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# AN ESSAY ON COMEDY

AND THE USES OF THE COMIC SPIRIT

BY

GEORGE MEREDITH

EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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TO  
JOSEPH QUINCY ADAMS  
A LOYAL FRIEND AND FAITHFUL CRITIC



## PREFACE

Meredith's *Essay on Comedy* is not seldom employed as a text-book, or for supplementary reading, in courses on the drama, on literary types, and on the theory of poetry in general. Indeed, it has on occasion been termed 'a classic.' That it may properly be so called, in every sense of the word classic, I am not prepared to assert. But when American students are expected to read it in any part of the curriculum, it seems to deserve and require a measure of elucidation and comment. For certain teachers its principal value may lie in the stimulus it gives the student to read the great authors with whose works Meredith is patently familiar, while the student is not; and the suggestion might be made that here is a reason why the *Essay* should not be systematically annotated. Yet there seems to be no real ground for the fear that the presence of notes would diminish the stimulating effect in question. On the contrary, my experience points to the belief that, for want of fuller

indications respecting the masterpieces (and their authors) to which Meredith refers, many of the allusions in the *Essay* escape due attention from the reader. Consequently I have done my best to satisfy the demand of my own pupils that the *Essay* be rendered more intelligible to them through the customary apparatus of an introduction, notes, bibliography, and index. If I have not solved every difficulty of interpretation or reference, I have not consciously neglected any; and where my efforts have not been altogether successful, the Notes in each case, as I hope, clearly indicate the deficiency.

In reprinting the *Essay*, I have not regarded minor oversights of its author as sacred. A few misquotations from other authors have been rectified in the text, and the changes recorded in the Notes. And in the matter of punctuation and the employment of capital letters I have normalized with a free hand so long as I was sure of the intended meaning, in an effort to conform to the best usage of the present. There can be no adequate reason for perpetuating chance infelicities that tend only to obscure the sense of Meredith's words or to disfigure the page; and there is the less reason in view of his complaint (sec p. 27) that

he was not very successful in revising his own proof-sheets. Meanwhile I have spared no pains to reproduce his actual words with the utmost fidelity.

Since the *Essay* may serve as an introduction to the study of comedy, I have included what purports to be a select and relatively brief Bibliography, consisting first, in the main, of standard or particularly accessible editions of the chief comic writers, and secondly of a few more scholarly or scientific, and a few more popular, works on comedy, laughter, and the like.

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## INTRODUCTION



# INTRODUCTION

## I. SKETCH OF MEREDITH'S LIFE

George Meredith, born February 12, 1828, at Portsmouth, England, was the only child of Augustus Armstrong Meredith,<sup>1</sup> a naval outfitter, and his first wife, Jane Eliza Macnamara, the father being of Welsh, the mother of Irish, extraction. After her death (when the son was five years old), the father remarried, and emigrated to Capetown, eventually returning to spend the last ten years of his life at Southsea, where he died (1876) at the age of seventy-five. Generally reticent concerning his early life, Meredith spoke seldom, and not without reluctance, of his father; his paternal grandfather, Melchizedek, and grandmother, Anne, appear as 'the Great Mel' and his wife at the opening of *Evan Harrington*. According to the novelist, his mother was said to have been 'handsome, refined, and witty'; and he adds: 'I think that there must have been some

<sup>1</sup> The father was christened Gustave Urmston, and the name was later changed to Augustus Armstrong.

Saxon strain in the ancestry to account for a virility of temperament which corrected the Celtic in me, although the feminine rules in so far as my portraiture of womanhood is faithful.'<sup>1</sup> When his father left Portsmouth, the boy remained at school there, learning nothing of consequence, as he afterward judged, except through the reading of the *Arabian Nights*; these stimulated his imagination, and he began to invent tales for himself. At the age of fourteen he was sent to the Moravian school at Neuwied, on the Rhine, near Cologne; here he underwent a religious experience, which was not, however, lasting, and here he made acquaintance with Continental literature. At sixteen he returned to England, only to find that the modest property he had inherited from his mother had been reduced through mismanagement until there was but money enough to let him be articled to a London solicitor, R. S. Charnock. But for law he had no taste. Yet the connection was important,

<sup>1</sup> See the article, *George Meredith: Some Recollections*, by Edward Clodd, in the *Fortnightly Review* 92. 19-31 (July, 1909); hereafter referred to as 'Clodd.' Lord Morley (*Recollections* 1. 37) says that Meredith described himself as a person 'of excellent temper, spotless principles, no sex.' Morley's *Recollections* are hereafter referred to as 'Morley.'

for Charnock was one of a coterie of writers which included members of the family of the novelist Thomas Love Peacock. Meredith now read widely in the classics, and in German literature; he wrote verse before he was nineteen, and drifted into journalism. Straitened in circumstances as he was, in 1849 he married Mrs. Mary Ellen Nicolls, the widowed daughter of Peacock, Meredith being twenty-one years old, and she nine years his senior. From Peacock, Lord Morley believes,<sup>1</sup> the young man 'acquired marked qualities of thought and style.' But the union was unhappy, though Meredith does not reveal enough concerning the facts to warrant much discussion. 'No sun warmed my roof-tree,' he says; 'the marriage was a blunder.'<sup>2</sup> They separated, without legal action; when she died in 1861, the care of their only child, a son, devolved upon him. This experience of wedded life is reflected in the series of fifty sonnet-like (sixteen-line) poems entitled *Modern Love* (1862). In 1860 Meredith began work as a critic of manuscripts for the house of Chapman and Hall, who had previously published for him *The Shaving of Shagpat* and *The Ordeal of Richard*

<sup>1</sup> Morley 1. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Clodd, p. 21.

*Feverel*; from then until 1895 they published all his novels except *Evan Harrington* (1861), *Rhoda Fleming* (1865), *The Adventures of Harry Richmond* (1871), and *The Egoist* (1879); moreover, during the temporary absence of John Morley, he took charge of their *Fortnightly Review*, and he also edited for them a series of Military Biographies. His official connection with the firm did not terminate until 1894. As 'reader' for them he passed judgment on some of the early work of William Black, Edwin Arnold, Thomas Hardy, Samuel Butler (*Erewhon*), Cotter Morison, George Gissing, and Fitzmaurice Kelly (*Life of Cervantes*). An arbitrary element frequently appeared in his praise or censure, yet, in spite of a costly mistake or two, it must be said that he served the interests of Chapman and Hall long and well, his criticism being wholly without fear or favor. When he rejected immature work that showed promise, he warned the publishers to watch the author for future productions, and often aided him with personal advice.<sup>1</sup> In 1864 he married Miss Marie

<sup>1</sup> See B. W. Matz, *George Meredith as Publisher's Reader*, in the *Fortnightly Review* 92. 282-298 (July, 1909); hereafter referred to as 'Matz.'

Vulliamy, with whom twenty years of happiness were in store for him; a son and a daughter were born to them. In 1866 he was sent to Italy by the *Morning Post* as special correspondent during the close of the Austro-Italian war. Henceforward, though anything like a general recognition of his merits as a novelist came late, his circumstances, while never affluent, ceased to be straitened; yet so late as 1874 he was moved to increase his income by reading aloud to a blind old lady in London. On the death of John Forster in 1876, Meredith was regularly installed as his successor with Chapman and Hall, becoming their official critic at a fixed, though not wholly adequate, salary. Subsequently he received two legacies from relatives. On February 1, 1877, he delivered his lecture at the London Institution (see p. 171) on *The Idea of Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit*. Here he developed a favorite conception which had been prefigured in earlier works such as *Sandra Belloni* (1864) and *Vittoria* (1865), and to which he afterward returned in his obscure *Ode to the Comic Spirit*, in *The Two Masks*, and in the Prelude to *The Egoist* (see pp. 34-42). Beyond this point it is unnecessary for our purposes to

follow his career; the details of his subsequent life, with ample references to his own works, and to books and articles about him, may be found in the excellent sketch by Thomas Seccombe in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Second Supplement.<sup>1</sup> But we may note that his life was full of friendships. Among his earlier and later friends were Cotter Morison, author of the *Life of St. Bernard*; John (latterly Viscount) Morley, whose *Recollections*, just published, give a vivid picture of Meredith; Admiral Maxse, Swinburne, Moncure Conway, Robert Louis Stevenson, Lowell, W. E. Henley, and Edward Clodd. One of his companions in walking was Sir Frederick Pollock. Of great physical activity throughout most of his life, Meredith may have injured himself by excesses in exercise. In old age a spinal lesion rendered him helpless, so that he was deprived of the stimulus and solace of walking; but his mind continued active. He died on May 19, 1909. One of the staff of Chapman and Hall thus describes Meredith in his maturity:<sup>2</sup> 'His figure was familiar to

<sup>1</sup> See also W. T. Young on Meredith in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. 13, chap. 14 (pp. 489-499), and the appended Bibliography (pp. 622-624).

<sup>2</sup> Matz, p. 282.

all. The striking head, with clearly chiseled features, the bright red tie contrasting sharply with the iron-gray hair, and the general appearance of alertness, had something of a galvanic effect upon those with whom he came into contact; and his conversation was no less electrifying.' To this picture we may add a few touches from Lord Morley, depicting the novelist in his prime:<sup>1</sup> 'He came to the morning meal after a long hour's stride in the tonic air and fresh loveliness of cool woods and green slopes, with the brightness of sunrise upon his brow, responsive penetration in his glance, the turn of radiant irony in his lips and peaked beard, his fine poetic head bright with crisp brown hair, Phoebus Apollo descending upon us from Olympus. His voice was strong, full, resonant, harmonious, his laugh quick and loud. He was born with much power both of muscle and nerve, but he abused muscle and nerve alike by violent gymnastic after hours of intense concentration in constricted posture over labors of brain and pen.'

<sup>1</sup> Morley l. 37.

II. MEREDITH'S BELIEFS AND INTERESTS AS RELATED TO THE *ESSAY ON COMEDY*

To his brief adherence to Christianity in his youth Meredith in after-life referred with no pleasure. He openly avowed his disbelief in a personal God and a future existence of the soul, and habitually alluded to the Christian faith as 'the Christian fable.'<sup>1</sup> His attitude to religion no doubt counted for something in his sympathy with Lord Morley, York Powell, John Stuart Mill, and Sainte-Beuve, and with professed exponents of Positivism, or the philosophy of Auguste Comte, such as Frederic Harrison. Thus it is hardly accidental when he quotes, in the *Essay*, from the writings of the lexicographer Littré, the recognized leader in France of the Positive Philosophy after the death of Comte himself. One might therefore seek to establish a relationship between Meredith and the Positivists in regard to religion and belief. And in point of fact he has a substitute for traditional Christianity resembling that of Comte; for there is an affinity between the cult of 'Earth' in the novelist and poet, and

<sup>1</sup> Clodd, p. 26.

the '*Grand Fétiche*' (that is, the Earth) in the French philosopher—something short of the '*Grand Être*,' or universal object of worship (that is, Humanity). Furthermore, the '*Comic Spirit*' of Meredith's *Essay* is an efflux or emanation of human society, and is regarded as the presiding or tutelary genius of human civilization. But the spirit of the Earth in Meredith is allied also to the *Erdgeist* which, with Goethe's own '*daemon*,' frequently occupies the attention of the German writer—the writer whom our novelist considers the greatest of men, and the most potent and enduring influence he has met with in life. Now the belief which Goethe accepts in rejecting Christianity is an easily identified, if not very exalted, form of Neoplatonism. Accordingly, in his belief, if we are not to describe it negatively, Meredith is Neoplatonic, and represents a trend of thought characteristic of the nineteenth century, midway between complete agnosticism and orthodoxy, and possibly best defined by the term Neopaganism—since Neoplatonism was historically the last phase of paganism, the phase in which primitive Christianity met its most respectable and insidious foe, and the phase which from time to time was to reap-

pear in close touch with the later development of Christianity, not seldom as an enemy within the walls. One may venture to think, however, that Meredith did not precisely derive his belief from France or Germany; rather it was this belief that rendered him sympathetic with various French and German writers of a like tendency. It would seem more probable that his notions of the oneness of all life and being, of 'the soul that breathes through the universe' (to use his own words<sup>1</sup>), echo the thought of certain English poets of the age preceding his; for his expressions frequently remind us of Wordsworth and the doctrine of the divine immanence found in Wordsworth's earlier poetry;<sup>2</sup> and his freely-devised mythology, his invention of spirits (as 'the Comic Spirit') and essences of one sort and another, and of the imps in *The Egoist*,<sup>3</sup> has a parallel in the demonology, clearly of Neoplatonic origin, which Coleridge employs and half-believes, and in the spirits, splendors, and other fictitious personages which Shelley produces, in his profuse, tenuous, and haphazard mythological machinery.

<sup>1</sup> Clodd, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Compare Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey* 93-102.

<sup>3</sup> See below, pp. 40-42.

In the *Essay on Comedy*, however, we have less to do with Meredith's cult of Earth and worship of 'Nature,' than with the half-pagan conception of the Comic Spirit; now a wise, alert, ironical demon of the upper air; again a more hazy 'emanation' of humanity; and yet again a mere verbal abstraction, not always dignified with the capitals C and S; nevertheless on the whole an approach to a personality in whose existence the author would have us believe. In similar fashion he personifies Comedy itself, and Dulness, Morality, Folly, Laughter, and Farce.

A writer who commonly employed an expression like 'the Christian fable' must necessarily be cut off from the full appreciation and enjoyment of a large part of the world's best literature. Meredith might be on friendly terms with a writer on St. Bernard like Cotter Morison, but could not very well maintain a loving familiarity with the best of Christian writers, or, in particular, with Mediaeval literature as a whole. Accordingly, when we refer, as we may, to the wide-ranging interest shown by the author of the *Essay on Comedy* in the literature of nearly every age and nation, we must make an important reservation in respect to what the Middle

Ages offer in the way of comedy. True, he has an eye for Boccaccio and Chaucer; but he does not mention Dante, nor is there any evidence that he is aware of the great body of Mediaeval comic poetry and prose. He does not touch upon the comic element in the Bible. We may take it for granted that his interests lie in classical antiquity on the one hand, and on the other, and more especially, in the literature of the Renaissance, down to his own time. He possessed a knowledge of modern French and German writers not easily matched in the circle of mid-Victorian poets and novelists.<sup>1</sup> But on the subject of his own reading we may let Meredith speak for himself. On April 5, 1906, he wrote to Dr. H. R. D. Anders:<sup>2</sup>

'I remember reading in my youth Otto Jahn's memoir of the great philologist Hermann and his indefatigable devotion to work, with a sigh of regret that he, who had his rivals at home, had so few, if any, among us. As for me, you ask of my readings of the formative kind. They were, first, the *Arabian*

<sup>1</sup> Compare John Lees, *George Meredith's Literary Relations with Germany*, in *The Modern Language Review* 12. 428-437 (October, 1917).

<sup>2</sup> *The Letters of George Meredith*, edited by his son (W. M. Meredith), two volumes, New York, 1912, 2. 578; this work is hereafter cited as '*Letters*.'

*Nights*; then Gibbon, Niebuhr, Walter Scott; then Molière; then the noble Goethe, the most enduring. All the poets, English, Weimar and Suabia and Austrian.'

Previously, in 1899, he had written to a correspondent:<sup>1</sup>

'In reply to your request that I should name the French writers now dead, who are, in my opinion, most characteristic of the genius of France, they are: For human philosophy, Montaigne; for the comic appreciation of society, Molière; for the observation of life and condensed expression, La Bruyère; for a most delicate irony scarcely distinguishable from tenderness, Renan; for high pitch of impassioned sentiment, Racine. Add to these your innumerable writers of *Mémoires* and *Pensées*, in which France has never had a rival.'

These utterances evince mental breadth and perspective; and breadth and perspective, in spite of limitations, are characteristic of the *Essay on Comedy*. In this, among the ancient classical and modern Continental writers of comedy, none of first importance escapes attention. Plautus, indeed, receives

<sup>1</sup> *Letters* 2. 501; the editor does not give the name of the correspondent.

scant justice; and Scandinavian comedy—for example, that of Holberg—is not brought under consideration; nor are Russian authors considered. It may also be thought that, notwithstanding the praise bestowed upon them, Aristophanes and Shakespeare are unduly depressed in favor of Molière, in that Molière becomes the central figure and point of reference for the entire discussion. Even so, the *Essay on Comedy* has the merit of a fairly comprehensive survey of the comic writers of all ages. From Greece are marshaled Aristophanes and Menander; from Rome, Plautus and Terence; from Italy, Boccaccio, Machiavelli, and Goldoni; from England, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Wycherley, Congreve, Sheridan, Goldsmith, Fielding, Smollett, and Lamb; from France, Rabelais, Molière, and Augier—even Erckmann-Chatrian; from Germany, Lessing, Goethe, and Heine. There are glances at the comedy of Spain and the Orient, quotations from Swift and Voltaire, an appraisal of the humor of Byron and Carlyle. But we need not exhaust the list provided by the Index. Is there another equally inclusive (we must not say exhaustive) treatment of the subject in existence? Certainly there is no other

from the hand of an author who himself succeeded as a creative artist.

It must be said that Meredith betrays no distinct indebtedness to theoretical discussions of comedy and laughter by scholars. Perhaps some one will rejoin that this is just as well—though we could wish him more familiar, if he is familiar at all, with the *Symposium* of Plato, and the commentators thereon. On the other hand, he has read discussions by literary men, including Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt, and Lamb, on the comedy of the Restoration; and he owes a considerable debt to modern French literary critics, for instance, Sainte-Beuve, as a source of information on special topics. He has used Littré on Aristophanes and Rabelais to advantage, and likewise Saint-Marc Girardin, and current periodicals like the *Journal des Débats*. But his literary judgments do not depend upon the opinions of others; in the main they rest upon his own individual examination of masterpieces. If he has a bias in favor of Molière, one of the greatest of the great, who can complain? Such a bias is preferable to colorless impartiality, which never has been the quality of a first-rate critic.

But breadth of view and independence of judgment are not the only merits of the *Essay*. Possibly its chief value lies in the stimulus arising from these and other qualities, such as allusiveness and vivacity of style, drawing and urging the student to fill up gaps in his own reading. Again, by insisting upon the need of ideal relations between men and women if comedy is to prosper, and by indicating the social conditions in which a Molière may flourish, the *Essay* itself induces in us a mood and way of thinking that assist the appreciation of comic writers when we turn from it to them. Finally, it renders an undoubted service in laying stress upon the emotional or mental effect of a comedy as the criterion by which the comedy is to be judged.

This last point is one of the utmost importance. For Meredith, comedy must awaken 'thoughtful laughter'; its end is 'to touch and kindle the mind through laughter,' or 'to shake and elevate the feelings.' For him, then, the pleasure afforded by the comic writer is primarily intellectual, and only secondarily emotional. Meredith may be wholly right in this, or he may be right in a measure. He has not gone far toward analyzing the

pleasure we obtain from Rabelais or Aristophanes. But for the type of comedy that interests him he goes straight to the point where the investigation should begin, the point where Aristotle begins in his discussion of tragedy. That is, he asks: What is the proper effect of a given literary type upon the spectator or reader? Having answered this question for 'literary comedy' in a way that satisfies him, he proceeds to scrutinize the means by which the desired effect has been attained or missed in reputable comedies. To some, his answer regarding the end may seem final, and his examination of the means too casual and saltatory, leaping back and forth without much progress, or no progress save through variety of illustration. But, with the instinct of genius, he does lay stress upon ends, and not, like a formalist, upon means; he reaches a point in his search from which others may conceivably proceed further; and he indicates the path of advance for the study of this or any other literary type.

III. STRUCTURE AND STYLE OF  
THE *ESSAY*

'I never outline my novels before starting on them,' said Meredith to Clodd.<sup>1</sup> Would that he had early formed the habit of constructing a plan in advance for everything he wrote. The *Essay on Comedy* does not clearly follow a predetermined order, and therefore wants the lucidity to be found, let us say, in an essay by Matthew Arnold, where the march of the whole is settled from the beginning, together with the divisions and articulations of the parts, down to the separate paragraphs, and sometimes to individual sentences. In this essay of Meredith the breadth and comprehensiveness we have noted are pervasive qualities due to instinct rather than art, and there is some lack of precision in the order and in matters of detail. A formal scheme by parts and subdivisions may, indeed, be extracted from the *Essay* by force (see pp. 45-70). From this scheme we may infer that certain main ideas, and a tone or mood of mind, and some attention to chronological sequence, govern the whole, and that the law of association, and chance suggestion,

<sup>1</sup> Clodd, p. 24.

rule in the development of paragraphs and sentences.

Conscious art is shown in smaller details. Meredith consciously aims at apt illustrations and striking figures, at compression, and at novel and felicitous collocations in diction. On occasion he amplifies profusely, still giving the impression of brevity by the use of asyndeton. He also shows a tendency to express himself in general terms; not that he avoids concreteness, but that he omits or conceals the local and particular. Thus he alters 'an eminent Frenchman, M. Littré,' to 'an eminent Frenchman.' Or he speaks of 'the light of Athene over the head of Achilles' without reminding us that the source of his figure is the Iliad. Or again, he writes a page and a half on two comedies of Augier without naming either them or their author. His style may therefore be described as general and allusive. He had a long and powerful, but not always exact, memory, which he trusted, with the result that it sometimes played him false. The ornaments of his style, then, are in no small measure freely drawn from his wide and discursive reading—from Shakespeare, Pascal, Goethe, Swift, and the like. So far as I have observed, he owes

little to the diction of the Bible; at least, in comparison with Ruskin or Carlyle, his debt is negligible.

In part he draws his embellishments from external nature, and although this source is less evident in the *Essay on Comedy*, I can not forbear to illustrate the point by a quotation from Lord Morley:<sup>1</sup>

'Nobody in prose, and I almost dare to say nobody in verse, has surpassed Meredith in precision of eye and color and force of words for landscape, from great masterpieces like the opening pages of *Vittoria*, or the night on the Adriatic in *Beauchamp*, down to the thousand vignettes, miniatures, touches, that in all his work bring the air, clouds, winds, trees, light, storm, with magic truth and fascination for background and illumination to his stage. He lived at every hour of day and night with all the sounds and shades of nature open to his sensitive perception. These divine and changing effects were not only poetry to him, nor scenery; what Wordsworth calls the "business of the elements" was an essence of his life. To love this deep companionship of the large refreshing natural world brought unspeakable fulness of being to him,

<sup>1</sup> Morley 1. 38-39.

as it was one of his most priceless lessons to men of disposition more prosaic than his own.'

In the entire world of letters two men stand out pre-eminently for Meredith: Goethe, the sage, well-rounded man, and Molière, the comic poet. But in point of style he has followed neither. The natural clarity, ease, and emphasis of Goethe, who always writes pure and clear German, and who, if he ever becomes difficult to understand, does so, not because of obscurity in the medium he employs, but when his subject itself taxes our powers of thought—these are not the property of Meredith. Nor is the lucidity of Molière his, either—that lucidity, combined with distinction, which is characteristic of Menander, Terence, and their following, down to Congreve and Sheridan and French comedy of the present day. Highly as he may praise it, the manner is not in his possession. If, as Lord Morley says, Meredith inherited something in the way of thought and expression from Peacock, he is also a debtor to Jean Paul, and therefore not without points of similarity to Carlyle. In the end he carried the use of compression, and of hints, oblique indications, symbolical gesture, and indirect-

tion, to an excess, desiring the reader to find too much between the words and lines in proportion to what the words and sentences directly offer. Doubtless the truly pregnant writer—for example, Pascal—gives with a few phrases far more thought than at first sight they seem to contain; but even at first glance the utterances of Pascal contain much. Such is not always the case with Meredith. On this head we can not do better than consult Lord Morley, a lifelong friend of the novelist, and a judge who will not be suspected of cold impartiality or disdain:<sup>1</sup>

‘In spite of his protest and remonstrance, I could not always deny that I found a page or a chapter in a novel obscure and beyond my understanding—some riddle of elaborated motive, or coil of incident, or dazzling tennis-play of dialogue. It is of no avail for any writer to contend that he is not obscure. If the world, with every reason for the most benevolent will possible, and sincerest effort, still find him obscure, then for his audience obscure he stands. If the charge is largely made, is not the verdict already as good as found? If the gathering in a great hall make signs that they cannot hear me,

<sup>1</sup> Morley 1. 40.

it is idle for me to persist that my voice is perfectly audible. The truth is that Meredith often missed ease. Yet ease in words and artistic form has been a mark of more than one of his contemporaries, who amid the world's riddles saw deepest and felt warmest.'

These strictures, however, touch the *Essay on Comedy* only in an incidental way when Meredith's allusions are explained as I hope I have explained them in the Notes. But the *Essay* possibly marks the turning-point from his earlier to his later style. *The Egoist*, published two years later (1879), is in some sense an outgrowth of the *Essay*, serving to illustrate the theory of comedy he had enounced; and *The Egoist* is open to the charge of fastidiousness of diction, undue compression of language, and inattention to the probable difficulties of the reader. After 1891 these qualities became accentuated in nearly all that he wrote.

IV. REFERENCES TO THE *ESSAY*

Meredith's lecture, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> was delivered on February 1, 1877. Apparently he had been at work on it as early as November 3, 1876, for he writes on that day to Miss Alice Brandreth:<sup>2</sup>

'And besides I am very busy, and shall get no work done for next year if I cease to lash myself; and I am disturbed about my lecture, and doubt if it will please.'

According to M. Photiadès, the attendance at the lecture was good,<sup>3</sup> for he mentions 'the company which assembled in large numbers at the London Institution on the first of February, 1877.'

On a Saturday following (probably February 3) Meredith wrote to Morley:<sup>4</sup>

'One line. All went well. Morison in one of his enthusiasms, which make one remember that one has word praise. Audience very attentive and indulgent. Time 1 h. 25 m., and no one left the hall, so that I may imagine there was interest in the lecture. Pace moderate; but Morison thinks I was in-

<sup>1</sup> See p. 7, and compare pp. 171-172.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters* 1. 269.

<sup>3</sup> Photiadès, *George Meredith*, 1913, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters* 1. 270-271.

telligible chiefly by the distinctness of articulation.'

The lecture was then printed, 'with amendments,'<sup>1</sup> in the *New Quarterly Magazine* for April, 1877 (vol. 8, pp. 1-40). The April number of this magazine appeared early, for on March 31 Meredith wrote to Morley:<sup>2</sup>

'The article on Comedy is out—cursed with misprints that make me dance gadfly-bitten.'

On April 4 he wrote again to Morley to the same effect:<sup>3</sup>

'There are horrid errors in the printing of the "Comic"—some, I am afraid, attributable to me. I am the worst of correctors of my own writing.'<sup>4</sup>

That the lecture differed in certain respects from the *Essay* as we have it in the *New Quarterly Magazine* may be seen at a glance in the following report of the lecture in the *London Times*.

<sup>1</sup> See the article on Meredith, by Thomas Seccombe, in the *Dict. Nat. Biog.*, Second Supplement.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters* 1. 272.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters* 1. 274.

<sup>4</sup> A proof of the article for the *New Quarterly Magazine*, 'with the author's corrections,' was subsequently presented by Miss J. L. Benecke to the British Museum, where it still remains; see *The Works of George Meredith*, vol. 36, p. 313 (London, 1911).

V. EXTRACT FROM *THE TIMES*(LONDON, FEBRUARY 5, 1877<sup>1</sup>)

## COMEDY

On Thursday afternoon an interesting lecture was delivered at the London Institution by Mr. George Meredith on *The Idea of Comedy*. There was a numerous and appreciative audience. What he offered, he said, was meant as an introduction to the study of comedy, dwelling especially on the uses of the comic spirit, which he defined as the genius of thoughtful laughter. Perhaps a chapter on farces might be more entertaining, but what he was to treat of was quite distinct from farce. There were men whom Rabelais would call 'agelasts,' or non-laughers, whom we should, perhaps, style Puritans, and at the other extreme were the *hypergelasts*, or Bacchanalians—ever-laughing men. Neither of the two classes would relish *The Rape of the Lock* or the *Tartuffe*. The Bacchanalians can not understand our speaking seriously of comedy, and the Puritans deem it immoral to do so. Our English Comedy of Manners under the Merry

<sup>1</sup> P. 4, col. 5.

Monarch was Bacehanalian beyond the Aristophanic example. In the middle path only, between the Puritans and the mindless roisterers, who would both smother a good thing, should we walk safely. Our English idea of a comedy of manners might be imaged in a blowsy country Hoyden putting on the city madam, with all her native rawness peering through the French polish. If we believe that idle, meaningless, unwise laughter is the best of recreations, significant comedy, which calls forth thoughtful laughter and makes us better men and women, will seem pale and shallow in comparison. In that Caroline age female modesty was protected at the play by a fan. That fan was the flag of the epoch which gave, in the so-called Comedy of Manners, a comedy of Samoeïde manners under city veneer, and was as empty of the comic idea as the mask without the face behind it. It was not public caprice, as Elia seems to have thought, but a bettering state of things, when the fan with the eyelet-hole was pitched away. That fan brained the Wycherley school of comedy. A like fate, though from the other side of the house, befell the heavy and tearful drama with the moral tacked to it, like a rod fright-

fuller than that wielded in the pupilit. Save Congreve's *Way of the World* there was neither portraiture nor much quotable fun, neither salt nor soul, and it died. Mr. Meredith next spoke of the French school of stately comedy, to which, as John Stuart Mill said, that nation owes its better knowledge of men and women. Molière followed Horace, and marked the manners of his age, but without raw, realistic painting. He etherealized his characters. Our English school has not clearly imagined society. True, we have good literary comedies, pleasant to read, and now and then to see acted. They were chiefly drawn from the Greek Menander through the Roman Terence. Shakespeare is a well-spring of characters saturated with the comic spirit, with more blood-life than was to be found anywhere else. They are of this world, too, but of this world enlarged to our embrace by great poetic imagination. They are creatures of the woods and wilds, not grouped and toned to pursue a comic exhibition of the narrower world of society. Had he lived in a less heroic and later period, he might have turned to the painting of manners as well as of man. The crowding of the French nobles

to the Court of Louis XIV was politically a misfortune, but it was a boon to the comic poet. It was then shown how Molière availed himself of the opportunity; and there followed critical appreciation of his greatest plays, especially the *Tartuffe*, *Les Femmes Savantes*, and the *Misanthrope*. Molière was in modern times what Menander was to the Greek and Roman world—the prince of comic poets. M. Sainte-Beuve conjures up the ghost of Menander, saying: ‘For the love of me love Terence.’ Molière, like Menander, idealized upon life. The foundation of their types is real and in the quick, but they painted with a spiritual strength, which is the solid in art. This idealistic conception of comedy gives breadth and opportunities of daring to comic genius—an assertion of which abundance of illustrations were given. Italian comedy gave many hints for a *Tartuffe*, but they were already found in Boccaccio, as well as in Machiavelli. Spanish comedy was next glanced at; but further East there was a total silence of the comic Muse, although the Arabs were intensely susceptible to the comic, witness the *Arabian Nights*. There had been plenty of fun in Bagdad, but there would never be civilization there until comedy was

possible in that city, which the Oriental seclusion of females seemed to forbid any hope of for a long time to come. Speaking generally, the English were most in sympathy with the primitive Aristophanic comedy, in which the comic is capped by the grotesque, irony tips the wit, and satire is a naked sword. The English excel in satire, and are racy humorists; they like hard-hitting with a moral aim behind it. But the Comic Spirit was different from both humor and satire. Our capacity for comic perception might be gauged by our ability to detect the ridicule of those we love without loving them less, and to welcome the hint. The comic was the governing spirit which awakens and barbs with an aim the powers of laughter, but it is not to be confounded with them. Mr. Meredith illustrated the distinctness of comedy from satire and humor by reference to Fielding's Jonathan Wild, whose grumbling at the unfairness of his conviction by twelve men of the opposite party was neither humor nor satire, but was intensely comic. Byron had great powers of satire and humor, fused at times to irony, but he took an anti-social position, directly opposed to the comic. 'When he begins to philosophize,' said Goethe of him,

'he is a child.' One excellent test, the lecturer said, of the civilization of a country was the flourishing of comedy, and the test of a true comedy is its calling up thoughtful laughter. If we believed (as every sane man must) our culture to be founded on common sense, we could not help feeling sure that the big round satyr's guffaw of olden times would come again, but in the finely-tempered smile, or silvery laughter, of the Comic Spirit. That Spirit is not hostile to the poetic, witness Chaucer, Shakespeare, and the *Comus* of Milton. Sensitiveness to the laugh is a step in civilization; so is shrinking from laughter. Audience and poet became better through the lessons of comedy. How much ability was now drifting with the tides in novel-writing, pun-hatching, and journalism! Names would occur to them of those who had the power to produce good work in comedy. Honorable mention followed of the late Mr. Robertson, Mr. Tom Taylor, Mr. Gilbert, and Mr. Burnand. The blame for the low state of comedy among us lay, not with authors, but with the public.

VI. MEREDITH'S PRELUDE<sup>1</sup> TO  
*THE EGOIST*

Comedy is a game played to throw reflections upon social life, and it deals with human nature in the drawing-room of civilized 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. For, being a spirit, he hunts the spirit in men; vision and ardor constitute his merit: he has not a thought of persuading you to believe in him. Follow and you will see. But there is a question of the value of a run at his heels.

Now the world is possessed of a certain big

<sup>1</sup> 'A Chapter of Which the Last Page Only is of Any Importance'—Meredith's argument at the head of the chapter. *The Egoist* was published in 1879.

book, the biggest book on earth; that might indeed be called the Book of Earth; whose title is the Book of Egoism, and it is a book full of the world's wisdom. So full of it, and of such dimensions, is this book, in which the generations have written ever since they took to writing, that to be profitable to us the Book needs a powerful compression.

Who, says the notable humorist, in allusion to this Book—who can studiously travel through sheets of leaves now capable of a stretch from the Lizard to the last few poor pulmonary snips and shreds of leagues dancing on their toes for cold, explorers tell us, and catching breath by good luck, like dogs at bones about a table, on the edge of the Pole? Inordinate unvaried length, sheer longinquity, staggers the heart, ages the very heart of us at a view. And how if we manage finally to print one of our pages on the crown-scalp of that solitary majestic outsider? We may with effort get even him into the Book; yet the knowledge we want will not be more present with us than it was when the chapters hung their end over the cliff you ken of at Dover, where sits our great lord and master contemplating the seas without upon the reflex of that within!

In other words, as I venture to translate him (humorists are difficult: it is a piece of their humor to puzzle our wits), the inward mirror, the embracing and condensing spirit, is required to give us those interminable mile-post piles of matter (extending well-nigh to the very Pole) in essence, in chosen samples, digestibly. I conceive him to indicate that the realistic method of a conscientious transcription of all the visible, and a repetition of all the audible, is mainly accountable for our present branfulness, and for that prolongation of the vasty and the noisy, out of which, as from an undrained fen, steams the malady of sameness, our modern malady. We have the malady, whatever may be the cure or the cause. We drove in a body to Science the other day for an antidote; which was as if tired pedestrians should mount the engine-box of headlong trains; and Science introduced us to our o'er-hoary ancestry—them in the Oriental posture. Whereupon we set up a primeval chattering to rival the Amazon forest nigh nightfall, cured, we fancied. And before daybreak our disease was hanging on to us again, with the extension of a tail. We had it fore and aft. We were the same, and animals into the bargain. That is all we got from Science.

Art is the specific. We have little to learn of apes, and they may be left. The chief consideration for us is, what particular practice of Art in letters is the best for the perusal of the Book of our common wisdom; so that with clearer minds and livelier manners we may escape, as it were, into daylight and song from a land of fog-horns. Shall we read it by the watchmaker's eye in luminous rings eruptive of the infinitesimal, or pointed with examples and types under the broad Alpine survey of the spirit born of our united social intelligence, which is the Comic Spirit? Wise men say the latter. They tell us that there is a constant tendency in the Book to accumulate excess of substance, and such repletiness, obscuring the glass it holds to mankind, renders us inexact in the recognition of our individual countenances—a perilous thing for civilization. And these wise men are strong in their opinion that we should encourage the Comic Spirit, who is, after all, our own offspring, to relieve the Book. Comedy, they say, is the true diversion, as it is likewise the key of the great Book, the music of the Book. They tell us how it condenses whole sections of the Book in a sentence, volumes in a character; so that a fair part of a book, outstripping thousands of

leagues when unrolled, may be compassed in one comic sitting.

For verily, say they, we must read what we can of it—at least the page before us—if we would be men. One, with an index on the Book, cries out, in a style pardonable to his fervency: 'The remedy of your frightful affliction is here, through the stillatory of Comedy, and not in Science, nor yet in Speed, whose name is but another for voracity. Why, to be alive, to be quick in the soul, there should be diversity in the companion-throbs of your pulses. Interrogate them. They lump along like the old lob-legs of Dobbin the horse; or do their business like cudgels of carpet-thwackers expelling dust, or the cottage-clock pendulum teaching the infant hour over midnight simple arithmetic. This, too, in spite of Bacchus. And let them gallop; let them gallop with the God bestriding them, gallop to Hymen, gallop to Hades, they strike the same note. Monstrous monotonousness has enfolded us as with the arms of Amphitrite! We hear a shout of war for a diversion. Comedy he pronounces to be our means of reading swiftly and comprehensively. She it is who proposes the correcting of pretentiousness, of inflation,

of dulness, and of the vestiges of rawness and grossness to be found among us. She is the ultimate civilizer, the polisher, a sweet cook. If, he says, she watches over sentimentalism with a birch-rod, 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. In comedy is the singular scene of charity issuing of disdain under the stroke of honorable laughter; an Ariel released by Prospero's wand from the fetters of the damned witch Sycorax. And this laughter of reason refreshed is floriferous, like the magical great gale of the shifty spring deciding for summer. You hear it giving the delicate spirit his liberty. Listen, for comparison, to an unleavened society: a low as of the udderful cow past milking hour! O for a titled ecclesiastic to curse to excommunication that unholy thing! So far an enthusiast perhaps; but he should have a hearing.

Concerning pathos, no ship can now set sail without pathos; and we are not totally deficient of pathos; which is, I do not accurately know what, if not the ballast, reducible

to moisture by patent process, on board our modern vessel; for it can hardly be the cargo, and the general water-supply has other uses; and ships well charged with it seem to sail the stiffest—there is a touch of pathos. The Egoist surely inspires pity. He who would desire to clothe himself at everybody's expense, and is of that desire condemned to strip himself stark naked—he, if pathos ever had a form, might be taken for the actual person. Only, he is not allowed to rush at you, roll you over, and squeeze your body for the briny drops. There is the innovation.

You may as well know him, out of hand, as a gentleman of our time and country, of wealth and station; a not flexile figure, do what we may with him; the humor of whom scarcely dimples the surface, and is distinguishable but by very penetrative, very wicked imps, whose fits of roaring below at some generally imperceptible stroke of his quality have first made the mild literary angels aware of something comic in him, when they were one and all about to describe the gentleman on the heading of the records baldly (where brevity is most complimentary) as a gentleman of family and property, an idol of a decorous island that admires the

concrete. Imps have their freakish wickedness in them to kindle detective vision; malignly do they love to uncover ridiculousness in imposing figures. Wherever they catch sight of Egoism they pitch their camps, they circle and squat, and forthwith they trim their lanterns, confident of the ludicrous to come; so confident, that their grip of an English gentleman, in whom they have spied their game, never relaxes until he begins insensibly to frolic and antic, unknown to himself, and comes out in the native steam which is their scent of the chase. Instantly off they scour, Egoist and imps. They will, it is known of them, dog a great House for centuries, and be at the birth of all the new heirs in succession, diligently taking confirmatory notes, to join hands and chime their chorus in one of their merry rings round the tottering pillar of the House, when his turn arrives; as if they had (possibly they had) smelt of old date a doomed colossus of Egoism in that unborn, unconceived inheritor of the stuff of the family. They dare not be chuckling while Egoism is valiant, while sober, while socially valuable, nationally serviceable. They wait.

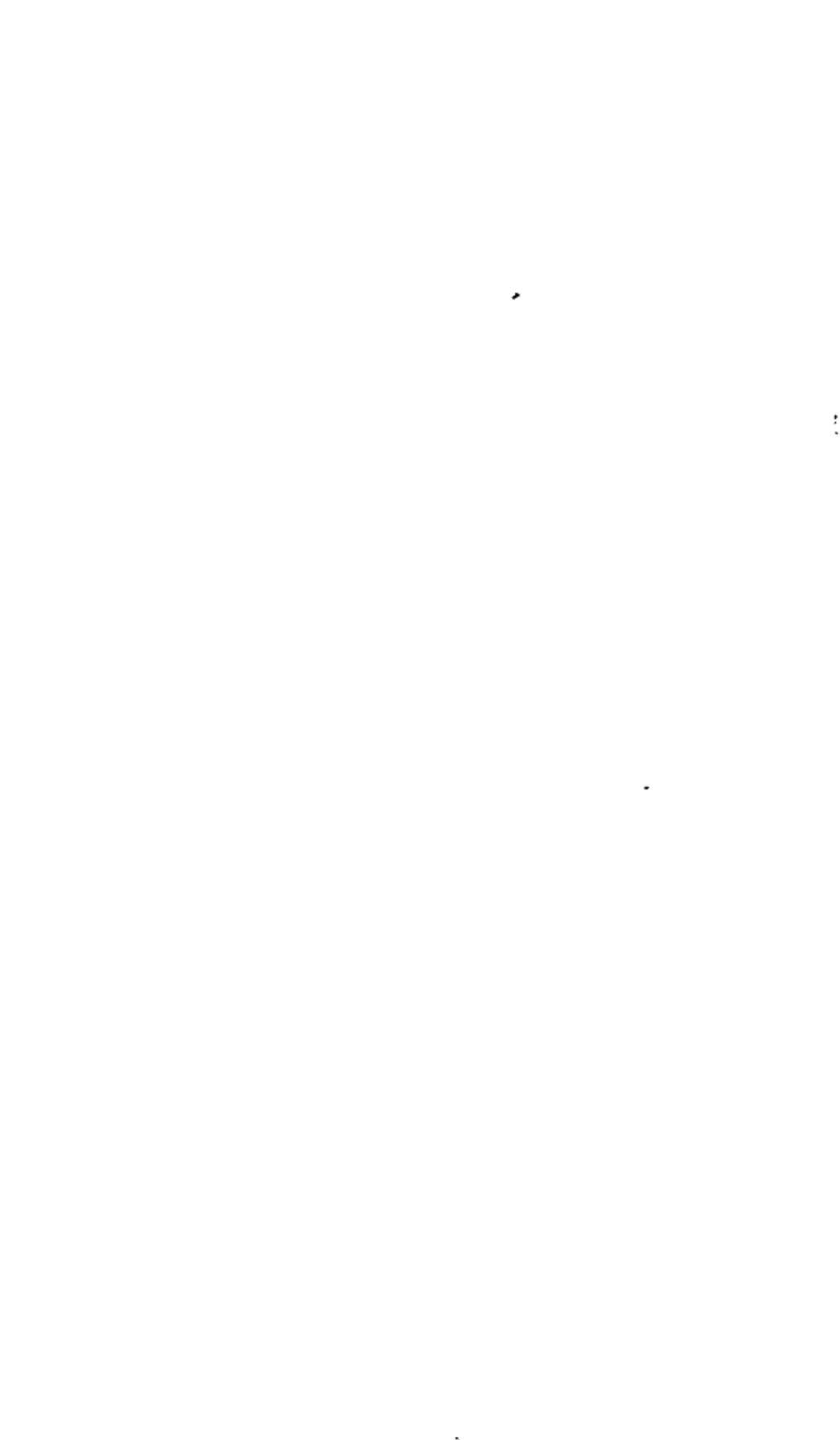
Aforetime a grand old Egoism built the

House. It would appear that ever-finer essences of it are demanded to sustain the structure; but especially would it appear that a reversion to the gross original, beneath a mask, and in a vein of fineness, is an earthquake at the foundations of the House. Better that it should not have consented to motion, and have held stubbornly to all ancestral ways, than have bred that anachronic spectre. The sight, however, is one to make our squatting imps in circle grow restless on their haunches, as they bend eyes instantly, ears at full cock, for the commencement of the comic drama of the suicide. If this line of verse be not yet in our literature—

Through very love of self himself he slew—

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ANALYSIS OF THE *ESSAY*



# ANALYSIS OF THE *ESSAY*

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ON THE IDEA OF COMEDY AND OF  
THE USES OF THE COMIC SPIRIT



## ON THE IDEA OF COMEDY AND OF THE USES OF THE COMIC SPIRIT

Good comedies are such rare productions x  
that, notwithstanding the wealth of our  
literature in the comic element, it would not  
occupy us long to run over the English list.  
If they are brought to the test I shall pro- 5  
pose, very reputable comedies will be found  
unworthy of their station, like the ladies of  
Arthur's Court when they were reduced to  
the ordeal of the mantle.

There are plain reasons why the comic 10  
poet is not a frequent apparition, and why  
the great comic poet remains without a  
fellow. A society of cultivated men and  
women is required, wherein ideas are current,  
and the perceptions quick, that he may be 15  
supplied with matter and an audience. The  
semi-barbarism of merely giddy communities,  
and feverish emotional periods, repel him;  
and also a state of marked social inequality  
of the sexes; nor can he whose business is to 20  
address the mind be understood where there

is not a moderate degree of intellectual activity.

Moreover, to touch and kindle the mind through laughter demands, more than spright-  
 5 lieness, a most subtle delicacy. That must be a natal gift in the comic poet. The substance he deals with will show him a startling exhibition of the dyer's hand, if he is without it.  
 10 People are ready to surrender themselves to witty thumps on the back, breast, and sides; all except the head—and it is there that he aims. He must be subtle to penetrate. A corresponding acuteness must exist to welcome him. The necessity for the two con-  
 15 ditions will explain how it is that we count him during centuries in the singular number.

*'C'est une étrange entreprise que celle de faire rire les honnêtes gens,'* Molière says; and the difficulty of the undertaking cannot be  
 20 overestimated.

Then again, he is beset with foes to right and left, of a character unknown to the tragic and the lyric poet, or even to philosophers.

We have in this world men whom Rabelais  
 25 would call 'agelasts'; that is to say, non-laughers—men who are in that respect as dead bodies, which, if you prick them, do not bleed. The old gray boulder-stone, that has

finished its peregrination from the rock to the valley, is as easily to be set rolling up again as these men laughing. No collision of circumstances in our mortal career strikes a light for them. It is but one step from being agelastic to misogelastic, and the *μισοβγελως*, the laughter-hating, soon learns to dignify his dislike as an objection in morality. 5

We have another class of men who are pleased to consider themselves antagonists of the foregoing, and whom we may term 'hyper-gelasts'; the excessive laughers, ever-laughing, who are as clappers of a bell, that may be rung by a breeze, a grimace; who are so loosely put together that a wink will shake 15 them.

C'est n'estimer rien qu'estimer tout le monde;

and to laugh at everything is to have no appreciation of the comic of comedy.

Neither of these distinct divisions of non-laughers and over-laughers would be entertained by reading *The Rape of the Lock*, or seeing a performance of *Le Tartuffe*. In relation to the stage, they have taken in our land the form and title of Puritan and Bacchanalian; for though the stage is no longer a public offender, and Shakespeare has been 25

revived on it, to give it nobility, we have not yet entirely raised it above the contention of these two parties. Our speaking on the theme of comedy will appear almost a libertine proceeding to one, while the other will think that the speaking of it seriously brings us into violent contrast with the subject.

Comedy, we have to admit, was never one of the most honored of the Muses. She was in her origin, short of slaughter, the loudest expression of the little civilization of men. The light of Athene over the head of Achilles illuminates the birth of Greek tragedy. But comedy rolled in shouting under the divine protection of the Son of the Wine-jar, as Dionysus is made to proclaim himself by Aristophanes. Our second Charles was the patron, of like benignity, of our Comedy of Manners, which began similarly as a combative performance, under a license to deride and outrage the Puritan, and was here and there Bacchanalian beyond the Aristophanic example—worse, inasmuch as a cynical licentiousness is more abominable than frank filth. An eminent Frenchman judges, from the quality of some of the stuff dredged up for the laughter of men and women who sat through an Athenian comic play, that they

could have had small delicacy in other affairs, when they had so little in their choice of entertainment. Perhaps he does not make sufficient allowance for the regulated license of plain-speaking proper to the festival of the god, and claimed by the comic poet as his inalienable right, or for the fact that it was a festival in a season of license, in a city accustomed to give ear to the boldest utterance of both sides of a case. However that may be, there can be no question that the men and women who sat through the acting of Wycherley's *Country Wife* were past blushing. Our tenacity of national impressions has caused the word 'theatre' since then to prod the Puritan nervous system like a satanic instrument; just as one has known anti-papists for whom Smithfield was redolent of a sinister smoke, as though they had a later recollection of the place than the lowing herds. Hereditary Puritanism regarding the stage is met, to this day, in many families quite undistinguished by arrogant piety. It has subsided altogether as a power in the profession of morality; but it is an error to suppose it extinct, and unjust also to forget that it had once good reason to hate, shun, and rebuke our public shows.

We shall find ourselves about where the comic spirit would place us, if we stand at middle distance between the inveterate opponents and the drum-and-fife supporters of  
 5 comedy. '*[Celui qui s'arrête] fait remarquer l'emportement des autres, comme un point fixe,*' as Pascal says. And were there more in this position, comic genius would flourish.

Our English idea of a comedy of manners  
 10 might be imaged in the person of a blowsy country girl—say Hoyden, the daughter of Sir Tunbelly Clumsey, who, when at home, never disobeyed her father except in the 'eating of green gooseberries'—transforming  
 15 to a varnished city madam, with a loud laugh and a mincing step; the crazy ancestress of an accountably fallen descendant. She bustles prodigiously, and is punctually smart in her speech, always in a fluster to escape  
 20 from Dulness, as they say the dogs on the Nile-banks drink at the river running to avoid the crocodile. If the monster catches her, as at times he does, she whips him to a froth, so that those who know Dulness only  
 25 as a thing of ponderousness shall fail to recognize him in that light and airy shape.

When she has frolicked through her five acts, to surprise you with the information

that Mr. Aimwell is converted by a sudden death in the world outside the scenes into Lord Aimwell, and can marry the lady in the light of day, it is to the credit of her vivacious nature that she does not anticipate your calling her Farce. Five is dignity with a trailing robe; whereas one, two, or three acts would be short skirts, and degrading. Advice has been given to householders that they should follow up the shot at a burglar in the dark by hurling the pistol after it, so that if the bullet misses, the weapon may strike, and assure the rascal he has it. The point of her wit is in this fashion supplemented by the rattle of her tongue, and effectively, according to the testimony of her admirers. Her wit is at once, like steam in an engine, the motive force and the warning whistle of her headlong course; and it vanishes like the track of steam when she has reached her terminus, never troubling the brains afterward; a merit that it shares with good wine, to the joy of the Bacchanalians.

As to this wit, it is warlike. In the neatest hands it is like the sword of the cavalier in the Mall, quick to flash out upon slight provocation, and for a similar office—to wound.

Commonly its attitude is entirely pugilistic; two blunt fists rallying and countering. When harmless, as when the word 'fool' occurs, or allusions to the state of husband, it has the  
5 sound of the smack of harlequin's wand upon clown, and is to the same extent exhilarating. Believe that idle, empty laughter is the most desirable of recreations, and significant comedy will seem pale and shallow in comparison.

10 Our popular idea would be hit by the sculptured group of Laughter holding both his sides, while Comedy pummels, by way of tickling him. As to a meaning, she holds that it does not conduce to making merry;  
15 you might as well carry cannon on a racing-yacht. Morality is a duenna to be circumvented. This was the view of English comedy of a sagacious essayist, who said that the end of a comedy would often be the com-  
20 mencement of a tragedy, were the curtain to rise again on the performers. In those old days female modesty was protected by a fan, behind which—and it was of a convenient semicircular breadth—the ladies present in  
25 the theatre retired at a signal of decorum, to peep, covertly askant, or with the option of so peeping, through a prettily-fringed eyelet-hole in the eclipsing arch.

Ego limis specto  
sic per flabellum clanculum.

—TERENCE.

That fan is the flag and symbol of the society giving us our so-called Comedy of Manners, 5 or comedy of the manners of South-Sea islanders under city veneer; and, as to comic idea, vacuous as the mask without the face behind it.

Elia, whose humor delighted in floating a 10 galleon paradox, and wafting it as far as it would go, bewails the extinction of our artificial comedy, like a poet sighing over the vanished splendor of Cleopatra's Nile-barge; and the sedateness of his plea, for a cause 15 condemned even in his time to the penitentiary, is a novel effect of the ludicrous. When the realism of those 'fictitious, half-believed personages,' as he calls them, had ceased to strike, they were objectionable company, un- 20 caressable as puppets. Their artifices are staringly naked, and have now the effect of a painted face, viewed, after warm hours of dancing, in the morning light. How could the Lurewells and the Plyants ever have been 25 praised for ingenuity in wickedness? Critics apparently sober, and of high reputation, held up their shallow knaveries for the world

to admire. These Lurewells, Plyants, Pinch-wives, Fondlewifes, Miss Prue, Peggy, Hoyden, all of them save charming Millamant, are dead as last year's clothes in a fashionable fine lady's wardrobe; and it must be an  
5 exceptionally abandoned Abigail of our period that would look on them with the wish to appear in their likeness. Whether the puppet-show of Punch and Judy inspires our  
10 street-urchins to have instant recourse to their fists in a dispute, after the fashion of every one of the actors in that public entertainment who gets possession of the cudgel, is open to question; it has been hinted; and  
15 angry moralists have traced the national taste for tales of crime to the smell of blood in our nursery-songs. It will at any rate hardly be questioned that it is unwholesome for men and women to see themselves as they are, if  
20 they are no better than they should be; and they will not, when they have improved in manners, care much to see themselves as they once were. That comes of realism in the comic art; and it is not public caprice, but  
25 the consequence of a bettering state. The same of an immoral may be said [as] of realistic exhibitions of a vulgar society.

The French make a critical distinction in

*ce qui remue* from *ce qui émeut*—that which agitates from that which touches with emotion. In the realistic comedy it is an incessant *remuage*; no calm—merely bustling figures—and no thought. Excepting Congreve's *Way of the World*, which failed on the stage, there was nothing to keep our comedy alive on its merits; neither, with all its realism, true portraiture, nor much quotable fun, nor idea; neither salt nor soul.

The French have a school of stately comedy to which they can fly for renovation whenever they have fallen away from it; and their having such a school is mainly the reason why, as John Stuart Mill pointed out, they know men and women more accurately than we do. Molière followed the Horatian precept, to observe the manners of his age, and give his characters the color befitting them at the time. He did not paint in raw realism. He seized his characters firmly for the central purpose of the play, stamped them in the idea, and, by slightly raising and softening the object of study (as in the case of the ex-Huguenot, Duc de Montausier, for the study of the *Misanthrope*, and, according to Saint-Simon, the Abbé Roquette for *Tartuffe*), generalized upon it so as to make

it permanently human. Concede that it is natural for human creatures to live in society, and Alceste is an imperishable mark of one, though he is drawn in light outline, 5 without any forcible human coloring.

Our English school has not clearly imagined society; and of the mind hovering above con- gregated men and women it has imagined nothing. The critics who praise it for its 10 downrightness, and for bringing the situations home to us, as they admiringly say, cannot but disapprove of Molière's comedy, which appeals to the individual mind to per- ceive and participate in the social. We have 15 splendid tragedies, we have the most beautiful of poetic plays, and we have literary comedies passingly pleasant to read, and occasionally to see acted. By literary comedies, I mean comedies of classic inspiration, 20 drawn chiefly from Menander and the Greek New Comedy through Terence; or else comedies of the poet's personal conception, that have had no model in life, and are humorous exaggerations, happy or otherwise. These 25 are the comedies of Ben Jonson, Massinger, and Fletcher. Massinger's Justice Greedy we can all of us refer to a type, 'with good capon lined,' that has been, and will be; and

he would be comic, as Panurge is comic, but only a Rabelais could set him moving with real animation. Probably Justice Greedy would be comic to the audience of a country booth, and to some of our friends. If we have lost our youthful relish for the presentation of characters put together to fit a type, we find it hard to put together the mechanism of a civil smile at his enumeration of his dishes. Something of the same is to be said of Bobadill, swearing 'by the foot of Pharaoh'; with a reservation, for he is made to move faster, and to act. The comic of Jonson is a scholar's excogitation of the comic; that of Massinger a moralist's.

Shakespeare is a well-spring of characters which are saturated with the comic spirit; with more of what we will call blood-life than is to be found anywhere out of Shakespeare; and they are of this world, but they are of the world enlarged to our embrace by imagination, and by great poetic imagination. They are, as it were—I put it to suit my present comparison—creatures of the woods and wilds, not in walled towns, not grouped and toned to pursue a comic exhibition of the narrower world of society. Jaques, Falstaff and his regiment, the varied

troop of clowns, Malvolio, Sir Hugh Evans and Fluellen (marvelous Welshmen!) Benedict and Beatrice, Dogberry, and the rest, are subjects of a special study in the poeti-  
5 cally comic.

His comedy of incredible imbroglio belongs to the literary section. One may conceive that there was a natural resemblance between him and Menander, both in the scheme and  
10 style of his lighter plays. Had Shakespeare lived in a later and less emotional, less heroic, period of our history, he might have turned to the painting of manners as well as humanity. Euripides would  
15 probably, in the time of Menander, when Athens was enslaved but prosperous, have lent his hand to the composition of romantic comedy. He certainly inspired that fine genius.

20 Politically, it is accounted a misfortune for France that her nobles thronged to the Court of Louis Quatorze. It was a boon to the comic poet. He had that lively quicksilver world of the animalcule passions, the huge  
25 pretensions, the placid absurdities, under his eyes in full activity; vociferous quacks and snapping dupes, hypocrites, posturers, extravagant, pedants, rose-pink ladies and mad

grammarians, sonnetteering marquises, high-flying mistresses, plain-minded maids, inter-threading as in a loom, noisy as at a fair. A simply bourgeois circle will not furnish it, for the middle class must have the brilliant, 5  
flippant, independent upper for a spur and a pattern; otherwise it is likely to be inwardly dull, as well as outwardly correct. Yet, though the King was benevolent toward Molière, it is not to the French Court that 10  
we are indebted for his unrivaled studies of mankind in society. For the amusement of the Court the ballets and farces were written, which are dearer to the rabble upper, as to the rabble lower, class than intellectual com- 15  
edy. The French bourgeoisie of Paris were sufficiently quick-witted and enlightened by education to welcome great works like *Le Tartuffe*, *Les Femmes Savantes*, and *Le Misanthrope*, works that were perilous ventures 20  
on the popular intelligence, big vessels to launch on streams running to shallows. The *Tartuffe* hove into view as an enemy's vessel; it offended, not '*Dieu, mais . . . les dévots*,' as the Prince de Condé explained the 25  
cabal raised against it to the King.

The *Femmes Savantes* is a capital instance of the uses of comedy in teaching the world

to understand what ails it. The farce of the *Précieuses* ridiculed, and put a stop to, the monstrous romantic jargon made popular by certain famous novels. The comedy of the  
5 *Femmes Savantes* exposed the later and less apparent, but more finely comic, absurdity of an excessive purism in grammar and diction, and the tendency to be idiotic in precision. The French had felt the burden of  
10 this new nonsense; but they had to see the comedy several times before they were consoled in their suffering by seeing the cause of it exposed.

The *Misanthrope* was yet more frigidly  
15 received. Molière thought it dead. 'I can not improve on it, and assuredly never shall,' he said. It is one of the French titles to honor that this quintessential comedy of the opposition of Alceste and Célimène was  
20 ultimately understood and applauded. In all countries the middle class presents the public which, fighting the world, and with a good footing in the fight, knows the world best. It may be the most selfish, but that  
25 is a question leading us into sophistries. Cultivated men and women who do not skim the cream of life, and are attached to the duties, yet escape the harsher blows,

make acute and balanced observers. Molière is their poet.

Of this class in England, a large body, neither Puritan nor Bacchanalian, have a sentimental objection to face the study of the actual world. They take up disdain of it, when its truths appear humiliating; when the facts are not immediately forced on them, they take up the pride of incredulity. They live in a hazy atmosphere that they suppose an ideal one. Humorous writing they will endure, perhaps approve, if it mingles with pathos to shake and elevate the feelings. They approve of satire, because, like the beak of the vulture, it smells of carrion, which they are not. But of comedy they have a shivering dread, for comedy enfolds them with the wretched host of the world, huddles them with us all in an ignoble assimilation, and cannot be used by any exalted variety as a scourge and a broom. Nay, to be an exalted variety is to come under the ealm, curious eye of the Comic Spirit, and be probed for what you are. Men are seen among them, and very many cultivated women. You may distinguish them by a favorite phrase: 'Surely we are not so bad!' and the remark: 'If that is

human nature, save us from it!’—as if it could be done; but in the peculiar paradise of the wilful people who will not see, the exclamation assumes the saving grace.

5 Yet, should you ask them whether they dislike sound sense, they vow they do not. And question cultivated women whether it pleases them to be shown moving on an intellectual level with men, they will answer  
 10 that it does; numbers of them claim the situation. Now comedy is the fountain of sound sense; not the less perfectly sound on account of the sparkle; and comedy lifts women to a station offering them free play  
 15 for their wit, as they usually show it, when they have it, on the side of sound sense. The higher the comedy, the more prominent the part they enjoy in it. Dorine in the *Tartuffe* is common sense incarnate, though  
 20 palpably a waiting-maid. Célimène is undisputed mistress of the same attribute in the *Misanthrope*; wiser as a woman than Alceste as man. In Congreve’s *Way of the World*, Millamant overshadows Mirabell, the sprightliest male figure of English  
 25 comedy.

But those two ravishing women, so copious and so choice of speech, who fence with men

and pass their guard, are heartless! Is it not preferable to be the pretty idiot, the passive beauty, the adorable bundle of caprices, very feminine, very sympathetic, of romantic and sentimental fiction? Our women are taught to think so. The Agnès of the *École des Femmes* should be a lesson for men. The heroines of comedy are like women of the world, not necessarily heartless from being clear-sighted; they seem so to the sentimentally reared, only for the reason that they use their wits, and are not wandering vessels crying for a captain or a pilot. Comedy is an exhibition of their battle with men, and that of men with them; and as the two, however divergent, both look on one object, namely, life, the gradual similarity of their impressions must bring them to some resemblance. The comic poet dares to show us men and women coming to this mutual likeness; he is for saying that when they draw together in social life their minds grow liker; just as the philosopher discerns the similarity of boy and girl, until the girl is marched away to the nursery. Philosopher and comic poet are of a cousinship in the eye they cast on life; and they are equally unpopular with our wilful English of the

hazy region and the ideal that is not to be disturbed.

Thus, for want of instruction in the comic idea, we lose a large audience among our cultivated middle class that we should expect  
5 to support comedy. The sentimentalist is as averse as the Puritan and as the Bacchanalian.

Our traditions are unfortunate. The public taste is with the idle laughers, and still  
10 inclines to follow them. It may be shown by an analysis of Wycherley's *Plain Dealer*, a coarse prose adaption of the *Misanthrope*, stuffed with lumps of realism in a vulgarized  
15 theme to hit the mark of English appetite, that we have in it the key-note of the comedy of our stage. It is Molière travestied, with the hoof to his foot, and hair on the pointed tip of his ear. And how difficult it  
20 is for writers to disentangle themselves from bad traditions is noticeable when we find Goldsmith, who had grave command of the comic in narrative, producing an elegant farce for a comedy; and Fielding, who was a  
25 master of the comic both in narrative and in dialogue, not even approaching to the presentable in farce.

These bad traditions of comedy affect us,

not only on the stage, but in our literature, and may be tracked into our social life. They are the ground of the heavy moralizings by which we are outwearied, about life as a comedy, and comedy as a jade, when popular writers, conscious of fatigue in creativeness, desire to be cogent in a modish cynicism; perversions of the idea of life, and of the proper esteem for the society we have wrested from brutishness, and would carry higher. Stock images of this description are accepted by the timid and the sensitive, as well as by the saturnine, quite seriously; for not many look abroad with their own eyes—fewer still have the habit of thinking for themselves. Life, we know too well, is not a comedy, but something strangely mixed; nor is comedy a vile mask. The corrupted importation from France was noxious, a noble entertainment spoilt to suit the wretched taste of a villainous age; and the later imitations of it, partly drained of its poison and made decorous, became tiresome, notwithstanding their fun, in the perpetual recurring of the same situations, owing to the absence of original study and vigor of conception. Scene 5, Act 2, of the *Misanthrope*, owing, no doubt, to the fact of our not producing matter

for original study, is repeated in succession by Wycherley, Congreve, and Sheridan, and, as it is at second hand, we have it done cynically—or such is the tone—in the manner of  
5 ‘below stairs.’ Comedy thus treated may be accepted as a version of the ordinary worldly understanding of our social life; at least, in accord with the current dicta concerning it. The epigrams can be made; but it is un-  
10 structive, rather tending to do disservice. Comedy justly treated, as you find it in Molière, whom we so clownishly mishandled—the comedy of Molière throws no infamous reflection upon life. It is deeply conceived,  
15 in the first place, and therefore it cannot be impure. Meditate on that statement. Never did man wield so shrieking a scourge upon vice; but his consummate self-mastery is not shaken while administering it. Tartuffe and  
20 Harpagon, in fact, are made each to whip himself and his class—the false pietists, and the insanely covetous. Molière has only set them in motion. He strips Folly to the skin, displays the imposture of the creature, and is  
25 content to offer her better clothing, with the lesson Chrysale reads to Philaminte and Bélise. He conceives purely, and he writes purely, in the simplest language, the sim-

plest of French verse. The source of his wit is clear reason; it is a fountain of that soil, and it springs to vindicate reason, common sense, rightness, and justice—for no vain purpose ever. The wit is of such pervading spirit that it inspires a pun with meaning and interest. His moral does not hang like a tail, or preach from one character incessantly cocking an eye at the audience, as in recent realistic French plays, but is in the heart of his work, throbbing with every pulsation of an organic structure. If life is likened to the comedy of Molière, there is no scandal in the comparison.

Congreve's *Way of the World* is an exception to our other comedies, his own among them, by virtue of the remarkable brilliancy of the writing, and the figure of Millamant. The comedy has no idea in it, beyond the stale one that so the world goes; and it concludes with the jaded discovery of a document at a convenient season for the descent of the curtain. A plot was an afterthought with Congreve. By the help of a wooden villain (Maskwell), marked gallows to the flattest eye, he gets a sort of plot in *The Double-Dealer*. His *Way of the World* might be called 'The Conquest of a Town Coquette';

and Millamant is a perfect portrait of a coquette, both in her resistance to Mirabell and the manner of her surrender, and also in her tongue. The wit here is not so salient as in certain passages of *Love for Love*, where Valentine feigns madness, or retorts on his father, or Mrs. Frail rejoices in the harmlessness of wounds to a woman's virtue, if she keeps them 'from air.' In *The Way of the World*, it appears less prepared in the smartness, and is more diffused in the more characteristic style of the speakers. Here, however, as elsewhere, his famous wit is like a bully-fencer, not ashamed to lay traps for its exhibition, transparently petulant for the train between certain ordinary words and the powder-magazine of the improprieties to be fired. Contrast the wit of Congreve with Molière's. That of the first is a Toledo blade, sharp, and wonderfully supple for steel; cast for dueling, restless in the scabbard, being so pretty when out of it. To shine, it must have an adversary. Molière's wit is like a running brook, with innumerable fresh lights on it at every turn of the wood through which its business is to find a way. It does not run in search of obstructions, to be noisy over them; but when dead leaves and viler

substances are heaped along the course, its natural song is heightened. Without effort, and with no dazzling flashes of achievement, it is full of healing, the wit of good breeding, the wit of wisdom.

5

'Genuine humor and true wit,' says Landor, 'require a sound and capacious mind, which is always a grave one. . . . Rabelais and La Fontaine are recorded by their countrymen to have been *rêveurs*. Few men have been graver than Pascal; few have been wittier.' To apply the citation of so great a brain as Pascal's to our countryman would be unfair. Congreve had a certain soundness of mind; of capacity, in the sense intended by Landor, he had little. Judging him by his wit, he performed some happy thrusts; and, taking it for genuine, it is a surface wit, neither rising from a depth nor flowing from a spring:

10

15

20

On voit qu'il se travaille à dire de bons mots.

He drives the poor hack-word, 'fool,' as cruelly to the market for wit as any of his competitors. Here is an example, that has been held up for eulogy:

25

WITWOUND. He has brought me a letter from the fool my brother. . . .

MIRABELL. A fool, and your brother, Witwound!

WITWOOD. Ay, ay, my half-brother. My half-brother he is; no nearer, upon honor.

MIRABELL. Then 'tis possible he may be but half a fool.

5 —By evident preparation. This is a sort of wit one remembers to have heard at school, of a brilliant outsider; perhaps to have been guilty of oneself a trifle later. It was, no doubt, a blaze of intellectual fireworks to the  
 10 bumpkin squire who came to London to go to the theatre and learn manners.

Where Congreve excels all his English rivals is in his literary force, and a succinctness of style peculiar to him. He had correct  
 15 judgment, a correct ear, readiness of illustration within a narrow range—in snap-shots of the obvious at the obvious—and copious language. He hits the mean of a fine style and a natural in dialoguc. He is at once  
 20 precise and voluble. If you have ever thought upon style, you will acknowledge it to be a signal accomplishment. In this he is a classic, and is worthy of treading a measure with Molière. *The Way of the World* may be read  
 25 out currently at a first glance, so sure are the accents of the emphatic meaning to strike the eye, perforce of the crispness and cunning polish of the sentences. You have not to look over them before you confide yourself

to him; he will carry you safe. Sheridan imitated, but was far from surpassing, him. The flow of boudoir billingsgate in Lady Wishfort is unmatched for the vigor and pointedness of the tongue. It spins along with a final ring, like the voice of Nature in a fury, and is, indeed, racy eloquence of the elevated fishwife. 5

Millamant is an admirable, almost a lovable, heroine. It is a piece of genius in a writer to make a woman's manner of speech portray her. You feel sensible of her presence in every line of her speaking. The stipulations with her lover in view of marriage, her fine lady's delicacy, and fine lady's easy evasions of indelicacy, coquettish airs, and playing with irresolution, which in a common maid would be bashfulness, until she submits to 'dwindle into a wife,' as she says, form a picture that lives in the frame, and is in harmony with Mirabell's description of her: 15 20

Here she comes, i' faith, full sail, with her fan spread and her streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders.

And, after an interview: 25

Think of you? To think of a whirlwind, though 't were in a whirlwind, were a case of more steady contemplation; a very tranquillity of mind and mansion.

There is a picturesqueness, as of Millamant and no other, in her voice, when she is encouraged to take Mirabell by Mrs. Fainall, who is 'sure' she has 'a mind to him':

5 MILLAMANT. Are you? I think I have—and the horrid man looks as if he thought so too.—

One hears the tones, and sees the sketch and color of the whole scene, in reading it.

Célimène is behind Millamant in vividness.

10 An air of bewitching whimsicality hovers over the graces of this comic heroine, like the lively conversational play of a beautiful mouth. But in wit she is no rival of Célimène. What she utters adds to her personal witchery,  
15 and is not further memorable. She is a flashing portrait, and a type of the superior ladies who do not think, not of those who do. In representing a class, therefore, it is a lower class, in the proportion that one of Gains-  
20 borough's full-length aristocratic women is below the permanent impressiveness of a fair Venetian head.

Millamant, side by side with Célimène, is an example of how far the realistic painting  
25 of a character can be carried to win our favor, and of where it falls short. Célimène is a woman's mind in movement, armed with an

ungovernable wit; with perspicacious, clear eyes for the world, and a very distinct knowledge that she belongs to the world, and is most at home in it. She is attracted to Alceste by her esteem for his honesty; she cannot avoid seeing where the good sense of the man is diseased. 5

Rousseau, in his letter to D'Alembert on the subject of the *Misanthrope*, discusses the character of Alceste as though Molière had put him forth for an absolute example of misanthropy; whereas Alceste is only a misanthrope of the circle he finds himself placed in—he has a touching faith in the virtue residing in the country, and a critical love of sweet simpleness. Nor is he the principal person of the comedy to which he gives a name. He is only passively comic. Célimène is the active spirit. While he is denouncing and railing, the trial is imposed upon her to make the best of him, and control herself, as much as a witty woman, eagerly courted, can do. By appreciating him she practically confesses her faultiness, and she is better disposed to meet him half-way than he is to bend an inch; only she is '*une âme de vingt ans,*' the world is pleasant, and, if the gilded flies of the Court are silly, un- 10 15 20 25

compromising fanatics have their ridiculous features as well. Can she abandon the life they make agreeable to her, for a man who will not be guided by the common sense of his class, and who insists on plunging into one extreme—equal to suicide in her eyes—to avoid another? That is the comic question of the *Misanthrope*. Why will he not continue to mix with the world smoothly, appeased by the flattery of her secret and really sincere preference of him, and taking his revenge in satire of it, as she does from her own not very lofty standard, and will by and by do from his more exalted one?

Célimène is worldliness; Alceste is unworldliness. It does not quite imply unselfishness; and that is perceived by her shrewd head. Still, he is a very uncommon figure in her circle, and she esteems him, 'l'homme aux rubans verts,' who 'sometimes diverts,' but more often horribly vexes her—as she can say of him when her satirical tongue is on the run. Unhappily the soul of truth in him, which wins her esteem, refuses to be tamed, or silent, or unsuspecting, and is the perpetual obstacle to their good accord. He is that melancholy person, the critic of everybody save himself; intensely sensitive to the

faults of others, wounded by them; in love with his own indubitable honesty, and with his ideal of the simpler form of life befitting it—qualities which constitute the satirist. He is a Jean Jacques of the Court. His proposal to Célimène, when he pardons her, that she should follow him in flying human-kind, and his frenzy of detestation of her at her refusal, are thoroughly in the mood of Jean Jacques. He is an impracticable creature of a priceless virtue; but Célimène may feel that to fly with him to the desert (that is, from the Court to the country),

Où d'être homme d'honneur on ait la liberté,

she is likely to find herself the companion of a starving satirist, like that poor princess who ran away with the waiting-man, and, when both were hungry in the forest, was ordered to give him flesh. She is a *fieffée* coquette, rejoicing in her wit and her attractions, and distinguished by her inclination for Alceste in the midst of her many other lovers; only she finds it hard to cut them off—what woman with a train does not?—and when the exposure of her naughty wit has laid her under their rebuke, she will do the utmost she can: she will give her hand to honesty, but she

cannot quite abandon worldliness. She would be unwise if she did.

The fable is thin. Our pungent contrivers of plots would see no indication of life in the outlines. The life of the comedy is in the idea. As with the singing of the skylark out of sight, you must love the bird to be attentive to the song, so in this highest flight of the comic Muse, you must love pure comedy warmly to understand the *Misanthrope*; you must be receptive of the idea of comedy. And to love comedy you must know the real world, and know men and women well enough not to expect too much of them, though you may still hope for good.

Menander wrote a comedy called *Misogynes*, said to have been the most celebrated of his works. This misogynist is a married man, according to the fragment surviving, and is a hater of women through hatred of his wife. He generalizes upon them from the example of this lamentable adjunct of his fortunes, and seems to have got the worst of it in the contest with her, which is like the issue in reality in the polite world. He seems also to have deserved it, which may be as true to the copy. But we are unable to say whether the wife was a good voice of

her sex; or how far Menander in this instance raised the idea of woman from the mire it was plunged into by the comic poets, or rather satiric dramatists, of the middle period of Greek comedy preceding him and the New Comedy, who devoted their wit chiefly to the abuse, and, for a diversity, to the eulogy of extra-mural ladies of conspicuous fame. Menander idealized them, without purposely elevating. He satirized a certain Thais, and his Thais of the *Eunuchus* of Terence is neither professionally attractive nor repulsive; his picture of the two Andrians, Chrysis and her sister, is nowhere to be matched for tenderness. But the condition of honest women in his day did not permit of the freedom of action and fencing dialectic of a Célimène, and consequently it is below our mark of pure comedy.

Sainte-Beuve conjures up the ghost of Menander saying: 'For the love of me love Terence.' It is through love of Terence that moderns are able to love Menander; and what is preserved of Terence has not, apparently, given us the best of the friend of Epicurus. *Μισούμενος*, the lover taken in horror, and *Περικειρομένη*, the damsel shorn of her locks, have a promising sound for

scenes of jealousy and a too masterful display of lordly authority, leading to regrets of the kind known to intemperate men who imagined they were fighting with the weaker,  
 5 as the fragments indicate.

Of the six comedies of Terence, four are derived from Menander; two, the *Hecyra* and the *Phormio*, from Apollodorus. These two are inferior, in comic action and the  
 10 peculiar sweetness of Menander, to the *Andria*, the *Adelphi*, the *Heauton Timorumenos*, and the *Eunuchus*; but *Phormio* is a more dashing and amusing convivial parasite than the *Gnatho* of the last-named comedy.  
 15 There were numerous rivals of whom we know next to nothing (except by the quotations of Athenaeus and Plutarch, and the Greek grammarians who cited them to support a dictum) in this, as in the preceding periods  
 20 of comedy in Athens; for Menander's plays are counted by many scores, and they were crowned by the prize only eight times. The favorite poet with critics, in Greece as in Rome, was Menander; and if some of his  
 25 rivals here and there surpassed him in comic force, and outstripped him in competition by an appositeness to the occasion that had previously in the same way deprived the

genius of Aristophanes of its due reward in *Clouds* and *Birds*, his position as chief of the comic poets of his age was unchallenged. Plutarch very unnecessarily drags Aristophanes into a comparison with him, to the confusion of the older poet. Their aims, the matter they dealt in, and the times, were quite dissimilar. But it is no wonder that Plutarch, writing when Athenian beauty of style was the delight of his patrons, should rank Menander at the highest. In what degree of faithfulness Terence copied Menander—whether, as he states of the passage in the *Adelphi* taken from Diphilus, '*verbum de verbo*' in the lovelier scenes (the description of the last words of the dying Andrian, and of her funeral, for instance)—remains conjectural. For us, Terence shares with his master the praise of an amenity that is like Elysian speech, equable and ever gracious; like the face of the Andrian's young sister:

Adeo modesto, adeo venusto, ut nil supra.

The celebrated '*flens quam familiariter*,' of which the closest rendering grounds hopelessly on harsh prose, to express the sorrowful confidingness of a young girl who has lost her sister and dearest friend, and has

but her lover left to her—‘she turned and flung herself on his bosom, weeping as though at home there’—this our instinct tells us must be Greek, though hardly finer in Greek.

5 Certain lines of Terence, compared with the original fragments, show that he embellished them; but his taste was too exquisite for him to do other than devote his genius to the honest translation of such pieces as the  
10 above. Menander, then; with him, through the affinity of sympathy, Terence; and Shakespeare and Molière, have this beautiful translucency of language. And the study of the comic poets might be recommended  
15 if for that only.

A singular ill fate befell the writings of Menander. What we have of him in Terence was chosen probably to please the cultivated Romans, and is a romantic play with a comic  
20 intrigue, obtained in two instances, the *Andria* and the *Eunuchus*, by rolling a couple of his originals into one. The titles of certain of the lost plays indicate the comic illumining character; a *Self-Pitier*, a *Self-Chastiser*, an  
25 *Ill-tempered Man*, a *Superstitious*, an *Incredulous*, etc., point to suggestive domestic themes. Terence forwarded manuscript translations from Greece that suffered shipwreck; he, who

could have restored the treasure, died on the way home. The zealots of Byzantium completed the work of destruction. So we have the four comedies of Terence, numbering six of Menander, with a few sketches of plots (one of them, the *Thesaurus*, introduces a miser, whom we should have liked to contrast with Harpagon), and a multitude of small fragments of a sententious cast, fitted for quotation. Enough remains to make his greatness felt.

Without undervaluing other writers of comedy, I think it may be said that Menander and Molière stand alone specially as comic poets of the feelings and the idea. In each of them there is a conception of the comic that refines even to pain, as in the Menedemus of the *Heauton Timorumenos*, and in the Misanthrope. Menander and Molière have given the principal types to comedy hitherto. The Micio and Demea of the *Adelphi*, with their opposing views of the proper management of youth, are still alive; the Sganarelles and Arnolphes of the *École des Maris* and the *École des Femmes* are not all buried. Tartuffe is the father of the hypocrites; Orgon of the dupes; Thraso of the braggadocios; Alceste of the 'Manlys'; Davus and Syrus of the

intriguing valets, the Scapins and Figaros. Ladies that soar in the realms of rose-pink, whose language wears the nodding plumes of intellectual conceit, are traceable to Philaminte and Bélise of the *Femmes Savantes*; and the mordant, witty women have the tongue of Célimène. The reason is that these two poets idealized upon life; the foundation of their types is real and in the quick, but they painted with spiritual strength, which is the solid in art.

The idealistic conception of comedy gives breadth and opportunities of daring to comic genius, and helps to solve the difficulties it creates. How, for example, shall an audience be assured that an evident and monstrous dupe is actually deceived without being an absolute fool? In *Le Tartuffe* the note of high comedy strikes when Orgon on his return home hears of his idol's excellent appetite. 'Le pauvre homme!' he exclaims. He is told that the wife of his bosom has been unwell. 'Et Tartuffe?' he asks, impatient to hear him spoken of, his mind suffused with the thought of Tartuffe, crazy with tenderness; and again he croons: 'Le pauvre homme!' It is the mother's cry of pitying delight at a nurse's recital of the feats in young animal

gluttony of her cherished infant. After this master-stroke of the comic, you not only put faith in Orgon's roseate prepossession, you share it with him by comic sympathy, and can listen with no more than a tremble of the laughing-muscles to the instance he gives of the sublime humanity of Tartuffe:

Un rien presque suffit pour le scandaliser,  
 Jusque-là qu'il se vint, l'autre jour, accuser  
 D'avoir pris une puce en faisant sa prière,  
 Et de l'avoir tuée avec trop de colère.

'And to have killed it too wrathfully'! Translating Molière is like humming an air one has heard performed by an accomplished violinist of the pure tones without flourish.

Orgon awakening to find another dupe in Madame Pernelle, incredulous of the revelations which have at last opened his own besotted eyes, is a scene of the double comic, vivified by the spell previously cast on the mind. There we feel the power of the poet's creation; and, in the sharp light of that sudden turn, the humanity is livelier than any realistic work can make it.

Italian comedy gives many hints for a Tartuffe; but they may be found in Boccaccio, as well as in Machiavelli's *Mandragola*.

The Frate Timoteo of this piece is only a very oily friar, compliantly assisting an intrigue with ecclesiastical sophisms (to use the mildest word) for payment. Frate Timoteo has a fine Italian priestly pose:

DONNA. Credete voi, che 'l Turco passi questo anno in Italia?

FRATE TIMOTEO. Se voi non fate orazione, sì.

Priestly arrogance and unctuousness, and trickeries and casuistries, cannot be painted without our discovering a likeness in the long Italian gallery. Goldoni sketched the Venetian manners of the decadence of the Republic with a French pencil, and was an Italian scribe in style.

The Spanish stage is richer in such comedies as that which furnished the idea of the *Menteur* to Corneille. But you must force yourself to believe that this liar is not forcing his vein when he piles lie upon lie. There is no preceding touch to win the mind to credulity. Spanish comedy is generally in sharp outline, as of skeletons; in quick movement, as of marionettes. The comedy might be performed by a troop of the *corps de ballet*; and in the recollection of the reading it resolves to an animated shuffle of feet. It is,

in fact, something other than the true idea of comedy. Where the sexes are separated, men and women grow, as the Portuguese call it, *afaimados* of one another, famine-stricken; and all the tragic elements are on the stage. Don Juan is a comic character that sends souls flying; nor does the humor of the breaking of a dozen women's hearts conciliate the comic Muse with the drawing of blood.

German attempts at comedy remind one vividly of Heine's image of his country in the dancing of Atta Troll. Lessing tried his hand at it, with a sobering effect upon readers. The intention to produce the reverse effect is just visible, and therein, like the portly graces of the poor old Pyrenean bear poising and twirling on his right hind-leg and his left, consists the fun. Jean Paul Richter gives the best edition of the German comic in the contrast of Siebenkäs with his Lenette. A light of the comic is in Goethe—enough to complete the splendid figure of the man, but no more.

The German literary laugh, like the timed awakenings of their Barbarossa in the hollows of the Untersberg, is infrequent, and rather monstrous—never a laugh of men and women in concert. It comes of unrefined,

abstract fancy, grotesque or grim, or gross, like the peculiar humors of their little earthmen. Spiritual laughter they have not yet attained to; sentimentalism waylays them  
 5 in the flight. Here and there a *volkslied* or *märchen* shows a national aptitude for stout animal laughter, and we see that the literature is built on it, which is hopeful so far; but to enjoy it, to enter into the philosophy of the  
 10 broad grin that seems to hesitate between the skull and the embryo, and reaches its perfection in breadth from the pulling of two square fingers at the corners of the mouth, one must have aid of 'the good Rhine wine,'  
 15 and be of German blood unmixed besides. This treble-Dutch lumberlikeness of the Comic Spirit is of itself exclusive of the idea of comedy, and the poor voice allowed to women in German domestic life will ac-  
 20 count for the absence of comic dialogues reflecting upon life in that land. I shall speak of it again in the second section of this lecture.

Eastward you have total silence of comedy  
 25 among a people intensely susceptible to laughter, as the *Arabian Nights* will testify. Where the veil is over women's faces, you cannot have society, without which the senses

prudery of the veil as the civilizing medium of his race.

There has been fun in Bagdad. But there never will be civilization where comedy is not possible; and that comes of some degree of social equality of the sexes. I am not quoting the Arab to exhort and disturb the somnolent East; rather for cultivated women to recognize that the comic Muse is one of their best friends. They are blind to their interests in swelling the ranks of the sentimentalists. Let them look with their clearest vision abroad and at home. They will see that, where they have no social freedom, comedy is absent; where they are household drudges, the form of comedy is primitive; where they are tolerably independent, but uncultivated, exciting melodrama takes its place, and a sentimental version of them. Yet the comic will out, as they would know if they listened to some of the private conversations of men whose minds are undirected by the comic Muse; as the sentimental man, to his astonishment, would know likewise, if he in similar fashion could receive a lesson. But where women are on the road to an equal footing with men, in attainments and in liberty—in what they have won for them-

are barbarous and the Comic Spirit is driven to the gutters of grossness to slake its thirst. Arabs in this respect are worse than Italians—much worse than Germans,—just in the degree that their system of treating women is worse. 5

M. Saint-Marc Girardin, the excellent French essayist and master of critical style, tells of a conversation he had once with an Arab gentleman on the topic of the different management of these difficult creatures in Orient and in Occident; and the Arab spoke in praise of many good results of the greater freedom enjoyed by Western ladies, and the charm of conversing with them. He was questioned why his countrymen took no measures to grant them something of that kind of liberty. He jumped out of his individuality in a twinkling, and entered into the sentiments of his race, replying, from the pinnacle of a splendid conceit, with affected humility of manner: ‘*You* can look on them without perturbation—but *we!* . . .’ And, after this profoundly comic interjection, he added, in deep tones: ‘The very face of a woman!’ Our representative of temperate notions demurely consented that the Arab’s pride of inflammability should insist on the . 10 15 20 25

selves, and what has been granted them by a fair civilization—there, and only waiting to be transplanted from life to the stage, or the novel, or the poem, pure comedy flourishes, and is, as it would help them to be, the sweetest of diversions, the wisest of delightful companions.

Now, to look about us in the present time, I think it will be acknowledged that, in neglecting the cultivation of the comic idea, we are losing the aid of a powerful auxiliar. You see Folly perpetually sliding into new shapes in a society possessed of wealth and leisure, with many whims, many strange ailments and strange doctors. Plenty of common sense is in the world to thrust her back when she pretends to empire. But the first-born of common sense, the vigilant Comic, which is the genius of thoughtful laughter, which would readily extinguish her at the outset, is not serving as a public advocate.

You will have noticed the disposition of common sense, under pressure of some pertinacious piece of light-headedness, to grow impatient and angry. That is a sign of the absence, or at least of the dormancy, of the comic idea. For Folly is the natural prey

of the Comic, known to it in all her transformations, in every disguise; and it is with the springing delight of hawk over heron, hound after fox, that it gives her chase, never fretting, never tiring, sure of having her, allowing her no rest.

Contempt is a sentiment that cannot be entertained by comic intelligence. What is it but an excuse to be idly-minded, or personally lofty, or comfortably narrow, not perfectly humane? If we do not feign when we say that we despise Folly, we shut the brain. There is a disdainful attitude in the presence of Folly, partaking of the foolishness to comic perception; and anger is not much less foolish than disdain. The struggle we have to conduct is essence against essence. Let no one doubt of the sequel when this emanation of what is firmest in us is launched to strike down the daughter of Unreason and Sentimentalism—such being Folly's parentage, when it is respectable.

Our modern system of combating her is too long defensive, and carried on too ploddingly with concrete engines of war in the attack. She has time to get behind entrenchments. She is ready to stand a siege, before the heavily-armed man of science and the

writer of the leading article or elaborate essay have primed their big guns. It should be remembered that she has charms for the multitude; and an English multitude, seeing her make a gallant fight of it, will be half in love with her, certainly willing to lend her a cheer. Benevolent subscriptions assist her to hire her own man of science, her own organ in the press. If ultimately she is cast out and overthrown, she can stretch a finger at gaps in our ranks. She can say that she commanded an army, and seduced men, whom we thought sober men and safe, to act as her lieutenants. We learn rather gloomily, after she has flashed her lantern, that we have in our midst able men, and men with minds, for whom there is no pole-star in intellectual navigation. Comedy, or the comic element, is the specific for the poison of delusion while Folly is passing from the state of vapor to substantial form.

O for a breath of Aristophanes, Rabelais, Voltaire, Cervantes, Fielding, Molière! These are spirits that, if you know them well, will come when you do call. You will find the very invocation of them act on you like a renovating air—the south-west coming off the sea, or a cry in the Alps.

No one would presume to say that we are deficient in jokers. They abound, and the organization directing their machinery to shoot them in the wake of the leading article  
5 and the popular sentiment is good. But the comic differs from them in addressing the wits for laughter; and the sluggish wits want some training to respond to it, whether in public life or private, and particularly when  
10 the feelings are excited. The sense of the comic is much blunted by habits of punning and of using humoristic phrase, the trick of employing Johnsonian polysyllables to treat of the infinitely little. And it really  
15 may be humorous, of a kind; yet it will miss the point by going too much round about it.

A certain French Duc Pasquier died, some years back, at a very advanced age. He had  
20 been the venerable Duc Pasquier, in his later years, up to the period of his death. There was a report of Duc Pasquier that he was a man of profound egoism. Hence an argument arose, and was warmly sustained, upon  
25 the excessive selfishness of those who, in a world of troubles, and calls to action, and innumerable duties, husband their strength for the sake of living on. Can it be possible,

the argument ran, for a truly generous heart to continue beating up to the age of a hundred? Duc Pasquier was not without his defenders, who likened him to the oak of the forest—a venerable comparison. 5

The argument was conducted on both sides with spirit and earnestness, lightened here and there by frisky touches of the polysyllabic playful, reminding one of the serious pursuit of their fun by truant boys that are assured 10 they are out of the eye of their master, and now and then indulge in an imitation of him. And well might it be supposed that the comic idea was asleep, not overlooking them! It resolved at last to this, that either Duc Pas- 15 quier was a scandal on our humanity in clinging to life so long, or that he honored it by so sturdy a resistance to the enemy. As one who has entangled himself in a labyrinth is glad to get out again at the entrance, the 20 argument ran about, to conclude with its commencement.

Now, imagine a master of the comic treating this theme, and particularly the argument on it. Imagine an Aristophanic comedy of 25 the Centenarian, with choric praises of heroic early death, and the same of a stubborn vitality, and the poet laughing at the Chorus;

and the grand question for contention in dialogue, as to the exact age when a man should die, to the identical minute, that he may preserve the respect of his fellows, followed by a systematic attempt to make an accurate measurement in parallel lines, with a tough rope-yarn by one party, and a string of yawns by the other, of the veteran's power of enduring life, and our capacity for enduring *him*, with tremendous pulling on both sides. Would not the comic view of the discussion illumine it and the disputants like very lightning? There are questions, as well as persons, that only the comic can fitly touch.

Aristophanes would probably have crowned the ancient tree with the consolatory observation to the haggard line of long-expectant heirs of the Centenarian, that they live to see the blessedness of coming of a strong stock. The shafts of his ridicule would mainly have been aimed at the disputants; for the sole ground of the argument was the old man's character, and sophists are not needed to demonstrate that we can very soon have too much of a bad thing. A centenarian does not necessarily provoke the comic idea, nor does the corpse of a duke. It is not pro-

voked in the order of nature, until we draw its penetrating attentiveness to some circumstance with which we have been mixing our private interests, or our speculative obfuscation. Dulness, insensible to the comic, has the privilege of arousing it; and the laying of a dull finger on matters of human life is the surest method of establishing electrical communications with a battery of laughter—where the comic idea is prevalent.

But if the comic idea prevailed with us, and we had an Aristophanes to barb and wing it, we should be breathing air of Athens. Proser now pouring forth on us like public fountains would be cut short in the street and left blinking, dumb as pillar-posts with letters thrust into their mouths. We should throw off incubus, our dreadful familiar—by some called boredom—whom it is our present humiliation to be just alive enough to loathe, never quick enough to foil. There would be a bright and positive, clear Hellenic perception of facts. The vapors of unreason and sentimentalism would be blown away before they were productive. Where would pessimist and optimist be? They would in any case have a diminished audience. Yet possibly the change of despots, from good-

natured old obtuseness to keen-edged intelligence, which is by nature merciless, would be more than we could bear. The rupture of the link between dull people, consisting  
 5 in the fraternal agreement that something is too clever for them, and a shot beyond them, is not to be thought of lightly; for, slender though the link may seem, it is equivalent to a cement forming a concrete of dense co-  
 10 hesion, very desirable in the estimation of the statesman.

A political Aristophanes, taking advantage of his lyrical Bacchic license, was found too much for political Athens. I would not ask  
 15 to have him revived, but that the sharp light of such a spirit as his might be with us to strike now and then on public affairs, public themes, to make them spin along more briskly.

20 He hated with the politician's fervor the Sophist who corrupted simplicity of thought, the poet who destroyed purity of style, the demagogue, 'the saw-toothed monster,' who, as he conceived, chicaned the mob; and he  
 25 held his own against them by strength of laughter, until fines, the curtailing of his comic license in the chorus, and ultimately the ruin of Athens, which could no longer

support the expense of the chorus, threw him altogether on dialogue, and brought him under the law. After the catastrophe, the poet, who had ever been gazing back at the men of Marathon and Salamis, must have felt that he had foreseen it; and that he was wise when he pleaded for peace, and derided military coxcombry and the captious old creature Demus, we can admit. He had the comic poet's gift of common sense—which does not always include political intelligence; yet his political tendency raised him above the Old-Comedy turn for uproarious farce. He abused Socrates; but Xenophon, the disciple of Socrates, by his trained rhetoric saved the Ten Thousand. Aristophanes might say that, if his warnings had been followed, there would have been no such thing as a mercenary Greek expedition under Cyrus. Athens, however, was on a landslip, falling; none could arrest it. To gaze back, to uphold the old times, was a most natural conservatism, and fruitless. The aloe had bloomed. Whether right or wrong in his politics and his criticisms, and bearing in mind the instruments he played on and the audience he had to win, there is an idea in his comedies; it is the idea of good citizenship.

He is not likely to be revived. He stands, like Shakespeare, an unapproachable. Swift says of him, with a loving chuckle:

5           But as to comic Aristophanes,  
          The rogue too vicious and too profane is.

Aristophanes was 'prófane,' under satiric direction; unlike his rivals Cratinus, Phrynichus, Ameipsias, Eupolis, and others, if we are to believe him, who, in their extraordinary  
10 Donnybrook Fair of the day of comedy, thumped one another and everybody else with absolute heartiness, as he did, but aimed at small game, and dragged forth particular women, which he did not. He is an aggregate  
15 of many men, all of a certain greatness. We may build up a conception of his powers if we mount Rabelais upon *Hudibras*, lift him with the songfulness of Shelley, give him a vein of Heinrich Heine, and cover him with  
20 the mantle of the *Anti-Jacobin*, adding (that there may be some Irish in him) a dash of Grattan, before he is in motion.

But such efforts at conceiving one great one by incorporation of minors are vain, and  
25 cry for excuse. Supposing Wilkes for leading man in a country constantly plunging into war under some plumed Lamachus, with

enemies periodically firing the land up to the gates of London, and a Samuel Foote, of prodigious genius, attacking him with ridicule: I think it gives a notion of the conflict engaged in by Aristophanes. This laughing bald-pate, as he calls himself, was a Titanic pamphleteer, using laughter for his political weapon; a laughter without scruple, the laughter of Hercules. He was primed with wit, as with the garlic he speaks of giving to the game-cocks to make them fight the better. And he was a lyric poet of aerial delicacy, with the homely song of a jolly national poet, and a poet of such feeling that the comic mask is at times no broader than a cloth on a face to show the serious features of our common likeness. He is not to be revived; but, if his method were studied, some of the fire in him would come to us, and *we* might be revived.

Taking them generally, the English public are most in sympathy with this primitive Aristophanic comedy, wherein the comic is capped by the grotesque, irony tips the wit, and satire is a naked sword. They have the basis of the comic in them—an esteem for common sense. They cordially dislike the reverse of it. They have a rich laugh, though

it is not the *gros rire* of the Gaul tossing *gros sel*, nor the polished Frenchman's mentally digestive laugh. And if they have now, like a monarch with a troop of dwarfs, too many  
5 jesters kicking the dictionary about, to let them *reflect* that they are dull, occasionally (like the pensive monarch surprising himself with an idea of an idea of his own), they *look* so. And they are given to looking in the  
10 glass. They must see that something ails them. How much even the better order of them will endure, without a thought of the defensive, when the person afflicting them is protected from satire, we read in memoirs of  
15 a preceding age, where the vulgarly tyrannous hostess of a great house of reception shuffled the guests and played them like a pack of cards, with her exact estimate of the strength of each one printed on them; and  
20 still this house continued to be the most popular in England, nor did the lady ever appear in print or on the boards as the comic type that she was.

It has been suggested that they have not  
25 yet spiritually comprehended the signification of living in society; for who are cheerfuller, brisker of wit, in the fields, and as explorers, colonizers, backwoodsmen? They are happy

in rough exercise, and also in complete repose. The intermediate condition, when they are called upon to talk to one another, upon other than affairs of business or their hobbies, reveals them wearing a curious look of vacancy, 5 as it were the socket of an eye wanting. The comic is perpetually springing up in social life, and it oppresses them from not being perceived.

Thus, at a dinner-party, one of the guests, 10 who happens to have enrolled himself in a burial-company, politely entreats the others to inscribe their names as shareholders, expatiating on the advantages accruing to them in the event of their very possible speedy 15 death, the salubrity of the site, the aptitude of the soil for a quick consumption of their remains, etc.; and they drink sadness from the incongruous man, and conceive indigestion not seeing him in a sharply-defined 20 light that would bid them taste the comic of him. Or it is mentioned that a newly-elected member of our Parliament celebrates his arrival at eminence by the publication of a book on cab-fares, dedicated to a beloved 25 female relative deceased, and the comment on it is the word 'Indeed.' But, merely for a contrast, turn to a not uncommon scene

of yesterday in the hunting-field, where a brilliant young rider, having broken his collar-bone, trots away very soon after, against medical interdict, half put together in splinters, to the most distant meet of his neighborhood, sure of escaping his doctor, who is the first person he encounters. 'I came here purposely to avoid you,' says the patient. 'I came here purposely to take care of you,' says the doctor. Off they go, and come to a swollen brook. The patient clears it handsomely; the doctor tumbles in. All the field are alive with the heartiest relish of every incident and every cross-light on it, and dull would the man have been thought who had not his word to say about it when riding home.

In our prose literature we have had delightful comic writers. Besides Fielding and Goldsmith, there is Miss Austen, whose Emma and Mr. Elton might walk straight into a comedy, were the plot arranged for them. Galt's neglected novels have some characters and strokes of shrewd comedy. In our poetic literature the comic is delicate and graceful above the touch of Italian and French. Generally, however, the English elect excel in satire, and they are noble hu-

morists. The national disposition is for hard-hitting, with a moral purpose to sanction it; or for a rosy, sometimes a larmoyant, geniality, not unmanly in its verging upon tenderness, and with a singular attraction for thickheadedness, to decorate it with asses' ears and the most beautiful sylvan haloes. But the comic is a different spirit. 5

You may estimate your capacity for comic perception by being able to detect the ridicule of them you love without loving them less; and more by being able to see yourself somewhat ridiculous in dear eyes, and accepting the correction their image of you proposes. 10

Each one of an affectionate couple may be willing, as we say, to die for the other, yet unwilling to utter the agreeable word at the right moment; but if the wits were sufficiently quick for them to perceive that they are in a comic situation, as affectionate couples must be when they quarrel, they would not wait for the moon or the almanac, or a Dorine, to bring back the flood-tide of tender feelings, that they should join hands and lips. 15 20

If you detect the ridicule, and your kindness is chilled by it, you are slipping into the grasp of Satire. 25

If, instead of falling foul of the ridiculous

person with a satiric rod, to make him writhe and shriek aloud, you prefer to sting him under a semi-caress, by which he shall in his anguish be rendered dubious whether indeed  
 5 anything has hurt him, you are an engine of Irony.

If you laugh all round him, tumble him, roll him about, deal him a smack, and drop a tear on him, own his likeness to you, and  
 10 yours to your neighbor, spare him as little as you shun, pity him as much as you expose, it is a spirit of Humor that is moving you.

The comic, which is the perceptive, is the governing spirit, awakening and giving aim  
 15 to these powers of laughter, but it is not to be confounded with them; it enfolds a thinner form of them, differing from satire in not sharply driving into the quivering sensibilities, and from humor in not comforting them  
 20 and tucking them up, or indicating a broader than the range of this bustling world to them.

Fielding's Jonathan Wild presents a case of this peculiar distinction, when that man of eminent greatness remarks upon the un-  
 25 fairness of a trial in which the condemnation has been brought about by twelve men of the opposite party; for it is not satiric, it is not humorous; yet it is immensely comic

to hear a guilty villain protesting that his own 'party' should have a voice in the law. It opens an avenue into villains' ratiocination. And the comic is not canceled though we should suppose Jonathan to be giving play 5 to his humor. (I may have dreamed this, or had it suggested to me, for, on referring to *Jonathan Wild*, I do not find it.) Apply the case to the man of deep wit, who is ever certain of his condemnation by the opposite 10 party, and then it ceases to be comic, and will be satiric.

The look of Fielding upon Richardson is essentially comic. His method of correcting the sentimental writer is a mixture of the 15 comic and the humorous. Parson Adams is a creation of humor. But both the conception and the presentation of *Alceste* and of *Tartuffe*, of *Célimène* and *Philaminte*, are purely comic, addressed to the intellect; there 20 is no humor in them, and they refresh the intellect they quicken to detect their comedy, by force of the contrast they offer between themselves and the wiser world about them—that is to say, society, or that assemblage 25 of minds whereof the comic spirit has its origin.

Byron had splendid powers of humor, and

the most poetic satire that we have example of, fusing at times to hard irony. He had no strong comic sense, or he would not have taken an anti-social position, which is directly opposed to the comic; and in his philosophy, judged by philosophers, he is a comic figure by reason of this deficiency. 'Sobald er reflectirt ist er ein Kind,' Goethe says of him. Carlyle sees him in this comic light, treats him in the humorous manner.

The satirist is a moral agent, often a social scavenger, working on a storage of bile.

The ironist is one thing or another, according to his caprice. Irony is the humor of satire; it may be savage, as in Swift, with a moral object, or sedate, as in Gibbon, with a malicious. The foppish irony fretting to be seen, and the irony which leers, that you shall not mistake its intention, are failures in satiric effort pretending to the treasures of ambiguity.

The humorist of mean order is a refreshing laugher, giving tone to the feelings, and sometimes allowing the feelings to be too much for him; but the humorist of high has an embrace of contrasts beyond the scope of the comic poet.

Heart and mind laugh out at Don Quixote,

and still you brood on him. The juxtaposition of the knight and squire is a comic conception, the opposition of their natures most humorous. They are as different as the two hemispheres in the time of Columbus, yet they touch, and are bound in one, by laughter. The knight's great aims and constant mishaps, his chivalrous valiancy exercised on absurd objects, his good sense along the high road of the craziest of expeditions, the compassion he plucks out of derision, and the admirable figure he preserves while stalking through the frantically grotesque and burlesque assailing him, are in the loftiest moods of humor, fusing the tragic sentiment with the comic narrative. The stroke of the great humorist is world-wide, with lights of tragedy in his laughter.

Taking a living great, though not creative, humorist to guide our description: the skull of Yorick is in his hands in our seasons of festival; he sees visions of primitive man capering preposterously under the gorgeous robes of ceremonial. Our souls must be on fire when we wear solemnity, if we would not press upon his shrewdest nerve. Finite and infinite flash from one to the other with him, lending him a two-edged thought that peeps

out of his peaceullest lines by fits, like the lantern of the fire-watcher at windows, going the rounds at night. The comportment and performances of men in society are to him, by  
 5 the vivid comparison with their mortality, more grotesque than respectable. But ask yourself: 'Is he always to be relied on for justness?' He will fly straight as the emis- sary eagle back to Jove at the true Hero.  
 10 He will also make as determined a swift descent upon the man of his wilful choice, whom we cannot distinguish as a true one. This vast power of his, built up of the feelings and the intellect in union, is often wanting in  
 15 proportion and in discretion. Humorists touching upon history or society are given to be capricious. They are, as in the case of Sterne, given to be sentimental; for with them the feelings are primary, as with singers.  
 20 Comedy, on the other hand, is an interpretation of the general mind, and is for that reason of necessity kept in restraint. The French lay marked stress on *mesure et goût*, and they own how much they owe to Molière  
 25 for leading them in simple justness and taste. We can teach them many things; they can teach us in this.

The comic poet is in the narrow field, or

enclosed square, of the society he depicts; and he addresses the still narrower enclosure of men's intellects, with reference to the operation of the social world upon their characters. He is not concerned with beginnings or endings or surroundings, but with what you are now weaving. To understand his work and value it, you must have a sober liking of your kind, and a sober estimate of our civilized qualities. The aim and business of the comic poet are misunderstood, his meaning is not seized nor his point of view taken, when he is accused of dishonoring our nature and being hostile to sentiment, tending to spitefulness and making an unfair use of laughter. Those who detect irony in comedy do so because they choose to see it in life. Poverty, says the satirist, 'has nothing harder in itself than that it makes men ridiculous.' But poverty is never ridiculous to comic perception until it attempts to make its rags conceal its bareness in a forlorn attempt at decency, or foolishly to rival ostentation. Caleb Balderstone, in his endeavor to keep up the honor of a noble household in a state of beggary, is an exquisitely comic character. In the case of 'poor relatives,' on the other hand, it is the rich, whom

they perplex, that are really comic; and to laugh at the former, not seeing the comedy of the latter, is to betray dulness of vision.

Humorist and satirist frequently hunt together as ironists in pursuit of the grotesque, to the exclusion of the comic. That was an affecting moment in the history of the Prince Regent, when the First Gentleman of Europe burst into tears at a sarcastic remark of Beau Brummell's on the cut of his coat. Humor, satire, irony, pounce on it altogether as their common prey. The Comic Spirit eyes, but does not touch, it. Put into action, it would be farcical. It is too gross for comedy.

Incidents of a kind casting ridicule on our unfortunate nature, instead of our conventional life, provoke derisive laughter, which thwarts the comic idea. But derision is foiled by the play of the intellect. Most of doubtful causes in contest are open to comic interpretation, and any intellectual pleading of a doubtful cause contains germs of an idea of comedy.

The laughter of satire is a blow in the back or the face. The laughter of comedy is impersonal and of unrivaled politeness, nearer a smile—often no more than a smile. It laughs through the mind, for the mind di-

rects it; and it might be called the humor of the mind.

One excellent test of the civilization of a country, as I have said, I take to be the flourishing of the comic idea and comedy; 5 and the test of true comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter.

If you believe that our civilization is founded in common sense (and it is the first condition of sanity to believe it), you will, 10 when contemplating men, discern a Spirit overhead; not more heavenly than the light flashed upward from glassy surfaces, but luminous and watchful; never shooting beyond them, nor lagging in the rear; so closely 15 attached to them that it may be taken for a slavish reflex, until its features are studied. It has the sage's brows, and the sunny malice of a faun lurks at the corners of the half-closed lips drawn in an idle wariness of half- 20 tension. That slim feasting smile, shaped like the long-bow, was once a big round satyr's laugh, that flung up the brows like a fortress lifted by gunpowder. The laugh will come again, but it will be of the order of the smile, 25 finely-tempered, showing sunlight of the mind, mental richness rather than noisy enormity. Its common aspect is one of un-

solicitous observation, as if surveying a full field and having leisure to dart on its chosen morsels, without any fluttering eagerness. Men's future upon earth does not attract  
 5 it; their honesty and shapeliness in the present does; and whenever they wax out of proportion, overblown, affected, pretentious, bombastical, hypocritical, pedantic, fantastically delicate; whenever it sees them self-  
 10 deceived or hoodwinked, given to run riot in idolatries, drifting into vanities, congregating in absurdities, planning short-sightedly, plotting dementedly; whenever they are at variance with their professions, and violate  
 15 the unwritten but perceptible laws binding them in consideration one to another; whenever they offend sound reason, fair justice; are false in humility or mined with conceit,  
 : individually, or in the bulk; the Spirit over-  
 20 head will look humanely malign, and cast an oblique light on them, followed by volleys of silvery laughter. That is the Comic Spirit.

Not to distinguish it is to be bull-blind to  
 25 the spiritual, and to deny the existence of a mind of man where minds of men are in working conjunction.

You must, as I have said, believe that our

state of society is founded in common sense, otherwise you will not be struck by the contrasts the Comic Spirit perceives, or have it to look to for your consolation. You will, in fact, be standing in that peculiar oblique 5 beam of light, yourself illuminated to the general eye as the very object of chase and doomed quarry of the thing obscure to you. But to feel its presence, and to see it, is your assurance that many sane and solid minds 10 are with you in what you are experiencing; and this of itself spares you the pain of satirical heat, and the bitter craving to strike heavy blows. You share the sublime of wrath, that would not have hurt the foolish, 15 but merely demonstrate their foolishness. Molière was contented to revenge himself on the critics of the *École des Femmes* by writing the *Critique de l'École des Femmes*, one of the wisest as well as the playfullest 20 of studies in criticism. A perception of the Comic Spirit gives high fellowship. You become a citizen of the selecter world, the highest we know of in connection with our old world, which is not supermundane. Look 25 there for your unchallengeable upper class! You feel that you are one of this our civilized community, that you cannot escape from it,

and would not if you could. Good hope sustains you; weariness does not overwhelm you; in isolation you see no charms for vanity; personal pride is greatly moderated. Nor  
 5 shall your title of citizenship exclude you from worlds of imagination or of devotion. The Comic Spirit is not hostile to the sweetest songfully poetic. Chaucer bubbles with it; Shakespeare overflows; there is a mild moon's  
 10 ray of it (pale with super-refinement through distance from our flesh and blood planet) in *Comus*. Pope has it, and it is the daylight side of the night half-obscuring Cowper. It is only hostile to the priestly element when  
 15 that, by baleful swelling, transcends and overlaps the bounds of its office; and then, in extreme cases, it is too true to itself to speak, and veils the lamp—as, for example, the spectacle of Bossuet over the dead body of Molière,  
 20 at which the dark angels may, but men do not, laugh.

We have had comic pulpits, for a sign that the laughter-moving and the worshipful may be in alliance; I know not how far comic, or  
 25 how much assisted in seeming so by the unexpectedness and the relief of its appearance; at least they are popular—they are said to win the ear. Laughter is open to perversion.

like other good things; the scornful and the brutal sorts are not unknown to us; but the laughter directed by the Comic Spirit is a harmless wine, conducing to sobriety in the degree that it enlivens. It enters you like fresh air into a study, as when one of the sudden contrasts of the comic idea floods the brain like reassuring daylight. You are cognizant of the true kind by feeling that you take it in, savor it, and have what flowers live on, natural air for food. That which you give out—the joyful roar—is not the better part; let that go to good-fellowship and the benefit of the lungs. Aristophanes promises his auditors that, if they will retain the ideas of the comic poet carefully, as they keep dried fruits in boxes, their garments shall smell odoriferous of wisdom throughout the year. The boast will not be thought an empty one by those who have choice friends that have stocked themselves according to his directions. Such treasuries of sparkling laughter are wells in our desert. Sensitiveness to the comic laugh is a step in civilization. To shrink from being an object of it is a step in cultivation. We know the degree of refinement in men by the matter they will laugh at, and the ring of the laugh; but we

know likewise that the larger natures are distinguished by the great breadth of their power of laughter, and no one really loving Molière is refined by that love to despise or be dense

5 to Aristophanes, though it may be that the lover of Aristophanes will not have risen to the height of Molière. Embrace them both, and you have the whole scale of laughter in your breast. Nothing in the world surpasses

10 in stormy fun the scene in the *Frogs*, when Bacchus and Xanthias receive their thrashings from the hands of business-like Aeacus, to discover which is the divinity of the two by his imperviousness to the mortal condition

15 of pain, and each, under the obligation of not crying out, makes believe that his horrible bellow—the god's 'iou! iou!' being the lustier—means only the stopping of a sneeze, or horsemen sighted, or the prelude to an invocation

20 to some deity, and the slave contrives that the god shall get the bigger lot of blows. Passages of Rabelais, one or two in *Don Quixote*, and the supper 'in the manner of the ancients' in *Peregrine Pickle*, are of a similar cataract

25 of laughter. But it is not illuminating; it is not the laughter of the mind. Molière's laughter, in his purest comedies, is ethereal—as light to our nature, as color to our thoughts.

The *Misanthrope* and the *Tartuffe* have no audible laughter, but the characters are steeped in the comic spirit. They quicken the mind through laughter, from coming out of the mind; and the mind accepts them 5 because they are clear interpretations of certain chapters of the Book lying open before us all. Between these two stand Shakespeare and Cervantes, with the richer laugh of heart and mind in one; with much of the Aristophanic robustness, something of Mo- 10 lière's delicacy.

The laughter heard in circles not pervaded by the comic idea will sound harsh and soulless, like versified prose, if you step into them 15 with a sense of the distinction. You will fancy you have changed your habitation to a planet remoter from the sun. You may be among powerful brains, too. You will not find poets—or but a stray one, over- 20 worshiped. You will find learned men undoubtedly, professors, reputed philosophers, and illustrious dilettanti. They have in them, perhaps, every element composing light, except the comic. They read verse, 25 they discourse of art; but their eminent faculties are not under that vigilant sense of a collective supervision, spiritual and present,

which we have taken note of. They build a temple of arrogance; they speak much in the voice of oracles; their hilarity, if it does not dip in grossness, is usually a form of pug-  
 5 nacity.

Insufficiency of sight in the eye looking outward has deprived them of the eye that should look inward. They have never weighed themselves in the delicate balance  
 10 of the comic idea, so as to obtain a suspicion of the rights and dues of the world; and they have, in consequence, an irritable personality. A very learned English professor crushed an argument in a political discussion by asking  
 15 his adversary angrily: 'Are you aware, Sir, that I am a philologer?'

The practice of polite society will help in training them, and the professor on a sofa, with beautiful ladies on each side of him,  
 20 may become their pupil and a scholar in manners without knowing it; he is at least a fair and pleasing spectacle to the comic Muse. But the society named polite is volatile in its adorations, and to-morrow will be petting a bronzed soldier, or a black African, or a prince, or a spiritualist; ideas cannot take root in its ever-shifting soil. It is besides  
 25 addicted in self-defence to gabble exclusively

of the affairs of its rapidly revolving world, as children on a whirli-go-round bestow their attention on the wooden horse or cradle ahead of them, to escape from giddiness and preserve a notion of identity. The professor is better out of a circle that often confounds by lionizing, sometimes annoys by abandoning, and always confuses. The school that teaches gently what peril there is lest a cultivated head should still be coxcomb's, and the collisions which may befall high-soaring minds, empty or full, is more to be recommended than the sphere of incessant motion supplying it with material.

Lands where the Comic Spirit is obscure overhead are rank with raw crops of matter. The traveler accustomed to smooth highways and people not covered with burrs and prickles is amazed, amid so much that is fair and cherishable, to come upon such curious barbarism. An Englishman paid a visit of admiration to a professor in the land of culture, and was introduced by him to another distinguished professor, to whom he took so cordially as to walk out with him alone one afternoon. The first professor, an erudite entirely worthy of the sentiment of scholarly esteem prompting the visit, be-

haved (if we exclude the dagger) with the vindictive jealousy of an injured Spanish beauty. After a short prelude of gloom and obscure explosions, he discharged upon his  
 5 faithless admirer the bolts of passionate logic familiar to the ears of flighty caballeros: 'Either I am a fit object of your admiration, or I am not. Of these things, one: either you are competent to judge, in which case I stand  
 10 condemned by you; or you are incompetent, and therefore impertinent, and you may be-take yourself to your country again, hypo-crite!' The admirer was for persuading the wounded scholar that it is given to us to be  
 15 able to admire two professors at a time. He was driven forth.

Perhaps this might have occurred in any country, and a comedy of *The Pedant*, discovering the greedy humanity within the  
 20 dusty scholar, would not bring it home to one in particular. I am mindful that it was in Germany, when I observe that the Ger-mans have gone through no comic training to warn them of the sly, wise emanation eye-  
 25 ing them from aloft, nor much of satirical. Heinrich Heine has not been enough to cause them to smart and meditate. Nationally, as well as individually, when they are ex-

cited they are in danger of the grotesque; as when, for instance, they decline to listen to evidence, and raise a national outcry because one of German blood has been convicted of crime in a foreign country. They 5 are acute critics, yet they still wield clubs in controversy. Compare them in this respect with the people schooled in La Bruyère, La Fontaine, Molière; with the people who have the figures of a Trissotin and a Vadius before 10 them for a comic warning of the personal vanities of the caressed professor. It is more than difference of race. It is the difference of traditions, temper, and style, which comes of schooling. 15

The French controversialist is a polished swordsman, to be dreaded in his graces and courtesies. The German is Orson, or the mob, or a marching army, in defence of a good case or a bad—a big or a little. His 20 irony is a missile of terrific tonnage; sarcasm he emits like a blast from a dragon's mouth. He must and will be Titan. He stamps his foe underfoot, and is astonished that the creature is not dead, but stinging; for, in 25 truth, the Titan is contending, by comparison, with a god.

When the Germans lie on their arms, look-

ing across the Alsatian frontier at the crowds of Frenchmen rushing to applaud *L'Ami Fritz* at the Théâtre Français, looking and considering the meaning of that applause, which is grimly comic in its political response to the domestic moral of the play—when the Germans watch and are silent, their force of character tells. They are kings in music, we may say princes in poetry, good speculators in philosophy, and our leaders in scholarship. That so gifted a race, possessed, moreover, of the stern good sense which collects the waters of laughter to make the wells, should show at a disadvantage, I hold for a proof, instructive to us, that the discipline of the Comic Spirit is needful to their growth. We see what they can reach to in that great figure of modern manhood, Goethe. They are a growing people; they are conversable as well; and when their men, as in France, and at intervals at Berlin tea-tables, consent to talk on equal terms with their women, and to listen to them, their growth will be accelerated and be shapelier. Comedy, or, in any form, the Comic Spirit, will then come to them to cut some figures out of the block, show them the mirror, enliven and irradiate the social intelligence.

Modern French comedy is commendable

for the directness of the study of actual life, as far as that (which is but the early step in such a scholarship) can be of service in composing and coloring the picture. A consequence of this crude, though well-meant, realism is the collision of the writers in their scenes and incidents, and in their characters. The Muse of most of them is an *Aventurière*. She is clever, and a certain diversion exists in the united scheme for confounding her. The object of this person is to reinstate herself in the decorous world; and either, having accomplished this purpose through deceit, she has a *nostalgie de la boue* that eventually casts her back into it, or she is exposed in her course of deception when she is about to gain her end. A very good, innocent young man is her victim, or a very astute, goodish young man obstructs her path. This latter is enabled to be the champion of the decorous world by knowing the indecorous well. He has assisted in the progress of *aventurières* downward; he will not help them to ascend. The world is with him; and certainly it is not much of an ascension they aspire to; but what sort of a figure is he? The triumph of a candid realism is to show him no hero. You are to admire him (for it must be sup-

posed that realism pretends to waken some admiration) as a credibly living young man; no better, only a little firmer and shrewder, than the rest. If, however, you think at all, 5 after the curtain has fallen, you are likely to think that the *aventurières* have a case to plead against him. True, and the author has not said anything to the contrary; he has but painted from the life; he leaves his audience to 10 the reflections of unphilosophic minds upon life, from the specimen he has presented in the bright and narrow circle of a spy-glass.

I do not know that the fly in amber is of any particular use, but the comic idea en- 15 closed in a comedy makes it more generally perceptible and portable, and that is an advantage. There is a benefit to men in taking the lessons of comedy in congregations, for it enlivens the wits; and to writers it is bene- 20 ficial, for they must have a clear scheme, and even if they have no idea to present, they must prove that they have made the public sit to them before the sitting, to see the picture. And writing for the stage would be 25 a corrective of a too-inerusted scholarly style, into which some great ones fall at times. It keeps minor writers to a definite plan, and to English. Many of them now swelling a

pleihoric market in the composition of novels, in pun-manufactories, and in journalism—attached to the machinery forcing perishable matter on a public that swallows voraciously and groans—might, with encouragement, be attending to the study of art in literature. Our critics appear to be fascinated by the quaintness of our public, as the world is when our beast-garden has a new importation of magnitude, and the creature's appetite is reverently consulted. They stipulate for a writer's popularity before they will do much more than take the position of umpires to record his failure or success. Now the pig supplies the most popular of dishes, but it is not accounted the most honored of animals, unless it be by the cottager. Our public might surely be led to try other, perhaps finer, meat. It has good taste in song. It might be taught as justly, on the whole (and the sooner when the cottager's view of the feast shall cease to be the humble one of our literary critics), to extend this capacity for delicate choosing in the direction of the matter arousing laughter.



## VARIANT READINGS



## VARIANT READINGS

The present text follows that of the edition of *An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit* published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1905, save in the matter of punctuation and capital letters, in various points of typography, and in pagination; and the edition of New York, 1905, follows that of Archibald Constable and Company, Westminster, 1897, except in pagination. When there is a difference in the wording between the present text and the *Essay* as it originally appeared, in the *New Quarterly Magazine*, April, 1877, I give, in the following list, first the present reading, and then the reading of 1877 in quotation-marks. Differences in the wording of the Edition de Luxe of 1898 are also recorded. Attention is called in the Notes to cases in which I have rectified Meredith's quotations from other authors.

78 25. An eminent Frenchman judges,  
1877: 'An eminent Frenchman, M. Littré,  
judges,'

81 23-24. to the joy of the Bacchanalians.

1877: 'much to the joy of the Bacchanalians.'

83 1-3. Ego limis specto sic per flabellum clanculum.—TERENCE.

In 1877 this was a footnote.

85 8. neither, with all its realism,

1877: 'neither, with all the realism,'

85 20-21. He did not paint in raw realism.

1877: 'But he did not paint in raw realism.'

86 16-17. literary comedies passingly pleasant to read,

1877: 'literary comedies pleasant to read,'

87 1-3. he would be comic, as Panurge is comic, but only a Rabelais could set him moving with real animation.

1877: 'it should be comic, as Panurge is comic.'

87 5-6. If we have lost our youthful relish

1877: 'but if we have lost our youthful relish'

88 4-5. subjects of a special study in the poetically comic.

1877: 'subjects of a special study in the comic.'

88 10-11. Had Shakespeare lived

1877: 'Had he lived'

88 17-19. to the composition of romantic comedy. He certainly inspired that fine genius.

1877: 'to the composition of romantic comedy.'

93 8. The heroines of comedy are like

1877: 'No, the heroines of comedy are, like'

93 17-18. the gradual similarity of their impressions

1877: 'the similarity of their impressions'

95 2. and may be tracked into

1877: 'and may be traced into'

95 26-96 10-11. vigor of conception. Scene 5, Act 2, of the *Misanthrope*, [etc.] . . . tending to do disservice. Comedy justly treated.

1877: 'vigor of conception. But comedy justly treated,'

97 7 (see note, p. 211) Veux-tu toute ta vie

1877: 'Veux-tu toute la vie'

1897: 'Veux-tu toute la vie'

1898 (Edition de Luxe): 'Veux-tu toute ta vie'

100 5.—By evident preparation.

1877: 'Palpably, and by evident preparation.'

100 14-16. correct judgment, a correct ear, readiness of illustration

1877: 'correct judgment, a correct ear, and readiness of illustration'

102 16-17. and a type of the superior ladies who do not think,

1877: 'and a type of the ladies who do not think,'

102 18-19. it is a lower class, in the proportion

1877: 'it is an inferior class, in the proportion'

107 10-14. He satirized a certain Thais, and his Thais of the *Eunuchus* of Terence is neither professionally attractive nor repulsive; his picture of the two Andrians, Chrysis and her sister,

1877: 'he satirized a certain Thais, but his Thais of the *Eunuchus* of Terence is neither professionally attractive nor repulsive, and his picture of the two Andrians, Chrysidis and her sister,'

107 15-17. But the condition of honest women in his day did not permit of the freedom

1877: 'But the condition of honest women in his day did not conceive of the freedom'

107 24-108 5. has not, apparently, given us the best of the friend of Epicurus. *Μισούμενος*, the lover taken in horror, [etc.] . . . fragments indicate.

Of the six comedies

1877: 'has not apparently given us the best of the friend of Epicurus.'

'Of the six comedies'

108 20-21. for Menander's plays are counted by many scores,

1877: 'for Menander's plays are counted by hundreds.'

113 11-15. colère.

'And to have killed it too wrathfully'!  
Translating Molière is like humming an air one has heard performed by an accomplished violinist of the pure tones without flourish.

Orgon awakening

*The Works of George Meredith* (Edition de Luxe), Volume 32, Westminster, 1898, p. 41:

'colère.

'Orgon awakening'

114 4-8. Frate Timoteo has a fine Italian priestly pose:

DONNA. Credete voi, che 'l Turco passi questo anno in Italia?

FRATE TIMOTEO. Se voi non fate orazione, si.

In 1877 this passage constituted a footnote, its place in the text being taken by the sentence: 'Native Italian comedy did not advance beyond the state of satire, and the priests were the principal objects of it.'

117 21-22. with affected humility of 1877: 'with deep humility of'

119 17-18. But the first-born of common sense,

1877: 'But that first-born of common sense,'

122 14-16. And it really may be humorous, of a kind; yet it will miss the point

1877: 'And it really may be humorous, yet it will miss the point'

122 19-21. He had been the venerable Duc Pasquier, in his later years, up to the period of his death.

1877: 'He had been the venerable Duke Pasquier up to the period of his death.'

122 22-23. a man of profound egoism.

1877: 'a man of profound egotism.'

122 27-28. husband their strength for the sake of living on.

1877: 'husband their strength for the mere sake of living on.'

125 24-28. blown away before they were productive. Where would pessimist and optimist be? They would in any case have a diminished audience. Yet possibly the change of despots,

1877: 'blown away before they were productive. Yet possibly the change of despots,'

128 13-14. and dragged forth particular women, which he did not.

1877: 'and dragged forth women, which he did not.'

133 6-7. with asses' ears and the most beautiful sylvan haloes.

1877: 'with asses' ears and the most beautiful of sylvan haloes.'

134 10-11. spare him as little as you shun,

1877: 'spare him as little as you shun him,'

135 6-9. his humor. (I may have dreamed this, or had it suggested to me, for,

on referring to *Jonathan Wild*, I do not find it.) Apply the case

1877: 'his humor. Apply the case'

1898: 'his humor. Apply the case'

136 6-7. judged by philosophers, he is a comic figure by reason of this deficiency.

1877: 'judged by philosophers, apart from his grandeur as a poet, he is a comic figure, by reason of this attribute.'

137 23-24. under the gorgeous robes of ceremonial.

1877: 'under the gorgeous robes of ceremonials.'

141 20-21. drawn in an idle wariness of half-tension.

1877: 'drawn in a sort of idle wariness of half tension.'

147 1-2. The *Misanthrope* and the *Tartuffe* have no audible laughter,

1877: 'The *Misanthrope* and the *Tartuffe* have no audible laugh,'

153 8-10. The Muse of most of them is an *Aventurière*. She is clever, and a certain diversion exists in the united scheme for confounding her.

1877: 'The Muse of all of them is an *Aventurière*. She is clever, and a certain diversity

exists in the united scheme for confounding her.'

154 12-13. circle of a spy-glass.

I do not know that the fly in amber

1877: 'circle of a spy-glass.

'This is the comedy we are now importing. French farces are very funny and altogether preferable. The names of English writers for the stage who have ability to produce good original work will occur to you. In a review of our modern comedies, those of the late Mr. Robertson would deserve honorable mention. Mr. Tom Taylor can write excellent dialogue. Mr. Gilbert, if he could look with less contempt at the present condition of the public taste, would write well-considered comic plays of his own. Mr. Burnand has hints of comedy in his most extravagant pieces. I do not know that the fly in amber'

155 21-22. when the cottager's view of the feast shall cease to be

1877: 'when the cottager's view of a feast shall cease to be'

155 23-25. extend this capacity for delicate choosing in the direction of the matter arousing laughter.

1877: 'extend this capacity for delicate choosing to the matter arousing laughter.'



## NOTES



## NOTES

75 (title). In the edition of 1897 there is a reference from the title to Meredith's footnote: 'A lecture delivered at the London Institution, February 1st, 1877, and afterward published in *The New Quarterly Magazine* for April, 1877.' The London Institution for the Advancement of Literature and the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, now at Finsbury Circus, London, began its activities in the year 1806, the founders having met on May 23, 1805, with the object of promoting, through ample subscriptions, the study of British history, literature, and biography, and, secondarily, of the natural and mathematical sciences. A useful library had been formed several years before lectures were inaugurated in 1819. Among the early lecturers were: Spurzheim, on Phrenology, 1826; Faraday, 1827; Samuel Wesley, Vocal Music, 1828; James Montgomery, A Retrospect of the History of Literature, 1831; James Sheridan Knowles, Dramatic Poetry,

1832; Basil Montagu, *The Philosophy of Laughter*, 1832, 1833; Charles Cowden Clarke, *The Poetry of the Prose Writers of England*, and *The Ancient Ballads of England*, 1835. See *A Catalogue of the Library of the London Institution . . . preceded by an Historical and Bibliographical Account of the Establishment*. London, 1835. In 1911 the Library contained 100,000 volumes.

**75 9. the ordeal of the mantle.** See the ballad of *The Boy and the Mantle* in Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (ed. Wheatley, 1910, 3.3-12). This is No. 29 in Child, *The English and Scottish Ballads* (1.271 ff.). A boy visits the Court of King Arthur, bringing a mantle which will exactly fit a wife who has been faithful, and will betray one who has been unfaithful.

Stanzas 9-11 (Child):

Forth came dame Gueneuer,  
to the mantle shee her bed;  
The ladye shee was new-fangle,  
but yett shee was affrayd.

When shee had taken the mantle,  
shee stode as she had beene madd;  
It was from the top to the toe  
as sheeres had itt shread.

One while was itt gaule,  
another while was itt greene;  
Another while was itt wadded;  
ill itt did her beseeme.

Stanza 13:

Shee threw downe the mantle,  
that bright was of blee,  
Fast with a rudd redd  
to her chamber can shee flee.

Sir Kay's lady is equally or more unfortunate.

Stanza 19:

Then euey knight  
that was in the kings court  
Talked, laughed, and showed,  
full oft att that sport.

Cradock's lady is more successful: the garment merely wrinkles and draws up at her great toe. Whereupon she confesses that she had kissed Cradock before she married him, and then

The mantle stoode about her  
right as shee wold.

75 13-14. A society of cultivated men and women. In Meredith's opinion the conditions have been met at the Court of

Louis XIV of France, and, less fully, in Elizabethan England and in the age of Aristophanes. But his belief that Athenian women were present in the theatre when the comedies of Aristophanes were presented is open to question. See note on 78 27-28.

76 7-8. a startling exhibition of the dyer's hand. Compare Shakespeare, Sonnet 111.6-7:

And almost thence my nature is subdued  
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.

76 17-18. *C'est une étrange entreprise que celle de faire rire les honnêtes gens.* 'It is a strange undertaking, that, of making good people laugh.'—From the speech of Dorante in Scene 7 of Molière's one-act play, *La Critique de l'École des Femmes*.

76 24-25. men whom Rabelais would call 'agelasts.' Doubtless Meredith uses this word from Rabelais (c 1490-1553) because he has recently seen it in an article to which he shortly alludes (78 25), *Aristophane et Rabelais*, by the French lexicographer Littré. Compare the following passage (É. Littré, *Littérature et Histoire*, second edition, 1877, p. 173): 'Et, si l'on est Rabelais, on s'enveloppera des conceptions les plus fan-

*tasques, des railleries les plus fines, et des gauloiseries les plus grossières; car, s'il en veut aux papeclus et aux porteurs de rogatons, il en veut aussi aux agelastes, c'est-à-dire à ceux qui ne rient pas.*' ('And, if you are Rabelais, you will disguise yourself with the most fantastic conceptions, the most delicate raillery, the most vulgar of vernacular phrases; for, if he had an animus against the sycophants and news-mongers, he likewise had one against the *agclasts*—that is, against those who do not laugh.')

In the article cited, Littré quotes the first of the two passages in *Pantagruel* where the word occurs (Rabelais, *Oeuvres*, ed. Jannet, 1873, 4.10, 5.102). The first is (*Pantagruel*, Book 4, Dedicatory Epistle to Odet, Cardinal de Chastillon): '*Mais la calomnie de certains canibales, misanthropes, agelastes, avoit tant contre moy esté atroce et desraisonnée, qu'elle avoit vaincu ma patience.*' ('But the calumny of certain cannibals, misanthropes, non-laughers, had been so fierce and insensate against me that it had conquered my patience.')

The second is (Book 5, chapter 25): '*Il ne fut onques tant severe Caton, ne Crassus l'ayeul tant agelaste, ne Timon Athenien tant misanthrope, ne Heraclitus tant abhorrant du propre humain,*

*qui est rire, qui n'eust perdu contenance, voyant au son de la musique tant soudaine, en cinq cens diversitez si soudain se mouvoir, desmarcher, saulter, voltiger, gambader, tournoyer.*' ('Nor was Cato ever so severe, nor old Crassus such a non-laugher, nor Athenian Timon so misanthropic, nor Heraclitus so averse from the action peculiar to man, which is laughing, that they would not have lost their gravity at the sight, when, at the sound of the music so sudden, [the cavaliers, queens, and nymphs] so suddenly moved in five different directions, deployed, jumped, leaped up, skipped, twisted about.')

Rabelais forms *agelaste, agelastes* ('never-laughing'), after the Greek word ἀγέλαστος ('not laughing,' 'grave,' 'gloomy'), which occurs in the Homeric Hymn to Ceres (line 200) and in Aeschylus (*Agamemnon* 794).

76 27-28. **which, if you prick them, do not bleed.** Compare Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice* 3.1.67-68: 'If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh?'

77 6. **agelastic.** 'One that never laughs'; so Henry Cockeram, *The English Dictionarie, or a New Interpreter of Hard English Words* (1623), second edition, 1626.

77 6-7. **misogelastic, and the μισόγελως, the laughter-hating.** 'Misogelastic,' and similarly 'hypergelasts' (77 11-12), seem to be the coinage of Meredith, or at all events not to be derived from either Rabelais or Aristophanes. For μισόγελως see Aulus Gellius, ed. Hosius (1903), 15.20: *Alexander autem Aetolus hos de Euripide versus composuit:*

ὁ δ' Ἀναξαγόρου τρόφιμος χαιοῦ στριφνὸς μὲν  
 ἔμοιγε προσειπεῖν  
 καὶ μισόγελως καὶ τωθάζειν οὐδὲ παρ' οἶνον  
 μεμαθηκώς,  
 ἀλλ' ὅ τι γράψαι, τοῦτ' ἂν μέλιτος καὶ Σειρήνων  
 ἔτετεύχει.'

Compare Aulus Gellius, translated by W. Beloe (1795), 3.179: 'And Alexander Aetolus wrote these lines on Euripides:

Although thy pupil, Anaxagoras,  
 Doth for a grave and churlish peasant pass,  
 Let him but write, and quickly you shall  
 know  
 What honied strains from chanting sirens  
 flow.'

77 12-13. **the excessive laughers, . . . who are as clappers of a bell.** Shakespeare makes Don Pedro say of Benedick (*Much Ado* 3.2.8-13): 'From the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, he is all mirth. . . . He

hath a heart as sound as a bell, and his tongue is the clapper; for what his heart thinks his tongue speaks.'

77 17. *C'est n'estimer rien qu'estimer tout le monde.* Molière, *Misanthrope* 1.1.58.

77 22. *The Rape of the Lock.* See Edward Bently in the *Cambridge History of English Literature* (9.78): 'Young Lord Petre, by snipping a lock of Miss Fermor's hair, had caused ill-feeling between the families. Pope was invited by his friend Caryll to allay this by taking the theme for a playful poem. *The Rape of the Lock*, in its first form, was written within a fortnight, and published anonymously in Lintot's *Miscellany*, 1712. For the genre Pope was indebted to Boileau's *Lutrin*, as Boileau had been to Tassoni's *Secchia Rapita*; but in its blending of mock-heroic, satire, and delicate fancy, this exquisite specimen of filigree work, as Hazlitt called it, remains unmatched. Pope's hand was never happier than in adding to the original sketch his machinery of sylphs and gnomes.'

77 23. *Le Tartuffe.* Compare the title-page of the first edition: *Le Tartuffe ou l'Imposteur, comédie de J.-B. P. de Molière. Imprimé aux despens de l'auteur, et se vend à*

*Paris, chez Jean Ribou, au Palais, vis-à-vis de l'église de la Sainte-Chapelle, à l'image S. Louis.* 1669. (*The Tartuffe, or the Impostor.* A Comedy by J.-B. P. de Molière. Printed at the expense of the author, and to be had in Paris of Jean Ribou, at the Palace, opposite the church of the Sainte-Chapelle, by the image of Saint Louis. 1669.) See pp. 112-114.

78 8-9. **Comedy . . . one of the . . . Muses.** Strictly speaking, one could hardly term comedy a 'Muse.' In later times, the Greeks regarded Thalia as the Muse of comedy.

78 10. **in her origin.** The precise origin of ancient classical comedy is a matter of dispute. Aristotle observes that the invention of comedy was claimed by the Dorians of Megara, and likewise by the Dorians of Sicily; he adds that at all events comedy originated in the improvisations of the leaders in the Phallic song and dance, noting that the custom of the Phallic procession has been preserved up to his time in many cities. See his *Poetics*, chapters 3, 4 (*Aristotle On the Art of Poetry*, tr. Cooper, pp. 8, 9, 12). The Phallic procession was associated with the worship of Dionysus. In *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, London, 1914, F. M. Cornford argues from a study of Aris-

tophanes that the type arose from a marriage ritual, in which the risen god Dionysus typified the revival of vegetation when the winter is past (he being the fructifying principle), and which simulated 'the union of Heaven and Earth for the renewal of all life in Spring.'

**78 12. The light of Athene over the head of Achilles.** See Iliad 18.203-227; in the translation of Lang, Leaf, and Myers: 'But Achilles dear to Zeus arose, and around his strong shoulders Athene cast her tasseled aegis, and around his head the bright goddess set a crown of a golden cloud, and kindled therefrom a blazing flame. . . . Thus from the head of Achilles soared that blaze toward the heavens. And he went and stood beyond the wall beside the trench. . . . There stood he and shouted aloud, and afar off Pallas Athene uttered her voice, and spread terror unspeakable among the men of Troy. . . . And the charioteers were amazed when they saw the unwearying fire blaze fierce on the head of the great-hearted son of Peleus, for the bright-eyed goddess Athene made it blaze.'

**78 13. the birth of Greek tragedy.** Meredith would suggest that ancient tragedy began with the Iliad, and the notion agrees

with that of Aristotle in the *Poetics*, chapter 4 (see my translation, p. 12, and Index *s. v.* 'Iliad'). Yet according to Aristotle (*ibid.*, p. 12), tragedy proper, as distinguished from tragic tales in general, goes back to the improvisations of the poet-leaders in the dithyrambic chorus of satyrs. Consequently the origin of tragedy, like that of comedy, may be traced to the cult of Dionysus. In the current theory of its evolution, tragedy arose in the ritual of the dying god, which typified the death of the year, and of vegetation, in the winter season. (See William Ridgeway, *The Origin of Tragedy*, Cambridge, 1910.)

78 15. **Son of the Wine-jar . . . Dionysus.** See Aristophanes, *Frogs* 22:

ὄτ' ἐγὼ μὲν ὦν Διόνυσος, υἱὸς Σταμνίου.

(When I, who am Dionysus, son of—Wine-jar.) The comic effect arises from the substitution of 'Wine-jar,' when the expected phrase would be 'Son of Zeus,' or the like.

78 17-18. **Our second Charles . . . of like benignity.** Compare Addison's account of the dramatist D'Urfey, in the *Guardian* for May 28, 1713: 'I myself remember King Charles the Second leaning on Tom D'Urfey's shoulder more than once, and humming over a

song with him. It is certain that monarch was not a little supported by *Joy to Great Caesar*, which gave the Whigs such a blow as they were not able to recover that whole reign.'

78 18-19. **our Comedy of Manners.** See George H. Nettleton, *English Drama of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, New York, 1914, chapters 5-8, pp. 71-140; Alexandre Beljame, *Le Public et les Hommes de Lettres en Angleterre au Dix-huitième Siècle*, Paris, 1897, pp. 29-35, 48-56; *Cambridge History of English Literature* 8.131-201. And compare note on 110 25-26.

78 25. **An eminent Frenchman.** In 1877 Meredith was more specific, adding: 'M. Littré.' Maximilien Paul Émile Littré (1801-1881), translator of Hippocrates, author of the great *Dictionnaire de la Langue Française*, professor of history and geography, statesman, positivist and friend of Comte—and hence of special interest to Meredith. He was a man of extraordinary erudition and patience, and no mean literary critic. The work to which Meredith here alludes has been cited above (76 24-25); I translate the passage which he has in mind (p. 152): 'In the case of

Rabelais, we have to do with a book, held in the hand—and the reader is alone. . . . In the case of Aristophanes, on the contrary, we have to do with a theatre. An immense public is assembled; women are present; the gross words fall on this crowd, which laughs and does not blush. This cynicism of the public long since forced me to abate a too favorable opinion as to the level of Hellenic development. In the sphere of morals all things are interrelated; and there cannot have been much delicacy elsewhere when there was so little here. [*Tout se tient dans les choses morales; et il ne se peut qu'il y ait beaucoup de délicatesse dans le reste, quand il y en avait si peu en ceci.*] My observation is immediately confirmed in the sixteenth century, which took such delight in obscenity both at the theatre and in books, and which so readily united violence, perfidy, and cruelty.'

**78 27-28. men and women who sat through an Athenian comic play.** That women were present at these performances is maintained by A. E. Haigh, *The Attic Theatre*, Third Edition, revised and in part rewritten by A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, Oxford, 1907, chapter 7, pp. 324-329. It is disputed by B. B. Rogers in his edition of the

*Ecclesiazusae* of Aristophanes, Introduction, pp. xxix-xxxv. Rogers would seem to have the better of the argument.

79 5-6. **plain-speaking . . . festival of the god.** With this and subsequent remarks of Meredith on Attic comedy compare Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 490 ff. (tr. B. B. Rogers); Alfred and Maurice Croiset, *Histoire de la Littérature Grecque* 3.465-472; Maurice Croiset, *Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens*, tr. James Loeb.

79 13. **Wycherley's *Country Wife*.** William Wycherley (1640?-1716), for some years 'the central figure of Restoration comedy,' in *The Country Wife* (1673?) 'reveals at once perhaps the height of his dramatic power and the depth of his moral degradation. Borrowing from Molière's *L'École des Femmes* something of the general situation for his main plot, he transformed the real *ingénue* Agnès into Mrs. Pinchwife, whose nominal purity at the outset is due to lack of opportunity to sin. The progress of her corruption when she is transferred from the country to the fashionable world of London is detailed without sympathy either for the degraded wife or for the dishonored husband. Horner, who prosecutes

his vices through an assumption perhaps the most atrocious in all Restoration comedy, is Wycherley's real hero. Ingenuity is prostituted in the service of animal license. . . . And when, at the end of the play, Pinchwife remains unconscious of the ruin wrought, and the curtain falls to a mocking dance of cuckolds, one sees the gulf between even the lowest decadence of Elizabethan drama and what the Restoration age termed "comedy." (Nettleton, *English Drama of the Restoration*, pp. 78-80.)

79 18-21. **anti-papists . . . Smithfield . . . lowing herds.** Smithfield (otherwise 'Smoothfield'), an historic cattle-market in London, mentioned in 1150, has since 1868 been the seat of the Central Meat Market, London, covering more than three acres. In the twelfth century, Smoothfield, lying outside the city walls, served as an open playground and promenade. The spot is associated with public executions, and in particular with the cruel persecutions of the Protestants in the reign of Queen Mary the Catholic. Here on October 16, 1555, Ridley and Latimer, and on March 21, 1556, Cranmer, were burnt at the stake. About 300 are said to have been burnt in this persecution.

80 7. as Pascal says. Meredith misquotes him: '*Comme un point fixe fait remarquer l'emportement des autres.*' I have restored the words of Pascal in the text, and here subjoin the passage with its context (Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Brunschwig, 1904, 2.291-292—Brunschwig, No. 382; Havet, section 6, No. 24): '*Quand tout se remue également, rien ne se remue en apparence, comme en un vaisseau. Quand tous vont vers le débordement, nul n'y semble aller; celui qui s'arrête fait remarquer l'emportement des autres, comme un point fixe.*' ('When everything is equally in motion, apparently nothing moves—as on ship-board. When all proceed toward disorder, no one seems to be going that way; he who pauses makes evident the excess of all the rest, as a fixed point.')

80 11. **Hoyden.** See the comedy of Sir John [Vanbrugh,] architect and playwright, [*The Relapse, or Virtue in Danger* (1696)—pub. 1697) 4.1, where Miss Hoyden says to young Fashion: 'Sir, I never disobey my father in anything but eating of green gooseberries.' *The Relapse* was [adapted, and expurgated, by Richard Brinsley Sheridan in *A Trip to Scarborough* (1777).]

80 20. **Dulness.** To Meredith, this creature of the imagination is male. Yet compare Pope, *Dunciad* 1.9-16:

In eldest time, ere mortals writ or read,  
 Ere Pallas issued from the Thund'rer's head,  
 Dulness o'er all possessed her ancient right,  
 Daughter of Chaos and eternal Night;  
 Fate in their dotage this fair idiot gave,  
 Gross as her sire, and as her mother grave,  
 Laborious, heavy, busy, bold, and blind,  
 She ruled, in native Anarchy, the mind.  
 Still her old Empire to restore she tries,  
 For, born a Goddess, Dulness never dies.

And see the note to *Dunciad* 1.12, Pope and Warburton, 1743: 'I wonder the learned Scriblerus has omitted to advertise the reader, at the opening of this poem, that Dulness here is not to be taken contractedly for mere stupidity, but in the enlarged sense of the word, for all slowness of apprehension, shortness of sight, or imperfect sense of things.'

80 20-21. **dogs on the Nile-banks.** The story goes back to Aelian (*Variae Historiae* 1.4): 'And that habit of the Egyptian dog is clever; for they do not carelessly and freely take one continuous drink from the river—bending over and lapping as much as

they crave,—since they suspect the animals in it. Instead, they run along the bank, again and again furtively drinking what little they can snatch. And thus, satisfying themselves by degrees, they manage to escape destruction, and likewise quench their thirst.' See also Phaedrus, *Fables* 1.25, and Pliny, *Natural History* 8.61; and compare John Marston, *The Tragedy of Sophonisba* 3.1. 1.201–203:

SYPHAX. I'll use this Zanthia,  
And trust her as our dogs drink dangerous Nile  
(Only for thirst), that fly the crocodile.

81 I. Mr. Aimwell. Aimwell, a character in *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1707) of George Farquhar, in the last (fifth) scene of the last act learns that, his elder brother being just dead, he is now Lord Aimwell, and may openly wed Dorinda, the daughter of Lady Bountiful.

81 10–11. follow up the shot . . . by hurling the pistol after it. This sounds like the humor of *Punch*; two of the editors of *Punch*, Taylor and Burnand, were among Meredith's friends (see note on 154 12, and *The Letters of George Meredith*, 1912, Index) Compare Boswell's *Johnson* (Oxford Edition 1.398; cf. 2.537): 'There is no arguing with Johnson; for when his pistol misses fire, he

knocks you down with the butt end of it.' Boswell says the conceit is adapted from one of Cibber's comedies, but Birkbeck Hill in his edition of Boswell does not identify the source.

81 26-27. **the cavalier in the Mall.** The Mall, a walk bordered by trees, in St. James' Park, London, was a fashionable promenade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—originally an alley where the game of mall, involving the use of ball and mallet, was played. Compare *The Mall, or the Modish Lovers* (1664), by J. D. (John Dryden?) in the *Works of John Dryden*, ed. Scott-Saintsbury, 8 (1884). 507; in act 4, sc. 2, 'Enter Ccourtwell [a brisk gallant, lately arrived from Spain] and Perigreen from fighting, Perigreen wounded: COURT. Rash boy! to force me to this rudeness; for 'twas not manhood in me thus to hurt thee; alas, thou cou'dst not fight; thou hadst no skill to hold thy weapon for thy own advantage.' See also Henry Fielding, *Love in Several Masques* (1727) 4.4.

82 11-12. **Laughter holding both his sides.** From Milton, *L'Allegro* 32.

82 18. **a sagacious essayist.** I have not identified the writer to whom Meredith al-

ludes. Leigh Hunt, referring to Wycherley's marriage, says (*Dramatic Works of Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar*, 1866, p. xiii): 'The result of this dramatic exordium was the usual termination of comedy—matrimony; and (as Dennis might have said) something not so pleasant afterward, at the fall of the curtain.' See John Dennis, *Some Remarkable Passages of the Life of Mr. Wycherley*, in *A New Collection of Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*, London, 1725.

83 1. *Ego limis*. From the speech of Chaerea in Terence, *Eunuchus* 601–602:

interea somnus virginem opprimit. ego limis  
specto sic per flabellum clanculum.

('Meanwhile sleep overcomes the maiden. I furtively take a squint at her, thus, through the fan.')

83 10–12. *Elia . . . bewails the extinction*. See Charles Lamb, *On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century* (*The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. Lucas, 2.141 ff.), an essay first published in the *London Magazine*, April, 1822. Meredith may have seen it in Leigh Hunt's collection of the dramatic works of Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar ('a new edition,' London, 1866),

which contains the Restoration comedies with which Meredith seems to be most familiar.

83 14. **Cleopatra's Nile-barge.** See Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* 2.2.191-223 (a passage based upon North's translation, from the French of Amyot, of *The Life of Marcus Antonius* by Plutarch).

83 18-19. '**fictional, half-believed personages.**' Meredith quotes from the essay just mentioned (Lamb, *Works*, ed. Lucas, 2.142).

83 25. **the Lurewells and the Plyants.** Referring to the character of Lady Lurewell in Farquhar's *The Constant Couple, or a Trip to the Jubilee* (1699), and its sequel, *Sir Harry Wildair* (1701), and to that of Sir Paul Plyant, 'an uxorious, foolish old knight,' in Congreve's *The Double-Dealer* (1693).

84 1-3. **Pinchwives, Fondlewifes, Miss Prue, Peggy, Hoyden.** Pinchwife is the husband in Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (see note on 79 13), who thinks it necessary to watch his wife, Margery Pinchwife, very closely after introducing her to town society; Fondlewife, an uxorious banker in Congreve's *The Old Bachelor* (1693); Miss Prue, 'Daughter to Foresight by a former wife, a

silly, awkward country girl,' in Congreve's *Love for Love* (1695); Peg, 'Maid to Lady Wishfort,' in Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700); for Hoyden, see note on 80 11.

84 3. **Millamant.** See Nettleton, *English Drama of the Restoration*, pp. 130-131: 'Yet if, in Dryden's words, *The Way of the World* "had but moderate success, though it deserves much better," the judgment of posterity has gone far to correct the error. Millamant, Congreve's most brilliant character creation, has commanded Hazlitt's eulogy [*Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, Lecture 4] and George Meredith's tribute to the "perfect portrait of a coquette" [see 98 6-7]. They had been anticipated, however, by an earlier critic, her lover Mirabell: "I like her with all her faults; nay, like her for her faults. Her follies are so natural, or so artful, that they become her; and those affectations which in another woman would be odious, serve but to make her more agreeable" (1.2). She enters with a flash, and goes off in a blaze of wit. Even amid the ceaseless pyrotechnics of Congreve her departure seems like the extinction of a brilliant rocket. Yet Millamant is an artificial creation—beautiful and fragile as Dresden china. She has the

wit, but not the humanity, of Shakespeare's Beatrice.'

84 5-6. **fine lady's wardrobe . . . abandoned Abigail.** The name Abigail, signifying a waiting-woman (probably from 1 Samuel 25), first came into general use in England through *The Scornful Lady* (1609?) of Beaumont and Fletcher. Meredith refers to the custom of 'fine ladies' who give their cast-off garments to their maids. Compare Smollett, *Humphrey Clinker* (1771; ed. Hensley, 1899, 1.75): 'An antiquated Abigail, dressed in her lady's cast clothes.'

84 9. **Punch and Judy.** See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, eleventh edition, 22.648-649 (article on *Punch* by R. Mortimer Wheeler), and Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* 2.159-160.

84 16-17. **the smell of blood in our nursery-songs.** Compare the story of Jack the Giant-Killer, where the giant roars:

Fi, fee, fo, fum!

I smell the blood of an English man!

Be he alive, or be he dead,

I'll grind his bones to make me bread!

84 23-25. **realism . . . bettering state.** 'Realism in the writing is carried to such a

pitch in *The Old Bachelor* that husband and wife use imbecile connubial epithets to one another.' (Meredith's footnote.) See Congreve, *The Old Bachelor* 4.1 (end).

84 25-27. **The same of an immoral may be said of realistic exhibitions of a vulgar society.** I have inserted an 'as' in brackets after 'said'; but the imperfect construction may be improved in such a way as to convey either of two meanings: The same may be said of realistic exhibitions of an immoral society as may be said of realistic exhibitions of a vulgar one. Or: What is urged against realistic exhibitions of an immoral society applies to realistic exhibitions of a vulgar one.—I incline to the latter interpretation.

85 1. **ce qui remue . . . ce qui émeut.** Did Meredith take this from Sainte-Beuve, whom he has read with some diligence, or from Joubert, whom Sainte-Beuve quotes? See Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du Lundi* (1852) 1.136: '*M. Joubert adore l'enthousiasme, mais il le distingue de l'explosion, et même de la verve, qui n'est que de seconde qualité dans l'inspiration, et qui remue, tandis que l'autre émeut.*' ('M. Joubert worships enthusiasm,

but he distinguishes it from vehemence, and even from verve, which is a quality of but second importance in inspiration, and which *agitates* us, whereas the other *moves* us.') Compare *Pensées de J. Joubert*, 1909, p. 303 (No. 6): '*L'enthousiasme est toujours calme, toujours lent, et rest intime. L'explosion n'est point l'enthousiasme, et n'est point causée par lui: elle vient d'un état plus violent. Il ne faut pas non plus confondre l'enthousiasme avec la verve: elle remue, et il émeut; elle est, après lui, ce qu'il y a de meilleur pour l'inspiration. Boileau, Horace, Aristophane, eurent de la verve; La Fontaine, Ménandre, et Virgile, le plus doux et le plus exquis enthousiasme qui fût jamais.*' ('Enthusiasm is ever calm, ever leisurely, and remains inward. Vehemence is not enthusiasm, and does not result therefrom; it proceeds from a more violent state. Further, we must not confuse enthusiasm with verve; this last *agitates* us, whereas that sets us in motion; after enthusiasm, it is verve that offers what is best for inspiration. Boileau, Horace, Aristophanes, had verve; La Fontaine, Menander, and Virgil, the most delicate and exquisite enthusiasm that ever existed.')

85 4. *remuage*. The condition of *agitating* us.

85 15. as **John Stuart Mill** pointed out. I have found no passage in Mill which Meredith directly echoes, though Mill frequently contrasts French and English manners and literature, emphasizing the social qualities of the French, and the direct relation between their knowledge of life and their writings. See, for example, Mill's essays on Armand Carrel and Alfred de Vigny (in *Dissertations and Discussions*, New York, 1882, I. 259, 261, 328, 333, etc.).

85 17-18. the **Horatian precept**. See Horace, *Ars Poetica* 156-157:

aetatis cuiusque notandi sunt tibi mores,  
 mobilibusque decor naturis dandus et annis.

(‘You must mark the characteristics of each several period of life, and must give the fitting traits to the changing dispositions and shifting years.’) Meredith extends the application to different ages in history. But compare the succeeding lines in Horace; Shakespeare, *As You Like It* 2.7.136-166; and Cornelia G. Harcum, *The Ages of Man*, in the *Classical Weekly* 7.114-118 (Feb. 7, 1914).

85 25. **Duc de Montausier**. ‘Tallemant des Réaux, in his rough portrait of the Duke,

shows the foundation of the character of Alceste.' (Meredith's footnote.) The reference is to Charles de Sainte-Maure (1610-1690), at first Baron de Salles, then Marquis, and finally Duc de Montausier. Meredith probably saw the 'portrait' as quoted by Sainte-Beuve in *Tallemant et Bussy in Causeries du Lundi* (1857) 13.187; see Tallemant des Réaux (1619-1692), *Les Historiettes*, ed. Monmerqué and Paris, 1864, 2.528: '*En effect, c'est un homme tout d'une piece; Mme de Rambouillet dit qu'il est fou à force d'estre sage. Jamais il n'y en eut un qui eust plus de besoin de sacrifier aux Graces. Il erie, il est rude, il rompt en visiere, et s'il gronde quelqu'un, il luy remet devant les yeux toutes les iniquitez passées. Jamais homme n'a tant servy à me guerir de l'humeur de disputer.*' ('In fact, the man is all of a piece. Madame de Rambouillet says that he is mad by virtue of his wisdom. Never was there any one who had greater need of sacrificing to the Graces. He shouts, he is blunt, he insults you to your face, and, when he chides, he openly revives all your past misdeeds. Never man served so well to cure me of the humor of arguing.')

85 26. **the Misanthrope.** Alceste, in Molière's comedy, *Le Misanthrope* (1666).

85 26-27. according to Saint-Simon, the Abbé Roquette. See *Mémoires de Saint-Simon (Les Grands Écrivains de la France)*, Paris, 1879-1916, 14.293-294: '*Il mourut alors [23 Feb., 1707] un vieux évêque qui, toute sa vie, n'avoit rien oublié pour faire fortune et être un personnage; c'étoit Roquette, homme de fort peu, qui avoit attrapé l'évêché d'Autun, et qui, à la fin, ne pouvant mieux, gouvernoit les états de Bourgogne à force de souplesses et de manège autour de Monsieur le Prince. Il avoit été de toutes les couleurs: à Mme de Longueville, à M. le Prince de Conti son frère, au cardinal Mazarin; surtout abandonné aux jésuites; tout sucre et tout miel, lié aux femmes importantes de ces temps-là, et entrant dans toutes les intrigues; toutefois grand béat. C'est sur lui que Molière prit son Tartuffe, et personne ne s'y méprit.*' ('There died then [Feb. 23, 1707] an old bishop who all his life never forgot how to make a success and be a great figure; it was Roquette, a man of very little consequence, who had got his hand on the bishopric of Autun, and who in the end, for want of anything better, governed the dominions of Bourgogne by means of wiles and intrigue in the circle of Monsieur the Prince. He had served under all the colors—under Madame de

Longueville, under Monsieur the Prince de Conti, under Cardinal Mazarin; above all, given over to the Jesuits; all sugar, all honey, intimate with the important women of those times, and entering into all the intrigues; nevertheless a blissful saint. He it was whom Molière took as model for his *Tartuffe*, nor did any one fail to understand this.' I translate the footnote of A. de Boislisle (*ibid.* 14.294-295): 'As to the "original" of *Tartuffe*, one may consult, in addition to the account in the edition [of Molière] in *Les Grands Écrivains* 4.299 ff., an article by M. Brunetière in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* for Aug. 1, 1890, pp. 664-675. It is through the assertions of Daniel de Cosnac that the Abbé de Choisy, and subsequently Saint-Simon, have seen in *Tartuffe* the portrait of M. de Roquette. A paper in blue portfolio No. 15275, in Vol. 581 of the Cabinet of Titles, describes him as 'chief of those false devotees known under the name of Tartuffes; and d'Holait (note in portfolio No. 8138 of the foundation Chérin) asserts that he was so called because of his relations with Mlle. de Guise, of whose affairs he took charge. M. H. Pignot, in his book (1876) already cited [*Un Évêque Réformateur sous Louis XIV, Gabriel de Roquette*], has

discussed, and finally rejected, this resemblance.'

**86 16. poetic plays.** Meredith doubtless means plays containing an abundance of the lyrical element, and perhaps also of the pastoral element, such as Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, *The Sad Shepherd* of Ben Jonson, and *The Faithful Shepherdess* of John Fletcher. To Aristotle, tragedy is poetry *par excellence*.

**86 20-21. the Greek New Comedy.** See Legrand, *The New Greek Comedy*, tr. Loeb, London, 1917; Bond, *Early Plays from the Italian*, Oxford, 1911.

**86 26. Fletcher.** John Fletcher (1579-1625), for whom see G. C. Macaulay in the *Cambridge History of English Literature* 6.121-159 (chapter 5, on Beaumont and Fletcher). Macaulay says (p. 152): '*The Chances* and *The Wild-Goose Chase* stand in the first rank among Fletcher's comedies, and in them we see, in full perfection, that lively and brilliant style of dialogue which gained him the reputation of understanding the conversation of gentlemen better than any other dramatist of his time.'

**86 26. Justice Greedy.** Greedy, 'a hungry justice of peace,' is a character in

*A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (1625), by Philip Massinger (1583-1640). For Massinger see Emil Koepfel in *Camb. Hist. Eng. Lit.* 6.160-187 (chapter 6).

86 27-28. 'with good capon lined.' See Shakespeare, *As You Like It* 2.7.153-154:

And then the justice,  
In fair round belly with good capon lined,

Meredith having misquoted ('fat capon') I have restored the proper reading.

87 1. **Panurge.** The jester of Pantagruel in the story of this name by Rabelais. Panurge is an arrant rogue, devoid of all moral qualities, but possessed of great ability; he delights in practical jokes. His many adventures include his journey in quest of a wife, when he must consult the oracle of the Holy Bottle.

87 11. **Bobadill.** See Ben Jonson, *Every Man in his Humor* (1598) 1.4:

BOBADILL. By the foot of Pharaoh, and 't were my case now, I should send him a chartel presently.

87 13. **The comic of Jonson.** Probably the best literary estimate of Ben Jonson (1573-1637) is that in the exhaustive

monograph of Maurice Castelain, *Ben Jonson, l'Homme et l'Oeuvre*, 1907.

87 24-25. **creatures of the woods and wilds.** Meredith betrays the same preference for the romantic comedy of Shakespeare as Milton (*L'Allegro* 133-134):

Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,  
Warble his native wood-notes wild.

87 28. **Jaques.** A lord attending upon the banished Duke in *As You Like It*.

87 28. **Falstaff.** See 1 and 2 *King Henry the Fourth*, *King Henry the Fifth* 2.3, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

88 1. **Malvolio.** See *Twelfth-Night*.

88 1. **Sir Hugh Evans.** See *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

88 2. **Fluellen.** See *King Henry the Fifth*.

88 2-3. **Benedick and Beatrice, Dogberry.** See *Much Ado about Nothing*.

88 6. **His comedy of incredible imbroglio.** Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* may have been indebted to an earlier Elizabethan play, the *Historie of Error*, now lost, but is ultimately founded in the main upon the

*Menaechmi*, and in part upon the *Amphitruo*, of Plautus.

88 14-19. **Euripides . . . inspired that fine genius.** Does Meredith mean, inspired the genius of the New Comedy as a whole, or the genius of 'romantic comedy,' or inspired Menander? Probably the last. Compare Quintilian, *Education of an Orator*, tr. Watson, 10.1.69: 'Menander, as he himself often testifies, admired Euripides greatly, and even imitated him, though in a different department of the drama; and Menander alone, in my judgment, would, if diligently read, suffice to generate all those qualities in the student of oratory for which I am an advocate; so exactly does he represent all the phases of human life; such is his fertility of invention, and easy grace of expression; and so readily does he adapt himself to all circumstances, persons, and feelings.' But the tragedies of Euripides furnished only one of the influences that produced the New Comedy. See Legrand, *The New Greek Comedy*, chapter 5 (pp. 206-272), and Index, *s. v.* 'Aristophanes,' 'Euripides,' 'Theophrastus,' etc.

88 28. **rose-pink ladies.** In 1869 Meredith said of the 'lipping and voweled purity'

of Tennyson in the *Idylls of the King* (*Letters of George Meredith*, 1912, 1.198): 'It's fashionable; it pleases the rose-pink ladies; it sells.' Compare note on 112 2.

89 25. as the Prince de Condé explained. The expression used by Meredith is not found in the explanation to the King commonly attributed to the great Condé, but is possibly taken from Voltaire, who quotes from an unidentified source (*Oeuvres Complètes de Voltaire*, Paris, 1879, etc., 23.117): '*Pendant qu'on supprimait cet ouvrage [Le Tartuffe], qui était l'éloge de la vertu et la satire de la seule hypocrisie, on permit qu'on jouât sur le théâtre italien Scaramouche Ermite, pièce très-froide, si elle n'eût été licensieuse, dans laquelle un ermite vêtu en moine monte la nuit par une échelle à la fenêtre d'une femme mariée, et reparaît de temps en temps en disant: "Questo è per mortificar la carne." On sait sur cela le mot du grand Condé: "Les comédiens italiens n'ont offensé que Dieu, mais les français ont offensé les dévots."*' ('We know the saying on this head of the great Condé: "The Italian comedians have merely offended God, but the French have offended the bigots."') According to the edition of Voltaire just cited, in 1739 he alluded to the 'saying' without quot-

ing it; the quotation was added in 1764. The better-known 'saying' appears at the close of Molière's *Préface* to the first edition (1669) of *Tartuffe*; see *Oeuvres de Molière (Les Grands Écrivains de la France)*, 1873, etc., 4.383-384:

*'Finissons par un mot d'un grand prince sur la comédie du Tartuffe.*

*'Huit jours après qu'elle eut été défendue, on représenta devant la cour une pièce intitulée Scaramouche Ermite; et le Roi, en sortant, dit au grand prince que je veux dire: "Je voudrais bien savoir pourquoi les gens qui se scandalisent si fort de la comédie de Molière ne disent mot de celle de Scaramouche." A quoi le Prince répondit: "La raison de cela, c'est que la comédie de Scaramouche joue la Ciel et la religion, dont ces Messieurs-là ne se soucient point; mais celle de Molière les joue eux-mêmes: c'est ce qu'ils ne peuvent souffrir."*

(Let us close with a saying of a great prince on the comedy of *Tartuffe*.)

'Eight days after the play had been forbidden, there was represented before the Court a piece entitled *Scaramouche the Hermit*; and when the King was leaving, he said to the prince I refer to: "I should very much like to know why the people who are so greatly scandalized by the comedy of Molière have

not a word to say about that of *Scaramouche*." To which the Prince replied: "The reason is, the comedy of *Scaramouche* ridicules Heaven and religion, for which those gentlemen feel no concern, but that of Molière ridicules those gentlemen themselves—and that is what they cannot endure."')

90 1-2. **the *Précieuses***. Molière's comedy, in one act, *Les Précieuses Ridicules* (1659) preceded *Les Femmes Savantes* (see 90 5) by thirteen years.

90 14-15. **the *Misanthrope*** . . . frigidly received. A traditional error, found in Grimarest (1705); see *La Vie de Mr de Molière, par J.-L. le Gallois, Sieur de Grimarest, Réimpression de l'édition originale . . .* ed. Malassis, Paris, 1877, pp. 98-99: 'Il [Molière] ne fut pas plustost rentré dans son cabinet qu'il travailla au Médecin malgré lui, pour soutenir le Misanthrope, dont le seconde représentation fut encore plus foible que la première—ce qui l'obligea de se dépêcher de fabriquer son fagotier. . . . La troisième représentation du Misanthrope fut encore moins heureuse que les précédentes. On n'aimoit point tout ce sérieux qui est répandu dans cette pièce. D'ailleurs le Marquis étoit la copie de plusieurs originaux

*de conséquence, qui décrioient l'ouvrage de toute leur force. "Je n'ai pourtant pu faire mieux, et seurement je ne ferai pas mieux," disoit Molière à tout le monde.* ('Molière had no sooner returned to his study than he set to work on the *Médecin Malgré Lui* so as to bolster up the *Misanthrope*, the second representation of which was still less effective than the first—which made him hasten to forge his faggoteer [= Sganarelle]. . . . The third representation of the *Misanthrope* was even less successful than the two preceding. The element of seriousness which pervades the piece was not at all well-liked. Moreover, the Marquis was copied from various personages of consequence, who decried the work with all their might. "However, I could not do better, and assuredly I never shall do better," said Molière to every one.') But compare the actual receipts at the first performances (*Le Misanthrope*, ed. Livet, 1883, pp. ii, iii): "Friday, June 4 [1666], first performance of the *Misanthrope*, a new play by M. de Molière, 1447 liv., 10 s.; divided, 92 livres." From the time his troupe was established at Paris, that is, since October 24, 1658, only thirteen times had Molière's receipts reached a higher figure. . . . The *Misanthrope*, then, from the outset promised suc-

cess; on Sunday, June 6, the success was confirmed, the receipts rising to 1617 *liv.*, 10 *s.*, a figure that up to this time had been exceeded for the troupe but eight times. Furthermore, they continued to give this play nineteen times more up to August 1.'

92 24-25. *Millamant* . . . *Mirabell*.  
See note on 84 3.

93 6-7. *The Agnès of the École des Femmes should be a lesson.* Agnès is a young girl reared by the middle-aged Arnolphe in such a way as to make her extremely unsophisticated and apparently docile. Her guardian (who was training her to be his own wife) is therefore astounded when she insists upon marrying a youth she has secretly met during his absence from town. Her own explanation of her change of front is (5.4):

Et dans l'âge où je suis,  
Je ne veux plus passer pour sotté, si je puis.

94 12-13. *Plain Dealer*, a coarse prose adaptation of the *Misanthrope*. See 111 27-28, and note on 95 27-96 2.

94 22-23. *Goldsmith . . . comic in narrative.* Meredith evidently prefers *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) to *She Stoops to*

*Conquer*, produced at Covent Garden (1773) before an enthusiastic audience. The sub-title of Meredith's novel *The Egoist* is: *A Comedy in Narrative*.

94 24. **Fielding.** Henry Fielding (1707–1754) produced several comedies, burlesques, and farces between 1728 and 1737, when the Licensing Act was passed. He then turned to novels; it is on *Joseph Andrews*, *Jonathan Wild*, and *Tom Jones* that his reputation chiefly rests. Yet his own opinion (see Austin Dobson in the *Encyc. Brit.*) was that 'he left off writing for the stage when he ought to have begun.'

95 5. **comedy as a jade.** 'See *Tom Jones*, Book 8, chapter 1, for Fielding's opinion of our comedy. But he puts it simply; not as an exercise in the quasi-philosophical bathetic.' (Meredith's footnote.) Fielding writes: 'Our modern authors of comedy have fallen almost universally into the error here hinted at; their heroes generally are notorious rogues, and their heroines abandoned jades, during the first four acts; but in the fifth, the former become very worthy gentlemen, and the latter women of virtue and discretion; nor is the writer often so kind as to give him-

self the least trouble to reconcile or account for this monstrous change and incongruity. . . . As a genius of the highest rank observes in his fifth chapter of the *Bathos*: "The great art of all poetry is to mix truth with fiction, in order to join the credible with the surprising."'

95 27-96 2. Scene 5, Act 2, of the *Misanthrope* . . . Wycherley, Congreve, and Sheridan. See Wycherley, *Plain Dealer* 2.1; Congreve (ed. Ewald, 1887), *Way of the World* 1.1-2, 2.2; Sheridan, *School for Scandal* 1.1, 2.2. But our identification of scenes can be only approximate, since the arrangement of them (for example, in Congreve) differs in different editions, and it is impossible to say what editions Meredith consulted. On the influence of Molière see Ferchlandt, *Molière's Misanthrop und seine Englischen Nachahmungen*, Halle a. S., 1907; Gillet, *Molière en Angleterre, 1660-1670, Memoires of the Académie Royale de Belgique*, second series, Vol. 9, Brussels, 1913; Miles, *The Influence of Molière on Restoration Comedy*, New York, 1910.

96 19. *Tartuffe*. See pp. 112 ff., and note on 85 26-27.

**96 20. Harpagon.** The wretched hero of Molière's *L'Avare* (1667), a miser in whom, as in the Euclio of the *Aulularia* of Plautus, avarice has overcome all better impulses. Compare what J. Wight Duff says of Euclio (*A Literary History of Rome*, p. 177): 'The two other great portraits of a miser are French; for neither Ben Jonson's Volpone nor Shakespeare's Shylock loved gold after the typical manner of *L'Avare*. Molière's Harpagon and Balzac's Grandet instantly cross the mind as one reads.'

**96 25-27. the lesson Chrysale reads to Philaminte and Bélise.** See Molière, *Les Femmes Savantes* 2.7. Chrysale is an honest tradesman of strong common sense; Philaminte, his wife, has discharged an excellent cook for faulty grammar; Bélise, his sister, detects subtle love-making in the speeches of all her acquaintance.

**97 6-7. inspires a pun with meaning and interest.** *Femmes Savantes*:

BÉLISE. Veux-tu toute ta vie offenser la  
grammaire?

MARTINE. Qui parle d'offenser grand'mère  
ni grand père?

The pun is delivered in all sincerity, from

the mouth of a rustic.' (Meredith's footnote.) See *Les Femmes Savantes* 2.6.64-65.

97 12-13. **life . . . likened to the comedy of Molière.** Compare the utterance attributed to the learned grammarian Aristophanes of Byzantium (*Syrianus in Hermogenem*, ed. Rabe, 1892, 2.23 [134.4]: 'O Menander, and thou, human life, which of you copied the other?') Coleridge renders it (*Works*, ed. Shedd, 4.26): 'O Life and Menander, which of you two imitated the other?'

97 26-27. *The Double-Dealer*. 'Maskwell seems to have been carved on the model of Iago, as by the hand of an enterprising urchin. He apostrophizes his "invention" repeatedly: "Thanks, my Invention." He hits on an invention, to say: "Was it my Brain or Providence?—no matter which." It is no matter which, but it was not his brain.' (Meredith's footnote.) See Congreve (ed. Ewald), *Double-Dealer* 5.4; 3.1.

98 6-7. **where Valentine feigns madness, or retorts on his father.** See Congreve, *Love for Love* 4.2; 2.1.

98 9. **keeps them 'from air.'** See *Love for Love* 2.2, where Mrs. Frail says to Mrs. Foresight: 'Ours are but slight flesh wounds,

and if we keep 'em from air, not at all dangerous.'

99 6-7. Landor. *'Imaginary Conversations, Alfieri and the Jew Salomon.'* (Meredith's footnote.) See Landor's *Imaginary Conversations*, ed. Forster, *Alfieri and Salomon the Florentine Jew* (3.277).

99 11-12. 'few have been wittier.' As Meredith quotes: "Few men have been wittier." I have rectified the quotation.

99 21. *On voit . . . de bons mots.* ('One observes that he labors to utter smart sayings.') A line in the satirical character-sketch by Célimène of Damis, uncle of the young Cléon (Molière, *Misanthrope* 2.5.78).

99 24-25. an example . . . for eulogy. The passage is found in Congreve (ed. Ewald), *The Way of the World* 1.2.

99 27. my brother . . . Meredith reads: 'my brother, etc., etc. '; he has purposely omitted five lines.

100 2. upon honor. Meredith reads: 'upon my honor.'

100 18-19. He hits the mean of a fine style and a natural in dialogue. Compare Aristotle, *Poetics*, chapter 22 (Cooper, *Aris-*

*tolle On the Art of Poetry*, pp. 73-74): 'In respect to diction, the ideal for the poet is to be clear without being mean. The clearest diction is that which is made up of current terms [the ordinary words for things]. But a style so composed is mean. . . . But the language attains majesty and distinction when the poet makes use of terms that are less familiar: rare words, metaphors, lengthened forms—everything that deviates from the ordinary usage. Yet if one composes in a diction of such terms alone, the result will be either a riddle or a jargon. . . . The poet, then, should employ a certain admixture of these expressions that deviate from the ordinary; for distinction and elevation of style will result from the use of such means as the strange word, the metaphor, the ornamental word [? the nobler, when there are synonyms], and the rest; and clearness will arise from such part of the language as is in common use.'

101 3. **boudoir billingsgate.** Billingsgate, the proper name (doubtless from a personal name *Billing*) of one of the gates of London, was carried over to the fish-market there established. The seventeenth-century references to the 'rhetoric' or abusive language of this market are frequent; accordingly, foul

language, as of a fishwife, is itself called 'billingsgate' [*New English Dictionary*]. See then, for example, the tirade of Lady Wishfort against Foible, her woman (Congreve, *The Way of the World* 5.1): 'Out of my house, out of my house, thou viper! thou serpent, that I have fostered! thou bosom traitress, that I raised from nothing!—Begone! begone! begone!—go! go!—That I took from washing of old gauze and weaving of dead hair, with a bleak blue nose over a chafing-dish of starved embers, and dining behind a traverse rag, in a shop no bigger than a birdeage!—Go, go! starve again, do, do!'

101 19. **dwindle into a wife.** See Congreve, *The Way of the World* 4.1: 'These articles subscribed, if I continue to endure you a little longer, I may by degrees dwindle into a wife.'

101 22-29. **Here she comes . . . mind and mansion.** *The Way of the World* 2.2.

102 2-3. **encouraged . . . by Mrs. Fainall.** *The Way of the World* 4.1: 'Fy! Fy! have him, have him, and tell him so in plain terms; for I am sure you have a mind to him.'

102 6. **thought so too.** Meredith reads: 'thought so too, etc., etc.' In Congreve,

Millamant continues: 'Well, you ridiculous thing you, I'll have you—'

102 9. **Célimène.** Meredith now returns to his favorite comic poet, Molière, and his favorite comedy, *Le Misanthrope*. See 90 14-91 2.

102 19-20. **Gainsborough.** See, doubtless, the portrait of the Duchess of Devonshire, by Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), exhibited in 1783. The picture was stolen in 1876 (Meredith was working on his essay in that year), and not recovered until 1901. And compare *Araminta* (1909), a novel by J. C. Snaith.

102 22. **Venetian head.** Meredith compares Gainsborough with Titian (1477?-1576), who spent the major part of his life in Venice, and idealized the blond type of northern Italy.

103 8. **Rousseau, in his letter.** The letter is not strictly on the subject of the *Misanthrope*: see *J. J. Rousseau, Citoyen de Genève, À M. D'Alembert, de l'Académie Française* [etc.], *sur son Article 'Genève' dans le VII<sup>e</sup> Volume de l'Encyclopédie, et particulièrement sur le Projet d'Établir un Théâtre de Comédie en cette Ville* (1758). I translate a

brief passage (*Oeuvres Complètes de J. J. Rousseau*, ed. Musset-Pathay, Paris, 1824, 2.49-50): 'What is, then, the misanthrope of Molière? A man of probity who detests the morals of his age and the malice of his contemporaries; who, precisely because he loves his kind, hates in them the injuries they mutually do to one another, and the vices of which these injuries are the result. . . . He says, I admit, that he has conceived a dreadful hatred against the human race. But under what circumstances does he say this? It is when, outraged at having seen his friend basely betray his affection, and deceive the man who demands it in return, he perceives him going on to amuse himself in the highest degree at his anger. . . . Moreover, the excuse he gives for that universal hate fully justifies the cause of it.'

103 26-27. '*une âme de vingt ans.*'  
Célimène to Alceste (*Misanthrope* 5.7.42):

La solitude effraie une âme de vingt ans.

('Solitude alarms a creature of twenty years.')

104 20. '*l'homme aux rubans verts.*'  
Acaste to Alceste, reading aloud the letter written by Célimène (*Misanthrope* 5.4):

‘ “*Pour l’homme aux rubans verts, il me divertit quelquefois avec ses brusqueries et son chagrin bourru; mais il est cent moments où je le trouve le plus fâcheux du monde.*” ’

(“As for the man with the green ribbons, he sometimes diverts me with his rough ways and his surly anger; but there are a hundred occasions when I find him the most disagreeable person alive.” )

105 5. **a Jean Jacques.** See note on Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), 103 8.

105 5–6. **His proposal to Célimène.** See *Le Misanthrope* 5.7.

105 14. **Où d’être homme d’honneur.** See the conclusion of the last speech of Alceste (*Misanthrope* 5.8.72–74):

Je vais sortir d’un gouffre où triomphent les  
vices,

Et chercher sur la terre un endroit écarté

Où d’être homme d’honneur on ait la liberté.

(‘I am going to leave a pit where vice is triumphant, and to search through the earth for a place apart, where one is at liberty to be an honest man.’)

105 16. **like that poor princess.** I have not found the story elsewhere. Is Meredith inventing?

105 19. *fieffée*. The word means 'by feudal right and necessity,' and hence 'out and out,' 'arrant.' Livet (*Lexique de la Langue de Molière*) gives several instances from Molière, including *L'Avare* 2.5: '*Il faut être folle fieffée.*' For Meredith's '*fieffée coquette*' see an additional example noted by Livet, in Thomas Corneille, *Baron d'Albikrac* 1.6:

Avec vos cheveux blonds, en coquette fieffée  
Vous vous imaginez être fort bien coiffée.

106 9. **comic Muse.** Thalia? Compare note on 78 8-9.

106 16-17. *Misogynes*. That is, *The Woman - Hater*. The Atticist Phrynichus (fl. A.D. 180) calls it, not 'the most celebrated' (Meredith), but 'the finest' of the comedies of Menander; see the *Epitome* in Lobeck's edition (1820) of Phrynichus (p. 417): '*καὶ τοῦτο Μένανδρος τὴν καλλίστην τῶν κωμῶδιῶν τῶν ἑαυτοῦ, τὸν Μισογύνην, κατεκηλίδωσεν.*'

107 4-5. **the middle period of Greek comedy.** The question has been raised whether there was in reality a definite stage in the history of Greek comedy which we may designate as the 'Middle Comedy.' Legrand (*The New Greek Comedy*, tr. Loeb, pp. 4 ff.)

decides in the affirmative. Meredith may have obtained his notions of the comedy intervening between Aristophanes and the contemporaries of Menander from Charles Benoît's *Essai Historique et Littéraire sur la Comédie de Ménandre* (1854) or Maurice Guillaume Guizot's *Ménandre, Étude Historique et Littéraire sur la Comédie et la Société Grecques* (1855). Legrand says (p. 24) that perhaps the difference between the Middle and the New Comedy 'lay not so much in the kind of people it attacked as in the greater or lesser frequency of its attacks.' Possibly the Middle Comedy made more extensive use of plots taken from mythology; but our knowledge of the transitional stage is slight.

**107 10-11. He satirized a certain Thais.** Menander wrote a comedy of this name (*Θαίς*), now best known, perhaps, because of a maxim from it, or from Euripides, quoted by Saint Paul (1 Cor. 15.33): 'Evil communications corrupt good manners.' But Legrand says (p. 29): 'It is particularly open to question whether Athenaeus was not mistaken in recognizing an historical personage in Menander's Thais.'

**107 14. Chrysis.** See the *Andria* (= *The Lady of Andros*) of Terence.

107 20-21. **the ghost of Menander.** See Sainte-Beuve on Terence, in *Nouveaux Lundis* (Aug. 3, 1863), 1884, 5.339: '*Pour moi, je crois entendre l'Ombre de Ménandre, par chacun de ces vers aimables qui nous sont arrivés en débris, nous dire: "Pour l'amour de moi, aimez Térence."*' ('As for me, with each one of these winning verses that have come down to us in fragments, I seem to hear the shade of Menander say to us: "For love of me love Terence."')

107 24. **what is preserved of Terence has not . . . given us the best.** Contrary to the view of Meredith and his age, the disappointing nature of the fragments of Menander that have been unearthed since Meredith wrote might lead one to think that perhaps, after all, the best of the New Comedy was no better than what we have in Plautus and Terence. See note on 107 27.

107 25-26. **the friend of Epicurus.** The relations between Menander and the Greek philosopher Epicurus remind us that Molière studied under the French philosopher and mathematician Gassendi.

107 26-27. *Μισούμενος*, **the lover taken in horror.** Possibly rather, *The Jilted Lover*

(Lat. *Odiosus*). Compare Legrand, *The New Greek Comedy*, p. 151: 'In the *Μισούμενος* the jilted lover is driven out of doors at night by his sad thoughts, and awakens his slave Getas, who has nothing to do with the matter, to tell him of his mortification.'

107 27. *Περικειρομένη*. (Lat. *Tonsa*.) This is one of the plays of Menander of which very considerable fragments have recently been discovered, and the quality of which (see note on 107 24) can now be appraised. A French translation appears in the edition of Ἡρώς, *Ἐπιτρέποντες*, *Περικειρομένη*, and *Σαμία*, by G. Lefebvre, Cairo, 1907; and a version of *Ἐπιτρέποντες* (*L'Arbitrage*) is given by Maurice Croiset in the *Revue des Études Grecques* 21.229-325 (1908). Those who do not read French with ease may wish to consult the translation from the *Γεωργός* by Grenfell and Hunt in their edition of the Geneva Fragment of this play (Oxford, 1898).

108 5. **the fragments.** See *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta*, ed. Kock, 3.97-101, 111-112.

108 6-7. **four are derived from Menander.** In their entirety, according to our present knowledge, only three. The *Andria*

was drawn from two plays of Menander, 'Ανδρία and Περιουσία; the *Eunuchus* likewise from two, 'Ευνοῦχος and Κόλαξ; the *Heauton Timorumenos* from one, 'Εαυτὸν Τιμωρούμενος; while the *Adelphi* was drawn partly from the 'Αδελφοὶ Β' of Menander, and partly from the *Συναποθνήσκοντες* of Diphilus. As Meredith notes, the other two extant plays of Terence are derived from Apollodorus Carystius—the *Hecyra* from 'Εκύρα, the *Phormio* from 'Επιδικαζόμενος. Meredith later (109 14–15) alludes to a passage from Diphilus in the *Adelphi*.

108 11. *Heauton Timorumenos*. *The Self-Tormentor* (or *Self-Punisher*) of Terence, in which Menedemus afflicts himself with heavy labor because he has driven away his son Clinia by harsh treatment. In this play occurs the line (77) uttered by Chremes:

homo sum; humani nil a me alienum puto.

('I am a man; nought touches humanity but I deem it my concern.') The sentence strikes the key-note of both Terence and Menander.

108 16–17. quotations of Athenaeus and Plutarch. See Yonge's translation

(Bohn) of *The Deipnosophists, or Banquet of the Learned*, of Athenaeus, a Greek writer, born at Naucratis in Egypt, who lived first at Alexandria and later at Rome about 300 A.D.; and Goodwin's edition of translations, by several hands, of the *Moralia* of Plutarch of Chaeronea (c 46–c 120 A.D.), or the translation in Everyman's Library. But we now know more both of Menander and of his contemporaries than Meredith allows; see again Legrand, *The New Greek Comedy*.

108 17–18. **the Greek grammarians.** Such as the 'Atticist' Phrynichus (see note on 106 16–17); compare Sandys, *A Short History of Classical Scholarship*, 1915, chapter 10 (pp. 77 ff.).

108 21. **counted by many scores.** Meredith first (1877) wrote: 'by hundreds.' The number of plays ascribed to Menander by the critics of antiquity varied between 105 and 109. According to Suidas the number was 108, the figure now generally accepted (Croiset, *Histoire de la Littérature Grecque* 3.623); they were composed within a period of thirty years.

108 22. **crowned by the prize only eight times.** See Aulus Gellius (tr. Beloe, 1795)

17.4: 'Through interest, and the power of party, Menander was frequently overcome in the dramatic contests by Philemon, a writer by no means his equal. Menander, meeting him once by chance, said to him: "Tell me, I request,—and excuse me for asking,—Philemon, do you not blush when you carry away the prize from me?" . . . Some say that Menander left 108, some 109, comedies. I have met in a book written by Apollodorus, an eminent author, these lines upon Menander (the book is intitled *Chronica*):

From Diopceithes of Cephisium

He sprung, and fifty years and two he lived,  
And wrote an hundred comedies and five.

The same Apollodorus informs us, in the same book, that of these 105 plays only [eight] were rewarded with the prize.' By a slip of the pen, doubtless, Beloe mistranslates 'octo' as 'five.'

108 22-23. **The favorite poet with critics, in Greece.** Among Greek critics would be included Athenaeus and Plutarch.

108 23-24. **as in Rome.** This would include Gellius, Julius Caesar, and Quintilian. See Quintilian, *Education of an Orator* (tr.

Watson) 10.1.72: 'Other comic writers, however, if they be read with indulgence, have some good passages that we may select, and especially Philemon, who, preferred as he frequently was to Menander by the bad taste of his age, deserves in the opinion of all critics to be regarded as second to him.'

108 25-26. **comic force.** Julius Caesar uses the expression '*vis comica*' (or possibly '*comica virtus*') in his celebrated lines on Terence; see Suetonius *De Poetis (Vita Terenti)*, in Rolfe's edition of Suetonius, 1914, 2.462:

Tu quoque, tu in summis, o dimidiate  
 Menander,  
 poneris, et merito, puri sermonis amator.  
 lenibus atque utinam scriptis adiuncta foret  
 vis  
 comica, ut aequato virtus polleret honore  
 cum Graecis, neve hac despectus parte  
 iaceres!  
 unum hoc maceror ac doleo tibi desse,  
 Terenti.

('Thou, too, O half-Menander, even thou, art ranked among the highest, and justly, thou lover of Latin undefiled. And would that to thy limpid style had been added comic force, so that thy excellence might in honor rival

that of the Greeks, and thou not lie in this regard disdained. For thy lack of this one quality, my Terence, I am hurt and pained.') I have departed from Rolfe in placing the comma after '*comica*' rather than '*vis*'—following those who interpret '*comica*' with '*vis*' rather than with '*virtus*.'

108 28–109 2. **deprived . . . of its due reward in *Clouds* and *Birds*.** The Athenian comic poet Ameipsias twice won prizes above Aristophanes, taking second prize with the *Connos*, when Aristophanes took third with the *Clouds*, and first with the *Comastae*, when Aristophanes took second with the *Birds*. See note on 128 7–8. Aristophanes ridicules him for low buffoonery in the *Frogs* 12–15; see the edition of this play, with translation, by B. B. Rogers.

109 4–5. **Plutarch . . . comparison.** See the *Συγκρίσεως Ἀριστοφάνους καὶ Μενάνδρου Ἐπιτομή*, a work included under the *Moralia* of Plutarch (ed. Dübner, Paris, Didot, 1856, 2.1039–1041), and apparently an abstract, by another hand, from a treatise by Plutarch. See *An Abstract of a Comparison betwixt Aristophanes and Menander* (tr. William Baxter, Gent.), in *Plutarch's Morals*, tr. from the

Greek by several hands, ed. Goodwin, Boston, 1878, 3.11-14: 'To speak in sum and in general, he [Plutarch] prefers Menander by far; and as to particulars he adds what here ensues. Aristophanes, he saith, is importune, theatric, and sordid in his expression; but Menander not so at all; for the rude and vulgar person is taken with the things the former speaketh, but the well-bred man will be quite out of humor with them. . . . Menander's plays participate of a plenteous and divine salt, as if they were made of the very sea out of which Venus herself sprang. But that of Aristophanes is harsh and coarse, and hath in it an angry and biting sharpness. And for my part I cannot tell where his so much boasted ability lies, whether in his style or persons. The parts he acts I am sure are quite over-acted and depraved. His knave, for instance, is not fine, but dirty; his peasant is not assured, but stupid; his droll is not jocose, but ridiculous; and his lover is not gay, but lewd. So that to me the man seems not to have written his poesy for any temperate person, but to have intended his smut and obscenity for the debauched and lewd, his invective and satire for the malicious and ill-humored.'

109 9-10. when Athenian beauty of style was the delight of his patrons. Plutarch (c 46- c 125 A.D.) may have received distinct marks of recognition from the Emperor Hadrian, during whose reign there was a renaissance of Greek culture in the Roman Empire. The latter part of his life ran into the period of the 'Atticists,' for whom the diction of classic writers served as a model, and who, indeed, did not regard some of the words of Menander with favor. See Croiset, *Histoire de la Littérature Grecque* 5.638 ff. Of Plutarch Croiset (Alfred Croiset) says (5.489): 'For a large number of his contemporaries, Greeks or Hellenizing Romans, he was the authorized interpreter of the Hellenic past—of its history, religion, morals, and science.'

109 14-15. '*verbum de verbo.*' 'Word for word.' See the Prologue to the *Adelphi* of Terence (6-11):

*Synapthnescontes* Diphili comoediast;  
 cam *Commorientis* Plautus fecit fabulam.  
 in Graeca adulescens est, qui lenoni eripit  
 meretricem in prima fabula; eum Plautus  
 locum

reliquit integrum. eum hic locum sumpsit  
sibi

in *Adelphos*, verbum de verbo expressum  
extulit.

(*Linked in Death* is a comedy of Diphilus, the plot of which Plautus took for his *Com-morientes*. In the Greek there is a young man who in the first part of the story carries off a courtesan from a procurer, an incident which Plautus entirely omits. This incident our poet [Terence] has utilized in *The Brothers*, translating it word for word.)

109 17-18. **remains conjectural.** Yet see Legrand, *The New Greek Comedy* (Index, s. v. 'Terence'; and the article on *Roman Comedy* by W. A. Oldfather in the *Classical Weekly* New York, May 23, 1914) 7.217-222.

109 22. *Adeo modesto . . . ut nil supra.* Meredith reads: '*ut nihil supra.*' See Terence, *Andria* 117-120: '*interea inter mulieres . . . unam aspicio adolescentulam, forma . . . et voltu, Sosia, adeo modesto, adeo venusto, ut nil supra.*' ('Presently among the women . . . I beheld one girl whose figure—[Sosia interrupts] and her face, Sosia, so modest, so charming, that it couldn't be beaten.')

110 1-3. **'she turned . . . at home there.'** See Terence, *Andria* 135-136:

tum illa, ut consuetum facile amorem cerneres,  
reiecit se in eum flens quam familiariter!

110 6-7. **he embellished them.** See the article by Oldfather mentioned in the note on 109 17-18.

110 18-19. **the cultivated Romans.** 'Terence did not please the rough old conservative Romans; they liked Plautus better, and the recurring mention of the "*vetus poeta*" in his prologues, who plagued him with the crusty critical view of his productions, [1877: 'who plagued him with their views of his productions,'] has in the end a comic effect on the reader.' (Meredith's footnote.) See Duff, *A Literary History of Rome*, p. 203: 'The Luscus Lanuvinus (not Lavinus), the "*maliuolus uetus poeta*," on whom Terence retorts in all his prologues except that to the *Hecyra*.' On Plautus and Terence generally see Duff, pp. 156-201, 203-219.

110 21-22. **rolling a couple of his originals into one.** See note on 108 6-7.

110 24. **Self-Pitier.** 'Εαυτὸν Πενθῶν (Lat. *Se Lugens*). See *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta*, ed. Kock, 3.26.

110 24. *Self-Chastiser*. Ἐαυτὸν Τιμωρούμενος (Lat. *Se Puniens*). See the *Heauton Timorumenos* of Terence; compare notes on 108 6-7, 108 11. And see Kock 3.41-44.

110 25. *Ill-tempered Man*. Δύσκολος (Lat. *Morosus*). See Kock 3.36-41.

110 25. *Superstitious [Man]*. Δεισιδαίμων (?Lat. *Superstitiosus*). See Kock 3.32-33.

110 25-26. *Incredulous [Man]*. Ἄπιστος (Lat. *Incredulus*). See Kock 3.21. Titles like *The Incredulous Man*, *The Superstitious Man*, *The Ill-tempered Man*, of Menander remind us of the *Characters* of Theophrastus (tr. Jebb, ed. Sandys, 1899), where thirty types in all are defined and described, including the Distrustful (=Incredulous) Man, the Superstitious Man, and the Surly Man. Compare G. S. Gordon, *Theophrastus and his Imitators in English Literature and the Classics*, Oxford, 1912, p. 52: 'To instruct and amuse this municipal society Theophrastus invented the Character, and Menander, his pupil in philosophy, perfected the Comedy of Manners. It is a significant conjunction, not peculiar to Athens. You will find that whenever Characters are written there is this same conjunction, of character-writing and comedy: to every Theophrastus his Menander. To

Hall, Overbury, and Earle, the accepted imitators of Theophrastus in England, corresponds Ben Jonson with his Comedy of Humors, an earlier, harsher, and profounder version of the later Comedy of Manners. To La Bruyère, his professed disciple in France, corresponds the comedy of Molière, the French Menander. To the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, the New Testament, as I may call them, of character-writing in England, corresponds the comedy of Congreve, our English Molière.'

110 27-111 2. **Terence . . . died on the way home.** But compare Duff, *A Literary History of Rome*, p. 205: 'His death in 159 [B.C.] is wrapped in mystery. Was he lost at sea, as one account ran, homeward bound with a stock of plays adapted from Menander in Menander's own country, or did he die in Arcadia broken-hearted over the lost manuscripts of his latest plays?' The chief source for a knowledge of his life is the extract from Suetonius *De Poetis* preserved by Donatus, which contains disagreeing statements taken from the grammarians; see note on 108 22.

111 2-3. **The zealots of Byzantium completed the work of destruction.** Byzantine literary history had not been thoroughly investigated when Meredith wrote this.

I translate from Krumbacher, the leading modern authority (*Geschichte der Byzantinischen Litteratur*, 1891, pp. 218-219): 'In seeking the causes for the loss of so many works, we may safely exclude religious intolerance; that ancient works were destroyed merely because of their pagan character can scarcely be maintained. Veritably fatal, on the other hand, was the long stagnation of scholarly and literary effort from the middle of the seventh to the middle of the ninth century. In the tenth century the disappearance of many works may have been hastened through the encyclopaedias of Constantine, which by their handy excerpts were calculated to replace the original works, at least for the needs of Church and State, and, it would seem, led to some falling off in the making of complete transcriptions. Vast losses occurred through the barbarous destruction and burning of Constantinople (in 1204) by the Crusaders, when not only countless works of art, but documents and books, perished.' Compare Gilbert Murray, *The 'Tradition' of Greek Literature*, in Cooper, *The Greek Genius and its Influence*, 1917 (esp. pp. 177-181).

111 4-5. four comedies of Terence . . .  
six of Menander. See note on 108 6-7.

111 5. a few sketches of plots. See notes on 107 24, 107 26-27.

111 8. Harpagon. See note on 96 20.

111 8-9. a multitude of small fragments. See notes on 107 10-11, 108 16-17, and *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta*, ed. Kock, 3.3-272 (esp. 151-272).

111 17. Menedemus. See note on 108 11.

111 19-20. Menander and Molière have given the principal types to comedy. But see note on 110 25-26. And consider the type, say, of the Braggart Captain (*Miles Gloriosus*) of Plautus, with its relations, on the one hand, to the Hercules of Euripides' *Alceste*, and the mock-Hercules (Dionysus) of Aristophanes' *Frogs*, and, on the other, to the Falstaff of Shakespeare.

111 26. Orgon. See *Le Tartuffe* of Molière, and note on 77 23.

111 27. Thraso. A braggart (Gr. *θράσων*, connected with *θρασύς*, bold, over-bold). The name of a swaggering captain in the *Eunuchus* of Terence. Compare the *Miles Gloriosus* of Plautus.

111 27. Alceste. See *Le Misanthrope*, and compare notes on 94 12-13 and 95 27-96 2.

111 28. 'Manlys.' Manly is the hero of Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer*, greatly debased from his prototype in *Le Misanthrope*.

111 28. **Davus and Syrus.** These are names commonly given to slaves in Roman comedy. See the familiar '*Davus sum, non Oedipus*,' in Terence (*Andria* 194); the corresponding Greek name, Δᾶος, is so characteristic that Legrand has used it for the title of the French work frequently mentioned in the English translation (*The New Greek Comedy*) in the foregoing notes. For Syrus see Terence, *Adelphi* and *Heauton Timorumenos*.

112 1. **Scapins.** Scapin, whose original was found in Italian (Milanese) comedy, is the central figure in *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (1671) of Molière.

112 1. **Figaros.** Figaro is the hero of *Le Barbier de Séville* and *Le Mariage de Figaro* of Beaumarchais (1732-1799); in the first a barber, in the second a valet de chambre. In both he outwits every one with whom he has dealings. Littré (*Dict. de la Langue Française*) calls him '*Barbier spirituel et malin; valet adroit et peu gêné par sa conscience*.' The name has passed into common speech, and denotes

an intriguer, or go-between, or in general any adroit or unscrupulous person. Mozart has utilized *Le Mariage de Figaro* as the basis of an opera; see also *Il Barbiere de Seviglia* of Rossini.

112 2. **the realms of rose-pink.** See note on 88 28; and compare Carlyle, *French Revolution* 1.2.3: 'If we pierce through that rose-pink vapor of Sentimentalism, Philanthropy, and Feasts of Morals.' Compare also Meredith, *Diana of the Crossways* (1885): 'Rose-pink and dirty drab will . . . have passed away.'

112 4-5. **Philaminte and Bélise.** See notes on 96 25-27, 97 6-7.

112 7. **Célimène.** See pp. 92, 93, 102-106.

112 23-26. '*Et Tartuffe?*' . . . '*Le pauvre homme!*' In this scene (*Tartuffe* 1.5) Orgon utters each of these expressions four times, at regular intervals in the dialogue.

113 8-11. ***Un rien . . . trop de colère.*** See *Le Tartuffe* 1.6.49-52: 'A mere nothing suffices to scandalize him—to the point that, just the other day, he accused himself of having caught a flea while he was praying, and of having killed it too wrathfully.'

113 12-15. **And to have killed it . . . pure tones without flourish.** This passage appears in 1877, and in our text, but is omitted in the Edition de Luxe of Meredith (Vol. 32, Westminster, 1898, p. 41).

113 16-17. **another dupe in Madame Pernelle.** See *Le Tartuffe* 5.3.

113 25-26. **hints for a Tartuffe . . . in Boccaccio.** That is, in the *Decameron*; for example: First Day, Fourth Story; Third Day, Fourth Story and Eighth Story.

113 27. **Machiavelli's *Mandragola*.** See R. Warwick Bond, *Early Plays from the Italian*, 1911, p. xviii: 'Another competitor for the priority is Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), whose lost *Le Maschere* (1504) satirized contemporaries in imitation of the *Clouds* of Aristophanes, and whose *La Mandragola* and *Clizia* . . . were composed between 1512-1520. The *Mandragola* is held by many critics as the best of all Renaissance comedies; an opinion I cannot share, feeling it far surpassed in vigor and variety, in ease and naturalness of conduct, and in humor, both by *La Cassaria* and *I Suppositi* [of Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533)]; while its subject, the corruption of an innocent young wife by her

mother and confessor, is one that could only cease to be repellent if treated with the high seriousness and passion of tragedy.' Compare Villari, *Life and Times of Niccolò Machiavelli* (English translation), 1898.

114 4-8. **FRATE TIMOTEO** has a . . . *orazione, sì*. In 1877 Meredith's sentence and the quotation constituted a footnote. In the text came the sentence, subsequently omitted: 'Native Italian comedy did not advance beyond the state of satire, and the priests were the principal objects of it.' See Bond, *Early Plays from the Italian*, p. xv: 'The drama of modern Europe begins in Italy early in the sixteenth century with the work of Ariosto, Bibbiena, Machiavelli, and their successors, work which was a direct derivative from that of ancient Rome as represented by Plautus and Terence.'

114 6-8. **DONNA**. *Credete voi . . . sì*. See Machiavelli, *La Mandragola* 1.3:

LADY. Do you believe that the Turk will come to Italy this year?

FRATE TIMOTEO. If you do not pray, yes.

114 12-14. **Goldoni** sketched the Venetian manners . . . with a French pencil. The Venetian Republic was in a state of decay

throughout the eighteenth century. Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793), after a shifting life in various cities of Northern Italy, settled in Venice, his birthplace, in 1740. Early influenced by the *Mandragola* of Machiavelli, he determined to effect a revolution in Italian comedy; he produced a great number of plays in imitation of Molière, depicting Venetian society, the aristocracy as well as the bourgeoisie. In 1761 he was induced to visit Paris, to write for the Italian theatre, and shortly became attached to the Court of Louis the Fifteenth. One of his best comedies, *Le Bourru Bienfaisant*, in French, was produced for the occasion of the wedding of Louis the Sixteenth and Marie Antoinette (1770). In an Italian comedy, *Il Moliere* (1751), he patterns one of his characters, Pirlone, a hypocrite, after Tartuffe. A rapid writer, he composed upward of 120 comedies; the first collected edition of his works (1788-1789) was in 44 volumes. See H. C. Chatfield-Taylor, *Goldoni, a Biography*, New York, 1913.

114 17-18. furnished the idea of the *Menteur* to Corneille. The French tragic poet Pierre Corneille (1606-1684), in the *Épître* and the *Examen* preceding his comedy

*Le menteur* (1644), gives us to understand that 'this piece is in part translated, in part imitated,' from a Spanish play, *La Verdad Sospechosa*, which he at first accidentally attributed to Lope de Vega, but which was actually written, as Corneille subsequently recognized, by Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y Mendoza (1581-1639); see *Oeuvres de P. Corneille (Les Grands Écrivains de la France)*, ed. Marty-Laveaux, 1862-1867, 4. 119, 131, 137, 241-273.

114 25. *the corps de ballet*. The chorus of dancers in light opera.

115 4. *afaimados*. Meredith reads '*af-faimados*'—a possible, but less usual, spelling; as he says, the word means 'faminc-stricken,' that is, *famished, hungry, eager, very eager*. The customary form is *esfaimados*.

115 6. *Don Juan*. See Fitzmaurice-Kelly, *A History of Spanish Literature* (1898), p. 312: 'Whether or not there existed an historic Don Juan at Plasencia or at Seville is doubtful, for folklorists have found the story as far away from Spain as Iceland is; but it is Tirso's glory to have so treated it that the world has accepted it as a purely Spanish conception.' The reference is to 'Tirso de

Molina (1571-1648) and his *Burlador de Sevilla y Convidado de Piedra* (*The Seville Mocker and the Stone Guest*), which was first printed in 1630, in a collection of plays by Lope de Vega and others. For the relations between the story of the vengeful Spanish libertine and Molière's comedy of *Don Juan*, Mozart's opera, and Byron's mock-epic, see G. Gendarme de Bévotte, *La Légende de Don Juan*, Paris, 1906.

115 13-17. **Atta Troll . . . Pyrenean bear.** The allusion is to *Atta Troll*, a politico-satirical poem in 27 chapters by Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), published in part in 1843, published completely in 1846. Heine says (*Life* by Stigand, 1875, 2.297): 'It is a politico-romantic poem, and will presumably give the death-blow to the prosaic, bombastic tendency-poetry.' In this 'swan-song of romanticism,' the note is that of the mock-heroic poems on the theme of Roland, and hence the scenes in the Pyrenees (*Atta Troll* 1.9-20, in Heine's *Werke*, ed. Elster, 2.355):

Herzlich lachend schau'n sie nieder  
 Auf den wimmelnd bunten Marktplatz,  
 Wo da tanzen Bär und Bärin  
 Bei des Dudelsackes Klängen.

Atta Troll und seine Gattin,  
Die geheissen schwarze Mumma,  
Sind die Tänzer, und es jubeln  
Vor bewundrung die Baskesen.

Steif und ernsthaft, mit Grandezza,  
Tanzt der edle Atta Troll;  
Doch der zott'gen Enehälfte  
Fehlt die Würde, fehlt der Anstand.

(Heartily laughing they look down upon the swarming motley market-place where dance the bear and she-bear to the sound of the bagpipes. Atta Troll and his spouse, her name Black Mumma, are the dancers, and the Basques are jubilant with admiration. Stiff and solemn, with a grand air, dances the noble Atta Troll; but his shaggy better half lacks dignity, lacks decorum.)

115 13-14. **Lessing tried his hand at it.** Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) in his earlier life wrote comedies modeled upon the French. His later *Nathan der Weise* (1779), and, more particularly, *Minna von Barnhelm* (1767), commonly regarded as the first great national comedy in German literature, hardly deserve the sweeping censure of Meredith.

115 19. **Jean Paul Richter.** Johann Paul Friedrich Richter (1763–1825), better known by his pen-name ‘Jean Paul,’ a German humorist of imagination and sentiment, whose writings had an influence upon Carlyle, and hence upon Meredith, not merely in point of style, but in thought as well. See Carlyle, *Miscellaneous Essays* and *Life of Jean Paul F. Richter*.

115 20–21. **the contrast of Siebenkäs with his Lenette.** See *Blumen-, Frucht-, und Dornenstücke, oder Ehestand, Tod, und Hochzeit des Armenadvocaten F. St. Siebenkäs im Reichsmarktflecken Kuhschnappel*, von Jean Paul, Berlin, 1796. (*Flower-, Fruit-, and Thorn-Pieces, or the Married State, Death, and Wedding of Counsel for the Poor, F. St. Siebenkäs, of the Imperial Market-Town of Kuhschnappel* [etc.]). I translate from the Introduction by Paul Nerrlich (*Jean Pauls Werke*, Zweiter Teil, 1885, pp. iv–v): ‘Siebenkäs lives—and therewith we have said much—in the Imperial Market-town of Kuhschnappel, as Jean Paul himself lived in Hof; he groans under the burden of a position with which he is not content; he is poor; and he is married to a wife who, in herself altogether exemplary and excellent, and undeni-

ably possessed of a certain superiority of soul, is nevertheless absolutely unsuited to her gifted husband, for the reason that, a born housekeeper, she has her limitations and does not understand him. The timid, unassuming, obedient Lenette, with her full, round, rosy little face is the most plastic character among all the remarkable women Jean Paul has created. Inspiring, of course, she can hardly appear; but she comes before us as a real person, and we follow her career with lively sympathy. For this one figure of Lenette the nineteenth-century reader would readily exchange all the Beatas, Clotildas, Natalies, and Winifreds, and all the rest of the "beautiful souls" with their various names.'

115 21-22. **A light of the comic is in Goethe.** For example, in his *Reinecke Fuchs* (1793), and in the Mephistopheles of *Faust*; compare also the scene of the *Hexenküche* in *Faust*. Three years before his death Meredith thought that the influence of 'the noble' Goethe had been 'the most enduring' influence in his life (see Introduction, p. 15).

115 25-26. **Barbarossa in the hollows of the Untersberg.** Frederick I (1123?-1190) of the Holy Roman Empire, called Barbarossa

(Red-beard), was drowned in Cilicia while leading the Third Crusade. According to Bryce his bones were interred at Tyre; but there has been uncertainty regarding the place of his burial. In time, a popular legend which appears in connection with other heroes of various countries became attached to his name, after having been associated with that of Frederick II. See Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire* (1909), p. 181: 'To the southwest of the green plain that girdles in the rock of Salzburg [in Austria], the gigantic mass of the Untersberg frowns over the road which winds up a long defile to the glen and lake of Berchtesgaden. There, far up among its limestone crags, in a spot scarcely accessible to human foot, the peasants of the valley point out to the traveler the black mouth of a cavern, and tell that within the red-bearded Emperor lies amid his knights in an enchanted sleep, waiting the hour when the ravens shall cease to hover round the peak, and the pear-tree blossom in the valley, to descend with his Crusaders and bring back to Germany the golden age of peace and strength and unity.' The history of the legend has been studied by Georg Voigt (*Historische Zeitschrift* 26.131-187) and Sigmund Riezler (*ibid.* 32.63-75).

Meredith no doubt was familiar with Rückert's ballad, *Barbarossa* (1813):

Der alte Barbarossa,  
Der Kaiser Friederich.

In this the hero, every hundred years, though imperfectly awake, bids his dwarf go forth to see whether the ravens still 'hover round the peak.' But here the scene accords with the version of the story which places the cave in Thuringia, 'in the high and steep hill of the Kyffhäuser' (Bryce).

116 5-6. *volkslied* or *märchen*. A *volkslied* is a popular or national song, or a popular ballad; a *märchen* is a fairy-tale or traditional popular story.

116 25-26. *susceptible to laughter*, as the *Arabian Nights* will testify. See, for example, *The Story of the Porter and the Ladies of Baghdad* (*The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, tr. Lane, ed. Stanley Lane-Poole, 1914, 1.56 ff.).

117 7. *Saint-Marc Girardin*. François Auguste Marc Girardin (1801-1873), known as Saint-Marc Girardin, a French journalist, literary man, and politician, very prolific as a writer on various subjects. He

traveled in the Orient, and gave no little attention to questions touching the near East. See his *Souvenirs de Voyages et d'Études*, in two volumes (1852, 1853); *Souvenirs et Réflexions Politiques d'un Journaliste* (1859); *La Syrie en 1861, Condition des Chrétiens en Orient* (1862). Under present conditions, these works are inaccessible to me.

118 3. **There has been fun in Bagdad.** See note on 116 25-26; and compare Meredith's own sometimes tender, sometimes boisterous, tale, *The Shaving of Shagpat* (1855), a burlesque imitation of Oriental story-telling.

120 14-15. **partaking of the foolishness to comic perception.** One is tempted to regard 'the' before 'foolishness' as a printer's error, and to read: 'partaking of foolishness to the comic perception.'

121 24-25. **spirits that . . . will come when you do call.** Compare Shakespeare, *1 King Henry the Fourth* 3.1.53-55:

GLENDOWER.

I can call spirits from the vasty deep.

HOTSPUR.

Why, so can I, or so can any man;

But will they come when you do call for them?

**122 13. Johnsonian polysyllables.**

Compare Osgood, *Selections from the Works of Samuel Johnson*, New York, 1909, Introduction, p. xxxii: 'In these latter days of literary informality Johnson's preference for words of Latin origin is not much liked. It has been often assumed that he made easy things hard in his fondness for polysyllabic grandeur, but the test of actual and intelligent reading will show how sincere was his hatred of "that offense which is always given by unusual words." If the reader sometimes comes upon things "equiponderant" or "colorific," or hears of "the tortuosities of imaginary rectitude," yet he has no doubt at all of Johnson's meaning. Like many great literary men he was a conservative in language, and strongly averse to coinage or importation; he chooses no words which are not in good English standing.'

**122 18. Duc Pasquier.** Here and subsequently Meredith printed 'Duke' Pasquier. The story concerns Étienne Denis, Duc de Pasquier (1767-1862), an eminent and highly-respected French statesman, who lived through the Revolution, held office under the Empire, and was chancellor and duke under Louis-Philippe. His *Memoirs* ap-

peared posthumously (1893-1894). Meredith may have learned something of him by word of mouth; or possibly through a series of articles on Pasquier by Saint-Marc Girardin in the *Journal des Débats* for September and October, 1862, which I have been unable to consult; but more probably through the work of Louis Favre, *Estienne Denis Pasquier . . . Souvenirs de son Dernier Secrétaire*, Paris, 1870 (esp. pp. 438 ff.).

**123 25-26. Imagine an Aristophanic comedy of the Centenarian.** The subject is scarcely Aristophanic, since the extant comedies of Aristophanes all have some relation to the interests of the State; the main idea of each play is more general than this. The situation described by Meredith bears a faint resemblance to the debate between Admetus and his aged father in the *Alcestis* of Euripides, a 'satyric' tragedy containing certain elements of comedy. Possibly the subject would have been more suited to the New Comedy—but indeed it is more in keeping with Meredith's conception of Molière, save for his allusions to the Chorus, which has something of the Aristophanic flavor.

**124 5-6. an accurate measurement.** Compare, perhaps, the test of the relative

excellence of Aeschylus and Euripides in the *Frogs* of Aristophanes, where verses of the rival poets are weighed in a huge pair of scales.

125 5. **Dulness.** See note on 80 20.

125 18. **throw off incubus, our dreadful familiar.** See *New English Dictionary*: 'Incubus . . . in the Middle Ages often represented as a malignant demon who lay upon men and women. . . . A person or thing that weighs upon and oppresses like a nightmare.'

126 12-14. **A political Aristophanes . . . too much for political Athens.** This notion, current in the time of Meredith, needs to be revised. The attack on the poet by Cleon, aroused by the comedy of the *Babylonians* (see *Acharnians* 377 ff.), was unsuccessful. 'The words of Aristophanes, "I almost perished," appear simply to indicate that his adversary managed to get together a fairly strong minority' (Croiset, *Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens*, p. 51). Still it is to be noted that for a time the poet did not attack either Cleon or the demagogues as a class. Again, the nature of the supposed law of Syracosius limiting the license of Athenian comedy is very doubtful; see Croiset, *ibid.*, pp. 118-119: 'In a fragment of

the *Hermit* by Phrynichus, performed in 414, . . . the poet expressed the wish that Syracosius might get the mange; "for," said he, "he has deprived me of the liberty of putting those into my comedy whom I wished to." . . . The scholiast of Aristophanes who quotes this fragment adds: "*It seems* that Syracosius passed a decree which forbade the introduction of any person by name in comedy." We see that this statement is based on a conjecture, which appears to have the lines of Phrynichus as its only foundation. They evidently allude to an actual occurrence, but we do not know what this occurrence was. . . . In any event the alleged decree is very improbable in itself. Comedies performed about the year 414 abound in proper names and satirical allusions to contemporaries.'

126 12-13. **taking advantage of his lyrical Bacchic license.** See the speech of Dicaeopolis in the *Acharnians* 497-504 (Rogers' translation):

Bear me no grudge, spectators, if, a beggar,  
I dare to speak before the Athenian people  
About the city in a comic play;  
For what is true even comedy can tell.  
And I shall utter startling things but true.

Nor now can Cleon slander me because,  
 With strangers present, I defame the State.  
 'Tis the Lenaea, and we 're all alone.

In the *Babylonians* (see preceding note), a lost play, Aristophanes seems to have given Cleon a handle for a dangerous suit against him, since utterances touching the State had been made in a comedy performed at the festival of the Great Dionysia, when foreigners were present; whereas the *Acharnians* was produced at the Lenaea (another festival in honor of Bacchus), when foreigners were not present.

126 20-21. **He hated . . . the Sophist.** In the *Clouds* (see the edition of B. B. Rogers, and also that of Starkie, each containing a translation) Aristophanes ridicules the Sophists in the figure of Socrates.

126 22. **the poet.** Euripides is frequently held up for ridicule by Aristophanes, but particularly in the *Frogs* (see Rogers' edition, with translation, or the translation by Gilbert Murray).

126 22-23. **the demagogue, 'the saw-toothed monster.'** The reference is to Cleon (*Wasps* 1031):

θρασέως ξυστὰς εὐθὺς ἀπ' ἀρχῆς αὐτῷ τῷ καρχαρῶδοντι.

(‘In the very beginning of his bold career he [Aristophanes] grappled with the jag-toothed monster.’) See also *Knights* 1017, and *Peace* 754. The poet represents himself as another Heracles; his first labor, the struggle with Cleon (in the *Knights*), being followed by his encounter with the Sophists (in the *Clouds*).

126 26–27. **fines, the curtailing of his comic license.** See note on 126 12–13.

126 28–127 1–5. **could no longer support the expense of the chorus.** In the first nine of the extant plays of Aristophanes the chorus is conspicuous and important. In the tenth, the *Ecclesiazusae*, its functions are much curtailed, and in the last, the *Plutus*, ‘it has only about forty lines assigned to it in the course of the dialogue, and in the pauses between the dialogue it sang interludes unconnected with the plot’ (Haigh, *The Attic Theatre*, 1907, p. 287). But it did not entirely disappear even in the earlier poets of the New Comedy (*ibid.*, p. 288). Compare Croiset, *Histoire de la Littérature Grecque* 3.530–531 (I translate): ‘When Athens was taken and conquered by Lysander, its institutions were temporarily destroyed. The city had to endure the tyranny

of the Thirty, and then the civil war for the restoration of the democracy. When the amnesty had been proclaimed the city breathed again, but it was impoverished. . . . People were no longer rich enough to take upon themselves the expense of representations; the chorus was reduced until it amounted to very little, the parabasis being suppressed. The poet [Aristophanes] . . . had to accommodate himself, in the second part of his life, to this new régime.'

'127 5. **Marathon and Salamis.** The plain of Marathon was the scene of the decisive battle of the Persians of Darius under Datis by the Greeks under Miltiades in 490 B.C. Ten years later the fleet of Xerxes, son of Darius, was destroyed by the Greek navy at Salamis. Aristophanes (c 444–c 385 B.C.) refers to the 'men of Marathon, hard in grain as their own oak and maple,' in the *Acharnians* 181, and makes other comparable allusions; see also the allusion to Marathon and Salamis in the *Knights* 781–785. After the naval victory of the Spartans under Lysander at Aegospotami in 405 B.C., the humiliation of Athens was complete (404).

127 7. **pleaded for peace.** That is, in the *Acharnians*, the *Peace*, and the *Lysis*-

*trata*; see the editions, with translations, of Rogers.

127 8-9. **the captious old creature Demus.** A personification of the Athenian people in Aristophanes' *Knights*; 'the John Bull of Athens,' as Hookham Frere puts it.

127 14-15. **Xenophon, the disciple of Socrates.** See *The Works of Xenophon*, translated by H. G. Dakyns, London, 1897; especially the *Memorabilia*, in Vol. 3.

127 15. **by his trained rhetoric.** After the death of Cyrus, the Greek army, over a thousand miles from home, had become demoralized through the treacherous murder of their officers by the Persian satrap Tissaphernes. Hereupon, Xenophon, though but nominally attached to the army, made a masterly address, outlining plans for the retreat, and won the confidence of the surviving leaders; he then successfully directed the homeward march. See the *Anabasis*, Book 3, chapters 1, 2.

127 18-19. **mercenary Greek expedition under Cyrus.** See Xenophon, *Anabasis*, Book 1, chapter 1.

127 19-20. **Athens . . . was on a landslide, falling.** Compare Aristophanes, *Wasps*

(422 B.C.) 1232-1235; the allusion is to Cleon:

Mon, lustin' for power supreme, ye 'll mak'  
The city capseeze; she 's noo on the shak'.

Rogers, who thus translates, adds that the Scholiast says these lines are borrowed from Alcaeus.

127 23. **The aloe had bloomed.** The allusion seems to be to the *Agave americana* (of a genus found in Mexico and Central America), which is popularly confused with the Aloes, and commonly known as the American aloe. This sends up a vertical scape 24-36 feet in height, bearing throughout its length sometimes as many as 4,000 flowers. After flowering, the plant dies down, new plants arising from lateral buds at the ground. According to an erroneous popular notion it blooms once in a hundred years; and hence the name 'century-plant.' Compare the second sentence of Pater's essay, *The Poetry of Michelangelo* (1873): 'A certain strangeness, something of the blossoming of the aloe, is indeed an element in all true works of art.'

127 23-27. **Whether right or wrong . . . there is an idea.** The construction of the sentence is loose.

127 27-28. **the idea of good citizenship.** Compare Croiset (*Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens*, p. 163): 'His ideal does not appear to have changed; it is always that of a frankly democratic city, but one in which the greatest influence would have been in the hands of a moderate element, of the class of hoplites who were able to furnish their own equipment, or of the small landowners—in a word, of the rural democracy. . . . While the poet continues to fight the influential demagogues, he does not attribute to any of them the baneful importance which he formerly attributed to Cleon, nor does he aim at any particular reform in the State. . . . The idea of harmony, of sincere reconciliation, of close union with a view to the common good, is what constantly inspires him.'

128 2-3. **Swift says of him.** In the quotation, Meredith reads, 'But as for' and 'The dog too witty.' I have restored the proper readings. See Swift's lines *To Dr. Sheridan*, 1718 (*Poems of Jonathan Swift*, ed. W. E. Browning, London, 1910, 2.311); I give the first 16 lines (of 33):

Whate'er your predecessors taught us,  
I have a great esteem for Plautus,

And think your boys may gather there-  
hence

More wit and humor than from Terence;

But as to comic Aristophanes,

The rogue too vicious and too profane is.

I went in vain to look for Eupolis

Down in the Strand, just where the New  
Pole is;

For I can tell you one thing, that I can,

You will not find it in the Vatican.

He and Cratinus used, as Horace says,

To take his greatest grandees for asses.

Poets, in those days, used to venture high;

But these are lost full many a century.

Thus you may see, dear friend, *ex pede* hence,

My judgment of the old comedians.

128 7-8. **Cratinus, Phrynichus, Ameip-  
sias, Eupolis, and others.** Poets of the  
Old Comedy; see the quotation from Swift in  
the preceding note; and compare Horace,  
*Satires* 1.4.1-5:

Eupolis atque Cratinus Aristophanesque  
poetae

atque alii, quorum comoedia prisca virorum  
est,

siquis erat dignus describi, quod malus ac  
fur,

quod mocchus foret aut sicarius aut alioqui famosus, multa cum libertate notabant.

(‘Eupolis, Cratinus, and Aristophanes, and the other manly poets of the Old Comedy, if any one deserved to be drawn as a rogue and a thief, as a rake or a cut-throat, or some other kind of notable villain, branded him with great freedom.’) For the ‘others’ see Croiset, *Histoire de la Littérature Grecque* 3.585 ff., where 29 comic poets are named, including the four rivals of Aristophanes mentioned by Meredith. Aristophanes pays his respects to Cratinus and Phrynichus repeatedly by name; he names Eupolis in the *Clouds* 553, and Ameipsias in the *Frogs* 14. He compares himself with his rivals to their disadvantage in the parabases of the *Knights* (507–546) and the *Clouds* (518–562).

128 10. **Donnybrook Fair.** Donnybrook is now a part of Dublin, Ireland, in the south-eastern section of the city. The former village of the name was famous for a fair, held under license from King John in 1204, which gained a scandalous notoriety for disorder, and accordingly was discontinued in 1855.

128 13–14. **dragged forth particular women, which he did not.** See Rogers’

translation, in his edition of the *Clouds* (551-560):

But the others, when a handle once Hyper-  
bolus did lend,  
Trample down the wretched caitiff, and his  
mother, without end.  
In his *Maricas the Drunkard*, Eupolis the  
charge began,  
Shamefully my *Knights* distorting, as he is  
a shameful man,  
Tacking on the tipsy beldame, just the  
ballet-dance to keep,  
Phrynichus's prime invention, eat by mon-  
sters of the deep,  
Then Hermippus on the caitiff opened all  
his little skill,  
And the rest upon the caitiff are their wit  
exhausting still;  
And my simile to pilfer 'of the Eels' they  
all combine.  
Whoso laughs at their productions, let him  
not delight in mine.

128 17. *Rabelais*. See note on 76 24-25.

128 17. *Hudibras*. A political satire by Samuel Butler (1612?-1680), directed against the anti-Royalists, and published in three parts (1663, 1664, 1678). It takes its name

from its hero. The idea of a Presbyterian knight-errant was doubtless adapted from Don Quixote. The metre is, if one may use the expression, doggerel of a high order; many of the couplets take a lasting hold upon the memory; the plot is slight, and the characters are little more than puppets. From the first, as we learn in Pepys' *Diary*, the work was extraordinarily popular, for the author's wit is brilliant, playing with force and directness upon the political and religious questions of the day. See the edition of *Hudibras* by A. R. Waller (1905).

128 20. **the *Anti-Jacobin*.** A periodical, begun in 1797 as a weekly newspaper inspired by George Canning (1770-1827), and edited by the satirist William Gifford. It was designed to support the ministry of Pitt, 'to expose the vicious doctrines of the French Revolution' as they were avowed in England, 'and to turn into ridicule and contempt the advocates of that event, and the sticklers for peace and parliamentary reform'; see *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin*, edited by Charles Edmonds, London, 1890. Among the writers for it were Canning himself, George Ellis, and John Hookham Frere, later known as a translator of Aristophanes. Two of the most

famous contributions, *The Friend of Humanity and the Knife-Grinder* and *The Loves of the Triangles* (a parody of Erasmus Darwin's *The Loves of the Plants*), were jointly composed by Canning and Frere, and Canning, Frere, and Ellis, respectively.

128 22. **Grattan.** Henry Grattan (1746-1820), an Irish statesman and brilliant orator, a contemporary of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and more successful in public life than Sheridan, had an unusual command of fierce invective and dignified wit.

128 25. **Wilkes.** John Wilkes (1727-1797), an English politician of dubious fame, attacked the ministry under George III, and then the King himself; he was arrested, but, being a member of parliament, was released, and obtained large damages at law for his arrest. His resistance made him a popular hero, and the proceedings against him for his obscene *Essay on Woman* did not diminish his popularity. A libel on the secretary of state led to his expulsion from parliament. He was re-elected. When, after his fourth election, the House of Commons declared him ineligible to sit, he was elected sheriff for London and Middlesex. In 1774 he became

Lord Mayor of London, and, once more elected to parliament, he was allowed to sit. Wilkes was defended by 'Junius,' and his company was tolerated by Johnson (see Boswell). It is unfortunate that so worthless a character should have been associated in a vital way with the cause of the rights of electors and the growth of the liberty of the press. To Meredith, for the moment, he is a dangerous demagogue, an English Cleon. Compare Byron's humorous treatment of Wilkes in *The Vision of Judgment* (1822), stanzas 65-73.

128 27. **some plumed Lamachus.** Lamachus, son of Xenophanes, took part as an Athenian general in the Peloponnesian war; in the seventeenth year of the war (415 B.C.) he was a colleague of Alcibiades and Nicias in the great Sicilian expedition. Aristophanes first mentions him in the *Acharnians* 270. Rogers, in commenting on the line, calls him 'the gallant soldier whom in his lifetime Aristophanes was accustomed to satirize as the representative of the war party, but of whom after his death he always speaks in terms of well-deserved admiration.' For the epithet 'plume' see *Acharnians* 965:

κραδαίνων τρεῖς κατασκίους λόφους.

(Rogers translates: 'And shakes three shadowy plumes.')

**129 2. Samuel Foote.** An English comic playwright and actor (1720–1777), distinguished for his powers of mimicry, but according to Dr. Johnson (see Boswell) not true to life. Johnson discussed him with Wilkes. Says Percy Fitzgerald (*Samuel Foote, a Biography*, 1910, pp. 199–200): 'Foote was associated with two tumultuous beings—daring, reckless, and ever at war with their fellows. It would be difficult to find in the history of English social life three such specimens of the "stormy" life and brilliancy at the same moment as Wilkes, Churchill, and Foote. . . . They were always "in assailment"—Foote from the stage, Churchill from his desk or from the gaol, Wilkes from the House of Commons. . . . All three in their respective lines were men of power and capacity, and dangerous to meddle with.'

**129 6. bald-pate, as he calls himself.** Compare the *Peace* 771:

φέρε τῷ φαλακρῷ, ὄδς τῷ φαλακρῷ.

Rogers translates (*Peace* 771–774):

Give this to the bald-head, give that to the  
bald-head,

And take not away  
That sweetmeat, that cake, but present and  
bestow it  
On the man with the brow of our wonderful  
Poet!

129 8-9. **the laughter of Hercules.** See Aristophanes, *Frogs* 42-46.

129 10-11. **garlic . . . to the game-cocks, to make them fight the better.** See the *Knights* 494:

ἴν' ἀμεινον, ὦ τᾶν, ἐσκοροδισμένος μάχη.

Rogers translates: 'Why, if you are garlic-primed, you 'll fight much better.' It is the scholiast who explains that the metaphor is taken from cock-fighting. The same notion is found in the *Acharnians* 166.

130 1-2. **Gros rire . . . gros sel.** Compare Meredith's letter of Nov. 14, 1902, to James Sully on Sully's *An Essay on Laughter* (*Letters of George Meredith*, ed. by his son, 1912, 2.544): 'On the theme of laughter, you should have dealt with the great stomach laugh of the English—on which they found their possession of the sense of humor. A chapter would not have been too much for it.' Would Meredith distinguish 'the *gros*

*rire* of the Gaul' from 'the great stomach laugh' of the Englishman? '*Gros sel*' is rough or gross wit, such as the obscenity of Rabelais. Compare Sainte-Beuve, *Molière* (1835), in *Portraits Littéraires*, 1884, 2.21: '*Après le sel un peu gros, mais franc, du Cocu Imaginaire.*'

130 4-5. **like a monarch with a troop of dwarfs.** Perhaps Meredith has no particular monarch in mind, since various European kings had collected dwarfs at their courts. The Court of Philip the Fourth of Spain was celebrated for them. Yet I suggest Philip the Second and his dwarfs as more nearly satisfying the conditions of this allusion, and of the allusion immediately following to 'the pensive monarch.' See E. J. Wood, *Giants and Dwarfs* (London, 1868).

130 4-5. **too many jesters kicking the dictionary about.** This seems to be Meredith's way of saying that the English writers of comedy of the day were too much given to word-play. Burnand (see note on 154 12), doubtless one of the offenders, wrote *Antony and Cleopatra*, or *His-tory and Her-story in a Modern Nilo-metre* (1866); *Elizabeth, or The Invisible Armada* (1870); and *F. M. Julius Cnaesar, the Irregular Rum 'un* (1870).

130 14-15. in memoirs of a preceding age. Meredith reads: 'in Memoirs of a Preceding Age'; but he often uses capital letters for emphasis, and is generally inconsistent in such matters. I have been unable to identify any work with the title *Memoirs of a Preceding Age*, and at present have no reason to believe in the existence of such a work; accordingly the capitals have been reduced to lower case. See next note.

130 15-16. the . . . hostess of a great house of reception. As Mr. A. W. Pollard suggests to me, this doubtless means Elizabeth Vassall Fox, Lady Holland (1770-1845), who presided over a circle of literary men and Whig politicians at Holland House. See Princess Marie Liechtenstein, *Holland House* (London, 1874) 1.142 ff. Sydney Smith (*ibid.* 1.161) had heard 'five hundred traveled people assert that there is no such agreeable house in Europe as Holland House'; and he shared their opinion. See also Fyvie, *Notable Dames and Notable Men of the Georgian Era* (London, 1910). Another possibility is Lady Hester Stanhope; compare the *Memoirs of the Lady Hester Stanhope, as related by herself in conversations with her physician*, 3 vols., London, 1845, published

without warrant and anonymously by Dr. C. L. Meryon. The book concerns the latter part of her life, when she lived in the Orient, a vulgarly tyrannous lady indeed; see the edition of 1846—for example: 1.104, 190, 247, 249, 255, 262, 267, 274. Kinglake calls her ‘Chatham’s fiery granddaughter,’ and says (*Eothen*, chapter 8): ‘After the death of Lady Chatham, which happened in 1803, she lived under the roof of her uncle, the second Pitt; and when he resumed the Government in 1804, she became the dispenser of much patronage, and sole secretary of state for the department of treasury banquets.’ Her satirical remarks upon individuals clung to them. This earlier period of her career corresponds very well with the description in Meredith.

132 4-5. **splinters.** In the sense of surgical splints, as here, the word is regarded by the *New English Dictionary* as obsolete or dialectal.

132 19. **Fielding.** See note on 94 24.

132 20. **Goldsmith.** See note on 94 22-23.

132 20-21. **Miss Austen . . . Emma and Mr. Elton.** Jane Austen (1775-1817) published her novel *Emma* anonymously in 1816.

Of the author, Sir Walter Scott said (Diary, March 14, 1826; see Lockhart's *Life*): 'That young lady had a talent for describing the involvements, and feelings, and characters of ordinary life which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with.'

132 23. **Galt's neglected novels.** See, for example, *The Annals of the Parish* (1821) by John Galt (1779-1839). Galt was most successful in dealing with aspects of Scottish rural life.

132 25. **In our poetic literature the comic is delicate.** Is the reference again to the pastoral drama? See note on 86 16.

133 3. **larmoyant.** 'Tearful.' Compare one of the quotations in the *New English Dictionary, s. v.*: '1897 *Naturalist* 270. Another strange face, though not so larmoyant, provocative of laughter unto tears.'

133 22. **Dorine.** See Molière, *Le Tartuffe* 2.4.

134 1. **a satiric rod.** Compare Ben Jonson, *Every Man out of his Humor*, Induction:

My soul  
Was never ground into such oily colors,  
To flatter vice, and daub iniquity;

But, with an armèd and resolvèd hand,  
 I'll strip the ragged follies of the time  
 Naked as at their birth . . .

. . . and with a whip of steel  
 Print wounding lashes in their iron ribs.  
 I fear no mood stamped in a private brow,  
 When I am pleased t' unmask a public vice.

134 22. **Fielding's Jonathan Wild.** See notes on 94 24 and 135 7-8.

135 3. **villains' ratiocination.** 'The exclamation of Lady Booby, when Joseph defends himself—"Your virtue! . . . I shall never survive it!" etc.—is another case.—*Joseph Andrews*. Also that of Miss Matthews in her narrative to Booth: "But such are the friendships of women."—*Amelia*.' (Meredith's footnote.) The first quotation is from Fielding's *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams* [etc.] (1742), Book 1, chapter 8; the second from Fielding's *Amelia* (1752), Book 1, chapter 8. Meredith prints the words 'Your virtue!' in italics; I follow the edition of Fielding by Henley (1902) in using roman letters.

135 7-8. **on referring to Jonathan Wild,** I do not find it. Nevertheless the

basis of the allusion is there. See *The Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great* (1743), Book 1, chapter 2, seventh paragraph (ed. Henley, 1902, p. 6); Fielding, however, refers, not to Jonathan, but to a member of the family in a previous generation: 'After the death of Edward the family remained in some obscurity down to the reign of Charles the First, when James Wild distinguished himself on both sides the question in the civil wars, passing from one to t'other, as Heaven seemed to declare itself in favor of either party. At the end of the war, James not being rewarded according to his merits, as is usually the case of such impartial persons, he associated himself with a brave man of those times, whose name was Hind, and declared open war with both parties. He was successful in several actions [=robberies], and spoiled many of the enemy; till at length, being overpowered and taken, he was, contrary to the law of arms, put basely and cowardly to death by a combination between twelve men of the enemy's party, who, after some consultation, unanimously agreed on the said murder.' So much for James Wild. Jonathan Wild, a notable felon, was born at Wolverhampton, Staffordshire, about 1682, and was executed,

after a celebrated trial, at Tyburn on May 24, 1725.

**135 13. The look of Fielding upon Richardson.** The publication of *Pamela* (1740) by Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) inspired Fielding with the idea of a parody, and led him to begin *Joseph Andrews* (see note on 135 3); but as the characters of Fielding, especially that of Parson Adams, grew under his hands, his work became an independent novel.

**135 16. Parson Adams.** Mr. Abraham Adams the curate, in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*; a kindly, ingenuous person, of many peculiarities.

**135 28. Byron had splendid powers of humor.** Compare Meredith's estimate as reported by Edward Clodd (*Fortnightly Review* 92.24): 'Byron has humor in his satires; the roguish element in these is unsurpassed. But his high flights are theatrical; he was a sham sentimentalist.' The date of the utterance is late—possibly 1906.

**136 8. 'Sobald er reflectirt ist er ein Kind.'** For 'reflectirt' Meredith reads 'philosophirt.' The quotation as it now appears in the text is found in *Goethe's Gespräche*, ed.

von Biedermann, 3.156; the conversation of Goethe is that of Jan. 18, 1825, and the passage in question: '*Aber Lord Byron ist nur gross, wenn er dichtet; sobald er reflectirt ist er ein Kind.*' ('But Lord Byron is great only as a poet; the moment he reflects he is a child.') The remark is addressed to Ecker-mann.

**136 9-10. Carlyle sees him in this comic light.** Carlyle frequently adverts to Byron; for example, in *Past and Present*, Book 3, chapter 4 (*Works*, Centenary Edition, 10.154): 'A gifted Byron rises in his wrath; and feeling too surely that he for his part is not "happy," declares the same in very violent language, as a piece of news that may be interesting. It evidently has surprised him much.'

**136 14-15. Irony . . . savage, as in Swift.** See, for example, *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People from Being a Burthen to their Parents, or Country, and for Making them Beneficial to the Publick*, Dublin, 1729, in which Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) gravely makes use of statistics to show the advantage that would arise, in the helpless condition of Ireland, if

the young children of the poor were to be sold as food for the rich. The author is not self-seeking (*Prose Works*, ed. Temple Scott, 7.216): 'I have no children by which I can propose to get a single penny, the youngest being nine years old, and my wife past child-bearing.'

136 16-17. **sedate, as in Gibbon, with a malicious.** A good instance of irony may be found in *The Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon* (1737-1794), ed. Murray, London, 1896, pp. 64 ff., where the great historian discusses the University of Oxford as it was when he was a student there. But Meredith doubtless thinks of Gibbon's treatment of Christianity in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, for example, in chapter 15; compare what Meredith said (about 1903) to Edward Clodd (*Fortnightly Review* 92.28): 'I have been re-reading Gibbon with increased appreciation. The subtlety of his remarks on Christianity, and the dexterity of conveying through veiled implication of belief his scepticism, is delightful.' See also Introduction, p. 10.

136 28-137 2. **Don Quixote . . . the knight and squire.** For Don Quixote and his squire, Sancho Panza, see *The Ingenious*

*Gentleman Don Quixote of la Mancha*, written by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547-1616), tr. John Ormsby, ed. Fitzmaurice-Kelly, 1901; or see the translation by James Robinson Smith, revised edition. See also *Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, a Memoir*, by James Fitzmaurice-Kelly, Oxford, 1913 (Spanish translation, revised, by B. Sanin Cano, 1917).

**137 19-20. a living great, though not creative, humorist.** Meredith means Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881). He was over eighty-one years old when Meredith delivered the lecture, and had long since passed the period of his activity as a writer. In calling him 'not creative,' Meredith doubtless wishes to remind us that Carlyle was neither novelist nor comic poet.

**137 20-21. the skull of Yorick.** See Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 5.1.179-202.

**137 22-24. primitive man . . . under the gorgeous robes of ceremonial.** See Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (1833-1834); for example, Book 1, chapters 5, 9. There is an excellent edition of *Sartor Resartus* by Mac Mehan, Boston, 1896.

**138 8-9. emissary eagle . . . Jove.** In classical writers the eagle is frequently re-

ferred to as the herald of Zeus. See *Iliad* 24.310, and Euripides, *Ion* 158-160.

138 9. **the true Hero.** See Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History, Six Lectures, Reported, with Emendations and Additions* (1841). *Heroes and Hero-Worship* has been well edited by Mac Mehan, Boston, 1901.

138 18. **Sterne . . . sentimental.** Laurence Sterne (1713-1768), author of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767) and *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768).

138 23. **mesure et goût.** 'Restraint and good taste.'

138 24. **own how much they owe to Molière.** See, for example, Sainte-Beuve, *Molière* (1835), in *Portraits Littéraires*, 1884, 2.1-63.

139 18. **Poverty, says the satirist.** I have put the remainder of the sentence in quotation-marks, since Meredith translates from Juvenal, *Satires* 3.152-153:

nil habet infelix paupertas durius in se  
quam quod ridiculos homines facit.

139 24. **Caleb Balderstone.** The aged butler, devoted to the interests of the Master

of Ravenswood, in *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) of Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832); see, for example, chapter 7.

139 27-28. 'poor relatives.' See the essay of Charles Lamb on *Poor Relations* (*Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. Lucas, 2.157-163); and compare Meredith, *The Egoist*, chapter 1.

140 7-10. Prince Regent . . . burst into tears at a sarcastic remark of Beau Brummell's. No such anecdote seems to be contained in the *Life of Beau Brummell* by Captain William Jesse or the *Life of George IV* by Percy Fitzgerald. Can it be that Meredith has transformed the well-known story of the 'cut' by the Prince and the retort by the beau, after their estrangement? The incident is conveniently found in the article, *Beau Brummell*, by Florence Ellicott in *Temple Bar* (1872) 35.236: 'He [the Regent, subsequently George IV] greeted them all with some words of friendly recognition, with the exception of Brummell, at whom he stared as if he did not know who he was, or why he was there. Stung to the quick by this public insult, the beau said in a loud tone to Alvanley, immediately their royal guest had passed

on: "Alvanley, who's your fat friend?" The Prince heard the remark, and was as much mortified by it as even its author could have desired.' George Bryan Brummell (1778-1840) gained a reputation at Eton and Oxford for the exquisiteness of his dress and the perfection of his manners. After some experience in the army, he came into a fortune, entered society, and passed for a model of elegance. When he had lost the protection of the Prince Regent, his gambling debts led him to escape across the Channel. He died in penury at Caen, France.

141 3-4. **One excellent test . . . as I have said.** See pp. 75 ff., 118-119.

141 11-12. **a Spirit overhead.** See 86 7-8.

142 6-7. **out of proportion.** See the *Poetics* of Aristotle, beginning of chapter 5 (Cooper, *Aristotle On the Art of Poetry*, p. 14): 'As for comedy, this . . . is an artistic imitation of men of an inferior moral bent; faulty, however, not in any or every way, but only in so far as their shortcomings are ludicrous; for the ludicrous is a species or part, not all, of the ugly. It may be described as that kind of shortcoming and deformity

which does not strike us as painful, and causes no harm to others; a ready example is afforded by the comic mask, which is ludicrous, being ugly and distorted, without any suggestion of pain.'

143 17-18. Molière . . . *École des Femmes*. In his *Préface* to *L'École des Femmes* (1662) Molière says of *La Critique de l'École des Femmes* (1663): '*L'idée de ce dialogue, ou, si l'on veut, de cette petite comédie, me vint après les deux ou trois premières représentations de ma pièce.*' ('The idea of this dialogue, or, if you prefer, of this little comedy, came to me after the first two or three performances of my play.') He alludes in this *Préface* to his critics.

144 9-12. a mild moon's ray of it . . . in *Comus*. Compare lines 4-6 of Milton's *Comus* (1634):

In regions mild of calm and serene air,  
Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot  
Which men call earth;

and also *Comus* 115-118:

The sounds and seas, with all their finny  
drove,  
Now to the moon in wavering morrice move,

And on the tawny sands and shelves  
Trip the pert fairies and the dapper elves.

144 12. **Pope.** See note on 77 22.

144 12-13. **the daylight side of the night half-obscuring Cowper.** Compare *The Diverting History of John Gilpin* (1782) of William Cowper (1731-1800) with the same poet's *Lines written during a Period of Insanity* (1763); and see, perhaps, *The Castaway* (Cowper's *Poetical Works*, ed. Milford, Oxford, 1907, p. 431), which begins:

Obscurest night involved the sky,  
Th' Atlantic billows roared,  
When such a destined wretch as I  
Washed headlong from on board,  
Of friends, of hope, of all, bereft,  
His floating home for ever left.

This poem was written in 1799.

144 18-19. **the spectacle of Bossuet over the dead body of Molière.** Molière died of haemorrhage on the night of February 17, 1673, having left the stage where he was playing the part of the Hypochondriac in his comedy of *Le Malade Imaginaire*. The great pulpit-orator and Roman Catholic controversialist Jacques Bénigne Bossuet (1627-

1704) was then in attendance at the Court of Louis XIV. In 1693 he published his *Maximes et Réflexions sur la Comédie*, near the beginning of which (chapter 3) occurs the following passage: '*La première chose que j'y reprends, c'est qu'un homme qui se dit prêtre ait pu avancer que la comédie, telle qu'elle est aujourd'hui, n'a rien de contraire aux bonnes moeurs, et qu'elle est meme si épurée à l'heure qu'il est sur le théâtre français, qu'il n'y a rien que l'oreille la plus chaste ne pût entendre. Il faudra donc que nous passions pour honnêtes les impiétés et les infamies dont sont pleines les comédies de Molière, ou qu'on ne veuille pas ranger parmi les pièces d'aujourd'hui celles d'un auteur qui a expiré, pour ainsi dire, à nos yeux, et qui remplit encore à présent tous les théâtres des équivoques les plus grossières dont on ait jamais infecté les oreilles des chrétiens.*' ('The first thing which I reprehend is that a man who calls himself priest could maintain that comedy, such as it is to-day, contains nothing contrary to good morals, and that it is so correct at the present hour on the French stage as to offer nothing to which the chastest ear might not listen. We must, accordingly, class as moral the impious and infamous matters with which the come-

dies of Molière are filled; or else we must not count among the plays of to-day those of an author who expired, so to speak, before our eyes, and who still, even now, fills our theatres with the most obscene jokes that ever corrupted the ears of Christians.')

**144 22. We have had comic pulpits.** Swift and Sterne might serve to illustrate the assertion (compare notes on 128 2-3 and 138 18); see also Leigh Hunt on Isaac Barrow (1630-1677), in *Wit and Humor (Selections from the English Poets 3. 2-3)*. But perhaps the most suitable instance of a clergyman who made effective use of wit and humor in the pulpit is Robert South (1634-1716); see W. H. Hutton, *Divines of the Church of England, 1660-1700*, in the *Cambridge History of English Literature* 8.335-353. Doubtless the name of Sydney Smith (1771-1845) should be included in any list, however brief.

**145 14-15. Aristophanes promises his auditors.** See the *Wasps* 1051-1059 (tr. Rogers):

But O for the future, my Masters, pray  
 Show more regard for a genuine Bard  
 Who is ever inventing amusements new  
 And fresh discoveries, all for you.

Make much of his play, and store it away,  
 And into your wardrobes throw it  
 With the citrons sweet; and if this you do,  
 Your clothes will be fragrant, the whole  
 year through,  
 With the volatile wit of the Poet.

146 10. **the scene in the *Frogs*.** See the *Frogs* 612-673. For this as for other references to Aristophanes consult the edition, with a masterly translation, of B. B. Rogers. The *Frogs* has also been translated by Hookham Frere, and by Gilbert Murray. Each of the three translations has its own distinctive merits.

146 18-19. **or horsemen sighted.** Meredith reads 'horseman'; but the Greek is (*Frogs* 653): 'ἰππέας ὀρῶ'—'I see horsemen.'

146 23. **the supper 'in the manner of the ancients.'** Meredith prints thus:

the Supper in the Manner of the Ancients ;  
 but Smollett wrote:

an Entertainment in the Manner of the  
 Ancients .

See chapter 44 of *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751) by Tobias George

Smollett (1721-1771); the chapter-heading, or argument, reads (Smollett, *Works*, ed. Henley, 1899, *Peregrine Pickle* 1.281): 'The Doctor prepares an Entertainment in the Manner of the Ancients, which is attended with divers ridiculous Circumstances.' The humor arises from the variety and objectionable and surprising nature of the viands, and the effect upon the banqueters.

147 7. **the Book.** See Introduction, pp. 34 ff.

148 9. **weighed themselves in the . . . balance.** A Biblical figure; see Da. 5.27: 'TEKEL. Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.'

149 2. **whirli-go-round.** Compare *whirligig* and *merry-go-round*. Meredith, who prints 'whirligoround,' had already used the word in *Rhoda Fleming* (1865), chapter 43: 'And he was a faithful servant, till one day he got up on a regular whirly-go-round, and ever since . . . such a little boy!' See also *Harry Richmond* (1871) 3.56: 'like one who has been gazing on the whirligoround.' Wright, *English Dialect Dictionary* (s. v. 'Whirly') records the word from Gloucester, Dorset, and Devonshire.

149 22-23. **the land of culture.** Compare the statement of Meredith (Edward Clodd, *George Meredith: Some Recollections*, in the *Fortnightly Review* 92.21): 'I learned very little at school, until I was sent to Neuwied, the learning of German proving a good thing when my friend Hardman, of the *Morning Post*, sent me as correspondent in 1866 on the outbreak of war between Austria and Italy.'

150 6. **caballeros.** Spanish gentlemen. See Latin *caballarius* (horseman), French *chevalier* (knight), English *cavalier*.

150 26. **Heinrich Heine.** See note on 115 13-17.

151 8. **La Bruyère.** Jean de la Bruyère (1645-1696), author of the *Caractères* (1688); see the edition of his works (1865-1878) by G. Servois in the collection of *Les Grands Écrivains de la France*; and see note on 110 25-26.

151 8-9. **La Fontaine.** Jean de La Fontaine (1621-1695); see the edition of his works (1883-1892) by H. Regnier in *Les Grands Écrivains*.

151 10. **a Trissotin.** The name of a 'bel esprit'—a poetaster and coxcomb—in

Molière's comedy of *Les Femmes Savantes* (1672); the name is compounded of *tri* ('thrice') and *sot* ('fool' or 'blockhead')—that is to say, 'Thrice-fool,' or 'Fool Cubed.'

151 10. a **Vadius.** The name of a 'savant' in the same comedy; he is a grave and heavy pedant.

151 18. **Orson.** One of the twin-brothers in the story of *Valentine and Orson*; he was suckled by a bear, and had the uncouth manners of the forest, whereas Valentine was reared by their uncle, King Pepin, and grew to be a courtier. The more primitive version of the tale is called *Valentine and the Nameless One*. The later version, appearing as a French romance of the Charlemagne cycle, was composed in the time of Charles VIII; it was first printed in 1489 at Lyons. For the widespread popularity of the story, and for an account of its various subsequent adaptations, see Wilhelm Seelmann, *Valentin und Namelos*, in *Niederdeutsche Denkmäler*, Vol. 4 (1884).

151 23. **Titan.** Hyperion? The revolt of the Titans against their father Uranos is first recounted in the *Theogony* of Hesiod (see Mair's translation, or the translation in

the edition of Sandys). They succeeded in setting up their youngest brother Kronos as their ruler; but a new struggle ensued, between Kronos and his son Zeus, in which the Titans took different sides. Those supporting Kronos represent the wild, disorderly forces of nature, finally defeated by the Olympian deities under Zeus, who stand for law and order.

152 2-3. *L'Ami Fritz*. A comedy by Erckmann-Chatrian (Émile Erckmann and Alexandre Chatrian), first produced on December 4, 1876, at the theatre of the Comédie Française, Paris (Meredith being then engaged in composing his *Essay*). It is based upon their novel of the same name (1864), which represents Alsatian life before the war of 1870. The hero, Fritz Kobus, a kindly, well-to-do sybarite of thirty-six, much sought after by mothers and daughters, eventually marries little Suzel, the young daughter of his farm-manager. The comedy in no way recognizes the recent loss of Alsace by France to Germany. It was promptly attacked by the conservative element of the French press for an alleged lack of patriotism in the authors, but was received by the public with unanimous applause, and has continued to hold the stage.

**152 10. our leaders in scholarship.** In 1906 Meredith writes to H. R. D. Anders: 'I remember reading in my youth Otto Jahn's memoir of the great philologer Hermann and his indefatigable devotion to work, with a sigh of regret that he, who had his rivals at home, had so few, if any, among us.' See Introduction, p. 14.

**152 18. Goethe.** See p. 115 and note on 115 21-22.

**153 8. The Muse of most of them is an *Aventurière*.** Meredith regards as typical of French comedy in the middle of the nineteenth century, not Alexandre Dumas the younger (1824-1895), who, while contending for the sanctity of marriage, has a special interest in persons like himself, not born in wedlock, and in the moral regeneration of the fallen when they experience true love; but rather Émile Augier (1820-1889), author of *L'Aventurière* (1848) and *Le Mariage d'Olympe* (1855). Of Augier, Ferdinand Brunetière says (I translate from his *Manuel de l'Histoire de la Littérature Française*, 1899, p. 492 n.): 'His originality really lies in the force, somewhat brutal, which he has put at the service of certain ideas that are commonly

defended with some measure of timidity or hesitation, for the reason that they are not less commonplace than just. Thus he has firmly established the proposition that a good name is better than riches, and that love does not restore the innocence of courtesans.' Compare Gustave Lanson (I translate from his *Histoire de la Littérature Française*, 1901, p. 1050): 'He is to be judged by his work in prose, not by the awkward eloquence of *L'Aventurière* . . . or the antique graces of *Philiberte* (1853). Augier is a bourgeois; and his drama gives expression to the ideas of a bourgeois of 1850, of sane mind, right feelings, firm will, and spotless morality. At the outset he rejected romanticism; in *Gabrielle* (1849) he unmasked the fallacy of the romantic ideal, the danger of the unbridled and supreme passion. To the sentimentality proceeding from romanticism, to any rehabilitation of courtesans through hypocritical or ingenuous pity, he gave a check in *Le Mariage d'Olympe*.'

153 14. *nostalgie de la boue*. See Augier, *Le Mariage d'Olympe* 1.1:

LE MARQUIS. Mettez un canard sur un lac au milieu des cygnes, vous verrez qu'il

regrettera sa mare, et finira par y retourner.

MONTRICHARD. La nostalgie de la boue!

BAUDEL. Vous n'admettez donc pas de Madeleines repentantes?

LE MARQUIS. Si fait, mais au désert seulement.

(‘THE MARQUIS. Put a duck on a lake in the midst of swans, and you will see he will regret the loss of his puddle, and will end by returning thither.

‘MONTRICHARD. Homesickness for the mire!

‘BAUDEL. Then you do not admit the existence of repentant Magdalens?

‘THE MARQUIS. Yes indeed, but only in the wilderness.’)

154 6-7. *the aventurières have a case to plead against him.* In *Rhoda Fleming* (1865) Meredith had represented Dahlia Fleming as the victim of an astute young man of the world; in spite of her fall she preserves her purity of heart. The novel gave offense to the ultra-Puritanical in England.

154 12. *circle of a spy-glass.* In 1877 these words were followed by a passage (see *Variant Readings*, p. 167) on several of Meredith's contemporaries who wrote for the

comic stage, including Robertson, Taylor, Gilbert, and Burnand. Thomas William Robertson (1829-1871), less successful as an actor than as a dramatist, early retired from the stage, and wrote a number of plays that were very popular; for example, *David Garrick* (1864), *Society* (1865), and *Caste* (1867). Tom Taylor (1817-1880), after distinguishing himself as a student at Glasgow and Cambridge, was professor of the English language and literature in the London University, became a barrister in 1845, and about 1846 took up the career of dramatist, writing or adapting upwards of one hundred pieces for the stage; among these were *Still Waters Run Deep* (1855) and *Our American Cousin* (1858). From 1874 to 1880 he was editor of *Punch*. Sir William Schwenck Gilbert (1836-1911)—knighted in 1907—author of the *Bab Ballads*, collaborated with Sir Arthur Sullivan in a long series of comic operas, several of which attained a high degree of popularity in America; for example, *H. M. S. Pinafore* (1878), *The Pirates of Penzance* (1879), *Patience* (1881), and *The Mikado* (1885). When Meredith wrote the *Essay*, Gilbert was perhaps best known for his fairy comedies, such as *Pygmalion and Galatea* (1871); *The Happy*

*Land* (1873) was received with great enthusiasm. Sir Francis Cowley Burnand (1836-)—knighted in 1902—founded the Amateur Dramatic Club at Cambridge, and later wrote *Black-Eyed Susan* and other burlesques, with comedies and farces. He was editor of *Punch* from 1880 to 1906. See note on 130 5-6.

154 13. **the fly in amber.** Compare Herrick, *Hesperides*, No. 817 (*Works*, ed. Pollard, 1898, 2.86):

I saw a fly within a bead  
Of amber cleanly buried;  
The urn was little, but the room  
More rich than Cleopatra's tomb.

Compare also Martial, *Epigrams* 4.32:

Et latet et lucet Phaethontide condita gutta,  
ut videatur apis nectare clusa suo.  
dignum tantorum pretium tulit illa laborum;  
credibile est ipsam sic voluisse mori.

(‘Preserved in a bead of amber [= ‘tear of the sisters of Phaethon’], there lurks and gleams a bee, so that she seems to be enclosed in her own honey. A worthy reward she had for all her labors. It is credible that she wished to die thus.’)



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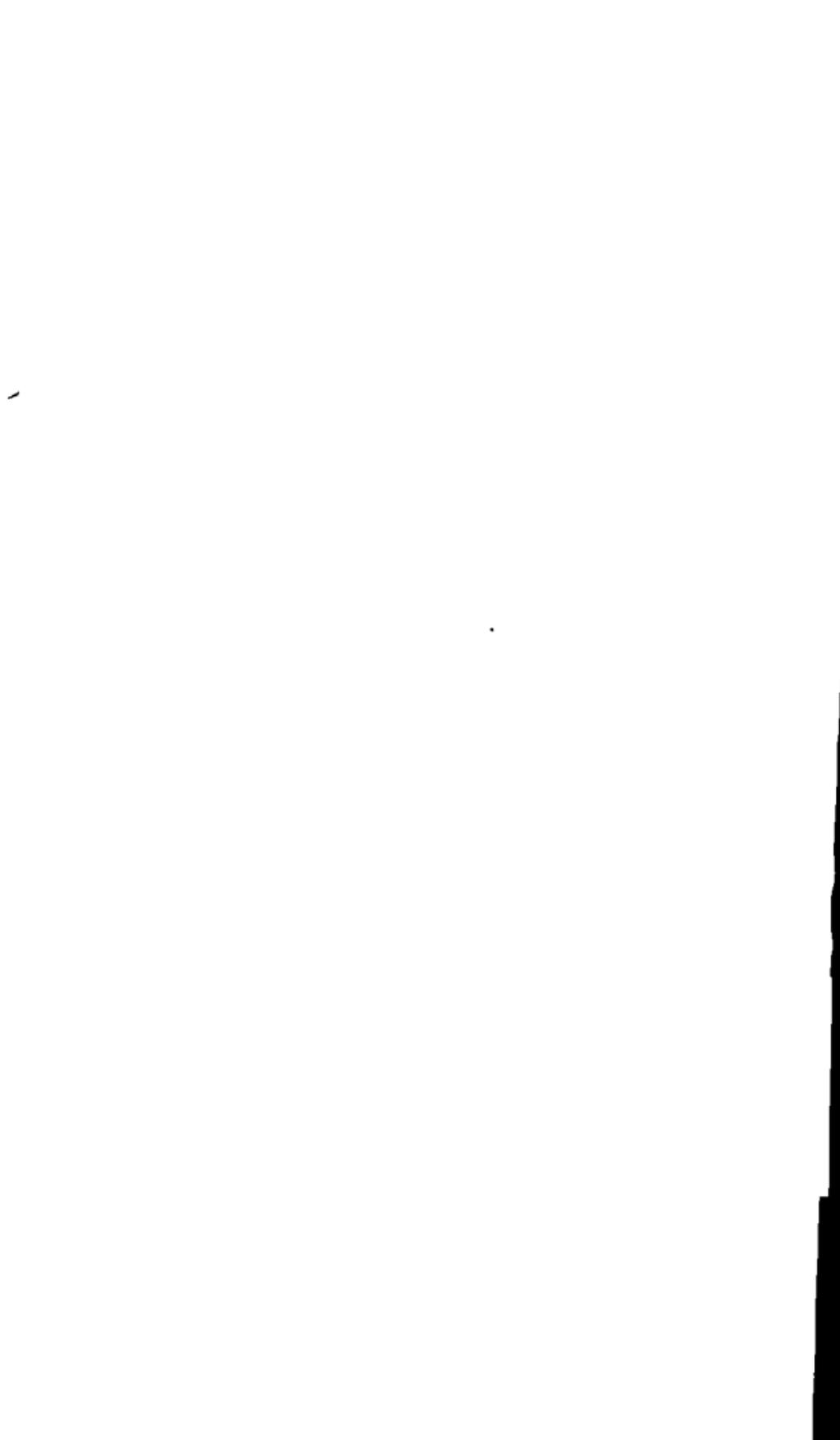
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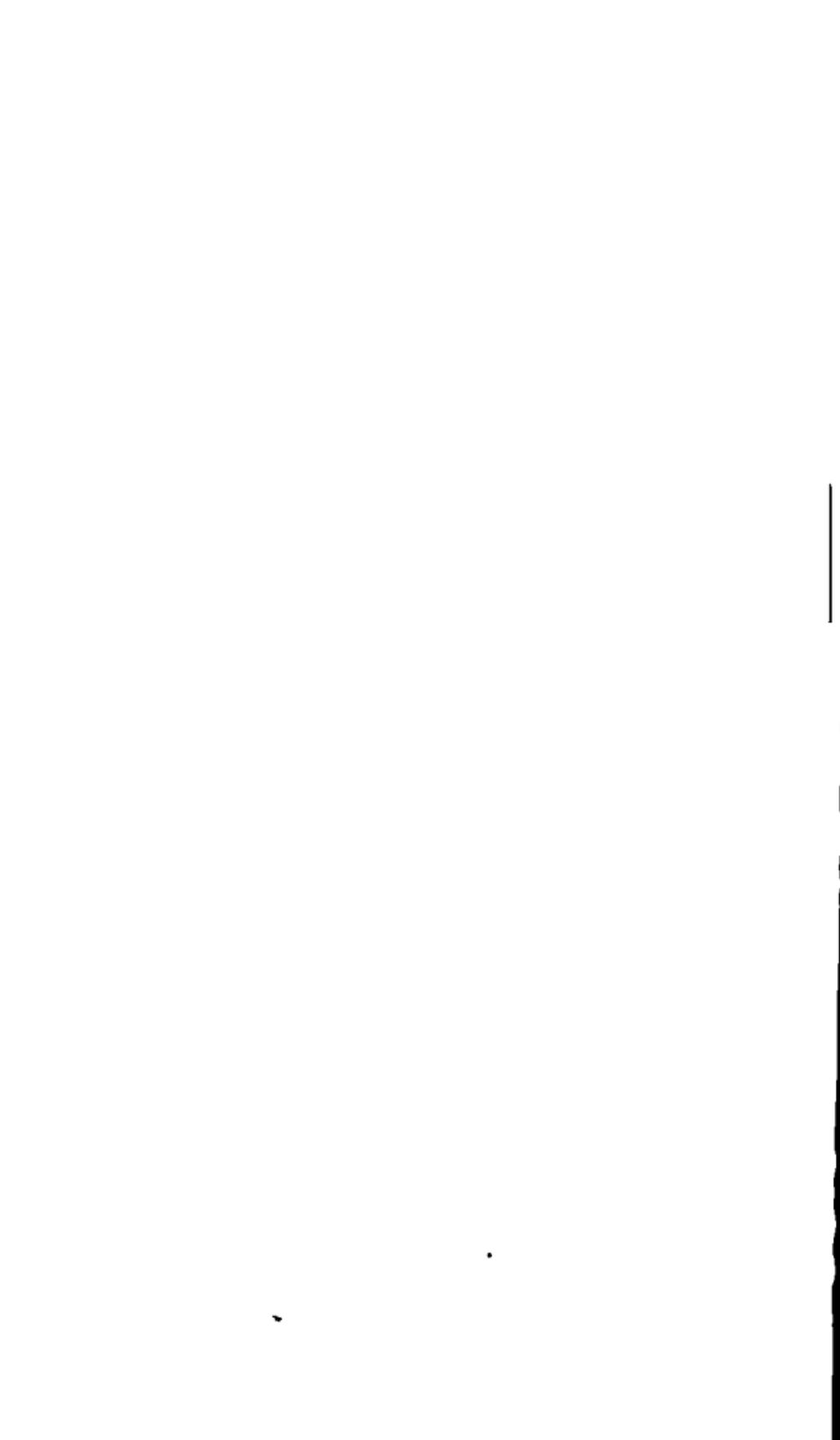
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