They are, if rightly constructed, rightly considered, cloisters, where the bottle meditates on joys to bestow, not on dust misused! Have you anything great?’

‘A wine aged ninety.’

‘Is it associated with your pedigree, that you pronounce the age with such assurance?’

‘My grandfather inherited it.’

‘Your grandfather, Sir Willoughby, had meritorious offspring, not to speak of generous progenitors. What would have happened, had it fallen into the female line? I shall be glad to accompany you. Port? Hermitage?’

‘Port!’

‘Ah! we are in England!’”

Then again in the library, seated, with the decanter between them.
“Dr. Middleton eyed the decanter. There is a grief in gladness for premonition of our mortal state. The amount of wine in the decanter did not promise to sustain the starry roof of night and greet the dawn. ‘Old wine, my friend, denies us the full bottle!’

‘Another bottle is to follow.’
‘No!’
‘It is ordered.’
‘I protest.’
‘It is uncorked.’
‘I entreat.’
‘It is decanted.’

‘I submit. But, mark, it must be honest partnership. You are my worthy host, sir, on that stipulation. Note the superiority of wine over Venus! – I may say the magnanimity of wine our jealousy turns on him that will not share! But the corks, Willoughby. The corks excite my amazement.’

‘The corking is examined at regular intervals. I remember the occurrence in my father’s time. I have seen to it once.’

‘It must be perilous as an operation for tracheotomy; which I should assume it to resemble in surgical skill and firmness of hand, not to mention the imminent gasp of the patient.’
A fresh decanter was placed before the doctor.

He said, 'I have but a girl to give!' He was melted.”

This is Dr. Middleton who has surrendered his daughter Clara to Sir Willoughby. She meekly obeys her father’s advice to marry Sir Willoughby. She experiences her repulsion for Sir Willoughby, when he hugs and kisses her frequently. This physical repulsion lead her to understand Sir Willoughby thoroughly. The vivacious young Clara can not stay in the egoist’s trap. Sir Willoughby asks Clara:

‘You are cold, my love? You shivered.’

‘I am not cold’, said Clara. ‘Some one, I suppose, was walking over my grave.’

The gulf of a caress hove in view like an enormous billow hollowing under the curled ridge.

She stooped to a buttercup; the monster swept by.

‘Your grave!’ he exclaimed over her head; ‘my own girl!'

As her father supports Sir Willoughby she seeks help and guidance from Lætitia Dale, Vernon Whitford.

There were two alternatives before Clara, when she becomes free from Sir Willoughby and they are De Craye and Vernon Whitford. De Craye is an Irishman with wit charm and fluency. He also is shallow and of moral instability. He is a very close and sincere friend of Sir
Willoughby and it is immoral to steal the fiancé of his friend. But Whitford is sober, scholarly, and is always ready to help. He personifies the traditional traits of self-restraint and taciturnity. In a way Meredith affects the Comic Spirit through the person of Vernon Whitford.

Meredith wrote *The Egoist* under the influences of the new theories of Comte, Spencer and Bradley. The term ‘egoist’ used for the title itself definitely indicates its significance. According to the prevailing connotations of the word ‘egoist’ as explained by Spencer and Comte; ‘egoist’ was a biological term with moral implications. The word is used in the context of biology. The term ‘egoist’ writes John Goode, “re-enters the English language between mid-fifties and mid-seventies with a renewed connotative force – linking it with the attempt to find a basis for human conduct in empirical scientific discourse.”

If emphasis is given to Comte and Spencer’s ideas, egoism is the human process involved with the movement to create sociology. In this process the romantic conception of the individual self is transcend into social turns. Actually, Comte analyses the cerebral functions in terms of the progressive scale moving from egoism to altruism a scale which exists statically is the mind of every individual and dynamically is individual growth and social evolution. On one side there is the
individuals awareness and on the other side its involvement in society. Between these two stages of egoism. There is intermediary stage, consisting of pride and vanity. These two conditions of pride and vanity are essentially personal not only in origin but also in object. Though they are personal they can be gratified by means of a social character. According to Comte the two agents egoistic instincts and social affection are connected by the institution of family. Comte states “If, on the one hand domestic life is that which prepares us to fill the charm in us for others, on the other hand it places us in the situation, the best enables each of us to abuse this power over others... For society continually acts in purifying the leading characteristics of family.”

So family is first breeding place for pride and vanity and marriages is an act of self-improvement. It is opined that the Meredith’s *The Egoist* may be read in the light of Comte’s sociological theories because the English philosophical scene in 1870’s was very much coloured by his thought. If the structure of egoism in *The Egoist* in relation to the biological conception as described above, such a study will be more fruitful. Primarily, such a study enables us to maintain a moral neutrality. Meredith states the book of egoism is the book of the Earth. “The Egoist is our fountainhead of primeval man”, and he is a sign of indestructibility. The primitive force of Sir Willoughby is a
potential for good. Even Clara’s rebellion is described as egoism of women (VI 54). Even though Willoughby is an egoist, he is ‘a degenerate egoist’. For him house and family are not natural instincts but only artificial acquisition. He seeks in love not the instinct of self-preservation but only ‘pacification of a voracious aesthetic gluttony’ (XI - 134). He is retarded as his procreation instinct is perverted to a narrower appetite. Hence Willoughby is a social egoist.

“Degenerate or not (and there is no just reason to suppose it) Sir Willoughby was a social Egoist, fiercely imaginative in whatsoever concerned him. He had discovered a greater realm than that of the sensual appetites and he rushed across and around it in his conquering period with an Alexander’s pride”.

Meredith wants to present the retorted and perverted social egoist, by brightening the inward mirror where he can see himself as a dangerous imp. This can be done only through art, which is nothing else than the Comic Spirit. There is another point to be considered here. The question is whether the egoist, filled with pride and vanity, destroys the social fabric or it is the social structure that makes one as an egoist. It is a fact that Willoughby is a perfect make and a product of the social structure. His social status is merely paradigmatic. And we are sure that
his egoism is conditioned only by biological and cultural determination. Meredith describes Willoughby, "that little prince's education teaches him that he is other than you and by virtue of instruction he receives and also something, he know not what within, he is enabled to maintain his posture..."\textsuperscript{42}

The words 'something' and 'within' clearly indicate that Willoughby's personality is made and moulded by the social structure. Sir Willoughby declares that Feudalism is not an objectionable thing if you can be sure of the Lord. All the inhabitants of Pattern household accept the supremacy of Willoughby, and their obedience contributes to the making of his egoism. It is a paradox that the egoist is the by-product of the social organisation and it is the cause of the disturbance and a hurdle to the social harmony and progress.

However, Meredith performs the duty of an artist, to lay bare the social and the psychological world of Sir Willoughby. His intention is to expose the internal processes of the external behaviour of a social egoist. The vast difference between what he is and what he ought to be is brought to the readers.

"the Egoist is the Son of Himself. He is likewise the Father. And the son loves the father, the father the son; they reciprocate affection
through the closest of ties; and shall they view behaviour unkindly wounding either of them, not for each other’s dear sake abhorring the criminal? They would not injure you, but they cannot consent to see one another suffer or crave in vain. The two rub together in sympathy besides relationship to an intenser one. Are you, without much offending, sacrificed by them, it is on the altar of their mutual love, to filial piety or paternal tenderness: the younger has offered a dainty morsel to the elder, or the elder to the younger. Absorbed in their great example devotion, they do not think of you. \( ^{43} \)

During this artistic process a mirror is present before Sir Willoughby. Actually, Sir Willoughby exists in every man’s conscience. When the readers also feel the ludicrous experiences of this degenerate egoist, the purpose of the Comic Spirit is more than achieved. That is the main objective of the author. It does not mean that after reading the egoist, many would change into Vernon Whitfords. The change shall definitely come slowly in due course of time, after how long one cannot say. But the Comic Spirit continuously and untiringly endeavours to awaken every individual conscience.
11. The Tragic Comedians (1880)

'The Tragic Comedians' is based on the real story associated the German Social democratic leader Lascelle and Helen Von Donniges. In the novel Alvan and Clotilda are the hero and the heroine. Actually, Lascelle was a fiery and patriotic democratic leader who was a Jew. His personal traits and brilliant politics attract the young aristocratic girl. They love each other and decide to run away because their marriage is not possible due to their different race and religion. Clotilda comes prepared to Alvan's room. But Alvan does not want an eloped union with Clotilda. He takes her back to her parents, because Alvan wants a ceremonial and proper marriage. The angry and furious parents ask Alvan not to see their daughter again. The ego and confidence of Alvan are shattered by their behaviour. He thinks that he is displaying his heroic qualities and his behaviour shall be admired and even rewarded by the parents of Clotilda. He also is convinced that he can dominate anybody, and this false arrogance is also broken. Clotilda was also disappointed with Alvan's behaviour. She becomes a victim of her mother and at last agrees to marry other man from her community. Alvan wants to take revenge and invites Clotilda's father for a dual. The prince to whom Clotilda was betrothed comes to fight in place of the oldman. In the dual Alvan was killed, and Clotilda marries the prince.
Actually, the heroin in real life Helen, wrote her autobiography published in 1879 in which she narrated her love for Lascelle and his death. This novel is a document of Meredith’s radical enthusiasm for the democratic movement. The writer, at the beginning of the novel accepts the stand taken by the real pair in life and also the pair in the novel. Sassoon writes, “I did not know the story had been taken from ‘real life’ though Meredith informed me of it in a short prelude written in such enigmatic lamp. That I failed to make head or tail of it.”

He adds that “It was frightfully powerful but unpleasantly perturbing and dull of bits I could not comprehend. The people seem quite real, half way through the book. (I was thankful that there were only 200 pages). The love affair began to go wrong and Alvan’s extenuating mental experiences in the second half were like a wild dream.

However, writes Jack Lindsey, “what Meredith is concerned to show is the failure, the betrayal of revolutionary responsibility.” Alvan revolted against the aristocratic society and yet he returns to the story through his love for Clotilda. Half way through this battle against the bourgeois, Alvan deserts the cause of the working class. Over and above he tries to regain his status among the bourgeois, with a request to
admit him into their folds. Clotilda also reveals her weakness for social status. A better reason for Clotilda is the shock received of Alvan’s exotic behaviour. Even beyond this the failure of Evan’s love is the usual sentimentalism. Alvan is successful in other fields with his strength and dominant power. So he hopes to get success in love also. His opinions about women are falsely based on it. In this novel the word Philistine is the central image, which is a representative of Milton’s *Dalila*. The fall of these two lovers, is definitely comic in the context of Meredith’s literary art. These two characters exhibit the tremendous hiatus between their idealistic visions and their weakness to achieve them. It is a classic case of self-deception.

The novel suggests the inordinate energy and power in its composition. It is frightfully powerful, and presents in such a way as to bother and fatigue one’s mind. There is no relaxation of the strained and strenuous style of narration. It also contains the phenomenon of his paroxysmal writing and the clenched and over strong quality. It also suggests an artificial vitality, superseding the rich impetus and the spontaneous aliveness. There might two reasons for this style of Meredith in the tragic-comedians. Meredith had a very thick emotional identification with Lascelle and his social position. With all superhuman attributes Lascelle must have fought against his adversaries
with rare and certain success. But he falls a prey to the ‘Philistine’ woman. Reluctantly, his failure is incredible and disappointing. So the authors’ identity with Lascelle deprived him with the cool objectivity. “Meredith had entered into Alvan and the mood is one of unredeemed blackness.”

12. *Diana of the Crossways* (1885)

Meredith’s novel *Diana of the Crossways* is another novel of Meredith which is based on real life incidents and characters. It was published in 1885, and his only novel which was sold beyond expectations. Diana is Meredith’s radiant and brilliant heroine, who was in real life Caroline Norton. She was one of the most famous ladies of English society and politics along with Lady Duff Garden. She was married to a Lord who was nearly 30 years elder than her. Mrs. Norton was the grand daughter of the great dramatist, Sheridan. In the novel all the social and political incidents associated with Diana are real happenings. The serialisation of this book came to an abrupt end, and it was published as a book of 43 chapters.

The novel ‘Diana of the Crossways’ is a glaring example for the play of the Comic Spirit. Diana’s pilgrimage is the quest for that elusive kingdom where spontaneity and the processes of democratisation meet
in eternal sunlight. As the victims of Diana’s spirit are the mannered minute and polite disguise, so the targets of Meredith’s Comic Spirit are those artificial comedies of manners that had graced continental stages for a century. More importantly, the Comic Spirit is not divorced from the life of the stage; but exists in an uneasy, though close relationship with the other forces working towards social equality, much as Diana’s tryst with Dacier. During the reign of the Comic Spirit (Meredith sees a sort of dialectic of history operating which insures the alternation of kingdoms), life and art are virtually indistinguishable. It is when the Comic Spirit comes to exist apart from the people as a separate artistic manifestation, that the collapse of the realm is at hand and comedy lapses into irony or satire. Aesthetic organicism is a necessity for the operation of the Comic Spirit, and its precursors are the smaller sylphs who deflate egos through the manipulation of overheard rumour.

Diana is the pure woman who moves through divisions and controversial situations. She impulsively commits many mistakes. There are some similarities between Clara Middleton and Diana. But the only difference is that Diana attempts to escape from marriage, whereas Clara tries to escape from marriage even before it takes place. The resemblance of her story to Clara is particularly close in the scene when she is on the verge of open flight. But both are convinced that
running away would be cowardly, both have a physical revulsion against amatory caresses. Diana is an Irish beauty just as Caroline Norton. Diana is also an ambitious novelist.

Diana is introduced at a Dublin wall and meets her old friend Lady Dunstan. Here she is introduced to Austin Redworth, who loves her but thinks his income too small for proposing her marriage. Because of her sociability, ambition and extraordinary beauty, Diana is pestered everywhere by attempts at seduction. Even at Dunstan's place Sir Copsley has his try. To escape such conditions, Diana gets engaged to Warwick. Lady Dunstan suspects and also advises not to rush into a loveless marriage. Mr. Warwick who is very senior in age is a humourless gentlemanly official. Very soon differences arise between Diana and her husband. The husband encourages her to have acquaintance with Lord Dannisburgh of the cabinet for worldly progress and benefits. But very soon he ends by divorce proceedings. Being an extravagant spendthrift and a woman after high luxury and passion, Diana is caught in financial bankruptcy. Diana wants to leave to country but Redworth stops her on the advice of Lady Dunstan. The divorce suit filed by Warwick is rejected in the court and so there is a danger that Warwick reclaims her by law. On her travels she meets Percy Dacier a nephew of her cabinet friend. In the meantime Redworth
becomes an M. P. The relationship between Diana and Percy gets rosy colours and they become very thick and close.

Diana pursues the career of novel writing, but not to great success. There are rumours connecting Percy with Diana. One night Percy comes to Diana and divulges state secret and asks not to reveal it. Taking advantage of the emotional nature of this meeting he tries to kiss her but she rejects. However, Percy puts a proposal for marriage and lives with a sense of damaged dignity. Diana immediately sells the state secrets to the editor of the Times. Percy finds himself betrayed. He goes back to Ms. Asper and declares their betrothal. Two days before the marriage of Percy and Miss Asper, Warwick dies. Diana also becomes very ill in the house of Lady Dunstane. In the end Redworth acquires Diana, because, as Meredith says, he believes in her soul.

A critical analysis of this novel brings forth an apparent contradiction in Meredith’s scheme of things. Usually, it is the male protagonist, who is presented as a sentimentalist or a snob or an egoist. Meredith conceives a woman as an effective instrument not only to expose but also to correct such a sentimentalist or an egoist. But here Diana the heroine is presented as a female egoist. Some critics opine that *Diana of the Crossways* is a commonplace novel because it is not
completely Meredithian. This fact is attributed for its great popularity. J. W. Beech states that it is almost an ordinary novel. Diana is a woman of energy and she possesses an aspiring soul, and her aim throughout her career is to secure freest play for her faculties. "The light of energy burns upwards. Of course most of them are the candles in the wind. Let us allow for atmospheric disturbance."48 The essence of the novel is that, "There is nothing the body suffers that the soul may not profit by."49 According to Meredith Diana is "Not one whose purity was carved in marble for the assurance of an Englishman, that is, in possession of the changeless thing that defies time and his fellows, is the pillar of his house and universally enviable."50

The great popularity and appeal of Meredith's 'Diana of the Crossways' may be attributed to the cause of woman. The Victorian society was steeped in an atmosphere in which a woman is bound with domestic slavery. She was not a lone personal figure without social ambition and political participation. George Meredith wrote at a time when the state of womanhood was one of the repression and one might also say of bondage. Though Meredith had shown that women could be more realistic and more indomitable than the men, he had exhibited the idealistic youths in a favourable light. He recognised clearly that the heart of the problem was woman's need of emotional freedom In The
Egoist he insisted that the over-possessive attitude of the male was bound to arouse repulsion in the wife. He kept pointing out that the masculine demand for absolute purity in women was a survival of primitive arrogance, and that the result was hypocrisy on the part of women, who could conform to the false ideal only by pretending to be utterly chaste not only in actions but in thoughts, and thus were obliged to comport themselves like something little better than imbeciles. Meredith had apparently shared something of the idealization of feminine innocence that he was now assailing, and had indicated that a woman’s strength of character arose from her very lack of sophistication – from her intuitive kinship with the genuine natural forces that have become inhibited by artificial conventions. Meredith in The Egoist for the first time asserted the essential claim for “women’s rights” – not as an issue of political or social legislation but as the need for psychological and spiritual independence.

In the contemporary society, as a rule girls could not travel alone and much less venture alone in buses or wear handsome caps (when they came in) or walk by themselves. They never went into society without chaperon. Talent or no talent, they had to perform on the piano at parties and were escorted to the instrument on an arm of a man. They wore intolerable clothes from the age of fourteen. They were not
allowed to work unless they were fortunate enough to bring parents who were poor, as many of the clergy were. It was almost a disgrace to do household work and to know much about business or to be able to cook. Girls ought to live at home and await the men who would come forward to marry them, for marriage was to be their goal. On such a background the character of Diana must have been a daring attempt. In contemporary literature, incidents showing the despicable position of woman appear in plenty. The lead taken by Meredith in this direction is acknowledged and appreciated by many. Meredith represents Diana as the new woman. She thirst for independent and is constantly doing indiscreet things. She discards unconventionalities and goes for long early walks alone. Diana also enjoyed conversation with statements in her husband’s absence. Her nature is extremely impetus and it is described as reflective daughter of impulse. Her intense vitality prevents her from enduring anything in dignified silence. She must act, she must plunge into every excitement. But the worst symptom in Diana is her neglect of blood and body, and is determined to live on an intellectual plain. This defect is attributable to the civilisation itself. Any individual upper class woman conforms to a pattern which denies the existence of blood and requires the disguise of intellect, pretending that woman is pure soul. But the woman who violates this pattern can
only escapes into wilderness before her. For this aberration of Diana, she becomes a victim of the Comic Spirit. Diana is comic in renouncing blood and to live in intellect.

13. **One of Our Conquerors (1891)**

One of our conquerors is an extraordinary novel of Meredith in more than one sense. It presents insurmountable difficulties. Yet if one reads it with patience, it reveals many amazing things. The hero Victor Radnor married in his youth a rich widow much older than him called Mrs. Burman. After sometime Victor falls in love with a young companion Nataly and they eloped. Victor and Nataly live together as man and wife for 20 years and had a daughter Nesta. The couple could not marry because Mrs. Burman though suffering from many diseases, still lives on refuses a divorce. So the problem of Victor is the need to live a lie, because the happiness of Victor’s union with Nataly is tainted as illegal and illegitimate. Rumours and scandals galore and the neighbours boycott his family because of which he has to change houses. There unmarried life is lived in unspoken hope of her death. Sometimes Victor things that these rumours and scandals are spread by Mrs. Burman which cannot be confirmed. Nataly is ready to lead her happy life, without a formal marriage and also with Mrs. Burman alive.
But Victor is not satisfied till he proves himself to be a conqueror, over this predicament. However, the young Nesta is not aware of her illegitimacy. Victor's dream of a conquest is to declare the legitimacy of his marriage with Nataly, and to occupy the county mansion called Lake lands. It is interesting to note that his occupation of Lake Lands is not completely dependent on Mrs. Burman's death alone, but the death of a sick member of parliament also. Actually, the novel stresses the growing of Nesta to her adulthood and discovering the truth of her birth. She is engaged to? "on the insistence of her parents. Nataly suffers from a fatal disease and dies before a few hours of Mrs. Burman's death. Victor ends in madness and Nasta marries her true lover.

The story unfolds the slow dramatic downfall of the great and audacious financial victor. Actually, his name is emblematic and he belongs to the new ruling class, the Bourgeois in their imperialistic phase.

Victor who embodies the forces that have conquered India is also our conqueror, the conqueror and the looter of his own people. Victor represents the whole class that has become rich and wealthy by their conquering methods. There were so many of his class in his time, but they were not in such domestic quandary as victories. It is said that here
is a case where they apparently exceptional becomes the perfect example of the normal. But Victor is a model of his class. He enjoys wine and possesses boisterous good humour, and he is very shrewd.

Meredith calls him the abstract optimist. The term ‘abstract optimist’ is defined as a man who sees himself bustling on to a worthy social goal—while in fact the goal is only the heightening of his own egoism. Victor exhibits wide gap between idea and actuality. This man has no future, feels Meredith but madness. His class has no future but destruction and disaster.

From the point of view of the Comic Spirit, Victor is the ‘histrionic self-deceiver’. Meredith says that the histrionic self-deceiver us armed for enjoying the coveted reality through the partial simulation of possessing it. Victor’s affluent life, wealthy position do not succeed in erasing his original guilt of marrying and deserting Mrs. Burman. The same guilt continues when he cannot marry Nataly. To cover up the same guilt, he decides to marry Nesta to a man whom she does not love. At a particular juncture, Victor wants to seek forgiveness from Mrs. Burman. On reflection Victor realises that in spite of his uninterrupted success, his life is a blank. He could not live with Nataly as her equal because he thought that she was not his married wife. The same feeling
of shame and guilt, that he refused to Nesta in the last stage. Before his
death Victor expresses a desire to be with Nesta. Here Nesta acts as the
agent of the Comic Spirit to expose the inconsistency, the ludicrous
mental gyration of her father Victor. Nataly and Victor though not
formally married enjoyed all consequences and the result of the
marriage. Still they feel themselves guilty in the absence of that formal
bond called marriage. It is still a mystery as to how a formal bond of
marriage would achieve miracles. Nesta who was engaged to Darktra
revolts against their decision. Finally she is married to Siegfried.

14. Lord Ormont and His Aminta (1894)

It is interesting to note that Meredith in his last novels had dealt
with the marriage, its problems and its various shades. His novel 'Lord
Ormont and His Aminta' published in 1894. Here Meredith handles the
question of forced marriages by extra considerations than love and
affection. Aminta and Matey Weyburn are together in their school days
and are known to each other very well. At the same time, they also hear
admirable things about Lord Ormont, a military officer of renowned,
serving in India. Actually, the name of Lord Ormont is a heroic idol for
the young generation. The same Lord Ormont, finds Aminta and
proposes for marriage. Aminta and Ormont are married in the embassy at Madrid.

Aminta has a taste of Lord Ormont’s nature and character on the day of marriage itself. Ormont is very angry because his army service and its great merits are not considered and recognised by the English. He declares his aversion for the English society and people. After the marriage Aminta realises her condition. She comes to a conclusion that she is not his wife in any sense. Besides Ormont himself never presents her as wife in public. Ormont always craves to be alone, to look after and maintained the accounts of his family estate. Her condition is pitiable, and she has to face many attempts that seduction, particularly by one Morsford.

Aminta is reduced to a prisoner without any sign or privilege of a married wife. Actually, Lady Charlotte, Ormont’s sister expresses her doubts whether Aminta is really married to her brother. When things go to far, and when Aminta has been limitless humiliated Ormont decides to declare Aminta as his wife in public. But by then Aminta’s hibernation in a false marriage comes to an end. She takes a quick decision, to run away with her schoolmate Matey. Aminta now is free from that dream spell of army-status and Ormond-glamour. She runs
away with Matey to Switzerland where they live unmarried. Aminta accepts the job in an advance school.

Aminta is definitely different from the previous heroines. When she finds the reality about Ormont she is disillusioned of her so-called Lord, Aminta escapes into outside world of work to live happily with her young lover Matey. He says to Aminta, as they prepare to leave for Switzerland: “I shall not consider that we are malefactors. We have the world against us. It will not keep us from trying to serve it. ....I shall have to ask you, to strengthen me, complete me. If you love me, it is your leap out of the prison... I trust you to weigh the position you lose and the place we choose to take in the world...... if the world is hostile we are not to blame it. In the nature of things it could not be otherwise. My own soul, we have to see that we do,-- though not publicly, not insolently, often good citizenship. But we believe—I with my whole faith, and I may say it of you—that we are not offending Divine law—Our union gives us power to make amends to the world”.

However, Lord Ormont has some remorse and repentance for his treatment of Aminta after the strong dose given by his sister Lady Charlotte. Ultimately, when he makes effort for reconciliation with
Aminta, Ormont faces utter disappointment. The age old wisdom comes to memory,

"He who will not when he may,
When he will, he shall have nay".

Lord Ormont is a perfect representative of Victorian England where wealth, not age, not love and not intelligence where (wealth) can acquire a wife of a poor or helpless women. He is wealthy, aristocratic and possesses army praises, especially in India. Ormont is more interested in the maintenance of his estate and accounts. Meredith’s last novel has more appeal due to the theme of women handled as sacred cows. Some novelist of the Victorian fiction have dealt with despicable position of woman, especially on the background of marriage with all their ironic and satiric exposure of this sham, they did not propagate the destruction of that institution called marriage. It is Meredith who encourages to break down the walls of misused and abused institution of marriage. This new and extended spirit and subject of marriage gives the real value to his last novel. Aminta, by leaving Ormont by stepping into the world outside, may be unclear dot on the horizon anticipating arrival of Ibsen’s Nora (Dolls House). _Lord Ormont_ and His _Aminta_ and _The Amazing Marriage_, published in consecutive year share a similar background and spirit.
15. The Amazing Marriage (1895)

Meredith’s last novel *The Amazing Marriage* was published in 1895. Actually, Meredith had been working on this novel for quite sometime. Here also the theme is the problem of marriage. The beginning of this novel is filled with Romantic Adventures, pastoral natural settings. It unravels the elopement of a married Countess with an old man, the Old Buccaneer. They have two children, Carinthia and Chillon. These two children grew in the remote mountainous area of Switzerland without any knowledge of the outside world. The Son joins the British army and the daughter Carinthia lives with her parent till they die within a few days of one another. After the death of her parents Carinthia is alone and Chillon her brother comes to fetch her away. During his stay there, one day when they are walking across the mountain, they meet a penniless nature lover, named Woodseer. Woodseer secretly entertains the idea of love for Carinthia. In the meantime Lord Fleetwood happens to come to Woodseer, and the Lord gets the information about Carinthia. The Lord is romantically excited, in which he encounters Carinthia. He immediately proposes marriage. It is very interesting situation. The lord makes a picture of Carinthia from the description of Woodseer. He thinks of her as strong and
courageous girl with spirit of freedom and revolt. Similarly, Carinthia also images Fleetwood as a personification of resolute integrity.

Carinthia’s uncle wants to get rid of the responsibility of her and so hurries her into the marriage with Fleetwood. But in the meantime he develops fascination for another girl Henrietta. Ironically Chillon is in love with Henrietta. To serve their own aims, they surrender Carinthia to Fleetwood, as a kind of sacrifice.

Carinthia does not require much time to realise Fleetwood as an unscrupulous lover and a vein aristocrat. Because for Fleetwood, she understands, that a boxing match is a greater priority than a new bride. Fleetwood returns and with his help of a ladder enters Carinthia’s room to sleep with her. Carinthia is with a child and feels deserted. She desires to inform Fleetwood about her state. Fleetwood’s behaviour and his treatment are exemplary and typically of a villain. He always finds a pretext to express his hatred for her. Unable to bear the humiliation and the destitute condition, Carinthia goes and lives in Wales. She is helped by a Welshman, Owein. The relations become a topic of defamation and scandal, the dying wife of Owein blames him. Fleetwood is as soft and cowardly, as arrogant and cruel simultaneously. He repent and seeks a compromise. He goes to Carinthia to express his repentance.
But Carinthia has learnt to be independent and to stand on her own feet. So she firmly rejects his attempts of compromise. Fleetwood become a financial bankrupt. He joins the Austrian service as a mercenary, and then goes on Carlyst expedition into Spain. Carinthia also follows him as a nurse. Fleetwood enters a monastery as a monk and soon after, dies. Carinthia marries the Welshman Owein who leads a peaceful life.

The character of Fleetwood is filled with Evil. Either he lives with Malice and evil or he becomes a religious maniac. His evil designs are the plot of the novel, and Carinthia is wounded victim of every shaft of Fleetwood. He put her to physical suffering, mental agony, social humiliation and scandal, and lastly, dampening of her spirit. But at the same time Fleetwood fears the responsibility of any human relationship. But he also knows how to hide his fears by pretensions. His attempts to be repentant through Carinthia and to make compromise with her are good examples for hiding his fear. For him property and wealth are utmost important. Though it appears that his repentance comes too late in reality, it is the completion of his self-destruction.

Carinthia is the innocent women, walking into the trap of a hasty marriage with a cruel man, elicits Meredith’s most sympathy. Reared under love and care of Nature, Carinthia feels at home among the poor
minors and common folk. When the minors fight against their proprietor, she says that she is also fighting against a Lord. Even in the minor’s strike she does not back out though she is Fleetwood’s wife. Carinthia has natural attachment for the poor, may be Woodseer, Owein or the minors.

Even in the last novel, Meredith’s dexterous handling of the Comic Spirit is evident. The duchess runs away from her husband. It is clearly indicated that the institution of marriage has its own serious limitations. Actually, Carinthia is the result of a non-formal union of a women and a man living together without marriage. Ironically, such a daughter enters into a formal wedlock which proves once more the futility of marriage and a husband. It is a curse falling on the same generation after generation. When Carinthia settles down with Owein readers may question how long and how many times. Here the Comic Spirit is not so sharp and so quick as in The Egoist. The creator of the Comic Spirit has been mellowed down, and is satisfied with depicting the reality, without attempting to suggest any permanent solution. It may be remembered here that Meredith suggested experimental marriages on contract basis, to eliminate or minimise the evil effects of marriage. It is easy to suggest solution but it is difficult actually to live and experience. The Amazing Marriage is only a namesake solution.
Of all the novels of Meredith, ‘The Egoist’ stands supreme. The novel written after two years of the Essay on Comedy “enabled the author to develop action out of motive, to probe subtleties of character and to reveal the complex ironies in the interplay of personalities. His inquiry into the art of comedy as crystallised in his lecture, was applied to every scene in the book”. In case of other novels too, the active role of the Comic Spirit is glaringly illustrated. As all his protagonists are either egoists or sentimentalists, the Comic Spirit definitely works to bring them back to sanity. Meredith’s idea of comedy and the role of the Comic Spirit are not only vain precepts but they are the tenets derived by their author’s continuous practice of the same. In this chapter the important works of Meredith are studied and analysed in the light of the practice of his principles of comedy.
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cha.i

Letters of George Meredith Vol. I, 242-43

Chapter XV ‘Beauchamp’s Career’

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p. 45

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p. 416

ii, p. 16

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p. 246

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Diana of the Crossways

Diana of the Crossways

Diana of the Crossways

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