

For the same reason, a man will willingly risk every kind of danger, and even become courageous, although he may otherwise be faint-hearted. What a delight we take in watching, either in a play or novel, two young lovers fighting for each other--i.e., for the interest of the species--and their defeat of the old people, who had only in view the welfare of the individual! For the struggling of a pair of lovers seems to us so much more important, delightful, and consequently justifiable than any other, as the species is more important than the individual.

Accordingly, we have as the fundamental subject of almost all comedies the genius of the species with its purposes, running counter to the personal interests of the individuals presented, and, in consequence, threatening to undermine their happiness. As a rule it carries out its ends, which, in keeping with true poetic justice, satisfies the spectator, because the latter feels that the purposes of the species widely surpass those of the individual. Hence he is quite consoled when he finally takes leave of the victorious lovers, sharing with them the illusion that they have established their own happiness, while, in truth, they have sacrificed it for the welfare of the species, in opposition to the will of the discreet old people.

It has been attempted in a few out-of-the-way comedies to reverse this state of things and to effect the happiness of the individuals at the cost of the ends of the species; but here the spectator is sensible of the pain inflicted on the genius of the species, and does not find consolation in the advantages that are assured to the individuals.