Chapter V

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, Meredith's concept of Comic Spirit is studied in detail and its predominant attributes have been noted. It is not only felt but also experienced by all that Meredith's novels are their author's endeavour to demonstrate the principles of Comic Spirit in his novels. Even though it is a fact that Meredith has shown his theory of Comic Spirit in his novels, it may not be true that all his novels exhibit the tenets of the Comic Spirit scrupulously and consciously applied. For example Farina may not stand to a scrupulous test of the strict application of the requirements of the Comic Spirit. Similarly, his later novel 'Lord Ormont and Aminta also does not display the theory of Comic Spirit in depth. But it does not prove any self-contradiction on the part of the author regarding conception and execution of his theory of the Comic Spirit.

"The Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit" received little attention at the time, when it was published. But 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 own genre. The lecture brought into focus a theory that he had held
throughout his writing— the value of laughter as a form of intellectual clarification and emotional therapy. He conceived it as neither satire nor burlesque, but a dispassionate and clear-sighted perception of folly, sentimentality, and conceit. His own adoption of this attitude in his novels has been partly responsible for the disfavour they evoke in some readers. He holds himself aloof from his characters and observes them with Olympian mockery at moments when the reader would prefer an illusion of sympathetic identification. His basic assumption was that the Comic Spirit can promote true human progress by destroying inflated self-importance and providing a sane sense of proportion: it functions only when the senses are under the complete control of the intellect. In the emphasis upon reason and the avoidance of excesses the argument aligned itself with the classical tradition, and so there is nothing surprising in his choice of Molière as the best exemplar of it."

Meredith is the profoundest direct delineator of egoism in our language. He has more deeply read the spirit of inherent selfishness and more accurately gauged its meanings and subtleties, than has any other writer. Not only in The Egoist itself, but in every one of his novels there is a sense at work to explore the egoism underlying and forming the structure of personality. To him it has become not merely the chance characteristic that one incongruous or peculiar figure might suggest but
a definite and vital constituent in every life. He claims that it is one of
the inborn legacies, and as such amenable to real philosophic research.
He sees it as the great elemental instinct, educated by society to wear
over this body of the primal such a polished coating of modernity, that
many may have been led into the belief that it is one of the things
society has formed instead of realizing what is the truth, that it was in
existence ages before society was even imaginable.

“The Egoist is our fountain-head, primeval man: the primitive is
born again, the elemental reconstituted. Born again, into new conditions,
the primitive may be highly polished of men, and forfeit nothing save
the roughness of his original nature. He is not only his own father, he is
ours; and he is also our son. We have produced him, he us”. The ideas
and attitudes of Meredith towards a society and individual have been
formed and consolidated over his writing career spreading about nearly
forty years. Though they appear in embryonic form in the first novel
‘The Shaving of Shagpat’ gradually grows to take a concrete shape in
his novels in 1880’s. It always happens in the life of any artist that he
reaches the zenith of his work at a particular point. The preceding work
contributes towards the gradual growth and the succeeding work shows
a loosening or relaxed quality. Similarly the point of zenith in
Meredith’s career is ‘The Egoist’.
In case of Meredith the earlier work was comparatively of conflicting results. In spite of the tight plot, brilliant love scenes, poetic exposition of character and the ridiculous nature of the so-called system, 'The Ordeal of Richard Feverel' is not his best work. Meredith's earlier life was disturbed due to domestic problems, in his youth his dream of romantic life is shattered by financial constraints and marriage problems. Besides the Victorian reading public showed utter neglect towards his writings. There was a patch of happy domestic life with encouraging friends circle and comparatively improvement in financial conditions. But this patch was short-lived because of the death of his second wife and his son Arthur. After 1890's, Meredith has become mellowed in thought and attitude. Though it cannot always be concluded that problems of personal life shall take away some perfection of his work. There cannot be any universal law on this. But in case of Meredith, he himself complained that he could have done better if he were to be in a better condition.

What we want to drive at by the above explanation is to show that Meredith's earlier work may not be a perfect execution of the principles of the Comic Spirit. The Essay on Comedy was delivered in 1877 and The Egoist was written in 1879. The vehement and emphatic postulation
in the essay is demonstrated by performance in the novel. Meredith also repeated his praise of the Comic Spirit in his *Ode to the Comic Spirit*.

Meredith lived at a time when the Victorian Society was practically disintegrating. The fragmentation started but very few not only realised it but reacted also. He was a severe critic of the Victorian thought and literature. He was rebelling against the convention which refused to sanction the free play of ideas in a novel and which rejected penetrative analysis of motives. It is the speciality of Meredith that he lived through 1840’s 1850’s and actually witnessed the destruction of Victorian ideals. In an age of doubtful and unstable beliefs Meredith had a strong and unshaken faith in Nature and man. He was in favour of science as far as it retained the reason and rational faculty for man. He was a champion of intellectual cult but was not ready to neglect the emotions and also the spiritual goals. It is to the credit of Meredith that in an age of crumbling philosophies, he evolved an alternate and viable philosophy of life. He assigned the supreme place for Nature in his philosophy of life. His conception of Nature is a blend of the Classical and the Romantic conceptions. It is the whole life of man personified, and manifested in the external nature. A happy, healthy and moral man is his primary desire. His second demand is the highly civilised society consisting of only such men. His vision is that of ancient Greek and
Athenian society sans its excesses. Civilisation gradually progresses with the contribution of such citizens to bring some day the predicted but invisible species. In this philosophy of life and man, Meredith introduces the concept of Comic Spirit as an effective corrective measure.

Sometimes Meredith creates a suspicion in the readers whether his novels and poetry are only a rendering of certain ideas about Nature and Society into art. Even if a positive answer cannot be given, the fact is that Meredith’s primary interest is to reform man and society towards a better future. “At his worst, he justifies his suspicion. At his best, he obliterates any ground for it; he demonstrates, it is because of his achievement in form – his triumphs of style and techniques – his ideas have power and meaning”.¹ A chronological study of his works, informs that Meredith’s views on society have changed over the decades. In the fifties, Meredith wholeheartedly mixed with the enthusiasts for the revolutions sweeping Europe. In the sixties, he shared the opinion of war as an instrument by which Nature corrects social wrongs and by which social character is moulded. In seventies, Meredith had embraced a belief in liberal reform as opposed to both conservative restraint and revolution. For the remaining period of life Meredith made liberalism as a social creed. However, it is interesting that the conservatives and
liberals had reason to believe that Meredith shared their social views and values. Meredith related to the contemporary society, eclectically. His political social and philosophical thought cannot be identified with any single school or movement. As Kelvin observes, "His searching curiosity and his readiness to commit himself on many issues led him by turns into a number of different intellectual camps. But this is not to say that he lacked integrity. Not only where his conviction varied as they were sounding held, but ideas that seem strange bed fellows when regarded abstractly, managed to exist together, exceedingly well within the controlling forms of his art."²

Meredith's views on politics have undergone as per the changing conditions. But ultimately his interest in politics is due to his primary concern with the civilisation and society. The social problems may not find permanent solutions at any particular time or civilisation. For example, the relationship between the individual and the society or the rights of personality or issues, continuously discussed and decided variously. Similarly, individual conduct is largely founded upon the dogmas of questionable valve. Words like 'Morality' and 'Justice' yield interpretations far different from those of the law and the common usage. Meredith deals with such permanent problems. Is conduct merely a matter of the revolution of the society, a method of making life
liveable, or is based upon an inherent comprehension of the absolutely
good? Are we bound to sacrifice ourselves for society, or is the
individual (who indeed goes to form society) to live out of his
individuality? Apart from the various schools like the socialist, the
individualist, the communist, we know very well that existence is
largely a matter of compromise. Meredith provides his own attitude
towards a problem of the relation of the individual to the society.
Everyman and woman must decide for themselves, what they will do.
The decision of the individual may push him into isolation. This aspect
of isolation, may be the result of the choice or the social alienation, is
welcome sometimes. But the great example of individual’s isolation and
alienation from society is the worst suffering for the post war man. The
concept of individual isolation has its bright and bleak sides. He
strongly believes in the advancement of the individual by means of
society. According to him civilisation is held together by society, and
no general forward movement is possible save in the range of
civilisation. Meredith is not opposed to individual freedom. On the
other hand he supports the urge for the individual freedom in Clara
Middleton, Aminta, and in Natale. He simply wants that freedom must
be governed by certain laws. In his novels those who want to enjoy
individual freedom at the cost of social norms are severely punished.
As a thinker concerned with social problems, Meredith considers the problem of marriage in depth. We have already seen that Meredith’s three last novels are eloquent sermons on this problem. ‘One of our Conquerors’ presents a man who marries a woman much older than himself and then leaves her for the woman whom he should have married. ‘Lord Ormond and his Aminta’ is the story of a woman who married a man far her senior and then leaves him when the true lover comes. The theme of The Amazing Marriage is a hasty marriage and its tragic consequences. It is not only in these three novels that Meredith has dealt with this problem, but in many other novels this problem is presented. But Meredith’s stand about marriage is very clear and can be presented from two dimensions. First of all marriage is a device evolved by human community to solve various problems of sex. During the last uncountable ages, the institution of marriage is serving the purpose in its own fashion. It must be asserted that marriage is the only solution for infinite problems related with the sexual appetite of human being. It may not have fulfilled its purpose to the complete satisfaction of all the concerned and involved. Due to individual conditions and considerations marriage might have proved to be unhappy, insufficient or a misery for some. Happy marriages also are very numerous, a fact to substantiate the view that it is an admirable institution. But for those unhappy
individuals to whom marriage proved to be a misery Meredith's advice is that they should solve it for themselves without much social acrimony or community unrest. He seems to say, follow what Nature and Nature's human assistant society dictates but follow them only to the point where individuality will naturally merge itself in their flow. Matey Weyburn tells Aminta, before departing to Switzerland, that they have offended the society. But their sincere love shall compensate for defying the social norms. Even than they shall strive to contribute to the society in their own fashion. The ending of these three last novels provide the same message.

The second angle to Meredith's conception of marriage is biological. According to Meredith a man has to obey the laws of Nature at different stages of blood, mind and spirit. One has to fulfil the demands of these three as per their timely needs. When young, one has to answer and fulfil the call and demand of the body, and similarly in case of mind and spirit. When all these three faculties are equally and balancedly fulfilled, Meredith calls them as true to Nature. He says

"Pleasures that through blood weakening spirit from the brain,
Each of each in sequent birth,
Blood and brain and spirit three,
(Say the deepest gnomes of Earth)
Join for true felicity."
Are they parted, then expect someone sailing will be wrecked."

In a young man, love coupled with knowledge tells him the secret pleasures of body;

"Love born of knowledge,
Love that gains vitality as Earth it made,
The meaning of the pleasures, pains,
The life, the Death, illuminates."

So Meredith’s philosophy does not accept asceticism, the denial of physical and sensual pleasures, as it also abhors the too much indulgence in sensual and sexual pleasures. The healthy life as prescribed by Nature is to travel between the ascetic rocks and sensual whirlpools. The only means for this prescribed journey is mating at the correct time with the correct partner. This means, sanction by society is marriage. So for Meredith marriage is an institution which should be adopted and also to be compromised with.

Meredith’s philosophy of the Comic Spirit finds its expression in ‘The Egoist’ and the ‘Diana of the Crossways’. ‘Moliere and Meredith are probably the two supreme comic writers in literature. They, of all others, have the profoundest insight to the elemental passions in that cultured and perfumed form which may be said to represent the mind of
society. For the comic spirit is a kind of intellectual iron-hand-in-the-velvet-glove, and is as keen-visioned as it is polished.

Nature empowers a woman to act as its agent. Meredith’s conception of woman is poetically superior and socially admirable. He says, “There is the democratic virus secret in every woman.” According to him women on the whole possess impersonal individuality than men. In *The Egoist*, Sir Austin says, “I expect that woman will be the last thing civilised by man.” Beauchamp observes in the remark, “He committed the capital fault of treating her as his equal in passion and courage not as metal ready to run into the mould under temporary stress of fire.”

But a woman’s observation of a man is recorded in the words of Clara:

‘He, tries to be more than he is’, thought the lady and began insensibly to conceive him less than he was.”

In one of his best-remembered strictures, Matthew Arnold put his finger on “something premature” in the literature of the romantic era, splendid though it was. In spite of their energy and creative force, those poets, not excepting Wordsworth, were “wanting in completeness and
variety," the reason being that they had insufficient materials to work
with; in other words, they did not know enough. They lived and wrote
before the acceptance of the historical method and the rise of modern
science. It was Meredith’s good fortune to attain the height of his
powers about the time when Arnold pronounced these animadversions.

Meredith is in a way special and different from many other
novelists. He combined two characteristics different if not contrary. He
was good Hampshire man but also a good European. The visionary
ardour of the cult flamed is an intellect of super subtle keenness. He
was united with a romantic sympathy for Nature, all-pervading irony,
and a rare mastery of words. Meredith is more a continental, sharing
and sympathising with the spirit of Europe, then an insular English type.
The ideas and thoughts of the English, were many times castigated by
him as parochial and partial. One English writer says, “We shroud our
wealth in our island mists, and involved ourselves in our own virtue.
Our morality is a native product, so too is our hypocrisy. We are
Philistines, slaves of conventions, we show the shopkeeper taint in our
passions, we prove by our journals that we are turning to facts, and ideas
are unknown to us and unwelcome. There is much truth in these
charges. Like the Greeks whom Tacitus describes, we admire nothing
except our own productions. Continentals seem to us as eccentric, as we
do to them." Meredith displays a deep and vast tendency of liberal and
catholic thought and attitude that unite him with the European rather
than the English. Besides his sympathy and respect for the European
ethos especially France are remarkable. It is remarked rather correctly
that he understood the spirit of France as no other Englishman did, and
similarly he and his work were understood so admiringly by the French
as no Englishman did. "It seems odd, but it is the countrymen of Moliere
who have produced the most intelligent appreciations of Moliere's
English disciple, as the names of Photiades, Galland, Chevally, Ramon
Fernandez remind us". "Thus seeing through the strong and weak
points of his people, its active virtues, its utilitarian narrowness, he
seizes with rare acuteness the features of other national idiosyncrasies;
no English observer has better understood the moral nature of France". Meredith has presented a genuine portrait of a truly continental
personality through Alvan in his The Tragic Comedians. Meredith's
admiration for the French literature, and his praise for the German
character and his constant criticism of the English, are also a trait of his
Europeanism. Meredith has definitely put a bit of his own in Alvan. He
also was a great lover of nature, and obtained peace on a Mount Blanc
evening and was equally elated by the Alps.
Nature, in Meredith’s novels is the eternal background. Meredith lived fully enjoying the pleasures of body and brain. He loved Nature with a surpassing love in all her modes, but his keenest joy was to describe English scenery, that too the scenery of Hampshire. Some of the best descriptions in his novels remind us of Hampshire. Cecilia and Beauchamp’s day-long ride across the downs, the Redworth’s ride to the ‘Crossways’ on a November night, the Fleetwood’s walk with Carinthia are some veritable examples. But mere picturesque scenes are not the speciality of Meredith. With him Nature has blown away the cobwebs of the brain, has given a spin to the blood, colour and vitality. To Meredith Nature is not a mysterious far-off power. For him Nature is the Mother Earth. His belief is that men are the offspring of the Mother Earth, we come from Earth and we are dissolved into the Earth. This belief of Meredith gives a new meaning and an added force and a strenuous purpose made into intellectual basis of man’s outlook. Meredith’s faith in the mother Earth may be described as a type of Pantheism. To make it clear, Pantheism is a religion without revelation, and hence its followers must workout their conclusions from their own starting principles. Meredith’s Pantheistic faith in the Earth demands a strict disciplined behaviour, obeying the laws of Nature. Any violation
of Nature's laws shall put men in an abnormal position. Meredith's emphasis on morality and social conduct, originates, in this context.

Meredith trusts largely to instincts and these instincts are provided by the Earth, and one can safely follow them. Meredith's women always act and react on these instincts only. Instincts are always not straight, and sometimes they may pervert men and women. Before obeying the instincts, one may need instructions. Life is something to be enjoyed in all its richness and pleasure is not inherently wrong. So asceticism does not find favour in such a system. The system of morality and the standard of conduct, are not wrong only because they have been evolved during the past ages. The general conditions of morality and conduct have to be tested with Common Sense. In every age these creeds and convention are up to new tests by poets, thinkers and philosophers. Meredith's attempt is not to defy, but only to test them anew, so that these creeds and conventions can inspire the generations with spiritual force, and also to infuse them with new life. The ideas, the creeds and the conventions are thoroughly discussed in his novels and the poet philosopher declares some of them to be dead, some of them to be followed as they are and some to be rectified. Meredith says,
‘A thousand years! You may count full many a thousand by this route before you are one with divine philosophy. Whereas a single flight of brains will reach and embrace her; give you the savour of Truth, the right use of the sense, Reality’s infinite sweetness; for these things are in philosophy; and the fiction which is the summary of actual Life, the within and without of us, is, prose or verse, plodding or soaring, philosophy’s elect handmaiden. To such an end let us bend our aim to work, knowing that every form of labour, even this flimsiest, should minister to growth’.  

The responsibility of a thinker or a poet is to explore life. The method of this exploration is through art for a poet. It is a fact that life has some thinking quarters and some abominable spots. There are some artists who assault our nostrils with the odours of dunghills. They also provide knowledge of the world which comes from sifted and assorted from dustbins. This method of realism, Meredith hates. He wrote, “My love is for Epical subjects not for cobwebs in a putrid corners, though I know the fascination for unravelling them.” He vents his horror at the French realists and their work, “who reads must smell putrid for a month… a nocturient, cacaturient, crew.. Sheer realism is at best the breeder of the dung-fly.” For him love is the renunciation of self and passion is noble strength on fire. Meredith says in his poem ‘Earth’s
Secret', "Not solitarily in field we find Earth's secret open, though one page is there, Her plainest such as children spell, and share'

With bird and beast, raised letters for the blind.
Not where the troubled passions to the mind,
In turbid cities can the key be bare.
It hangs for those who hither thither fare,
Close in the earth reading nature with our kind.
They, hearing history speak, of what men were,
And have become, are wise. The gain is great
In vision and solidity; it lives.
Yet at a thought of life apart from her,
Solidity and vision lose their state,
For Earth, that gives the milk, the spirit gives."

Though comedy as a literary form has a long history, it has never been put to moral and philosophical purpose as Meredith has done. We have romantic comedy, comedy of humours, comedy of manners, realistic comedy etc. It may be pointed out that all these dramatists of comedies were initially motivated by the evils of society and the deficiencies of individuals, and they intended to correct them by exposing them to laughter. But Meredith has started with the philosophical conception of an ideal man and an ideal society. The deficiencies of individual and their undesirable influence on civilisation and society are the hurdles to achieve such an ideal society and hence
the need of Comic Spirit. Here, the difference is that Meredith intends to assign the proper place for the Comic Spirit in the whole working of the human and the social spheres. George Meredith’s contribution to the exposition of comedy is memorable. It reveals Meredith’s concern for man’s happy life in society, and he is even restless to discover an agent to expose the real cause for man’s unhappiness. Even as a literary critic his study about comedy is vast and deep. He displays a marvellous understanding about this literary form and he is very clear in his ideas about comedy. The comparison between different writers of comedies and even different countries where comedy flourished, is a very fertile and useful. Some of his observations on the flourishing of comedy are revealing and amazing. Comedy is a great art and it is more useful to human society because it can be enjoyed collectively and at the same time it works as a corrective measure for individuals and society. Meredith’s knowledge of human mind and his interest in analysing human emotions naturally equipped him to make extraordinary study of comedy, and the essay is the result.

There is nothing more essential to a consideration of Meredith’s novels than a right understanding of his “idea of comedy”. For, many of his creations have been conceived under its direct inspiration and all under its supervision, while the ultimate subtlety of its working is to be
traced in the vital influence it has undoubtedly exercised on his style. It is probably as much to that sensitiveness as to any other that we owe the entire absence of commonplace expression in his writing. To posture in outworn expression is as ludicrous as swaggering in a threadbare coat. If “our new thoughts have thrilled dead bosoms,” we need not dress them from mouldy wardrobes. The great difference between such and the author of *The Egoist* is that they have to make their ‘comedy’, whereas for the latter it inheres in all things “as vitally as poetry and as diffused as sunshine.” It needs but the eye to see, and the hand to fix it for us in art. Adrian Harley says, “no art arrives at the artlessness of nature in matters of comedy.” But, indeed, there is no matter on which the majority of men are more completely benighted than this of comedy; the idea that the comic is in the laugh rather than the laughed at, is of no restricted prevalence.

Such cynicism and such laughter are not directly related to the Comic Spirit. Its laughter comes first, if not solely, in her brain, softly. To see “where” indeed “the laugh comes in” is a rare quality, perhaps hardly indigenous in Britain – around Meredith whose mere name is a lambent light of the comic. In this matter of love, as in all subjects of the muse, it is not, of course, the fact that is laughable, but the falsehood in which it parades. For, “if”, says Meredith, “she watches over
sentimentalism with a birchrod, she is not opposed to romance. You may love, and warmly love, so long as you are honest. Do not offend reason. A lover pretending too much by one foot’s length of pretence, will have that foot caught in her trap.” It is not at Lucy and Richard by the river that the muse smiles, she smiles on them mother-wise may be, not at the great passion of a Sandra, but the poor make-believe of a Wilfred Pole, who “could pledge himself to eternity, but shrank from being bound to eleven o’clock on the morrow morning,” and could wonder if there was not a shade too much confidence in Sandra’s cry of “my lover!”

Truth, indeed, life as it is, is the one great desire of the comic muse, and to whip men back, to that, does she carry her lash of laughter. Her great gift is an eye for proportion, to sins against which, in one way or another, all comic attitudes may be traced.

The measure of the disproportion decides the quality of the laughter which she calls forth to ridicule and rectify it. She does not necessarily laugh herself, - ‘inclined to smile’ probably represents the extent of her own humorous demonstrativeness, - nor need we, she but appeals to our brain to recognize the anomaly, whence may or may not run a summons to the powers of laughter. But let us beware lest in our
laughter we commit the very sin which raised it, for thought, all laughter, must arise primarily from an imagined comic perception, of the wrong side. Over-laughing, the sin of the ‘hypergelast’, is even less tolerable than that of the “agelast,” he who will not:

‘Show his teeth in way of smile

Though Nestor swore the jest be laughable,‘

and if we are guilty of it, the muse will but send out another laughter upon ours, which in its turn may need chastening; a good illustration of her primarily perceptive quality, and the process by which “the original big round satyr’s laugh” is sublimated in time to “the slim feasting smile” of the muse. When we have learnt the secret of fine laughter, to do as much of it in the brain as possible, and when the comic conception is so mighty as to need all powers of laughter in heart and brain, “the laugh will come again” says Meredith, “but it will be of the order of the smile.”

“Types in whom many will not, “for the life of them,” be able to see “what there is to laugh at,” such as Matthew Arnold used to meet travelling “on the Woodford branch in large numbers.” Matthew Arnold, by the way, with that exquisitely reticent smile of his might stand for Mr. Meredith’s “idea of comedy” made flesh”.¹³
Racial heredity and atavism were subjects of recurrent speculation for him. Anyhow, from the start he decided to be an aristocrat in literature, since the world denied him the hallmark of patrician birth. In his novels, he plays with an idea which could set his mind alight because it belonged to his psychological inwardness rather than his intellect. It appears that Meredith might have lived in an absurd dream all his life, and in the nonsense world of dreams he sometimes became a Marquis. For in dreams we remain adolescent, and our fantasies are foolish. Not that he attached any importance to titles. It was the idea of fine breeding which appealed to him. For him, lineage meant a tradition of civilised manners and intelligence. The enigma of his ancestry must have been with him all his life. Often he must have wondered where he came from and whence he derived his thoroughbred points and the almost angelic refinement of the upper part of his face.

Comic Spirit and Meredith’s Achievement

After a lengthy and detailed study of Meredith and the Comic Spirit, one wishes to know the ultimate result. The nature and scope of the Comic Spirit is elaborated. It is also applied to Meredith’s novels. But what is the actual achievement of Meredith in this process. It must be accepted that Meredith has done a great service to the English novel
and to the theory of Comedy. He explained some aspects of the novel which were not explicitly discussed before. Similarly, he also raised some completely new ideas in relation to fiction.

The first and the foremost achievement of Meredith is to provide a new genre in fiction, which is different from the realistic and sentimental variety. This new genre does not indulge, either in ‘rose-pink’ or ‘dirty-drab’ method. Here the stage is a drawing room of aristocratic personae, materialistically and spiritually. The aristocracy of the characters is not decided on the aspects of wealth, social status or manorial titles. Sir Willoughby belongs to this category, while Vernon Whitford a spiritual aristocrat. This type of fiction floats on ethereal and imaginative planes, but never stoops to the low, ugly and obscene. It is a real reflection of genuine civilisation, claiming not merely materialistic progress but a certain condition of mental and spiritual elevation. The Comic Spirit infuses this type of fiction with philosophy and poetry. Before Meredith fiction never absorbed or imbibed these two aspects, except as the individual author’s choice or option. But Meredith’s Comic Fiction makes Philosophy and Poetry as essential ingredients. Secondly the fiction under dominance of Comic Spirit, functions on a particular level of intellect and serious thought. The other types of fiction cater to the entertaining needs of the common and the
average. But Meredith’s type demands a reading public with a flair for intellect and dialectical discussions on serious concerns of the society. By this attempt, Meredith has definitely widened and extended the nature and scope of fiction.

Thirdly, Meredith had released and liberated the form of fiction from the trammels of traditional requirements like plot. As the cardinal aim of the Comic Spirit is to expose the mental and psychological subtleties and processes of a character, situation becomes only an instrument. When the dominance of the situation is set aside, the conception of the plot becomes nominal. Similarly, the dialogue does not serve the traditional purpose of narration. It is more or less a flash of lightening to reveal the mental condition. In the same way, a character becomes a specimen for clinical study, and not a living individual with singularly individualistic habits and customs. So under the glaring light of the Comic Spirit, Meredith proposes a type, almost akin to the novel of stream of consciousness.

This gives us the fourth point of Meredith’s achievement. Meredith is not merely interested to expose infinitesimal subtleties of the egoist’s mind. His primary interest is to make the egoist think, and learn about his own deficiencies and resultant ludicrous positions. His
fiction definitely is a kind of cure for the individual, egoist or sentimentalist and so teaching morality is the primary goal. The contribution of the Comic Spirit is to make fiction as a perfect blend of intellectual entertainment and teaching morality. The problem of morality in literature is very old. But Meredith’s morality is not one of religion or any creed. It is the creed of Nature — organic nature, human nature and even fictional nature. That is why Meredith’s creed of Nature does not fall in the orthodox notion of morality. The speciality of the Comic Spirit is to deal with everyday human behaviour, and every action and incident of daily life. Whatever the case may be the new fictional type asserts the relationship between the entertainment and the development of normal conduct.

The term ‘Morality’ need not confuse us. The Comic Spirit conceives this morality as ‘common sense’ and ‘sanity’, relating to our own neighbours and our society. For him civilisation is the accepted truth. The term grants that all the members in it are normal and sane. The sincere desire of the Comic Spirit is to see that sanity prevails everywhere in a civilised society. That is why Meredith is called the apostle of sanity.
It must be remembered that Meredith loved and wrote when England was going through a phase of scepticism, idealistic conflicts and false complacency. He rises against the intellectual torpor of his countrymen. He provided a very easy escape from the critical condition prevailing in the mind-Victorian era. He exhorted everyone to understand Nature thoroughly and to follow it sincerely. Otherwise the Comic Spirit is hovering on your head. Meredith’s doctrine of the Comic Spirit rises in animality and ends as a mystic vision.

Another achievement of Meredith is that the term ‘Sentimentalism’ is made a byword for the unbalanced, the disproportioned, the haughty, the proud or the foolish. Actually, he gave currency to this term ‘sentimentalist’ as an abuse that people were afraid to be titled or called as sentimentalists. Finally, Meredith’s contribution is to erase the dividing line between tragedy and comedy on light-serious or happy-sorrowful end divide. He established the fact that comedy and tragedy are equal subjects for the dissection of the Comic Spirit.

Sigmund Freud warned, “Thus Civilisation has to be defended against the individuals”. Meredith’s Comic Spirit is out to do the same. For him this Comic Spirit is the ‘sword of common sense’, and also ‘the
sacred chain of man to man'. According to him an individual, being an egoist or a sentimentalist, is the greatest danger to the civilization. If he is not curbed from his follies he would definitely destroy the civilization. The fear expressed by Freud, is attempted to be dispelled by Meredith by prescribing the Comic Spirit and its vital role.

Meredith shall be remembered by the future generations for his contribution in the field of new ideas which would be relevant and useful. Baker says, "For what we have received we are indebted to the ideas in his novels and his poems and those ideas have plenty of work to do still."

Earnest Baker sums up Meredith’s contribution, a) the great openness which he has brought to Victorian fiction, b) the degree to which he forwarded the development of internalisation' c) the creation of a vocabulary and methods for the investigation of the levels of experiences, his predecessor ignored or censored out d) and above all came closer than earlier English novelists to representing identity is a moving present rather than a fixed fictional past."

In Meredith’s comic vision, modern egoism ironically generates the growth of new community and fellowship. Playing on the rapacious, possessive "one" and "I" of his century, he imagined that "our united
social intelligence, which is the Comic Spirit,” might possibly evolve pride in collective life, a rational feeling of unity with nature, and the liberty, fraternity, and equality of the two sexes.

His ode “To The Comic Spirit” makes clear his almost metaphysical devotion to comedy.

“Beneficently wilt thou clip
All over-steppings of the plumèd,
The puffed, and bid the masker strip,
And into the crowned windbag thrust,
Tearing the mortal from the vital thing,
A lightning o’er the half-illumed, [...]
This half-enlightened heart, still doomed to fret,
To hurl at vanities, to drift in shame
Of gain or loss, bewailing the sure rod,
Shall of predestination wed thee yet. [...]
And teaching how for being subject free
Past thought of freedom we may come to know
The music of the meaning of Accord.

Meredith’s motto was: “Service is our destiny in life or in death. Then let it be my choice living to serve the living, and be fretted uncomplainingly. If I can assure myself of doing service I have my home within.”
Meredith was a good man. Possessed by the turbulence of his genius, he strove to subdue himself to a philosophy of noble endeavour and service of that Comic Spirit which he called the Sword of Common Sense, through which he sought to know 'the music of the meaning of Accord', and to 'speak from the deep springs of life'.

But a soul touched with the same tongue of fire, a visionary bathed in purest rays of light, rendered a brotherly homage to Meredith.

Mr. Thomas Hardy cried:

"Forty years back, when much had place
That since has perished out of mind,
I heard that voice, and saw that face.
He spoke as one afoot will wind
A morning horn ere men awake;
His note was trenchant, smart, but kind.
He was of those woods words can shake
And riddle to the very core
The falsities that Time will break...
Of late, when we two met once more
The luminous countenance and rare
Shone just as forty years before.
So that, when now all tongues declare
He is unseen by his green hill,
I scarce believe he sits not there.
No matter. Further and further still
Through the world's vaporous vitiate air
His words wing on—as strong words will."
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