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## THE AESTHETIC VIEWS OF W. M. THACKERAY

The evaluation of the aesthetic views of W. M. Thackeray in a separate detailed study seemed to me desirable for several reasons. First of all it is always very interesting and stimulating to all genuine lovers of literature, literary critics, and creative artists to get to know the views of any really great novelist on his own craft and to have a look into his workshop, for such knowledge helps very considerably in arriving at a better understanding of his works and of the given *genre* in general. The second motive for undertaking this task is that it has so far not been done, at least not in the form and conception presented here. There have been some successful attempts to evaluate the development of Thackeray's aesthetic views (A. A. Elistratova, V. V. Ivasheva), but this was done in an extensive monograph devoted predominantly to the reconsideration of Thackeray's early and mature work (Ivasheva) and in a more generally conceived survey of the whole development of Thackeray the novelist, included in a *History of English Literature* for the use of university students (Elistratova). Western scholars have hitherto presented only one study on this theme which is unhappily buried in a periodical inaccessible to us (Clapp), so far as we do not count some studies or chapters on Thackeray as reader of books and literary critic which pay some attention to his aesthetic views (Saintsbury, *CHEL*, Melville, Enzinger, etc.).<sup>1</sup> And, finally, most of the scholars who have touched on the problem in their articles, monographs, or histories of literature have not, in my opinion, solved it satisfactorily. For the most part they pay too little attention to Thackeray's aesthetic views, do not assess them in their development, or evaluate this incorrectly, ignore the social atmosphere in which they appeared, or regard Thackeray's aesthetics as primitive or almost non-existent. Of course Thackeray, like many great creative artists, did not work out any complete aesthetic and literary theory elaborated down to the smallest detail. But if we gather together his numerous reflections and remarks upon the substance of art in general and literature and painting in particular, some of his more significant reflections on his own creative method and on that of other writers, and if we confront these with his own creative approach to the depicted reality, we shall gain a comparatively clear idea

of the main principles of his aesthetics. My analysis cannot of course lay claim to any exhaustive and final solution of the problem, which would require more detailed treatment in the form of a monograph, paying more attention to the practical application of Thackeray's creed in his own works, than I am able to give here.

## I.

### THE GROWTH OF THACKERAY'S AESTHETIC CONCEPTIONS

The views of the great English satirist on literature and art did not begin to assume any clear form until the end of the 1820s and early 1830s, when he was about twenty years old. This does not mean, however, that before that time he was quite incapable of discerning fundamental aesthetic qualities and expressing his likes and dislikes in relation to individual works of art and literature. The several preceding years, which he spent at grammar school, represent an important period of aesthetic preparation, of reading and of the first creative attempts in the field of literature and drawing. Even the earliest period of his life, his childhood and the years spent at private school, is not negligible as the seed-time of his aesthetics, for he was then under the strong influence of his cultivated mother who, first directly and then indirectly from a distance, played an important role in the formation of his literary taste and in the early development of his passion for reading books. Her influence did not of course bring immediate results and Thackeray's earliest reading was naturally desultory and unselective — he read everything he could lay his hands on, as he himself later confessed,<sup>2</sup> and, like all boys of his age, preferred historical novels and novels of adventure. This early fancy of his for romantic stories was not, however, merely the usual boyish love of excitement and adventure. It provided him with the essential possibilities of escape from the deep misery he experienced in his early school days, caused by the separation from his mother, the brutal teaching methods and unbearable living conditions. In his later years, when he so often wrote of his unhappy school experiences with deep sorrow and pity, he also liked to remember the delightful hours spent over the pages of the beloved novels of his childhood, Jane Porter's *Scottish Chiefs* and *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, Pierce Egan's *Life in London*, the delightfully horrible novels of Mrs. Radcliffe and Horace Walpole and the novels of Walter Scott.<sup>3</sup> Especially the last named novelist was one of the most pleasant and generous companions and benefactors of his youth. The boy very probably read all the novels of the great writer as they came from the press, but preferred then, and ever afterwards, those which did not end with deaths and murders. His greatest

early favourite among Scott's characters was Rebecca in *Ivanhoe* whose unfortunate destiny moved his boyish heart and later became one of the impulses for him to write his burlesques *Proposals for a Continuation of 'Ivanhoe'* and *Rebecca and Rowena*, in which he good-humouredly ridiculed some of the weaknesses of Scott's creative method, but also endeavoured to redress the wrong committed upon this enchanting heroine by her creator. Although at the close of his life Thackeray several times expressed his deep thankfulness to all these beloved authors of his childhood for the happy hours they granted him in his youthful misery, his boyish enchantment with them was not of the same intensity in every case and its later development did not run in identical grooves. His admiration of Gothic romances, for instance, had never been completely uncritical, as his juvenile drawings in the copy of Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* bear witness, ridiculing the most typical aspects of the creative approach of this writer and the whole literary school. His fascination with the novels of Jane Porter and Pierce Egan was of a rather longer duration, but he cured himself even of this as soon as he began to read the novels of great realistic novelists. The reading of Gothic romances and the novels of Jane Porter and Egan was not necessarily quite useless for the future novelist, but they did not play any decisive role in the development of his aesthetic and creative principles, apart from their possible influence by way of contrast. The case is of course different with the last named early favourite of Thackeray, Walter Scott. Even if the young satirist very soon acquired a critical attitude to Scott's idealized depictions of barbarous feudal relationships and excessive display of historical lore, he had much to learn, especially as writer of historical novels, from the general approach of his predecessor to the depiction of the past and, as realistic novelist, from Scott's mastery in creating characters.

It is most probable, though we have no direct evidence for it, that in these early years of his first acquaintance with literature Thackeray read four classic books for children, two of which belong to world literature (*The Arabian Nights* and *Don Quixote*) and two to English (*Gulliver's Travels* and *Robinson Crusoe*). For his early knowledge of three of these books (*Gulliver's Travels* excepted) we have at least indirect evidence,<sup>4</sup> while for his lifelong admiration of this trio we have many later proofs. The classic work of world fairy-tale literature, *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, did not cease to enchant Thackeray from childhood up to maturity by the inexhaustible wealth of its Oriental themes which became, too, one of his important literary sources. In his literary works, early, middle, and late, he often used some of the stories contained in the book as allegories illustrating his images and ideas, and frequently referred to it or quoted from it. Also the immortal novel of Miguel Cervantes belonged to those books which were Thackeray's early favourites, which he read several times during his lifetime and which served him as literary models. *Don Quixote*

roused his enthusiasm not only because it was a parody on chivalric romances, the *genre* in which he himself excelled, but first and foremost because he regarded its author as a master of realism and genuine humour, the creator of convincing and lifelike characters. The character of the crazy, courageous and generous knight fighting single-handed his hopeless fight against the whole world, proved very stimulating, too, for Thackeray the novelist, and served him as one of the prototypes of those personages of his, whom he endowed with similar spiritual qualities and depicted as misfits in bourgeois society, whose fight for truth and justice in the world of money interests is, for want of better arms than their own pure hearts, doomed to failure, but whom he holds up as models worth imitating. This indebtedness is for the first time manifested in the character of Dobbin, but was most fully revealed and also openly confessed by the novelist in that of Colonel Newcome.<sup>5</sup> As Thackeray's later scanty remarks suggest, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* was also one of those books that he had loved as a boy and continued to appreciate till the end of his life, in this case mainly for the verisimilitude of realistic narrative. (Another book which held such a place in his heart was Lesage's *Gil Blas*, which he ever afterwards praised for its vivid and sparkling humour and the author's capacity to create characters faithful to life.) The case is different, however, with the fourth of the books mentioned, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Although we do not possess any direct evidence of it, it seems very probable that if Thackeray read it in his childhood at all, he read it in an abridged edition for children and presumably liked it. The abundant later evidence demonstrates, however, that in his mature years he assumed towards Swift that characteristic attitude of distaste mixed with admiration which found its most explicit expression in his lectures on the *English Humourists of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century* and which also amply proves that in no period of his life did Thackeray see in his great predecessor a literary teacher or model, although his creative approach had much in common with that of Swift.

As I have pointed out above, the period of Thackeray's study at Charterhouse may be characterized as the important seed-time of his aesthetic creed. It was during these years that Thackeray began to look critically at the world in which he lived, if only at the small world confined within the walls of the school building, that his faculties of observation began to sharpen and his talent of selecting the ridiculous aspects of the reality surrounding him witnessed a noticeable development, manifested especially in his drawings and caricatures on themes provided by school life. As the reminiscences of his schoolfellow John Frederick Boyes testify, he also began to manifest some capabilities of discernment in his reading, revealed a sound literary taste which went beyond the level of Gothic fiction and selected his new favourites especially from the English realistic novelists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was probably at this period

of his life that he began to read the novels of his main literary teacher Henry Fielding and certainly now that he became acquainted with some of the works of Tobias Smollett, Oliver Goldsmith, Addison and Steele, and Samuel Johnson.<sup>6</sup> With certain later modifications all these writers remained his favourites till the end of his life, but, besides Fielding to whom he was most indebted, it was especially in the workshop of Addison and Steele that he learned much, on the example of whose elegant and polished diction he modelled his style, from whom he learned how to conduct his authorial commentary and by whose positive social ideal, supremely embodied in Sir Roger de Coverley, he was much influenced, especially in his later years, when he definitely entered on the road leading towards compromise with the existing society. As the evidence we possess shows, with the works of Laurence Sterne Thackeray did not become acquainted until a later period of his life: he himself confessed that he had not any work of this novelist in his library while he was at school, as they were not regarded as suitable reading for young people. In the years of his maturity, however, he knew Sterne's works intimately and even if he had grave critical reservations as to some aspects of Sterne's creative method, he was considerably indebted to his predecessor's realistic mastery in the creation of characters, while his general approach to the depiction of reality had also some other traits in common with that of Sterne, which were pointed out by Bagehot and Kathleen Tillotson.<sup>7</sup> Thackeray's acquaintance with the works of Samuel Richardson is also of a later date: he probably read *Pamela* somewhere in the 1830s, as his review of Fielding's works suggests, but he did not read *Clarissa* until much later, when Macaulay expressed surprise at his ignorance.<sup>8</sup> As his rather scornful references to this novelist testify, Richardson never was one of his favourite authors and his works did not serve him as literary models. At the close of his life, however, he grew enthusiastic about Richardson's unconvincing lay figure of Sir Charles Grandison, who by his complete adaptation to all the conventions of the bourgeois social and moral code admirably suited Thackeray's later ideal of gentlemanliness.

It was at Charterhouse, too, that Thackeray got his first deeper insight into contemporary English poetry. As Boyes informs us, he belonged to a group of boys in which the leading role was played by William Wellwood Stoddart (the son of Hazlitt's brother-in-law Sir John Stoddart) who told his friends anecdotes about Scott, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Hazlitt, and Lamb, with all of whom his father was intimately acquainted, and brought them new books to read and discuss. In this circle of his early friends Thackeray spoke with enthusiasm about the genius of Keats, whom he also ever afterwards ranked among the greatest geniuses of English literature. As his early correspondence and the autobiographical elements in his later novels show, he began to become acquainted, too, with the poetry of other great romantic poets, notably Words-

worth and the then very popular Byron, and may also have been a passionate admirer of the latter's poetry, like his later hero Pendennis, although his not very much later sharply critical and even biassed attitude to the main creative principles of the great romanticist casts some doubts upon this.

The curriculum of the grammar school enabled the young student to get his first insight into the works of classic ancient authors and acquire a rudimentary knowledge of Latin and Greek. Unfortunately his first instructors were brutal, vulgar and snobbish teachers with military manners, who used pedantic teaching methods and often had recourse to corporal punishment. The suffering which the sensitive boy had to undergo during his Latin and Greek lessons made everything pertaining to these languages extremely distasteful to him — even the writers who used them as their medium and the countries in which they lived. In his later years Thackeray many times referred to this early hatred of his of the classic languages and writers, a hatred which he never completely overcame, but much moderated in his mature years by his own study.<sup>9</sup> Whereas his early classical education did not play any significant role in the formation of his aesthetic creed, his first acquaintance with the theatre and drama proved more fruitful. With loving nostalgia he liked to remember in his later years the plays he saw in the last year of his study in the London theatres, although during that period of the decline of the English drama he could not see any good new plays, nor any original productions of the classic ones. Nevertheless this was the time which made him an inveterate lover of this sort of entertainment, and the impressions were accordingly deep and unforgettable, as his reminiscences and all his works bear witness. One of the most important factors determining the development of his aesthetics were of course his own creative efforts which served him, like his reading, as one of the means of escape from the acute unhappiness he experienced. All his *juvenilia* — caricatures of his schoolfellows and teachers, marginal illustrations in the hated textbooks and beloved novels, and his first attempts at writing poetry — reveal his early bend towards parody, burlesque and satire and his budding critical attitude to false sentimentality and bombast.

During his studies at Cambridge Thackeray's aesthetic views began to assume a more definite shape, in harmony with the general development of his personality, the expanding and deepening of his interest in social and political problems, the sharpening of his critical attitude towards contemporary society and the growing consciousness of its basic characteristic traits — the existence of class differences, the decisive role of money interests and the all-pervading snobbery. Having been disappointed with the whole system of university study, the future novelist began to search for the desired knowledge of life, literature and art in spheres that eventually proved more rewarding than the university curriculum — in the actual reality existing outside lecture-rooms, in the

discussions on art and literature which he carried on with his friends (among whom we find such later literary celebrities as Alfred Tennyson and Edward Fitzgerald), in the books he read, in the pictures he studied and copied, and, last but not least, in his own activities as writer and caricaturist. As reader of books the young university student considerably developed his capabilities of selection and critical discernment, even though he also committed some mistakes in his assessments of the books read. The most characteristic aspects of his literary taste in this period is his increasing love of the great realistic novelists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially of Henry Fielding, now for the first time openly avowed,<sup>10</sup> his delight in the works of eccentric humourists (Clarke, Hook, and the other representatives of the fiction of "high jinks"), and his deep interest in the works of the great representatives of American and English progressive thought and literature, Thomas Paine and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Thackeray's interest in the poetry and personality of the great romanticist may be to a certain extent explained by the fact that the two years he spent at the university witnessed a veritable cult of Shelley's poetry among the students. As Professor Lounsbury pointed out, this cult reached its climax at the end of 1829 and in 1830, when the most enthusiastic admirers, some of them Thackeray's intimate friends, made a journey to Oxford to defend Shelley against Byron, who was greatly in fashion there, and to express their indignation at Shelley's having been sent down from that university on account of his atheism.<sup>11</sup> Thackeray followed with interest the passionate discussions of the merits and demerits of Shelley's poetry that were taking place in the students' Debating Society, which was preparing for the defence of Shelley at Oxford, and even began to write a contribution of his own, which he eventually did not read, and an essay on the great romanticist for a planned but finally not realized new university magazine. In spite of this participation in the activity of the students, however, he did not identify himself with the cult of the poet, for even if he did not deny him genius and strong feelings, he was considerably confused by his *Revolt of Islam* and obviously repelled by his "religion". Nevertheless, as A. A. Elistratova pointed out, the young student experienced the powerful attraction of both the revolutionary poetry of Shelley and of his life consecrated to the struggle for liberty, both of which could not but evoke in him reflections about the basic questions of social development.<sup>12</sup>

During his university studies Thackeray considerably enlarged the fundamental knowledge of Latin and Greek and the classics which he had gained at the grammar school under the tyrannical rule of Dr. Russell. He found the university methods of instruction and study much more agreeable than "that steady grubbing pace with which the Cistercians used to go over the classic ground, scenting out each word as they went, and digging up every root in the way",<sup>13</sup> began to discover the beauties of the works of Thucydides and



Aeschylus and intended to compete for the college prize for the best essay on the theme "On the Influence of the Homeric Poems on the Religion, the Politics, the Literature and Society of Greece", but was discouraged by the extensive reading necessary for its elaboration. The knowledge of classical literatures Thackeray gained at the university was not very deep, as the superficial classical education he ascribes to some of his later characters suggests (Pendennis, Clive Newcome), but it was extensive and formed a solid foundation for further studies. Even if there is only scanty direct evidence of his later reading, his early and later paraphrases of classic authors and numerous marginal remarks in his works and letters reveal that in his later years he possessed a good working knowledge of at least some of the works of Anacreon, Horace, Homer, Juvenal, Tacitus, Ovid, Catullus, Lucretius, Aristophanes, Aeschylus, Virgil, and Thucydides. As most Thackerayan scholars are agreed, of these writers it was especially Horace to whom Thackeray was most indebted, and not only for the formation of his style, as James Hannay demonstrated, but in his whole creative approach and outlook. As G. N. Ray suggested, Thackeray "found in the London of high Victorian days many points of similarity with Augustan Rome as Horace had known it" and, in spite of the great differences between the two writers, "Thackeray's attitude resembled Horace's, not merely towards the city, but also towards life in general".<sup>14</sup> This comparison of Horace, the poet of decaying pagan society and Thackeray, the novelist of a society which found itself in his time at least twice on the brink of a precipice, is very revealing and would deserve separate treatment.

Of all the factors that determined and influenced the growth of Thackeray's aesthetic conceptions in the period discussed, one of the most significant was his study of the art of painting. He had not as yet begun the regular training in the studios, but visited exhibitions and museums at Cambridge and Paris, where he studied and copied the works of famous painters. Even at this early time he began to reveal some capabilities for the critical evaluation of the works of individual painters and even of the main movements in art, both contemporary and of the past, and pronounced his first negative judgments of the representatives of the classical school of painting, who later were among the main butts of his art criticism. At Cambridge, as at Charterhouse, Thackeray drew many caricatures on the themes provided by university life, which have not great value as works of art, but manifest, as Alekseev pointed out, the keenness of his faculty of observation and the quickness of his reactions to all the phenomena of life.<sup>15</sup> They undoubtedly helped him, too, in verifying his early conceptions of art in their practical application and making them thus more clean-cut and definite. This holds good, too, for his early literary attempts, the parodies in verse and prose which he published in the university magazines *The Snob* and *The Gownsmen* and which manifest his steadily developing ability

of grasping and underlining the comic traits and aspects of his milieu, and his increasingly critical attitude to sham prose and poetry.

A very significant stage in the development of Thackeray's aesthetic views in the years preceding the beginning of his literary career is represented by his sojourn at Weimar after the premature interruption of his university studies in July 1830. The young man found himself for the first time amidst the busy life outside school and university walls, and, liberated from the hateful school discipline, eagerly imbibed new stores of knowledge, provided bountifully by life itself. He followed with keen interest contemporary political events in Germany, England and other European countries, which were then being shaken by the echoes of the July Revolution in France, evaluated them in his letters mostly in the spirit of progressive public thought in Europe and for the first time revealed his hatred of monarchical *régimes* and his republican sympathies. One of the most important items of his daily programme at Weimar, besides his active participation in the social life of the city, on the snobbery of which he caustically commented in his letters, but which endeared itself to him by its courtesy and gentlemanliness, was an individual and highly pleasant course of German literature and history under the tutorship of an excellent teacher, Dr. Weissenborn. This proved to be very effective, since the young student not only became intimately acquainted with the works of some outstanding German writers, but was also able to pronounce and formulate his first original literary judgments and to reflect seriously upon some of the basic aesthetic problems. In this process a not negligible role was played by his becoming personally acquainted with Goethe, who delighted him with his kind behaviour and interest in an unknown young Englishman and even with his appearance, of which Thackeray drew several sketches. His meeting with the poet did not remove, however, Thackeray's critical reservations as to the poet's personal character as he fancied he knew it from the talk of his acquaintances and friends. His early negative view of the great German classic poet as a libertine "by practice and profession" and a mean and greedy man<sup>16</sup> is regrettable, but there is also a grain of truth in it, as Thackeray met Goethe two years before the latter's death, at the period when the great humanist had already resigned himself to the sphere in which he had to live and when his character had been harmfully effected by his high position at the court of the duchy and its general social conditions. What is more lamentable, however, is that Thackeray's opinion of Goethe as a man considerably influenced his views of the poet's work, which are in many respects biased, though not completely unjust. Thus he found himself unable to do full justice to the great merits of Goethe's masterpiece, *Faust*, even though he admitted them, and severely criticized the novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre und Wanderjahre* as "a wretched performance" without principle and interest, without delicacy, morality, and philosophy. The deepest

roots of these judgments of his do not lie, however, in his critical attitude to the poet's personal character, but in the development of his aesthetic views towards realistic conceptions of literature and art. By the beginning of the 1830s his distaste for irrationalism and mysticism in literature and art in general and romanticism in particular had been so definitely formed, that he was repelled by Goethe's pathetic style and regarded his symbolic way of depicting the chosen sphere of life as a retreat from reality. This is confirmed by his sharp criticism of what he regarded as touches of mysticism in *Wilhelm Meister* and what he characterized as "a dotting drivelling sentimentality not worth the pains of deciphering".<sup>17</sup> Thackeray persevered in his negative attitude to Goethe's creative method for many years and even wrote a satirical poem on the theme of *Werther*, but he also revealed an increasing capacity to appreciate the merits of Goethe's works, as is proved especially by the ungrudging tribute he paid to the poet's genius in his late reminiscence of Weimar.<sup>18</sup> Although his original view of Goethe's creative approach had been more negative than positive and we can scarcely speak about any direct indebtedness of the English novelist to the German writer, his personal acquaintance with Goethe and the study of his works exercised no negligible influence upon his developing literary views — provoking him to thoughts and reflections upon the fundamental problem of literature, its relationship to reality, and helping him to realize and formulate his own views more definitely and clearly.

Thackeray's early evaluations of the works of Goethe's great contemporary Schiller are much more positive and just, though even they are, this time in a positive sense, strongly influenced by his views of the poet's personal character, which seemed to him, contrary to that of Goethe, without any stains. The young student of German literature did not allow himself to be restrained by the poet's romantic creative method and gave full vent to the feelings of deep admiration evoked in him by the revolutionary content of Schiller's poetry and its spirit of youthful energy, which made him range this poet above Goethe and immediately after Shakespeare.<sup>19</sup> Thackeray's enthusiasm for Schiller's work is in full harmony with the attitude of contemporary progressive public thought in Europe, which was so clear-sightedly analysed by Belinsky,<sup>20</sup> and is a convincing proof of the progressive character of his early aesthetic views. Their essential progressiveness is further confirmed by Thackeray's taking keen interest, as reader, translator, and later as literary critic, in almost all the representatives of the liberal, advanced wing of contemporary German literature, except the greatest of them, Heinrich Heine, who was paradoxically perhaps nearest to him of all the contemporary German writers in using irony as the main form of his creative approach.<sup>21</sup> While in Germany or in the years immediately following Thackeray read or translated the works of E. M. Arndt, Johann Ludwig Uhland, Jean Paul, and in the period of Chartism, when he worked

as literary critic and his ability of selecting, if not always correctly assessing the positive values of contemporary German literature attained its maturity, he translated one poem by Adalbert von Chamisso, took a fancy to his *Remarkable History of Peter Schlemihl* and reviewed, if not quite justly, the historically significant poetical collection of Georg Herwegh, *Gedichte eines Lebendigen*. Besides Thackeray's preference for the above German writers, perhaps the most convincing evidence of the progressive character of his developing aesthetic creed is his early critical attitude to the works of the more escapist representatives of German romanticism. Although he was at first enchanted with the eccentric fantasy of E. T. A. Hoffmann, soon after his closer acquaintance with his works he found it disagreeable and not "extraordinary". As one remark in his diary suggests, he came to the conclusion that Hoffmann did not reach the strength and depth of the satirical generalizations of Jean Paul, whose "Rabelaisian humour" he preferred. For all his critical reservations, however, Thackeray never ceased to appreciate the genius of the great German romanticist and even translated for the English readers one part from his fairy tale *Nussknacker und Mausekönig* (*The History of Krakatuk*). As far as the high priests of reactionary romanticism, the brothers Schlegel, are concerned, Thackeray at first deeply admired August Wilhelm Schlegel's *Vorlesungen über schöne Litteratur und Kunst*, the first part of which (*Die Kunstlehre*) he intended to translate into English, cherishing at the same time a hope of being introduced to the learned scholar. After the second reading of the book, however, he came to the conclusion that it was "a spurious one" and changed his mind about acquainting the English reading public with it. His realistic aesthetics had been by that time so far developed that Schlegel's romantic theories of literature and art could not, when thoroughly understood, retain his admiration.<sup>22</sup>

As follows from the above, Thackeray's sojourn at Weimar played a far from negligible role in the whole development of his views and personality. The gradual maturing of his world outlook in the favourable calm atmosphere suitable for deeper reflection on some of the important problems of life and human society, serious and eager study of literature and history, literary discussions at the ducal court and private social parties, participation in the rich cultural life of the town including frequent visits to the theatre, personal acquaintance with Goethe — all this could not but bring about a considerable expanding and deepening of Thackeray's literary interests and aesthetic views. As Merivale suggests, life in a town which was then a veritable Court of Letters, pervaded by "the living presence of Goethe, and scarce less living memory of Schiller", might have also drawn the attention of the sensitive and imaginative young man, who had as yet no definite plans for the future, towards literature.<sup>23</sup>

In the years following his return from Germany and preceding the beginning of his professional literary career (1830—1837) the development of Thackeray's

aesthetic views continued along the above suggested lines, leading towards realistic conceptions of literature and art in their as yet not fully mature form, as they are embodied in his early literary works and criticism, published in the *National Standard* and *Fraser's Magazine*. One of the important factors determining their formation was again the influence exercised upon the young writer and critic through literary works he read and works of art he studied and copied. Thackeray's literary interests assumed a wider range in this period — he enlarged the knowledge of German literature he had gained at Weimar, read with keen interest almost the whole of contemporary English production in the *genre* of fiction and laid the foundation of his future store of knowledge of French literature. His long sojourns in France in the 1830s, connected with his work as foreign correspondent of the *National Standard* and the *Constitutional*, were especially fruitful for his aesthetic education. In Paris he lived a rich cultural life, was a regular and enthusiastic theatre-goer, visited libraries and reading rooms where he spent many hours endeavouring to get a deeper insight into French literature, both classic and modern, and, seriously thinking at this time of becoming a professional artist, devoted himself assiduously to the study of art, both in Paris and London studios. Although this study did not make him a professional painter, it made him an excellent illustrator and graphic artist with an almost Hogarthian talent in the field of caricature and grotesque, refined his critical perception and helped much in the definitive formation of his aesthetic views. As Alekseev pointed out, the outcome of the long-lasting struggle between Thackeray the painter and Thackeray the writer was the blending of individual spheres of art in his consciousness on the one hand, and heightened sensibility towards the specific character of the literary form of expression on the other hand. The great novelist liked to use the terminology of painting, when he talked about his own works, as Alekseev demonstrates in detail, and never succeeded in getting rid of the influence of painting upon his literary art, but on the other hand he manifested his fine sense for the specific form of literary expression by his liking for daring metaphors and puns and by his excellent characterizations of the English pronunciation of foreign languages and of social dialects.<sup>24</sup>

Although the influence of the impressions gained during this period from the books Thackeray read and pictures he saw and studied played a very significant role in the formation of his aesthetic creed, they were not the most important and decisive factors. The general tendency of this development was determined and continuously influenced by the actual reality itself; by the social life of which the young writer was a part and by the general social atmosphere in which he lived. His consciousness was in this period exposed to the strong influence of the momentous events taking place in the political and social life of his own country and of France, the mass struggles of the English people

for the reform of Parliament, and the establishment of the reactionary *régime* of the July monarchy in France. Under the impact of these events his political and social views developed towards bourgeois radicalism, and he began to stand out, in his literary work and journalism, as a conscious opponent of the policy of the English ruling classes and of the reactionary monarchical *régimes* in Europe. This development of Thackeray's world outlook is indirectly reflected, too, in his aesthetic views, and reveals itself especially in his increasing capability of discerning the socially wholesome and unwholesome tendencies and phenomena in contemporary literature. He reveals himself as a keener observer and manifests a better discernment, however, in evaluating the literature of his own country than that of France. From the whole production of fiction in England in the first half of the 1830s he positively appreciated only the works of the representatives of bourgeois realism (Edgeworth, Ferrier, Marryat, Galt, and perhaps as early as this also Peacock) who were indeed in that period of interregnum the main protagonists of wholesome tendencies in English literature side by side with Dickens and himself. As early as the beginning of the decade he acquired a critical attitude to the creative method of some of those second-rate imitators of Scott and Byron, who in the second half of the decade and in the 1840s became the butts of his criticism and parody (Bulwer, Disraeli, Mrs. Norton and the other poetesses of the Silver-Fork School, and, from American literature, Cooper).<sup>25</sup> Whereas Thackeray's early views of contemporary English literature were substantially sound, his first critical judgments of French literature bear witness that even if he was able to point out some negative phenomena in the contemporary literary development, he was not always able to discern the actual progressive tendencies. As his sharp critical views of Hugo's early Gothic romances and of some other products of the so-called "Satanic School" witness and as his obvious indifference to Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and Vigny confirms, the young writer and critic arrived very early at a negative attitude to this unfruitful type of French romanticism. From the confusing quantity of literary works produced in France in the period he was able to select, as did his great contemporaries Chernyshevsky and Belinsky, the poetry of Pierre-Jean de Béranger, as — in his eyes — the only phenomenon deserving deep admiration. He was not able, however, either in the period we are dealing with or later, to find any other positive values in the new literary currents in France. His revolt against romantic excesses in literature led him too far and he developed a tendency, which did not undergo any substantial modification in later years, to condemn the whole Romantic movement, without duly distinguishing its divergent tendencies which differed from each other not so much in their general creative approach as in their aesthetic ideals and social value. In the years we are discussing he included in his condemnation, besides the above representatives of escapist romanticism, even the more mature Victor

Hugo, who had already rejected the Gothic novel, and, at the close of the 1830s, George Sand, though he was never completely unjust to these two great writers. Thackeray also committed the then not uncommon mistake on the part of critics and readers of including among the representatives of French romanticism the great realist Honoré de Balzac. The romantic elements characteristic of Balzac's creative approach in *La Peau de Chagrin* made him range this novel among the typical products of this school and prevented him from appreciating the novelist's splendid depictions of French bourgeois society which have so many common traits with his own. It is worth noticing that Thackeray nowhere mentions Balzac's great novels that were all published during his lifetime, though it seems highly probable that he read at least some of them and that he might even have been influenced by Balzac's creative method, as several scholars suggest, some of whom, however, go too far in their conclusions as to his indebtedness.<sup>26</sup> Since Thackeray did not recognize the kinship between his approach and that of Balzac, he could not find among French contemporary novelists any literary teacher or model in whose workshop he would consciously and avowedly learn, as far as we do not count the boulevard writer Paul de Kock and Balzac's disciple Charles de Bernard whose works he positively appreciated and, in the latter case, greatly admired. But he drew much from the works of some French classic writers, though even in this case the indebtedness was not always intentional. He obviously learned much from Rabelais, whose robust and burlesque humour he even compared to his own, possibly from Ronsard, whose poetry appealed to him by its melancholy reflections upon the ephemeral character of life, youth, love and beauty, from Montaigne, whose creative approach of moralist and sceptic so much resembled Thackeray's and from whom the English novelist, a great lover of the *Essais*, borrowed one of the most important motifs of several of his works, "Il n'y a pas de héros pour son valet de chambre", from Voltaire, whom he criticized for his atheism, but preferred to contemporary French writers, and later from Diderot, whose creative method of "a remarkable sentimental Cynic" seemed to him much akin to his own.<sup>27</sup>

The crucial period in the formation of the personality, views and opinions of the young writer was the decade 1837—1847, during which he worked as a professional journalist, critic and man of letters and which witnessed the quick development and maturing of his aesthetic and creative principles that found their most splendid embodiment at the end of this decade in his *Vanity Fair*. The literary influences that affected him through the books read remained of course a considerable factor in this development, and not infrequently served him as sources or models for his own literary work. The duties of a critic and reviewer of contemporary French, German and English writing demanded a great amount of reading, and everything he read contained something that was sug-

gestive for him and that he stored for further use in his diary or in memory. The young writer himself, however, was increasingly aware that literary influences were not the main source of his literary inspiration and that the decisive role in the formation of his aesthetic and creative principles was played by reality itself, and several times he extolled direct experience of life over the experience acquired from literature. For instance in 1843 he wrote:

"Seeing is certainly better than book-reading; it would be a good plan I think for a man in my trade to give up reading altogether for, I say, a year: and see with nobody else's eyes but his own".<sup>28</sup>

In the decade we are dealing with this influence of actual reality was indeed uncommonly strong, since in none of the previous periods of Thackeray's life was his consciousness exposed to so many and so brutal blows coming not only from the sphere of his private and professional life (the loss of his family happiness and his hard road to recognition), but especially from the wider sphere of the life of the whole country which was then being shaken by the storms of Chartism and came very perilously near the verge of the precipice. His keen and deep interest in the problems called up by these momentous political and social events, amply proved in his correspondence, is also indirectly reflected in his aesthetic creed and literary work, and revealed itself, as A. A. Elistratova pointed out, in that acuteness with which he fought, both as literary critic and novelist, against anti-popular art and literature, for an art and literature faithful to life and democratic.<sup>29</sup> His literary and art criticism again affected the further maturing of his conceptions of literature and art that were developing along the above suggested lines towards a realistic aesthetic creed. It was in the period of Chartism that Thackeray pronounced, especially in his book reviews, art criticisms, polemic works and parodies, his most significant statements concerning the basic problems of literature and art which we shall discuss in the following chapters of this study.

## II.

### THE MAIN PRINCIPLES OF THACKERAY'S MATURE AESTHETICS AND HIS CREATIVE METHOD

#### A) THACKERAY'S VIEWS OF THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF ART AND LITERATURE

As I have suggested above, it was the stormy events of the period of Chartism that made the young Thackeray for the first time think more deeply about the society in which he lived and led him to the conclusion, fully reflected in all his early and mature works, that its established organization could not



be perfect if it excited such passionate anger and hatred on the part of the working masses. This conclusion led him inevitably to reflection on what was the place and role of literature and art in human society in general and in the society of his time and place in particular. As early as 1838 he came to the opinion that a man of letters had no right to live in isolation from other human beings, devoting himself to morbid contemplation of his own personality, but that he had some duties towards society which he had to fulfil. The world is a healthier and higher school of poetry than a quiet study, writes Thackeray, and adds that "a *great* artist has the whole world for his subject, and makes it his task to portray it".<sup>30</sup> With the advance of time and the strengthening impact of contemporary social struggles upon his consciousness, the young novelist and critic came to be more and more alive to the significant role played by art and literature in the life of human society and repeatedly pointed out that the artist had no right to hold his society in contempt, but should feel great responsibility towards it and serve it honestly with his talent. He did not identify himself with the opinions of those writers who laid balm to their disappointment at not having been appreciated by the contemporary reading public by despising their readers and expecting fame from future generations, but was firmly convinced that the writer and artist should create his works for the society in which he lived. He liked to point out that all writers of real genius wrote for the people of their time and place, and by amusing them and making them happy secured for their work not only contemporary recognition, but immortal fame as well.<sup>31</sup>

The essentially progressive character of Thackeray's mature aesthetic views is most clearly manifested in his conviction that art and literature should serve the widest masses, that they belong in the hands of the people. Perhaps the most convincing expression of this view of his may be found in a remarkable passage in one of his art criticisms, in which he appeals to the English people to take art and literature from the hands of the aristocratic patrons and expresses his belief that their patronage would be much better and more effective than that of the British aristocracy ever was. It is true that by the term "the English people" Thackeray understood both the working and middle classes, but his appeal to the artists not to address themselves to a few elect, "to one duke or two dandies", but rather to "a hundred tailors or tinkers", to "the weak and poor; and they whose union makes their strength"<sup>32</sup> bears witness that he had in mind first and foremost the lowest sections of the community.

The young satirist devoted also considerable attention to the problem of the position and role of literature and art in contemporary social struggles, but his conception of this important issue is characterized by deep contradictions which are rooted in the contrasts existing in his consciousness since his youth and sharpening under the impact of the revolutionary storms of Chartism.

In 1840, when the Chartist movement was at its whitest heat, he began to proclaim the opinion, obviously partly inspired by Ovid's famous tribute to the arts which he so much delighted to quote, that one of the most important tasks to be performed by literature and art in human society was to ameliorate manners, and especially to calm the revolutionary moods of the working class. The argument he develops in his article "Caricatures and Lithography in Paris", his comparison of the cheerful and sober French workers with their embittered and dissatisfied comrades in England and the remedy he proposes to the latter after the French model (the cultivation of art and promotion of harmless amusement) bear witness that he regarded the aesthetic education of the working class as the main means of securing its prosperity and happiness and thus actually saw in literature and art important instruments for suppressing the revolutionary activity of the masses.<sup>33</sup> In his other occasional remarks written in this decade and especially in the argument he develops in his book reviews in the *Morning Chronicle*, he pronounced some even more, from my point of view, unacceptable statements, namely that literature should not be socially and politically engaged, that a novelist should be a non-combatant in contemporary social struggles, should not depict topical problems and assume the role of a regenerator of society.<sup>34</sup> As I have suggested in my article "W. M. Thackeray's Literary Criticism in the 'Morning Chronicle'",<sup>35</sup> his whole argument, however, his concrete evaluation of the works of some contemporary novelists (mostly second-rate) in which it is applied and, last but not least, Thackeray's own works amply prove that he did not protest against engagement of literature as such but against inorganic application of a certain tendency to literary work from the outside, against any purpose that is not inherent in it and does not pervade it throughout, but is laboriously and needlessly explained by the novelist, explicitly pointed out in authorial commentary. His views approach thus very near to those of Belinsky who declared that "what is *shown* in art is also *proved*", though at the early stage of his development he pronounced some even less acceptable statements on the problem than Thackeray.<sup>36</sup> That Thackeray's conception of the problem discussed was essentially sound in spite of the above confusions in his theoretical pronouncements, is further confirmed by the fact that in the same year in which he published his burlesque *A Plan for a Prize Novel*, which is usually regarded as another protest of his against the engagement of literature (but in fact again pillories those second-rate novelists who were unable to clothe their purpose in adequate artistic form), he put down in his private correspondence an interesting remark which shows that he perfectly realized how important a function literature and art played in contemporary social struggles and was not even unaware that he participated himself, through the medium of his own literary works, in the process of the destruction of the old social order. He wrote very explicitly:

"The present writers are all employed as by instinct in unscrewing the old framework of society, and get it ready for the Smash. I take a sort of pleasure in my little part in the business and in saying destructive things in a good humoured jolly way".<sup>37</sup>

As I have demonstrated in more detail in the above quoted article, even if Thackeray made some pronouncements about the social engagement of literature which at first sight appear entirely negative, he at the same time very clearly realized that the life of the people, and especially of its most oppressed section, the working class, should find reflection in literature as an inseparable component of contemporary reality. He often emphasized that most contemporary English writers completely ignored that sphere of life, and highly appreciated those novelists, poets, journalists, historians, and philosophers who first dared to enter the "awful, awful poor man's country"<sup>38</sup> and brought some news about it to the uninformed governing classes. These statements of his prove that he was able to appreciate the help the writer could give the people if he truthfully depicted their terrible conditions of life and thus acquainted the public with them.

It is of course Thackeray's own literary work that provides us with the final answer to the question of what his views on the social engagement of literature actually were. In his stories and novels Thackeray did not discuss topical political, economic and scientific problems, but through the medium of his depictions most convincingly expressed his own social, moral, and even political standpoint. He excluded from the frame of his canvas the English working class, since he did not know intimately its way of living and only rarely succeeded in getting in closer contact with it. Owing to this ignorance he did not search for the prototypes of his main characters in the working-class milieu, though in no other sphere than here could he find the genuine positive heroes for whom he, in the 1830s and 1840s, vainly sought in the milieu of the middle and higher classes. As A. A. Elistratova pointed out, his *Vanity Fair* is not only a "novel without a hero", but also "a novel without the people"<sup>39</sup> and this holds good for his whole work. This must not lead us, however, to precipitate conclusions that the great novelist was indifferent to the lowest social classes and their condition of life and that his work was something far removed from the interests of the people. In his newspaper contributions, stories, sketches, and novels written up to the middle of the 1850s, we find many marginal notes, commentaries, descriptions and even characters and episodes which prove that the writer often reflected upon the condition of the working masses and especially upon the abysmal contradictions between the two nations living side by side in his country, the existence of which he realized even earlier than Engels and Disraeli.<sup>40</sup> Worth noticing are several miniature pictures of the abysmal poverty of the inhabitants of London slums and of the debtors' prisons, one sympathetically drawn portrait of a poor girl (Fanny Bolton), an episodic

figure of a worker (in *The Newcomes*) used by Thackeray for venting his indignant protest against the licentious behaviour of young noblemen to poor girls, and against the unsurpassable difference existing between the rich and the poor, and several convincing depictions of the impoverishment of the English petty and unsuccessful higher bourgeoisie which prove that the novelist regarded this phenomenon as typical of a society ruled by Mammon (Mr. B. from *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*, Mr. Protokol from *Fitz-Boodle's Professions* and especially John Sedley). Notable in this connection is also Thackeray's tendency to recruit those characters of his early and mature works that are not wholly corrupted from the ranks of the common people who work to earn their livelihood, especially from the petty bourgeoisie and poor intelligentsia (Samuel Titmarsh and his friends who help him in need, Mr. Woolsey, Dennis Haggarty etc.). And last but not least, a very important role in Thackeray's depictions of contemporary society is played by those representatives of the lower social classes who work in aristocratic and bourgeois families — governesses, companions, footmen, and other servants. These characters represent a whole gallery of pictures which contains various types differing from each other by the degree of the depth of their elaboration, ranging from the smallest episodic figures to the imposing character of Becky Sharp. Thackeray's depictions of footmen are mostly negative, since their very existence had always excited the satirist's deepest indignation, but in spite of this he leaves them their sound human kernel and makes from them excellent critics of their noble masters (Yellowplush, Jeames de la Pluche). The portraits of the representatives of the other categories are mostly sympathetically drawn, even that of Becky, with whose revolt the novelist sympathizes in spite of himself, though he is not ready to condone the methods she used. Worth noticing is Thackeray's portrait of the relentlessly exploited servant-maid of Blanche Amory, in which he convincingly pillories the soft-voiced and well-bred tyranny exercised by the rich ladies over their subordinates. In all his depictions of the life of the servants Thackeray depicts and underlines the unsurpassable gulf existing between them and their masters, who live under one roof as two different nations between whom there can be no genuine human relationship.

These pictures from the life of the lower social classes do not of course exhaust Thackeray's relationship to the English people and the engagement of his works in their struggles. The great satirist perfectly realized that literature and art could help the masses in an indirect, but very effective way, by enabling them to come at a better and deeper understanding of human life and society in general and the society of their time and place in particular. From his first appearance before the English public and without any substantial modifications until his death, he consistently adhered to the opinion that the social significance of art and literature lay especially in the notional significance of

their artistic pictures. As his many occasional remarks bear witness, the novelist was convinced that the notional significance of literature equalled that of science but was at the same time well aware of the specific differences between the approach of these two forms of social consciousness to their materials. Like his model Fielding, who called himself a "historian" and his masterpiece *Tom Jones* a "history", or "a heroic, historical, prosaic poem", Thackeray also used to give the name of "historical works" to novels in general and his own works in particular and to emphasize their great notional value, never forgetting, however, that the historian and novelist have their different specific spheres and neither of them has the right to usurp the place of the other. Very often he even used to put the notional value of literature above that of historical science, which again reminds us of Fielding and his statement that *Don Quixote* deserves the name of "history" more than the historical work dealing with the same period. This does not mean, however, that Thackeray wanted to place art and scientific knowledge in mutual contradiction. He preferred novels to historical works chiefly because he regarded the novelist's elaboration of the given material as much more vivid and eloquent and hence capable of exercising much stronger influence upon the morals and manners of the reading public, and no less because he wished to raise novels, much undervalued in his time as frivolous entertainment, to the place they deserved. It stands to reason that Thackeray did not criticize good historical works but only such as did not provide that information about the past which he expected of them, namely a deeper insight into the characters of historical and political personages and the life of the wide masses of the people, "the expression of the life of the time; of the manners, of the movement, the dress, the pleasures, the laughter, the ridicules of society".<sup>41</sup> Thackeray's theoretical views of the notional significance of literature are also reflected in his own literary practice, for even if he might not have been fully aware of it himself, he created a whole series of plastic and convincing depictions of the life, manners and morals of the English ruling classes which possess a great notional value and through the medium of which he provided his readers with deep and truthful knowledge of the depicted sphere and thus in fact also gave a mighty weapon into the hands of those who actively participated in the contemporary social and class struggle. Even if he did not resolve to join the fight of the English people, did not accept the programme of the Chartists and followed the revolutionary situation in the country with increasing fears, his satirical depictions revealing the decisive role of money in bourgeois society and condemning its social and moral codex hit at the very root and foundation of this society and thus helped to undermine what so far seemed firm and unshakable, to shatter the self-satisfaction of the ruling classes and their conviction of the unlimited durability of their rule. The subversive strength of his mature satire was recognized by

many of his contemporaries, for instance by Charlotte Brontë, and was most aptly evaluated by the critic of *Fraser's Magazine*:

"*Vanity Fair* admits of being explained as a representation of part of the world, but it may also be viewed, and that somewhat plausibly, as a general attack upon things as they are, and as a declaration of war upon the established order of society".<sup>42</sup>

From the diverse aspects of the social function of art and literature Thackeray paid much attention, early, middle, and late, to their educational influence upon the morals, behaviour, feelings, and taste of their consumers. Like all great writers, and especially his literary models, the English realists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, he held and propagated the opinion that literature and art should educate the readers and spectators to goodness and virtue and should not lure them to evil and vice. But the moral point of view he assumed when assessing literature and art had a much stronger tendency to predominate over all the other approaches than with his predecessors and bore unmistakable traces of the influence of the narrow-minded morality of Victorian bourgeois society. To do justice to the great satirist, however, it is necessary to point out that both in his literary theory and practice his submission to the established moral code was not of the same degree and intensity in all the stages of his development. In the 1830s and 1840s it was never completely unconditional: in his literary criticism he applied with only occasional doubts the correct standpoint that a genuine work of art cannot be immoral (for instance Fieldings's novels), neither in his literary theory nor criticism did he demand, as most moral critics do, that the good people of the story should be rewarded and the bad punished, and he many times openly complained of the restrictions imposed upon contemporary novelists by the excessive prudery of Victorian society. He found the taboo perhaps most irritating when he wished to depict truthfully the life of a young man of his time, and several times expressed his regrets that contemporary writers did not enjoy such freedom in this respect as their predecessors in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Besides the often quoted complaint in the preface to *Pendennis*, we possess a less known piece of evidence from his conversation, in which he confided to William D. Lewis that "the restrictions now put on the English novelists, wise and proper, no doubt, made it impossible for him to give the young fellow (the Marquis of Farintosh in *The Newcomes* — L. P.) as he actually is, as Fielding painted 'Tom Jones', Smollett 'Roderick Random' or Paul de Kock, the 'French Student', and therefore the picture must be incomplete".<sup>43</sup>

Even if Thackeray was so restive at the restrictions imposed upon him by the literary conventions of his time, in his best novels, and especially in *Vanity Fair*, he was not so much hampered by them as he thought himself and as some scholars, especially Praz and Greig, believe: The former scholar, who maintains

that Thackeray was so restricted in *Vanity Fair* by moral conventions that the realism of the novel "is in fact paralysed realism, impaired by reticences and *sous-entendus*", and the latter, who insists that Thackeray's writing is essentially false and at times puerile "when his story brought him within sight of sexual 'irregularities'",<sup>44</sup> do in my opinion great injustice to the novelist and undervalue his power of suggestion in which he excelled especially in *Vanity Fair* and which helped him much in overcoming the effects of literary taboos. I find myself in agreement with those scholars (Bagehot, Ray, K. Tillotson) who pointed out that Thackeray's art came victorious from its struggle with literary conventions and that the novelist in this respect outgrew his time. The last named scholar's evaluation of the character of Becky and its relationship to contemporary taboos in literature seems to me most clear-sighted:

"Thackeray has lost nothing by his half-observance of propriety. A more direct treatment would have put the emphasis wrong. Becky's master-passion is for money and power; what precisely she paid for them is not important — and we know enough of her to be sure that the price would be as low as possible . . . No one who reads *Vanity Fair* carefully would dream of calling it a squeamish novel: Thackeray does more than avoid squeamishness on his own part; he exploits it as it exists on the part of many of his readers. It is turned against themselves, and very openly".<sup>45</sup>

None of the above mentioned scholars, however, evaluate Thackeray's attitude to literary conventions as it developed and make their conclusions generally valid for the novelist's whole literary career (K. Tillotson excepted, since she deals only with *Vanity Fair*). As I have suggested above and shall demonstrate in the last part of this study, Thackeray's submission to these restrictions was not constant and in the later period of his life underwent noticeable modifications.

From the beginning of his literary career the great novelist also frequently reflected on another aspect of the social function of art and literature, namely their educational influence upon the aesthetic taste of their consumers. He was more keenly interested, however, in the practical aspects of this problem than in the theoretical issues connected with the aesthetic qualities of literature and art as such. As his remarks on the latter subject witness, Thackeray saw the supreme task and aim of art and literature to lie in their aesthetic effect upon the consciousness of the spectator, reader, or listener:

"The effect of the artist, as I take it, ought to be to produce upon his hearer's mind, by his art, an effect something similar to that produced on his own, by the sight of the natural object. Only music, or the best poetry, can do this".<sup>46</sup>

He is more explicit in other remarks in which he investigates the substance and nature of this aesthetic effect in more detail, but in spite of this the scanty evidence we possess does not allow us to come to any definite evaluation of his

views of this problem. What he understood by his term "effect" is perhaps most pregnantly expressed in his definitions of art as "a feeling for the beauty of Nature", "an exquisite and admiring Sense of Nature".<sup>47</sup> When he comes to discussing details, however, we cannot help feeling that his views on the sublime aesthetic problems are less penetrating than his remarks on the more practical aspects. He evidently divides art and literature into two spheres, the higher, in which he includes the visual arts, music, ballet, and poetry, and the lower, which he does not mention in this connection, but which is obviously represented by fiction. He ascribes genuine aesthetic effect only to the branches of art and literature belonging to the higher sphere and his conception of this effect is much influenced by his religious views and hence contains strong idealistic elements. As his many reflections on the subject witness, the novelist had always regarded the beauties of nature as a personal kindness bestowed upon man by the Creator and thus came naturally to the conclusion that the supreme aim of the "higher" spheres of art was to evoke in the spectators and readers the feeling of love for "God's world", of good will to mankind and gratefulness to God. From this wider perspective these branches of art coalesce in his mind so closely that he often finds himself unable to distinguish their specific traits and notices only the common aspects conditioning their aesthetic substance. As far as the art of painting and literature are concerned, their coalescence was of course to a great extent the result of the long struggle between Thackeray the painter and Thackeray the novelist, as Alekseev pointed out, but Thackeray's conception of the supreme aim of the "higher" spheres of art was in my opinion a stronger factor in the process. The novelist's statements concerning this problem seem to suggest that he was himself well aware of this.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, Thackeray's conceptions of the purpose and effect of the "lower" region of art, fiction, are thoroughly realistic, as I shall demonstrate below. The root of this paradox, so far not commented upon, seems to me to lie not only in the notoriously low position of the novel among the other literary *genres* at the time of Thackeray's early development and even of his maturity, but especially in the limitations of his whole philosophy of life.

As I have suggested, Thackeray did not pay so much attention to the theoretical formulations of the aesthetic aim in art and its aesthetic effect, as to the concrete influence of individual literary works and works of art upon the literary and aesthetic taste of the wide masses of the English public. His reflections upon this problem show that in the period of Chartism he came to the conclusion that art and literature should not lower themselves to the level of the taste of their consumers, but should elevate and refine it. He regarded this as especially topical and necessary in the sphere of the plastic arts, and many times bitterly complained of the incapability of his countrymen, in comparison with the French and Germans, of appreciating "abstract art", of the low level



of their aesthetic taste, which he characterized as "far worse than regular barbarism".<sup>49</sup> If we read his reflections carefully, however, we may see that he distinguishes between the aesthetic taste of the middle classes, which seems to him not to reach a level corresponding to the possibilities of aesthetic education they possess, and the taste of the working class, which he regards as essentially wholesome and capable of development, if owing to the lack of such possibilities yet immature and undeveloped.<sup>50</sup> Thackeray did not rest content with theoretical proclamations about the level of the aesthetic taste of his countrymen, but endeavoured to elevate it, as literary and art critic, by energetically fighting against all sorts of pseudo-art and literature, and, as novelist, by educating his readers to his own intellectual standard.

Thackeray was also keenly interested in the practical problem of the material and social position of artists and literary men in his time and country. He consistently adhered to the realistic opinion that writers and artists were not beings elected by God and possessing something inaccessible to other people, but that they, like any other members of their society, worked to earn their livelihood and therefore had to work honestly and fulfil all their duties. His works contain a whole gallery of characters recruited from the ranks of the artistic and literary professions, and, as he presented a truthful, unadorned picture of their life and milieu, he was often accused of discrediting his own profession. The whole evidence we have at our disposal, however, bears witness that on the contrary he had always fought for the honour of his profession and to secure for literary men and artists that position in society which they deserved. Nevertheless within this general drift we may observe some noteworthy developments which reflect the changes in his own consciousness, the social atmosphere of his time and the very position of the artists. In the 1830s and 1840s he repeatedly pointed out that artists in England were not properly appreciated and rewarded, and hence — in a society having no other criterion of respectability than money — not generally respected, and as an effective remedy proposed not sentimental pity, but better pay. At the close of the 1840s, when his own social position and that of literary men in England greatly improved, and when, under the impact of the events of 1848, he began to reveal the first signs of a growing inclination to enter into a compromise with society, he considerably modified his earlier standpoint, several times proclaimed in public that the literary profession was not held in disrepute and finally arrived at a complete identification of the literary man or artist with his bourgeois milieu, which accepts him in a friendly way, if he serves it, and despises him, if he fawns upon it. In the later period of his life the novelist obviously could not even imagine that the writer might be in opposition to society and yet be in the right, as he himself had been in the earlier stages of his literary career.

## B) THACKERAY ON ART AND LITERATURE AS REFLECTION OF REALITY

In his theoretical reflections on aesthetic problems Thackeray paid perhaps the greatest attention to the relationship of the picture to the depicted, of art and literature to actual social and human reality. Nowadays we classify him as a realist or critical realist, but at the time of his literary beginnings and even of his mature creative work there did not exist, either in England or in any other European country, any definitely formulated aesthetic conception of realism and this term itself was little known in literary theory and criticism and not generally used. The realistic aesthetic creed was then being created by the great writers themselves — Balzac and Stendhal in France and Thackeray and Dickens in England — who called themselves simply followers of “truth” and “nature” and did not use the term “realism” whether characterizing their own creative approach or that of the writers they criticized. As Stang pointed out, it was not until 1851 that the not precisely defined term “realist” was used for the first time in England and applied to Thackeray, who by that time had begun to be regarded by many of the English critics as the novelist who had paved the way for the new creative principles and laws for the novel.<sup>51</sup> The great satirist never adopted the term himself, not even in the second half of the 1850s or in the following decade, when it began to be generally used in English criticism, but consistently described himself as a novelist whose main purpose was “to speak the whole truth” about the depicted reality, and consciously adhered to the conception of literature as imitation of nature.

In his main aesthetic doctrine that art and literature should be a faithful mirror of nature, “a close imitation of life”,<sup>52</sup> Thackeray is a direct follower and disciple of Fielding, and also the significance he gives to the term “nature” is in its substance identical with that given by his predecessor — nature in the wider sense of the word, the entire reality, all that really exists within and without us or that can be realized. Like his model, Thackeray identifies his conception of “nature” with his ideas of “truth” and “beauty” as the most suitable objects for artistic expression. The two great English novelists are so close to each other in their literary theory, that some statements of Fielding could be without any essential modifications ascribed to his great follower, such as for instance the former’s proclaiming himself “a historian who professes to draw his materials from nature only”, a writer who always tried to adhere to nature, “from the just imitation of which will flow all the pleasure we can this way convey to a sensible reader”.<sup>53</sup> This indebtedness of Thackeray is of course well known and often discussed,<sup>54</sup> and reveals itself not only in Thackeray’s early and mature works, but also in his critical judgments on Fielding pronounced in the 1830s and 1840s, in which he highly appreciates the novels

of his predecessor for presenting "a strong, real picture of human life" and endeavouring to tell "the whole truth about human nature",<sup>55</sup> and in his preference in this period for the coarse truth of life depicted by Fielding to the falsely sentimentalized depictions provided by some fashionable novelists of his own day.

Thackeray not only demanded faithful depiction of life from the writers whose works he reviewed or parodied, but naturally felt himself bound to depict what he regarded as truthful in his own works and did not allow himself to be averted from this duty by the disagreeable and even disgusting aspects of the truth of life he intended to present to his readers. But even if he went on declaring himself to be a showman of the awful truth of life almost up to the end of his days, his ideological and emotional evaluation of the phenomena he chose for his depiction underwent considerable modifications with the advance of time. First to change was his emotional evaluation of the depicted sphere of life, this modification being closely connected with the development of his conceptions of humour and satire. As a realist and satirist Thackeray in his theoretical reflections naturally paid much attention to those types and forms of the writer's aesthetic relationship to his materials that pertained to the sphere of the comic — to humour, irony, and satire. As his occasional marginal remarks and all his early works bear witness, in the early years of his professional literary career he correctly grasped in theory and applied in his literary practice both the conception of irony and that of satire. His high tributes to the sharp satire and bitter irony of Fielding, Gay, Hogarth, and even of Swift, which he in one case puts above that of Fielding,<sup>56</sup> clearly show that in this period he revealed a great ability to appreciate the highest sphere of satire in which indignant anger and hatred stifle laughter. It was in these years, too, that Thackeray's creative approach was that of a slashing satirist, whose pen was dipped in gall and in whose works there was much angry indignation and very little laughter. When he himself later looked back at these "dreadful early works in which every stroke is full of venom",<sup>57</sup> as they were characterized by his contemporaries, he denoted his creative method as that of a writer who was born with "a sense of the ugly, the odd, of the meanly false, of the desperately wicked" and who relentlessly revealed and destroyed these qualities under whatever disguise they appeared.<sup>58</sup> The truth of life that he presents in his *Yellowplush Papers* and the other early works up to *Cox's Diary* and also in two works written in the succeeding years up to 1847 (some parts of *Men's Wives* and especially *Barry Lyndon*) is the terrible truth about a society consisting of an endless series of parasites, villains, criminals, rogues, and their dupes, which every day gives birth to more and more morally corrupted people. The world he depicts is a hideous and gloomy place, inhabited by people fighting, struggling, and trampling on others for their own security, behind whom

black care is always sitting and preventing them from casting away their egoism; pulling down the walls of the prison-house within whose damp and chill shades they are closed and realizing their rapidly fading vision of a really human life. The satirist does not present in these works any hope for mankind on board the sinking ship of society, as he is convinced that this society is governed by "the dreadful, conquering Spirit of Ill", against which it is vain to fight; thus all these works are pervaded by an atmosphere of utter despair.<sup>59</sup>

The marginal notes in Thackeray's critical contributions written in the succeeding years 1841—1847 testify, however, that his earliest conception of satire as well as that of humour underwent some modifications which indirectly reflected the maturing of his outlook in the period of Chartism. Whereas in the earlier period of his life he preferred eccentric humour with a strong bent towards farce and parody, in the 1840s he came to realize that genuine laughter is in its substance deeply humanistic, because it serves the aim of confirming all positive qualities in man and society and refuses everything that is outlived and not humane. Therefore he highly evaluated in this period and ever later all those writers whose works contained elements both of humour and satire and whose creative approach was characterized by love of mankind. Since he did not use the term "realist" or "romantic", he denoted all such writers as "humourists" and included among them Shakespeare, Chaucer, Cervantes, Addison, Steele, Fielding, Jean Paul, Sterne, Scott, and Dickens, actually almost all writers of genius, whether realists or romanticists, dramatists, novelists, poets or essayists, who used in their works both humorous and non-humorous criticism of life. At the same time he began to dissociate himself from the most intense satire in which humorous elements completely disappear and laughter is ousted by savage anger. In the period we are dealing with he uttered several negative judgments upon the Swiftian type of satire, which he characterized as foul and morbid, and even several times denounced its author as a wicked old cynic who looks at the world with "furious, mad, glaring eyes" and whose jokes are "like the fun of a demon".<sup>60</sup> These modifications of Thackeray's conceptions of humour and satire foreshadow significant changes that took place in his creative approach at the time of his working on *Vanity Fair* and found full reflection in his mature work. As his private correspondence amply proves and Ray's interesting discoveries in the original manuscript of the novel confirm,<sup>61</sup> when Thackeray began to reap the first fruits of success and started his work on his masterpiece, he came to regard his literary profession as a vocation closely resembling that of a popular preacher or teacher and thus involving the necessity of the writer's full realization of his great responsibility towards his audience, and adapted accordingly his creative principles and his own assessment of them. As with his judgments on other contemporary "humourists"; in his statements about his own creative method he started to stress the quality

of love for mankind as an indispensable part of his endowment and began to call himself a satirical moralist, whose aim was both to provide criticism of life and demand forgiveness for the foibles and abuses criticized, or, as Ray formulates it, he decided to abandon the relatively objective realism of his earlier works and accepted "as part of the novelist's responsibility the task of understanding sympathetically and of judging his principal characters". The outcome of this modified approach was "a remarkable liberation of creative energy", a "new-found ability to penetrate to the profounder levels of personality", and a new capacity to give "all aspects of his talent free play".<sup>62</sup> These conclusions of the American scholar are further developed by V. V. Ivasheva who by means of a thorough analysis of the novel demonstrated that these changes in Thackeray's point of view reflect the contradictions ripening in his consciousness at the end of the 1840s and do not yet signify his retreat from sharp social satire, as they produced, with the deepened typicality of the pictures, a strengthening of the satirical revelatory tendencies of the novel.<sup>63</sup> Thackeray persevered in this creative approach during all the remaining years of his creative career, but the proper balance between his twin purposes was preserved only in the three great novels published after his masterpiece, *Pendennis*, *Henry Esmond*, and *The Newcomes*, though even in them the scales of the balance were steadily descending to the side of the moralist, along with the deepening of the contradictions in the novelist's mind under the impact of the changing social atmosphere in England after 1848.

The truth of life that Thackeray presents to his readers in this quartet of his greatest novels is much more complex and manysided than in all his preceding works, and goes much deeper below the surface of the depicted reality. He succeeded in drawing in them an impressive panoramic picture of the English bourgeois and aristocratic society of his own time and of the preceding century, by depicting it as a great fair of vanities governed by the laws of purchase and sale, at which all the positive human qualities change into salable merchandise. This cold and empty world, in which nobody is missed or mourned over and in which promises, gratefulness and pledges are of no account, is inhabited by people whose hearts have changed under the influence of its laws into hard stones and who have irrevocably lost the capability of genuine human feelings, by isolated individuals who are not capable of overcoming the boundaries of their egoism and solitude and entering into relationships of understanding and love:

"How lonely we are in the world! how selfish and secret, everybody! . . . Ah, sir — a distinct universe walks about under your hat and under mine — all things in nature are different to each — the woman we look at has not the same features, the dish we eat from has not the same taste to the one and the other — you and I are but a pair of infinite isolations, with some fellow-islands a little more or less near to us".<sup>64</sup>

The great satirist perfectly grasped and splendidly depicted the characteristic traits of the English bourgeois and aristocrat, as we shall demonstrate more fully below, but absolutized them as weaknesses of human nature in general, which in his opinion has been the same since the beginning of human history and cannot be charged even by the sharpest satire, and thus came necessarily to the conclusion that both the character of the English bourgeois and the social relationships existing in his society were generally valid phenomena and everlasting laws of life. This is the root of his sceptical, pessimistic and fatalistic philosophy, which developed in him during the period of Chartism, of his conviction that bourgeois society was created and organized by Fate which in an entirely mysterious and unaccountable manner allotted to each of its members his rewards and punishments, gave "to this man the purple and fine linen", and "to the other rags for garments and dogs for comforters".<sup>65</sup> Thus he finally always comes to the melancholy consciousness of the vanity of all things, the vanity of all efforts to improve human relationships and to reform society. The motto from the Book of Apocrypha, "Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity", is the main motif that sounds in all his mature works and is most splendidly elaborated in *Vanity Fair*. The subjective meaning that Thackeray put into his satirical pictures is rooted in the contradictions inherent in his philosophy of life: even though he theoretically admitted the necessity of basic changes in English society and faithfully depicted the consequences resulting from the operations of the laws valid and respected in it, he could not and would not renounce the world of profit and money of which he regarded himself, in spite of all his sharp criticism, as an inseparable part, could not and would not seek hope where it in his time really existed — in the organized struggle of the working class — and thus was not able to prescribe any effective remedy that would cure the diseased society.

Thackeray's incapability of presenting in his great novels any concrete and realizable solution of the abuses he pilloried does not imply, however, that he had no positive ideal to set in contrast to his dark and disconsolate depictions. Whereas in his early works, with the single exception of *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*, his aesthetic ideals are only inherent in his negation and not embodied in his images, they begin to appear in a more concrete form in *Vanity Fair*, though they are more than outweighed by his sharp social criticism. As his handling of character and commentary shows, he did measure the world depicted by a certain standard, namely the Christian faith, with which he endowed those characters that are not presented in an entirely adverse light, and the lack of which he made one of the characteristic traits of his negative characters. Another aspect of his positive programme thus elaborated in his personages is his ideal of gentlemanliness which he conceives as a summary of the positive qualities of exceptional people who succeeded in avoiding the de-

teriorating influence of the laws of purchase and sale and preserved noble hearts, untainted honesty, and the capability of genuine, unselfish love. Though the novelist himself regarded gentlemanliness as a non-class notion, his definition in one of the commentaries on his first embodiment of it, Major Dobbin, clearly shows that his ideal objectively referred to the English bourgeoisie and that he thus began to seek positive social and moral values in the very world he condemned in his depictions. In spite of this, however, these aspects of Thackeray's positive programme do not play in his masterpiece any significant role. His main creative interest is not concentrated on the existence or lack of religious faith and gentlemanly qualities in his characters, but first and foremost on their relationship to bourgeois society and its social and moral code, on the degree to which they succumb to the laws governing the fair of vanities. Moreover, his handling of the main characters shows that he was not yet firmly convinced about the possible realization of his positive ideal in bourgeois society. It is the character of Dobbin that most strongly indicates his being aware that people of this type fight a vain, Don Quixotian struggle and that neither gentlemanliness nor religion nor genuine human love are effective regenerative and salutary social forces that could bring about the reform of society and the personal happiness of its members.

In the three novels following *Vanity Fair* Thackeray began to propagate his positive programme in a more emphatic manner, although he still persevered in his doubts about the possibility of its being actually put into practice in his time and society. What most convincingly illustrates the changes that were taking place in his consciousness after 1848 is his ever-increasing tendency to find positive social and moral values in bourgeois society and to embody them in predominantly positive characters presented as models worth imitating. Whereas with the male protagonists of his positive ideals Thackeray lays more stress on their gentlemanly qualities (the most splendid embodiment of his ideal of gentleman is of course Colonel Newcome, who at the same time represents, as Ray pointed out, a veritable model of Christian humility<sup>66</sup>), with his female characters he begins to emphasize in an increasing manner moral purity and virtuousness, and especially motherly love which is becoming for him something more and more sacred with the advance of time. It is especially Laura who, in her role of the wife of the narrator of *The Newcomes* (and even more so of the later novel *The Adventures of Philip*) becomes a veritable bourgeois ideal of the homely, kind, virtuous and pious woman, wife and mother. The way in which Thackeray depicts these characters clearly reveals, however, that his doubts about the effectiveness of his positive programme have not yet been weakened — he presents them as people for whom there is no place in bourgeois society, who either seem ridiculous to the successful inhabitants of the fair (Colonel Newcome) or live in solitude and isolation

(Warrington, Esmond), and most of whom never attain perfect happiness.

Thackeray's demand for "truth of life" which he laid on literature and art was closely connected with another important tenet of his realistic aesthetics, his insistence on a writer or painter having to be intimately acquainted with his materials, preferably from his personal experience. He formulated this principle most convincingly in those of his literary and art criticisms in which he rebuked some second-rate contemporary novelists or painters for their neglect of this indispensable part of a genuine artist's equipment. Thus for instance he mercilessly criticized writers of "political" novels for meddling "with subjects of which their small studies have given them but a faint notion" and thence treating "complicated and delicate questions with apologues, instead of argument",<sup>67</sup> and the authors of the Newgate and fashionable novels for presenting fancy pictures of a milieu personally unknown to them. In these contributions he pronounced his fairly well-known demand that a painter depicting social themes should "be of the world which he depicts", and a less known remarkable statement that the world of the working people should be depicted by an author arisen from their midst, a man "really familiar with the mill and the mine":

"We want a Boz from among the miners or the manufactories to detail their ways of work and pleasure — to describe their feelings, interests, and lives, public and private".<sup>68</sup>

The novelist did not demand the fulfilment of this postulate only from the other writers of his time, but adhered to it himself during his whole literary career, though even here there were some later modifications. He never attempted to depict a milieu and characters which he did not sufficiently know from his own experience, notably those of the working classes, and also refrained from presenting detailed descriptions of the life of those social classes, of which he knew more, but not from intimate personal contact. For instance in *Vanity Fair* he desisted from giving the reader full information about the highest circles of society in which Becky moved after her introduction at the court, because at the time of his working at the novel he had not yet gained access to high aristocratic society. Thackeray's own personal experiences played for him a decisive role in the creative process and remained for ever written into the pages of his novels, which he once denoted as "diaries, in which our own feelings must of necessity be set down" and about which he several times wrote that they had their own secret history, as they contained all the author's private thoughts and feelings experienced while working at them.<sup>69</sup>



Throughout his literary career Thackeray naturally paid much attention to the theory of the novel, although he did not leave behind him any fully elaborated system of principles or rules and only dealt with the subject in occasional remarks scattered throughout his letters, critical contributions and literary works. It was again in the 1840s that for the first time he began to think more deeply about the content of that truth of life which the novel should reflect and depict, about what should and what should not be the subject of the novelist's creative interest. Very remarkable is the argument he develops in his contributions to the *Morning Chronicle*, in which he takes exception to the way in which some contemporary novelists treat the novel as literary *genre* and specifies what should not be in his opinion included in their themes, notably the principles of abstract sciences (but also political and social problems, as I have pointed out above). According to his opinion, as it may be summed up from his whole argument, the subject of scientific study are facts, concrete data, statistics, and experiments, whereas the subject of "the novelist's study" are human beings and their actions, "human manners and morals".<sup>70</sup> His argument is a protest against the creative approach of those novelists who work with abstract formulas and not with living people, who express their ideas through the medium of abstract political and scientific notions that are not revealed and embodied in characters and plot.

Even more than in the problem of what should be the proper ground for the novelist, Thackeray was interested, like all great realistic novelists, in the problem of the creation of literary character and even attempted to formulate the main principles of the method of typification. As with his whole literary theory, his conception of literary character was not original and was much indebted to that of Fielding, which Thackeray of course knew well and in the 1830s and 1840s regarded as a model worth imitating. This indebtedness will be clearly apparent, if we only confront the main principles of artistic typification as they were understood and proclaimed by these two great novelists. Fielding correctly grasped that the depiction of man served the artist as the medium of depicting the whole of reality, that it was "the highest object ... which presents itself to the pen of our historian, or of our poet".<sup>71</sup> He consistently laid stress on characters having to be "copies of Nature", to be drawn from the author's own observation and experience, and on the author having to keep in creating them within the bounds of possibility and probability, avoiding the presentation of monsters or supernatural beings. He also proclaimed that the novelist had no right to make from his characters incarnations of "angelic perfection" or "diabolical depravity", since real people are neither

angels nor devils but beings in whom virtue and vice are mixed up in a very remarkable manner. Like his great model, Thackeray too regarded as the foremost theme for the novelist man and human nature, and proclaimed the principle that literary character was to be a faithful depiction of reality, was to represent a real, living human being, in whose existence the reader was able to believe. That is why he, especially in his function as literary critic, so highly appreciated those novelists who possessed the ability to create such convincing characters that "have become real living personages in history" and have taken their place side by side with "nature's own [beings]". He regarded the creation of "these realities" as "the greatest triumph of a fictitious writer" and paid generous tributes to those writers who had achieved it, notably to Shakespeare, Cervantes, Le Sage, Fielding, and Dickens.<sup>72</sup> Like many great realistic novelists, Thackeray often insisted that it was actual reality itself that appeared in his own works and that his characters, even those criticized by his readers as improbable, were "natural" and "to the life". He was also convinced, like Fielding, that the task of the novelist was to depict the real world and not supernatural beings and events which he did not regard as belonging within the thematic range of the novel. Although he consistently applied this principle in all his works, he did not formulate it until later, in *The Newcomes*, which he characterized as the history of the world and things pertaining to the world, and added that in his opinion "things beyond it . . . scarcely belong to the novelist's province".<sup>73</sup> Like his predecessor, Thackeray was also well aware that human nature is very complex and full of contradictions and at the very beginning of his literary career dissociated himself from all forms of romantic idealization of reality and schematic depiction of men as ideal heroes and utterly bad villains. That is why he so sharply criticized and so skilfully parodied those contemporary writers of fiction who presented in their works unconvincing, idealized and exaggerated characters and why he always protested whenever he met in the works he read or reviewed anything that went beyond the bounds of strict realism devoid of romantic excesses, for the introduction of which in the English novel he so energetically fought. The most explicit formulation of these views of his may be found in his letter to David Masson, in which he reacted to this critic's review of *Pendennis* and *David Copperfield*, published in *The North British Review* in May 1851. Masson, inspired by Goethe's notorious maxim that "Art is called Art precisely because it is *not* Nature", made distinctions between the "real" style in fiction represented by Thackeray and the "ideal" represented by Dickens, expressed some reservations to the former as representing "grey sameness" and defended the latter as making objects and modes of action more glorious and transcendent than any we see in real life, yet keeping them within the bounds of "nature". Thackeray expressed in his letter deep admiration for Dickens's art, but reprehended his great contemporary

for deviating from a faithful depiction of reality by creating not "real men" but exaggerated, if delightful characters, and added:

"...and in so far I protest against him — and against the doctrine quoted by my Reviewer from Goethe too — holding that the Art of Novels is to represent Nature: to convey as strongly as possible the sentiment of reality — in a tragedy or a poem or a lofty drama you aim at producing different emotions; the figures moving, and their words sounding, heroically; but in a drawing-room drama a coat is a coat and a poker a poker; and must be nothing else according to my ethics, not an embroidered tunic, nor a great red-hot instrument like the Pantomime weapon".<sup>74</sup>

Thackeray's "disbelief in heroes", as he himself called it, has very deep social roots and reflects the satirist's sharp critical attitude to the reality he depicted. It found its most splendid embodiment, of course, in his *Vanity Fair*, to which he gave the subtitle "a novel without a hero" in order to emphasize even more emphatically the fact revealed by his pictures that among people living in bourgeois society there existed neither real positive heroes as protagonists of positive moral and social values nor ideal romantic heroes and heroines living exciting lives full of breathtaking adventures, but that they were all common people living their everyday existences who only very rarely remained untainted by the baneful influence of the prevalent laws of profit and money. Thackeray persevered in his retreat from "the great and heroic" also in the three novels following *Vanity Fair*, by creating his characters as avowed contrasts to romantically conceived heroes and pointing out explicitly in his commentary that he did not depict ideal beings but ordinary people. But even if in this trio of his great novels there do not appear romantically idealized figures, there do appear, as I have demonstrated above, genuine positive heroes who are bearers and spokesmen of the novelist's social and moral ideal. The most explicit formulation of this modification in his conception of the heroic may be found in his adverse criticism of the character of Tom Jones in his lecture on Fielding, in which he insisted, as formerly, that "in novels, the picture of life" there should not appear admirable heroes, since "there exists in life no such being", but contrary to his previous practice modified this postulate by adding that if the novelist intends to present such a character, he should take care that he is admirable.<sup>75</sup>

Both Fielding and Thackeray understood the basic principles of the creation of literary characters, the method of typification: they realized that a convincing and lifelike character has to be a social type, a type of human behaviour, created by certain social conditions. Fielding declared in one of his reflections upon this problem that he described "not men, but manners; not an individual, but a species"<sup>76</sup> and similar statements were also pronounced by Thackeray, especially in his reactions to the protests of some of his readers who seemed to recognize themselves or some other living individuals in the depicted characters.

When four ladies saw themselves in his *Lady Scrapper* and three families protested against his having revealed their family secrets in his picture of the Mogynses, the satirist wrote:

“No, we are not personal in these candid remarks. As Phidias took the pick of a score of beauties before he completed a *Venus*: so have we to examine, perhaps, a thousand Snobs, before one is expressed upon paper”.<sup>77</sup>

Thackeray applied this basic principle of typification in the creation of most of his main and significant subsidiary personages who are all the result of observation and study of many individuals of one type of character, behaviour, and social position, though of course many of them possess, too, some traits of individual people the novelist intimately knew. Some of his minor characters, however, were created after the model of a single individual, as all Thackerayan scholars agree — for instance *Wenham* in *Vanity Fair* is the portrait of Croker, *Foker* in *Pendennis* of Arcedeckne etc. But these were exceptional cases with Thackeray and not common occurrences, as some scholars believe, who devote much time to identifying the originals of his characters and thus undervalue his creative originality (Krishnaswami, Sencourt, Greene, Scudder, Ray, and others). After all, even from these characters created after living models Thackeray made lifelike and convincing personages, reflecting his deep knowledge of human character in general and embodying the characteristic traits of the given social class in particular, and present-day readers need not therefore know anything about their prototypes. Thackeray himself only rarely admitted that his characters were portraits of really existing individuals, on the contrary he often insisted that they had no single living originals. Thus for instance when John Esten Cooke asked him who was the prototype of Lord Crabs, whom he regarded as “the most finished and altogether perfect scoundrel of the whole list”, Thackeray answered that he did not remember “ever meeting with any special person as the original”. When Cooke suggested that the novelist must have then drawn this figure from his imagination or from general observation, Thackeray said he supposed so but that he did not know, as he might have seen him somewhere, and added:

“I really don't know where I get all these rascals in my books. I have certainly never lived with such people”.<sup>78</sup>

As this quotation suggests, like some of his critics and many great novelists Thackeray considerably underrated his keen capacity for observation and his sensitive reactions to the reality surrounding him which were noticed and appreciated by some of his contemporaries, and his ability of drawing from the phenomena observed correct conclusions and deep generalizations. He was personally convinced that he created instinctively, in a state of inspiration during

which he subconsciously grasped the substance and laws of the reality he depicted, several times explicitly declared that his pen was guided by some occult force which induced him to write in a certain manner, and often insisted that he had no idea where all he put on paper came from. In spite of this essentially idealistic conception of literary inspiration, however, there was nothing idealistic in his own literary work which had always been hard toil accompanied by intense suffering, as we know from his numerous remarks. and which was not founded on the operations of some unknown power, a divine Muse, but on keen perception, observation, and study of life, experience of many years standing and, of course, great talent. After all, whatever were the doubts of the satirist about the origin of his characters, once they were created they seemed to him to assume their own independent existence, began to lead him and guide his pen and became for him real living persons whom he knew perfectly down to the very "sound of their voices", who pursued him incessantly and with whom he parted only very reluctantly and "with a rather sad heart".<sup>79</sup> How real his characters were to him and how he disliked taking leave of them is also confirmed by his later favourite device of transferring some personages from one novel to another, his custom of describing their further fortunes in his private letters and his frequent coming across his characters "miraculously" turned-up alive.

It is worth noticing that Thackeray dissociated himself consciously from one component of the typification of literary characters, the depiction of their concrete participation in the process of production, in science, commerce, and other spheres of human activity. As his literary work bears witness he assumed this standpoint in the earliest stages of his authorship, but he did not formulate it until much later, in his *Virginians*, where he declared that "the real business of life" could form in his opinion "but little portion of the novelist's budget", went on insisting that only those novelists who wrote about the profession of arms might "venture to deal with actual affairs of life", as they had to deal with interesting circumstances, actions, and characters implying depictions of "dangers, devotedness, heroic deaths, and the like", and added:

"But law, stock-broking, polemical theology, linen-drapery, apothecary business, and the like, how can writers manage fully to develop these in their stories? All authors can do, is to depict men *out of* their business — in their passions, loves, laughters, amusements, hatreds, and what not — and describe these as well as they can, taking the business part for granted, and leaving it as it were for subaudition".<sup>80</sup>

According to A. A. Elistratova this statement reveals Thackeray's detestation of the hunt after profit and all forms of social activity of the bourgeoisie connected with the exploitation of the working class, which he found anti-poetical and anti-artistic. As this scholar further points out, Thackeray refrains, too, from

depicting even productive work which was in his society of course robbed of its imaginative and emotional drama and changed into merchandise, concentrates in seeking for his positive hero "merely upon the sphere of uncommitted, passive human existence" and even if he depicts his positive personages in working activity, he looks upon their work "as upon something personal, private, that has no real significance for the changes of the existing social relationships, for an active influence upon the world".<sup>81</sup> These conclusions seem to me to a certain degree acceptable — Thackeray does only very generally suggest that his characters devote themselves to some work or activity (for instance Lord Steyne, Sedley, and Osborne to speculations on the Stock Exchange and the two latter to commercial activity) but he for the most part does not depict them directly at work (some exceptions may be found in his earlier works, for instance he does provide some details about the work of the perruquier and perfumer Mr. Eglantine, the tailor Mr. Woolsey, and the barber Cox). We learn very little about Becky's work as governess, though more about her as the companion of Miss Crawley. In harmony with the principles formulated above, Thackeray informs us in greater detail about the activities of those of his characters who work in the army, especially of Gahagan; Barry Lyndon, Dobbin, and in a smaller extent of Osborne and Rawdon. The problem of the depiction of the concrete working activity of people seems to me, however, very complex and controversial. The fact that Thackeray does not depict his characters at their work does not, as I see it, prevent him from creating convincing characters, individualized social types, who are firmly rooted in the given social milieu, whose fortunes are closely connected with important events of social and political life and whose participation in the process of production or in unproductive employments is sufficiently clear to the reader. In my opinion Thackeray is right when he maintains that in depicting the man as a participant in working processes a hint is sufficient for the reader to be able to complete the picture to the smallest detail. This can be illustrated *inter alia* from his picture of old Osborne, whose brutal and exploiting behaviour towards the members of his own family and his former friends and collaborators, so convincingly depicted by the novelist, does not leave the reader in any doubts about his behaviour on the Stock Exchange and in the City. Every reader of *Vanity Fair* can also form a very distinct idea about what sort of governess and companion Becky was, what were her relationships to her pupils and to Miss Crawley, and what were the main motives of all her actions connected with her work. A different problem arises, however, when we evaluate those of his characters who devote themselves to literary work and painting and about whose activities Thackeray provided more information than was his common usage (Pendennis, Warrington, Clive Newcome, J. J. Ridley, and Philip). But even if his depiction is more detailed, it does not penetrate far below the surface of what is depicted,

not even as far as his art of suggestion enabled him to go with the above discussed characters. As A. A. Elistratova pointed out, Thackeray does not even hint that his personages of this type have to grapple with those serious creative problems common to all honest artists in bourgeois society, the problem of their social responsibility and of their struggle to attain truth in art in the face of bourgeois social thought, and reduces their creative efforts to purely technical and formal difficulties. As Chernyshevsky emphasized in his evaluation of the character of Clive Newcome and A. A. Elistratova further developed as far as the other characters are concerned, the outcome of this approach is that Thackeray's portraits of literary men and artists lose much of their convincingness and social significance.<sup>82</sup> The cause of this inadequacy, which seems to me to be more conspicuous in Thackeray's later characters than in Pendennis and Warrington, must be sought for in the above discussed characteristic change in Thackeray's opinion on the position of artists in bourgeois society which took place at the close of the 1840s.

Thackeray in his reflections concerning the creation of literary character paid some attention, too, to the emotional relationship of the novelist to his personages and in his theory dissociated himself from the relationship characterized by excessive sentiment and pathos. He was convinced that the novelist "should not be in a passion" with his characters and should depict them, whether they are positive or negative, with a like "philosophic calmness" and on this score reprehended very good-humouredly Fielding in his earlier years and rather less so Charlotte Brontë in his later. He went on proclaiming that "a novelist . . . ought to have no likes, dislikes, pity, partiality for his characters" till the end of his literary career, but did not apply it consistently in his literary practice, as his later confessions of hatred or sympathy to some of his characters bear witness.<sup>83</sup> As far as his views on the proper handling of pathetic situations are concerned, the most convincing formulation of them may be found in one of his letters of 1848, in which he declared that pathos "should be very occasional indeed in humorous works and indicated rather than expressed or expressed very rarely" and illustrated his meaning by the way he handled the episode of *Vanity Fair* depicting Amelia's attempt to separate herself from her son.<sup>84</sup>

It is worth noticing that until the last years of the 1840s Thackeray did not pay attention to the problem of depicting literary character in its development. This is of course not surprising, since in harmony with his fatalistic view of the unchangeable substance of human nature the satirist had always held the opinion that people do not and cannot change and that new circumstances only bring to the surface hidden traits of their characters. Although he applied this opinion with only some deviations consistently in his literary practice, he did not formulate it in connection with his own characters until the novels following *Vanity Fair*, for the first time in *Pendennis*.<sup>85</sup> This survey of Thackeray's theo-

retical views concerning the creation of literary characters may be concluded by pointing out that the great novelist was also well aware that his capability in this respect had its limits and that certain types suited his artistic temperament better than others. He expressed it very convincingly in his later years:

"No human brain is big enough to grasp the whole truth — and mine can take in no doubt but a very infinitesimal portion of it but such truth as I know that I must tell, and go on telling whilst my pen and lungs last, and the public and the author are not weary of each other".<sup>86</sup>

So far I have dealt only with Thackeray's views concerning the depiction of man in literature and those creative principles that he himself did not apply or intentionally avoided in his literary practice. In the following I shall attempt to demonstrate what principles and methods he actually used in the typification of his characters. For want of space I am unable to provide a detailed analysis, but shall only sum up briefly the main aspects of Thackeray's art of characterization and notice the general drift of its development.

In the earlier stages of his literary career, up to the publication of *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray's creative approach was based on the selection and grouping of typical traits of the reality depicted and their demonstration through the medium of his characters, essentially without authorial commentary. His method of typification may be characterized by a term inspired by V. V. Ivasheva's analysis of *Vanity Fair*, namely as a discovery of character on two levels — the initial presentation of the personage as it reveals itself to a superficial observer and the gradual demasking of its real face. The first level always includes the placing of character against the existing social milieu while the second contains the evaluation of the author, expressed not directly in a commentary addressed to the reader, but through various media dependent on whether Thackeray used fictitious narrators or depicted reality directly. Thus for instance Yellowplush describes his master Deuceace first in such a way as he appears in the eyes of the snobbish bourgeois society — he mentions his aristocratic title, describes his noble way of life and elegant appearance, and emphasizes that he is proud of being able to serve such a fine gentleman. Gradually he demonstrates, through the medium of his descriptions of Deuceace's deeds, behaviour, relationships to other people and by reproducing his speech, his real character as gambler, impostor and morally utterly corrupted man. The authorial commentary is very laconic and never comes from the mouth of the author himself — it is always Yellowplush who comments on the behaviour of his master from the standpoint of a lackey who intimately knows him and who confronts Deuceace's morals with his own conception of the moral code, which is also perverted, though not in such a degree as his master's. These media fully suffice Thackeray in achieving his aim of demasking the real character of Deuceace, though they do not yet enable him, at this stage of the development of his art, to create



a fully elaborated and strongly individualized typical character. A somewhat different and more difficult method is used by Thackeray in those early works, in which his narrators, villains of small or great size, characterize themselves and relate their own deeds with boastfulness and self-satisfaction, turning moral values upside down and complaining of the misunderstanding of society and bad luck when their criminal deeds get their reward. In these works Thackeray leaves the second degree of the discovery of character to the reader himself. but makes it possible by a strong undercurrent of irony. This holds good for *Stubbs's Calendar* and *Major Gahagan*, but especially for his first great novel *Barry Lyndon*, in which he achieved the mastership of irony by continuously using hidden allegory and intentionally evaluating all phenomena reversely, thus making full use of the approach of Fielding in *Jonathan Wild*, though not achieving its greatness. In the *Shabby Genteel Story* Thackeray depicts reality directly, without using a narrator, but otherwise his creative approach does not essentially differ from that which he used in the above mentioned works. For instance when characterizing Brandon he again first depicts his positive traits — elegant appearance, behaviour and cultivated speech of an educated man and gentleman. Very soon, however, he begins to reveal Brandon's real character, first through the medium of Brandon's own letter to his friend Cinqbars, then by depicting the preceding course of his life which made him a rogue without moral scruples. For the first time he begins to address the reader in authorial comments in which he makes him acquainted with his own attitude, as the writer of the story, to his characters, but his commentaries are still only very sporadic and do not yet form an inseparable part of his creative approach. Worthy of at least brief remark is also the creative method Thackeray uses in *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*, which he presents as a story edited and illustrated by the cousin of the hero, Michael Angelo Titmarsh, but narrated by the hero himself, essentially without commentary on the part of the "editor" or Thackeray himself. The elaboration of the individual personages of the story is harmonized with the personal character of the narrator, who in his naivety first believes everybody and sees in them only positive traits (the first level of the discovery of character). Thus Brough is depicted first as a great man of the City and the Stock Exchange, who is morally on a high level, looks after his clerks like a father and inspires utter confidence. Samuel's aunt Mrs. Hoggarty is first described as an eccentric and comic, but essentially kind-hearted and harmless old woman. Only in very rare marginal commentaries, which are the outcome of the story having been written later than Samuel lived it, the narrator draws the reader's attention to the real character of this impostor and of his grasping and egoistical relative. Much of the second level of the discovery of these characters is again left to the reader himself.

As I have suggested, the first level of the discovery of character in these early

works contains the placing of Thackeray's personages in the given social milieu, in a concrete social situation, i.e. the description of their social status and material position. But the novelist does not rest content with the mere description of the position of his characters in society, he also depicts in them the most typical aspects of the life of the English upper classes, which were approximately at the same time being revealed by Engels in his works concerning England — the feudal survivals in economic life and social manners, manifested in the fawning attitude of the bourgeoisie to the aristocracy and in the demoralization of the latter class, and the new traits both these classes assumed under capitalism, namely their incessant and strong desire for acquiring property and money. The very fact that Thackeray selected from the complex phenomena of life that surrounded him these very aspects testifies to his ability of orientating himself in the milieu he intended to depict and of taking hold of the "main link of the chain" that enabled him to grasp and depict reality in all its complexity and with all its basic contradictions. The endowment of his characters with these typical traits, which implicated their depiction in mutual personal and social relationships, belongs of course to the second level of the discovery of character, since it contains the author's evaluation.

Of the above mentioned characteristic traits of the contemporary English upper classes it was the servile adoration of the aristocracy by the middle classes that caught Thackeray's attention first, at the very beginning of his literary career, and became for him one of the most important aspects of reality that clamoured for artistic depiction. In the early years of his authorship he had not yet had any apt name for this typical feature of English social life, but in all his works written up to his *Book of Snobs*, in which he labelled it for ever as "snobbery", he sharply indicted it through the medium of his satirically drawn characters recruited especially from the bourgeois milieu. In the characters he created in the first three years of his professional authorship (1837—40) this characteristic trait definitely predominates and they serve the author for the convincing revelation of the emptiness of the life of the snobbish bourgeois and the ridiculousness of his pretensions to gentility (Mrs. Shum, Captain Rook and his dupe Mr. Pigeon, Stubbs, William Pitt Scully, Cox and his wife, Mrs. Gann and her elder daughters etc.). Snobbishness on a rather higher level is also underlined as one of the characteristic traits in Thackeray's early characters recruited from the ranks of the aristocracy and pilloried for their arrogant behaviour to the people standing on the lower rungs of the social ladder, but the novelist's attention is concentrated rather on other typical features of this class — its moral degradation and social uselessness (Deuceace, Lord Crabs, Sir Gorgon, George Brandon, Viscount Cinqbars, the arrogant aristocratic guests from *Cox's Diary*, and Galgenstein from *Catherine*, a sharply critical portrait of a morally corrupted young nobleman of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, who might,

however, have quite well existed in Thackeray's time side by side with his Deuceaces and Brandons).

Besides the above mentioned typical traits of the English ruling classes Thackeray began to elaborate in his earliest characters another typical aspect of the reality he chose for depiction, which did not find, however, its full elaboration and supreme artistic depiction until the 1840s, when it became the main theme of his whole work — the theme of the rule of profit over man in capitalist society and the resulting change of all human relationships into money relationships. All the above mentioned representatives of the snobbish bourgeoisie and the aristocracy more or less intensively devote themselves to incessant hunt after profit, see the supreme aim of their lives in the acquirement of wealth and advantageous social position and willingly succumb to the wolfish laws governing their society. The desire for profit hardened the heart of Lord Crabs and made him capable of ruining his own son, made a tyrant from Lady Griffin, who enslaves all the members of her household, and a miserly hypocrite from Lord Gorgon. Money relationships entirely replaced family feelings at the Stubbses and the Ganns, profit is the strongest motive determining the actions of Deuceace, Stubbs, Brandon, and the elder Misses Gann, who devote all their energy to hunting rich brides or bridegrooms, or to seeking unearned profits.

In the works written in 1844—1847 Thackeray's art of typification developed along the suggested lines to greater maturity, his palette began to assume new shades of colour and he presented to his readers more complex characters than the rather simple figures of vulgar and ridiculous petty bourgeois snobs or small villains and impostors of the preceding period. Whereas the predominant trait of Thackeray's earliest characters had been their snobbishness, the typical feature of those created in the first half of the 1840s is their money-getting propensity and greediness. This does not mean, however, that Thackeray renounced the theme of snobbery altogether: on the contrary, the fight against this aspect of English social life became a programmatic one, in which the satirist saw the inseparable part of his vocation as novelist, as he himself proclaimed in the introduction of his *Book of Snobs*. This is also confirmed by the new way in which he handles his characters of bourgeois snobs — he no longer presents them as ridiculous, but mostly draws them as perfectly detestable types (Mrs. Haggarty, and especially his condensed characterizations in the *Book of Snobs*). And, what is even more important, on the canvas of his picture of contemporary society new socially significant types recruited from the ranks of the bourgeois snobs begin to appear — the portraits of great capitalists and men of the City, which bear witness that he was also well aware who were the real rulers of his country (Mr. Brough and the condensed sketches of "Great City Snobs" in the *Book of Snobs*).

As typical traits of the British aristocracy Thackeray in all his works written between 1840 and 1847 again underlined its physical and moral degeneration, material bankruptcy, haughty behaviour towards lower social classes and utter social uselessness. The most splendid embodiment of these traits in the process of their historical birth is Barry Lyndon and in their mature form several episodic figures in Thackeray's stories from contemporary life (the members of the haughty families of the Tiptoffs and the Kickleburys, the morally corrupted families of the Cinqbarges, Ringwoods, Crabses and Deuceaces, the unscrupulous Bareacres etc.) and especially his condensed satirical portraits of the Pontos, Miss Snobky, Lord Buckram, Lady Susan Scrapper and other representatives of this class in the *Book of Snobs*.

Through the medium of his delineations of the morals and manners of these two English upper classes and their mutual relationships Thackeray convincingly revealed not only the snobbery of the bourgeoisie and the degradation of the aristocracy but first and foremost the omnipotent rule of money in the whole society of England, both of his own time and of the preceding century. Most personal and social relationships depicted by the satirist in this period are motivated by money interests, even the relationships between close relatives (Mrs. Hoggarty and Samuel), husbands and wives (most of the couples he depicts with the exception of Samuel Titmarsh and Raymond Gray and their wives) and between young people who intend to marry. Thackeray's elaboration of the theme of marriage in bourgeois society is a convincing proof of his detestation of a society which bowed before the doctrine of Malthus, prevented marriage ties between young people who did not possess sufficient material means and thus changed human hearts and bodies into marketable goods.

In the works so far discussed Thackeray placed his characters firmly within the framework of the existing social relationships and depicted them in a concrete social situation, but he had not yet paid sufficient attention to their individual psychology and mostly underlined in them one predominant characteristic personal trait (self-satisfaction in Stubbs, boisterousness in Cahagan, moral weakness in Deuceace and Brandon, hypocrisy in Mr. Brough etc.). He frequently resorts to satiric exaggeration, his creative approach being therefore considerably shallower than in the succeeding years while its outcome, with the exception of Barry Lyndon, is in experimental sketches rather than full-blooded lifelike characters. In his masterpiece *Vanity Fair* Thackeray adopted a much more complex approach to the depicted reality which reflects the changes of his attitude to his own creative work and the ensuing modification of his conception of humour and satire, discussed above. He chose an original method of narration by representing himself to be the manager of a puppet show who has his booth at Vanity Fair, like all its other inhabitants, and who not only directs his miniature actors, but from time to time treads the stage, talks to the

audience about his puppets and comments on their behaviour and actions. He thus assumes the double role of an observer and critic and at the same time that of a participant in the comedy he presents to his audience, the brother and friend of those he depicts and pillories. The deep contradictions implicit in this twofold standpoint of the satirist and moralist and the excellent artistic quality of the depictions created by this method could not escape the attention of Thackerayan scholars, most of whom correctly understood that with this work something novel appeared in Thackeray's creative achievement. Worth noticing are again the conclusions of G. N. Ray and V. V. Ivasheva which seem to me the most stimulating. Both pointed out that the new quality which exalts *Vanity Fair* above all Thackeray's preceding works is its stronger individualization of characters, but the analysis of the latter scholar is in my opinion more thorough since it does not confine itself to the sphere of Thackeray's private and professional life, like Ray's, but goes deeper to those roots which are embedded in social reality. According to V. V. Ivasheva, of the various means Thackeray uses for realistically revealing social life through the medium of his characters there stands out prominently one, which she characterizes as the discovery of character on three levels. As she demonstrates in detail, the novelist first shows the deeds of the actors playing in his puppet comedy or depicts their feelings in dialogue, then washes off the mask which they put on their faces and reveals the real meaning of their behaviour and sensations and finally expresses his judgment on those depicted in a short sentence or a not very extensive commentary. V. V. Ivasheva regards the authorial commentary in *Vanity Fair* as an organic component of Thackeray's style, which serves the novelist for the strengthening of his satire and the deepening of the typicality of his pictures.<sup>87</sup> Her evaluation seems to me more acceptable than that of many Thackerayan scholars who see in the commentary a mere dead-weight, an unnecessary obtrusion on the part of the novelist, which takes much from the value of his works by setting the reader at a distance from the characters and thus disabling him from living their fate along with them (Taine, Couch, Lubbock, Praz, Greig, Kettle, and others). Only very few Thackerayan scholars besides Ray and V. V. Ivasheva stand out as the defenders of the commentary (M. Las Vergnas, Geoffrey and Kathleen Tillotson, J. W. Dodds, A. A. Elistratova), but even these, with the exception of the two last named scholars, do not in my opinion solve the problem satisfactorily, since they evaluate the commentary without paying due attention to its development.<sup>88</sup> As I shall demonstrate below, there is a substantial difference between Thackeray's mature commentary, as we find it especially in *Vanity Fair* and in the three novels following, and its later forms, to which even the Soviet scholars do not pay sufficient attention.

Although Thackeray in *Vanity Fair* penetrated deeper below the surface of

the individual psychology of his personages than in his earlier works, he did not reach the profoundest levels of human personality and his art has therefore been found wanting in one of the essential qualities — the art of individualization (in his lifetime by Roscoe and Bagehot and recently especially by those scholars who compare his creative method with that of George Eliot).<sup>89</sup> In my opinion these critics are rather too much inclined to ignore the obvious fact that Thackeray chose his media to suit his creative purpose and that he refrained from depicting the depths of the inner life of the inhabitants of *Vanity Fair* because by doing so he would have put the emphasis wrong. His purpose of depicting bourgeois society as a great Fair of Vanities demanded the main stress being laid upon the social substance and roots of his characters and their position in concrete social relationships, while their individual traits are somewhat shifted to the background, as they would divert the reader from the main thing he was expected to see. The specific form of narration adopted by Thackeray in the novel admirably suited all these aims, as the role of the manager of a puppet show enabled him to stand out not only as a satirical commentator revealing first and foremost the relationship of his personages to the given society, the degree in which they succumb to its laws, but also as an omniscient novelist who intimately knows all the thoughts and feelings of his miniature actors and the deepest motives of their actions, but who intentionally does not tell the reader everything he knows and leaves much unsaid between the lines. The outcome of this approach is a whole gallery of convincing social types, the most significant and best drawn of which (notably old Osborne, Lord Steyne and Sir Pitt) are depicted as distinct individualities, substantially differing in their appearance, psychology, character, behaviour, way of life, material position and speech, but resembling each other in the traits that typify their particular class and in the fact that they belong to the same social and economic formation, to the same Fair of Vanities. In my opinion these imposing figures, along with Thackeray's most brilliant achievement, the character of Becky, will survive all adverse criticism and retain their liveliness, vividness and great notional value for many generations to come.

Thackeray's original narrative method exercised also a decisive influence in the formation of that characteristic style adopted by the novelist in his masterpiece, a style characterized by artistic tact, devoid of exaggeration and melodrama and very rarely taking recourse to realistic grotesque. Thackeray's favourite device is symbolically to shut the door or drop the veil over human grief and tragic events (the suffering of old Sedley and of Amelia, the tragic end of George Osborne), over dramatic situations (the discovery of Becky's unfaithfulness), over great love (Amelia's love to her husband and son), in short, over all situations which could lead to excessive sentimentality and pathos. Thackeray's attitude as the commentator of the Fair enables him, too, to suggest

in his masterpiece the flow of time, so that even if he does apply in the creation of his characters the above mentioned views on human nature and does not depict most of them as really developing or changing, they do not give the reader the impression of being static. This was also noticed by some scholars (Dodds, Praz, Ray, K. Tillotson, Talon) but Arnold Kettle was the first to point out that in contradiction to Thackeray's proclamations on the unchangeable substance of human nature, some of his characters in *Vanity Fair* do change and develop, like Pitt Crawley and especially Amelia.<sup>90</sup> To these characters it is in my opinion necessary to add Rawdon Crawley, who under the influence of his love for Becky and especially for his son, noticeably develops from a light-hearted dandy into a man of noble character.

In the three novels following *Vanity Fair* Thackeray continued to use the method of the discovery of character on three levels, in which the third level, the commentary, still remains an organic component of the picture and is one of the media by which the novelist expressed his attitude of a critic and moralist with regard to the depicted reality. Although the substance of Thackeray's art of typification remains unchanged, there do appear some significant modifications in his general creative approach which reflect the changes that were taking place in his consciousness after 1848 and signal the ensuing development of his aesthetic creed and creative principles. While in *Pendennis* Thackeray depicted reality directly, from *Henry Esmond* onwards he again began to use fictitious narrators who either tell their own story (Esmond, who narrates with old-fashioned courtesy in the third person) or the fortunes of their acquaintances or friends (*Pendennis*, who is the narrator of the story of the Newcomes). These later narrators stand out, like their predecessors Yellowplush, Solomons, Mr. Snob, and the manager of the puppet show, as critical commentators of the actions of the characters presented, but their main function is that of objective historians or chroniclers who elaborate the story from past reminiscences or preserved family documents and letters. More than in the criticism of the depicted reality they are concerned in the objective rendering of the given materials which would reproduce the reality as faithfully as possible. As Thackeray begins to emphasize with *Pendennis* and all his later *alter-egos*, his narrators in spite of their endeavour to attain objectivity do not guarantee entire correctness of details, since they reconstruct dialogues, events and the inner life of the characters from fragmentary data and their elaboration is moreover influenced by their own interpretation of the described events and personages, with whom they could not have become acquainted from their own personal experience. Thackeray commits his narrators to the confidence and good will of his readers and thus actually distances himself from full authorial responsibility and at the same time retreats from his former attitude of the omniscient novelist, though he preserves the laconic approach to the depiction of intense human feelings

and tense dramatic situations. The result of these modifications of Thackeray's narrative method is that his later narrators are not such sharp critics of the reality they present as were their predecessors, while they sometimes step out of their role of critical commentators altogether, as for instance Pendennis in the later chapters of *The Newcomes* in which he explains how he arrived at the story and introduces his wife Laura upon the scene. In these cases the commentary begins to be felt by the reader as too obtrusive, as an anonymous reviewer of the novel in Thackeray's lifetime and recently Ray, too, pointed out,<sup>91</sup> since it ceases to be an inseparable component of the whole picture. Upon the whole, however, these changes in Thackeray's creative principles do not yet detrimentally affect the artistic quality of his characters, among which we find immortal creations, both of original individuals and convincing social types, in which the novelist depicts the above discussed characteristic traits of the English bourgeois-aristocratic society of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and of his own time (the most imposing of them seem to me to be Major Pendennis, Sir Francis Clavering, Beatrix Esmond, Lady Kew, Barnes and Ethel Newcome, and Colonel Newcome, the last assessed by Chernyshevsky as a creation worthy of Shakespeare himself).

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An inseparable component of Thackeray's art of typification was the depiction of the behaviour, actions, and deeds of his characters through the plots of his novels and through the medium of their composition. From the beginning of his literary career he was not only deeply interested in the truth of life of literary characters, but also in that of depicted events, in the problem of how to depict the plot of the novel that it might render actual reality as faithfully as possible. As an active fighter for realism in literature Thackeray consistently proclaimed the principle that the plot of the novel should reflect the conflicts and events of real life. That is why as literary critic and especially as novelist he so vehemently fought against conventional clichés and mannerisms used by some contemporary novelists in their works, especially against the misapplication of chance, violently surprising turns of the plot, striking contrasts, too exciting and improbable events, and other superficial and melodramatic effects. He was convinced that the events depicted in the novel had to be determined and duly motivated by the characters of the personages, and not by interventions from without, for instance by a surprising and entirely unmotivated discovery of unsuspected family relationships or lost important documents, and expressed his views on this problem very clearly several times, most happily perhaps in his review of Mrs Gore's Christmas story *The Snow Storm*.<sup>92</sup> Even in this respect he learned much from Fielding, who also proclaimed in theory and realized in practice the principle that the novelist was



to depict events that really happened or could happen, events perhaps surprising or even marvellous, but never incredible or supernatural. Fielding's *Tom Jones* was regarded by Thackeray as a model of the mastery of composition which he himself never reached, since almost all his novels, with the exception of *Vanity Fair* and *Henry Esmond*, are rather loosely constructed and cannot boast of such a perfectly elaborated composition as Fielding's novel, in which, as Thackeray emphasized, each trifling incident "advances the story, grows out of former incidents, and is connected with the whole".<sup>93</sup>

Thackeray's distaste for conventional schemes of plot is closely connected with his highly critical attitude to the misuse of poetical justice in unnatural happy endings which he regarded as being in contradiction to actual reality. The rewarding of good characters and the punishment of the evil at the end of a novel or story ran counter to his conception of bourgeois success which he so splendidly elaborated in all his early and mature work, but especially in *Barry Lyndon* and *Vanity Fair*. His depictions convincingly reveal his indignation at the thought that anybody could even pronounce the words "good and reward", "evil and punishment" in one breath, in the given time and society. He especially resented the practice of those contemporary novelists who dealt in their works with the "Condition of England question" and did not present any better solution than a compromise happy ending resembling the final scene of a pantomime and having nothing in common with the way in which problems were solved and conflicts settled in real life. An almost classic protest against conventional happy endings is his burlesque *Proposals for a Continuation of 'Ivanhoe'* and its later enlarged version *Rebecca and Rowena* in which he endeavours to rectify the happy end of Scott's novel and in his authorial comments protests against the general convention of ending novels with the marriage of the young hero and heroine, as if life ended after this event and married people did not experience anything worth depiction, and pleads for "middle-aged novels". Like conventional happy endings, Thackeray also resented conventional unhappy endings and much disliked reading novels ending with the death of the hero or heroine, declining "to agitate [his] feelings needlessly".<sup>94</sup>

Thackeray applied these conceptions of the proper way of handling the plot not only in his literary criticism, but first and foremost in his imaginative literary work, and that quite consistently in his stories and novels written up to *Pendennis*. His distaste for conventional schemes of plot is the main reason why only very few of his early works have a plot in the traditional sense of the word, such as *The Bedford-Row Conspiracy* and *Catherine* (the plots of which are, however, taken over in the first case from the French source, and in the second from the *Newgate Calendar*), *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*, some stories from the series of *Fitz-Boodle Papers* and *Men's Wives* (especially *Ravenswing*),

and *Barry Lyndon*. The germs of plot may be also found in *The Shabby Genteel Story*, but the unravelling of plot was not provided by Thackeray until near the close of his life, in *The Adventures of Philip*. Other early and mature works of his lack formal plot in the generally accepted sense of the word, but they are in most cases not entirely loose and amorphous in their composition. His *Vanity Fair*, for instance, in which he broke with all contemporary literary conventions and, as several Thackerayan scholars pointed out, by presenting a panoramic picture of the whole social organism liberated himself from the necessity of devising a complex plot, is built upon the structure of the "Fair", to which everything is logically connected, as V. V. Ivasheva showed, its composition consisting of two intertwining lines of plot concentrating round Amelia and Becky, as was demonstrated for the first time by Lord David Cecil, recently noted by Arnold Kettle and V. V. Ivasheva and remarkably analysed by Kathleen Tillotson. In those early and mature works of his which do contain germs of formal plot. Thackeray never builds his sujets on stereotyped schemes, never uses surprising and unexpected happenings when unravelling his plots. As Kathleen Tillotson pointed out, the only situation in *Vanity Fair* which resembles traditional conventional schemes is the scene of the discovery of Becky's unfaithfulness, but she correctly underlines the essential differences between the elaboration of similar episodes in the stock scenes of the penny theatres and in Thackeray's masterpiece. The plots of Thackeray's early and mature works (it would be perhaps better to speak about the fragments of formal plot, as G. Tillotson does) reflect real conflicts and events, reproduce the real life of man, in which equally there does not exist — as the last named scholar emphasizes — any connected plot. Professor Tillotson argues against the negative evaluation of Dr. Leavis, who reprehends Thackeray's novels for merely "going on and on", and points out that "the lack of edged shape" is not a demerit but the merit of Thackeray's novels and a deliberate device by the means of which the novelist wanted to achieve the impression of continuity, characteristic of life itself, to approach to "the vastness of the world and the never-endingness of time", in order to be able to depict life more truthfully. That is why his novels do not end, but temporarily cease, like life itself, to continue in another way in his next works.<sup>95</sup> Neither of the two last quoted scholars, however, distinguishes between *Vanity Fair* and the following three great novels, and between these and the later ones, so that I cannot find myself in full agreement with their conclusions. G. Tillotson's evaluation seems to me acceptable for the quartet of Thackeray's great novels, but not for the later ones, for which Dr. Leavis's conclusions apply better.

In his early works and especially in *Vanity Fair* Thackeray avoids the conventional usage of poetic justice and splendidly elaborates his own conception of justice in bourgeois society through the medium of his favourite theme of

bourgeois success. His stories and novels are not closed by conventional happy endings, and even if they do end happily, it is after many trials and disillusionments of his characters and the happiness achieved is always, with the single exception of that attained by Samuel Titmarsh, very doubtful. His "good" characters are not rewarded (Dobbin) and the evil are not properly punished, but mostly flourish unmolested for a long time before their final fall or die deplored and glorified by respectable society (Barry Lyndon and all his other early villains, Becky, Lord Steyne). Only very exceptionally do his stories end with a marriage, but if they do, it is either a device taken over from the original source of his story (*The Bedford-Row Conspiracy*), a false marriage (Brandon with Caroline) or a marriage which burlesques the conventional happy endings (the marriage of Andrew Fitch with the comic rich widow). Almost all Thackeray's important personages are married people and he depicts their fortunes after marriage. Only one of his works of this period ends with death, *Catherine*, the titular heroine of which is, like her historical prototype, burnt at the stake. While working at the three great novels which followed his masterpiece, Thackeray still essentially adhered to the above mentioned principles concerning the plot and composition of his novels, but gradually he began to encroach upon them, if not as yet with any detrimental effect upon the truth of life presented. As Praz points out, as early as *Pendennis* we find some elements of melodrama in the plot, such as for instance the episode of the conflict between Major Pendennis and his servant Morgan, Foker's discovery that Altamont is the father of Blanche and Altamont's identification with a runaway convict.<sup>96</sup> Although in *The Newcomes* Thackeray explicitly declared that he disdained "the tricks and surprises of the novelist's art",<sup>97</sup> the plot of the novel is unravelled by a discovery of a lost letter which ensures Clive's moral, though not legal right to a certain property. Thackeray also begins to retreat from his principle that a happy end of a novel does not reflect the unravellings of human stories in real life, though in this case we should rather speak about suggestions of future developments than about actual changes. The happy end of *Pendennis* is still considerably illusory and the author himself doubts the happiness of the couple, but in spite of this it is in fact a compromise happy ending closing the essentially tragic conflict of the hero with the depiction of his petty bourgeois happiness in the small world confined within the limited sphere of the family hearth. In *The Newcomes* this process culminates and the marriage of Pendennis, the narrator of the story, is depicted without any misgivings on the part of the novelist as an ideal and perfectly happy union. In the depiction of the fortunes of the main personages of this novel, however, Thackeray does not identify himself with those writers who, at variance with actual reality, reward virtue and punish vice. Although he did retreat from the logical conclusion to which his story was pointing by succumbing to the wishes of his readers and vaguely

suggesting that Clive will eventually marry Ethel, his retreat is not absolute, for he does not depict the actual further fortunes of the couple but sends his readers to the happy, harmless fable-land of poetical justice, in which the good people are rewarded and the evil punished absolutely, and the readers can settle the fortunes of his heroes according to their own imagination. But the very fact that he does send them to this fabulous land, is an undoubtable modification of his former creative principles.

### III.

#### SOME LATER DEVELOPMENTS

In the concluding chapter of this study I intend to outline, though owing to the lack of space necessarily only cursorily, some of the basic changes that took place in Thackeray's aesthetic views and creative principles in the later stages of his literary career. These were noticed by most Thackerayan scholars, even though there also appeared opinions that Thackeray's creative principles did not change at all (Praz, G. Tillotson, Greig, Forsythe) or that they only matured (Saintsbury, Dodds). Most of those literary historians and critics who do take notice of the change, however, do not satisfactorily explain its causes, which they seek exclusively in the private and professional life of the novelist paying none or only very little attention to its social background (besides the above and below mentioned Ray, Ellis, Ennis, K. Tillotson), do not localize it correctly in the course of Thackeray's life (*CHEL*, Trollope), and if they do, they do not in my opinion evaluate it correctly (Lewes, Stevenson, Stephenson). Worthy of at least short notice is the evaluation of the last named scholar, who correctly places the change in the beginning of the 1850s (though he sees in it a sudden change and not, as in fact it was, the outcome of a long process), characterizes it as a development from sharp satire to a more optimistic approach to the depiction of reality, the roots of which he finds in the gradual deepening of Thackeray's religious faith which led him to the final conviction that the existing social structure was perfect and secure, but evaluates it in the opposite way, as a change from the worse to the better, as the rise of Thackeray's star from the darkness of disbelief, pessimism and fatalism.<sup>98</sup> A much more acceptable evaluation was according to my opinion provided by Chernyshevsky and V. V. Ivasheva, some of whose views I have quoted above and shall mention again in this chapter.

As I have pointed out in my article "The Relationship of W. M. Thackeray to Henry Fielding", beginning with 1848, and increasingly since the middle of the 1850s, significant changes took place in Thackeray's consciousness and his whole attitude to reality, in his views of human nature and of political and

social problems. This characteristic development of his world outlook, which is conditioned not only by the circumstances of his private and professional life, but also by the changes of the whole political and social climate in England after 1848, and may be characterized as a gradual strengthening of his inclination towards reconciliation to the bourgeois society of his time and place, found indirect reflection, too, in his aesthetic creed and creative method. It is not any sudden and revolutionary change but a long process, which has its deepest roots in the contradictions existing in Thackeray's mind since his earliest years and deepening under the impact of the changing conditions in which he lived, and its outcome is not an absolute renunciation of realistic aesthetics but only several greater or lesser modifications of its individual tenets, the first signals of which appear, as we saw, as early as *Pendennis*, and which are fully reflected in Thackeray's works written after *The Newcomes*.

Even in his later years Thackeray preserved his conviction that literature and art play a very important role in the life of human society, but he modified his views of some aspects of their social function. As far as their educational influence upon the morals of the public was concerned, Thackeray finally fully conformed himself to the moral conventions of his time and ceased to find them irritating. He felt hampered by them only once, when working at his historical novel *The Virginians*, as they prevented him from faithfully depicting the life of the gayer, more outspoken and ruder generation of his ancestors, and complained of them both in his private correspondence and the commentary of his novel.<sup>99</sup> But these were his last protests which were sincerely felt and were not purely formal. With the advance of time he more and more intensively thought about novels being read by young people and these finally become one of his main criteria for the moral contents of his own literary works and literature in general. From his several remarks on this matter, the following from his essay "De Juventute" illustrates the final phase of his attitude to contemporary moral taboos perhaps most convincingly. After having sharply criticized the moral contents of Sterne's works; he adds:

"But I am thankful to live in times when men no longer have the temptation to write so as to call blushes on women's cheeks, and would shame to whisper wicked allusions to honest boys".<sup>100</sup>

Another convincing proof of Thackeray's final identification with the moral codex of bourgeois society is his editorial work in the *Cornhill Magazine*, during which he refused to publish Trollope's novel *Mrs. General Talboys* and Elizabeth Browning's poem "Lord Walter's Wife" as morally objectionable works depicting illicit passion and quite unsuitable for a reading public including also very young persons. If we accept Stang's statement, supported by much evidence, that the first protests against this "tyranny of the young person" in literature

began to appear earlier than is usually supposed, in the 1850s, the more regrettable seems to us Thackeray's complete and unprotesting submission to it.<sup>101</sup>

As far as his views of literature and art as reflection of reality are concerned, Thackeray continued until the very end of his literary career to designate himself as a novelist who endeavoured to present in his works a faithful depiction of the chosen sphere of life, but his conception of the truth of life which the writer should convey to the reader and of the artistic media which he should employ, were gradually being significantly modified. In the above quoted article on Thackeray and Fielding I have outlined the general drift of this development, which is in its substance a gradual deepening of the contradictions inherent in the double role of a satirist and moralist which he assumed for the first time in *Vanity Fair*. With the advance of time Thackeray began to lay an ever stronger stress on the duty of the novelist to depict the selected sphere of reality with love, understanding and sympathy, on the necessity to forgive his characters their weaknesses and foibles and extend to them the hand of friendship. He continued to call himself a satirist, but he took an ever growing interest in convincing his readers that his attitude to the depicted reality was not critical but positive, began to defend himself vehemently against the charges of misanthropy and cynicism and often emphasized that under the mask of a satirist there went a sentimental man who did not mean to do harm to anybody.<sup>102</sup> The former merciless satirist put an ever widening gulf between himself and satire of the highest degree, and finally, as I demonstrated in my article, arrived at a complete identification of satire and humor, thus culminating the process begun in the preceding years. This characteristic development is also confirmed by his having expressed his pleasure in the general moderation of English satire which took place in the 1850s and 1860s under the influence of moods of compromise spreading in all the spheres of life, and having written about the new tone appearing on the pages of *Punch* with high appreciation:

"Whilst we live we must laugh and have folks to make us laugh. We cannot afford to lose Satyr with his pipe and dances and gambols. But we have washed, combed, clothed, and taught the rogue good manners; or rather, let us say, he has learned them himself; for he is of nature soft and kindly, and he has put aside his mad pranks and tipsy habits; and, frolicsome always, has become gentle and harmless, smitten into shame by the pure presence of our women and the sweet confiding smiles of our children".<sup>103</sup>

Thackeray's retreat from satire was not, however, quite devoid of occasional misgivings. Some of his reflections from the 1850s and 1860s bear witness that he realized, if only very rarely, that this washed and perfumed satire was robbed of its most significant traits and thus actually changed into whimpering sentimentality.<sup>104</sup>

One of the tenets of Thackeray's realistic aesthetics which remained unchanged even in the 1850s and 1860s was his demand that the writer and artist should

perfectly master his materials before he begins writing or painting. We may even say that proportionately to the drying up of his imagination, of which he was increasingly aware, as his correspondence testifies, he more closely adhered to personal experience than ever before. But even here we come across some modifications, since, contrary to his practice in the preceding years, Thackeray substantially supplemented the sources of inspiration provided by his personal observation by the study of written materials and even the information of experts. His frequent remarks about books and materials he studied when he was working at a new theme and his requests for expert information, increasing in number with the advance of time, seem to suggest that second-hand information read out from books or provided by other people was becoming for him a more important source of inspiration than direct experience of life, which apparently ceased to provide him with new and powerful impulses. One of the main causes of this development is the gradual weakening of Thackeray's interest in the society of his own time, the depiction of which required personal experience, and its concentrating on the past, as I shall demonstrate in further detail below, the mastering of which was unthinkable without knowledge and inspiration gained from books.

Although Thackeray earnestly went on endeavouring to depict in his last novels the chosen spheres of life truthfully, the truth he lays before his readers differs substantially from that he presented before. His dissociation from sharp social satire is manifested first and foremost as a general retreat from the depiction of contemporary reality and its pressing problems to that of the past, or, in the two novels depicting the society of his own time, as a suppression of socially significant themes and their replacement by themes less significant. Of course Thackeray even in his earlier years did not ignore the rich sources of inspiration offered by the past of his own country, as his *Catherine*, *Barry Lyndon* and the fragment of the *Knights of Borsellen* bear witness, but the depiction of history was not then in the centre of his creative interest and his best artistic forces were devoted to the depiction of contemporary society. The main motive of his recourse in this earlier period of his life to past historical epochs, above all to that of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was not only his old love for the cultural tradition of this particular century. As V. V. Ivasheva demonstrated, it was especially his deep preoccupation with this period as the seed-time of those social processes that held the foreground of his interest when he depicted the society of his own time and that enabled him, by depicting them, to pronounce his judgment on the present. This is also confirmed by the information provided by Lady Ritchie, that her father did not finish *The Knights of Borsellen* because the depicted historical epoch (14<sup>th</sup>—15<sup>th</sup> centuries) seemed to him to be too distant from the present to suit his creative purposes.<sup>105</sup> After *Pendennis*, however, we may observe a characteristic shift of the focus of Thackeray's interest

from the present to the past, and that not only in his imaginative work (*Henry Esmond*, *The Virginians*, *Denis Duval*) and critical papers (his lectures on the English humourists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and on the *Four Georges*), but also in his private life which was lived, as he several times confessed, more in the preceding century than in his own time. With the advance of time Thackeray's interest in history was steadily increasing and the novelist toyed for many years with the idea of leaving off writing novels altogether and devoting himself to writing historical works. He had many ambitious plans in this field, as his correspondence proves, but owing to ill health and premature death was unable to realize them. Thackeray's retreat to history, as it reveals itself in the first two of the three novels mentioned, is not a reactionary escape from the present, as even in them the novelist goes on judging his own time through the depicted past, especially in *Henry Esmond*, which belongs to his best achievements, as I demonstrated above, and even in the *Virginians*, in which he sharply pillories those characteristic aspects of the life of London high society and the English and American country gentry which survived in his own time (egoism, parasitism, licentiousness, and snobbery). Nevertheless it is a compromise allowing Thackeray to pay less attention to the most significant social problems of his own time, a compromise assessed by V. V. Ivasheva as the first step to the gradual blunting of the sharpness of his realistic disclosures.<sup>106</sup> This process culminates in Thackeray's last unfinished novel *Denis Duval* which, if finished, would undoubtedly be a superficial novel of adventure and escape, containing several reactionary motifs that are suggested in the fragment and are due, as A. A. Elistratova demonstrated, to his having chosen for his hero a participant in the counter-revolutionary war led by England in the period of the French bourgeois revolution against the French people and thus entering into direct conflict with historical truth.<sup>107</sup>

The truth about the society of his own time that Thackeray presents in his late novels *Lovel the Widower* and *The Adventures of Philip* even more convincingly reveals how far the novelist retreated from the aesthetic position of a realist and satirist after his last great novel on contemporary theme, *The Newcomes*. Both these novels, but especially the first of them, are complete artistic failures, one of the main causes of which must be sought for in their narrowed and limited social criticism lacking in satirical intonations. As far as *Lovel the Widower* contains any criticism at all, it is directed against evil mothers-in-law, and in this case Thackeray avowedly settles his personal accounts, against snobbery (Lady Baker), against cowardice and submissiveness (the titular hero and the narrator Mr. Batchelor). In *The Adventures of Philip* Thackeray for the last time attempted to depict English bourgeois society as a great fair of vanities governed by Mammon and pervaded by snobbery, but in contradiction to *Vanity Fair* he does not pay attention to the whole system of social relation-



ships but concentrates his interest on individual, less important themes and motifs (such as for instance the motif of the "skeletons in closets" which is becoming one of the most significant mottoes for Thackeray's late imaginative work, of evil mothers-in-law etc.). As A. A. Elistratova pointed out, through the medium of the story of his titular hero, which is founded on the biblical legend of the good Samaritan, Thackeray endeavours to show that Christian philanthropy is just as mighty a factor in the life of bourgeois society as the hunt for profit — contrary to Thackeray's preceding characters of this type, his hero gains success in spite of adverse circumstances and not by his own efforts and talent, but first and foremost through the help of the good Samaritans of bourgeois England who include even good rich men, a type impossible in Thackeray's previous works.<sup>108</sup> Thackeray's retreat from his former standpoint as a sharp critic of bourgeois society is also revealed in his authorial commentary: though he critically refers to the manners of the Americans and the haughty behaviour of Englishmen on the Continent, these critical marginal notes are more than counterbalanced by several very conservative observations, such as for instance on the racial problem, on the French revolution in 1830 and the situation in England, on the necessity of maintaining class distinctions, on the great merits of Queen Victoria, and so forth.

The modifications of Thackeray's conception of satire in the period discussed found also reflection in his much more emphatic propagation of his positive programme through the medium of those characters whom he conceived as protagonists of his social and human ideals and presented as models of bourgeois virtues (George Warrington, Theo Lambert, Lovel, Charlotte Baynes, Dr. Barnard). As Ray very clearly pointed out, beginning with *The Virginians* Thackeray's dissatisfaction with the world is not so much revealed in his characters, as in a strengthened crusade for the gentlemanly standard.<sup>109</sup> It is for the first time in this novel, too (and not in all the works written after Thackeray's family tragedy, as Ray believes) that Thackeray after his tentative indications in *The Newcomes* finally without any doubt comes to see one of the highest values of life and its main justification in the idyllic bourgeois home, sheltered from the stormy social struggles taking place outside its walls. The confirmation of this may be found not only by confronting this novel with its predecessors, but also in the evidence we possess of Thackeray's having entertained the idea of writing, after *The Newcomes*, a novel predominantly dealing with family relationships and having desisted from it largely on account of his lack of experience of family life.<sup>110</sup> The bourgeois family idyll, depicted in the married lives of Philip and Charlotte and of Pendennis and Laura and placed against the general marriage mart in bourgeois society, is also one of the remedies Thackeray proposes to his society in *The Adventures of Philip*. Characteristic of Thackeray's creative approach in his last years is also a streng-

thened propagation of religious faith: all his late novels are pervaded with a strong religious spirit and testify to his arriving at a firm conviction that genuine faith is a reliable remedy for all human troubles and worries. This emphatic propagation of Thackeray's positive ideal is one of the main causes why the general atmosphere of all his late novels is no longer characterized by black pessimism, but by sad and calm resignation to all the dark aspects of the reality depicted, by deep melancholy and a feeling of weariness of life which is no longer rooted in Thackeray's despair over his society, but in the presentiment of approaching death.

The above outlined development of the slashing satirist into a conciliatory moralist accompanied by noticeable degeneration of his creative powers was noticed even by some of his readers and by many critics of his and the succeeding generations. Most clear-sighted seems to me the assessment of G. N. Ray, which obviously partly inspired also the above quoted Soviet scholars. In his *Buried Life* Ray pointed out and by later discoveries confirmed that the philosophy of life Thackeray arrived at in his last years led him to quite a different kind of novel from those he had written previously:

"His later novels, particularly *The Virginians* and *Denis Duval*, are romantic in mood if they remain realistic in treatment. . . In his later books. . . he sought primarily to amuse his readers, to lead them into "happy, harmless fable-land"; and though his keen sense of reality did not desert him, his aim in writing fiction became essentially frivolous, as it had never been before".<sup>111</sup>

Ray suggests that this late conciliatory standpoint of Thackeray may be understood either as defeat or victory, and concludes that the novelist himself regarded it as victory, though not without misgivings, quoting as evidence the novelist's following pronouncement after the publication of Jeaffreson's novel *Live It Down* (1863):

"It would be the very title for my story of my own life".<sup>112</sup>

My opinion, however, which can be supported by much evidence, is that Thackeray's misgivings were too strong for us to be able to speak about his feeling victorious. The impression we get from his late correspondence is that of a resigned and melancholy man, tired of life and expecting nothing from it but its ensuing and almost coveted end, of a novelist who is completely indifferent to his craft and to literary success and who goes on writing only to secure comfort for his daughters, of a writer who perfectly realizes that he has ceased to be able to write even humour, let alone satire, and that the wells of his inspiration had gone dry. On the other hand Ray is right in maintaining that in *The Virginians*, *Philip*, and *Lovel* Thackeray reveals a brooding sensitivity to negative criticism of his novels and devotes much space to polemics with the charges of cynicism, against which he defends himself very vehemently, con-

stantly referring to his improvement in this respect. This acute sensitiveness to criticism is of course the culmination of a longer process that has its beginnings as early as in 1850, when Thackeray wrote the first of his several open letters addressed to his critics ("The Dignity of Literature", *Morning Chronicle*, 12 January).

The above outlined modifications in some of the basic tenets of Thackeray's aesthetic creed are duly reflected in the art of typification he applies in his later novels. Although in his theory the novelist continued to proclaim that literary characters should be faithful to life and dissociated himself from the conventional conception of romantic heroes and heroines,<sup>113</sup> in his literary practice he was no longer able to apply these principles so successfully as in his mature works. In his later novels he again uses his favourite device of letting his stories be narrated either by his heroes themselves in the first person (Denis Duval) or by an outside narrator (Pendennis in *The Adventures of Philip* and Mr. Bachelor in *Lovel the Widower*), in one case, however, he assumes the role of the narrator himself (in *The Virginians*). These last narrators of his again stand out as commentators of the depicted reality, and thus his method of typification formally remains the discovery of character on three levels. But his authorial commentary, whether expressed by himself or through the mouths of his *alter-egos*, gradually begins to lose its former function of the third level, through the medium of which he used to express his critical judgment of the depicted, and is becoming a medium for expressing his conciliatory attitude and for propagating his positive ideals. The outcome of this characteristic development, which is closely connected with the changes in Thackeray's critical attitude to the reality itself, is that the novelist ceases to connect his personages with significant social problems and to typify in them the most characteristic traits of their social class, even though he had ample opportunity of doing so, since the characters he chooses for depiction are in many respects similar to those he had created before. Thus the Baroness Bernstein, Beatrix Esmond in her old age, is his most successful creation in the period we are dealing with, but her portrait lacks the sharp satirical sidelights thrown upon her predecessor and younger self Beatrix, and is endowed, moreover, with attractive traits. The character of Lovel, a rich merchant from the City, provided Thackeray with a splendid opportunity of creating a new and different old Osborne, but the novelist solves only insignificant family problems in connection with this figure and presents him in a positive light as a homely, kind and generous man who allows himself to be long tyrannized by his mother-in-law before he finds courage to revolt. The talented and educated butler Dick Bedford is only a very pale reflection of the satirical commentators Yellowplush and Jeames. Dr. Firmin and his younger self Mr. Brandon, and the earlier and later Carolines, are separated, as Saintsbury pointed out, "not merely from each other

but from their earlier selves, not only by the years of change, and suffering, and guilt on one side, but, I think, by something a little more gulf-like — a difference of conception and attitude to them on the part of their maker".<sup>114</sup> Thus we could go on demonstrating that Thackeray's late characters, while doubtless not romantically idealized figures of perfect heroes or downright scoundrels, nevertheless are neither convincing social types drawn in all their individual diversity. The novelist's obtrusive, disproportionately lengthy and tedious commentary, deprived of satirical intonations and pervaded with bourgeois sentimentality, exercises a baneful influence upon their vitality and with only very rare exceptions they appear before the reader as insignificant, pale and inexpressive figures which do not catch his fancy and leave him completely indifferent to their fortunes and misfortunes.

In his later novels Thackeray retreats, too, from the principles he formerly applied in the composition of his novels. It is true that he goes on proclaiming his distaste for conventional schemes of *sujet* and critically comments upon the recognized stock in hand of contemporary novelists, but these are to a great extent merely theoretical reflections. For instance he did declare in his essay "On a Peal of Bells" that he disliked depicting in his novels scenes and situations which could lead to melodrama and false sentiment, such as love-making, and that he disdained using the traditional devices of "the villain in the cupboard" or the loss of "a will which shall be forthcoming in due season",<sup>115</sup> but a month before this declaration was written he did use, in *The Adventures of Philip*, the device of a sudden discovery of a lost will for reinstating his hero in comfort and made use of it even earlier, as I have pointed out above. Thackeray also encroaches upon his former principle that the happy end of the novel does not reflect the actual solutions of human problems in real life and begins to revert to poetical justice which he so firmly refused in earlier years. In all his late novels his good characters are properly rewarded by happy marriages and respectability (George Warrington, Philip, Lovel) and the plot is unravelled by means of a conventional happy end. It is also symptomatic that Thackeray in this period of his life persuaded his daughter to change the conclusion of her novel *The Story of Elizabeth* into a happy ending.<sup>116</sup> On the other hand the novelist very rarely abuses poetical justice in solving the fortunes of his negative characters. Originally he planned a due punishment for Dr. Firmin (and earlier for Altamont) but finally he did not resort to it and let him escape from justice.<sup>117</sup>

We may add in conclusion that the above outlined general development of Thackeray's aesthetics found its due reflection, too, in his critical views of the works of other writers and his own. The most convincing of the earlier proofs of these changes is the injustice he performed upon his former favourite and model Fielding in his lectures on the English humourists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century

which are by some critics, and not without justification, evaluated as a blot upon his literary and critical reputation. Significant modifications may be observed in his attitude to his earlier works: in 1858 he confessed that he hated the *Book of Snobs* and could not read a word of it, and he also assumed a considerably critical attitude to his early burlesques and parodies and even apologized, in public or privately, to the authors he criticized and ridiculed in the heyday of his critical career. This convincingly completes the above suggested picture of Thackeray in the last stage of his literary career as a novelist who laid down the sharp weapons of his satire and looked at the reality he chose for his depiction with tolerant, compromising and sentimental resignation.

\* \* \*

The investigation of the main principles of Thackeray's aesthetic creed in their development and practical application in his imaginative work and criticism enables us to come to the conclusion that even if he did not elaborate any complete and finished aesthetic and literary theories and did not leave behind him any detailed analyses of the novelist's technique, he was keenly and constantly interested in almost all the basic problems pertaining to art and literature in general and the art of fiction in particular, and in the latter case in some aspects even foreshadowed the critics of the second half of the century who paid to the individual components of the novelist's craft greater and more systematic attention. As I have tried to demonstrate, Thackeray's aesthetic views grew from the fruitful soil prepared by his family and school life and self-education, and developed to maturity in the unsettled social atmosphere of Chartism. This latter was one of the most significant factors determining the general tendency of the development of these views and conditioned their essentially progressive character, which is revealed above all in Thackeray's capability of discerning socially wholesome and unwholesome tendencies and phenomena in contemporary literatures — a discernment which surprisingly associates him with the Russian revolutionary democratic critics of his time — and in his conviction that art and literature should serve the widest masses of people. The above analysis provides sufficient ground for ascertaining that Thackeray followed in his literary work and criticism definite and clear aesthetic principles, to which he consistently adhered until the middle of the 1850s and from which he did not fully retreat even in his last years when some of his conceptions underwent significant modifications. Even though Thackeray almost completely ignored the more subtle problems of the art of fiction, which did not begin to draw the attention of the novelists and critics until the close of the century, such as the handling of point of view, time, interior monologue etc., and even though his aesthetic principles are more often expressed in a half-humorous way than precisely formulated, and lack a deeper philosophical foun-

dation, they are not silly and unworthy of discussion, as Greig insists, but are basically sound, were novel and needful in their time and place and, embodied in Thackeray's images and applied in his literary criticism, played a significant social function by promoting the cause of realism in the English novel of his time and paving the way for its acceptance in the consciousness of the English reading public.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See A. A. Elistratova, "Thackeray", *Istoriya angliyskoy literatury*, vol. II, part 2, Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, Moskva, 1955; V. V. Ivasheva, *Tekkerey-satirik (Thackeray the Satirist)*, Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 1958; Edwin R. Clapp, "Critic on Horseback", *The Sewanee Review*, 1930 (evaluated by Lionel Stevenson as a "rather general view of Thackeray's aesthetic pronouncements", see *Victorian Fiction, A Guide to Research*, Harvard University Press, 1964, p. 182); George Saintsbury, *A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe*, Edinburgh and London, 3 vols., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1917, vol. III, pp. 499 to 502 and *Consideration of Thackeray*, Oxford University Press, London, 1931; *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 1916, vol. XIII, ch. IX; Lewis Melville, "Thackeray as a Reader and Critic of Books", *The Fortnightly Review*, vol. 80, pp. 836-845; Philip Enzinger, "Thackeray, Critic of Literature", *The Quarterly Journal*, publ. by The University of North Dakota, 1930-1, vols. 20-21. See also some of my previous studies, especially "W. M. Thackeray's Literary Criticism in the 'Morning Chronicle' (1844-1848)", *Brno Studies in English*, vol. II, Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, Praha, 1960, pp. 79-111.
- <sup>2</sup> See *The Letters and Private Papers of W. M. Thackeray*, Collected and edited by Gordon N. Ray, 4 vols., Oxford University Press, 1945, vol. IV, pp. 371-372. (Further to be denoted as *Letters*.)
- <sup>3</sup> See especially *The Oxford Thackeray*, ed. George Saintsbury, 17 vols., Oxford, 1908 (further to be denoted as *Works*), II, pp. 98, 423-424, 622, 707, 722, III, 307-308, 342, IV, 178, V, 459, IX, 166, X, 493, 501, 572, XI, 91, XIV, 158-159, XVII, 151-152, 354-355, 418-419, 422, 429-434, 599, 601-602, 608; *Thackerayana*, ed. Joseph Grego, A New Edition, London, Chatto and Windus, pp. 19-29, *Fraser's Magazine*, vol. XXI, 1840, p. 228.
- <sup>4</sup> *The Arabian Nights* is one of the early favourites of Dobbin and Denis Duval, *Don Quixote* of Esmond, *Robinson Crusoe* of Denis Duval.
- <sup>5</sup> See James Grant Wilson, *Thackeray in the United States*, 2 vols., London, Smith, Elder & Co., 1904, vol. II, p. 92; see also *Letters*, III, p. 304, IV, p. 435, *Works*, IX, p. 343, XIV, pp. 49, 85, 875.
- <sup>6</sup> See John Frederick Boyes, "Memorial of Thackeray's School-Days", *Cornhill Magazine*, vol. XI, pp. 118-119, 126-127, quoted in *Letters*, I, pp. 20-21 n. See also Thackeray's juvenile drawings in the *Spectator*, the *Tatler*, the *Rambler*, and other magazines of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and his later reminiscences.
- <sup>7</sup> See *The Works and Life of Walter Bagehot*, Longmans, Green, and Co., London, 1915, vol. IV, pp. 229-266 ("Sterne and Thackeray", 1864); Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties*, Oxford, At the Clarendon Press, 1954, pp. 150, 252, 254.
- <sup>8</sup> See *Works*, XVII, p. 364; Lewis Melville, *William Makepeace Thackeray*, John Lane, The Bodley Head, London, 1910, 2 vols., I, p. 179.
- <sup>9</sup> See especially *Works*, IX, p. 122, 114, VIII, p. 36, X, p. 175.

- <sup>10</sup> See William Hepworth Thompson, *Memorials*, pp. 347—348, quoted in *Letters*, I, p. 108 n.
- <sup>11</sup> See Thomas R. Lounsbury, *The Life and Times of Tennyson*, Oxford University Press, 1915, pp. 150—161.
- <sup>12</sup> See Elistratova, op. cit., pp. 272—273; *Letters*, I, p. 74.
- <sup>13</sup> *Works*, XII, p. 30.
- <sup>14</sup> G. N. Ray, *The Age of Wisdom (1847—1863)*, London, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 93, see also p. 94; James Hannay, *Brief Memoir of the Late Mr. Thackeray*, Edinburgh, 1864, p. 8, and Elizabeth Nitchie, "Horace and Thackeray", *Classical Journal*, XIII, March 1918, pp. 393—419 (both quoted in Ray's book, pp. 447—448 n.).
- <sup>15</sup> See M. P. Alekseev, *Iz istorii angliyskoy literatury*, GICHL, Moskva, Leningrad, 1960, p. 428.
- <sup>16</sup> See *Letters*, I, pp. 130, 136, 148; G. N. Ray, *The Age of Wisdom*, p. viii.
- <sup>17</sup> *Letters*, I, p. 213; see also *ibid.*, p. 133.
- <sup>18</sup> See *Works*, X, pp. 631 ff., XII, pp. 517—518, XVII, p. 592.
- <sup>19</sup> See *Letters*, I, pp. 134, 136, 141—142.
- <sup>20</sup> See V. G. Belinsky, *Spisy (Works)*, SNKLHU, Praha, 1956, especially vols. II, p. 298, I, pp. 187—188, IV, pp. 90—91, 289.
- <sup>21</sup> See Saintsbury's remarks on this kinship in his *Consideration of Thackeray*, pp. 20, 74. In the Thackeray canon I have found only one insignificant reference to Heine, in *Works*, II, p. 231.
- <sup>22</sup> See *Letters*, I, pp. 214, 225, 117—118, 123.
- <sup>23</sup> Herman Merivale and Frank T. Marzials, *Life of W. M. Thackeray*, London and Felling-on-Tync, The Walter Scott Publishing Co., Ltd., New York, p. 83.
- <sup>24</sup> See Alekseev, op. cit., pp. 425, 440—441, 437—439.
- <sup>25</sup> See *Letters*, I, pp. 228, 206, 158, 187, 201, 203, 98, 198, 35, 206, 197. Thackeray saw sometime before 1841 the dramatization of Peacock's novel *Maid Marian* (see *Works*, IV, p. 14). For his knowledge of Peacock's novels see also *Letters*, II, p. 718, and for his later praises of Marryat *Letters*, II, p. 31, III, pp. 591, 575—576, *Works*, XVII, pp. 594, 598. Though Thackeray probably read the first works of Dickens as they came from the press, it was not until in 1838 that he began to put him in the foremost place in English fiction.
- <sup>26</sup> Especially J. A. Falcóner, "Balzac and Thackeray", *English Studies*, vol. 26, 1944—5, pp. 129—133, W. C. D. Pacey, "Balzac and Thackeray", *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 36, 1941, pp. 213—224, and A. Carey Taylor, "Balzac et Thackeray", *Revue de littérature comparée*, 1960. P. T. Lafleur in "Sainte-Beuve, Balzac, and Thackeray" (*The Modern Language Review*, 1914) and R. Maitre in "Balzac, Thackeray, et Charles de Bernard" (*Revue de littérature comparée*, 1950) hesitate to assert any direct influence.
- <sup>27</sup> See *Letters*, I, p. 412, II, p. 500, *Works*, II, pp. 227, 173, Harold Strong Gulliver, *Thackeray's Literary Apprenticeship*, Valdosta, 1934, pp. 58, 213.
- <sup>28</sup> *Letters*, II, p. 118, see also *ibid.*, III, p. 32, *Works*, IV, p. 202, XIII, p. 199.
- <sup>29</sup> See Elistratova, op. cit., p. 283.
- <sup>30</sup> *Works*, I, p. 107.
- <sup>31</sup> See *Works*, II, pp. 247—248, 516, VI, pp. 413—416, VIII, p. 290, *Letters*, II, p. 316.
- <sup>32</sup> *Works*, II, pp. 591, 592—593 ("Objections against Art Unions", *Pictorial Times*, April 1843).
- <sup>33</sup> See *Works*, II, pp. 174—175, 549, VIII, p. 466. For his quotations of Ovid see *Works*, II, pp. 411—412, 468—469, XIV, pp. 69, 70.
- <sup>34</sup> See W. M. Thackeray, *Contributions to the Morning Chronicle*, ed. Gordon N. Ray, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1955, pp. 70—71, 74, 101—102 (further to be denoted as *Contributions*); *Works* VI, pp. 408—409, VIII, p. 175.

- <sup>35</sup> See note (1).
- <sup>36</sup> For Thackeray's views see e. g. *Works*, VI, pp. 596—597, VII, p. 353, IX, p. 161, XI, p. 227, *Contributions*, pp. 73—74, 70—71, 101; for the views of Belinsky, op. cit., I, pp. 652, 631 ff.
- <sup>37</sup> *Letters*, II, p. 761.
- <sup>38</sup> *Works*, VIII, p. 257.
- <sup>39</sup> A. A. Elistratova, op. cit., p. 301.
- <sup>40</sup> See for instance *Works*, I, p. 134, III, pp. 194—195, VIII, pp. 196, 255—257, *Contributions*, p. 81.
- <sup>41</sup> *Works*, XIII, p. 543; see also *ibid.*, II, pp. 92—93, 98, 182, 194—195, III, pp. 397—398, VI, pp. 340—341, XIII, p. 14, *Contributions*, pp. 78, 101.
- <sup>42</sup> *Fraser's Magazine*, LXIX, April 1864, p. 415. For the views of Charlotte Brontë see *The Brontës Life and Letters*, ed. Clement Shorter, 2 vols., Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1908, I, p. 373, II, p. 248, and preface to *Jane Eyre*.
- <sup>43</sup> Morton McMichael, Jr., "Thackeray's Visit", *Philadelphia Press*, June 12, 1887, quoted in *Letters*, III, p. 102 n. See also *Works*, XII, pp. xxxvi—xxxvii, 211, *Letters*, II, p. 457, III, p. 407, and many others.
- <sup>44</sup> Mario Praz, *The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction*, Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 204; J. Y. T. Greig, *Thackeray: A Reconsideration*, Oxford University Press, 1950, p. 22, see also pp. 19, 117.
- <sup>45</sup> K. Tillotson, op. cit., pp. 70—71; see also Walter Bagehot, *Literary Studies II*, pp. 187—188, quoted by K. Tillotson, op. cit., p. 68, G. N. Ray, *The Age of Wisdom*, pp. 123—125, 193, 243, 389, 453, J. W. Dodds, *Thackeray: A Critical Portrait*, Oxford University Press, 1941, pp. 134, 151, Patricia Thomson, *The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal, 1837—1873*, Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 125
- <sup>46</sup> *Works*, IX, p. 174.
- <sup>47</sup> *Works*, II, p. 379, *Letters*, II, p. 691.
- <sup>48</sup> See *Works*, II, pp. 502, 516; 669, VI, p. 541, XI, p. 791, XIV, p. 851.
- <sup>49</sup> *Works II*, pp. 174, 348.
- <sup>50</sup> See e.g. *Works*, II, pp. 609—610, III, pp. 194—195, VIII, p. 196.
- <sup>51</sup> See Richard Stang, *The Theory of the Novel in England, 1850—1870*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1959, pp. 147—149, 177. Stang accepts the conclusion of Robert Gorham Davis ("The Sense of the Real in English Fiction", *Comparative Literature*, III, 1951, p. 214) that the first usage of a more precisely defined term "realism" occurred in England in 1853 in the essay "Balzac and His Writings". The two scholars thus rectify the conclusion of the authors of *Oxford English Dictionary* who mention as the date of the transfer of the term to England the year 1856, the date of the publication of the 4<sup>th</sup> volume of Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. As for the first usage of the term in France, see Bernard Weinberg, *French Realism: The Critical Reaction, 1830—1870*, New York, Modern Language Association of America, London, Oxford University Press, 1937, p. 117.
- <sup>52</sup> *Works*, VI, p. 607, II, p. 354; see also II, p. 378.
- <sup>53</sup> *Tom Jones*, book IV, ch. VI, *Joseph Andrews*, Preface.
- <sup>54</sup> See my article "The Relationship of W. M. Thackeray to Henry Fielding", *Sbornik prací filosofické fakulty brněnské university*, D 9, 1962, pp. 99—114 and other studies quoted and discussed in it.
- <sup>55</sup> *Works*, III, pp. 385, 386. As for Thackeray's avowals of this indebtedness, see especially *Letters*, I, p. 412, III, p. 402.
- <sup>56</sup> See his review "William Ainsworth and Jack Sheppard", *Fraser's Magazine*, vol. XXI, 1840, p. 236.



- <sup>57</sup> *Westminster Review*, 1853, quoted by G. N. Ray in *Thackeray: The Uses of Adversity* (1811—1846), Oxford University Press, 1955, p. 249.
- <sup>58</sup> See Dr. John Brown, *Horae Subsecivae*, Third Series, Edinburgh, 1884, p. 180, quoted by Ray in *The Uses of Adversity*, p. 228. See also *Letters*, II, p. 582, *Works*, X, p. 590.
- <sup>59</sup> See especially *Works*, II, p. 412, III, pp. 102—103.
- <sup>60</sup> *Works*, V, p. 506, VI, p. 570, see also *ibid.*, pp. 329—330, IX, p. 162, *Letters*, II, p. 553 n.
- <sup>61</sup> See G. N. Ray, "Vanity Fair: One Version of the Novelist's Responsibility", *Essays by Divers Hands*, ed. Edward Marsh, London, 1950, pp. 87—101, *The Buried Life: A Study of the Relation between Thackeray's Fiction and His Personal History*, Oxford University Press, 1952, pp. 30—31, 123, *The Uses of Adversity*, pp. 385, 400.
- <sup>62</sup> For Thackeray's views see especially *Works*, IX, p. 493, *Letters*, II, pp. 261—262, 281—283, 420, for the views of G. N. Ray *The Buried Life*, pp. 30—31, 123. As Ray points out, Thackeray's term "Comic History" by which he characterized his *Vanity Fair* is a direct echo of Fielding's definition of the novel as "comic epic in prose" and signified for the novelist something subtler than were his earlier magazine "comicalities". When Bedingfield asked him whether *Vanity Fair* would be "funny", he answered: "It will be humorous". (See *The Uses of Adversity*, p. 498 and *The Age of Wisdom*, p. 142.)
- <sup>63</sup> See V. V. Ivasheva, *op. cit.*, pp. 236, 241, 246, 248.
- <sup>64</sup> *Works*, XII, pp. 183—184; see also XIII, p. 357, XI, p. 96.
- <sup>65</sup> *Works*, XI, pp. 723—724, see also *ibid.*, p. 725, IX, p. 373.
- <sup>66</sup> See *The Age of Wisdom*, pp. 245, 247.
- <sup>67</sup> *Contributions*, p. 101.
- <sup>68</sup> *Works*, II, p. 714, *Contributions*, p. 80.
- <sup>69</sup> *Works*, XVII, pp. 592—593, X, pp. 637, 638, XII, pp. 518, 911.
- <sup>70</sup> *Contributions*, pp. 77—78.
- <sup>71</sup> *Tom Jones*, book VIII, ch. I.
- <sup>72</sup> See *Contributions*, pp. 94—95, Melville, *op. cit.*, II, p. 69, *Works*, II, pp. 183—184, VI, p. 413, VIII, p. 184.
- <sup>73</sup> *Works*, XIV, p. 485.
- <sup>74</sup> *Letters*, II, pp. 772—773 and note; see also Stang, *op. cit.*, p. 190, *Works*, X, pp. 587—588.
- <sup>75</sup> See *Works*, XIII, pp. 649—652, XII, pp. 237, 977, 1002, XIV, p. 595.
- <sup>76</sup> Preface to *Joseph Andrews*.
- <sup>77</sup> *Works*, IX, p. 296; see also *Letters*, II, p. 308, *Works*, XVII, p. 597.
- <sup>78</sup> Quoted by Wilson, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 259, 260.
- <sup>79</sup> See *Letters*, II, pp. 291, 315, 408, 652, III, pp. 438 n., 459—460, *Works*, XIV, p. 1007, XVI, p. 627, XVII, p. 591, G. N. Ray, *The Age of Wisdom*, p. 188.
- <sup>80</sup> *Works*, XV, pp. 603—604.
- <sup>81</sup> A. A. Elistratova, *op. cit.*, pp. 319—320.
- <sup>82</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 320 and N. G. Chernyshevsky, "The Newcomes", *Sovremennik*, January 1857.
- <sup>83</sup> *Works*, XII, p. 152; see also III, pp. 391—392, *Letters*, III, p. 67.
- <sup>84</sup> *Letters*, II, pp. 424—425.
- <sup>85</sup> See *Works*, XII, pp. 766—767, XIII, p. 170.
- <sup>86</sup> *Letters*, IV, p. 14; see also Wilson, *op. cit.*, II, p. 50.
- <sup>87</sup> See V. V. Ivasheva, *op. cit.*, pp. 237 ff.
- <sup>88</sup> See H. A. Taine, *History of English Literature*, 2 vols., A New Edition, London, Chatto and Windus, n. d., II, p. 391, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, *Charles Dickens and Other Victorians*, Cambridge University Press, 1927, p. 147, Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (quoted by Geoffrey Tillotson, *Thackeray the Novelist*, Cambridge University Press, 1954, p. 72), Mario Praz, *op. cit.*, pp. 208—210, 261, J. Y. T. Greig, *op. cit.*, pp. 114—116,

- Arnold Kettle, *An Introduction to the English Novel*, Hutchinson's University Library, London, New York, Melbourne, Sydney, Cape Town, 1951, vol. I, pp. 157—169, K. Tillotson, op. cit., pp. 253—255, G. Tillotson, op. cit., pp. 91, 104, J. W. Dodds, op. cit., pp. 215—216, 223, A. A. Elistratova, op. cit., p. 311.
- <sup>89</sup> See Stang, op. cit., pp. 54—55.
- <sup>90</sup> See Arnold Kettle, op. cit., p. 160; for the opinions of the other scholars mentioned see Dodds, op. cit., p. 125, Praz, op. cit., p. 210, K. Tillotson, op. cit., p. 239, G. N. Ray, *The Uses of Adversity*, pp. 408—409, Henri-A. Talon, "Time and Memory in Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*", *The Review of English Studies*, vol. XIII, 1962, p. 147—156.
- <sup>91</sup> See *Quarterly*, XCVII, September 1855, p. 360, quoted by Stang, op. cit., p. 109, and *The Age of Wisdom*, pp. 246—247.
- <sup>92</sup> See *Contributions*, p. 105.
- <sup>93</sup> *Works*, III, p. 389.
- <sup>94</sup> See *Works*, VI, pp. 310, 321, 596—597, IX, p. 106, X, pp. 500—502, and many others.
- <sup>95</sup> See V. V. Ivasheva, op. cit., p. 249, Lord David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists*, 1945, p. 80, Arnold Kettle, op. cit., p. 161, K. Tillotson, op. cit., pp. 231, 234, 240 ff; G. Tillotson, op. cit., pp. 12, 172, 173.
- <sup>96</sup> See Mario Praz, op. cit., p. 196; see also *CHEL*, vol. XIII, p. 291.
- <sup>97</sup> *Works*, XIV, p. 901; see also p. 414.
- <sup>98</sup> See Nathaniel Wright Stephenson, *The Spiritual Drama in the Life of Thackeray*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1913, especially pp. 38, 177, 185, 190.
- <sup>99</sup> See *Letters*, III, p. 617, *Works*, XV, pp. 158, 178, 206, 253, 273, 290, 424—425, 562, 738.
- <sup>100</sup> *Works*, XVII, p. 431; see also *Works*, XV, p. 783, *Letters*, III, p. 146, IV, p. 389, Melville, op. cit., II, p. 104.
- <sup>101</sup> See Richard Stang, op. cit., pp. 211—215; see also K. Tillotson, op. cit., pp. 54 ff, Patricia Thomson, op. cit., pp. 150, 164.
- <sup>102</sup> See *Letters*, II, pp. 539, 636—637, IV, pp. 14, 87, 141, Melville, op. cit., II, pp. 68—69.
- <sup>103</sup> *Works*, II, p. 170.
- <sup>104</sup> See especially *Works*, XVII, pp. 400—401.
- <sup>105</sup> See *The Centenary Biographical Edition of the Works of W. M. Thackeray*, with Biographical Introductions by his daughter Lady Ritchie, in 26 vols., London, Smith, Elder & Co., 1911, XXV, p. xlv.
- <sup>106</sup> See V. V. Ivasheva, op. cit., pp. 301 ff
- <sup>107</sup> See A. A. Elistratova, op. cit., pp. 341—342.
- <sup>108</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 338—341. See also the remarkable analysis of *Philip* in Joseph E. Baker, "Thackeray's Recantation", *PMLA*, LXXVII, 1962, pp. 586 ff.
- <sup>109</sup> See G. N. Ray, *The Age of Wisdom*, p. 375.
- <sup>110</sup> See *ibid.*, *The Buried Life*, pp. 7, 25, *The Uses of Adversity*, pp. 264, 275, *Letters*, III, p. 619 n.
- <sup>111</sup> G. N. Ray, *The Buried Life*, p. 120; see also *The Age of Wisdom*, pp. 374, 408, 411.
- <sup>112</sup> G. N. Ray, *The Buried Life*, p. 119. See also J. W. Dodds, op. cit., p. 216.
- <sup>113</sup> See *Works*, XVI, pp. 45, 210, 329, XVII, pp. 58, 544; see also his praises of the characters created by great realistic writers, *Works*, XVII, pp. 598, 600, 608.
- <sup>114</sup> George Saintsbury, *Consideration of Thackeray*, p. 240.
- <sup>115</sup> *Works*, XVII, p. 607, see also p. 355.
- <sup>116</sup> See Hester Thackeray Fuller and Violet Hammersley, *Thackeray's Daughter, Some Recollections of Anne Thackeray Ritchie*, Dublin, 1951, p. 9.
- <sup>117</sup> See *Works*, XVII, p. 595.

## ESTETICKÉ NÁZORY W. M. THACKERAYHO

V úvodu studie autorka hodnotí výsledky dosavadního bádání o daném problému a vyslovuje výhrady k závěrům těch vědců, kteří věnují Thackerayovým estetickým názorům příliš malou pozornost; protože je považují za primitivní nebo vůbec pochybují o jejich existenci, i těch literárních historiků a kritiků, kteří se sice jimi zabývají, avšak nehodnotí je v jejich vývoji a ve svém hodnocení nepřihlížejí ke společenské atmosféře, v níž tyto názory vyrůstaly. Tyto závěry vedou autorku k přesvědčení, že podrobný rozbor daného problému je potřebný a žádoucí. W. M. Thackeray sice nevypracoval žádnou ucelenou estetickou a literární teorii propracovanou do nejmenších detailů, zanechal však velké množství úvah týkajících se základních problémů literatury a umění, poznámek a kritických soudů o jeho vlastní tvůrčí metodě i tvůrčím přístupu jiných spisovatelů. Na základě jejich rozboru a konfrontace s jeho vlastními uměleckými postupy lze dospět k poměrně jasné představě o základních principech jeho estetiky.

V první kapitole autorka podává podrobné hodnocení vývoje Thackerayových estetických koncepcí od doby jeho dětství k období chartismu. Detailně rozebírá všechny významné faktory, které určovaly a podmiňovaly směr jejich vývoje, sleduje tento vývoj v těsné souvislosti s rozvojem celé spisovatelovy osobnosti a ukazuje, jak se Thackerayovy estetické názory vyvíjely směrem k realistickému pojetí literatury a umění a nabývaly pokrokového charakteru, který se projevuje především v jeho vzrůstající schopnosti rozpoznat některé zdravé a nezdravé tendence v současných literaturách, zejména literatuře anglické. Za nejvýznamnějšího činitele v procesu utváření Thackerayovy estetiky považuje autorka vliv samotné reality, autorovy přímé životní zkušenosti a společenské atmosféry, v níž se umělecky a ideově vyvíjel. Dospívá k závěru, že tento vliv byl kromobyčejně silný v období chartismu, kdy se spisovatel vedle svých osobních a profesionálních problémů musel také vyrovnávat s palčivými problémy společenskými a politickými, které na jeho vědomí doléhaly mnohem silněji než kdykoli předtím. Hluboký zájem o tyto problémy se nepřímou obráží také v jeho estetických názorech a projevuje se především v prohloubeném zájmu o základní otázky literatury a umění.

V hlavní části studie autorka rozebírá základní principy Thackerayovy zralé estetiky v jejich vývoji a v těsném sepětí s Thackerayovou vlastní tvůrčí metodou. Podrobněji analyzuje spisovatelovy názory na jednotlivé aspekty společenské funkce umění a literatury, rozebírá některé nejasnosti jeho názorů na postavení literatury a umění v současném společenském boji a jejich výchovné působení na morálku a estetický vkus veřejnosti a ukazuje, jak Thackeray tyto své názory aplikoval ve své umělecké tvorbě a kritice. V druhé kapitole autorka rozebírá Thackerayovy názory na literaturu a umění jako specifické formy odrazu skutečností, zasazuje je do kontextu literární teorie jeho doby a konfrontuje je s názory jeho literárního vzoru Fieldinga. Podrobnou pozornost pak věnuje rozboru vývoje Thackerayova tvůrčího přístupu k životní pravdě zobrazované v jeho rané a zralé tvorbě,

zejména vývoje jeho koncepce humoru a satiry. Dospívá k závěru, že v raném období své literární činnosti Thackeray správně chápal, v teorii a aplikoval v praxi pojmy „ironie“ a „satira“, jako kritik dovedl správně hodnotit nejvyšší oblast satiry, v níž je smíchl nahrazen rozhořčeným hněvem a ve své tvorbě vystupoval jako nesmiřitelný a krutý soudce zobrazované skutečnosti. Autorka se ztotožňuje s názorem G. N. Raye, že v letech bezprostředně předcházejících vydání Thackerayova mistrovského díla *Trlu marnosti* se spisovatelovo pojetí humoru a satiry začíná měnit a že v tomto románě poprvé zaujímá dvojaký postoj satirika a moralisty, který je charakteristický pro celou jeho následující uměleckou tvorbu, avšak prochází po *Trlu marnosti* významnými změnami. Jejich rozbohem dochází autorka k závěru, že rovnováha mezi tímto dvojitým aspektem Thackerayova přístupu je zachována pouze ve třech velkých románech vydaných po *Trlu marnosti*, *Pendennisovi*, *Henry Esmondovi* a *Newcomech*, avšak i v nich začíná stále více převažovat stanovisko moralistické.

Třetí kapitola je věnována rozboru Thackerayových názorů na některé ze základních problémů teorie a umění románu, především tvorby literárních charakterů, které autorka srovnává s názory Fieldingovými a zkoumá v jejich vývoji a praktické aplikaci v Thackerayově umělecké tvorbě. Podrobný rozbor Thackerayova přístupu k tvorbě charakterů ji vede k závěru, že jeho rané typizační umění je ve své podstatě rozkrýváním charakteru ve dvou rovinách, kdežto jeho tvůrčí postup v období zralosti je obohacen o další stupeň, jak poprvé ukázala V. V. Ivaševová — o autorské vystoupení, které tvoří v jeho nejlepších dílech a zejména v *Trlu marnosti* organickou složku jeho stylu. V závěru kapitoly autorka analyzuje spisovatelovy názory na problémy týkající se románové kompozice a na dokladech z jeho románové tvorby ukazuje, že je důsledně uplatňoval až do románu *Pendennis*, v němž se projevují první náznaky romanopiscova pozdějšího ústupu z pozic realisty a zejména satirika.

V závěrečné části studie autorka podává rozbor vývoje Thackerayových estetických názorů od poloviny padesátých let, který celkově hodnotí jako postupně prohlubování protikladu imanentního v Thackerayově dvojakém hledisku satirika a moralisty, které se ve spisovatelově teorii projevuje v poslední etapě jako úplné ztotožnění satiry s humorem a v jeho umělecké tvorbě jako postupný ústup od ostré společenské satiry. Jak autorka dokumentuje, tyto modifikace Thackerayova přístupu k zobrazované skutečnosti se odrážejí také v jeho charakterizačním umění, které je sice i nadále formálně založeno na odhalování charakteru ve třech rovinách, autorský komentář však postupně ztrácí funkci třetího stupně, přestává být organickou složkou Thackerayova stylu a narušuje životnost charakterů. S celkovým ústupem Thackerayho od ostré společenské satiry souvisí také jeho ústup od zásad, které dříve aplikoval v kompozici svých románů a také od principů, které uplatňoval ve své literární kritice.

Rozbor hlavních zásad Thackerayovy estetiky umožňuje autorce dospět k závěru, že velký romanopisec sice nezanechal budoucnosti žádnou detailně rozpracovanou estetickou a literární teorii, že se však v průběhu celé své literární dráhy a zejména v období své umělecké zralosti živě zajímal takřka o všechny základní problémy umění a literatury vůbec a umění románu zvláště a že ve své teorii románu v některých ohledech předběhl kritiky druhé poloviny století, kteří jednotlivým aspektům teorie a praxe románu věnovali hlubší a systematictější pozornost. Autorčin rozbor poskytuje dostatečný podklad také pro závěr, že Thackeray uplatňoval ve své literární tvorbě a kritice jasné a pevné estetické zásady, jichž se důsledně přidržel od poloviny 50. let a od nichž neustoupil v plném rozsahu ani v posledních letech literární dráhy, kdy některé z jeho koncepcí prošly závažnými změnami. I když Thackeray takřka zcela ignoroval některé subtilnější problémy umění románu, které začaly poutat pozornost romanopisců a kritiků až na konci století, a i když jeho estetické názory nejsou postaveny na hlubším filosofickém základě a jsou častěji vyjádřeny polohumornou

formou než přesně formulovány, nejsou primitivní a zcela zanedbatelné, jak soudí například Greig, nýbrž jsou ve své podstatě zdravé, byly nové a potřebné ve své době a v dané zemi a ztělesněny v Thackerayových uměleckých obrazech a aplikovány v jeho literární kritice sehrály významnou společenskou úlohu tím, že napomáhaly proniknutí realistické tvůrčí metody do anglického románu Thackerayovy doby a připravovaly cestu k jejímu přijetí v povědomí anglického čtenářstva.